

Gospel-Centered Families
Ephesians 6:1-4

I'll never forget a story my friend Chuck Quarles shared at a pastors conference a few years ago while expounding Col. 3:18-21.

Several years ago a well-known biblical scholar invited him to lunch. As they sat across the table, Dr. Quarles told this scholar that he was extremely inspired by his productivity as a thinker and writer. (This man has written numerous commentaries and reference books).

Dr. Quarles said, "I'm amazed by your work. How did you manage to be so prolific?"

This theological heavyweight mumbled under his breath, "**I sacrificed my son.**"

"I was stunned by his words" Dr. Quarles said. He thought, "Maybe I misunderstood him." So he asked, "**What did you say?**"

The scholar replied (almost angrily), "**You heard me! I said I sacrificed my son!**"

Dr. Quarles said that this man went on to say that he had been so driven to research and write and publish and make a name for himself in the academic world that he had neglected his family. His son essentially grew up as a stranger to his father. Now, as an adult, his son was a homeless man, sleeping on the streets of one of America's biggest cities.

Dr. Quarles then tried to console him saying, "**I'm sure that's not your fault.**"

Even more angrily the scholar replied, "**Don't you try to console me.**" "Yes – I did that!... Even though people seem to be amazed by my productivity as a scholar, the fact is, I would give up every one of those books and far, far more, just to have my son back!"

Then this prolific writer looked across the table, straight into the eyes of Dr. Quarles and said, “**Just in case you want to walk in my footsteps, know that I pray to God that you won’t.**”

Dr. Quarles said that this conversation echoed in his mind for the next few weeks. He was haunted by it. He was so haunted by it, that he began to take a close look at his own life as a husband and father. By his admission, Dr. Quarles said, “**I was blowing it.**”

That conversation was a desperately needed wake up call from God that led him to consider his priorities, and adjust his lifestyle. It ultimately led him to make a change in ministry roles, and a change in a place of ministry.

Dr. Quarles said, “**I have never once regretted that radical change.**”

That story had a powerful effect on my life, as well. It still does.

Now, obviously, kids can grow up in great homes, and turn out a rebellious. I totally understand that. The point I’m driving out is:

**Those who've had their hearts changed by the gospel,
must seek to love, nurture and disciple their children.**

Ephesians

Paul continues with what scholars call “House Codes” in Ephesians 6:1-4; that is the duties between husbands and wives and parents and children. The structure may have reflected a similar style to other groups who taught in the family in Paul’s day. Paul however, infuses his instruction with theology.

This little section is brief but powerful. In these few verses Paul highlights essential priorities of children and parents.

But this is more than just becoming better parents and children. Paul is bringing down to earth the rich gospel instructions that he has already given in the previous chapters.

The gospel changes our identity, our lifestyle, and our homes. God turns us into new people, that means new husbands, new wives, new fathers, and new mothers. We have new loves.

What If I'm Not A Parent

We are a family as a church

Paul seems to assume that children are in attendance when the Scriptures are read. We want them to be present also. We want children to not see such a disconnect between their childhood and adulthood in the church. What's happening in America is kids get coddled, and entertained until college, then they never attend a local church partly because (they've never been trained in one. We want there to be as much continuity as possible. We want to prepare them for adulthood early.

Further, I think you see an application for those of you who are not yet parents for this particular message: the whole body of Christ is to be used in helping train children. If you are a single or married with no kids, or married with moved-out kids, the kids at Imago Dei are, on one level, your kids.

- **What this means is love them well. Sit with them if you like. Serve parents. Serve with gladness in childcare. We are a family. We require every member to occasionally serve in childcare in part to cultivate this understanding.**
- **While you don't have the same responsibilities as their parents, you have a responsibility to care for them like family. Paul said elsewhere, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim 5:1).**

You might be a parent in the future.

You are called to honor your parents regardless of your age.

While there will be a point in which you are no longer under the practical authority of your parents, and will one day leave them to cleave to your spouse, you are still called to honor your parents. They occupy a

special place in our lives. **They should not be forgotten. We should also seek to care for them and as they get older to care for them (1 Tim. 5:8)**

I want to point out four truths about the discipleship of our children; the first two are general observations. The last two are direct imperatives in the text.

#1: Value and Care for Children

The **fact that Paul mentions children** in such an important letter demonstrates the value the early church placed on children.

