

Confidence in the Promises**April 18, 2021****Dr. Ted Tripp**

I'm so thankful for the opportunity via this pre-recorded session to talk to you about raising kids. And I'm looking forward to next year when hopefully the pandemic will have settled to such a point and international travel will be available again and I'll be able to visit you in person.

I want to talk to you this morning. My topic is "Confidence in the Promises". I want to look at a passage that is often cited by parents as a promise regarding raising children. It's a familiar passage, Proverbs 22:6. It says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Let me just pray with you and ask for God's help as we consider this passage and strive to understand its meaning. Let's pray.

We come to You, Lord, with gratitude and thankfulness, as You have given us Your Word that we're not left in this world trying to figure things out and sort them out on our own or just trying to reason. But You have given us minds that are capable of reasoning. You have given us truth with which we can reason, and we thank You that that truth has been a scripture, that it's revealed, that it's been given to us in a fixed form that reads the same way every day.

And we desire Lord, to rightly divide the Word of Truth, to cut a straight path through the Scriptures, to be workman that need not be ashamed. And so, we pray that You would deepen our understanding of Your word and Your truth and give us hope and encouragement for the salvation of our children. We pray this for Christ's great glory. Amen.

Well, the promises from the Word of God are precious to all believers, because we're always looking for certainty. And we know that whatever God has promised is certain. We can depend on it; we can bank on it. In the words of Second Corinthians 1:20, no matter how many promises God has made, "they are all yes in Christ Jesus". Every promise God has made is secured for us by the work and Person, and life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, every parent longs for some promise, for some assurance from God regarding the salvation of their children. Because we cannot imagine Heaven being Heaven if any of our children were not there. I remember my mother talking about this and saying, "If God is going to wipe away every tear, then He will have to wipe away my memory of my children, if I get to heaven and my children are not there".

Well, we know that we can have confidence in the promises of God. But the question for us to consider today is what has God promised regarding the salvation of our children? Hasn't God promised that if we raise our children the right way, they will turn out to be children who know God and love God and live for His glory? Hasn't God promised that? And of course, the passage that I read to you a moment ago, Proverbs 22:6, is one of the passages that is often cited by parents who are looking for some assurance regarding the eternal state of their children's souls. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

I've had scores of conversations with young people as I've done seminars on raising children all over the world. And many, many conversations where young people are looking for assurances regarding the salvation of their children. The conversations go like this, the question is framed in this way: "If I'm diligent, as a parent, if I'm faithful to God, if I train up our children in the way that they should go, hasn't God promised that they will grow up, love God and live as Christians?"

I've also had times when I've spoken to brokenhearted parents who are confused and maybe even a little disappointed in God. The conversations go like this (and this is obviously composite) but the conversations have these kinds of elements to them:

"We did everything we were taught to do. We were in church three times a week. If the doors to the church were open, our family was there. We sacrificed to have our kids in Christian school, or we homeschool them. And we made choices that were difficult choices in order to train our children correctly. They were in youth programs in the church, and they even won prizes for Bible memorization. And they never gave us any trouble. We thought they were doing great.

But then he went to college. He even went on mission trips when he was in high school, but when he went to college, everything changed. He never seemed to get connected to a good church. He started hanging out with some young men and young women who were into drugs and the whole party scene and now he wants nothing to do with Christianity. And he gets hostile with us when we ask him questions and say 'what went wrong? Where did you get derailed?'

Meanwhile, we have friends who were worldly Christians. They were inconsistent in training their children, they allowed them to watch movies and entertainment that we forbid in our home. Their church attendance was often spasmodic, and they sent their kids to public school! They even allowed their kids far more latitude in making personal choices, much younger than we allowed our children to make those kinds of choices.

And you should see their kids today! They love God. They're the young people we always wanted our kids to be. They're active in the church. They're raising their kids well. And the people of the church, the people that we were with when we raised our children, they look at us. And we know they're quiet, but they are whispering about how we have failed in raising our children."

