



Parenting for the Glory of God.

————— "some specific parenting tips" —————

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1. The POWER of parenting

Every parent could honestly say that often the cry of our hearts is “Help, Lord!” Indeed, we as parents desperately need God’s strength for the daunting — and humanly impossible — task of shepherding precious souls to Christ. No greater calling exists for a Christian with children than to honor God by bringing up the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Frequently it is the case that parents have run low of energy, feel burnt out of doing yet another discipline, and they wonder if this particular ‘season of life’ will ever come to an end. Where do we as parents turn in moments of hardship and weakness? Where do we go when we need strength and grace?

God tells us that “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor 10.9). So in this text, God tells believers that in times of weakness God’s power is made perfect. The weaker we are as parents, the stronger God’s power works in and through us.

Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul provided the philosophy of ministry as he stated that his duty was to proclaim Christ (the unfathomable glories of this Savior!) by admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that he may present every man complete in Christ (Col 1.28). Yet, he goes on to state that he labors (that is, exerting tremendous energy and diligent effort), striving according to *God’s power* which mightily works within him (Col 1.29). In a sense, this is every parent’s philosophy of ministry as we seek to be ‘undershepherds’ in our homes caring for the little sheep that God provides under our care for a certain period of years. How do we proclaim Christ? How do we admonish and instruct and teach and labor and fulfill these lofty (and, again, humanly impossible!) goals? Not with mere human effort but according to God’s almighty power which so powerfully works within us.

Our God can do the impossible. Furthermore, God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask *or even think*, according to *the power that works within us* (Eph 3.20). That text means that our God is able, powerful and working in such a way that He can do more than we could pray for and more than we could ever imagine because *He mightily is working in us*. Paul lives to know Christ and he also wants to know the *power* of His resurrection (Phil 3.10). And we should learn to pray like this so that we would know what is the surpassing greatness of God’s power *toward us who believe* (Eph 1.19).

These verses repeatedly underscore the most wondrous reality that in our overwhelming weakness and inability, God remains overwhelmingly strong and able to do *what we could never do*. Our God is strong, mighty, sovereign, providential, and saving. He works through weak earthen vessels (2 Cor 4.7). Do you feel weak? Do you feel inadequate? Do you feel defeated and in despair? Do not lose heart! God still has the victory and is strong in your weakness! He supplies the daily strength that we need for parenting. The greatest prayer and the most humbling cry that we as parents can repeatedly utter is: “Help, Lord! I can’t do this! I desperately need you!” God will work and act — for His glory working in and through you. Trust Him. Receive

His power! The same Jehovah who sat as King at the flood is the same One who gives strength to His people (Ps 29.10-11). Rely on Him. Rest in Him. Request to Him. Receive His power!

2. The GOAL of parenting

Without goals, it's only a matter of time before one wanders without a sense of direction and purpose. Without clear, decisive, straightforward goals, no ultimate mark will be hit and ultimately one will be meandering aimlessly, without direction, and at a loss as to the *reason* why he does what he does. We must remember our goals. And not only must we remember our goals, but we must ensure that we have *the right* ones. When talking to Christian parents, a common goal for the children is that they become Christians. As important at this is and as noble as this is, this is not the *ultimate* goal of parenting. For if conversion is the goal, and if a child does not come to Christ, then the parent has failed in parenting. And that's not the biblical understanding of Christian living -- or parenting. In this write-up, I want to delineate a few goals of parenting and, in so doing, I also want to underscore the priority of the first item that is listed below.

The first goal of parenting must be *faithfulness*. It is required of God's stewards that one be found 'trustworthy' (1 Cor 4.1-2). Children of God receive a warm and glorious welcome into the kingdom when they hear: "Well done, good and *faithful* servant" (Matt 25.21, 23). God demands faithfulness of His people -- the kind of faithfulness that emulates His own faithfulness. Success, according to the Bible, is not *results* or *numbers*. Success in the Bible is gauged by faithfulness. How faithful is the parent to pray for the children? How faithful is the parent to selflessly love the children and daily point them to their eternal refuge in Christ? How faithful is the parent to get at the heart in the discipline room and during the occasions of instruction and discipleship? How faithful is the parent to lead in family worship and bring Christ and His gospel to bear in the hearts of the children? How faithful is the parent to repent of sin, ask for forgiveness, and model Christlikeness to the children? Parents must remember that the ultimate and chief goal of parenting *is faithfulness*. Be faithful to what God has called you to do and leave the *results* to God.

Secondly, the goal of parenting includes *evangelization*. Of course, every Christian parent longs for his children to come to know Christ in a saving way. Every parent longs for, prays for, and strives for this. And rightly so! But faithfulness to God does not guarantee the conversion of the child. But in being faithful to God and in being obedient to His Word, a Christian parent will evangelize the children daily. Indeed, he will utilize opportunities to formally teach about God (family worship, devotions, etc.) and informally teach about God (on a road trip, a funeral, watching a sunset, seeing an amazing creature, etc.). Parents must relentlessly, patiently, prayerfully, tenderly, and urgently evangelize the children by pointing out their sinful hearts, the character of God, the penalty for sin, the punishment of hell, the love and life of Christ, the

substitution that procured salvation, the need for repentance and faith, and the hope of eternal life for all who believe. Parents must lovingly invite the children to come to this God in Christ and to love Him, serve Him, obey Him, and trust in Him!

