

I. Parenting in Biblical Perspective
Biblical Parenting Illustrated in the Lives of Joseph and Mary
“The Starting Point—A ‘First Family’ Essential Practice”

Luke 2

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This is our opening study of Biblical parenting illustrated in the lives of Joseph and Mary, as it were the first family of Scripture in the sense of the preeminent family of Scripture and not chronologically. Some have told me they don't mind parenting if they could start out as Jesus being their first child. I do know there is a difference when you and I begin as I tell parents before the baptism of their covenant child, you now have a covenant viper in diapers in your hands. Your children are born sinners and Jesus had no sin nature but He was fully Man. He was a real Man, a real Boy, a real Baby that cried and got hungry. He had a true mind to develop for He didn't come into this world knowing the Pythagorean Theorem. He had a real human mind, soul and body and Joseph and Mary were called to parent Him. How did they do it?

They not only had Jesus but He had some brothers and possibly some indication of sisters but at least for sure brothers. His brothers were born sinners because many of them were unbelievers until likely after the resurrection of Jesus. So what is it that we can pick up from this first family? Before I go any further on this I want to give you some other reasons why this has been on my heart.

There are some streams that came together in this series for me. One is I was wanting to do a series on parenting and while I was studying for the Advent Season and the challenge each year to go to the Incarnation to present its glorious truths in a fresh and new way, it hit me that we don't really look at Joseph and Mary as parents very often to learn from. While there is not a lot of material there are some very crucial texts of Scripture that state some things about their parenting from which we can either mine out Biblical principles or illustrate principles that are given in Scripture that were being worked out in their lives. One thing made that turn particularly in the life of Joseph that begin to mushroom for me, in a way that it never had before.

This is a little disjointed but I want to give you the backdrop of my heart in this series. I have a pastor's heart because I know the pressures upon you and your parenting today. I do believe in grace but if I didn't believe in grace or the sufficiency of God's grace and the majesty of Christ, I would like many be fearful of parenting and bringing children into this world. The forthrightness of evil that have come into our rapidly neo-paganized society is really astounding, but I know God had called us to fill the earth, not only biologically but evangelistically and through discipleship. The best evangelism and discipleship that can be done is right where we have a promise to begin with when God says “I'll be a God to you and to your children after you.” Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31). Therefore as a pastor I want to equip you so that you would not raise children fearfully. If you do, what you fear will come upon you.

The opposite of fear in the Bible is not courage for that's the outworking of the absence of fear but the opposite of fear is love. It is perfect love found in the majesty of Christ casts out all fear. So I am hoping to be able to equip parents so that out of love to

Christ and the surety of the love of Christ will banish fear in their parenting, which is a snare and a trap because the things you fear come upon you.

I also have a heart desire because I think an opportunity has been presented to us that in a sense I wish had not been presented to us. Our nation is making an amazing rapid movement in the last twenty years into embracing the old habits of paganism, including sexual anarchy and to accommodate sexual anarchy there is the necessity to redefine the family and marriage. I believe as a church and as a pastor I'm responsible to speak and write to these issues. There is a matter of public theology. We have a responsibility to be a fountainhead of redeeming grace to see people won to Christ and evangelized but to also be a fountainhead of common grace for the well-being of society to speak to issues like the most foundational issue of all – marriage and its attachment of family. Therefore I wish we didn't have to fight this battle but we are.

One of the reasons we're fighting this battle is that family is being redefined because marriage is being redefined and marriage and family are being redefined to accommodate sexual anarchy, sexual abnormality and sexual rebellion against God. But we have had a hand in it. Homosexuality comes on the heels of heterosexual promiscuity. We have laid the ground work but this dissolution of the family has come with the dissolution of our own families and our own marriages.