Now, if you want to have some insight into how much we are full of pride and self-righteousness as God's people... some of you hearing those composite case studies have already decided what the first parents did wrong, and what the second parents whose kids turned out well, did right. You've already begun to evaluate, haven't you? And the speed with which we make that kind of assessment is indication of how much we believe that "getting it right" is what will produce children who grow up to love God.

And some of the anger with God and the cynicism that these couples I've spoken with reflect, is the anger of pride and self-righteousness...works righteousness. The underlying idea is, we were diligent; we did it right. We put effort into the right things. We took the commands of God seriously. We were committed to church, we sacrificed. We were so intentional as parents and look at what happened. It's not fair! We've been ripped off. We trained them in the way they should go. And they've gotten older, and they have departed from it. The promises of God haven't been true for us. We did it right. And it didn't work.

Well, one of the first ways that I respond to that is, “No, you didn't do it right”. Now, obviously, you can't say that quickly. Those are hard things to say very quickly in a conversation, especially when you have weeping parents in front of you. But the reality is they didn't get it right. They failed. They failed again and again.

Sometimes they disciplined in anger. Sometimes they were controlling and fearful. They were proud. They were self-righteous. They were concerned with external things more than internal things. Some days they were lazy and unmotivated. They didn't get it right.

I have three adult children. I didn't get it right. You didn't get it right. My wife and I sometimes jokingly say to each other, “we're all from dysfunctional families”. Because we are all raised by parents who are flawed people who sin and fail and don't get it right.

But, if you think about the meta story underneath this, the meta story underneath is, this is the way that parenting works if you do the things that God has called you to do. If you get it right, you will produce Christian children. Salvation is not by grace after all [then]; salvation comes to those whose parents fulfill all righteousness in child rearing.

If my son turns out to love God, and to walk with God, then I can take some of the glory for that. I mean, we *know* it's all of grace, but I did my part too. I trained him in the way that he should go. And I might even say to people who are commending my adult child who loves God, “Oh, God has been so good!”. And that's true. And I believe it. But I want them to realize that underneath my humility, I've been good too.

See, that kind of works righteousness is what dictates the subtext underneath so much of what is written and taught and believed about raising children. It's the idea that I can save my children. I can be the Savior and Lord in my family if I practice tough love. If I do gospel-centered parenting. If I use positive discipline. If I'm consistent. If I shepherd their hearts. If, if, if... you fill in the blank.

If I get it right, then I will produce children who love God and love others. You know, if I had believed that when I was raising my children, it would not have been a comfort to me, because I made too many mistakes. I was too wrongheaded. I was too full of myself. Too often I personalized their disobedience and I made it about me. And even my correction and discipline was about me. It wasn't about God. If I believed that getting it right would produce excellent children, it would not have been a comfort to me. Because I didn't get it right.

And so this “if you get it right, your kids will turn out right” is often the meta story that is underneath a young couple who is looking for assurances from God that if they're diligent, if they give themselves fully to all that God has commanded them to do, they can be confident that their children will grow up to know and love God. That is probably the most common use of this passage of Scripture for parents.

I recall to my shame, receiving a call from a friend many years ago. He told me about his daughter, who was 15 years old and who had gotten pregnant. The boy that she had been with was not a Christian. He was not from a Christian family. My friend was heartbroken. He was scared. He was scared for his daughter. He was feeling like she had ruined her life.

And I suppose that he called to find some comfort or encouragement from me. To my shame, I say he called the wrong person. I remember saying, "It doesn't have to be like this. You didn't have to have a daughter who is pregnant at 15". And the insinuation underneath my words, that I'm sure came through to my friend was, "you blew it".

It didn't have to be this way. But because you failed as a Christian father, see what has happened to your daughter. My counsel to him that day was cringeworthy counsel. There was no gospel in it. It was full of pride and self-righteousness. I offered no gospel hope to my friend. I offered no gospel hope because underneath it all, I had the notion that he had blown the one chance he had to raise his daughter.