Third, parenting must have the goal of *preparation*. This includes preparation for judgment day. There is a day soon coming when everyone will stand before Jesus Christ, the Judge of heaven and earth. And our job as parents is to prepare, by God's enabling grace and power, our children to stand before the Almighty and just judgment of God! Furthermore, we want to devote ourselves to prepare them for life. We want them to know what integrity is and what it looks like. We want them to be hard workers. We must teach and instruct them to be busy, workers with their hands, devoted to God, truthful in all things, and living with an eye toward eternity. Additionally, we parent to teach our children to prepare for marriage. We parent our boys to be men who lead, who are humble servants, selfless in their daily sacrifice, and genuinely loving as Christ loves. We teach our girls to be gentle, helpers, submissive, and to joyfully embrace the calling to follow and complete a man that God may bring into their lives. Finally, we want to prepare our children for when they themselves are parents. But ultimately, of course, our primary focus is on their preparation to meet God -- which most certainly will come.

Next, the goals of parenting must entail a *multi-generational influence*. We don't parent only for now. We parent for the future. We must remember the long-term perspective of parenting. Let's not have a narrow, myopic focus of parenting but remember that our children will one day be parents and they will be parenting their children, and then their children will have children that they will parent, and so forth. We must remember that we want to teach the generations to come -- yes, even the generations yet to be born -- to trust in the Lord and place their hope in God (see Psalm 78:1-8).

Finally, the goal of parenting includes *demonstration*. That refers to the demonstration of the gospel visibly and relationally. The way that God as Father treats us as His children has a very direct correlation to how we as parents must treat our children. And in so far as we faithfully understand how God treats us, we want to faithfully emulate His conduct with our children so as to rightly show selfless love and humble sacrifice in the gospel. How do we demonstrate God's selfless, sacrificial, humble love toward our children when they sin? How do we lavish forgiveness upon them that emulates God's enormous forgiveness of us? How do we communicate clearly, often, tenderly, and with comforting promises like God does to us in the pages of Scripture? How do we unilaterally initiate occasions to love our children even when they do not love in return? This is how God has loved us in Christ? Let us seek to remember the ultimate goal of being faithful to God and to His Word as we strive, working by His power, to follow Him, obey His Word, and see God's Spirit regenerate our children by His sovereign grace.

3. The MODEL of parenting

Sometimes parents may ponder to themselves: “can anyone else relate to me in this situation?” Or, “has anyone else ever gone through this?” Parenting can seem lonely. When children disobey, when young children act defiantly, when teenager revolt, parents may think that they’ve done it all wrong and that no one could relate to the despair that has risen in their soul. But I want to encourage every parent with a simple reality from Scripture. The ultimate parent is God. Remember what God said in Isaiah 1:2 - “Listen, O heavens and hear, O earth; for the Lord speaks, ‘Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have *revolted against me.*’” Indeed, later Isaiah says: “Israel has abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him” (Isa 1:4). Have you, dear parents, ever felt like this? Be encouraged: God can relate to you in *every* situation in life -- even the discouraging, lonely, and confusing parenting moments that enter into your life.

God is the PERFECT model. Of course, God is perfect...He is God! And He calls Israel, “My Son” (Hosea 11:1 and Isa 1:2). Let us remember that our God takes on the title of “Father” (Eph 3:14-15) and loves for His children to call Him “Abba” Father (Gal 4:6). God is the perfect model of a parent. He is the Father. He has children. And He had sons, and as Isaiah tells us, they were wayward and rebellious. Let us look to God as our model and observe how He parents.

God is a HURTING parent. As involved as God is in the lives of His creatures, we see that He is a God of emotion and that He is a God who cares. And God refers to Israel as “sons that he has reared and brought up” (Isa 1:2). But these sons have revolted against Him. Indeed, they have acted corruptly, abandoned Him, and utterly despised God. Could you imagine? Maybe you’ve been there, or maybe you’re going through it. Sons rising up and revolting against their parents and abandoning and utterly despising them! So God can relate. So God was one who was grieved by this. So much so that God invited them to come back to him, to return to him, and to be forgiven (Isa 1:18). O how God wanted to reconcile with them! He was grieved and hurt by their sin.

God has WAYWARD children. Israel was greatly rebellious. Indeed, they were full of evil deeds (Isa 1:16). They offered heartless sacrifices and were prone to just going through the religious motions of offering sacrifices (Isa 1:11). They trampled God’s courts (Isa 1:12) and prayed with uplifted hands as though God ignored their sin but would hear their petitions (Isa 1:15). So bad had Israel become that she didn’t even know how to blush over sin anymore. O yes, God can relate to you if you have children that have strayed. But wait, Did God do something wrong? Of course not! How faithful and tender and patient He was! Yet He had wayward children.

