

How to Parent Well

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[0 : 00] Hello and welcome to the next in our series on biblical guidelines for daily living. This week we're looking at the important topic of parenting and how to parent better and how God can help us do that.

Parenting is one of life's greatest joys but also one of life's greatest difficulties and frustrations sometimes. So let's turn to God and ask Him for help. Heavenly Father, thank you that you've called us to be moms and dads and that's a high calling indeed.

Lord, you want our earthly families to reflect your heavenly family. Lord, we don't do that really well and so we need your help. Father, will you be with us and send us your Holy Spirit so that we can be the moms and dads that we want to be and that you call us to be.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Now I think it's fair to say that in the modern world the family unit is under increasing attack and increasing pressure.

We've seen that divorce rates are at all-time highs. Is it 40 or 50% of people will be divorced? The breakdown in the family unit has reached really high levels.

[1 : 11] People have rejected marriage really in how to raise kids and so they either don't bother getting married. Some stay together and they've got long-term partners.

Some don't even bother with partnerships really and many women think they can do it all by themselves. The state has stepped in and seen that there's a problem and so they provide help in one sense with money.

But it has often a very opposite effect in that it sustains the breakdown of the family by incentivizing women almost to have children outside of wedlock without the dad.

And so the state in a sense has stepped in to be the dad that these children will never have. And of course it can't do a good job. It can never do a good job. Moms and dads are uniquely gifted by God to be the children's primary caregiver and best caregiver.

If we look at the stats to see whether the modern world is working and whether you can be a mom and a dad, a good mom and a good dad, and whether you can raise children well without being involved in their life, the stats will show you that that's just not the case.

[2 : 21] The best way to run a family is to use biblical guidelines, what would be known as the traditional family unit, which is now not so traditional because everyone wants to do things their own way. But here are some stats that show that not living the Bible's way causes great harm.

70% of unplanned teenage pregnancies occur in homes where there's no father. 69% teenagers are more likely to use drugs in homes with no father.

They're 76% more likely to commit crime. 85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes. 75% of teenagers in alcohol and drug abuse rehabs again come from a home with no father.

85% of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes. And daughters of single parents without a father involved are 53% more likely to marry as teenagers, 700% more likely to have children as teenagers, and 92% more likely to get divorced themselves.

Okay. Now this shows, without a doubt in my opinion, that living life without reference to God and trying to do it on your own is not going to work.

[3 : 36] It does a great amount of harm to your children and to society. Because of course these children grow up without a mom and a dad, and they grow up to be adults and then they can't cope, and they turn to all these mechanisms that just don't work and hurt society.

Well what's the answer then? Well let's turn to the Bible to see how it thinks of family. What patterns does it lay out?

And one helpful way to look at that is to take a big picture look at the Bible, a biblical overview if you will, and then we'll look at some specific texts. Now the big picture overview tells us that God made the world, and when he made it, he made Adam and Eve.

Yes, he first made man, but God saw that that wasn't going to work, and he gave him a helper. And then the very first thing he does is tell them to have children. And so children, right from the beginning, are kind of a sacred gift from God.

They don't really belong to us. Yes, we provide the ingredients if you want to put it like that, but we don't make them. God makes them. And so they are a precious gift from God, although sometimes it doesn't feel like that.

[4 : 48] But that tells us something about our role as parents. They're not ours alone. We're not to make them in our image in a sense.

We're to tell them about the God that made them and about the God that is in our lives as well. So that's the beginning of creation.

It didn't stay that way. It didn't stay good for long. And what we call the fall, where sin entered the world and just messed up all the human relationships that there are. One way that that manifests itself is in the role of authority.

I know that people don't like to think about authority anymore, and it's really a bad word. But, you know, you just can't live life without it. And so the biblical pattern is of the mom and the dad having authority over their children.

And even in that relationship between mom and the dad, the dad has authority over the wife. He's the leader of the house. Now, that doesn't mean just to put this out of the way.

[5 : 49] This doesn't give men carte blanche to be authoritative or bad and to use that to abuse. Typically, though, in the West, men have absconded their authority, and they, grown men, basically live life as teenagers, sleeping with whoever they want, whenever they want, breaking up and not settling down and growing up and being responsible for their actions.

But then the Bible says that redemption is available. So God's plan is to fix the problem of the world. Again, he uses a family to do that. In the Old Testament, he calls Abraham and his family, and he calls us to be in covenant with him.

