SIMPLER FAMILY 2026

Raising Christ Centered Kids

THE INTRODUCTION

The Bible talks a lot about parenting but not likely in the form we may expect. People undoubtedly pull all sorts of anecdotes from the stories of the Bible. We may look at how David failed to rebuke his sons for their sins and draw a lesson from that. We may use the story of the prodigal to shape some lesson of hope for the parent whose child has seemingly abandoned the faith. We doubtless find a way to incorporate the story of Cain and Abel into an object lesson of raising children. Do we talk about the sin of Ham as it relates to Noah, or Jepthah's sacrifice of his only daughter, or perhaps revisit David as a faithful son to Jesse who eventually proved to be the chosen king? Maybe we are more cautious than that and we go to the fifth commandment,

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

(Exodus 20:12)

Or again, "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." (*Ephesians 6:1*) There are so many stories of parents and children, so many verses that deal with the wisdom of a father and a son, and a couple of verses that seem to give clear cut instruction (the two I've just listed), but there doesn't seem to be an obvious gameplan for raising Godly children, so we are left piecing together a plan from bits of stories, fables, and random verses, with a dash of, "my parents did it this way, so I will too" or "my parents did it this way so I absolutely will not." We are left with a jumbled collection of ideas and philosophies that may or may not provide the help we really need to raise children who know and follow the Lord. Let us see if we can cut away those things that are unnecessary, useless, or dangerous, and rest on the heart of the matter:

what it means to know and follow our great God.

What Bible stories have you been taught to consider as guidelines for parenting?

Considering Biblical context, do those stories hold up as a pattern for parenting?

THEOLOGY

How can we begin to raise Christ-centered children if we don't first agree on what it means to be "Christ-centered?" This is where it gets a bit needlessly messy. Perhaps we grew up in church or around church culture, so we convince ourselves that we are already experts on what it means to have a life that is built on and about Christ. But culture plays such a large role in how we view the Bible that a dozen different followers of Jesus will often insist that their view of what it means to follow and glorify God is the right one. The execution of those ideas looks so far removed from one another that we can hardly say there is Christian unity in the system of knowing and following Jesus.

Let's begin with the basics.

THE NATURE OF MANKIND

We creatures, we created beings who fall into the category of the "human race," are not by nature good. Not so far as we understand "good" to be the character of God. We do not come forth into this world in line with the character or nature of God our maker. We are not naturally inclined, as has been argued by other theologians, to fill the "God-shaped void" within us.

"The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside: together they ahve become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."

(Psalm 14:1-3; Psalm 53:1-3; Romans 3:9-12)

Apart from Christ, we are powerless, ungodly sinners, who are enemies of God. (*Romans 5:6-10*) We are by "nature children of [God's] wrath, like the rest of mankind." (*Ephesians 2:3*) Time would fail us if we endeavored to look at every text that speaks of the character of humankind apart from Christ the Savior, the reconciler of men, the redeemer, the one who makes the sinner a saint, and the profane holy. I will assume we can agree on this point for now and move on.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS

Jesus is fully God.

Jesus is the exact imprint of the nature of the Father and the fullness of the Father's glory. If you have come to see and know Jesus, then you have also come to see and know the Father. The fullness of deity, all his power, all his magnificence, all his glory, abides in Jesus the Son. Jesus is the creator and maker of all things, and without him not a single thing has come into existence. Jesus upholds all of creation by the word of his power and does only those things which the Father does or says.

(See, for starters, John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 14:7-9; Colossians 1:15-20; Colossians 2:9; John 5:19-20; John 5:30; John 6:38)

Jesus, being the fullness of God, is the only one capable of reconciling sinful man to Holy God. Jesus is the mediator. Jesus is the means by which atonement is made. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, and no one can come to the Father but through him. Furthermore, there is no other name given under heaven by which salvation comes. Jesus, through his death on the cross, shed blood, and resurrection, gained victory over death, abolished sin, and opened the way for sinful mankind to come into the presence of God.

Now, through faith in his name, a person is declared righteous and holy.

