

Lesson 11

Parenting From God's Perspective

Embracing Grace; Avoiding Extremes

Before you begin:

Read the Following Passages:

- Psalm 127.4-5a
- Ephesians 6.1-4
- Matthew 5.14-16
- 2 Corinthians 5.20-21
- John 17.14-16
- Philippians 2.14-16
- Hebrews 4.15-16
- Romans 15.7
- 1 Corinthians 13.4-7
- 1 Thessalonians 5.11
- Mark 8.36

Parenting has been likened to sitting in front of a card table, staring at countless tiny jigsaw puzzle pieces. It's not just any puzzle, though. Some border pieces are missing, and you have to determine the boundaries for yourself. A few pieces don't belong; they've been mixed in from another puzzle, leading you down confusing paths. And to add to the complexity, the cover of the box—the blueprint of what you're trying to create—is nowhere to be found. It sounds nearly impossible, doesn't it?

Much like this perplexing puzzle, parents invest years assembling pieces only to sometimes find that the picture they end up with is vastly different from what they envisioned. Yet, amidst the challenges and unexpected turns, parenting remains the most fulfilling endeavor one can undertake. As Psalm 127:4-5a reminds us, *children are a blessing*, an inheritance from the Lord.

Tim Kimmel, in his influential book *Grace Based Parenting*⁴⁰, paints parenting as a historic endeavor. "We've been handed a piece of history in advance," he says, emphasizing that our influence today shapes the future. However, good intentions and skills aren't enough to sustain us

through the unpredictable terrains of parenthood. So, what's needed?

The answer is embedded in Ephesians 6:1-4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

This scripture, located within a broader discourse on mutual submission among believers, nudges parents towards a purpose-driven approach, aligned with God's plans. It beckons parents to anchor their relationship with Jesus, allowing Him to transform their interactions with their family.

Yet, discussions on parenting often touch a raw nerve. We tend to become entrenched in our beliefs and methods, resistant to external input. But parenting, much like life, is a learning journey. I reflect on my 27-year parenting journey and admit, my outlook has evolved. At 25, I had some theories; at 40, I was more confident. Now, approaching 50, with two grown children living several states away, I realize how much my perspectives have shifted. And yes, I made my fair share of mistakes. But my commitment now is to encourage others to mirror the way God parents His children. One person reflected this way:

“If I were starting my family again, I would love my wife more in front of my children, I would laugh with my children more at our mistakes and joys, I would listen more, even to the smallest child. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending to be better. I would pray differently for my family, rather than focusing on them, I would focus on me. I would do more things together with my children. I would do more encouraging. I would bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to the little things, deeds and words of kindness and thankfulness. But mostly—said this father—I would love God more, every day seeking to adore Him in front of them.”⁴¹

Avoiding Parenting Extremes

Let's begin by understanding extreme parenting styles—those that swing towards overindulgence or excessive rigidity. It's crucial to learn what they entail and why they might be less effective. Just as the multifaceted character of God influences us, our understanding of Him shapes the way we raise our children.

The Everything Goes Parent

In an age where the moral boundaries that directed generations before seem blurred or erased entirely, some parents have ventured into the realm of permissiveness. Setting no boundaries or expectations, these parents let their children choose friends, consume any media, and pursue all desires without guidance. It's akin to a child raising himself.

This style, while often well-intentioned, seems more concerned about public opinion than what's morally or ethically right. There's a growing inclination to follow popular trends, to seek parenting advice from mainstream media, and to value consensus more than individual discernment.

The Over-Controlling Parent

At the other extreme are parents who so fear the world's evils that they stifle their children's growth. They set strict boundaries, believing this will ensure righteousness. But obedience to external rules, without internal transformation, is fleeting. After all, a child's character is shaped more by what's inside their heart than their surroundings.

