

II. Parenting in Biblical Perspective
Biblical Parenting Illustrated in the Lives of Joseph and Mary
“Do You Know Where Your Children Are?”

Luke 2

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We will be looking at Luke 2 which will be a text we will become very familiar with over the next 7 to 8 studies working through this matter of Biblical parenting and then the principles as they are illustrated in the life of Joseph and Mary. We will be looking at a couple of texts in this study. What is extremely interesting about looking at the parenting of Mary and Joseph is on the surface and to some degree in reality, there seems to be not very much material to draw from because Matthew, Mark and John, all led by the Holy Spirit and in their own burdens and commitments, seems as if once Jesus is born they just let us have thirty years of silence in terms of His life. There is no information that they record about Him but Luke on the other hand does give us information. It's not a whole lot of information but he takes us in Luke 2 from Jesus' birth to His infancy, picking up again in His adolescence to the point of His declaration of His manhood at the temple and then gives us a description of what happens from then as He grows. Then we pick Him up in Luke 3 when He is baptized and is therefore ordained and installed Biblically into His public ministry of Prophet, Priest and King, the Anointed One.

Why would Luke have that information? I think the Holy Spirit led him to embrace it and to record it for us for which I'm grateful. I believe another reason is because Luke is somewhat of a historian and in both the Gospel of Luke and Acts it says that he inquired of and went to eye witnesses. In the book of Acts most of the eye witnesses were around Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria because he records that book while Paul is in prison who is then moved to Caesarea by the Sea and then to Rome. It's in that context that Luke is putting together the book of Acts and finishes up by the time Paul gets to his first Roman imprisonment. It seems as if Luke had previously put together the Gospel of Luke and had written almost all of it during the three year ministry that Paul had at Ephesus where Paul likely had access to Jesus' mother Mary who would have been under the care of John, who eventually becomes the overseer or bishop at the churches at Asia Minor in general and the church at Ephesus in particular.

That's why in Luke 2 you'll see repeated 'Mary pondered these things in her heart.' How do you know what someone ponders in their heart? I understand the Holy Spirit could have told Luke that Mary was pondering but humanly speaking in his humanity how would he know that Mary had pondered these things in her heart. I think he knew because Mary told him she did that. She could have told him, 'here are some things that happened and here are some things that were particularly on my heart to tell you.' One of those events is an event that I had the opportunity to experience as a parent and as a pastor in my multiple years of ministry.

In fact, I'm feeling the years of my ministry today. Today is my 45th wedding anniversary and my wife Cindy has upped for another year. She said she is going to give me another year and I'm very grateful for that. So throughout the years there has been an event that has been comparable to something that Mary allows Luke to know and the Holy Spirit empowers him to record. Let's look at the moment. Jesus is 12 years of age and He has now come to Jerusalem with His parents.

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, 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. [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.

I want to give you a couple of thoughts from this as we move ahead. I want to ask you to put two things in your mind. In the last study I share with you the findings that have been documented that the children of the church are going to college and not coming back to the church and clearly not only the number but the percentage has increased. As I share some thoughts on this I'll return to some of this but I have the opportunity to participate in an organization called the Gospel Coalition. One of the pastors who is very gifted in ministering to youth began to try to research this out, not about the kids that weren't coming back to the church but those who did. He found almost unfailingly three clear characteristics of the children of the church who upon leaving the church into the wilderness of college life as they finished returned to the church. I will circle back to those three characteristics at the end.

I want you to think about one other thing. We are in a ministry theme this year of contending for the faith. How many of you believe that marriage and family are under assault in terms of what we have enjoyed framed in God's common grace Biblically in our society? The family is under assault and what do you think the best way is for us to meet that assault? As much as I am heartbroken upon the foundational institution of family and marriage being utterly destroyed right in our midst almost at breakneck speed, on the other hand this is an unbelievable opportunity to live out Biblical marriage and family and engage in Biblical parenting in the face of what is absolutely destructive in society. There is no great apologetic of families than Godly families. There is no greater apologetic for the Biblical doctrine of marriage than Biblical marriages. There is no greater apologetic for Biblical parenting but Biblical parents.

I'm probably preaching to the choir here and there have been several that have asked that I preach this on Sunday mornings. That's a good thought but I believe right here at Briarwood to some degree we are learning parenting from the world and then we go to the Bible to try and get a few techniques to do and get control of our children so our kids are good. I believe with all of my heart that we do not have a Biblical world and life view of parenting. I also don't believe people will embrace it until they want to embrace it. Many may already know everything and they don't need this. As much as we sit here and decry the loss of Biblical parenting in our society, look at how much have we have withdrawn from engagement to learn of Biblical parenting as believers. I want to engage in this with you because I believe it's the greatest testimony to our society and it will come from solid marriages and the parents who know how to parent Biblically in the lives of their children with Godly wisdom.