(2 Corinthians 5:18-19; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Acts 4:12; John 14:6; John 11: 25-26; Hebrews 2:14-15; Hebrews 10:19-21; Romans 3:22)

That is the heart of the gospel. Of course there are a multitude of other things we could discuss that shape our view of the nature of mankind, our separation from God, our need for a Savior, the eternal nature of Christ as coequal with the Father, the atoning work of Jesus's death on the cross, the victory over sin and death established in his resurrection, the faith in Christ's finished work that brings about forgiveness of sins and imparts righteousness to the believer, and the promise of his eminent return; but we would exhaust ourselves before getting to the point. I will say, if you don't agree with these two previous points, you need not read further, for the basis of the rest of this teaching is the truth that we were enemies of God and that Jesus is the only one who could have reconciled us to him.

I grew up in the church and have been a believer since childhood. I actually liked church and its various programs. As early as I can remember, teachers and preachers told me about Jesus, and I grew up knowing I wanted to serve and honor God with my life. But something was happening that I wouldn't catch on to until I was about to turn forty.

I had been taught some version of, *"You need Jesus so God will forgive your sins and so that you can go to heaven, but you need the law so that you can be a good Christian."*

Though it was never said so blatantly, I was led to believe that the good news, the gospel, was the cross for forgiveness and the law for good living. And my goodness, how hard I tried to be good according to the law. If the Bible said to do it, I did. If the Bible condemned it, so would I. And that sounded right. That seemed to be the holy, righteous thing to busy myself with. But if I failed in any respect what the law had required of me, I instantly felt the sting of shame and condemnation. (Conversely, if I followed any law to the letter, I was swelled with pride and self-congratulation.) The law that was meant to keep me in line and was intended to instruct me in the way of godliness was the greatest source of guilt. If I did the right thing a hundred times and failed once, condemnation swept over me. If I avoided the sin for two weeks, or a month, or a year, and then fell to temptation, the counter got reset to zero. I've never been in an office where we had the board that says, "_ days worked without an accident," but that's how I treated my godliness. I have had 217 days without falling in this area or failing in that area. But the next Tuesday, my sin of omission or commission made me feel the need to reset that number back to zero. I felt the need to start all over again. God must certainly be so disappointed in me now. He must see how filthy I am, how weak I am. I can barely make it a week without having to begin again in this area or that one. One thing I was sure of as I went to bed each night was that I was not capable of being the "good enough" Christian the law seemed to require me to be.

And I hated myself for it.

WHY THE GOSPEL MATTERS

But you'll notice in conversations about the law that there is ***no*** cross there.
There is ***no*** atoning blood there.
And there is certainly ***no*** resurrection with a promise of new life.
We would all agree that the gospel (which literally means "good news") is the greatest news of all, but all of my first four decades of life felt more marked by failures, missteps, and tireless work to make sure I met the standard of what the law was asking me to do. The good news felt more like a deposit had been made on my behalf but that the monthly payments were up to me.

Like Jesus had purchased me a new home, a place in heaven, but I had to keep up with the mortgage and the utilities.

The only problem is that I was then and remain now a pauper (so far as it depends on me alone). I did not have the means to meet the large down payment required by the law, and neither do I have the means to maintain the note today.

However, the gospel is not the good news of a partial payment, an initial investment on your behalf. The gospel is the institution of a ***new*** covenant.
A covenant in which the debt held against you has been fully canceled.
A covenant in which the law has fallen from glory and no longer exists as the standard of holy living.

Let's talk about the reality of the old and new covenants a bit more thoroughly, for only in this wonderful understanding of the gospel can we expect to raise children who are set rightly on Jesus.

THE SURPASSING GLORY

Consider if you would this text from 2 Corinthians,

"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of

because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory."

(2 Corinthians 3:5-11)

Now it would serve us well to break this down a bit, and right away we should note that "our adequacy" and "made us adequate as servants" are language Paul uses to describe himself and his fellow ministers of the gospel. But that isn't really relevant to our point in this moment. Look at the descriptions of the two covenants: the old one, the law written on stones and handed over to Moses, and the new one, from the Holy Spirit of God.

OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
kills	gives life
ministry of death	ministry of the Spirit
ministry of condemnation	ministry of righteousness
no glory	surpassing glory

The old covenant is not like the new covenant. The old covenant fades away with the coming of Jesus. In fact, the first and oldest heresy in the church is that those people who put faith in Jesus must also be circumcised and observe the law to be righteous. Paul addresses this false teaching in Romans, Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Philippians. It is also addressed in Acts 15 and the book of Hebrews.
No one could ever be perfect through the law.
No amount of righteousness in God could ever be obtained through the law, for according to the law itself, righteousness through the law comes only through perfection under the law.

And if righteousness could not be obtained through the law, neither can it be maintained by the law.

The former commandment (of the law) is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness. It was a fault-filled covenant that was made obsolete when replaced by the better covenant of grace in Christ. (*Hebrews 7:18, Hebrews 8:6-7, Hebrews 8:13*)

THE SURPASSING GLORY

There is a righteousness that God supplies that does not come, can not come, through the works of the law. Again, if righteousness cannot come through the law, then why do we believe the works of the law somehow maintain it? As though the law helps to conform us to godliness! We started this journey by faith, with the work of the Spirit; why then would we be so foolish to believe that works of the law maintain it? As though in our own flesh and strength we could somehow finish or maintain that which began in us by God's good grace.

Jesus is the end of the law as a righteous standard for every single person who believes.

(*Romans 9:30-10:4; Galatians 3:1-11*)

THE SURPASSING GLORY

Now I can anticipate your rebuttal, and it is fair:

"Ryan," you'll say, *"no one is still teaching that you have to observe the law of Moses to be righteous."*

Most would argue that our churches and pastors are explaining that righteousness is still based solely on faith in the finished work of Jesus. We insist upon it, in fact. We ask the question: how can we put a stop to sin? How can we overcome the world if not by the law? The law, we will say, is just meant to police us, to keep us on the straight and narrow. And it sounds good at least on the surface of it. ***But, whether we want to admit it or not, we are engaging in a conversation about righteousness.*** People who violate the law are told that they are far from God, that he won't hear their prayers, that the relationship has been damaged, that we need to take that final step back to him, that we are sinful prodigals, but that the father is waiting for us to return. These arguments all expose how we have misread, misrepresented, and misunderstood the scriptures:

- The prodigal is not the story of a wayward Christian.
- "Your sins have made a separation between you and God," is a statement made to wicked idolaters, not followers of God.

Your position before God is and always will be secure based on who Christ is and never based on anything but your faith in his finished work.

Your prayers still reach heaven. We are instructed to come before the throne of grace with confidence and to cast all our cares on him because he cares for us. (*Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 5:7; Hebrews 4:16; Luke 15:11-32*)

Why do we keep trying to introduce the law, or reintroduce the law, as a standard, when it is "obsolete," "useless," "weak," "a ministry of condemnation and death," an "overthrown glory," that has been brought to nothing in light of Christ.

RAISING CHRIST CENTERED CHILDREN

I was raised under the law at church.

Youth services often centered on what we should and should not do; on what was allowed and what was too much like the world. We had entire bible studies on how to avoid certain language, certain social settings, and a lot of lessons on how to maintain sexual purity so that you could "save yourself for marriage." Every success was met with praise and every failure flooded with shame. If you violated the law, you could count on an opportunity at church camp, usually the last night, to write your sin on a piece of paper and burn it in the fire or nail it to the cross. You'd be sent home with a hug and a challenge; the sign was reset to zero. You had "made a mistake" or run "like the prodigal," but you could be made fresh and new again. "Just don't go back to those things again." And the law would be given to you once more. "Follow these guidelines, follow these rules, do the right things, avoid the wrong things." We'd leave those camps and youth meetings promising ourselves we would try harder this time, that this time we were serious about avoiding our sin, that this time we wouldn't let Jesus down. We'd attend accountability groups, we'd read our Bibles, and some of us would even try to dress ourselves in the armor of God to stave off impending sin. And then we'd fail and feel like failures. We'd beg God for help, and we would hope that tomorrow we could just be a little bit stronger than today. Next summer at camp we'd throw our sins into the bonfire or nail them to the cross once more and hope that maybe this is the year we'd get serious about God.

Maybe.

I was raised under the law at home.

