

**6/13/21 “Parenthood – part 1”
 Various Scriptures**

Welcome...

Today we continue our series on biblical manhood and womanhood by looking at parenthood. It has been said that if it was going to be easy to raise children, it never would have started with something called labor.

Parenting is difficult, costly and painful. And in the middle of all the endless parenting activities, it is easy to get lost. You can get swallowed up into the daily business of parenting, but lose sight of what it is that your working for or building toward. The parenting tasks that you have to do day after day get reduced to an endless catalog of unattractive duties that don't seem to have any overarching vision that holds them all together and sanctifies them with meaning and purpose.

More than a formula or some new parenting strategy, what parents really need is a big picture parenting worldview that can explain, guide, and motivate all the things that God calls us to do as parents. If you want to not just survive but thrive with vision and joy as a parent, then you need God's view of what he's called you to do. You need a big gospel parenting worldview that will not only make sense of your task, but will change the way you approach it.

So, this morning will be part one of parenthood looking at the big picture of parenthood and next week will be part two with more details in how God wants us to function as parents.

My prayer is that you see that family is central to God's revelation of Himself, His plan of salvation, and the church. Christ-centered families are a means of great blessing to the church and the world.

I. The Parent's Purpose

Scripture teaches that a primary purpose of the family is nothing less presenting the whole world with a series of three images – 1) God the Father, 2) the gospel, and 3) the church. In the family, God has embedded pictures of Himself, of His plan of salvation, and of His redeemed people.

Where do we find this purpose in the Bible? Well, we need to start with the biblical connection between marriage and having children. As we have done in other sermons in this series, we need to start at the beginning. Please turn to Genesis chapter 1. Let's read Genesis 1:26-28...

One of the first things that God does for Adam. He creates a helper suitable for him, Eve. Then God gives the first command to this brand-new family unit in Genesis 1:28, “be fruitful and multiply.” In other words, have children! God tells Noah the same thing after the flood in Genesis 9:27, “be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

Why is God so insistent that humans multiply? The answer is found in Genesis 1:27...

And in verse 28 God wants his image-bearers to multiply because He wants more of His image spread throughout the world. And He decided to graciously share the privilege of creating humans made in His image with us.

Theologian Bruce Ware writes, “It is as if God said, “I created the first and original pair of human beings in My very image, and I could continue creating them unilaterally so that you would have no part to play. But instead, you are now to bring about human beings; you are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with my greatest of all creations, humans made in My very image.”

Just as marriage provides a picture of Christ and the church, so the family also provides us with a portrait of the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity. This is why Paul could write in Ephesians 3:14-15, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” The relationship between heavenly Father and Son is the ultimate reality. The relationship between earthly fathers and sons, and parents and children generally, are small – at times distorted – but yet meaningful pictures of this ultimate reality. We are God’s image bearers in this world, and God has embedded a portrait of Himself in the family.

Second, the family also provides a profoundly personal picture of our salvation. In salvation, God adopts us. He makes us His sons and daughters.

God referred to Israel in Exodus 4:22-23 as His firstborn son, and the people of Israel were encouraged to sing of God’s fatherly compassion (Psalm 103:13). But Israel as a “son” merely pointed to Christ, the true Son. The good news is that Christ came to affect our adoption and to make us fellow heirs.

Look at Galatians 4:4-7 with me...

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” Galatians 4:4-7.

Hebrews 2:11 tells us the perfect Son, Jesus Christ, was not ashamed to call us brothers as we are sanctified from one Father!

In Matthew 6 Jesus taught his disciples to pray to “Our Father in heaven” and reminded them not to be anxious about food and clothes because “your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” Jesus also promised them in John 14:18, 32 that His Father would not abandon them as orphans.

In response to this good news, the apostle John couldn’t help but burst out with wonder in 1 John 3:1, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.”

And so your parent-child-relationship is no accident or small part of God’s plan; your relationship with your child is designed to teach us by analogy of our precious relationship to God – our heavenly Father.

J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* puts the point even more strongly, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. “Father” is the Christian name for God.”

Consider, how often Scripture points to this analogy to help us understand our lives and the circumstances that we encounter. For instance when trials and suffering come into our lives, Hebrews 12:5-6 tells us not to forget “that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He chastises every son whom He receives.”

The author of Hebrews continues, giving us even more insight into God's tender, fatherly ways with us. Hebrews 12:9-11, "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 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. 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."

And third,, the parent's purpose is for the family to be a portrait of the church. In 1 Peter 4:17 Peter calls the church the "family of God." In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul calls the church "God's household."

How is it that we are in the same family and belong to the same household? Because when you are reconciled to God the Father by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, we are also united to one another in Christ as adopted brothers and sisters.

In 1 Timothy 3:4-5 Paul tells us that an elder, "must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." Why? Paul continues, "if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?"

It's natural that Paul tells elders, like Timothy, in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 to "encourage an older man as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity."

Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."