God unconditionally loves His own. Never, ever, does God abandon His people, Israel. God tells them that the fixed order of the moon and stars and sun would have to pass away before God would give up Israel as His people (Jer 31.35-37). Of course God is faithful to His promises and His covenants! Consider the elect of God! While we were His *enemies*, Christ died for us (Rom

5.8). He loves us *unconditionally*. He remains faithful -- even when we are faithless (2 Tim 2.13). How does God treat His elect children (=believers) when we sin against Him? He is faithful to love, diligent to discipline, constant in compassion, long-suffering in patience, and ready to forgive. O what a most merciful and gloriously gracious God we worship and serve! How faithful He is with us -- even when we sin in those moments of stubbornness and being wayward. May we learn from our Father and love our children in the same way.

God lavishes love and promise-filled hope to His children. As the perfect model, God shows us that we can constantly communicate and remind the children of wonderful promises that come to all of His children -- He will still love us (Rom 8.35-39) and He will never leave or forsake us (Heb 13.5). How does God treat you as His child? He lavishes constant love upon you as you study Him, know Him, and seek to plumb the depths of His unfathomable love (Eph 3:14-19). He is always available to communicate with you through His Word and provide hope -- faithful, sure hope -- to you as His child through faith alone (2 Cor 1:20). May we learn from God, our perfect model, as we seek to be faithful in parenting our children as God Himself loves His own.

4. FAMILY WORSHIP & parenting

David set the example of family worship when he said: “Come, O children listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Ps 34:11). The Apostle Paul instructs parents to be diligent to train up the children in the ways of God (Eph 6:4). One of the greatest privileges that God has bestowed upon all parents rests in the duty of practically, daily, intentionally, and joyfully gathering the family together to worship Jesus Christ. To think of the awesome opportunity that parents have to shape and form the little children that God has loaned to us for a season is daunting at times. Yet, we cannot delegate this to others but we must be faithful in worshipping Jesus Christ with our children as we show them the person of Christ, the sinfulness of sin, the gospel of grace, and the strength He provides.

Why have family worship in your home as you seek to be faithful, God-honoring parents? Because God deserves to be worshiped, in our homes, by our families, on a daily basis. God is supremely worthy to be worshiped! And we want our children to learn this and see this and be captivated by this. In so doing, we want to remember a few goals as we lead our families to the “family altar” each day in worship in the “little church” in the home.

One goal is to *instruct*. One biblical essential in parenting is to instruct the children in the Word of God and in the ways of godliness. Consider the book of Proverbs. You can hardly get through a chapter without Solomon saying, “Listen my sons” (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1, et al). We must receive God’s Word into our own hearts and then impart that to our children as we faithfully -- formally and informally, planned and spontaneous -- instruct them in the truths of Scripture.

One goal is to **impart**. We want to lead in family worship, as faithful parents, because we want to impart to them the priority of worshipping God. If there's anything we want our children to learn as they grow up in our homes, we want them to see their dad and mom totally in love with and dazzled by the beauty of Jesus Christ and by the gospel of His grace! We cannot save them. But we can live a life of joy as we rest in His love, trust in His power, pray for His blessing, and serve in His strength. We want to impart to our children the joy-filled life that comes from serving and pursuing Jesus Christ.

One goal is to **influence**. We parent our children because we know that they will grow up and leave our homes and be on their own. We train them to send them off. We want to influence them in the ways of Godliness, in the hope in the Lord, in the confidence in God's promises, in the sufficiency of God's Word, and in the presence of God's Spirit. We want to influence our children so that they would follow our example and learn to fear God. We want to influence our children that they would prioritize the local church. We want to influence our children that they would seek God's wisdom in the sufficient Word rather than trusting in their own intuitions or in worldly advice. We want to influence them that to stand courageous for Jesus Christ in a dark and evil culture is the greatest and highest privilege God could give to His children!

One goal is to **invite**. Through the regular teaching of God's Word, we invite our children to taste and see that this God is good. We invite our children to repent of sin and trust in Christ. Through family worship, as you sing together, as you pray together, and as you read God's Word and teach it to the children, you have many opportunities to invite your children to come and know this God! You can invite them to ask questions. You can invite them to hear how God is working in your life. You can invite your children into your spiritual journey so they can learn from you and watch how you respond to the providentially-given circumstances of life. Invite your children to taste and see that God is good! Invite them to find rest for their souls in Christ! Invite them to repent and believe the gospel -- while they are young! Invite them to find Christ as their mighty stronghold and refuge.

One goal is to **ignite**. We want to ignite a passion for God in the souls of our children as they grow in grace in the years that God places them under our care. And while we lead our families in worship, we know that we can't really reach the *heart* and ignite the unseen *heart* for Christ. If we could we would! But we don't have the ability to reach the heart. That's why we obey God in leading in regular times of family worship and we persistently and urgently pray that God would bless the going forth of His Word to save the children by His sovereign, undeserved, and glorious grace.

5. The HEART & parenting

Parents sometimes seem shocked when they hear the divine statement from Proverbs 19:3 that the heart of the foolish man ‘rages against the Lord.’ Indeed, nonbelievers rage against the Lord. But parents also understand, and can relate to, what God says in Proverbs 22:15 that foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child. Indeed, it is the rod of discipline that will remove it far from him. The heart is the mission control center of a person’s life. It drives and governs and compels what they do, how they talk, how they think, and how they respond. The heart is the inner person and *this* is the ultimate target of our parenting. We must get at the *heart* of our children in parenting.