Further, Leon Morris points out that it is significant that Paul wrote “children” not just “boys” (Morris, *Expository Reflections on Ephesians*, 192). **“Girls were valued less in ancient society, but Paul did not accept such a limitation”** (Snodgrass, 322).

The early church had high regard for children. They carried on the legacy of **Jesus** who said,

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (**Matt 19:14**).

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” **2** And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them **3** and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **5** “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, **6** but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,[a] it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (**18:1-6**).

They also reflected the values of the OT: Seeing children as a blessing (Ps. 127-128), and maintaining the importance of parental instruction (Deut 6:4-9).

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,

the fruit of the womb a reward.
4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children[a] of one's youth.
5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them! (127:3-5)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[b] 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-7)

As I've noted elsewhere, while many in the Greco-Roman world would put kids on the trash heap for people to pick up (and often turned into Gladiators or slaves or prostitutes, or slaves), the early church welcomed them.

Stott notes, "It was a radical change from the callous cruelty which prevailed in the Roman Empire, in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones were killed, and even healthy children were regarded by many as a partial nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce" (238).

The philosopher Aristides described to the Emperor Hadrian the Christ-like care of early believers around the year AD 125: "They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly.

At Imago Dei, we want to live up to our name. We want to value all people, including children – regardless of race, background, or how they were brought into the world.

Let us joyfully celebrate the birth of children. We understand that the creation of life is work of God. We understand **that parents have a holy calling to be the primary disciple-makers of their kids.**

Bonhoeffer said it well, **“It is from God that parents receive their children, and it is to God that they should lead them.”** (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 31)

Surely there is no greater joy and responsibility than be entrusted with these little munchkins. They come with a stamp, **“yours for a limited time only.”** They are like **wet cement**. We have them but for a short time; go and have a coffee and they’re gone!

As mentioned, Let us we value one another’s children. We want the children of Imago Dei to grow up and realize that only the gospel changes lives; that little **Raji** would know important of the local church; that little **Kiyon** and **Jai** and **Drew** would know that the mission of Jesus is worth their lives; that for little **Marcus** and **Jacob**, the glory of God would be their supreme desire; that little **Judah** would group up and love his wife like Christ loved the church; and little **Audrey Claire** and **Trudy** would respect their husbands; that little **Nias** and **Jackson** would become a young warrior who does battle with the sword of the Spirit. In short, we want to disciple our kids.

Let us support the adoption of orphaned children. I rejoice that many are **in this process** or waiting on the **right time** to pursue adoption.

- We believe that the physical act of adoption reflects the spirit of adoption we enjoy as children of our Abba Father. *He pursued us when we were abandoned in the trash heap, and has now made us to sit in heavenly places; once sons of disobedience; now sons of God.* Like broken Mephiboseth we’ve been made to sit at the king’s table.
- We are ready to roll out our **adoption fund in the next few weeks**. See Matt for more info. This is very exciting!

Let us welcome the functionally fatherless into our lives and our homes.

Recent reports note that 80% of African American children in the U.S. are being raised apart from biological fathers; 60% of Hispanic and 50% of white children. (Chapell)

Many kids have fathers or mothers living but they are no where to be found.

- Consider foster care. Help a disadvantaged kid get through school. Care for the abused. Welcome that cousin or nephew that is in an awful situation.

Is there anything more wounding to a child that parental abandonment or death? Let me illustrate the pain of the fatherless with Fresh Prince of Bell Air. (A wealthy California family takes in a street smart Philadelphia teenager). Uncle Phil is trying to make a man out of Will.

In an episode called “**Papa’s Got a Brand New Excuse,**” Will's biological father shows up after fourteen years and spends time with him. Will is in high spirits, coming in with a duffle bag saying, “daddio!” because he thinks he is going to go on a trip with his dad. However, his dad lets him down again, making some excuse for postponing the trip. The dialogue ends with his dad calling him “son” but Will calls him “Lou” instead of dad. Will tries to play it off, but Phil cuts right to the heart. He says, “It’s okay to be angry, Will. Will’s anger intensifies as he says, “I just wish I didn’t buy him this present, ripping it from his duffle bag (a statue of a father holding his son.