I want to move quickly from where I think there is appropriate conviction and repentance we ought to have in those areas to hope. Nothing dispels darkness more than light and this is what we're moving into this year of contending for the faith. Do you want to know the greatest apologetic to establish the sacredness of a heterosexual, monogamous, conjugal, covenantal marriage? The greatest testimony where a man and woman established as a husband and wife provide parental oversight as fathers and mothers to the children they are biologically or legally entrusted with through adoption, the greatest apologetic is for us to establish families like that. In the midst of the dissolution of a society unraveling in the foundational institution like marriage and family is actually the greatest opportunity for the church of Jesus Christ, with courage and humility, to establish what God's grace can provide in marriages and families.

I also look back as to when those kinds of families come into existence and how rapidly things can be addressed in our society. I think it happens more rapidly than before. Today the very technology that exacerbates evil can also be used to propagate that which is good and righteous. What would the Reformers have done without the Guttenberg Press? They turned that technology into a great asset. We now have computers, internet, FaceBook, Twitter and Instagram. I'm just bringing this up but I don't have the slightest idea of how they work but we can use those things and in moments get messages, communication and testimonies around the world. The Reformers would do it in moments with pamphlets coming off the printing press. Now we can even do it quicker but of course with only 140 characters it's a little bit of a challenge. Yet the opportunities are enormous for us.

In thinking of the founding of this country this has been an amazing testimony of the providential blessings of God upon a nation that has been enjoyed in this nation. I look back and I like history. I think there is much to learn from His story and His providence. As I look back in history and try to do a good work in historical theology that is taking the theology of Scripture and seeing it played out in history, I see the amazing rising of this country in the 18th century. I look at a place like Philadelphia

where there is this gathering of men that have this amazing insight into writing the constitutions so that we're not a monarchy with a king in all its possible depravity nor are we a democracy with all the possible depravity of the mob vote but a republic using a democratic process but having a king called a constitution, ruled by law. That's amazing.

Then another amazing thing is that they went and knocked on the door of the Presbyterian Church in the colonies and said 'can we borrow your system of government and put it into our nation.' It didn't happen quite like that but it was almost like that, this representative republican form of government that's in place. It is absolutely astounding. When you look at the constellation of thinkers, even the unbelievers and how they were affected in God's common grace by the believers. Look at the effects of a George Mason, a John Adams on a Thomas Jefferson, a George Whitfield on a Benjamin Franklin and it's astounding. You get these trophies of a redeeming grace and then these who have been restrained and put into a positive direction because of common grace and you ask yourself 'how did it get there?'

We had less than two million people in this country, so where did this constellation of leaders and thinkers come from? It came from what they did as soon as they landed. As soon as they landed their families put together their home and then they built a church and then the next thing they built was a school, usually before a food supply was in place, because they understood that the coming generation must be told the truth of God's Word. So the church, family and school existed as the three legged stool that affected all of this society that kept producing them. It is no accident that thirteen of those men who were participating in the continental congress that gave us these founding documents refused to say there is a national church of coercion and established a freedom of religion and a rule by law that was liberty controlled by law. It is no accident that thirteen of these men were being disciplined by a Presbyterian minister by the name of Jonathan Witherspoon. It was the family and the church that moved throughout the culture.

I don't think that has changed throughout the ages. I think the same thing was true in the life of Mary and Joseph and the environment that Jesus was raised where He grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. So I want to give you a starting point in this study with just a few comments. I will tell you that most of us are looking at parenting by saying 'give me the next book so I can get my technique down.' I don't think the key is technique. I think the key to Biblical parenting are Biblical parents and I believe the key to Biblical parents is their engagement in, benefiting from and contribution to a Biblical church. Does that stand the test of Scripture? Does that stand the test of Mary and Joseph?

I want to look at Luke 2 which gives us most of the information on Jesus' childhood and Mary and Joseph's parenting. Luke 2 gives us Jesus from His infancy to His adolescence and then from His adolescence to His adulthood. I won't read the whole chapter but just some parts of it. Jesus has already been born.