I want to lay some things out for you and I want us to come back to this particular event. This is an event that I have had in my life. Maybe this has not happened to you where you have

left church and you remembered you forgot your child. This happened to me. This was not on purpose but it was an accident. As a pastor I have been exposed to this on many occasions where we are closing the doors to the church and there is a child looking around for their parents. I would have them sit on my lap and about 10 or 15 minutes later their parents would show up. That does happen and it happens to Mary and Joseph.

Mary and Joseph had been to church. They had gone all the way from Nazareth to the Temple which was their custom. They did it every year. There were three feasts that people would have gone to. This was the big one they would have gone to. They also went because this was the time that Jesus was to step into manhood at 12 years of age. They had gone to the temple and done their customary things and then it was time to go back home. So they began to journey back to Nazareth. It would have taken about a 2 to 3 days journey and so when they get to about the end of the first day they go around to make sure all were present. I can just see Joseph saying "Mary where is Jesus?" "He's with you, isn't He?" "No, He's with you." "I thought He was with you." "Where is He?" "Find Him." They go back to Jerusalem and look for Him for three days. Finally they go back and check at the temple.

They see Jesus sitting there asking questions and He's been answering questions. When I see that I think these are the same guys 18 years later who will do Him in, perhaps many of the same ones there who are astonished at His teaching. Mary then says what most mothers say, "Your father and I have been looking all over for you." I've heard that phrase before in my growing up years. Jesus says "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" I want to give Mary and Joseph a little slack here.

If you go back and read in the Old Testament when they travelled the women and children would travel in one group and the men would travel in another. They would do that for protection, safety and to help handle one another. So Jesus up until this year would have always travelled with His mother, Mary and the women. This is the year that Mary figures that He is entering manhood so He would be travelling with Joseph. With Joseph that has not computed yet. He is going on just as the way it has always been thinking He is with His mother and not thinking this is the year He moves into the other group. So they get to the end of the first day and He is not with either.

Here comes the occasion where Mary tells Luke so that we can see something she treasured in her heart out of that event and what she treasured out of this event is what Jesus said, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Out of that event we are then told that He goes home in submission to His parents and the result is that He grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man.

I want to unpack this with the question 'Jesus where are You? Where are your children?' Are they at church? Singles may be thinking at some point in time if God grants them children they will need to know where their children are. How do I approach Biblical parenting? I need to know where the children are that I'm parenting, not just physically but also spiritually. Parents with children you need to know where they are. Those of us who are older and we've already had them, we need to help our parents. Those of us who are a part of this body of Christ who stand up and take the baptismal vow are spiritual fathers and mothers available to fathers and mothers as uncles and aunts available to them. We also need to understand these principles so we can be encouragers, equippers and supporters to one another in the covenant community as an immediate family with perhaps an extended family existing in the context of God's covenant family.

With that in mind, how can we move from here to answer that question of ‘where are your children’? I want to first remind us of that essential practice of Biblical parenting. 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. In other words the immediate and extended family are continually united with the church family and that covenant family is engaged in this so that the immediate family (the parents) are making use of what is present and the means of grace and the people of grace in the church. They are being reinforced and equipped and supported in what they’re doing in their home. That is exactly what we see here.

We see that Joseph and Mary are continually engaged. 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.* How did they know He was to be circumcised on the eighth day? It was because Joseph had been trained in the Word of God to do what the Word of God said for him to do as a father for his son. 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.”* They bring Him up for the forty day observation for the waters of purification, the baptisms that would take place and the commitment of the first born because the Word of God, the Law of the Lord had told him. Joseph and Mary had been engaged in the synagogue and the temple as a way of life so they were equipped and they knew what to do as parents.

Luke 2:39-40 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.* [40] *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.* There is the declaration of His adolescence because the parents knew from the Word of God what they were supposed to do for their children. They weren’t learning it from the world but they were learning it from consistently being engaged and taught. They went up to Israel as they did every year and Jesus is saying “I must be in My Father’s house.”