Here is the **heart-wrenching monologue that illustrates the pain of parental abandonment and longing for attachment in the hearts of the fatherless.** **[Insert Picture]**

Will Smith: Hey, you know what, you ain't got to do nothing, uncle Phil. You know, ain't like I'm still five years old, you know? Ain't like I'll be sitting every night asking my mom "when's daddy coming home", you know? Who needs him? Hey, he wasn't there to teach me how to shoot

my first basket, but I learned it, didn't I? And I got pretty [dang] good at it too, didn't I, uncle Phil?

Uncle Phil: Yeah, you did.

Will Smith: Got to do my first date without him, right? I learned how to ride, I learned how to shave, I learned how to fight without him. I had *fourteen* great birthdays without him; he never even sent me a [dang] card. [*shouts*]

Will Smith: To [heck] with him! [*pause*]

Will Smith: I didn't need him then I won't need him now.

Uncle Phil: Will

Will Smith: No, you know what, uncle Phil? I'll get through college without him, I'll get a great job without him, I'll marry me a beautiful honey and I'm having a whole bunch of kids. I'll be a better father than he ever was. And I sure as heck don't need him for that, 'cause there ain't a

[*shouts*]

Will Smith: Ain't a dang thing he can ever teach me about how to love my kids. [*long pause*]

Will Smith: How come he don't want me, man? [*breaks down, starts crying and falls in the arms of uncle Phil*]

That's everywhere folks. And it's not a TV show. Parental abandonment crushes children. The reason I thought of this clip is because my nephew sent it to his mother, my sister. He sent it because he was grieving over the absence of his biological father.

In a Christian century article by William Wilimon entitled *Reaching and Teaching the Abandoned Children*, the importance of marital faithfulness is illustrated. He reports, more than 45 % of these students cited their parents' divorce as their "most determinative life-changing event.**"**

Let us be the church, imitating God to the fatherless. Hold out the hope of the gospel, and practice gospel-centered hospitality to those who are in broken homes, welcoming them as Jesus welcomed us. Let us care for these kids, and single moms.

Let us serve the fatherless in other gospel-reflecting ways. We sponsor children in Haiti (that you can actually meet and know), and

plan on serving children there (and elsewhere in the future) by building a school, and taking trips there to simply do James 1:27.

- **Let me put a face to it...**

[Insert video of Naiderson] – What we are doing in Haiti. Like too many Haitian children, Naiderson's parents were unable to take care of him and he was abandoned at an orphanage. Now, meet Pastor Gaetan. He has the man with the biggest smile in Haiti. **When Chris Marlow visited Yaveh Shamma, the orphanage on his property, they noticed a hospital bed laying in between two tents — one tent for the girls and one for the boys.** Pastor Gaetan and his wife slept between them. **"I wanted them to be protected, like a shepherd who cares for his sheep."** They already had fourteen children, and the earthquake brought 16 more. Help started a sponsorship program providing water, food, education and shelter. They meet in a tent school now, but the plan is to build one. In 2012, **Help raised over \$150,000 through Garage Sale for Orphans.** That money goes to fight trafficking, care for orphans and build schools. **We plan on taking part in a garage sale June 1.**

So, let us value and care for children!...

#2: Set a Christ-Centered Example to Your Children

Though not stated in 6:1-4, this point is implied based on the previous chapters of Ephesians. What are they learning?

First, they are learning basic Christian living.

Paul has been addressing all Christians in the church in Ephesus. Many of those Christians were parents.

One of the primary places that they were to live out these instructions in the previous chapters, like those in chapter 4 was in the home.

- **Children are learning from their parents' own relationship to the Lord. They are watching you **worship, parents!** That's one of the reasons we like having kids in corporate worship! They are seeing if you are dazzled by God's grace or not.**

- Children are learning from your view of and involvement in a local church.
- Children should see their parents do the following: speaking truth lovingly, working honestly, giving generously, encouraging others properly, putting away bitterness and anger repentantly, and forgiving one another Christianly. (cf., 4:25-32)
- In short, parents are called to do **Ephesians 5:1** – “Be imitate God, as beloved children.” The first picture of God that children receive is from their parents. They will get a sense of **authority, love, and protection** from their parents. As they see and treasure this example that will inevitably point them away from the parents to the ultimate father.
- As you fail to reflect Ephesians 5:1, you should use that as a time to repent before your kids and point them to this God.
- Further, children are learning what it looks like to love and serve others, as moms and dads do this. They are learning what it looks like to live out the mission of God by watching mom and dad.
- Your example is so influential. What are they seeing? Are they learning to value money over mission? Success over faithfulness to God? Hypocrisy or honest repentance, and humble desperation for grace.

