

XI. Parenting in Biblical Perspective  
*Biblical Parenting Illustrated in the Lives of Joseph and Mary*  
“Best Practices for Devotions and Discipline”

Luke 2

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This series on Biblical Parenting Illustrated in the Lives of Joseph and Mary was only supposed to be ten sermons but I received a request to deal with the issue of family devotions (worship) and discipline within the home and trying to put a Biblical framework around those two things – principles and best practices. Many of our young couples do not have models of how family devotions and discipline should take place in the home today so it was at that request that I am going to go through some best practices and basic principles in this series. I think these two issues are very crucial and extremely important to understand.

There hasn't been a lot of material to glean from on the lives of Joseph and Mary but it has been informative material in helping us understand Biblical parenting. Some of you are probably thinking 'how will he show us how Joseph and Mary disciplined?' Do you think they spanked Jesus? Do you think Mary and Joseph had the negative part of discipline that they reared Jesus with? Rearing is the old term used for raising your child. Do you think they reared Jesus? I don't know. They may have but this one thing I do know is if they did He didn't deserve it. That would be the one time they were wrong. He did not need that kind of discipline. I don't think Jesus is in your home, from your DNA.

There are a couple of things you know when you have children. Number one is they know there is a God. You have to learn to be an atheist. You don't meet five year old atheists. They know they are made in the image of God. They have a conscience but a conscience is not infallible. The presence of a conscience is a declaration of *imago deo* – that we're made in the image of God. Secondly, you know they are going to sin because they were born sinners. They are not going to become sinners for they were born sinners. Thirdly, you know that when you have children you have a promise. God says "I will be a God to you and to your children after you." You don't parent to gain a promise and favor from God but you begin your parenting as a believer with a promise from God and the ordained means that He has laid out for you to use whereby He fulfills His covenant promise to be at work in the life of your children to bring them from death unto life. So that means I know I'm very likely going to be faced with the need of discipline and all of its ramifications in the life of my child.

I'd like to start this study by reading a definitive text on discipline from Hebrews 12. This text sets the principal framework concerning discipline as it looks at the discipline that the Lord has for us. Hebrews 12:3-11 says [3] *Consider him (Jesus) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. [4] In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. [5] And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you (all of you) as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."*

[7] *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. [9] Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to*

*the Father of spirits and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

We can learn a number of principles here. First of all, discipline is the evidence of love. Its absence is the absence of love. In other words, there are some parents who do not discipline their children. That is a declaration that they don't love them. They may worship them. They may idolize them. They may adore them. They may live in constant need of their child's love but their need for their child's love and affirmation is so great that they won't risk it by disciplining their children out of their love to them. They have just decided that they need their child's love more than their child needs their love. That is why one of my best practices is that you can never be an effective parent unless you give up your need to be your child's friend. You are not your child's friend. You are their parent. Friendship and parenting is not the same thing. If you want your child to count you as a friend then be their parent. Later, they will thank you and declare you a friend but if you need their friendship then you are paralyzed in parenting because there are many things that parents have to do that put their child's affirmation and their child's adoration of them into jeopardy. If you have to have it then you won't say or do what your child needs to hear or see at that moment.

Here is another principle that is drawn from the text. God is our Father and our discipline should reflect His discipline. With earthly fathers, the best we can say is that they do their best. They do what seems to be best, is what the writer says, but God our Father, does what is good for His children because He loves them. So our discipline is not for our benefit. The sword cuts both ways. There are parents who don't discipline because they'll afraid they will jeopardize their child's affection for them and their child's friendship of them but there are some who do discipline but they don't discipline for the good of the child. They discipline for the good of their own emotional angst. They are just carrying out their frustrations and they are taking it out on their child which perhaps has been the source of their latest frustration.

Here is another principle from the text. Discipline is to be a training instrument. It is to train the child. Certainly, there is a punitive dynamic to negative discipline but even this is not the purpose of the punishment. The purpose we have when we love our children is that we want to train them up in discipline.