Luke 2:21 says [21] *And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* Mary and Joseph had both been instructed to call His name Jesus meaning Yahweh Saves for He will save His people from their sins. The covenantal sign in the Old Testament was replaced by the covenantal sign in the New Testament, baptism, was circumcision. They blessed the child and circumcised the child. They engaged the covenant promises

of God and their own commitment as His parents and then they named the child. We do the same thing here. We don't do circumcision but we do baptism. There are many children who are probably grateful who come up here and know that I'm not holding a knife.

Some ask me "I was baptized as a baby and so do I need to be re-baptized as a Christian?" Sometimes I want to respond if circumcision was still the sign if they would ask me "You know that wasn't very meaningful to me at the time, could I do the circumcision again?" I don't think they would say that. So baptism is now the sign and then we ask the father to name their child and the blessing. So they did that with Jesus after eight days and the sign then was circumcision, naming and blessing the child. Why? It is because it was the law of the Lord. Now fast forward about 32 days.

Luke 2:22-24 says [22] *And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* [23] *(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")* [24] *and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

There is repetition according to the law of the Lord. He is the first born so they brought Him back and made the presentation. They made the ceremonial sacrifice and the ceremonial purification which would have been the pouring of the waters in baptism and Mary would have had to have been purified also. Why did they do that? It was done because it was according to the Word of God. Now let's go a little further into Luke 2.

Luke 2:39 says [39] *And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.* Are you getting the notion that Mary and Joseph are Biblical parents? They are doing Biblical parenting. You will see the phrase 'according to the law of the Lord' five times. It refers to their Old Testament Bible, the Bible they had at that time. They conformed their parenting to it as Biblical parents. Now here is the result of their parenting. Luke 2:40 says [40] *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor (the gracious benevolence of the Lord) of God was upon him.* Now we move from adolescence to adulthood.

Luke 2:41-52 says [41] *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.* [42] *And when he was twelve years old (time for His manhood), they went up according to custom.* [43] *And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, [44] but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, [45] and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.* [46] *After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.* [47] *And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* (Why were they amazed at His answers? We already heard He had been growing in wisdom.) [48] *And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."* [49] *And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* [50] *And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.* [51] *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.*

[52] *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

What I'm hoping to do is in the coming studies we'll look at Joseph to learn about a father and then we'll take a look at Mary to learn about a mother. Then we will look at the objectives of parenting in general and the parenting of a child in particular, for your child to grow in wisdom. That does not mean they can Google on the computer. It means much more than that. How does that child that you have that tends to be anxious and withdrawn, learn wisdom and when to be bold? How does that child that is naturally aggressive learn when not to charge? It is called wisdom. How do we parent our children to wisdom? How do we teach them about what it means to be fearfully made, our bodies that come in the images of our parents? Jesus grew in wisdom and stature. What about the physical disciplines of life?

Jesus grew in favor with God. Favor means covenant graciousness. Noah found favor in the sight of God (Genesis 6:8). Jesus also grew in favor with man. How can my child know how to deal with other people made in the image of God in a right way? How can my child make the move from intellectual knowledge to understanding wisdom? How can my child know how to treat their body as a temple of the Holy Spirit? How can my child know what it means to have spiritual growth, growing in favor with God? How can my child know what it means to have relational and social growth? Look at Jesus. Jesus went home and He was not only submissive to the scribes and elders of the synagogue in the temple but He was submissive to His parents. How can I know how to care for, submit to, to respect, and to show dignity? How can a grandparent contribute to this? How can we as members of the church contribute to other parents, as parents draw upon us?

There was a phrase that I just read that was really interesting. It is repeated twice in Luke 2. The phrase is 'Mary pondered these things in her heart.' Up till now I have felt on absolutely safe ground Biblically but I am now going into a flight of speculation. It seems as if Luke under the direction of Paul wrote the book of Acts mainly while Paul was in prison, first at Jerusalem, then at Caesarea by the Sea, and then his first Roman imprisonment. It was about a two to four year period where he interviewed about 500 witnesses and he wrote the book of Acts but it seems as if the book of Luke was written earlier, while Paul was three years at Ephesus where perhaps he had access to Mary who was under the care of John, who became the bishop of the churches in Asia Minor. This sounds almost like a mother's communication.

