

We are in the second week of a sermon series that I have entitled “The practical gospel,” learning to put into practice what Paul said in *Philippians 2:12-13*, where he told the Philippians to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” Now that you have been saved, now that you have believed the gospel, work out the implications of the gospel into every area of your life as God works in you. Not “work for your salvation,” because we are saved by the grace of God and not by anything we have done, but rather “work out the implications of your salvation.” In other words, think through how the truths of the gospel should shape the different aspects of your life and allow the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to do His work.

The gospel summary statement I will be using this series: “**We are sinners who have been saved and justified by grace, learning to live as new creations according to God’s will, trusting in a certain and glorious eternal hope and future.**”

If you read that statement closely, you will recognize that it has a past, present, and future dimension. Today, we are going to use those three aspects as our framework and examine what the implications of the gospel are for your parenting.

Please understand this is not “7 steps to becoming the most awesomest parent ever,” but a look at the practical differences believing the gospel makes in your parenting. It is born out of the conviction that the gospel is the power for our lives. It is not just the door into the kingdom, and then we learn and follow principles for living. The more deeply we believe the gospel and apply its truths to every area of our lives, the better we will be. Even if you are not a parent, my hope is that this will still be valuable for you if you have young people in your life or are in any sort of mentoring role.

We are sinners who have been saved and justified by grace.

We are sinners means that we are all rebels against a holy God, separated from Him and staring at an eternity of separation from God and all that is good. And we are so full of wickedness that we can not save ourselves by our own good deeds, can not make ourselves right with God on our own. But the good news is that Jesus lived the perfect life we could not live and died a sacrificial death on the cross in our place, to take the punishment we deserve, to save us from the penalty of our sins, and to restore us to a right relationship with God. To be justified means that we are declared not guilty before a holy God. And this is all a gift of God’s grace, an undeserved gift given by an unobligated giver.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Work out your salvation does not mean work for your salvation; as Ephesians 2 tells us, no amount of good works could ever save us. We have been saved and justified by the grace of God. This humbles us into realizing we are no better than anyone else, and it lifts us up to realize just how loved we are. We are **justified**, declared not guilty, perfect in the sight of God, not because of anything we did, but because of what Jesus did for us. There is no condemnation and nothing can separate us from the love of God. We know we are worth so much to God that He would send His son to die for us. **The more the gospel shapes our identity, how does this affect our parenting?**

Implications for parenting:

- 1) **Our self-worth is not tied to our performance as a parent, or to whether or not we have children**

Our identity is in Christ. How our children are doing or how they turn out is not a reflection on our self-worth as a human being. Some find identity in work. Others in marriage. Others in parenting. But the gospel tells us that our self-worth is found in the God who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place in order to rescue us.

What happens when we get our self-worth from how we are doing as parents? If they are doing well, we are proud, thinking that we are really something because of our kids. If they are not doing well, we may think that we are failures. **We may try to control them, smother them, lie about how we or they are doing, or pretend things are better than they really are**, because we need them to do well so that we can feel good about ourselves.

Many of you who do not have children need to hear this. You may believe that somehow you are less of a person because you do not have parents, or perhaps the frequent questions by others about whether or not you have children sting when you hear it. Paul did not have biological children. Jesus did not have biological children. Children are not a necessary part of being a servant of God.

But the gospel declares that we are worthy because Christ died for us. And that is a self-worth apart from our performance. And so even if our kids did not or do not

turn out the way we wanted, it's not a reflection on our worth as a person. We can love them truly, not for our own ego. And if you do not have kids, it does not mean you are better or worse than those who do. Your self-worth comes from the gospel.

And even with our kids, this means that we don't have to pretend to be the perfect parents. The gospel gives us a humility that in the end is more attractive than being the "perfect parent." We know we are sinners completely dependent upon the grace of God, and this humility can make us quick to confess, to ask for forgiveness, and to be gracious to our children. Our mistakes, humbly and sincerely confessed, probably do more to win our children for Christ than all our virtues combined. Confession shows them we are imperfect but we are earnest about following Christ.

As Barnabas Piper wrote in *The Pastor's Kid* - We hear "sinners need grace," but what do we see? Too often it is a lack of need, or rather a lack of admission of need. Too often we see parents who strive to present themselves as the flawless heroes they can never be instead of the flawed, idiosyncratic, weird, and sinful people they really are... *What the Pastor's Kid (PK) needs is parents who not only admit to being sinners but actually admit to sins. It is far more powerful for a child to see his parents admitting, apologizing for, and working to correct real, actual sins...* We know what sins our dad commits, but if he doesn't admit to them, we can lose respect for him. We also fail to learn to recognize sins in our own lives, and even if we do see them, we won't admit them. Why should we? Dad doesn't... Add up all those responses and there is an even worse potential outcome: PKs never gain a sense of their own need for grace. We may have deep guilt because of an innate recognition of badness or incompleteness. We may suffer from identity issues. But none of this adds up in the PK's mind to I need the grace of Jesus to fix all this.

2) No child is born a Christian, so pray for their salvation

Ephesians 2:1-5 - As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.

We are born dead in transgressions and sins. We can not shape anyone into a Christian. So pray for their salvation!