And so there's a calling and a covenant aspect of being a Christian family, which elevates to a very high degree the role of the mom and dad in the home.

One book talks about them as being sacred guardians. And so we've been given this tremendous privilege of looking after children, but making sure that they understand that they've been called into a family far greater than our human family, the family of God.

When God redeems us and calls us and puts us in covenant with him, he gives us a change of heart. He actually helps and enables us to parent well. Now, we're all going to make mistakes.

[7 : 09] There's no such thing as a perfect parent, and we need to give up this idea that there is such a thing as a perfect family and being the best mom and best dad. You can be a good mom and a good dad, and you're called to do that.

But don't put the added pressure on of never, ever making a mistake. God knows us. He knows our history. He knows our past. And yet he forgives us. And so we've got to be a little bit easy on ourselves, moms and dads.

Give yourselves a break. Don't think that you need to be perfect. God doesn't expect you to be perfect, but he does want you to be good, and he wants you to be good at parenting. And so moms and dads, particularly dads, you need to take the lead in your home.

Now, one place that does that well, interestingly, is the guy called the dog whisperer. His name is Cesar Millan. He had a series on TV some time ago. So what he would do is go to families where the dogs were going crazy.

And, of course, everyone thinks it's the dog's fault, and it's a problem with the dog. Nine times out of ten, it's not a problem with the dog. It's a problem with the dog's owner, of how they are raising them, and how much tension and anxiety and their levels of frustration that they're taking out on the dogs.

[8 : 29] And typically, they're either too lax, and the dog feels they've got to protect the owner, or they're too authoritarian, and the dog is lashing out because his freedom is being abused, basically.

And so moms and dads, the same thing for your family. You've got to pitch your level of authority at the right level. You can't be overly authoritative.

You're going to chase them away. But you can't just let freedom reign because it's just unhelpful. The Bible then goes on to tell us that we've got help in this life to live Christian families and help with parenting, but this life ends.

And sadly, on many occasions, children's lives are taken way too soon, and it just breaks the hearts of the moms and dads. And how do you deal with that? Well, again, the Bible can help because this life is not all there is.

We look forward to the recreation of all things. And so we have this hope and this promise of the future that kind of takes the pressure off a little bit of having everything right, done now.

[9 : 43] You're not going to have a perfect life, no matter how good you are as a parent. And the Bible lets you take that pressure off and says, no, there is going to be a time where everything will be really good.

You can be reconciled. All the family issues that you were never able to deal with will be dealt with. And you can be friends and family with your family again in the new heavens and the new earth. Just some things to think about there then is, you're the most important person in your child's life. It's a huge privilege. You're the best mom and dad for your child. Your child is a gift from God and belongs to Him.

And then you're not alone in raising your children. When you become a Christian and God redeems you, He doesn't redeem you by yourself. He redeems your whole family.

But then He redeems you in a family of families, the local church, and there you've got fantastic resources that can help you parent better. So joining God's family gives you the privilege of accessing other families that have gone through maybe more, maybe worse, but are there to help with your family.

[10 : 56] So many families suffer alone without asking for help. But on the same level, many Christian families don't think of their place as a place of safety and nurture, and they don't think of offering help to the outside world.

And so moms and dads who are in our Christian church, you need to know, because of the way the world is, being a mom and a dad, being married, having a home where there's a mom and a dad, is one of the world's greatest beacons of light and hope and goodness.

It's the greatest source of goodness to the outside world. And what you'll find is that you tend to, the strays and the waves, the strays and the waves, people who don't have that are automatically drawn to it because there's just something there that lets them know that there's goodness and wholesomeness and they're just drawn to it like moths to a flame.

It's a great opportunity, a Christian home, practicing Christian hospitality, probably one of the greatest and best places to bring children into the kingdom and into a place where they can know what it's like to learn to be a good mom and a dad.

Dads, you're called to be the covenant heads of your households. And so one area of your responsibility is to lead your family in worship. Now, the modern church calls it devotion.

[12 : 21] I think family worship is probably a better way of describing it. Devotion sounds private and alone, whereas really what we should do is have our family worshiping God together. And probably the best place to do that is around the dinner table.

And not many people do this anymore, but moms and dads, try this if you've never done it before, where you take the Bible, you say some prayers at the table, you take the Bible, you open up a section, not a long section, just short, and read it and have just the quickest of discussions if you need to do that.

But just read it and pray. These things will, over time, it's that slow drip feed of the Word of God, knowing and teaching your kids that they see, okay, no, this Christian thing, the Bible thing, is really important to my parents.