Second, they are learning what the gospel looks like from their parents' marriage.

This point is implied by the *immediate context* of husband and wife relationships. The parents are giving their children a picture of the gospel!

- As we have said, the ultimate purpose of marriage is not marriage. It is a display the glorious union of Christ and his church.
- One of the best things you can do to teach your kids is love one another and stay together. They are learning gospel.

- Not only are they learning about the gospel from your marriage, but they are learning about marriage itself from your example. Does that mean kids who don't grow up without a mom and dad will have a broken family also? No, not necessarily! The gospel is powerfully enough to transform your life and your future relationships. It simply means that their parents' relationship will have an effect on them.
- What I would say to you who have a broken family, is make it your aim to live out the Bible. Make it your aim to have a wonderful marriage, described in Ephesians 5, and parent according to Ephesians 6.

Third, they are learning obedience, respect and submission as they watch their parents submit to and obey God.

This point is drawn from the immediate context also. A theme of submission and obedience and respect runs through Ephesians 5:21-6:9.

Parents, are under God's authority, both in their roles to one another and their roles as parents. Children are watching how we obey God.

Again, we will fail as parents. This doesn't make us bad parents, it simply means we need grace. Don't hide your need for grace and the gospel; for that is part of the teaching experience to them. Kids need to know that people fail in obedience, but there is one who did not fail, and he stood in our place, and gives us forgiveness and empowerment. They need to know Ephesians 1-3. In Christ, We are forgiven, redeemed, made alive.

#3: Children, Obey and Honor Your Parents in the Lord (1-3)

Children, listen up. Here is what God wants you to know.

A: You were made by God and to glorify God.

I pray you grow up with a holy ambition: Girls, now you care for baby dolls, but one day you may care for hungry babies, orphaned babies. Boys, now you play with trucks, but I pray one day you will drive a truck load of love to hungry people. Now you play ball, but I pray one day to will engage in a real battle, taking the gospel to unreached people, and fighting for injustice.

You need a relationship with God that comes through Jesus. Your greatest need is to trust in Jesus who died for sinners like you, receiving the punishment that sinners like you deserved. He died in place of us. We should have been on the cross, but Jesus took our place so that we could be made right with God – forgiven of our sins.

The Apostle Paul has been teaching this to the people in the congregation in Ephesus. Earlier he said, “For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith.” We can’t earn salvation. We receive it by faith. It is a gift. Jesus has done all the work for us. Believe in Christ and be saved.

B: One way you glorify God is by obeying and honoring your parents in the Lord.

When your parents are instructing you in the ways of the Lord, then you must obey and honor them.

- **You honor your parents with your attitude.** You don’t honor them when you huff and puff, or when you pout, or talk back to them. When you dishonor your parents like this, you dishonor God himself.
- **When God introduced his written law, the first relationship mentioned was commandment five, “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 20:12). It was a capital offense if you physically or verbally abused your parents (Ex 21:15, 17).**
- **The command to honor father and mother appears in five other places in the NT (Matt 15:4, 19:19; Mark 7:10, 10:19; Luke 18:20). Respect and love them. A child that does not**

grow up with honor and respect of parents, will likely not honor and respect others in general.

- **You obey your parents with your actions.** The word, “obey” means to “hear under” (MacArthur, 311). It means to listen with attentiveness and do what they say. Hear what they say. Do what they say. That’s obedience.

Listen to what Paul says to the Colossians.

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col 3:20).

So listen children. Do you want to please the Lord? Then obey your parents. Obeying your parents is one way you can obey the Lord.

Listen kids, you will have a hard time obeying your parents. When you don’t obey the, remember that Jesus died for sinners who disobey God. If you realize you are a sinner, and need to be forgiven by God, then you need to trust in Jesus – who obeyed the Father perfectly. Jesus cleanses us, gives us a new heart, and a desire to obey our parents. This pleases God.

Parents, we know that children don’t have to be taught disobedience. They do it naturally. A few Christmases ago, I saw this quite well...
David Isaac – Play the Nintendo!