The **priority** of reaching the heart. As in water, face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man (Prov 27:19). Again, it needs to be repeated that God says that foolishness is *bound up* in the heart of a child (Prov 22:15). The goal of our parenting is the heart. The priority of our parenting is the shaping and teaching and directing of the hearts of our children. If we simply aim at behavior modification and alter a bit of bad attitudes here and there when we’re in public, we’ve done nothing but put a nice veneer on an unchanged animal. We must aim for the heart. Why? The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure (of his heart) brings forth what is evil; for the mouth speaks from that which fills his heart (Luke 6:45).

The **work** of reaching the heart. Getting at the heart is very difficult. God tells us that the heart of man is deceitful and He also declares: “who can understand it” (Jer 17:9). A man in the heart of man is like deep water but a man of understanding draws it out (Prov 20:5). Why do our children do what they do and say what they say and respond the way they respond? It’s because they are *worshippers*. They really *want* something and the desire of their hearts (=lust/craving/need) is what’s driving and controlling them at that moment. Thus, we need to work hard at reaching the hearts of our children. For instance, if our 6 year old steals a \$20 bill from our counter and hides it and lies about it, we can’t just say “don’t do that again!” We must ask *why* did you do that? *What* did you really *want*? Or, what if your 3 year old throws an all out temper tantrum in the driveway and will not get in the car? You can’t just command the kid: “get in the car because I say so!” That may work when they’re 3 but not when they’re 17. In that moment, your child really *wants* something and *craves* something and is seeking *fulfillment* in something (rather than obeying you (and God!) with a happy and obedient heart). That’s what you’re after. We must remember to *aim at the heart* in our parenting and seek to show them that their hearts drive what they do, how they talk, and how they respond. Yes, parenting is work -- hard work! Reaching the heart and seeking to shape the heart is hard work -- but necessary work!

The **impossibility** of reaching the heart. Let us be humbled by the reality that it is impossible for me and you to change our children’s hearts. It just can’t be done in our strength. It is utterly impossible for us to regenerate them and give them a new heart that magically worships Christ and longs to honor and obey Him! O! But with God’s enabling grace and by God’s sovereign power, He has the ability to change the heart of a sinner (Ezek 36:25-27). Let us rejoice that

parenting is, in a sense, an utterly impossible task (in our strength to change the hearts of our kids) and yet at the same time it is a gloriously desperate condition where we call upon God in fervent, persistent, heartfelt prayer and beg God to change the hearts of our children so they will love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and glorify Him (Eph 2:1-10). Let the importance of parenting and the reality of the impossibility of our achieving this heart work compel us to pray daily and plead earnestly for God to save the souls of all of our children. No more greater work for parents exists than to pray to Him who is able to save, sanctify, and glorify sinners by His matchless grace.

The *benefits* of reaching the heart. The greatest benefit that comes when we as parents strive to parent the *hearts* of our kids (regardless of their ages) is that evangelism opportunities are sure to come. When the three year old throws the temper tantrum, when the 6 year old will not share with his siblings, when the 11 year old is mean toward a friend and utterly selfish and unkind in his speech, when the 16 year old is caught cheating on a math assignment, when the 18 year old storms out of the house in an angry rage because he can't go to *'that'* party that all his friends are going to, *all* of those occasions are God-given, sovereignly-bestowed opportunities to proclaim the glory of Christ, the sinful tendencies of our hearts, the holiness of God, and the sufficiency of Christ's crosswork. And as the children grow up in a gospel-teaching home and as they are instructed by parents (to be sure, imperfect parents!) who all the while plead with God for His saving mercies upon their children, O may it be that God would grant regeneration to the children and then they would glorify Christ and work hard with all their heart (Col 3:17, 23)!

Here's the thing. We're all busy -- *real busy*. And parenting the hearts of our kids takes *time* (time that we just don't seem to have in the moment!). Seeking to alter behavior doesn't take that much time. That's easy. Just command and demand they stop or threaten them or take away a toy or a privilege and you may get a change of behavior (for a moment, at least). But the heart remains unchanged all the while. So we must remember that, as God has given us souls that He has made and entrusted to us to care for, we must take the time to parent rightly and aim for the heart. That may mean our dinner on the table gets cold. It may mean we're 10 minutes late to a soccer game. It may mean that we're missing part of that big game we want to see. But remember the priority. Take the time, reach the heart, invest deeply, plead for God's grace to give power to your efforts! And may we as parents guard our own hearts as we seek to shepherd the hearts of our children. Solomon counseled his son by saying: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23). May God help us reach the heart!

6. DISCIPLINE & SPANKING in parenting

Every godly parent loves his child and ultimately wants what's best for him and for his eternal well-being. Parents long for their children to trust in Christ alone for salvation! God's Word provides the only sufficient, eternal, authoritative, divine guidelines for parenting our children.

That is to say, other resources can prove to be helpful and inspiring but God's Word is authoritative, God-breathed, and wholly sufficient for all matters pertaining to life and godliness, including *parenting*. So, what does Scripture have to say about discipline and spanking?