If only I had another pass at that conversation. If only I could have a redo and have that conversation again, I would tell him about the power of God. I would talk to him about the grace of the gospel. I would talk to him about the truth that our children are never hopelessly lost. I would help him to find hope in God, in God's rich mercies for the faithless and unbelieving. I would help him to think through how he could respond to his daughter in ways that were godly and focused on hope, the gospel hope we find in the Word of God.

But sadly, and to my shame, I tell you that my counsel to that man that day was the counsel of Job's comforters. You remember Job's comforters? The logic of their counsel to Job was, "If things have gone wrong, you must have done something wrong, because there's a reason why these things come to you. If you are as good a man as you're trying to convince us that you are, these things would not have happened to you".

Now, we all have Job's comforters inside us, don't we? We have those voices that are condemning us when our children disappoint. What did we do wrong? Where did we fail? And the implication even in those questions, when we ask them of ourselves, is, if I had gotten things right, I wouldn't be facing these problems. It's not that they behave this way because they're sinners...it's my fault. If I had done a better job, they would be happy.

Now, obviously, there are times when we can evaluate our performance, and whether or not we've been faithful, and we can always benefit from seeking God for grace and strength to be faithful to do the things God has called us to do as parents, but so often, it is Job's comforter that I speak to myself in those moments of reflection.

And of course, that paradigm, that idea that if I get it right, they will turn out right, is what makes us castigate ourselves for our failures, or preen ourselves when we feel successful. Now, some of you may be thinking by this point, "Okay Ted, I take your point. But if Proverbs 22:6 doesn't promise Christian children, what does the verse mean?"

Of course, we have to remember that Proverbs 22:6 is part of a genre in the Scripture of wisdom literature. Wisdom literature provides us with general principles for living in ways that honor God and show respect for God's guidance and law. So, wisdom literature is an application of Biblical truth to the practical issues of life. The proverbs are not legally binding promises from God. They're a general application of truth. Let me take a couple of examples to illustrate. In Proverbs 3:1 and 2, we read

“My son, do not forsake my teaching, but let your heart keep to my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.”

And we can ask ourselves, is that always true? If one lives in faithfulness to God's promises, will it always mean long life and peace? How did that work out for Steven in the book of Acts? He preached this great sermon and at the end of the sermon, the crowd came forward. They didn't even wait for singing “Just as I am”. They came forward and they put their fingers in their ears and they rushed him, and they stoned him to death. Faithful ministry? Yes. Length of days? No.

You see, if we make Proverbs 3:1 and 2 an ironclad promise that God promises long life and peace to everyone who doesn't forsake His teaching and keeps His commandments, then we have misinterpreted the passage. It's not an ironclad guarantee. It is a general statement that God's blessings attend faithfulness. For example, Proverbs 15:25. We'll take that as another illustration. “The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but he maintains the widow's boundary.”

Is the house of the proud always torn down? Do proud people always get their comeuppance in this life? Are widows never taken advantage of by unscrupulous men? Of course not. The purpose of the proverb is to set out the general principle that God recompenses the proud and the widow can entrust herself to God's care. You see, the wisdom of all the Proverbs is designed to point to the One who alone is wise. Remember, Colossians 2:3, “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

If you think back to Proverbs 3:1 and 2, there was One who never forsook the teaching of His Father, who fully kept the Father's commandments, and He was cut off from the land of the living in His sacrificial death. He sees and will see eternally, length of days and years of life and peace. He sees the travail of His soul, and He's eternally satisfied the will of the Lord prospers in His hand.

Ultimately, wisdom literature is designed to point to the One who alone is wise. And in whom all the promises of God's Word are “yes” and “amen”. So, when we come to Proverbs 22:6, rather than seeing it as an ironclad promise that I through my faithfulness with my family can produce a family that will be saved and will grow old serving and loving God, I must see this passage rather as a general application of a biblical principle.