- Nevertheless, though they will disobey at times, we must keep pressing the importance of obedience.
- When they fail to obey, we need to present the gospel to them. As you discipline them, do the gospel on them. Remind them of **Ephesians 5:18** which casts a shadow over the previous verses and these. It is by the Spirit that we obey. We receive the Spirit by believing on Jesus. Only by the Spirit does real transformation happen.

Why should the child obey? Paul provides some reasons.

"It is right" (1). That seems like an unnecessary reason to state.

- However, I think it's worth saying because one might be tempted to think, "Should I really require obedience?.... **Look how cute she is!**" Paul says, "This is right."
- **John Stott** adds: "[C]hild obedience belongs to the realm which came in medieval theology to be called 'natural justice.' It does not depend on special revelation; it is part of the natural law which God has written on human hearts." He notes, "It is not confined to Christian ethics; it is a standard of behavior in every society. Pagan moralists, both Greek and Roman taught it. Stoic philosophers saw a son's obedience as self-evident, plainly required by reason and part of the 'nature of things.'"

Why should the child honor their parents?

Instead of giving a warning, Paul actually gives a motivating promise (Stott, 240). He says...

It is good for the child (2c-3). God promises both "**blessing**" ("that it may go well with you") and "**safe-keeping**" ("that you may enjoy long life on the earth") [Chapell, 313].

- Paul combines Ex 20:12 and Deut 5:16. The original promise to Israel involved a long and good life in the land of Israel. Paul omits the focus on Israel and makes the statement more general and proverbial.
- Of course, this does not mean that by obedience to one's parents, the child may never get sick or even tragically die.
- Paul is basically saying that the child is endangering himself by dishonoring his parents.

- There are great spiritual blessings that come by obeying God's word. Obey and honor them "in the Lord."

#4: Make Disciples of Your Children (4)

Notice how the parents are addressed throughout these verses:

- "obey your parents" (verse 1)
- "Honor your father and mother" (verse 2)
- "Fathers, bring them up..." (verse 4)

Verse 4 says "fathers." That's a word that's actually used in **Hebrews 11:23** to refer to both parents. Paul could have both parents in mind, but more likely he is turning attention to fathers (Snodgrass, 322).

Nevertheless, we can apply verse four to both parents in general, and given special attention to fathers in particular.

Both need to **be present with the kids.**

- It is not the job of a day care, nannies, or an institution or grandparents to raise children. It is the parents' job.
- Big homes, nice cars, and long vacations are not worth neglecting your kids.
- This requires spiritual discipline on part of the parents, maybe especially on part of dads. It may call for an adjustment of one's lifestyle.
- Are you conscious of your time and attention with them?
- I've learned a lot from pastors because that's what I am. **Piper** took one out to lunch every Saturday and asked them questions. He wasn't a perfect parent, nor am I. But I've learned how important that time is.
- **Driscoll** has taught me about the value of having daddy-daughter dates, which I keep on a regular basis. They normally involve a coffee shop and shopping. **I've told them that I want to take them to the best coffee shops in the world!**

Both need **to teach** the kids together.

- While, **the father bears primary responsibility** for training and instruction, both share in the task of making children disciples of Jesus.

In Proverbs, the writer says,

20 My son, keep your father's commandment,
and forsake not your *mother's teaching*.

21 Bind them on your heart always;
tie them around your neck.

22 When you walk, they[d] will lead you;
when you lie down, they will watch over you;
and when you awake, they will talk with you." (Prov 6:20-22). See
also **1:8**

- **Paul told Timothy to hold fast to the instruction he received from his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:14).**
- **Timothy seems to have had an unbelieving dad. Fortunately, the mothers taught him.**
- **They share the same task, and should be united in this effort: to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**
- **It is always important for mother and father to be in on the same page in teaching and in discipline. We should not confuse the kids. (Piper, *Momentary Marriage*). We shouldn't let them play one against the other.**

Parents in general, and dads in particular have two particular challenges:

First, do not provoke them to anger.

Paul first mentions this: "Do not provoke your children to anger" (ESV) or "Do not exasperate your children" (NIV)

In the ancient world, fathers had absolute control and were sometimes harsh, (Snodgrass, 32). Reports show that fathers sold their kids, and could even kill them without being charged. As mentioned, many left them in the city.