Assume your children are not Christians unless you see real evidence of the new birth. New birth is a new nature, a radical change of heart. Not joining the church, not leaving bad habits and substituting good ones, not temporary remorse over sin, not even raising your hand or coming forward to “receive Christ.” New birth is known by its fruits – **the most important one is a desire for God himself**. Without that hunger that comes from inside, once they are out of your home, they will likely no longer have the motivation. They might be good teens, but their motivation could be guilt, fear, or pride and not love of God.

3) Our primary goal is not moral children, but heart transformation

What are you aiming for with your children? The primary focus is not morality – moralism is a deadly enemy of Christianity. Consider this quote from Lane & Tripp – *“One of the reasons teenagers are not excited by the gospel is that they do not think they need it. Many parents have successfully raised self-righteous little Pharisees. When they look at themselves, they do not see a sinner in desperate need, so they are not grateful for a Savior.”* **You can raise a nice, well-mannered, virtuous man or woman who is even more lost than the prostitute working around the corner if he is trusting in his own goodness before God.** Morality is not wrong, but do not mistake raising a good kid for the gospel. Many a “good teenager” completely leaves the faith when they go off to college or the real world because their goodness was not a product of their faith in Christ but just a response to the expectations of their home.

Our primary goal is heart transformation, that God would save them and give them new life in him.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Think about all the things you need to guard and protect your child from. You can set up every rule and safeguard. Or you can work on their heart, and when they have a new heart, their desires will change. The best way to overcome the world is not with morality or self-discipline but by seeing the beauty and excellence of Christ, by seeing something more attractive than the world.

We are learning to live as new creations according to God's will,

When we repent and come to faith in Jesus, God gives us His Holy Spirit. We have a new heart, a new spirit, a new hope, a new family, a new future. We have new desires. We are being renewed in our minds. We begin to learn how to live according to God's will, according to the values of the kingdom.

1) Love mercifully and sacrificially

The gospel teaches us how to love – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Grace – we did nothing to deserve it, and often don't appreciate it once we have it.

*Luke 6:36 - **Be merciful**, just as your Father is **merciful**.*

Jesus forgave us and showed us mercy, and we do the same to children who don't always deserve it, because we know how much mercy we have been shown.

*1 John 3:16 - This is how we know what love is: **Jesus Christ laid down his life** for us. And we ought to lay **down** our lives for our brothers.*

Love is sacrificial – it hurts, it inconveniences us, it is a source of stress, it interrupts our plans. This should not surprise us, because this is how Jesus loved us. You may be called to sacrifice career, time, reputation, hobbies, and many other things as you sacrificially love your children.

Think of John 13, where Jesus washes the disciples' feet as a sign of how he loves them.

Your example is everything – they will see through hypocrisy, but are attracted to real love, just as we were attracted to the beauty of Christ in the gospel. Your words will do more harm than good if your example is not Christlike

Archbishop Tillotson (1630-94) – *“To give children good instruction, and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them in the way to hell.”*

After making God your center, put your marriage before your children. **Remember from last week that the purpose of marriage is primarily to point people to the gospel, to reflect the eternal union of Christ and the church.** The audience is not

just God and our neighbors, but also our children. When we love our spouse at their worst, we teach our children that God loves us even when we are unattractive or sinful. By submitting, we teach that we trust Christ to provide. Preach the gospel through your marriage.

2) Discipline them to maturity

After we are born again, Jesus sanctifies us, continually working in us and bringing situations into our lives that will refine us and discipline us into maturity. We do the same for our children by bringing godly discipline into their lives, because we know that we do not want them to be judged by God.

You don't need to teach your children to be bad; **bad behavior comes naturally.** Paul David Tripp ; *"I never had to teach my children to hit one another, to be jealous, to speak unkindly, to push to the front of the line, to announce that their lunch was better than their neighbor's, to brag about their achievements, and to turn everything into a competition."* The first word is not "yes" but "no."

Proverbs 23:13-14 - *Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. ¹⁴ Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.*

Hebrews 12:10-11 - *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ 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.*

He parents us purposefully, with our holiness as his end. He disciplines us painfully if necessary.

Short-term solution is discipline and instruction of the Lord; long-term solution is a new heart.

3) Make your family more than your blood relatives

Matthew 12:46-50 - *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸ He replied to him, "**Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**" ⁴⁹ Pointing to his*

disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Your family is more than blood relatives. It is all who know God. Therefore, you can be a spiritual parent to many people, even if you don't have children of your own or even if your children are grown.

Consider adoption and foster care. We were adopted at the cost of God's Son, even though we deserved punishment. We have been given all the rights of an heir in Christ. When we adopt those who are not a part of our biological family, we display the same kind of welcoming grace that our Father showed to us in Christ.

Consider not just adoption but having the kind of home where people are welcomed as family no matter how long they are a part of your life – our fridge, money, possessions, time, and our advice is yours.

Trusting in a certain and glorious eternal hope and future.

We know that this life is not all that there is. We will live forever with God. Love will never end, death will be conquered. And all that our heart truly desires will one day be ours. We will spend eternity with God, in a place beyond comprehension.

1) Prepare your children first and foremost for eternity, not worldly happiness and success

The goal is not happiness or worldly success. **Mark 8:35-6** - *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet **forfeit** his soul?*

The route may not be college, a high-paying job, a house, or all the things that the world values as measures of success. Pray for them to come to Christ.