My position in the house and my relationship with my parents were always based on performance. Did I do what I was told to do when I was told to do it? Did I meet the minimum requirement? If not, there were consequences. Statements like, "I have to love you, but I don't have to like you right now," shaped my home life and my view of God. "You live under my roof and my rules. You'll sit there until every bite is finished. Because I said so. Because I'm the parent; that's why. I don't need a reason." I learned quickly to do the best I could to follow the rules. It made life easier. If I failed in following the rules that I knew about, or even those that I didn't know about, there would be consequences. The perks of home life were rewards for good behavior and could be taken away in a moment. "I put the clothes on your back. I put the food on the table. I put the roof over your head;" were all used to keep me in line, because they could all be taken away from me if I didn't comply.

That's not the nature of the gospel. That's the law. And all the law can do is produce condemnation and death. There is no life there, just the hope that maybe you can survive it.

Maybe.

RAISING CHRIST CENTERED CHILDREN

There are two covenants.
One produces death, and one produces life.

When we go to raise our children, we automatically submit them to a covenant. The one we submit our children to is largely based on which one we believe ourselves to be under as we relate to Christ.

If we think we still approach God through the works of the law, through ticking the box, making sure all our ducks are in a row, presenting our measly offerings to God who sits over us like a judge; then that is how we will raise our children.

If we approach God with confidence, knowing that our standing before him is steadfast, that our righteousness is intact, that his love for us has not diminished, that he sits with us as a Father well pleased; then that is how we will raise our children.

If we shape our kids through the lens of the LAW, we will raise kids who learn to survive, who do just enough to make it, but who live under the constant threat of failure, weighed down by the shame of sin. And sadly, all those laws we gave them will not do a single thing to preserve them in godliness or guard them from sin.

If we shape our kids through the lens of the GOSPEL, we will raise kids who know that they are righteous and holy by faith alone, who thrive in the strength that God supplies, who live under the constant joy that they are secure in Christ, lifted up by the Spirit in them who has made them into new creatures. And beautifully, the Spirit at work within them will transform them from glory to glory into the likeness of Christ.

To raise Christ-centered children, we must ensure they are centered on the Savior rather than the law.

We must hold up for them as the standard of all life, hope, and holiness, the cross of Jesus and not the letters carved on stone.

Do you believe that righteousness is imparted and maintained by the good news of the gospel?

Why do you think so many people hold to the law as a standard for righteous living?

When have you personally experienced shame and condemnation through failing the standard of the law?

Does the Bible clearly separate the old and the new covenant? How do we know?

Did your childhood home have a tendency towards a standard of law or a standard of gospel?

Does your current household have a tendency towards a standard of law or a standard of gospel?

How can you see the law standard cultivate condemnation and death in your home? In the lives of your children?

THE WISDOM

There is a lot of wisdom in the Bible, but we must never confuse wisdom with righteousness. There are wise people who do not know God and foolish ones who do. As a general rule, those who walk in wisdom move towards wisdom, and those who walk in foolishness move into further foolishness.

But wisdom, or lack thereof, does not impact the righteousness that Christ supplies.

It neither adds to it nor diminishes it. Righteousness is and always will be a matter of faith. But wisdom can make the believer's life less painful, with far fewer slings and arrows along the way to pierce the heart and bruise the body, just as foolishness can make the day-to-day life filled with drudgery, discomfort, and endless sorrow.

As parents, we want to teach our children wisdom, but we must never conflate a conversation about wisdom with our identity in Christ. The believer who walks in foolishness has the same enduring righteousness as the one who clings tightly to wisdom as a traveling companion.

We teach our children that "*a companion of fools suffers harm,*" and "*bad company corrupts good character.*" We remind them that those "*who walk with the wise will themselves become wise.*" These are good things to teach our children. A child who makes a foolish choice will undoubtedly have consequences in life, but not as it relates to the gospel. Their gospel identity remains immutable. (*Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33*)

We tend to go to a book like Proverbs and make it a rigid guideline. Don't misunderstand me, Proverbs has so many great things to say about how to walk in wisdom, but it can not be taken as a prescription to follow. Just because something is unwise doesn't mean it is ungodly or sinful. I had to learn this the hard way. I was burning bridges left and right because I was treating what I perceived as unwise in fellow believers as wickedness, as though my friends were contrary to the character or person of God.

