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Series: *Building Up the Family*

Title: *"How to Nurture a Child"*

Text: Psalm 127:3-5a; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4

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Psalm 127:3-5a

3 – Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from Him.

4 – Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.

5 – Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Ephesians 6:1-4

1 – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 – "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise---

3 – "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

4 – Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

A few weeks back when I heard that Tony Dow had died---it brought back a family beach week memory. You see, when our children and grandchildren gather with us at the beach every summer, we used bring along a TV show on DVD to watch together at night. And one year we brought *"Leave it to Beaver."*

After the vacation---Sue and I would often watch an episode or two because we both found it to be a great way to calm down and relax after an often-stressful day. And it was indeed a great de-stressor because in that half hour we were transported back in time to when the institution of the family was relatively healthy---those days when the most stressful thing a moms and dads had to deal with---was disciplining their youngest son for keeping a pet frog in the bathtub---or helping his older brother find the right sport coat for the spring dance. Things have definitely changed in the last sixty years when it comes to the American family---and not all that change has been for the good.

For example, back when Beaver was on the air, our culture defined a traditional family as one mom, one dad, one marriage, and children from that marriage only. Families like that made up the majority. Today less than half the families in our nation would meet this definition.

This is due to several factors.

For example, in the decades since the show aired there has been a 100% increase in the divorce rate---and today the US holds the record---when it comes to the number of children raised in single-parent homes. Nearly 25% of kids under 18 fall into that category---more than any other nation in the world.

Here's something else. During this time, cohabitation---living together without being married---has increased by a thousand percent.

Here are some more depressing stats.

Last year over a million babies were born out of wedlock in the US, almost a third of all births. Today 80% of school-age kids come home each day to an empty house because both parents work full-time jobs.

One consequence of these changes is the sad fact that the majority of children these days get most of their parenting---not from mom and dad---but rather from the public SCHOOL SYSTEM and/or the Internet---NOT a good thing for many reasons.

Plus, these days there is an ever-increasing pressure for kids to learn more and to do it faster. Today's children have much more stressful lives than kids did sixty years ago. I mean, no longer do they just enjoy being kids---now they are hurried to adulthood.

This week I read the true story of a first-grade teacher trying to deal with the irate mother of one of her little students. This mom screamed at the teacher because she had given her son a "satisfactory" on his 1st grade report card saying, "How is he ever going to get into M.I.T. if you give him a 'Satisfactory.'"

One child-development expert sees many eight-year-olds suffering from acute anxiety, and nine and ten-year-olds having lost all sense of what it means to be a child.

I point to all these grim facts to help you see that the family is having a hard time of it in our culture. It's no wonder that when one individual reviewed some of these statistics he said, "The nuclear family has EXPLODED."

Well, for the next month---I want us to try and help DEFUSE this problem---by looking to God's Word for guidance when it comes to marriage and family. Our series is called, *Building up the Family* and today we begin by looking at how to nurture CHILDREN. Now nurturing children---raising them from infant to young adult---is a very rewarding job---full of years of incredible, joyous experiences. Do I get an AMEN on that, parents? The verse from our text in Psalms says it well, "**Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. BLESSED are the parents whose quivers are full of them.**" (Psalm 127:3-4) Having kids is indeed a wonderful blessing---but it is also a very tiring, demanding job---a job that at times can feel overwhelming.

Most Thursdays Sue and I visit with our daughter Sarah and her husband Joe down in Springfield. When we arrive, the living room---which doubles as a play space---is trashed. Joe and Sarah always look EXHAUSTED---because they have a very sweet but very energetic three-year-old daughter who wakes up ready to go at 5:30AM---and her six-month old sister---who is currently not sleeping well.

Any new parent goes through the same kind of tiring days and nights---no time to clean---no time to yourself. Plus---parents worry about their kids---and rightly so---because our world is a potentially dangerous place---to bring up a child. I've lost count of how many school shootings there has been since Columbine 23 years ago.