The Apostle Paul says that parents must "bring them up in the *discipline* and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6.4). God also says in the Old Testament that "foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him" (Prov 22.15). Furthermore, God most clearly commands us as parents "do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol" (Prov 23.13-14). God says that "the rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother" (Prov 29.15). Then God instructs parents: "Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will delight your soul" (Prov 29.17). Why all this? Because our children need to be guided to understand that sinful decisions that their heart makes have consequences. Remember, the heart of the nonbeliever rages against the Lord (Prov 19.3). And so parents live *by faith* when we discipline our children because God says that the rod of discipline will remove that folly far from him (as the parent provides gentle, loving, biblical reproof as well seeking to *get at the heart*).

So your child has sinned. Your precious little one has disobeyed God, defied you, transgressed God's Word, and you've now taken your child into the discipline room. Then what? What do you do? What do you say? How do you discipline & point to Christ? How can you be firm with truth & tender with compassion?

This is a brief template that seeks to provide practical wisdom in assisting parents in the discipline and instruction of small children.

1. Gather the facts. — Ask questions of the child (as much as you're able with the younger ones) such as: "what happened?" or "tell me what's going on." This way you seek to understand the situation (even if you saw it) and you're allowing them to speak and give their account of the event.

2. Reach the heart. — Then, whatever happened to them, you ask "how did you respond?" or "how did that make you feel?" "what did you choose to do in that moment when it happened?" Then you can ask: "Why?" All of these questions intentionally target the heart. We want to reach the heart.

3. Expose the sin. — At this point, regardless of what's happened, it's vital to specify the sin. Perhaps the child manifested a heart of selfishness, a desire for control, an outburst of anger, not considering others as more important than themselves, etc. The goal is to clearly expose the sin.

4. Prove it biblically. — Ideally, we as Christian parents should have an open a Bible and show the child where in the Scriptures they have sinned against God. This is crucial so the child knows he didn't ultimately sin against mom or dad but first and foremost against God. This is where

godly parents need to constantly study the Word and hide it in our hearts so that we can bring biblical truth to the child's heart regularly & specifically.

5. Give the discipline. — The sin has been committed. The facts have been gathered. The heart has been exposed (as much as possible). The sin has been clearly stated and biblically proven. The child is guilty and has disobeyed God. Now the parent must use the rod. The goal is to bring enough pain for the child to see the error in what he's done but, of course, the discipline is not to bring harm or bruising to the child. Using the rod must be done in a private location and it must be firm. Whether it's one swat or two or three on the rear-end (an area that's not exposed and easily covered up), the parent must choose to obey God and use the rod when the child has sinned. Parents must choose to obey God rather than follow culture on spanking. Culture calls it "harming/abusing the child." God calls it: "saving your child's soul from death!" Choose to follow God! Use the rod.

6. Express tender love. — Immediately when the discipline has occurred and the child is saddened by the pain, hold the child, hug the child, affectionately place the child on your lap, and verbally tell them: "I love you!" This tender love and physical and verbal reassurance is important.

7. Give the gospel. — Now is the glorious opportunity to say: "do you know why I did this? You've sinned. And our God is holy. You're a sinner, just like daddy (or, mommy)..." The Law has exposed the sin. The child has received a discipline for the offense. Now bring the balm of the gospel and the hope of Christ. The glorious benefit of this consists in parents having many opportunities (even daily, at times!) to present the gospel to their children who have sinned. Yes, our God hates sin and sees our sinful hearts! But God sent His Son to take the "eternal discipline" that we deserve. Compel your children to trust in Jesus! Sinners are saved by faith — childlike faith — in Jesus as Lord & Savior! Show them Christ's glory, worth, work, and hope! Never underestimate the power of a faithful father who disciplines when he's home and able and a faithful mother who disciplines in the home and how many gospel occasions this presents with the child. O may God use Christian homes to save children at young ages for His glory and renown.

8. Pray with them. — When all has been done and said, don't forget to pray for them and with them. Still keeping the child on your lap and embracing him in your arms, pray for God to save them. Then, move on tenderly, lovingly, caringly, affectionately, and prayerfully.

For young children in the home that must learn that there are painful consequences to sinful choices, God's prescribed method of discipline is employing the rod. We as parents must *never* use the rod out of anger, frustration, or in a manner of lashing out at the children for a foolish choice they made. Rather, parents must all learn from God who disciplines those whom he loves and he scourges every son that he receives (Heb 12.5-6). Indeed, godly parents discipline for a short time as seems best and long for the time when it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb 12.11). Out of love, parental love, God-like love, as

you love your children, discipline them and declare the gospel to them. Or, as Paul puts it: bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6.4).

7. INSTRUCTION & parenting

Parents all understand Paul's command to "bring the children up in the discipline and *instruction of the Lord*" (Eph 6.4). But sometimes we grow weary in teaching the *same old truths* on many occasions again and again. Solomon could relate. He said "Hear my son your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). All through the Book of Proverbs, we receive many examples of Solomon pleading with his son to hear, listen to, heed, pay attention to, and receive His instruction. For instance, "my son, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments" (Prov 3:1). This is a vital and unending part of parenting. As the children grow, we as parents must be deliberate in our teaching and instructing of their hearts. This not only takes place in the discipline room when they're very small (with simple points of instruction) but as the child gets older, the physical spanking will decrease and the verbal instruction and biblical reasoning with the child will increase. When the child is so young that he cannot articulate or reason with you as the parent, discipline with the rod is the primary means of discipline when he has sinned. But as the child grows, verbal instruction, reasoning from the Scriptures, and helping the child see the desires that rule his heart that cause him to then choose to act, speak, or respond a certain way will then take priority in shepherding them toward Christ.