Lack of wisdom needs to be treated as lack of wisdom and nothing more. Those things that dishonor God should be treated with more gravitas, and we should learn to know the difference.

I was too often holding the people around me to my standard of wisdom rather than the standard of godliness. I learned this much too late and consequently cost myself relationships along the way.

We must, as godly parents, hold our children to the standard of Jesus, and we ought to shape for them what it means to be wise, but we must not confuse the two.

For example:

- It is unwise to throw rocks at a wasp nest, but it isn't ungodly.
- It is unwise not to prepare adequately for the college final, but it doesn't affect righteousness.
- It is unwise to spend all of your paycheck on frivolous things, but it doesn't undo your standing as a child of God.
- It is unwise to dive into a lake or river without knowing what is below the surface, but it does not call into question godly character.

Each one of these examples has a consequence. I did throw the rock at the wasp nest, and I was stung a half dozen times or so. I didn't prepare for the final, and in my final semester at Texas Tech I was put on academic probation. I did spend all the money foolishly and struggled to make ends meet for months afterward. I had an acquaintance who didn't know what was underneath the water and as a result ended up paralyzed.

These are all wisdom issues. We train our children to be wise, but not with the same intensity that we call upon them to walk with Jesus. If we treat wisdom issues with the same weight with which we treat submitting to the Spirit, we will frustrate both our children and ourselves.

Why do we tend to view our perspective of what is "wise" as THE only standard for what is wise?

Why do we weigh wisdom issues with the same weight as gospel issues?

How can we begin to discern the difference between a wisdom issue and a gospel issue?

THE PRACTICAL

At the end of the day, we should have one aim for our children:

that they know and glorify God.

We spend so much time trying to shape our children into ***our*** image rather than the image of ***Christ***. I cannot say this too many times: many of the instructions we give our children are an effort to make them more like us, to do things the way we want them done, rather than to have them glorify God.

We spend so much energy on laws and consequences rather than on identity in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe the rules are for their betterment, but often they are there for our sake and pleasure rather than for the sake of Jesus and the glory of God.

HOW THE THEOLOGY SHAPES OUR PARENTING

When we come to truly believe that the gospel is not only greater than the law but that the gospel so supersedes it in glory that the good news of Jesus swallows up the whole of the law, it absolutely changes how we, as Christians, live; how we interact with God as our Father and provider of salvation, how we walk in victory over the sin that Christ has set us free from, and how we now find life fully and totally in the Holy Spirit who indwells us. And if the good news of Jesus has that sort of impact on us as individual followers of Christ, then it must certainly effect a similar change in how we parent.

How could it leave us unchanged as parents?

The wearisome yoke of the law has been thrown off, and the true rest of the gospel of grace has been shouldered, not as a burden but as wings that make light of our bodies and minds. Those who were once held captive by the law have been set free to not only walk in the love that God supplies but also in holiness and peace.

After all, it was for freedom from the law that Christ has set people free. So why then should we submit to it again? (*Galatians 5:1*)

HOW THE THEOLOGY SHAPES OUR PARENTING

So, bringing the gospel into the home as the standard for parenting must, by its very nature, overthrow the system of the law. Since my children were old enough to listen, if not also understand, I have spoken to them of the overwhelming and limitless love of God. No correction was ever offered without making two things clear:

1) ***Your disobedience in this situation does not change how God views you.***

2) ***Because you are not viewed differently by God, neither then can I view you differently.***

You see, the law allows us to look at people with judgment and condemnation. The law requires an atonement to restore the relationship, and every fresh infraction requires a new sacrifice. But the gospel is one sacrifice for all time. The shed blood of Jesus and his empty tomb reach into my past and forever into my future, wiping out every stain of sin and failure. I am no longer just a sinner who needed grace over and over again. I, before Christ, was a sinner, and having now stepped by faith into his life and forgiveness, I am a righteous, holy saint. My identity, once in Christ, can not be changed. I was moved from death to life, from light to dark, from enemy to child, from sinner to saint. Those positions are final.