And not only is raising children in our culture a SCARY thing---it is also a huge RESPONSIBILITY. It's a task that we really can't afford to take lightly. I mean we need to do our best to get this job right---not only because we love our kids---but also because the kind of job we do when it comes to nurturing our kids has an enormous affect---for good or ill---on our fallen culture. Charles Swindoll writes, "How we raise our youngsters will have a greater impact on society than the way we vote, the art we create, the books we read, the technological problems we solve, or the planets we visit in space." And he's right. Depending on how we nurture these precious little ones that God has entrusted to us we will either become a part of the answer or just another part of the problem.

So, what do we need to know to properly nurture our kids? What do our children need?

1.) Moms and dads who are READY for parenthood.

Here are two basic factors that I think indicate readiness for parenting.

a. A strong, stable, mature RELATIONSHIP.

I point this out because many young couples don't really understand the stress that childrearing brings to marriage. I mean, no matter how well you are matched, marriage is tough---especially at the beginning. This is one reason that nearly 34% of divorces occur within four years of the wedding.

And I don't want to sound graceless---I know there are valid reasons for divorce in this fallen world of ours. But before we call it quits, we must do all we can to save our marriages because even though there are times when a bad marriage hurts children---and I'm referring to drug or physical abuse---divorce ALWAYS hurts children.

Time magazine did a story a few years back about the findings of a study that measured the long-term effects of growing up in a fragmented family. Here's an excerpt from the article:

"Two-thirds of the girls, many of whom had seemingly sailed through the crisis of divorce, suddenly became deeply anxious as young adults, unable to make lasting commitments---and fearful of betrayal in intimate relationships. Many boys, who were more overtly troubled in the post-divorce years, failed to develop a sense of independence confidence or purpose. They drifted in and out of college and from job to job."

I'm not trying to make divorced moms and dads feel guilty. I'm just trying to illustrate the fact that before a couple even considers parenthood, they need a stable marriage. They need to take the time to develop communication skills and the ability to solve conflicts and build the security that leads to intimacy.

Parents also need to get their household in order and their finances ready because kids are incredibly expensive. Don't get me wrong---children are worth every penny! But it takes tons of dollars to provide for a child's needs. The federal government estimates that it costs nearly \$250,000 to raise a child to age 18. It could cost nearly that much to put them through college and grad school. My point is young couples need to take ALL the steps necessary to build stable, MATURE marriages before they think about having kids---because as Susan Peters has put it, *"Children have a better chance of growing up if their parents have done so first."*

Sue and I waited four years before starting our family and 32 years before deciding to have grandchildren. All kidding aside during our first four years as spouses we had a lot of growing up to do when it came to relating to one another. We needed that time to learn our individual strengths and weaknesses so we could work together as a team. We needed those years to build a strong relationship---one we could each lean on as we weathered the inevitable storms and strains of parenthood.

By the way---couples need to realize that the Bible teaches us that parenting was DESIGNED as a TEAM process. This means that before the stork arrives moms and dads need to get their careers situated such that they can both be an active team member. I'm not saying both parents can't work. It's almost essential in our county---but I AM saying it brings even MORE challenges to raising kids. Remember, moms and dads---Nannies, baby-sitters, relatives, and day-care workers will never give an ultimate account to God for how they raised your children. You will.

Let me just say a quick word to single parents, especially single moms. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for you to literally do the job of two adults all by yourself. We'll talk more about how a church family can help you in a moment---but right now I want to encourage you to rely on the LORD as your team-member in the parenting process. As it says in Isaiah 54:5-6, ***"...your Maker is your husband---the LORD Almighty is His name---the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit---a wife who married young, only to be rejected."*** Rely on God as you seek to raise your kids!

b. A second thing parents need to be ready for kids is this: They must understand the primary REASON for parenthood.

The Genesis account tells us that Adam and Eve were made in God's IMAGE---but also that God gave them the responsibility of REPRODUCING His image through procreation. So, the purpose of bringing children into the world is not:

- To have a cute little guy or gal to play with.
- It's not so we can have an excuse to visit the toy section in Target.
- It's not to pass on property and the family name or to avoid loneliness in later years.
- It's not to get a tax deduction.