In Luke 4 Jesus gets up to read from the Scripture in the synagogue at Nazareth as was His custom. He knew exactly what to do because He had been raised in that synagogue along with His brothers so there was this engagement where the church, God’s family for you, and the home, your family for God, is united together intentionally, not that the church just fits into the schedule like everything else but there is a full engagement and an embedded relationship between the Christian family and the Christian church, the family of God and the family that God has given to you. Those two go together.

What would a family look like? Here is a definition of the family. If this is Biblical parenting let’s look at the context of the family. The church must be Biblically defined so what is the Biblical definition of the family? The family, Biblically defined, consists of one man and one woman united in the covenant of marriage with parental responsibility for all of their children. Now, we are in a sin-cursed world. Because of sin the family unit, not intentionally, but by the overflow of the effects of sin in this world, can’t be found that way. There is a widow because her husband died. There is a single parent because one has fallen into sin and has left the family through divorce. Those are realities which are all the more reason for the body of Christ to be able to step in to do what possibly can be done at those moments to assist.

The answer for us in compassion to families that are broken because of the sin in this world is not to back off on what God had originally intended for the family but to keep that before us and then with the power of God's grace begin to deal with those moments when that family unit has been broken because of either a sin that has broken a marriage or death. Then we as the body of Christ step into that moment because we know there is a challenge because a mother can't give what a father can give and a father can't give what a mother can give so a single parent is valiantly trying to accomplish that, thus all the more need for Godly access to men and women to assist in moments like that.

What is our objective? Our objective is to maintain and keep working toward that which God had made at creation by the power of His redemption to reestablish this of one man, one woman, with parental responsibilities for their children whether their children have come from biological reproduction or adoption or through foster care. That Godly marriage then takes on parental responsibilities. I hope at the end of this series to address even more specifically the challenge of single parenting.

How do we approach parenting whether single or father and mother? Here is a basic definition I have given for us. Effective Biblical parenting is a commitment by Christian parents to bring their covenant children to a saving relationship in Christ within Christ's church by intentional Gospel evangelism and discipleship. I think that is what parenting is. It is evangelism and disciple making. It's life on life and it's in the context of the family within the family of God. Biblical parenting is a commitment by Christian parents to bring their covenant children, not to be good kids, but to have a saving relationship with Christ within Christ's church.

I certainly want to teach my kids what it means to be good, to be respectful, have integrity and do all of those things but my job is not to raise a Pharisee. My job is to raise my children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that they would know Him. That's my call. I cannot convert them but I can call them to Christ in my parenting and in the context of that I can disciple them by teaching them all that the Lord has commanded so that they can have a Christian world and life view.

So I want to break down this Biblical parenting and give you five statements about it. Christian parents who are embedded as a family in a local church must know five crucial facts and you must believe these. I try to humorously get it across to parents before we get to this baptism with covenant parents I meet with them about God's promises to them. I remind them that they have a covenant child but they are holding a covenant viper in diapers. You must know the problem. Your child is born a sinner. Your child is born with a bad heart and a bad record. When you hold that child you're looking a child who is spiritually impotent, unable to savingly know God through Christ on their own. You're holding a child with all of the pinkness and freshness of their physical life but inside is a tomb of sin. They are not born a blank slate of sin and become sinners. They are born sinners and that's why they sin. This child is not in neutral.

This child knows there is a God for you don't meet four year old atheists. You have to really work at that. They know there is a God but they also have a sin nature in them that is suppressing that knowledge and will refuse to acknowledge that God. They will be drawn to anything and everything away from that God unless that God intervenes. One of the first instruments God by the Holy Spirit uses to intervene is you, the parent because you know where your child is. My child has a bad record, a bad heart and my child will have a bad life to one degree or another apart from the glory of God. Through God's common grace they may not turn

out to be a Hitler but they have a Hitler heart beating within them. Therefore I need to know that.

There is something else you need to know about the problem. They not only have a bad heart and a bad record but they have three enemies and all of them are greater than you. The Bible says the three enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil. All three of those want to take your spiritually dead child and bring the death of eternity to them. He is a murderer from the beginning. The world and its system of rebellion are opposed to God and wants to conform them to that image of that world. Then there is Satan, the prince of the power of the air, who is using everything he can to bring rebellion from their heart to life and in the midst of all of that inside of them is the principle of independence from God. That is what the phrase 'the flesh' means.

The phrase 'the flesh' starts in Genesis 6:5 when it says that God looked and saw that all flesh had gone astray. Flesh is in opposition to the Spirit. The Spirit gives you dependence upon God's grace and power. The flesh is a declaration of independence from God and self-reliance and self-absorption. So inside of your child is one enemy, the flesh and outside of them is the world and then working with the flesh and the world is Satan. That's the beginning of parenting and that's the problem. It is going to get better but I don't think you can appreciate the better until you know the problem.