Having just drawn those basic principles from that text, I want to lay out a couple of things for you. Luke gives to us this salient statement that Mary and Joseph embedded Jesus and their family in the synagogue and the temple. They didn't play drive-by church and it is clearly something Joseph was doing because he keeps acting in accordance with God's Word. When you read the book of James, who is the half-brother of Jesus, you can see that he has such a knowledge of the Word of God. Where did that come from? I think it was not only because his parents had engaged their family in the life of the Old Testament church but it was also because they had brought the ministry of the church into their home. In other words, they engaged as parents to teach, mentor and disciple their children.

I believe that parenting is basically evangelism and discipleship. It is speaking to the heart of your child to bring them to Christ and then speaking to the heart and mind of your child to train them up that they might love Him with all of their heart, soul and mind. So that they can think Christianly. The discipline of parents is this; you want your child to be brought to Christ in a personal, living, robust, intimate relationship and with your discipline you want to train them

with a Christ-centered, Bible-framed, Holy Spirit-focused, Holy spirit-enabled world and life view. This is so important.

When you look at life your interpretation and response to it all depends on the lenses that you're looking through. I have multi-national, multi-ethnic people sitting in front of me but if I had green sunglasses on what color would all of you look like? You'd all look green. What if they were red sunglasses? You'd all look red. If I had on a distorted pair of sunglasses then I couldn't see you clearly. We need clear lenses. We need rightly, ground lenses. They need to be Christ-focused, Biblically-framed, and Holy Spirit polished so that you interpret the issues, opportunities and decisions of life with a clear, Christian world and life view.

You will leave today and there will be a battle for your heart, mind and soul. All of the 'isms' of this world have been arrayed with amazing abilities to draw you into a man-centered world and life view. They come through the songs you listen to. They come through the programs on television that you watch. They come through those pop-ups on the screen of the computer. There are people who have designed and used algorithms to get to your mind that you have never even thought about. They will subtly begin to try to work into your life to get you to see a distorted, man-centered view of life in this broken world. So there is a battle for it.

The Reformers understood that the Christian life is one of discipleship. The Great Commission says to go and make disciples. Does the word disciple sound like the word discipline? Discipline is another way and another aspect of discipleship. What is discipleship? It is to create learners, who know the Lord, never exhaustively but increasingly accurately. That is the whole purpose of discipleship so in the family discipline has two elements to it. It is positive and negative. The positive element is what you are going to put into the life of your child.

At this time, I'd like to say a couple of words about child abuse. Child abuse comes along time before negative discipline. It is child abuse if you're not teaching your child because you are the most effective teacher in the life of your child. Do not let any association of educators or any professional guild tell you to move over. You decide how much you want to use the professionals but you are the most effective teacher and both dad and mom are needed. That's why we have to find ways as a church to help out single parents.

There is an interesting survey and millions of tax dollars went into this survey. The survey was how men and women train their children as fathers and mothers. They found out that fathers and mothers when they teach their children at learning moments, do it differently. Oh my, and it costs millions of dollars to learn that. I could have told you that but let me tell you what you're millions of dollars found out. Both teach but a dad teaches his children differently than a mother. Fathers teach your children, for the teaching of kindness is upon the mother's tongue and both are necessary. Fathers are responsible for all of the teaching but both in a complimentary way are needed in the life of a child. They also found out that when a dad teaches he takes a different posture than his wife does as a mother and it is done almost invariably. When a father teaches his child in a learning moment he stands ninety plus percent of the time right in front of them – eyeball to eyeball. That is the default position of a dad. When a mother teaches her child in a learning moment she stands right beside them, ninety plus percent of the time. One is not superior or inferior to the other.

I only bring out that survey to tell you both parents are needed in the child's life and both have a different way of delivering it. You shouldn't tell the dad to do it like the mom and you don't tell the mom to do it like the dad. Both of them are needed. I'm not saying dads can't come alongside their sons for my dad used to do that with me. When we would go walking my

dad would put his arm around me as a little boy and with my dad's arm around me nothing could touch me. As we were walking my dad would then kick me in the rear end and we'd walk some more and he would do it again. I couldn't wait until I could be a daddy where I could hug and kick at the same time. There must be something about daddy-hood that lets you do that.