Obviously, a mother can provoke a child to anger, as well. But given the dominant nature of the father, it seems he was the parent to most likely to provoke the child.

It is important for the father to fair, loving and consistent in attitude. Here are some possible causes:

- *When we fail to take in to account the fact that they are kids.*
- *When we compare them to others.*
- *When discipline is inconsistent.*
- *When we fail to express approval, even at small accomplishments.*
- *When we fail to express our love to them.*
- *When we discipline them for reasons other than willful disobedience and defiance.*
- *When we pressure them to pursue our goals not their own.*
- *When we withdraw love from them or overprotect them.*

The result... they get angry or, in the words of Colossians: discouraged.

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Col. 3:21

What we should be aiming at is encouragement.

Second, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Paul goes from a negative command to a positive command.

Notice three actions:

“Bring them up” – This phrase doesn’t really do justice to the notion expressed by the verb.

- Paul used this verb in verse 29 to refer to “nourish” (ESV) or “feeds” (NIV).
- He basically says that dads should care for their children lovingly.
- Calvin said, “**Let the children be lovingly cherished.**”

“discipline” and “instruction” – Instruction carries the idea of teaching, counsel, admonition or warning, and perhaps verbal instruction (Stott, 248).

- Discipline involves training, including punishment.
- Discipline is the word used in Hebrews 12 to refer to our Heavenly Father’s discipline of us, which is “for our good” (Heb 12:5-11).
- In light of what’s just said about anger, such discipline must be under control.
- The type of instruction and discipline we are to give is “**of the Lord.**”
- We are to teach that which is Christian instruction. Not the discipline and instruction “of the law” or “the Philosophers.”
- Paul may have had in mind what he said earlier in 4:21 that “the truth is in Jesus.” It is Christ-centered instruction we must give them.

As you drive, and play, and walk, talk about Jesus’ incarnation, death, resurrection and Lordship.

Akin said it well, “**Have fun and talk about Jesus a lot.**”

We are to lead our children to the truth that is in Jesus, ultimately that may submit to the Lord Jesus. He is their highest good.

Application: How?

A lot could be said here, but I just want to point out a few things from the parenting manual in the Bible: Proverbs.

Proverbs was written in part from a father to a son. We can learn much as parents about discipline and instruction from this book.

Let me break it down like this: Communicate and Educate.

1: We must communicate to the hearts of children.

Why?

Behavior flows from the heart (Prov. 4:23, 23:17; 26; Matt 12:34).

You need to get to the heart of your child. We talk about this all the time at IDC. We have been greatly helped by people like Paul Tripp who wrote *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov 4:23)

17 Let not your heart envy sinners,
but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. (Prov 23:17)

26 My son, give me your heart,
and let your eyes observe my ways. (23:26)

Ultimately we must speak the gospel, and pray for God to give them a new heart, with new desires (2 Cor 5:21).

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26).

We must communicate to them that Jesus Christ lived the life we couldn't live - perfectly obeying the father - and that he died the death we should have died - paying our penalty. That if they turn from their sin and believe that they can be forgiven, receive Christ's righteousness, and become a new Creation.

What?

- **Don't: Just deal with external behavior.** You have to do that some, or there would be no order at all. **Behavior modification**

is not wrong or bad, it's just insufficient to transform the heart.

- **Do:** Talk about values, beliefs, feelings, motives.
- **Do:** Talk about the **Gospel**. Talk about sin, repentance, grace, and the cross. Talk about becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus.
 - Make your corrective discipline of them a Gospel issue, not just a behavior issue.
 - Make the goal of corrective discipline conformity to Jesus.
- **Do:** Talk about your **goal** for them: to live the glory of God.

How?

- **Dialogue, not monologue. Ask them questions! Know what they believe, or doubt. Know their fears.**
- **Discern matters of the heart (Prov. 20:5).**
 - "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."
- **Practice various forms of conversation.**
 - **Affection.** Communicate your love to them. **Luke 15 provides that amazing picture of affection.**
 - **Encouragement.** Celebrate success, even small victories.