No, the primary purpose of parenting is to produce shining, active, young image-bearers who are motivated and trained to carry the torch of authentic Christianity into the next generation. In other words, a parent's responsibility is to use every opportunity to show them and tell them of God's great love in sending Jesus. As Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 6, we are to talk to our kids about the things of God, ***"when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, and when we lie down..."*** (Deuteronomy 6).

This is why we don't do CHILD dedications at Redland. We call what we do Parent-Child Dedications because it is a time for parents to pledge to their congregation that they will do their best to raise little image bearers---in the hopes that our little guys and gals will someday respond to our careful instruction---and decide to become Christians themselves, growing up to make a difference in this fallen world by exercising their unique God-given talents and gifts.

I won't share names so as to embarrass the family but there's a little boy in our church who is about to celebrate his 8th birthday---and he told his parents that at his birthday party he doesn't want his friends to bring HIM gifts. He wants them to bring canned goods for our food pantry. That's the kind of Christlike compassion we want to instill in our little ones. That's our primary motivation for bearing and raising kids! Remember, children are given to us by God! They are His---He has loaned them to us to carry on the process that He began the moment they were conceived! So as parents, from the moment our kids born we do anything we can every day to encourage our children to accept Jesus and then grow in His likeness.

I don't want to put you on the spot, but are you doing that, parents?

2.) To be nurtured children need to be LOVED.

This may seem like a given---like your kids will just automatically know you love them but that isn't so.

Parents communicate love to their children:

a. By KNOWING them.

You see, each child is different---unique! Any parent of more than one will attest to this. Some kids sleep through the night the first day home from the hospital. But just when this particular mom and dad are rejoicing, they have a second child who never sleeps more than two hours straight. Some kids do great in school---others have to work at it. Some are naturals at math---others have a tough time with arithmetic but are geniuses at languages---and so on. Each child is different. They're each little "God-given" mysteries waiting to be solved. As you may have heard, an accurate translation of our text from Proverbs is this,

"Train up a child---ACCORDING TO HIS BENT---HIS UNIQUENESS---and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

One of the best ways to make our kids know they are loved is for us to take the time and effort to get to know them by making it our goal early on to discover their unique "bent." In short, to LOVE our kids we need to become STUDENTS of our kids. We need to engage in the great adventure of becoming very familiar with the unique individual God made them to be. Remember, a good carpenter works WITH the grain not AGAINST it---and we need to KNOW our kids' "grain" before we can do our part in shaping them---growing them.

John Trent tells the story of his mother who raised three sons all by herself and she must have done a good job nurturing them because they all three became good at what they do.

- John is a noted Christian writer, specializing in Christian counseling.
- His brother Jeff is a medical doctor specializing in genetic research. At one time he lived in Rockville and worked at NIH. He may still do so.
- John's other brother, Joe, worked for several years as a heavy equipment operator.

Well, this single mom devoted herself to studying her three boys.

- To show her love for John she read several books on theology and counseling.
- To show her love to Jeff she took a course on genetics and read books on the subject.

- To show her love for Joe she subscribed to Heavy Equipment Digest so she could converse meaningfully to him about the load capacity of bulldozers and earth movers.

Well, what about you moms and dads? Would you be rated as an expert on your children? Here's a little test to help you decide:

- What do you enjoy doing more than anything else?
- Of all the people they have studied in the Bible, who is the person they would most like to be like and why?
- What do they believe God wants them to do for humankind?
- What is the best part of their school day, what is their worst?

Make up your own questions but remember---one way to communicate love to your child is to become the world's greatest expert when it comes to your kids.

Here's a second way we communicate love to our little ones.

b. By spending TIME with them.

Now, time is a precious thing in our fast-paced society, isn't it?! That's why we talk about "spending" it as if it were some form of currency. Well, our kids know our time is precious. We communicate that fact all too clearly---so when we "spend" our time on them, they instinctively conclude that they are precious to us---loved by us!

Several years ago, the University of California tested fifth and sixth graders to determine what caused them the highest degree of sadness, anxiety, and depression. The top answer had to do with what I talked about a moment ago---the need to have moms and dads who had a stable, loving, committed relationship and their worry that this might go away. But the second thing that caused them the most worry was parents who didn't spend enough time with them.