It kind of reminded me of the ministry though. Where people are hurting you kind of hug them up and then give them a little kick and say "What is the Lord teaching you here?" That's what dads do. It's not that they don't hug but they sure they are in your face, not in a negative way but you are being treated as a young man that is growing up. When I had that bad arm break I'll never forget my dad standing at the end of the bed, looking me in the eye when I was eleven years old and said "Son, you can do this." I have remembered that every time I have stood before things that I did not want to face. I also remember my mother standing right beside me with her arm around me saying "Son, we'll get through this." Both are needed in the life of a child.

I want to give you one more thing that our forbearers understood. I want to be careful how I say this but your child needs consistency in the discipling and discipline of their heart, soul and mind to Christ to give them a Christian world and life view. I think it's like a three-legged stool which I'm borrowing this illustration from someone I read about. One leg represents family, one leg represents church, and one leg represents academy and you want the three to work together. I am not telling all of you that you are conscience bound to enrolling your child in a Christian school. I am telling you that you are conscience bound to educate your child Christianly. I don't know what delivery system you are going to use as a parent to assist what you're already doing and that's between you and the Lord but what you don't want is a conflict. Here is what my church is saying, here's what my family is saying and here's what the school is saying. You don't want that in the life of your child.

You want to line them up. It may be a private school, a home school or a home school coop. We are blessed at this point in time to live a little bit in a bubble in Birmingham, Alabama where I have actually been invited to the public schools to talk about things from a Christian world and life view that I would have never been invited to in other places in this country. So I am grateful for the Christian administrators, teacher and all of those in these local public school systems that keep that door open for us and that are many times delivering something much better than a private school we would have selected somewhere or a private Christian school but has much more of a legalistic approach in definition to Christianity than a principal one. To get to the discipline of a child you have to get all three in place.

What am I talking about when I say child abuse? Child abuse can not only be that you don't provide for them what they need but that you allow things that they should not get in these impressionable years of their life. I think it is child abuse to put a computer in a private room with a child. You may be thinking that they will get access to computers but I'm not telling you they can circumvent you but just because what the world keeps offering doesn't mean you have to pay for it. It certainly doesn't mean you have it in place without some guidance. The reality is that your children are going to do what they see, read and hear. I believe it is child abuse to get what they ought not to see, read and hear to them. In that three-legged stool I think it's child abuse when we let people have access to our child's heart and if you knew the heart and lifestyle of that person who has produced or written that song or television program you wouldn't leave them alone with your child for thirty minutes much less a one hour program.

So I am asking you to give oversight in the life of your child, give input in the life of your child and put the fences up that need to be put up in the life of your child. Then as your child

matures remember what Mary and Joseph did. Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. As you have trained them up by disciplining and disciplining them then you begin to create moments in time where they start making choices, under your oversight long before they leave you to go off to college. Start creating those moments where your fearful child gets the opportunity to find out there are times to charge or that your unfearful child gets the opportunity to know there are times they will die if they do certain things or that your analytical child realizes that they can't keep collecting data their whole life, they have to make a decision.

As you see your children in their own make up in a Biblical world and life view that you are introducing to them that you start creating opportunities for them to make decisions in life under your oversight. Do this, so that they have wisdom, and then they will know how to deal with their bodies. Do this, so that they will have stature and will know how to deal with their relationship with God. Do this so they grow in favor with God and know how to deal with their relationship with others. Do this so they grow in favor with man. That is the reason that wisdom was first in that list and there is a reason it's there.

Sometimes for the sake of order and for the sake of the family you have to engage in negative discipline. Those things may mean keeping things from your child. With my son when I said to go to your room, no television and no contact with anybody, I might as well have given him some ice cream because that is what he loved particularly if he could find a book that he had hid up in his room somewhere. With another one of my children if I gave her timeout she would be ready to shrivel up and die somewhere. She could be in the heat of a basketball game, be pulled out but on her way out she was setting up time to spend with the other players, even on the other team. You have to know your child so that in those moments of discipline you know what to give or not to give to them that will teach them what you're trying to help them learn. There does come a time where there is negative corporal discipline in the life of a child.