God does not look at me with disappointment; I have not let him down; he is not frustrated with me; he doesn't need space from me; our relationship is not broken; he isn't giving me the silent treatment.

As far as God is concerned, the blood applied to my life has forever changed me, making me a "new creation" with no lasting remnants of who I once was. This is the beautiful truth of the gospel and ought to overwhelm our hearts with a flood of delight.

So then, if I am trying to represent the gospel in my home as a standard for daily living, *what does not change God's perspective of my children cannot change my perspective of them*. Otherwise, I proclaim the gospel as the good news of Jesus, but hold my children up to contempt as I measure them according to the law.

HOW THE THEOLOGY SHAPES OUR PARENTING

When something in the life of my child is contrary to the character of Jesus, there is no condemnation there, for those who are in Christ Jesus are free from condemnation. (*Romans 8:1*) Rather, I remind my child of the inconsistency in their behavior.

"You are a righteous and holy saint of God. Your behavior did not correctly represent who Jesus is or who he has made you to be."

I am not rebuking my child for breaking the law, nor giving them a law as a correction or a metric by which to live. Instead, I am showing that their behavior is inconsistent with the nature of the "new creation" they've been made to be, and I am setting Jesus before them again as the standard. The emphasis, then, in correction is not on my child trying to be better and asking them to promise to do better next time, but on reminding them of the goodness of God and the faithfulness of the Spirit who began this great work in them. Law will always emphasize self, and grace will always emphasize Jesus. It is an easy way to distinguish the two.

For those of you wondering how this conversation plays out if your child has not yet put their faith in Jesus, it unfolds in much the same way. Remember, *the goal for our children is for them to know and glorify God*. So when the child acts in a way that is inconsistent with the character of Christ, we correct them and say, "This behavior does not glorify or honor God. There is nothing more important in the world than that we would come to know God and glorify him. Your actions today are not in line with the nature of God." We can use the opportunity now to shape them into biblical thinkers before they even come to know Christ, so that when they come to salvation the groundwork has already been laid.

And in our correction we ought to be honest with ourselves about our motives. Are we actually trying to shape our children to be more like Jesus or more like us?

We give grace to our children the same way God gives tireless grace to us.

If we believe God is waiting to leap on every indiscretion, then we will treat our children in like manner. If we believe that God disciplines us from a heart filled with love for us, so that we are moved deeper into his grace rather than away from it, then we will practice the same with our children.

It's okay to want your kids to put their dishes in the sink, pick up their shoes lying on the floor, and finish their homework before they turn on their devices. *What is not okay is to pretend like these are issues of righteousness*. Parents really like to point out that "*children should obey their parents in the Lord for this is right,*" but frequently ignore that "*fathers should not exasperate their children.*"

I wonder if some of the conflict in the home is not because "*teenagers are difficult*" or "*toddlers all have that terrible twos phase,*" but rather arises from rules not meant to shape our children to be more like Jesus.

HOW THE THEOLOGY SHAPES OUR PARENTING

Does Jesus really care whether your kids have a clean room? I don't think so. I knew someone once who taught their children to clean their rooms because, "*If you are not faithful in the small things, God will not give you the bigger things.*" That is a terrible use of that text and just a way to manipulate children into observing the law for the sake of the possible future blessing. But in the gospel, every spiritual blessing is secured in Christ, and we are not now, nor ever, in jeopardy of losing a single one.

We don't teach our children to pick up their room so that Santa will give them more presents, so that they can watch the show, so that they can have ice cream, so that they can earn our pleasure, or so that God will give them a better blessing since they so diligently put away their toys.

Obedience for the sake of a blessing or so that a punishment can be avoided is not anything more than manipulation.

HOW THE THEOLOGY SHAPES OUR PARENTING

We reframe it.

In John 13, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. He told them that the servant is not greater than the master, but here he was as the Master humbling himself to wash feet. He instructs them to go and do likewise. In Philippians 2, we are told to have the same attitude as Christ, who made himself a servant and became obedient to God. The gospel is certainly a story of servitude. The gospel is the story of the Master humbling himself to be a servant to those who were, in fact, the lowly servants.

If Jesus was a servant, then it is not only fair but also just that we conduct ourselves as servants.