This is speculation on my part. I believe the Holy Spirit used the interviews that Luke, a historian, would have done not only for the book of Acts but also for the Gospel of Luke for he has already told us in Luke 1 that he has interviewed many witnesses. What greater witness to the childhood of Jesus than His mother who would ponder these things in her heart.

I'd like to read one other passage to you and then give you a few thoughts. Let's look in Luke 4 at Jesus' adulthood. He has already been doing miracles and comes back to His hometown of Nazareth. Luke 4:16 says [16] *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up* (His childhood home). *And as was his custom* (because it had been His parents custom and He was submissive to them and it's the place He must be), *he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day* (one this occasion because He was a Rabbi, by invitation he read), *and he stood up to read.*

So here is the starting point and it's nothing extraordinary but I believe effective, Biblical parenting is only achievable with Christian parents who insistently bring the church to their home by intentionally bringing their home to the church. I believe if you get this one wrong I don't believe you can do Biblical parenting. God may intervene but exceptions will only prove the rule. That is what we're to do as parents.

Sometimes children can have more sense than their parents but I'm absolutely astounded at the notion of parents wanting to go where their children want to go. I'm trying to imagine that in my own home growing up where I would wake up on a Sunday and my dad would say "Okay kids where do you think we ought to go to church?" That would have never happened in my home and I just don't have a category for that. My dad and mom took, didn't send, us to church and not with perfection, they took the church to home. Home to the church, not to be a Christian but because they were Christians and the church to their home and I refuse to describe the depth of my depravity and decadence but I can remember some of my most depraved moments still remembering 'deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide.' I can still remember the memorization of John 1:1-5 and the call away from my sin even at the moments of depravity which had been planted by my parents who took me to a Biblical church and then brought the Bible of the church to the home, not with perfection but with insistence and with intention. So the church is God's family for you and the home is to be your family for God.

What is the profile of a church that you take home and to which you take your home? I want to give you three things just to profile it. Number one is it is foundational life vitals. This isn't going to be anything new, I'm just going to recount them for you. One, you want to take them to a church that is committed to the glory of God. Secondly, you want to take them to a church that is Gospel driven. It relies on the power of the Gospel that sets us free from our sins, the penalty and power of sins. Three, you want to take them to a church that is surrendering to the Holy Spirit. It is Holy Spirit empowered. How do I know if it is a God-glorifying, Holy Spirit empowered, and Gospel-driven church? The answer is in four. Four, it will be a Christ-centered church. The preeminence of Christ will be clear as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. No church will be perfect but you will see that profile in them.

Secondly, what are the life vitals of the church I take my home to and the church that I take to my home? One, they are connected by prayer to heaven. They are committed to intercessory prayer. People ask me why we put the green chair story in our welcoming book since it happened a long time ago. It did happen ages ago but it set the course of this church, not with perfection but at least with some purpose to be a church committed to prayer and the Word. Why was the founding pastor asked in 1999 to place the mantel on the new pastor? What did he do? He handed me a Bible. Why is it that if I had a hammer and chisel I could go underneath this pulpit to hit through concrete about three feet I'd find a Bible that was put there when this pulpit was built? It is a church committed to prayer and the Word, with all its inadequacies and imperfections yet there is that intentional commitment. So there is prayer and the Word, to be preached, read, memorized and meditated upon.

Three, what is the result? Our goal at Briarwood is not church growth but our goal is church health. We want to be a healthy church. That is described in the Bible as a W.E.L.L. church. This is a church that does four things. One it ministers to God with

worship. That is our ministry of up reach. It ministers to the world with evangelism and that is our ministry of outreach. It ministers to one another with love and that is our ministry of in reach. It ministers to yourself by learning. So that is our life style to be well. God, help us to be a spiritually vital healthy church – Christ-centered, God-glorifying, Spirit-empowered, Gospel-driven – prayer and the Word and the result is a growing ability to worship, to evangelize, to love and to learn.