It really makes a difference in their lives. And it shows them more than anything for you saying it, you know, they see it. It lets them know how important it is to grow up to be a Christian as well. Well, let's turn to some Bible passages now that might help us see how significant the role of moms and dads are in the family and for their kids. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, Moses is telling the people of God how they're to pass on the blessings that they've received.

[13 : 41] God has saved them out of Egypt, and he wants to make sure that what God has done for them is passed on to them and their children. He says this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These words I'm commanding you today are to be upon your hearts so that you take it in, on the inside. And you shall teach them diligently to your children and speak of them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as reminders on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and your gates. And so here's a huge responsibility for parents to raise their children up knowing what God has done for them as parents and what God is going to do for them as their children.

They've been included into the covenant relationship with God and that he's their God and he specifically loves them and he's going to pour out his blessings on them.

Now this is the role, this is the primary role of the parent to do this. And many people think it's the primary role of the church. But at St. Mark's, between Nick, Naomi, and myself, we all agree that while the church is there to help, we're trying to get the parents to know that it's their role to take on the teaching that we give them as parents and for the parents to pass it on to the children.

[15:11] Now why is that important? What it does is when the parents pass it on to the children, it tells the children in no uncertain terms that this is really real, this is really important, and I really need to listen.

Now yes, we can help and in some sense supplement that teaching, but our role really is to teach the parents how best to teach their kids that they are Christian and bring them up in the knowledge of God.

One of the things that all the sociologists tell us is that parents have to be involved in their life, in the life of our children. Now what that means is you've got to spend time. You've got to literally spend time with them, talking to them, and obviously playing with them, and teaching them how life works. Now one place in the Bible that does it really well is the book of Proverbs, and so I'm going to highlight a few places in the book of Proverbs, but just to say the first eight or so chapters is of King Solomon writing as if he's talking to his son, and he says things like this, My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth. For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. And it says this very often, My son. And so what's happening is that the father, Solomon in this case, is taking his children, his son, but obviously our daughters can be there as well, taking them aside and talking to them on a very deep level and making sure that they understand that what he's saying to them is important.

[17:02] It's a deep communication of what he wants his son to get as a child and to teach him that he's a child now, but he's going to grow up, and so he needs to know how to grow up.

Far too many times, parents are involved in their children on a very, not superficial level, but just on a play level. And so in the modern Western world especially, we want to be our children's friend. The Bible says you are their friend, but you don't have to focus on being their friend. You need to focus on being their parent, their mom and their dad, their authority figure, so that you can teach them what it means to live life in this world and how to grow up and not just to play games with them and make sure that they love you.

Later on, once they've grown up and got their family and their own, you will find that you are much better friends. Proverbs goes on to say, Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman and from the wayward woman with her seductive words.

So you want to teach them from an early age or an age-appropriate level healthy and godly sexuality. Yes, for when they're teens, but mainly for looking for the right marriage partner.

[18:15] So you've got a huge privileged position to be in to teach your children how to, they must be looking for the right marriage partner as well. So think that far ahead for them and have those discussions with your children.

You'll also, just while we're speaking about issues of sexuality, you need to watch out for social media and electronic media of all kinds. The plague of pornography is rife and studies show that a large percentage of children are exposed to it at an increasingly early age, younger than 10 now. The only place that your child is going to learn good, wholesome, biblical patterns of sexuality is going to be from you and from the church.

It's certainly not going to get taught from schools or media or films or games or anything like that. It's going to come from you and from the church and from the Bible. In fact, the Western Cape Education Department recently released their policies for the LGBTQI policies at school.

And this is from their draft paper that's being commented on now. An LGBTQI plus learner has the right to choose the first name by which he or she wants to be known, irrespective of his or her gender characteristics assigned or assigned sex at birth.

[19 : 39] They go on to say a school may allow a LGBTQI plus learner to use the toilets and changing room facilities which he or she feels most comfortable with.

And it recommends that schools strive to create an environment where LGBTQI plus learners get affirmation that whatever their sexual orientation and gender identity are, they are respected, valued, and deemed part of the normal spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. And so we can see that this new approach to letting anything go has taken hold of in our schools. And so moms and dads, you're going to want to guard against that and be proactive in protecting your children against that.

Another important verse from Proverbs is this, Proverbs 22, Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. Now this verse again affirms a central role that parents have in raising up their children.