So that it's not just casting me on my role of securing the salvation of my children through my faithfulness, but it points me to Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and it casts me on His mercy, and on His kindness, as my hope for my children.

We can think about our children this way. There are two sets of issues that contribute to the person your children become. One of those issues are the shaping influences of life. The other is a Godward orientation of their hearts. I want to take each of those in turn. If you think about shaping influences, there are many shaping influences that come to our children. For example, the structures of family life. Is it a traditional family? Is the child being raised by natural parents? Or is it a single parent family? How many children are in the family? What is the birth order of children? All those issues will impact a child.

We have a young man in our community, raised in a Christian home. He is one of 11 children. He was the eldest; he changed more diapers by the time he was out of high school than most women have in

their entire life. He brought a lot of skill with caring for children into marriage with him when he was married because he had been a care provider for 10 younger brothers and sisters his entire life.

Or we think of family values. What's important in family life? Are people more important than things? Will mom and dad get more upset over a hole in your new school pants than they are over the fight that produced the hole in the school pants? Or boundaries. What are the boundaries of a family? Where are secrets kept? Where are things told? How high are the walls around family living? What is private? What do you share? All those things are very different.

I know of some families where the children have no idea how much money the parents earn, or even exactly how secure their financial income and financial life is. There are other families in which the children know the balance of the checkbook at a given moment. There are these differences in boundaries and children learn to understand those boundaries.

Or family roles. What are the roles of family? Because children learn to be adults by imitation. The boy observes his dad. He sees his dad's care and love for the family. He sees how mindful his dad is to save his wife steps. How solicitous he is of her needs. And he learns to be a man. Girls learn to be a woman by observing their mom. Observing their dad and the way that he interacts with them.

Think of things like conflict resolution. How are conflicts resolved in the family? These are powerful shaping influences. Is this a family where they talk through their problems? Can they speak freely to one another? Can they hear one another? Some parents even use children as emissaries when they are having a fight and not speaking to each other.

“Tell your mother that I'm ready to go.”

Mother says to the child, “tell your father, I'll be ready when I'm ready”.

Or think of how family responds to failure. Are our children mocked? Are they made to look foolish? Some families are very skilled at making even failed efforts seem successful because effort was put into it, and they know how to move their children from failure to further successes. Or think of family histories. Just the dynamic events that happen in family life: births, deaths, marriage, divorce, illness, moves from one part of the country to another, from one country to another country. Family reputation in the community.

I remember counselling a woman one time who was in her mid-30s. And she said to me, “we moved around a lot when I was a child”. Now “moved around a lot” ...that's way too ambiguous for a counsellor. We have to nail that down. What do you mean moved around? “Oh, we moved real often”. How often? 5 times during your childhood? “No, more than that.” 10 times? “Oh, more than that”. 15 times? “More than that”. She came back the next week and she and her sister talked together and counted eighteen moves before she had left home as a young adult. That impacts a person.

I think of a couple in the church that I serve who had a fire at their house. They were rehabilitating the house. They had torn off the staircase that led from the first floor to the second floor, temporarily, and they put a ladder in its place. In the middle of the night, they realized the house was on fire. The father said to his wife, “Honey, get the baby. We've got to get out of here. I'll grab our son. You get the baby”.

And so they fled from the house. The house was falling down around them, entirely engulfed in flames. They're watching it burn. He turned to her and said, “Where's the baby?” She said, “I thought you said

you were getting the baby". Dynamic event. That family's entire life story exists between before the fire and after the fire because everything changed after the fire.

We think of education. Do you homeschool your kids? Do you have them at a Christian school? Some Christian schools are excellent, and some Christian schools are legalistic and moralistic and not gospel centered. Do you homeschool? Or are you in a situation where public education can be an appropriate alternative for you? Those things impact our children. The community in which you live, the prosperity or the poverty of the community, the circumstances, cultural education, opportunities the community affords, the difficulty or ease with which one may meet basic needs in the community. All those things impact our children.

