

2024 Valley Bible Church Parenting Workshop

Topic 3 – Parenting Roles

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Introduction

What is the Christian parent's source of authority? *The Bible.*

How would you explain moral and non-moral issues? *Moral issues are Biblical commands; non-moral issues are areas of freedom.*

What can be a temptation when applying Biblical general commands? *The application of general commands is an area of freedom so legalism and judgmentalism are temptations.*

What is your purpose in parenting and how important is that? *To glorify God; very important because it impacts every area of life and parenting.*

What is the definition of successful Christian parenting? *It is not measured by the child's response, but by the faithfulness of the parents to God and His Word.*

What is your mission or goal as a Christian parent? *To make disciples of my children.*

What are some focus areas for the Christian household? *Parents striving for spiritual maturity, striving for a worthy walk, being deeply connected to a local church, and making purposed and opportune times to pour the Scriptures into your children.*

Any changes in your thoughts on parenting since last week?

Today we want to look at the Biblical roles for parents.

A Word for Single or Complicated-Situation Parents

Much Bible teaching on parenting presumes a two-parent model – two believers, husband and wife, striving in the power of the Spirit to glorify God. Yet, there are many families who do not have two-parent households. There are many permutations of what families look like – believer, non-believer, divorced, step, foster, different custody situations, etc.

Even if only one believing parent has access to the children, that one must strive in the power of the Spirit to glorify God by living out the parenting roles. As they do so, they will need to pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and seek wise counsel from spiritually mature believers.

Marriage Roles

In both of Paul's passages on family (Eph 5:18-6:4; Col 3:16-21), he starts with marriage, then moves to the child's responsibility, then to parenting. Peter does not even address parenting in his passage on family (1 Pet 3:1-7). The reason seems clear, the marriage relationship is the primary relationship in families, not the parent-child relationship(s).

⁶But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'" (Mark 10:6-9, see also Eph 5:31)

While this can be controversial in conservative Christian circles, nothing in Scripture commands that children become the center of the family unit. Like an atom, the nucleus of the family is the marriage – the husband and wife. Children are added and then orbit the nucleus. They do not become the nucleus. So, your first parenting role is to fulfill your marriage role – your respective husband or wife role.

Which relationship(s) is the center of your family?

Fulfilling your marriage roles does several things for your parenting (Eph 5:18-33):

1. Humble, unconditional, committed, sacrificial-service love within the marriage provides your children a demonstration of Christ's love for the church.
2. It establishes security in the home.
3. It builds unity in the marriage which is essential for God-honoring parenting.

Do you view a God-honoring marriage as essential to God honoring parenting?

We will only summarize here for the sake of time, but please see the end of the lesson for additional study material.

Husband

In the power of the Spirit, allowing the words of Christ to richly dwell within you (Eph 5:18; Col 3:16)...

1. Love your wife like Christ loves the church (initiating, sacrificial, humble, volitional, unconditional, committed, nourishing and cherishing, and practical) (Eph 5:21, 25, 28-29, 33; Col 3:19; Phil 2:3-4).
2. Lead like Christ as a servant-leader (shepherding, gentle and humble, submitted to God's will, by example, as a servant, selfless, motivating, managing well) (Eph 5:23).
3. Live with your wife in an understanding way (with knowledge). View her as valuable and precious. Show her honor (1 Pet 3:7).

Husband, are you striving to love and lead like Christ?

Wife

In the power of the Spirit, allowing the words of Christ to richly dwell within you (Eph 5:18; Col 3:16)...

1. Submit to your husband as to the Lord (align yourself under his leadership) (1 Pet 3:1-6; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5).
2. Be devoted to your husband and cultivate a fondness for husband (Prov 31:10-12; Titus 2:4).
3. Be devoted to caring for the family (Titus 2:3-5; 1 Tim 5:14; Prov 31:10-31).

Wife, are you striving to submit and be devoted to your husband?

Let's look at Ephesians 6:1-4 to see the roles that God wants you to fulfill as a parent.

Parenting Role #1 – Unified Authority

The first parenting role is a unified authority. This is not dictator parenting, but your role is that of an authority in your child's life. Many parents desire their children to be their best friends. The parent/child relationship can in many ways be a friendship – shared experiences, open communication, mutual respect, etc. But the primary relationship is parent/child not friend/friend. This is seen in the family commands. Children are commanded to obey their parents. Therefore, parents are responsible for teaching their children to obey.

¹Children, **obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** ²“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (Eph 6:1-3)

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

What are some differences in how you interact with a friend versus interacting with your children?

“Obey” means to obey on the basis of listening attentively for direction. This is a lifestyle command. Children are to obey as a pattern of life. Obedience is to be “in all things” (except when obeying parents would disobey God) and “in the Lord” which explains children are to obey as an outflow of a desire to please Christ. You teach your children to obey out of a desire to please Christ, not a desire to please mom and dad.