Here is what the acronym is for being a W.E.L.L. church. W is for **worship** where we are looking to God to be exalted in the praise of His name. E is for **evangelism** and the Gospel to go out in **love** of one another, that is to distinguish us so that the world would marvel at our love for one another which stands for the first L and the second L is for our **learning** to grow deeper in the Word of God.

Churches are established wherever the Great Commission is obeyed, right? What is the Great Commission? Matthew 28:19-20 says [19] ***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*** Parenting is making disciples and evangelism. The only good thing is that you as a parent already start with a promise when God says “I’ll be a God to you and to your children after you” because God has entwined His family with your family. In you Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). The institution of creation is the family. The institution of redemption is the church and the two of been entwined in God’s covenant of grace. God works through the family and God establishes a church as a family. Then God’s family ministers to families. That is what is taking place in the church of Jesus Christ.

So as we take a look at the church that comes out of the Great Commission what does the Great Commission say to do? It says to make disciples. How do you make disciples? We do that by going, through evangelism and baptizing them, enfolding them into the community, loving one another and as we baptize them they and their families are added to the body of Christ. Then you teach them to observe all that He has commanded us through learning. It is kind of like a homerun. First base is evangelism. Second base is enfolding. Third base is equipping. Now how do you get a homerun? Those who were against God’s glory now delight in God’s glory and they worship Him. How does the Great Commission start off? They met Him at the mountain and they worshipped Him those whom He had discipled.

Now you go to the book of Acts and the Gospel goes to Jerusalem. It says that 3,000 which are just heads of households are converted and as they’re converted and live as the family of God they were continually devoting themselves to the Apostles’ teachings. That is learning. Many were being added day by day and that’s evangelism. They were gathered together in the temple praising God and that’s worship. They are worshipping, evangelizing, and they loved each other so much they were willing to sell their private property to handle the needs of one another. That is the life style of the family of God - worship, evangelism, loving and learning (W.E.L.L.).

I want to give you the not so surprising Divinely designed effect. The church is God’s family for you. The home is your family for God. When you go to the church and engage and become a part of the church and then when you bring the church home, what happens? You want your home to be Christ-centered, God-glorifying, Holy Spirit-surrendered and you want your home to be attached to heaven through prayer and from

heaven to me through the Word of God. I want my home to worship. I can't wait to share with you the blessings of family worship.

We want to evangelize in our home. We want to lead our children to Christ. Our children don't start off converted. Please don't let anyone teach you that. They start off lost but you have a promise, therefore you want to evangelize your child. Then you want to learn how to love in your family and isn't it wonderful to have to learn from that in the church? It's easy to love your friends for you choose them. It's tough to love a family because you didn't choose it. God gave you your family. God gives you the family in His family. He chose them and chose you and put us together so that we learn how to love one another. We bring that love to our home so that the children learn how to love their father and mother by watching you love the leaders of the church.

You as leaders learn how to love your little flock by watching the elders, deacons and pastoral staff love you, father you and mother you in the body of Christ. So the two are working together, so that a Biblical church is promoting Biblical parents who begin to do Biblical parenting and all the life vitals, life styles, life lines and life profiles are being connected right where you are. So what happens when you bring your home to church and your church to the home as Christians? It is that the very vitals of the church, the life lines and life profiles begin to show up in your home so now I'm going to get to the takeaway.

Here is the takeaway and then we'll continue with the next step in our next study. I have good news and I have bad news. Today's generation have not abandoned their parent's religion in view of Christianity, they simply don't bother to hide their parent's view. There was a survey done by the national survey of youth and religion. It has spawned many books, pamphlets and sermons. It is really an interesting survey. It documents the fact that 75 percent of our children identify themselves as Christians but non-religious. You can translate that as I'm a Christian but I don't have time for the church. How can that be bad news? The surveys went further. They asked the generation about their parents. They said that is our parent's view.