So how do we teach and instruct? It's something that we can't not do. We can't ignore this clear command. We're called to impress God's truths deeply on the hearts of our kids (Deut 6.4-9). Come my children listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord (Ps 34.11). So what does this teaching and instruction look like? ***I want to provide 7 brief descriptions of our parental instruction to our children.***

1. Our instruction must be biblical. I suppose that's obvious for us as Christian parents but this point cannot be overemphasized. With the incessant pull of media, videos, movies, music, shows, and with the unraveling of the "family" in our culture, we can't just *coast* in casual teaching of our children. We must *daily* show our kids (from the youngest of ages!) *what* the Bible says, *where* it says it in the Bible, *why* it says what it says, and *how we must live* in response to God's Truth. Let it be said: we don't want our instruction to be child-centered or man-centered, but God-centered and biblically-founded. We must be the primary soul-carers (pastors!) of our kids.

2. Our instruction must be formal. By this I refer to regular times where we gather as a family to teach our kids about God and His truth in family worship. As Joshua said: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24.15), so every parent must resolve to formally instruct the

children in the home, in the Word, with intentionality, as a priority, *each day*. Going to church 50 times a year (1x a week) is good, but teaching 360+ times a year in the home is unparalleled!

3. Our instruction must be informal. Not only are there planned times of teaching but there is also the “as you are going” mentality of parental instruction. What if you see an ambulance driving by? What if you see a beautiful sunset that God has painted across the sky? What if you see a beautiful rainbow with all the colors magnificently displayed? What if you see two men fighting on the street corner? What if you see something immodest on a billboard? How do you respond in these *unplanned* opportunities, but to take it as a providential gift from God as a teaching moment! As you look around, you could constantly give thanks and praise to God for everything and use this as an opportunity to informally, and yet powerfully, teach your kids.

4. Our instruction must be incarnated (lived out). We could teach that we must pray always. We could teach that we must rejoice in Jesus Christ. We could tell our kids to give thanks in all circumstances. We could tell our kids to repent, ask for forgiveness, grant repentance, and walk humbly. But do *we model this with our lives*? Part of parenting is *modeling* and *showing* how God’s Word changes our lives. Our kids are watching! So much of living is more caught than taught. So *teach* with your mouth but also *show* with your life!

5. Our instruction must be courageous (even when the world doesn’t want it). Of course, the world is at enmity with Christ and it is darkness as God is in the Light. Of course biblical teaching is at odds with worldly thinking. Yet our teaching must be founded on the Word, grounded in truth, courageous in our application and resolute in our obedience. We tell our kids: God’s glory is the ultimate goal and we live for Him, we rejoice in Him, we suffer for Him, we’ll die for Him! It’s always better to die for the truth than to live for a lie. Teach from the Bible and also include the importance of courage and convictions. Don’t just hope for the kids to have some truths, pray for the truths to *grab hold of* your children! That’s living with courage!

6. Our instruction must be joy-filled (God’s path is always best). Solomon told his son, Rehoboam, “do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments ... it will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones (Prov 3.1, 8). Indeed, how “blessed is the man who finds wisdom” (Prov 3.13). Our teaching must include not only the laws of God and the duty to obey but also the *joys* of obedience and the *pleasantness* of following Christ even in the midst of sufferings, hardships, uncertainties, and pain. Let us remind our kids the best and most joyful and most satisfying path is *always* God’s path as clearly laid out in Scripture. We pursue whatever we think will bring us the greatest happiness and pleasure, so let us constantly impress upon our children that obeying God brings *great joy* -- because it does!

7. Our instruction, as it comes from Scripture, is sufficient (found in Scripture). Remember the doctrine of bibliology, the Bible is absolutely sufficient for *all things* related to life and godliness (2 Pet 1.3-4). That means that what God has clearly revealed and said in His written revelation (the Bible) is all we need for guidance and help through life -- *any* situation in life. We don’t need to supplement the Bible with secular scientific hypotheses, or modern-day psychological

formulas or self-help ideologies. God's Word is enough and sufficient for our instructing our kids and for helping them as they grow and mature through the early ages through the teenage years till they move out and live on their own.

We can't overemphasize the importance of teaching our children ... to put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God but to keep His commandments (Ps 78.5-7). May God help us to teach and instruct our children well, from Scripture, with joy, with intentionality, for His glory.

8. INVEST & LOVE in parenting

So you have a teenager. You may even have a teenager who thinks *he is right* and would gladly prefer to choose his own path rather than following the biblical path that you set before him. Or maybe you have a child just entering the teenage phase of life. His body is changing. His voice is deepening. His thinking is maturing. And his friends influence him powerfully. How do we as parents *invest intentionally* and *love biblically* in these seasons life? How do we parent our growing children as they approach and mature in the teenage years so that we adequately serve them and glorify God in preparing them to leave the home? What is entailed in this season of parenting? I want to plead with parents in this season of life to both *invest intentionally* and *love biblically* as they parent young men and young men as they mature and grow in your home.

I'll provide 6 pieces of counsel for us as parents to remember as we parent our maturing children for the glory of God!