Our children aren't just in need of a good coaching job from you. They need to be born again. Then they need to be evangelized and disciple because they have a bad record and they need a new record. They have a bad heart and need a new heart. They will have a bad life and that bad life can only be stopped by the grace of God and by giving them a new record and a new heart. You have enemies that are working against you – the world outside, the flesh inside of them and Satan the adversary, defeated but still greater than you. There are some answers to this but you have to know the problem.

Here is the premise. Parenting works, both the spiritual parenting of the church and the parenting that parents give spiritually in their home. In that national survey of youth and religion as they went through all of the kids that were leaving the church where the numbers have increased and the percentages have increased, there is some good news and bad news embedded in that. When those kids were interviewed that were leaving the church they all loved to say "I'm a Christian, I'm just not spiritual." What they meant was, "I'm a Christian but I just don't believe in religion or the church." How did they get to that point?

There were two things that the survey pointed out. The parents of those children were different than their grandparents. Their grandparents on any given month could be found in a church in worship engaged in principled membership of a church and they would show up with their attendance 3.6 Sundays out of every 4. These children's parents' average attendance is 1.8 Sundays out of every 4. Do you see what is happening here? They are doing what their parents did, unlike their parents they just don't hide it. They just go ahead and say it. Their parents had left the church for all intents and purposes.

Here is something else embedded in this. You are seeing again that parenting works. Bad parenting gets bad results. Good parenting gets good results. That is the premise that is found in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 22:6 says *[6] Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* That is not a promise. It is found in Proverbs which is a book of Divinely ordained common sense and in that statement that is what we call casuistic law – cause and effect – where if you do this then this is what happens. God has given you Divinely ordained common sense. What parents put into children eventually shows up in the

life of children, maybe not by age 14 or 18 or until 28 but normally, there are exceptions, but the normal factor is that parenting works. I know you think that everyone else has more influence on your child than you do but that is not true. Parenting works.

In this case of this national survey, bad parenting had produced children that said ‘that’s what my dad and mom do, so I’ll just confess that I don’t have any time for the church, but I’ll nod my head to Christianity.’ Here is this principle though that when you begin to work in the life of your child you’ll get G.I.G.O. The bad part of that translation is Garbage In Garbage Out but the good translation of that is Gospel In Gospel Out. If we have Gospel lives that show the priorities of Gospel living I believe that will eventually show up in the lives of your children.

Here is number three, the promise. You parent from a promise. God says “I will 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord God calls to Himself. Our God has established a covenant of grace and embedded in that covenant is the priority of the family. God delights to work His covenant grace through covenant families and He makes a promise. It’s not an unconditional promise. There are means whereby that promise is brought into fruition.

In the baptismal vows I ask the parents ‘do you acknowledge that your child is in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?’ Do you acknowledge the bad news that they have a bad record and a bad heart? Do you now look to your children for their salvation by grace even as you publically confess again that you know Christ as your Lord and Savior? If that’s the case then you’re parenting not for a promise but your parenting from a promise. Then I ask will you in humble reliance upon Divine grace and the power of the Holy Spirit will you endeavor to set before your child a Godly example? Why? It works. Will you pray with and for your child? Why? It is because you need Divine intervention. Will you teach them the Word of God? Why? It is because you need the power of God’s Word that breaks the heart to come into their life. Will you bring them to the means of grace and use all the means that God has appointed in His church to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Why? It is because you need to be embedded in God’s family to do your family. That is why we do those things because we believe it’s Biblical. When you confess the problem you also confess the promise and the promise is that God works in His church, God works in covenant families and God has made a promise to you. God said that promise is fulfilled through Me and the means start with you.

The fourth thing is the position of the child. Let’s look at I Corinthians 7. The problem that is being dealt with here is the problem of divorce and with people that were unequally yoked wanting to know if they could get a divorce. Being unequally yoked is not a grounds for divorce but in the context of it as Paul is telling believers to stay in unequally yoked marriage, he gives them a reason and works from a certain premise. I Corinthians 7:14 says [14] *For the unbelieving husband is made holy* (sanctified – not saved by you but set apart by you – so that spouse by being around the saved one has been set apart under the influence of the ever present Holy Spirit and they are encountering covenant blessings and hearing things of the Holy Spirit) *because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