It's a call to be involved and to take charge of your child's training and growth and development. Now you've got a short opportunity, a short window of opportunity really to instill in your child all the habits that you want them, all the good habits that you want them to have.

[20 : 59] Typically you need to be doing this from the ages of 0 to 10. By the time, or 12, 13, by the time they hit their teenage years, if you haven't been parenting or proactive parenting or involved, it becomes really difficult to have any input.

You can, it just takes longer and you've got to reestablish your relationship and you can't be as authoritative as you can as with a small child. So it's way more helpful to be doing this as when they're children, when they're young, than when they're trying to do this when they're teenagers. Nevertheless, the promise is that if you do this, if you take the responsibility on and do the training, you will be laying a solid foundation for that child's future that will last them their whole lives.

We don't like to think of this, but we may not be there their whole life. And so you want to input as much as you can when they're young and to put your stamp on them as it were, but to train them not in the way that you want, but in the training and knowledge of the Lord.

Another helpful part of the Bible is that passage in Ephesians that we read earlier, and so let's end our time there. Ephesians chapter 6 says this, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

[22 : 11] Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with the promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on earth. Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

So interestingly, children have a role as well to play in their parenting, if you will. Their role is to obey the moms and dads. Now kids, if you're listening, this is more important than you realize. I know it's not a cool thing to think about, but it is one of the most important things that you can do. Naomi would have taught us a little bit about that in her talk earlier. But there's also a warning for the fathers.

Fathers, don't exasperate your children. Now, exasperate here means to lash out in anger, to be overly angry and then to work that anger out on your children.

We must be careful, dads, when we put disciplines in place that we don't do it when we're hot-headed and frustrated and mad. All the books will say this, that don't discipline in the moment that it's happening and when you're frustrated.

[23 : 19] In other words, when your heat and your energy levels are up and your frustration levels are up, you've got to cool down and you want to discipline with a cool, calm head. One helpful way to do that is to make sure that your children know beforehand where the boundaries are and what will happen if they get broken.

So a friend of mine had a 1-2-3 system and he gave them three warnings and he raised his finger and number one, first warning, second time it happened, he was given the second warning and they knew that if the third finger came up, there was going to be painful repercussions, let me put it like that.

And so the surprise was that he only had to discipline them a few times that he had to count to number three. It wasn't constantly that he was counting to three and then having to discipline his kids.

So that that communication, they know that it's going to happen, they know why it's happening and then they can adjust their behavior accordingly. And then again in the last part of that verse you can see the call for the parents but specifically the fathers to bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

And so again, it's that admonition for moms and dads but particularly the dad to make sure that he takes the lead in training his children how to live life but specifically how to live life as a Christian. [24 : 47] and Ephesians does that really well for you. The whole Bible tells you how to live life as a Christian. But moms and dads, if you take the lead in your children's life by showing them love, by training them, by telling them what life is all about, by giving them the wisdom of the Lord, by loving each other, by making sure that your marriage is solid, that your relationship is working well, if you create an environment of love and nurture and acceptance and all the good things that go with having a healthy family, if you continue to do that, you are setting your children on such a solid foundation for success later on in life.

Yes, it's hard but there's so many resources available to us for doing that. Reach out if you're having trouble, speak to someone at church and ask them for help. Church members, remember that you've got a healthy family is such a novelty these days but such a good place for learning how family relationships are meant to work.

So open your homes and be open-minded about inviting other people in. Yes, it's hard work. You need to discuss this beforehand and your energy levels will go up and down and sometimes you're more able or sometimes less able but do look out for people who are struggling and offer help where you can.

In closing then, parents, I hope you realize that you've been given a kind of a sacred trust and you're a sacred guardian of the future. If you abscond your role as a mom and a dad it leads to all kinds of problems in your child's future not just yours but in their future as well.

But if you take the time and the energy and the effort to invest in your relationship with each other, if you take the time and the energy and the effort to invest in your relationship with God, it will play out in building a solid foundation for your children and for their children as well.

[26 : 47] And so, my hope and prayer is that you will find that helpful and there are many resources available for us to do that. Well, let's pray now to God to help us with these things.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the sacred trust that you've given moms and dads, of the children that you've given us and of the blessings that there are. Lord, we want to do well at parenting and we need your help.

Help us to turn to you for help as a source of all fatherhood. Help us to turn to your word, Lord, and to find truth and help there. Be with us, Lord, as we strive to raise our children to your honor and glory.

Amen.