25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down,
but a good word makes him glad. (12:25)

- **Correction/Rebuke/Warning (Prov. 12:24; 13:8; 15:1; 16:18). Warn about the dangers of pride, laziness, and folly.**

18 Pride goes before destruction,

and a haughty spirit before a fall. (16:18)

- o **Entreaty (Prov. 23:26).**
 - "My son, give me heart, and let our eyes observe my ways."
- o **Instruction (Prov.; 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1-2 Deut. 6:7)**

My son, keep my words
and treasure up my commandments with you;
keep my commandments and live;
keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; (7:1-2)

- o **Prayer.** Pray with your kids. Much of their theology will be shaped by your prayers. **"Not praying about being safe or having fun!"**

#2: We should educate children with biblical truth.

Teach them the biblical storyline, not just the biblical stories. Here I would recommend *The Jesus Story Book Bible*. It is possible for kids (and adults!) to know stories in the Bible but miss the story of the Bible. Read pages 14-17.

Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose), they get afraid and run away. At times, they're downright mean.

No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne-everything-to rescues the

ones he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

You see, the best thing about this Story is-it's true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling on Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle-the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

Teach them key theological truths. This includes: God, humanity, sin, Christ, Repentance, Sanctification.

For this, I would recommend *My First Book of Questions and Answers*. This will get them thinking about important topics and truths. (Example: James, "Maybe a little bit no").

You should also teach them the Creeds that we say.

I would also encourage you to read *Give them Grace by Fitzpatrick* in order to see how to work the gospel into your parenting.

Teach them Christian virtue.

I started recently driving James to school in order to have some "Daddy talks." We take a different Proverb every morning and talk about it. It has been very good for him and me. We talk about generosity, hard work, using gracious words, being kind, and other virtues that were embodied in Jesus, and who empowers us to live like this.

Teach them Spiritual Disciplines

- o Prayer
- o Bible Reading
- o Worship
- o Stewardship

- o Evangelism
- o Missions – Don't press your kid to just be a great athlete, or a great student, or a great dancer, teach them about a great commission.

A Word of Hope

Finally, in your communication and education you may feel like "I am not sufficient." You are right. Parenting makes you desperate for God's help.

A few weeks ago, Landon said, "I think I'm going to go back to Law School. Pastoring makes me want to cuss too much." I told him, "That's the way I feel about parenting."

"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is sorrow to the mother." (**Prov 10:1**). Maybe you feel sorrow instead of gladness.

We take great comfort in **Titus 2**. The grace of God "trains us for godliness." While parents have this responsibility to "train their child in the way he should go" we remain desperate for God's grace to change the hearts of their children.

Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Fitzpatrick reminds us "**The difference between us and Paul is that Paul bragged about his weaknesses and we try to hide ours.**" Don't hide them. Admit them. Go to God for help. Paul teach us that in our weakness, we find God's strength to be sufficient. **Weak parents have a strong Savior.**

- God's plan may include a relatively easy path of parenting, including respectful obedient kids. If so, glorify God for his grace in their lives God.

- **But God's plan may include pain, heartache, and affliction. In that case, you should aim to glorify him by being desperate for him, and by showing others where your strength and hope comes from.**

God desires to be glorified in both situations. In both situations, he strengthens you by his grace, for his glory.

If you have the latter situation, know that it is God who changes the heart, therefore there is always hope for prodigals.

Remember also that your identity is found in Christ not your parenting performance. It's founding the work of another. Jesus is our righteousness.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

We are justified before God! What is justification? It's not just "just as if I never sinned" but it's also "just if I always obeyed." Tell the good news to yourself and your kids!

Because God loves to change lives by his grace, there is even hope for the child who is rebellious, or the father who has never been changed by the gospel.

Philippian Jailor

I think one of the most encouraging picture of the life-transforming power of Christ on an individual is that of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16.

Paul and Silas are beaten, dehydrated, and given to this jailor, who basically tortured them. He showed no apparent concern for them.

But then Paul and Silas sing at midnight! And God shakes the earth.

The Jailor comes out and says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He then believes, along with his whole household, and then what happens?

The very next scene: This once cruel, harsh, vicious man, is treating the wounds of them with tenderness. No longer harsh. He provides a meal for them. (16:33-34)

What changed him? This man met Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ can change the hardest of men, even 59 year-old fathers.

He can change fathers, children, mothers, and families.

Look to this one, who changes hearts. Look to the one who was abandoned by his father at the cross, so that you will never have to be abandoned.

Do you know this Savior? Are you reflecting him in your home? Let us turn our attention to him now in the Supper.