The children aren’t born saved, they are born lost but they are born set apart. They are in a covenant family and in a covenant community. They are partaking, seeing and hearing of the good things of the age to come. It is all around them. They are hearing testimonies, seeing people converted because they are set apart among the things of the Lord. It doesn’t mean they

love it. It doesn't mean they are drawn to it. That's why you don't ask your children if they want to go to church. No, you bring them. They have something working against them that they don't want to be there. You want them there because they have been set apart and when they are in that context they are being affected not only with the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the Gospel in your home but in the body of Christ that is working in coalition with your home. So they are in a privileged position (been born into a covenant home with the promise of God) by being in a covenant family and in a covenant community. Their family is not playing drive-by church. They are embedded in the covenant community and as such they are experiencing and seeing the work of grace all around them.

The fifth one is the power you have. You have three power plants at work to overcome that bad record and that bad heart that will inevitably lead to a bad life. You not only have a promise, a position and the premise that parenting works, but you have power. Power plant number one is that you have the power of the Holy Spirit in your family and in His church. The power of the Holy Spirit can raise dead sinners to life. He can bless our inadequate words in family worship time, during a Bible reading time in our home. The power of the Holy Spirit is at work all around us and in us. The fruit of the Spirit is being developed within us. It is all being poured out in that home and upon those children.

The second power plant is the Word of God which is like a hammer that can break the heart of stone. It is the balm of Gilead that can soothe the troubled waters. Here is the power of God's Word that knows how to convict in the hand of the Spirit and knows how to console in the hands of the Spirit. You have the power plant of the Holy Spirit so will you pray for him? You have the power of the Word of God. Will you bring it into your home and will you bring your home to it? You need power.

Thirdly, you have the power of the Gospel. Romans 1:16 says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation...* This isn't a cheap shot for I'm just trying to get a point across. Alabama and Auburn football are not going to get your child to heaven. Technology, money or the acclaim of the world will not get your child to heaven. It is the Holy Spirit with the Word of God that will bring them to Christ with it being at work in your home and in the church of Christ. That's why they come back to it. It was their mother where they were birthed. That's why they come back to you. It was because you loved them enough not to be threatened by them withholding their friendship from you but because you wanted to be their parent more than you needed a friend. You bring those power plants of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the glorious message of saving grace in Jesus Christ, to them.

The gentleman that did the research for the national coalition, not on the kids that weren't coming back, but he went to the kids that did go back to church upon graduation who became embedded following Christ in the context of Christ's church. He found out three things in each one of them. Number one is that the ones who came back were converted. They weren't just good kids who came back to church. They were converted sinners. They had been saved and that's why they came back. Secondly, they had been equipped to think Christianly. Hopefully you are tying together some dots here. When I travelled with my mom and dad they used to have to keep us busy and one of my favorite 'keep-me-busy' games was 'connect the dots' in the backseat of the car on our trips.

I said in the beginning that Biblical parenting is your commitment in the context of the church and be supported there, to evangelize and disciple your children. Two of the marks of those kids who came back to the church was one they have been converted which means they were evangelized. They hadn't just been sent to a youth group to be a good kid, get entertained

and stay out of trouble. The Youth group, the Sunday school and the parents had aimed evangelism. They went to the Youth group to be equipped and disciplined. Connect the dots. Parenting is evangelism and discipleship. Who are the kids that come back to the church? It is the kids who came back to their home and the mother from which they were birthed, the church, are those who have been evangelized and disciplined. Their marks are that they are converted and equipped.

The third thing he found out was that their parents were engaged in the church. The ones that came back had parents in a church that evangelized and disciplined them and they had parents that were engaged in the church. Those were the ones that came back.

Here is what you start with. Here are the promises. Here is your child's position. Here is parenting. Now as the parents do it there is something very distinct about the way a daddy does it and there is something very distinct about the way a mommy does it. They are both parenting but they are very distinct at how they get this evangelism, discipleship and engagement done. We'll go through these one after the other. We'll start with daddy in the next study and I'll tell you from the Bible and show you from Joseph how a daddy does it. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You so much for Your Word, it's clarity and for illustrations like Mary and Joseph who were engaged and embedded and while they certainly didn't need to evangelize Jesus they did make sure He was disciplined. They were also engaged in the lives of their other sons. Father, help us learn from them but help us be Biblical parents, not worldly parents that bring the Bible to bear, but Biblical parents that bring the Word of God, the Spirit of God, through intercessory prayer with the Gospel to bear the power of parenting in the Spirit, with the Word, proclaiming the Gospel for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.