So, the purpose of the family is to reflect the glorious truth of the Father and the Son, the truth of the gospel and to be a picture of the church as the family of God. God purposed for the Christ centered family to be a powerful witness to the world and a great blessing to the church.

With this in mind, what is the priority of parenthood?

II. The Parent's Priority

Psalm 127:3 (which Adrian read at the beginning of the service) says "children are a gift from the Lord."

Just as we receive spiritual gifts from the Lord and are to be good stewards of those gifts for the glory of God, so good parenting begins with the radical and humbling recognition that our children don't actually belong to us. Rather, every child in every home, everywhere on the globe, belongs to the One who created him or her. As Psalm 127:3 reminds us children are God's possession for His purpose. That means that His plan for parents is that we would be His agents in the lives of these ones that have been formed into His image and entrusted to our care.

At the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 6 we are reminded that the Lord Almighty says, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me."

Then Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

At first, this verse may not sound like a parenting verse, but it presents a very helpful principle when it comes to parenthood. Paul first tells us to focus on purifying ourselves not our children. Many of us are tempted to focus on purifying our children that we neglect our own spiritual growth.

The parenting priority is much like an airline emergency brief. Before takeoff, every plane passenger is instructed that if the oxygen masks come down, parents should put on their own masks first before attending to their child. Why? Because in an emergency, young children need their parents to be able to think clearly and act effectively. If we don't take in oxygen, our thinking will grow fuzzy, and then our children who are dependent on us to get it right will ultimately suffer.

What's true in the air physically is equally true on the ground spiritually. If we neglect our own "spiritual oxygen"—our walk with God—our motivations and ambitions will become polluted. Our ability to discern, empathize, encourage, confront and correct will waste away. We must see parenting as a process through which God purifies us—the parents—even as He shapes our children.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:1 this extensive purifying involves "everything that contaminates flesh and spirit." This takes us far beyond the obvious "physical" sins and into the more hidden contaminations of jealousy, fear, bitterness, pride, control, and possessiveness. Paul warns us that this purification process is both deep and thorough.

Parenting will lead us to confront spiritual sins that we never even knew existed. It will point out inner weaknesses that we saw as strengths. It will reveal holes big enough to drive our mini vans and SUVs through.

Paul defines this process in 2 Corinthians 7:1 as "perfecting holiness." As fallen sinners, we won't fully mirror the image of Christ until that day in which He appears. In the meantime, we are to rub off the smudges, perhaps sand out some of the cuts and abrasive edges, and let Christ's spirit shine through as much as possible. This process of spiritual growth isn't just pervasive; it's also progressive and ongoing ("perfecting," present tense).

And why do we put in such strenuous effort to parent in a Christ centered way? What motivates us to approach parenting this way? Paul couldn't be clearer: we do it "out of reverence for God." When we are motivated by reverence, worship and love for God, we lose 99.9 percent of the excuses we make in family life for laziness, pride and selfishness. God remains forever worthy of reverence, so we forever are dependent upon Him to follow His plan that moves us along toward holiness.

Much like a Christ centered marriage requires faith and sacrifice for the husband to love his wife and for a wife to respect and submit to her husband, so Christ centered parenting requires vision and faith and humility and faithfulness out of reverence for God. Regardless of how your children treat you, you know that God wants you to be engaged in their lives, offering loving support as well as biblical correction. It doesn't matter how they respond to you as much as it matters what God has called you to do.

If you lose sight of your role and the priority God has given you as a parent, and your focus moves from the vertical focus on God down to simply focusing on your marriage and your children and you expect your spouse or your children to be stand-ins for God – something they were never designed to do – then you will be severely disappointed and God will not be glorified.

The truth is God centered parenting is about learning lessons from God as much as it is about teaching our children about God. The process of parenting can be one of the most spiritually formative seasons of our lives.

And if you want to know if you have the right priorities, ask your children a very insightful question. Ask your children: "What do you think your Dad and Mom feel most passionate about? If the gospel doesn't get mentioned then they have observed that you are more concerned about their behavior, or about having a clean house, or getting them into the best schools, or how well they perform in sports, or having a straight A report card so they can write about it in your Christmas letter.

Children in some ways are mirrors of our hearts. How we interact with them truly does reveal what we value most about life.

We have seen the parent's purpose, the parent's priority, now let's look at:

III. The Parent's Process

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the ultimate model of what God has called us to as parents. Think about how God the Father works change into our lives as His children. By faith in the complete work of Jesus, we are welcomed into God's family, with all of the rights and privileges of being his children. We have been forgiven of our sin, fully justified and completely accepted, but we are not complete, because there is massive change that needs to take place in us. Let me say it this way: the power of sin has been broken, but the presence of sin still remains and will be progressively eradicated. Here's what is important to understand: the Father's work of justification is an event, but his work of transformation is literally a life-long process

I love how Paul characterizes this process in 1 Timothy 1:15-16: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

Paul is saying, "Because I am the worst of all sinners, Jesus will be able to use me as a case study of how patient he is able and willing to be as He does His work of grace. So those who need to entrust themselves to the Father will be encouraged by the extent of His patience."