Here are some best practices. The first one is that in your home, keep your rules few but then keep your rules. The key to keeping your rules few in the home is you. The greater the character and the soul of the parents, the less rules are needed in the home to maintain order. Here is my favorite illustration of this. His name is Robert E. Lee. You have to listen to him because he went through West Pointe with no demerits. That is not bad. He takes the presidency of Washington College that is today known as Washington Lee. At one time there were forty students, three bombed out buildings and seven professors that haven't been paid in eighteen months. When Lee arrives they say to him "General Lee, now that you are president we want to maintain our honor code" and they handed him the book and said "What would you like to add to it or subtract?" Lee said "I would like to dismiss it." They basically said to him "We look forward to your leadership but we can't imagine taking this away." Lee said "We're going to keep an honor code but there will just be one rule. You will always conduct yourself as a Christian gentleman."

You need to know that Lee's school is about to be populated with hundreds of military veterans. Forget college kids, we're talking about military veterans going back to college with just one rule. What are you going to do about the parties or cheating or carousing or this or that? He saw that all being assumed under that one rule. You couldn't be a gentleman without being a Christian and if you're going to be a Christian then it means you have to be a gentle man, compassionate in relationships and strong and courageous in responsibilities. The reason he was able to keep one rule is that he embodied that rule. Whenever a family, a business, a nation loses the character and soul of its leaders, it has to multiple regulation and litigations in order to maintain order but when you have the embodiment of what the verities of the organization are or

of the family in the leadership of the family that sets the pace. So you don't need multiple regulations and litigations.

Then you have to keep your rules. You keep them positively and affirm those times when your child does that which is right. Then you keep them by boundaries with already known punishments but also know process to get there. So this is just from one pastor who has been a daddy and has raised his children who are now all out of the house. Now I'm an expert. It's done. When I was there I wasn't an expert but now I'll give you a couple of suggestions on these things.

Keep your rules few and keep them. In terms of negative discipline, the earlier in life it is done, the less it will have to be done later in life. The Bible speaks of the rod. The Bible is telling you not to use your hand or anything that belongs to you. In our home we had a nice little clear plastic 'board of education' and it hung on the wall. It had our children's names on it and I will tell you that they sought to hide it on numerous occasions but it stayed on that wall. It is theirs and it belongs to them. It didn't have my name on it. The only reason it ever comes off that wall is if you decide to take it off that wall with your behavior. In fact, we would make them go get it and then we would pray before its application. Then we would hold them afterwards. I'll confess that some of the prayer time was not a sacred, pietistic prayer on my life but it was giving me breathing room so that I wouldn't violate point one which was don't do it out of uncontrolled anger. Most of the prayer time was saying Lord get a hold of me now. Always make them verbally affirm what they did to cause it.

Don't ever say that silly remark 'this hurts me more than it hurts you.' No child believes that and it's not true. It's doesn't hurt you more than it hurts them and they will never believe that anyway so you might feel better saying that but they won't believe it. You share with them that you don't want to do it and that you're only doing it because it's necessary so that what you are doing is in a measured response bringing a consequence to disobedient behavior that brings chaos to their life and the family and you're doing it to train and teach them. What is it that you did, what should you have done or not have done, and you're giving them an opportunity to confess it and own it. There is a measure of punishment because the unpunished life and disobedience will have greater punishment in this world and in eternity and you want them to know that sin has consequences. Tell them it's not for your benefit or frustration but it's out of love to train them up and then sit and spend the time together.

Here is a side benefit of that. Back to the rearing thing, this is not your hand or anything that owns you and it should not be done anywhere but the one place God made for it to be done. There is a wonderful portion of the anatomy that is amazingly sensitive and there are no major organs anywhere nearby. That is why we said rearing your children so that you think through this very carefully. Sit down, spend time with them and don't divorce yourself from them but you stay engaged in their life, in that process.

