

Principled Parenting


Part 1: What Are We Trying To Do?

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TALKING POINTS WALKING POINTS

Leaders' Guide

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- 2 Looking back on your childhood, what would you say was **your parents'** "goal in parenting"?
- 3 What would an objective audit of your time and money reveal to be **your** goal in parenting? How do you feel about that?
- 4 Read Galatians 4:19. What does a "Christ-shaped child" look like? List five to ten attributes.
- 5 What are some things you're **currently doing** to produce "Christ-shaped" children?
What is **one** thing you're currently **not** doing which you believe would help your kids be Christlike?
- 6 Read Colossians 1:28. Which of the following activities are you currently employing with your kids:
 "proclaiming Christ to your children so that you can present them complete in Christ"
 "admonishing your children so that you can present them complete in Christ"
 "teaching your children so that you can present them complete in Christ"
- 7 What changes will you need to make in order to change an "**x**" (in the above list) to a "**✓**"?
- 8 On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think you "practice what you preach" to your kids?

- 9 What's **one** characteristic of Christ which you think your behavior scores **above** 5? **Below** 5?
- 10 **Take One Step:** What is **one** small, concrete step of obedience you **will** put into practice this week?



- 1 A basic, starter question. Don't spend too much time on this—but **do** use it to observe any unusually strong reactions. It may mean that that group member is struggling in parenting and needs follow-up.
- 2 This question may get a few laughs, but try to draw out some sincere, substantive answers. This question will help you get a feel for the sorts of childhood experiences group members had. And, be prepared to handle any “bomb shells”—some will have had significant hurt in childhood.
- 3 You may need to “prime the pump”, so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)
- 4 We **don't** expect children to have fully-formed, Christlike character, but some possibilities include:
 - submission to parents (Luke 2:48–51)
 - wisdom, favor with God, and favor with man (Luke 2:52)
 - gentleness and humility of heart (Matthew 11:29)
 - self-sacrifice (Philippians 2:5-8)
 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)
- 5 Be ready to “prime the pump” with your own answer, but don't jump the gun.
- 6 The following definitions may be of help:
 - “proclamation” means to announce thoroughly (ie, not just snippets of info from time to time)
 - “admonition” is warning someone of grave possible consequences of their action
 - “teaching” means providing both formal and informal instruction
- 7 This question requires vulnerability—help your group members take it seriously. It's easier to admit failure than it is to make changes, but we all need growth and change. (We're all quick to admit that we're not perfect, but we like to keep it at the level of abstraction.)
- 8 This question is formatted to help us move beyond vague generalities. Model for your group members how to be neither too harsh in our estimations, nor too lenient.
- 9 On this question, model honesty and humility for your group.
- 10 Decide your own answer in advance—and probably **lead off with your response**. Some folks are too ambitious with change (“I vow never again to...”), others make resolutions which are so vague, so squishy, one cannot judge progress (“I'll try to be a better husband.”)

Sermon Summary

What is the goal of Christian parenting? It is critical that we know what it is we are trying to do. Without a clear goal, our parenting efforts will lack direction and focus.

Principle #1: The Bible teaches that our goal should be for our children to become like Jesus (Galatians 4:19, Ephesians 4:13-15, Colossians 1:28). Contrast this with society's goal of parenting. It tries to convince us that our goal is to produce happy, successful kids. Our culture says we should produce children who are athletically gifted, academically successful, and socially adept. Let's be honest, it is hard to resist this current of our culture. But if we don't, culture, not God, will bear its own fruit in our children's lives. It is critical that we distinguish between our culture's dream for our children and God's dream for them. They are not the same! The world's goal is that your children be happy. God's goal is that they be holy! These are not mutually exclusive goals, by the way. True happiness is a byproduct of walking with God. It is not circumstantially-driven. It involves a settled sense of contentment that trusts in God's goodness and rests in his sovereignty. We need God's help as we seek to raise godly children. And that is where prayer comes in. Parenting will improve your prayer life! But to be successful parents we need to do more than just pray. We must spend time in the Scriptures. Why? Because that is how we get to know Jesus. That is how we grow in Christlikeness. Colossians 1:28 presents both the goal of parenting and the means to accomplish it: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Paul begins verse 28 with the subject of our parental instruction: Jesus! In our parenting, we are to present Jesus. Many of us never do. And we wonder why our children aren't walking with God. They don't know who he is! That makes perfect sense, because our children can't imitate someone they don't know. Remember, the goal of parenting is that our children become like Jesus, both in character and values. Similarly, we can't accurately present someone to them that we barely know. That brings us to a second parenting principle.

Principle #2: To parent successfully, we must practice what we preach. The more like Christ you are, the more Christ-like your children are likely to become. If you want your children to become Christ-like adults one day, you must endeavor to become Christ-like yourself. Your children are much more likely to embrace Biblical values if they see you living them out. If you find yourself telling your children to do a lot of things that you haven't learned to do yourself, like manage your anger, be honest with others, or kick a bad habit, then you need to stop talking and start doing! If you won't do it for your sake, do it for theirs! Can you honestly say that the way you live your life—your worship, your lifestyle, your devotion, your discipline, your habits, your stewardship, your generosity, your schedule, your priorities, your patience, your love and kindness—reflects how you want your children to live when they grow up? There is an immutable truth that we all need to accept: Our children are shaped by their role models, and they always begin with their parents. We must be what we want our children to become!