We then shape picking up the room as an opportunity to serve. To serve mom, who works hard to keep the house clean; to serve our guests who are coming over to play and fellowship with us; to serve because Christ himself came to serve. In service we get to share in the character of Jesus.

Parent, this only works if we ourselves are still willingly and happily serving those around us, without complaint. It is inconsistent to ask our children to serve us if we aren't also willing to serve them.

HOW WISDOM SHAPES OUR PARENTING

We teach our children from a place of wisdom, the very practical things of life. If we clean up for a few minutes every day, the room never gets out of control. If we do a little work on homework now, we won't have the stress of trying to finish it last minute. If we pack ahead of time, we are less likely to forget our toothbrush. If everyone puts their dishes in the washer, then no single person has to do all the clean up. If we save a little money for an emergency, we are less likely to be in a bind. If you tie your shoes correctly, you can run faster because you won't worry about them flying off your feet. If you let the fish run with the bait a little bit and then pull the fishing pole the opposite direction, you have a great likelihood of catching a fish. If you surround yourself with godly people, you will find it easier to honor God.

None of these things are gospel things. They are just wise.

They are helpful. And we should shape our children in as many wise ways as possible. But these things aren't directly connected to the story of redemption, and we should not handle them the same way as we do gospel issues.

My wife and I have very different personalities. The ways we handle friendships, conversations, and difficulties differ greatly. There is wisdom in both our methods, even though we have taken different routes. Wisdom is not necessarily right or wrong. Sometimes we will direct our children in wisdom, and they will go another way; though not our preferred path, it is still not foolishness.

HOW WISDOM SHAPES OUR PARENTING

I will often remind my kids as they walk out the door,
"Glorify God, and have fun."

But I almost as often remind them,
"Make wise choices because we don't get to choose our consequences."

All choices have consequences. Some are so inconsequential we don't even notice them. If our children run out into the world and make unwise choices, there will certainly be consequences. I tell my boys often that some of those consequences will follow you only until tomorrow morning, some for the next six months, and some for life. We don't get to choose our consequences; we only get to choose if we glorify God and make wise decisions.

Some things glorify God all the time. There are some things that never glorify God. Some things that glorify God under certain circumstances but dishonor him under others. Some choices are wise for some people, and the same choice may be foolish for others. There may be several wise choices to make, each with an opportunity to honor God. There may be foolish choices that do no damage to the reputation of my faith and other foolish choices that wildly misrepresent who I am as a follower of Christ.

But the basis for all of this comes down to the gospel.

Is the instruction I am giving my child consistent with the gospel? Do I have the gospel in mind? Am I responding to a lack of wisdom as though it is something that doesn't glorify God? Have I shaped my child's identity as unchanging in Christ? Does my child know that their position with me is unchanging? Am I seeking to conform my child to the image of Christ or my own image?

What are some rules you've given your children that are more about conforming them to your image and likeness rather than the likeness of Christ?

What are some changes you recognize you need to make immediately in your home?

How can you change your language to move away from the law and more to the gospel?

How can you better shape your child's identity in Christ?

How can you better serve the people in your household?

What are some practical ways you may encourage each of your children to be shaped more by the gospel?

Think of each one individually and consider how you may direct them specifically to be followers of the gospel rather than the law.

HOW WISDOM SHAPES OUR PARENTING

THE CONCLUSION

This booklet isn't meant to be all-inclusive or exhaustive. We could go on for another hundred pages, but I hope that these thoughts, in conjunction with the video, will be enough to give you, as a parent, a new/better way of thinking about raising your children. Above everything else, I hope that we parents will be faithful to hold our children to the standard of the gospel that they may come to know, enjoy, and glorify God with their lives.

I know how easy it is for us to worry that if we take the law away as a standard, our children will hasten to sin.

Still, you and I have to believe that God has saved to the uttermost, that Christ's blood is sufficient, that the Holy Spirit is good at his job, and that the gospel is powerful not only to save a life, but to equip it to be lived out in holiness.

More from Simpler & The Four56 Church:

thefour56.org/simpler

simplerbible.com

thefour56.org

contact: hello@thefour56.org