Here are some things on family worship. There are three things that I think we need to learn to do. There is personal worship, family worship and corporate worship. One of the great challenges of the Lord's Day is because we don't do personal worship or family worship, we come to the Lord's Day with this great need and we want a 70 minute service to deliver everything that I haven't given attention to throughout the week. Whereas the personal ought to lead to the family and the family ought to lead to the corporate worship but all three of them are interdependent and built upon one another.

So here are some best practices regarding family worship. I would strongly encourage you that your family worship needs to be simple – prayer and the Word. It needs to be at a

regular pace, a regular time. I would encourage you to do it daily. It needs to be done at the best possible time for your whole family to be together. I wish I could say like the culture we used to live in where you could just have it at supper time. In my family we did it at supper for a long time until the athletic issues of our children were coming up and caused it to be somewhat of a problem at that time for us. After that we then decided to do it at night before we went to bed so we bought the largest bed we could and everybody piled on it at night. When my children had friends over they just figured the friends ought to come to family worship but because I was getting ready for bed generally at that time I wasn't always ready for that. I can't tell you the number of kids that have been on that bed at night. That's where we would read together and pray together and talk about what has happened in our life. We would always sing together as well.

Always aim family worship at the youngest child. Everybody else will get a blessing. I strongly encourage you to get an instrument to help you, like a devotional book. I strongly encourage you to use the shorter catechism and now we have just gone back to positive discipline. I believe the greatest discipleship tool to teaching us who Jesus is, our relationship with Him and who our Triune God is, is using the shorter catechism. It has not been matched as a discipleship instrument. So I would encourage you to get this with the Scripture passages to read and talk about what is being taught. Sing some of the songs we sing in church with them or songs they sing in Sunday school. Pray together as a family. You are teaching your children how to pray and then if you are able find out what the pastor is preaching on Sunday morning and pull your family together Saturday night to read the text he will be preaching from so that you prepare your family for the Lord's Day morning. This is tying family worship in with corporate worship.

So there is your personal worship as you meet the Lord that then leads to family worship and as you have your family worship prayer for the leadership at your church in general and for the pastor in particular. Unite your family worship with the life of the church by praying for the leaders of the church. Spend at least one time of the day, either at a meal or at family worship, praying for the leadership of the church. I love what Suzanna Wesley had on her table. She had a sign on her table that said 'Divine worship, held three times daily here.' If John wasn't there then she conducted it and she carried it forward.

I would like to recommend a book to you for family worship. Jason Helopoulos has written a book called Family Worship in the Christian Home; a Neglected Grace. I urge you to take a look at this book. This is an excellent treatment of family worship.

Lastly, I believe this conjoining of positive discipline whenever necessary and negative discipline with family worship produces a home in which there are boundaries and expectations that moves a family forward and it equips you to lead your child's heart and mind to that personal relationship with Christ so that they grow in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. I know you are going to think that your child is not paying attention or hearing or listening at these times but I will tell you that is not true. They are hearing much more than you ever thought.

I will not describe the lifestyle I led in my rebellious years of immorality, ungodliness and blasphemy and the condition I was in on many nights but I can tell you that I can remember on those nights remembering my Sunday school teaching, my grandmother who would always be present in our family worship and would pray for me, and my dad and mom who did not send me to church but took me to church and then took the church, not perfectly and unevenly, in the home. They likely thought I wasn't hearing a thing. I was remembering all the things they

didn't think I was remembering and it was both convicting and calling me to Christ and I'm forever grateful for it. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word and the opportunity we have to surround ourselves with basic principles and thoughts on this matter of discipline and family worship. Would You give us the opportunity to do these things in a way that would honor You and give us the ability to implement and when we falter not to just quit or resign ourselves but to reengage? Jesus, help us even parent as our great God parents us. We have had earthly fathers but we have a heavenly Father who disciplines us and who trains us up out of love to worship Him and He does it for our good and our good is His glory for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.