1) Invest in your young adult children with INTENTIONAL love. We as parents must remember how God as our Father has loved us. He loved us intentionally. That is, he deliberately manifested and initiated and persevered in love for us sinners! We in the same way must love our children with a very intentional, purposeful, deliberate, Christ-pointing love. Whether they deserve it, or reciprocate it, or acknowledge it, or even appreciate our expressions of love is totally irrelevant. True love *purposes* to give blessing to the children for their well-being regardless of how -- or whether -- they respond.

2) Invest in your young adult children with INITIATING love. We love because God first loved us. We must initiate love. Do our young children act cold toward us or unbecoming toward us? Is there a broken relationship that has not been mended? How can you initiate prayerfully and patiently a kind of Christ-like love that seeks to meet them where they are, affirm your unwavering love for them, and verbalize your long-term desire for their well-being? Consider how Christ initiated love for you, that when you were unlovely He died for you. So in the same

way, don't wait for the child to open the door for you and extend the invitation, patiently, persistently, and prayerfully initiate opportunities to be together and point them toward Christ.

3) Invest in your young adult children with HEART-REACHING love. God doesn't just change behavior of His children but He transforms the heart. O that parents *wish* that we had that ability to change the hearts of our children! But we don't! But God does! And our blessed privilege and weighty responsibility is to reach the hearts of our children. This requires patience, thoughtfulness, and purposeful conversations. It's more than just reacting when something goes wrong in a fit of rage or angrily shouting a vengeful thought because of a lie. It's asking the *why* questions. It's sitting with your child and asking heart-probing, open ended questions to understand why you child thought the way he did, why he chose what he did, and why he acted (or spoke) the way he did. A man's plans are like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out (Prov 20.5).

4) Invest in your young adult children with GUIDING love. This includes teaching the Word to our children. And then we must let them make decisions. As hard as it may be, it may be even letting them make wrong ones. And then we are there to shepherd them through it so as to learn from those mistakes. Consider how patient and tender our Chief Shepherd is. He guides us so faithfully. When we sin, He is there to help, direct, guide, comfort, and assure us of the right direction to walk. So let it be this way with our children. Let us be guides for them -- not always making the decisions for them but seeking to help steer their thinking and decision-making in such a way that it would bring honor to Christ.

5) Invest in your young adult children with REASSURING love. Even when those hard times or discouraging times come, reassure them of your faithful love to them. At the end of Christ's life and ministry, He affirmed to the 11 that He was with them always, even to the end of the age. With all that they had been through, He reassured them of His faithful love toward them. So let it be with us toward our children. Let us reassure them that we love them and will continue to love them faithfully.

6) Invest in your young adult children with CHRIST'S ULTIMATE love. It should be stated that the greatest way any parent can invest in his children (of any age) is to teach the ways of Christ, the word of the cross, the freeness of grace, and the power of the gospel! The power in parenting rests in our fidelity to and dependence upon Christ and His gospel in our parenting -- in our instruction, in our reproof, in our correction, in our warnings, in our comfort, in our love. We want our growing children to know that there is a Savior who has been tempted in every way (as they are) and yet remained without sin! We want to emphasize that Jesus has the perfect righteousness that God requires for us to enter heaven! And it's freely available to us by faith alone in Christ alone! Let us never tire of speaking of our great Savior with passion and frequency.

9. REPROOF & CORRECTION & TRAINING in parenting

To parent children is to undertake one of the greatest responsibilities that God could ever give to a human! Parenting proves to be an unrelenting, tireless, perpetual, and desperate task! But take heart that the God who called you to parent the children He gave to you is Himself He who equips you, strengthens you, and uses you to bring grace, truth, life, and the gospel to their hearts so regularly. As the children age and mature, and as they approach the season of exiting the home and living on their own, I want to provide a few encouragements to parents with children in these years of young manhood and young womanhood.

1) Parents must *give biblical reproof.* Early in Proverbs, Solomon pleads with his son to “turn to my reproof (Prov 1.23). Even Scripture itself, which is God-breathed, is profitable for reproof (2 Tim 3.16-17). All of this is to lead the man of God to be adequate, equipped for every good work. So when your child comes home with a sour attitude and holds a grudge against a friend at school, or whether they lose their temper on the court and lash out in a fit of verbal rage against a teammate, or whether they’re caught cheating on a math quiz, Scripture still is sufficient to teach, to reprove, to correct, and to train in righteousness! This is our job, parents!

2) Parents must *warn with lovingly, urgent reproofs.* Regard reproof and heed it well and you will be wise (Prov 15.5). But he who hates reproof will die (Prov 15.10). But let parents remember the truths of God that those who harden their necks after much reproof, they will suddenly be broken beyond remedy (Prov 29.1). Let parents diligently warn sinful behavior that stems from selfish and idolatrous hearts and correct with the proper balm of God’s grace and the glorious gospel of Christ’s crosswork.

3) Parents must *correct with steadfast hope and biblical trust.* Proverbs 29:17 says that parents are to correct their children and they will give comfort. Indeed, the child will be a delight to your soul. Of course, this is not a blanket promise for every parent but it’s a general maxim, a wisdom principle for life. Parents, let us correct our children diligently, hopefully, believingly, and trusting that our children will hear and heed the reproof from us and that this will indeed prove to be comfort and a delight to our souls! And let this hope drive us to incorporate God’s Word in our teaching, our instruction, our reproofs, and our correction to our children. It is the Word of God that cuts and convicts and changes and conforms us to Christ (Heb 4.12-13).