Principle #3: To parent successfully, parenting must be a top priority. It can't be something that you tack on to an already full schedule. It can't be something that you give focused attention to only on the weekends, or when it is convenient, or when a crisis emerges. And ideally, parenting should be a top priority for both Mom and Dad. Parents are the primary early shapers of how children think about God, truth, morality, and their responsibility to their neighbors and broader community. As our children grow up and are exposed to unbiblical ideas and values, engaged parents have the greatest opportunity to successfully challenge those false ideas and values. But for that to happen, you must be fully engaged. You must know who their friends are and what they are being exposed to. And then you need to shape a plan to address it, which requires time, energy, and focus. You must be committed to the process, especially when the going gets tough. And when the going gets tough, you must remind yourself of the importance of what God has called you to do—to be a tool in his hand to help form a human soul. That is what parenting is all about.

Are you beginning to feel the weight of our parenting responsibility? Good, we should. But God is there to help us. He loves our children more than we ever could. He wants us to draw upon his vast resources as we seek to raise children who are both holy and happy!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

We must (1) know the goal of parenting, (2) practice what we preach, and (3) make parenting a top priority. That's a tough job! Let's look at some families in the Bible and learn from their successes and failures...

Monday—Jacob (aka “Israel”) and his twelve sons.

- Genesis 37:3 What do you learn about this family? What do v. 1-4 show resulted?
- Genesis 33:2 When anticipating dangers ahead, what did Jacob do? How do you think it made everyone feel?
- Genesis 37:18-35 Outline the relational dynamics in this narrative.
- Genesis 41:56—42:4 What is the significance of who did—and did not—journey to Egypt?
- Genesis 45:1-15 Outline the relational dynamics in this narrative.
- Summarize the lessons you learn from this family's example of failure to release two “special sons”. Summarize all the ways you see God's sovereign power in spite of human sin.

Tuesday— Elkanah, Hannah and Samuel.

- 1 Samuel 1:1-20 Summarize the key elements of this family's story.
- 1 Samuel 1:21-23 Summarize the indications of godly parenting going on here.
- 1 Samuel 1:24-28 We take 18-21 (or more!) years to launch our kids. What does Hannah's “early release” reveal about her?
- 1 Samuel 2:18-20 How do responsible, loving parents relate to their kids even after they have been released?
- Summarize the lessons you learn from this family's example of proper release of this special son. What specific applications can and should you make in your parenting?

Wednesday—Eli the Priest, and his sons (also priests). Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17 and 22-34.

- Outline the sinful practices of Eli's sons (religious and moral).
- How do v. 12 and 17 describe Eli's sons?
- **Who** does God hold accountable for “kicking at My sacrifices” (v. 29)—Eli's sons, Eli himself, or all three of them? Explain.
- Eli and his sons each had their own sins. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-4 and 11-18 Does Eli recognize God's justice?
- 1 Samuel 4:10-22 Describe the multi-generational damage done by Eli's passivity and cowardice in parenting.
- Summarize the lessons you learn from Eli's example. Are there any specific changes you can and should make?

Thursday—Mordecai and Esther

- Esther 2:5-7a Describe the family dynamic presented here.
- Esther 1:10-13a and 19 Describe the situation into which Esther will be thrust (2:8).
- Esther 2:10-11 and 17-20 Describe Mordecai's and Esther's on-going relationship after he “released” her.
- Esther 3 tells of an anti-Jewish plot which threatened to doom Mordecai, Esther, and all their people. Read Esther 4:7-17. How do you see Mordecai's “elder status” in his relationship with Esther, even though she now has higher status than he? How do you see Esther's submissive, wise acceptance of counsel—even though it may cost her her life? How do you see trust and boldness in both of their responses?
- What risks did Mordecai take as he “released” Esther to adulthood? What specific applications can and should you make in your parenting?

Friday—Solomon's proverbial wisdom to his sons.

- Proverbs 4:1-5 How old does this son, whom his father instructs, appear to be?
- Proverbs 5:7-23 How old does **this** son, whom his father instructs, appear to be?
- Do parents ever outgrow their **role** as teachers/advisors?
- How must the **style** of our teaching/advising change as we launch our children?
- Are you still receiving advice from your parents or in-laws? How is it delivered? What can you learn from this?
- Proverbs 31:1 From where did King Lemuel get his wisdom?
- Summarize what you learn about our on-going role in adult children's lives.

Saturday—Mary and Jesus.

- Luke 2:19 and 51 Mary clearly knew that her son was special, and yet...
- Luke 2:41-50 What charge did Mary level at Jesus (v. 48)? How did Jesus handle this false accusation (v. 49 and 51)? John 7:1-5 Notice that after living with them for 30-plus years, Jesus still had some skeptics in his very own family...
- Mark 3:20-21 and 31-32 When Jesus rose in popularity, what did his mother and brothers try to do?
- Mark 3:32-35 Did Jesus now view himself as “released” from this biological family? (Contrast this with Luke 2:49-51.)
- Knowing that Jesus never sinned, we know that he handled these two touchy situations both lovingly and righteously. What are some insights into godly submission and godly separation which you can employ?