And we could go on and on with illustrations of shaping influences. These things profoundly impact our children as they are growing up. And there are two mistakes we can make in understanding the shaping influences that impact our children. We can make the mistake of seeing them deterministically. That is, the mistake of assuming that the child was just the product of the shaping influences. Whatever the environmental circumstances were in which the child was raised, whatever pressures were brought to bear on him, will shape him in some way, and he is just going to be the product of those shaping influences.

The second mistake is a mistake of denial. It's a mistake of not taking seriously enough the impact of shaping influences on our kids. It's acting like the child who has been raised in a difficult home that is insecure and unstable, and where there's anger and fighting and bitterness, is unaffected, and the child who is raised in a home where there's order and symmetry and the beauty of Christ-like living will be unchanged by that. We can deny it.

Parents make the mistake often of Christian determinism. Many parents make that mistake. If I shelter him enough, if we have family worship every day, if we're positive in our interactions with him, if we send him to a Christian school, or better yet, if we homeschool him, if we keep him from harmful media, if we're part of a good church with him, if we teach him to obey and honor father and mother, if we do all those things, our kids will turn out right.

And that kind of Christian determinism sometimes exists in Christian parents. In fact, some of you have pursued understanding parenting because you want to learn how to get it right. And you're persuaded that if you provide the proper environment for your child, you'll produce a proper child. It's almost as though the child was inert.

The fact is our children are not inert. Our children are made in the image of God. They are made for God, they are covenantally designed. They will either live in a covenant relationship with God, or they will exchange the truth for a lie, and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator. But ultimately, what they do with God will determine how they interpret the circumstantial, shaping influences we provide.

Of course, there are many shaping influences that are outside our control. We don't control all the circumstances of life. Sometimes births, deaths, sickness, poverty, prosperity, those things come upon us unexpectedly. We don't manage those circumstances or control them. All of your children have been impacted in the past year by a pandemic that has changed life for everyone in the world. They will bear some impact from that throughout their entire life. But our children are not inert.

One of the most humbling aspects of raising kids is the realization that I cannot save my kids. I have no capacity to reach down inside and flip a switch, make this child into a child who believes God. It's one of the most humbling truths that we can ever grasp about child rearing. If your kids grow up to know God and love God, it's because God is rich in mercy and grace and kindness. Because God alone has the power to save.

You see, your children are not just passive responders to your parenting. They are active responders; they're not inert. Parenting children is not like running a plastic extrusion press where you put a certain amount of pressure on, and the plastic goes through the extruder, and it comes out in the right shape. It falls into the bin and the next one comes out looking exactly like it and falls into the bin. Our children are interacting with the parenting.

An illustration of this: one time I was with a friend of mine who was a potter and we're talking about clay, and he said, "I can only make the kind of things out of clay that the clay will allow me to make". And what he was pointing out is that some clay is supple and elastic, easily molded, shaped and manipulated, and some clay is dry, crumbly and hard to work. You can make things out of the elastic, supple clay that you can't make out of the dry and brittle clay.

You see, your children respond. They are not inert in this process. They are active responders. Your children respond according to the God-ward orientation of their hearts. If your child grows up and knows God and loves God, if he embraces the truth that knowing God can enable him to have peace and rest for his soul in all circumstances, if he embraces that truth, if he lives out of that truth, he will be able to respond constructively even to your shaping influences in which you sometimes fail.

But if he doesn't know God, if he doesn't love God, if he has, in the words of Romans chapter one, exchanged the truth for a lie, and His worship in serving created things rather than the Creator, if he's serving those idols of the heart, he may rebel against your best efforts. Now, often at this point, people respond with this question.

If there are no guarantees, then why bother? The answer to that question, of course, is you do what God has called you to do because God has called you to do it. That is what it means to love Him. That is what it means to live a life of faith and obedience to God. But the outcome is always far more complex than whether or not we've done the right things. God works through means and one of the means He uses is parents.