So, if you want to make your child feel loved and secure---give them your time! And, in our time with them, whether it's taking them to breakfast or playing a video game together or taking them shopping---or reading to them or helping them build a tree-fort or whatever. In these times, we are building a relationship with them through which we get to see their uniqueness and then can AFFIRM them for who they are.

So, TIME is kind of a "two-for" when it comes to making your kids feel loved!

c. Through meaningful TOUCH.

You may not realize this, but the skin has a built-in need to be touched. In fact, physiologists contend that the nerve endings of the skin are actually associated with certain vital glands centered in the brain. These glands regulate growth and many other important functions of the body. Research suggests that some children, because of a lack of touching, have their growth stunted to some degree.

Well, touching doesn't only affect our kids physically---it also affects their emotionally. Holding them when they are little---hugging them when they are big---touch tells them they are valuable.

I still remember the day we dropped our firstborn, Daniel off at college. After helping him move into the freshman dorm at Grove City, I said good-bye. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do as a parent, and I had to do it two more times! But the last thing I did before leaving that day was give Daniel a hug---and you know, these days the first thing my 39-year-old son does when we meet is hug me---and the last thing he does when we part is---anyone want to guess? RIGHT---hug me. To me that shows that even though he's way grown-up, physical touch causes him to feel loved.

d. A fourth way to express love for our children is by DISCIPLINING them.

Do you remember the reality show: SUPER-NANNY! What made her SUPER as a nanny? It wasn't some superior wisdom. It wasn't powers above those of mortal men or women. She didn't leap buildings in a single bound and was not faster than a speeding bullet. No, she just knew how to discipline kids.

Every episode was the same. This super-nanny would swoop down on a house where the kids were running things because parents have been too lazy to say NO---and she would set up rules and lovingly enforce them and do you know what? It worked. Kids would actually pick up their toys and go to bed when told to and do their homework and treat their parents respectfully. That's the power---and importance of discipline.

Part of the problem with families these days is that many parents have either forgotten this, or they are just too lazy. A few years back I was listening to WTOG and heard a story about a parent who called 911 and said, *"My daughter won't behave. Send a patrol car."* The 911 operator responded, *"What do you want us to do? Come over and shoot her?"* The operator was disciplined for his retort, but I understand his frustration. Too many parents just don't discipline their kids. They expect someone else to do it.

Chip Ingram, whom a bunch of us will hear teach at the COVE this next weekend---Chip hits the nail on the head when he says, *"Many parents focus too much on self-esteem and not enough on the esteem of others. Kids don't have values because parents have been buddies instead of parents."*

Too many parents believe if you really love your child, you won't need to discipline them or if you discipline your child, he will have every reason to doubt your love. But this is just not true. The best way to make your child feel loved and secure is to discipline them when they need it---and all children need it!

Now, it's important to understand the difference between punishment and discipline. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth. The focus of punishment is on the past. The focus of discipline is on the future. The motivation behind punishment is usually anger. And the motivation for discipline is love. It's all in the parental handbook that God provided.

Proverbs 13:24 says, ***"If you refuse to discipline your son it proves you don't love him."***

Proverbs 19:18 says, ***"Discipline your children while they are young enough to learn. If you don't you're helping them destroy themselves."***

Ruben Hill is a psychologist who has studied the effects of discipline in the home, and he has discovered that there are basically four types of parents---producing four different types of children. Now as I describe all this, I want you to ask yourselves two questions:

"Which type of parents were my mom and dad?"

And second, *"Which type am I?"*

a. The PERMISSIVE PARENT – HIGH love - LOW discipline.

This kind of parent might say things like this, *"You're tired aren't you. A paper route is a tough job. I'll do it for you. You stay and watch TV or play 'Grand Theft Auto' with your friends."* Hill found that this type of parent produces children with low self-image and inferiority complexes. These children feel very loved but are insecure because there are no boundaries.

b. The NEGLECTFUL PARENT – LOW love and LOW discipline.