This extreme could also be called fear-based parenting. While protective, it can sometimes lead to unintended consequences. We can grow fearful of everything that is wrong in the culture and erect walls that stifle - rather than encourage growth. The motivation to do this is only natural; we only want to protect the ones we love. And we should. However, while we have been called to not be of the world, we still live in it and are called to be ambassadors for Christ, being a positive influence through shining for Him, Matthew 5.14-16; 2 Corinthians 5.20-21; John 17.14-16.

Over-controlling parents often assume that the absence of negative influences will increase the chances of their children turning out well. But, while extremely helpful, a proper environment, education, and friends are *not always* a guarantee of a child turning out right. Locking them down can lead them to rebellion. It can also lead to behavior modification that only prioritizes external behaviors over a genuine relationship with God. While maintaining a conducive environment is essential, it's not a guarantee of spiritual success. Our goal should be to cultivate a genuine relationship with God in our children, where right actions stem from a heartfelt commitment.

The Middle Ground

The repercussions of parenting from either extreme can be severe. Thus, a balanced parenting approach is crucial. Engagement with the world is not approval. Our primary goal should be equipping our children to be effective members of society, not just the church community. This involves preparing them for hostile environments, teaching them problem-solving skills, and emphasizing engagement, not isolation.

Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world, by holding firm to the word of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing, Philippians 2.14-16.

Our families should be beacons of light in a dark world. Someone once wrote that God left our families to be porch lights -- pointing the way home for the lost to escape darkness. Looking back, I wanted my children to become vibrant and vivid spiritual lights in an increasingly dark world. I tried to equip them to develop ways not to be deceived by temptation. It was not always perfect -- but we kept working on it. Never give up. Never, ever stop.

As parents, we have the blessed task of sculpting adults who mirror God's love and righteousness. And the way God parents us provides the perfect template.

How God Raises His Children

The overarching theme in God's parenting style is grace. This doesn't negate obedience,

boundaries, or discipline. Rather, it influences the environment in which these are implemented. Grace means that even when we fail, God is there to lift us, to guide us, and to love us through our imperfections.

Hebrews 4:15-16 reminds us of the accessibility and forgiveness of God. It's a grace that's available every time we falter. Imagine the transformation in our parenting when we emulate this divine grace.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Children, with their unique personalities and challenges, need to know that it's okay to be different, to be vulnerable. They should understand that mistakes aren't calamities but learning opportunities. Reflecting God's love in our parenting can provide them with this assurance.

Our view of God inevitably influences our parenting. A skewed theology, focusing only on judgment and legalism, will stifle our children's understanding of God's love. It might even drive them away. But understanding God in all His grace and love allows us to cater our parenting according to the unique nature of each child, as Proverbs 22:6 suggests.

Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.

It is crucial to find the balance between freedom and boundaries, reflecting the love and guidance of our Heavenly Father. Our goal is not merely to raise obedient children but to nurture souls who have a profound, intimate relationship with God. May our parenting reflect the heart of God, guiding our children towards His eternal embrace.

What This Looks Like

Parenting is not merely a duty; it's a divine calling. Parents have the privilege of echoing God's unconditional love, guiding children towards spiritual responsibilities, and implanting in them the eternal hope found in Christ.

Unconditional Love

Every child is a unique creation of God, bearing individual emotional, physical, and personality traits. Understanding and accepting these traits does not mean condoning sinful or disrespectful attitudes. Instead, it emphasizes embracing the differences and potential within each child. God is a God of variety. No two zebras bear the same stripes, just as every individual has a distinct fingerprint. Similarly, the vibrant palette of every sunset is unique, showcasing God's love for originality. Recognizing this uniqueness and individuality, Romans 15:7 reminds us of the importance of acceptance in love:

Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

Constant Encouragement

It's easy to become overwhelmed by the pressures of adulthood, inadvertently venting our

frustrations on our children. However, our call is to uplift and support them constantly. Love focuses on the positive. Reiterating only the negatives can be detrimental to a child's self-worth. Instead, we are urged to motivate and champion their causes.

Encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing, 1 Thessalonians 5.11.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, 1 Corinthians 13.4-7.

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins, 1 Peter 4.8.

Leading Kids to Prioritize Spiritual Responsibilities

Beyond the realms of the world, parents have the pivotal role of guiding their children toward spiritual enlightenment. We need to help our kids discover the true value of the soul.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?, Mark 8.36.

This scripture clearly expresses that worldly gains are futile if one's soul isn't aligned with Christ.

Being Salt and Light

Children should be molded to reflect Christ's teachings in their lives, acting as agents of positive change in society.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven, Matthew 5.13-16.

Placing the Kingdom First

Children, when led by example, can learn the significance of prioritizing God's Kingdom over earthly desires.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you, Matthew 6.33.

Imparting to Kids the Hope Found Only in Christ

Hope is the anchor of the soul, and it's the parents' duty to ensure their children anchor their hopes in Christ. Our children often mirror our beliefs and values. If we showcase our unwavering hope in Christ and emphasize the temporariness of this world, our children will likely grow to believe the same.

How committed are you to reflecting Christ in your life, 2 Thessalonians 2.16-17? Our goal should grow to be that we not only nurture well-rounded children but also develop deeper connections with God's teachings. The goal is to ensure that they grow to reflect Christ's light in a world that

desperately needs it.

Some Important Take Aways

1. Parenting is a complex and continuous journey. Things may work out differently than you envisioned when you first started, but the journey can be fulfilling. Your beliefs and approaches to parenting will evolve with time and experience. It is essential to remain open and receptive to learning along the way.
2. Make sure your parenting style is aligned with God's plans. This involves anchoring your relationships in Jesus and allowing the Spirit to guide all your relationships.
3. Avoid parenting extremes by being overly permissive, but also remember that being over-controlling will stifle growth. Our goal should be equipping our children to engage with the world while staying true to their spiritual foundation.
4. God's parenting is rooted in grace. When we follow His style, the family atmosphere will be filled with understanding, acceptance, and love.
5. Love unconditionally, Romans 15.7. Focus on the positives, correct where/when necessary, and champion their causes.
6. Guide your children toward understanding the true value of the soul.
7. Labor to instill a sense of hope in your child, anchored in Christ. This will serve as a foundation of faith that can be relied upon during the challenges of life.
8. Nurture your children to shine the light of Jesus in the world.

Pray For:

1. The ability to parent with grace and understanding, reflecting God's boundless love and guidance in every interaction with your children.
2. To be equipped to find the balance between freedom and boundaries, so your children will grow with a heart deeply connected to God.
3. The wisdom to embrace the uniqueness of each child, so that you can mirror God's unconditional love and acceptance in your daily life.

For Discussion

1. How does the analogy of parenting being like a jigsaw puzzle resonate with your personal experiences?
2. How can we avoid falling into the pitfalls of either being "Everything Goes Parents" or

"Over-Controlling Parents"?

3. What does it mean to parent with a purpose-driven approach aligned with God's plans?
4. How can our understanding of God's character shape our parenting methods and approach?
5. In what ways can we ensure that our children understand that mistakes are learning opportunities rather than failures?
6. How can we strike a balance between shielding our children from negative influences and preparing them to engage with the world as ambassadors for Christ?
7. How can the way God parents us serve as a model for our own parenting?
8. What practical steps can we take to ensure our children see and understand the importance of spiritual responsibilities in their lives?
9. How can we, as parents, instill hope in our children in times of doubt or despair?
10. Reflecting on the idea of "being salt and light," how can we actively guide our children to be positive agents of change in society?

⁴⁰ Kimmel, Tim. *Grace-Based Parenting: Set Your Family Tree*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴¹ Anonymous. Quotation from "Parents, Do Not Provoke Your Children." MacArthur, John F., Jr. John MacArthur Sermon Archive. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.