But ultimately, your children are responsible for the ways that they respond to your parenting. That determinism that makes parents convinced that good parenting will automatically produce good children produces bitter fruit later in life. Because parents of unruly, troublesome teenagers and young adults often conclude, "It's all my fault. I failed as a parent". They provided the wrong shaping influences and they become filled with "if only". If only we had homeschooled, or if only we had not homeschooled. If only we had been more consistent. If only we had.... It's not hard to blame yourself; we can all identify things that we have done wrong. But we are forgetting Proverbs 4:23 that says, "Above all else, guard your heart. For the heart is a wellspring of life."

Your child's heart determines how he will respond to the parenting that you provide and to the shaping influences of life that he experiences. This kind of determinism (if I get it right, they turn out right), can

only lead to hopelessness. Because after the child has grown and after you've blown up, what hope can you have? If the only hope is that parents get it right, then what hope is there if you don't get it right?

Proverbs 9:7-10 is such an excellent illustration of this principle. Let me just read that passage to you quickly and make a few observations about it because it shows how ultimately what the child does with God determines how he responds to the parenting you provide. Proverbs 9:7:

“Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult. Whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you. Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will grow wiser still. Teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.”

Now there are four words in this passage that describe the activities of the parent. Correct, rebuke, instruct and teach. Four activities, but the passage describes two very different responders. One responder is the wise man. The other responder is the wicked man. Same input. Parent is correcting, rebuking, instructing, teaching. One child is wise, the other one is foolish. Two very different responses.

The wise man will increase in his learning, will grow in understanding. He will love the person who corrects, instructs, teaches, and rebukes. The foolish person, the wicked man, will hate the person. He will abuse them. He'll be angry with the person who instructs and teaches and rebukes. You see, the same input...two very different responses.

And as important as these shaping influences are, many of them are not under our control. Many shaping influences are things that happen in the society and environment around us that we don't manage. Like, for example, the pandemic. None of us had control over whether or not our children's education and lives would be interrupted for this past year by a global pandemic. It came upon us. It has a shaping influence. Our kids will talk about it until their grave. They'll remember their childhood as the childhood in which the pandemic took place and people that they knew and loved died. And millions of people around the globe died.

If God has not promised that if we get it right we will produce excellent children, then what has God promised? What can we hope in? One of the things is we know that God works through families. We see that from Genesis 12 onward. Families are frequently used by God to be the means of bringing grace and salvation to children. David writes about that in Psalm 78. He says:

God has established a testimony in Jacob and appointed the law for Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, so that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn might arise and teach them to their children, so that they, in turn, would set their hope in God.

We know that God works through families. God is a God who works through means and one of the means He uses to bring truth to our children is a parent who speaks God's word into their children's lives. Second thing which we can find hope in is that every day you confront your child with their need of God. You confront them with their lost state. You remind them day by day, that they're part of a fallen race. That Romans chapter 3 is true of them, just as it is true of you. Beginning with verse 10:

There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless, there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

It's true of our children just as it is true of us. There's no one good, no one righteous, no one that seeks God. It's true that we have to be careful that we never beat our kids up over their depravity, but we surely want them to know that they're part of a fallen race.

God is a God who overlooks nothing, who will bring every wicked deed done on this planet under His just and holy judgment. And one day, people will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. So, we acquaint our children every day with their lost state, with their need of God. We stand in solidarity with Him with that because we too need God. As Christians, everything that Romans chapter 3:10 through 19 says is true of us as well as of them.

The third thing that can give us hope is that day after day we remind our children that Jesus is a willing, able, and powerful Savior of sinners. Know that even though we're under God's wrath due to our sin, God has poured out His wrath on His Son, so that everyone who ever repents and believes might be saved. We're continually saying to our children that God's justice demands the punishment of your sins, and you can either bear the full weight of that wrath on yourself, or He has poured out His wrath on His son so that all who ever repent and believe might be saved.