4) Parents must *train and instruct often repeating the same truths frequently.* As we look at the wisest man who ever lived as King over ancient Israel, we see that he repeatedly told his sons to “listen to him” (Prov 5.7; 7.24; 8.6, 32 et al). He counsels his young son to listen to counsel and to accept discipline that he may be wise the rest of his days (Prov 19.20). Consider how Peter’s second epistle is full of “reminding” God’s people of the things they’ve already heard and

learned -- but reminders often safeguard us from falling into sins that can subtly entrap us (2 Pet 1.12, 13; 3.1). So, parents, let us not lose heart when we keep addressing the idols of the heart, remembering God's goodness in times of uncertainty and pain, refocusing our hearts on the future glory of heaven and not on the passing pleasures of sin's sparkles. Keep diving for the hearts of your children and seek to bring the glorious and joyous gospel of grace to their hearts regularly, constantly, repeatedly. Indeed, as Peter said it to the beloved believers, let us stir them up by way of reminder (2 Pet 1.13). Keep teaching, keep shepherding, keep guiding, keep training and keep leading to Christ and the gospel and the Scripture. This will be a sure guide to guard them and instill proper perspective through life.

10. PLEADING in parenting

To parent is to shepherd. To shepherd is to lead those that God sovereignly and graciously entrusts to our care. And we must shepherd with love, with diligence, with passion, with fervency, with faith, and with fervent pleadings. I want to focus on pleading with our children as we shepherd them because I feel that this is often a neglected area in Godly homes. How must we plead with our children as they grow up under our watchcare?

1) Plead with ***gospel urgency***. The Lord Jesus lived a life marked by urgency. He came to do the will of the Father and He allowed nothing to deter him or distract him away from that mission. Let us similarly plead with our kids with gospel urgency. Let us plead with them to place their individual trust in Christ alone. And let us plead toward this gospel with loving urgency -- as if eternity is soon-coming!

2) Plead with ***patient tenderness***. One has to survey the Book of Hosea to hear the patient tenderness of Jehovah as He longs for Israel to return to Him. O how patient our Savior is with us. And reflect on how patient God was before we were regenerated! O how tender and patient and long-suffering our God is! Let us plead with our children patiently, tenderly. Let's not force them, coerce them, manipulate them, instill false hope or assurance, but rather let us present the gospel faithfully, call them to repent clearly, summon them to believe singularly, and all the while let these conversations and calls be draped with garments of patient and tender love.

3) Plead with ***Christ-wooing joy***. It's one thing to tell someone to do something. It's quite another to bring someone to a personal acquaintance whom you know, love, care for, and who has won your heart and stolen your affections! Plead with your children to walk closely with Christ with gladness. Woo your children to the compassions of Christ! Win your children to Christ by speaking of His person, His work, His worth, His power, His glory, His beauties. Seek to present an irresistible Savior to your children regularly in the home. Call them to believe in a Savior they can't resist!

4) Plead with ***eternity's imminence***. Speak to your children and summon their souls to find rest in the Solid Rock of perfect righteousness found in Christ *soon* -- not to procrastinate, not to put it off. One may put off a business deal. One may procrastinate for a science project. One may delay marriage. But let us speak of Christ and the gospel in such a manner that eternity's imminence (=nearness) lies ever before us in our hearts, on our lips, and in our conversations. Heaven and hell both draw near. And when eternity breaks forth, it'll be too late to cross over from one abode to another. Plead with eternity always and ever before you!

5) Plead with ***desperate prayerfulness***. Like the old widow who pleaded with the judge and won him over because of her importunity, that is, her persistence. We knock -- and keep knocking -- and Christ says the door will be opened! Christ calls His people to pray and not lose heart. So in the hundreds of conversations you have and in the discouraging moments you may have, don't lose heart but remain desperate in prayer, believing in prayer, and persistent in your petitions. Little do we employ the divine power that is available to us in prayer because we often find ourselves too busy, too distracted, or just, sadly, too unbelieving in the power and efficacy of prayer. Talk to your children about God and remember to talk to God about your children also!

6) Plead with ***Godly demonstration***. Don't teach one thing to your children verbally but unteach it with your conduct. Don't preach one thing in family worship and then unpreach it with your prideful stubbornness. Live out who you really are *in Christ*. If you are positionally righteous in Christ -- all of grace! -- then seek to live out your position through Godly, Spirit-empowered, biblically saturated, prayerfully dependent conduct. Repent honestly. Ask for forgiveness specifically. Lead your children to the family altar regularly. And bow on your knees before Christ's Kingship together. Demonstrate godliness to your watching children as you know that so much is often caught more than taught.

7) Plead with ***regular invitations***. Whether you have small children in the toddler age, or those about to graduate high school and move off to college, keep pleading with your children to draw near to God and He will draw near to them. Like God told Israel: Come near to me and let us reason together. Keep inviting your children to the greatest pursuit a human soul could ever embark upon, to know and love and follow God.