Likewise, parenting is not a series of dramatic confrontation-confession events, but rather a life-long process of incremental awareness and progressive change that requires great patience. Your four-year-old will not say after you confront him, "Mom, I am a self-centered, self-ruling idolater in need of redemption." Your middle schooler will not become a fully transformed human being overnight and will still need your parenting wisdom.

But sometimes we think change will happen overnight and it is the desire for this change gets us into trouble.

Has this ever happened to you? You have parented your children all year long and finally you are getting to go on a family vacation. And as you get into the car, you're hoping that the little sinners, who needed so much of your attention the day before, you're hoping that they have been transformed during the night into fully sanctified, self-parenting, content little human beings who are humbly grateful to go on vacation. But you're not even half of a mile down the road, and the kids already fighting in the back of the van. You begin to lose it and threaten to turn around, drive back home, and cancel the vacation.

It is natural and we have our limits, but part of the problem is a misunderstanding of what you've been called to as a parent. What should our expectations and commitments and perspective be? Paul Tripp in his book entitled Parenting says we must be committed as a parent to what he calls "long-view" parenting. Let me share three mentalities that need to shape your parenting:

1. You Need to See Parenting as a Process

Jesus said in John 16:12-15, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

One of the last things Jesus said to His disciples is that He had many more things to teach them, but they were not at that time able to bear them. So, He promised them that He would send another teacher to complete His work. Here is the Jesus, the world's best teacher, who had a process mentality and because He did, he was willing to leave His work to unfinished people.

God has designed parenting to be a bit-by-bit, piece-by-piece process. He has called you to take advantage of the little moments of life to take little steps with your children. He has called you to be content with adding another piece to their view of themselves, their view of God, view of others, and view of life. Paul Tripp says parenting is: it's unfinished people (we parents) being used of God as agents of transformation in the lives of unfinished people. And, yes, it is true that like you, your children will leave your home still unfinished. So, first you need to see parenting as a process.

2. You Need to See Parenting as One Unending Conversation

As a parent, I find this mentality incredibly freeing. Because this mean I am freed from the pressure of needing to get from my child what I am never going to get in a single conversation.

A few weeks ago one of my children and I were having a heart to heart conversation that I really did not want to end but we both had to go. Honestly, I was a bit disappointed because we don't have talks like that very often.

And then this week in a phone call they said, "Pop, I haven't forgotten about that the conversation that we started, let's continue it when we both have some time next week."

And that is what we want as parents to look for another opportunity to advance that important conversation one more step and because you do, you don't consider those moments where correction is needed to be interruptions or hassles, but gifts of grace afforded you by a God who is at work in the hearts and lives of your children.

It may be a few moments at bedtime; it may be a brief talk at the dinner table; it may be a few carefully chosen words at the mall; it may be a few comments after school; it may be a back-and-forth discussion in the car. But you're called to be thankful for each one and for the incremental steps that are being taken to rescue, restore, and transform your children. You get up each day aware of what will be required, but thankful that for another day you can take more steps with your children in the most important process in the world.

3. You Need to Parent with a Project Mentality

Instead of being reactive as a parent, you must live with your children with a sense of project. What does that mean? You know your children; you know where they tend to be weak, blind, tempted, and rebellious, and where they struggle. So, you look for opportunities to address what God has shown you about the needy heart of each individual child.

If you don't parent with a sense of calling and with a project mentality then your parenting will tend to be reactive. Reactive parenting tends to be emotionally reactive. Because we are not carrying around with us this project mentality, we tend to see these moments as interruptions and hassles, and because we do, we tend to deal with them emotionally.

What this creates for your child is an irregular and inconsistent authority structure. Yesterday, you weren't doing well emotionally so the noise in the house drove you nuts and you yelled at your kids. Today, you are feeling good and the same noise level that got them in trouble yesterday doesn't get them in trouble today.

Sadly, the children become emotional weathermen. They have come to understand that the rules of the house tend to change with the emotion of the parent who is present. So they're constantly checking the weather in order to gauge what they can get away with today and what they can't. Because parental engagement and authority have been reactive and inconsistent, the child's submission and obedience to God given authority is inconsistent as well. We will look at this in more detail next week.

But let me close with a word of encouragement: Jesus lived, died and rose again not only to forgive you, but by His grace to also transform you. Jesus died and rose again so that unloving people would become loving, complainers would become joyful, contentious people would become peacemakers, impatient people would grow to be willing to wait, and unkind people would become those known for their kindness.

And in parenthood, God has told us our purpose, priority and process. None of us live out parenthood perfectly. So there are two things to remember. First, all of your failures have already been forgiven, so you can humbly admit them, confess them, and seek God's help. Second, you need to remember that you are not trapped in your cycle of failure because a God of abundant grace is at work changing, maturing, and growing you so that progressively you are part of what He wants to do in your children and wants to do in you.

Let's pray...