Children are to obey their parents because it is “right” and “well-pleasing to the Lord”. We do not obey God in order to get people's praise. We obey because it is an outflow of our love for God. Similarly, your children should not obey because it makes you happy or because they get your praise. They should obey you because it is right and well-pleasing to the Lord.

“Honor” (Eph 6:2) means to show high regard or respect and to count as valuable, to esteem.

Many families have a “good cop” and a “bad cop” Yet, children are to obey “parents”, not just “father” or not just “mother”. Both parents need to be involved. And it is important for parents to be united, to have consistency in what they are teaching their children. Inconsistency is a way to provoke your children to anger or exasperate them.

What are some examples of where you and your spouse need to be unified in your parenting?

Single Parents and/or Parents with Complicated Custodial Situations

For single parents with complicated custodial situations, it is important to have your household be one that honors the Lord and His word. Be consistent with the rules in your home. Make sure your child knows that in your home there are expectations. Pick your household rules judiciously. This is particularly important if your child's other household is more lenient than you desire. Do not make your home the one where you are trying to undo all the things you do not agree with in the other household. Let them see you striving for spiritual maturity, striving for a worthy walk, deeply connected to the local church, and speaking the word accurately to your them. Be the encourager of your child in your home.

Adult Children

A question often asked is, “At what age do children stop obeying their parents?” This is not an age, but a state. When children live independent of their parents the relationship changes and children are no longer under their parents’ authority. At all times parents are to be honored, but parenting changes when children live independent of you. The relationship is that of mentoring not authority.

Parenting Role #2 – Encourager

The next parenting role is that of encourager. This is viewed from the negative by commanding to not do the opposite of encourage – to provoke or exasperate your children.

⁴**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger**, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4 NAS)

²¹**Fathers, do not exasperate (provoke – ESV) your children**, so that they will not lose heart. (Col 3:21 NAS)

There is an interpretive challenge in this passage. While the more prevalent translation of the Greek word “peteres” is “fathers”. The word could alternatively be translated as “parents” as the footnotes in the NET and NIV say and was done in Hebrews 11:23 in the NASB and ESV when referring to Moses’ parents.

The immediate context of both parents holding the role of unified authority would seem to indicate “parents” is the better understanding. Ultimately, either father or mother can provoke, and father and mother should be bringing children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Without taking anything away from the biblical role of the father as head of the family (Eph 5:23), we can say that this applies to both parents.

“Provoke” (Eph 6:4) means to stimulate one to the point of a brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. “Exasperate” (Col 3:21) means to excite to anger or to cause irritation or annoyance. Both of these words are in the present tense meaning that parents are to take care to not be continually doing this to their children. This is not how our heavenly father treats us; we should not treat our earthly children in this way.

The result in children of parents who provoke or exasperate is that they may “lose heart”. “Lose heart” is literally “without passion, desire, or spirit” and means to become disheartened to the point of losing motivation, to be dispirited, to be broken in spirit, or to feel like giving up. We do not want this for our children.

Paul was vague concerning the exact ways parents can exasperate their children. The application of this command is left to the parents as they strive in the Spirit to be faithful. One thing we do know is that children can become angry at their parents for many reasons. A child angry because they do not want to obey their parents is not being provoked or exasperated. The emphasis is on the parents not doing this and not on the children taking the parent’s actions as this. The focus is the parent’s behavior.

What are ways parents provoke or exasperate their children?

Even though vague, we can think of some examples of provoking and exasperating behavior – overprotection; lack of standards; excessive, rash, or harsh discipline; favoritism; insensitivity to your child’s problems; perfectionism; lack of affection; neglect; critical without praise; indifference; or hypocrisy.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul used positive parenting examples when talking about spiritual care. These examples are how parents are to interact with and treat their children.

⁷But we proved to be **gentle** among you, as a nursing *mother tenderly cares* for her own children. ⁸Having so **fond an affection** for you, we were **well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives**, because you had become **very dear to us**. (1 Thess 2:7-8 NAS)

¹⁰You are witnesses, and *so is God*, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹just as you know how we *were* **exhorting** and **encouraging** and **imploring** each one of you as a father *would* his own children, ¹²so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:10-12 NAS)

These are a positive contrast of the negative “provoke” or “exasperate”. Words like “gentle”, “tender care”, “impart not only the gospel, but our very lives”, “very dear to us”, “exhort”, “encourage”, “implore”. We will talk more about discipline next week, but we see many more examples of positive correction than negative in the Scriptures.

How do you interact with and treat your children?

Parenting Role #3 – Nurturer

The next role for parents is that of nurturer.

⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, **but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**. (Eph 6:4 NAS)

After looking at the negative in Ephesians 6:4, Paul gives the positive. “But” in the Greek is a contrast word. The opposite of “provoking to anger” is “bring them up”.

“Bring them up” means to provide adequate nourishment, to nurture. This is a lifestyle command. Parents are to be constantly nurturing their children. As long as your children are part of your household or of that age, then you are responsible to be constantly nurturing.

We see the result of this in Jesus’ life. As a child, “He grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). From twelve years old and on, “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). “Wisdom” means the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. This is your task as you “bring them up” – to train them to follow the best course of action which is obviously the Word of God.

“Discipline” means to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behavior, of providing guidance for responsible living, of rearing and guiding a child toward maturity. It is a broad term for whatever parents do to train, correct, and educate children in order to help them develop and mature. It includes the idea of correction for wrongdoing. It is the overall training of children. The same word is used here.

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for **training** in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

¹¹For 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. (Heb 12:11)

“Instruction” means putting in the mind. It is encouragement or pointing out wrongdoing that leads to correct behavior. It is giving counsel about avoiding or stopping an improper course of conduct. This is alerting your children to the serious or dangerous consequences of their actions. This is translated as “warning” in Titus 3:10.

¹⁰As for a person who stirs up division, after **warning** him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, (Titus 3:10)

It is important to understand that it is not enough to “not provoke”, parents must also put on the positive of nurturing their children.

What are some ways you can nurture your children?
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Summary

In order to provide a picture of Christ, stability, and unity in the home parents must live out their respective marriage roles. Then as they live out their parenting roles, they should strive in the power of the Spirit to be a unified authority in the home, be an encourager, and be a nurturer. Neither the father nor the mother will be able to do these things and to do so to the glory of God unless they choose to bow before God and His word.

Discussion

Discuss the following questions/topics with your table.

1. **Brainstorm** the most important areas of agreement with your spouse (or shared-custody parent) that would make the biggest impact in your parenting (try to give three each).
2. **Brainstorm** ways you can encourage your children as opposed to provoke or exasperate them (try to give three each).
3. **Brainstorm** ways you can nurture your children to grow in the application of truth and to know right from wrong (try to give three each).

Additional Study

Read Ephesians 5:18-6:4 and Colossians 3:16-21.

Where does the power to fulfill God's pattern for marriage and family come from?

List the ways in which you fulfill God's plan for marriage and family?

List the ways in which you **do not** fulfill God's plan for marriage and family?

What does the role of bringing up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord require of parents?

Read the list below of ways in which a parent can provoke/exasperate their child. In what ways do you provoke/exasperate your child? What should you be doing instead?

Examples of provoking and exasperating parental behavior (adapted from the MacArthur NT Commentary of Ephesians and Colossians).

1. By overprotection or never allowing children age-appropriate liberty and enforcing overly strict rules. These parents do not trust their child. Nothing the child does earns their parents' trust, and the child can begin to despair and believe their behavior is irrelevant which can lead to rebellion.

Do you provide your children with age-appropriate freedom?

2. By lack of standards (the opposite of overprotection). This is a failure to discipline or to discipline inconsistently. These children are left to their own and cannot handle that freedom and begin to feel insecure and unloved.

Do you set boundaries for your children?

3. By excessive, maybe even rash, discipline, abusing your children verbally, emotionally, or physically. Be careful that you do not justify anger in your heart coming out in your voice as something other than anger.

Do you discipline in anger?

4. By showing favoritism or comparing the child unfavorably to siblings or other children. A Biblical example is Jacob showing favoritism with Joseph.

Are you careful to not show favoritism?

5. By depreciating their worth or insensitivity to your child's problems. Many children are convinced that what they do and feel is not important. Parents who do not listen to their children can move them to be discouraged.

Do you show your children that you value what they think and say?

6. By perfectionism or setting unrealistic goals or pushing achievement beyond reasonable bounds; by never rewarding them, or never letting them feel they have succeeded. Nothing is enough, so children never get full approval.

Are you encouraging your children by awarding small successes?

7. By failing to show affection. Parents need to communicate love verbally and physically. This would include not being available or having time for other things but not your children and not keeping promises.

Do you show your children that they are loved?

8. By not providing for their needs. By providing necessities, parents show their respect and concern for their children.

Do you provide for your children's needs (not necessarily wants)?

9. By criticism without praise. The child learns to condemn himself and to find fault with others. Parents should seek to create in the home a positive, constructive environment.

Are you often finding fault with your child's behavior?

10. By neglect or indifference. The result is rebellion (e.g., David and Absalom).

Are you involved in your children's lives?

11. By hypocrisy. By being different at home than you are with other people. The result is being dismissive of the things of the Lord.

Do you have a church face and a home face?