In 1975 the average attendance of evangelical church members in an evangelical church each month was family attendance representation of 3.6 Sundays. Today it is 1.8 Sundays a month. Parenting is working for our children have learned it from us. In fact, the survey went on to say that our best diagnosis of what they interpret Christianity is this; it is moral, therapeutic deism. Let me translate that. Christianity is good so that you engage in some acceptable morality and you have some principles for life that you can call upon and there is a God who is not really attached to you that is far away from you – deistic view of God – and He may or may not be engaged. In other words, it's the old genie in the bottle and let me rub it enough to see if He shows up. Let me use our language. God is my coach or my co-pilot.

As far as the church is concerned it's just another specialty store. If it works into my schedule then okay I'll go, but this holy institution purchased by the blood of Jesus in which He loved the church and gave Himself for her, is no longer an intentional priority for me and my family. We don't engage in the long view of life into eternity either, because we're also impacted by our culture and we want the next new thing. Most of the new church growth is just sheep leaving one pasture for another pasture for the next new thing until the next new thing comes, instead of the engagement of a family into the Word of God in prayer, Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled.

I'm trying to say to you that I believe that God's design still works. Here is the great news. If children can pick this up from their parents resulting in this, what would they pick up from parents who are Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled who were connected to the body of Christ as was Mary and Joseph. It was their custom. How did they know to circumcise Him on the eighth day? They had been taught the Bible. How did they know to come on the fortieth day? They were taught the Bible. How did they know to raise their Child with wisdom? They were taught. How did they know when to go to Jerusalem? They were taught. How did Jesus know to read from Isaiah? He had been there before and it was His family's custom. He was submissive to His parents and this is where you would find His parents so much so that when they are looking for Him He would say to them "Why did you look for three days? Did you not know I must be for this is our custom?"

This is the habit of our home because it's the habits of our heart. God has made your family. He has connected it to the church and the church is to connect itself to you. You might be thinking "I'm a single person here today" and I would say "No you're not. You're in the family of God." Certainly we'll have a ministry toward the dynamics of the singles of life but you're in the family and your family is in the family. The greatest thing you can do is to get some spiritual fathers and mothers to help you with parenting but you have to develop relationships and that takes time, participation, engagement and working through the difficulties of love because love is kind, patient, doesn't take into account what's wrong and the church and family of God is glorious but it's like Saul said; you'd hardly want to see it get made but it is great. So we need to stay engaged with it.

I have a lot I want to share with you in the next seven sermons about Joseph, Mary, wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man but I believe if you get this one wrong it will be all out of shape when you get to the end. I believe this is Biblical. Mary and Joseph did it. They did it with Jesus and they did it with His brothers. I believe that is the starting point for each of us. It is an amazing thing that God blesses the home, engaged in the church because God has designed it and ordained it to work together. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, how we long to be so engaged in the body of Christ and the body of Christ be so committed to being Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled, in prayer and the Word that when the challenges of life come within our home we know exactly what to do to our daughters, to our sons that they may date out of love to Christ and make decisions in life knowing about Biblical sexuality and know what to read and what to look at and all of the things that are assaulting them in this world because they have heard Christ and the Gospel over and over again. They may be holding it at arm's length but it's working implanted in their soul and heart and the way a child has been raised, trained and disciplined but Father, we can't take our children where we haven't gone and our children will end up usually where we are. Would You please first give us a love for Christ and then His church that our home would be vitally engaged and the church would so structure itself that it would be fully engaged so that the singles know that they're in a family and families are learning how to be a family and their family contributes to the family of God? God, this is absolutely impossible were it not for grace. So Jesus in You

the families of the earth are blessed. In You the promise to believers for their children has been secured and in You, You have purchased Your church, the family of God and we will give You the praise, in Jesus' Name, Amen.