The child of this parent has little or no relationship with their mom or dad. The child feels abandoned and forsaken. They think their parents don't care what happens to them. Neglectful parents are not only absent when they are away from home. They also rob their children of one of the most important factors in their lives---emotional accessibility. When they are home, they usually are not listening or paying attention to their kids. The neglectful parent might say things like, *"Work it out for yourself. Can't you see I'm busy?"* or *"That's your problem. I've got to get to work."*

c. The DOMINANT PARENT – LOW love – HIGH discipline

Children from these homes are provoked to rebellion because the parent has rule after rule after rule but no love whatsoever. The dominant parent might say things like this: *“Rules are rules. You’re late---so go to bed with no dinner.”* The children of these homes often turn into aggressive violent adults because as someone put it, *“Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.”*

d. The LOVING but FIRM parent – HIGH love – HIGH discipline

This kind of mom or dad realize that genuine love and discipline go hand in hand and children from these homes are more likely to turn out great. They have high self-image and excellent self-coping skills.

Now I think the main reason this last kind of parent is so rare is not because most parents don’t love their kids. They do--it’s just that as I said a moment ago, discipline is hard. It’s time-consuming. It stinks when you’re going through it---but the product is wonderful. Reminds me of potty-training. The process is miserable, but we all want the product---in the right place!

Loving but firm parents---moms and dads cling to the promise that we find in Hebrews 12:11 where it says, ***“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”***

3.) To be nurtured children need a church FAMILY.

As I said, this is a tough world for a child to grow up in. These days parenting is often too much for just a mom and dad. They need help---and this is especially true of single parents.

Well, this is where a church family comes in. You see other adults who have already parented can share the things they have learned. They can also reinforce our parenting, saying the same things we say to our kids. This reminds me of a *“Dear Ann Landers”* advice column I came across years ago. *“Dear Ann Landers: I’m a 16-year-old girl who is a nervous wreck from getting yelled at. All I hear from morning till night is, ‘Stop smoking, get off the phone, hang up your clothes, do your homework, clean up your room.’ How can I get them off my case? Signed, Sick of Parents.”* Do you want to hear Landers’ response? *“Dear Sick: ‘Stop smoking, get off the phone, hang up your clothes, do your homework and clean up your room.’”*

Kids need other adults like Ms. Landers to echo our parenting---other adults to live the same morals so as to back up what their parents say and do. This helps the child to realize that their moms and dads aren’t disciplining them just to make them miserable---because all adults have the same basic standards.

Another thing---one of the benefits of a church family is the fact that they provide a support group for parents when our kids REJECT our teaching. We need to understand that no matter how hard we try to do a good job as moms and dads, there are times when our kids will break our hearts and use their free-will to reject our parenting. You can use all these nurturing tips and still have kids that rebel. And, in times like these a loving, grace-driven church family is invaluable as they join hurting parents in praying for kids who have followed in the path of the prodigal son. In fact, our PARENT CHILD dedications are actually PARENT-CHILD-CHURCH dedications because we commit to help these parents in raising their little ones

4.) To be nurtured children need parents who PARTNER with God.

You know, nurturing kids is very similar to nurturing the young plants in a garden. And as any green thumb worth his fertilizer will tell you, it is impossible to grow a garden without Divine help. It doesn’t matter how much you prepare the soil and weed and prune if you have no sunshine or rain. Gardens need God’s help to succeed. Well in a similar way, we can’t nurture kids---we can’t successfully raise our children without the aid of our Heavenly Father---our Creator and Redeemer. As Dr. Henry Brant has said, *“A parent is a partner with God in making disciples of their children.”* So, parents who want to nurture their kids must also nurture a relationship with God---in which they study His word for guidance and spend time on their knees asking for His help.

I remember back during the school prayer debate one U.S. senator was asked to address the annual men's dinner at a local church. About 450 were present. The issue of school prayer was a very hot topic at the time. Well, in his speech the senator asked two questions. First, he said, *"How many of you would like to see prayer restored in the public schools?"* As far as he could tell, every hand was raised, with many *"AMENS!"* Then he asked, *"How many of you pray with and for your children at home?"* The silence was embarrassing.

I wonder what would happen if I asked the same two questions this morning? Would our honest voting reveal our dependence on God as parents?

LET'S PRAY