And so, we point our children to this willing, able, powerful Savior of sinners. And He has given us absolute ironclad promises. Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" is a message children need to hear continually. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is a willing, powerful, able Savior of sinners. He's a place where you can flee. And no one who ever turns to Him will ever be turned away. Here is another absolute ironclad promise of God. First John 1:8 – 2:2.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We confess our sins, He's faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's an ironclad promise from God. You can give that to your children, and that can give you hope, and give them hope. If we cast ourselves on Christ, He'll be our advocate. The basis of that advocacy is His righteous life and death on the cross. And God is faithful and just to the Son, who bore the wrath of God for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

It's so important that we model for our children the joy and gratitude of someone who knows God. Someone who is thankful to God for the grace of the gospel, who is thankful for rich mercy. You know, your love for God, your hope in God, your kindness, your gratitude, your joy, even in the midst of the trials, it speaks powerfully to our children.

When my children were young (they're all raised now; I have grandchildren who are in their 20s), but when my children were young, people used to ask me (because I taught often on raising children), "Do you think your children will grow up and love God?" And I used to say to them, "I believe that they are sinners, and every day I acquaint them with their lost state. And I believe that Jesus is a willing, powerful, able Savior of sinners.

And God, in His rich mercy has put them in a place where they are being shown every day the mercy and kindness of God and His grace and power to save. And I know that God works through means. And I know the gospel is the power of God to salvation. But ultimately, at the end of the day, salvation is from the Lord. And if they grow up to know God and love God, it's because He is merciful and able to save."

Now my adult children are believers. And they are raising their children with far more insight and wisdom than I ever had. But it is all to the praise of God's glory, because I didn't get it right. I made so many mistakes and I've had to ask my adult children so many times to forgive me for ways in which I was wrongheaded, and ignorant even of my own faithfulness as a father.

When I teach these things, the common question I've already alluded to is this: "Then why be diligent to do all God has called me to do? If my child is a product, not just of the shaping influences, but interacts with those influences out of the God-ward orientation of his heart, and if I'm powerless to change his heart, then why bother? Why give myself all the things God has called me to do?"

And the reality is that your obedience to God is an expression of love and gratitude to God for His grace in your life. And one of the effects of the gospel is we are made people who delight in the law of God. That's what Psalm 40:8 says. "I delight to do your will God, and your commandments are not grievous to me, because I delight to do your will." So, our love for God and our obedience to God, is not in order that we may get something from God. It is an expression of love and delight in God, and delight in His ways. Delight in what pleases Him.

Jesus, the Son of God, in covenant with the Father, came into our world. And He came to live in our flesh. He lived without sin for us so we might have righteousness. He died the death that we should have died because of our sin. There was one time which the Son did not call God, "Father". It was on the cross. The Father turned away from the Son, and the Son cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Father turned away from the Son so that He might turn toward us. The Son was forsaken by God in that hour, in order that I might be embraced by God in my neediness, in order that my children might be embraced by God. That is a powerful message for our kids. So, what do we remind them? That we are finite people; we're not even a sufficient reference point for ourselves. We need God. We need this One who came into our world, to seek and to save what is lost. We need this One who says, "If anyone comes to me, I will never cast him out."

He is a willing, able, powerful Savior of sinners. I can hope in this One who has such grace and such power, and ultimately, my satisfaction with regards to my children, and myself, and everything else that has ever happened on this planet will be resolved in the knowledge that God is good and wise, and He has done what pleases Him. And what pleases God must please me.

Let's pray together. We ask Lord, that You would humble us. Humble us to realize we can't save our kids through our efforts. And we ask also that You would encourage us and strengthen us with the hope that is found in Christ, in His grace. That we would love Him supremely, desire His glory above all things, and give ourselves fully to the calling He has given us as parents. Not just so we can get it right and earn our children's acceptance before God, but so we can glorify God by showing forth His glory to our kids.

We pray that you would have mercy on them. That you would do what You alone can do, and we are powerless to do. Would You save them. We pray this, for Your great glory.