

**God and Parenting**  
**Ephesians 5:21-33**  
**September 24th 2023**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

*My child arrived just the other day  
He came to the world in the usual way  
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay  
He learned to walk while I was away  
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew  
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you, dad"  
"You know I'm gonna be like you"*

*My son turned ten just the other day  
He said, thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play  
Can you teach me to throw, I said-a, not today  
I got a lot to do, he said, that's okay  
And as he walked away his smile never dimmed  
It said, I'm gonna be like him.  
You know I'm gonna be like him*

*Well, he came from college just the other day  
So much like a man I just had to say  
Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?  
He shook his head, and they said with a smile  
What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys  
See you later, can I have them please?*

*I've long since retired, my son's moved away  
I called him up just the other day  
I said, I'd like to see you if you don't mind  
He said, I'd love to, dad, if I can find the time  
You see, my new job's a hassle,  
and the kids have the flu  
But it's sure nice talking to you, dad*

*And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me  
He'd grown up just like me  
My boy was just like me*

This morning we're thinking about Parenting: how followers of Jesus should parent their children. And I start with those lyrics, by the 70's songwriter Harry Chapin, because even the world recognises that parenting is all about the example parents set.

We can't say very much about parenting in the short and precious time we have together this morning, except for three vital Biblical principles:

- Parenting is all about the parents, the moms and the dads
- Parenting takes its supreme example from God the Father
- Parenting is primarily spiritual

There are many experienced parents among us—if you have a specific parenting problem, young moms and dads, seek out an older parent, who's been down the road and seek their godly advice.

### **Parenting is all about the Parents**

Where do the Scriptures teach that?

The negative example is Abraham. On two occasions Abraham was prepared to risk Sarah's well-being for his own skin. Remember those stories? Genesis 12 and Genesis 20. He found himself in a corner and instead of sacrificing himself, he was prepared to sacrifice his wife, which is a sad mistake. And then years later what does his son Isaac do, when he is in a similar situation? Genesis 26: he makes the same mistake! He copied dad's error. Like father, like son. Our children are watching us 24/7/365 — we are their primary life example and model. Our example is passed on.

The positive example is Jesus and disciples. Twelve disciples spent only three years with Jesus but so profound was his example that they turned the world upside down, *"When they ( the enemies of the church) saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took*

***note that these men had been with Jesus.***” (Acts 14:13)

There is a global principle in Scripture: who you spend the most time with exerts the greatest influence on you! (It’s why our best friends ought to be fellow believers and why a believer should not court an unbeliever—because they could easily lead us astray.)

One of the greatest gifts a parent can bequeath to their children is their personal godliness and Christ like character. Moms and Dads, what kind of Christian life do you lead behind closed doors? How do you speak? How do you act? What are your priorities in life? Money? Career? Sport? Education? Your kids are picking it all up. *“Lord forgive our many faults and make us the godly mothers and fathers you want us to be.”*

### **Parenting takes it’s supreme example from God the Father**

God the Father is the supreme example of what a parent should aspire to become. It would do all parents—indeed all of us—good to consider how the Father treats us, his adopted sons and daughters; his constant love for us, his provision, his forethought, his forgiveness, and even his loving discipline:

*“Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our Spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* (Hebrews 12:7-11).

Perhaps someone here finds themselves under the discipline of the Lord? Things are very hard? Perhaps the Lord is pointing out things in your life and your attitudes that need to change? Don’t be discouraged! Your Father who loves you is chastising you for your good.

But parents, just as the Lord lovingly disciplines us, so we must discipline our children, because our children are sinners, born with a tendency, to do wrong. Lovingly we must bend the will without breaking the spirit.

Do you remember what happened at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? John the Baptist had been baptising people in the River Jordan, Jesus joined the queue, John's not happy baptising Jesus, because he thinks it ought to be the other way round. But Jesus insists and as he is baptised God the Father speaks from heaven the three most beautiful words any parent can speak to their child, parents take them to heart: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17)

- *"You're my son, your my daughter. I am so glad you are in our family, this is where you belong."* Have you ever spoken those beautiful words to your kids lately?
- *"I love you"* - in words, verbalise it! They need to hear it. When I reflect on my own dad who I highly respected, I cannot remember him ever saying to me "I love you" perhaps he did and I've forgotten. I knew that he loved me, no question about it, but I cannot remember him verbalising it. But God the supreme Father verbalises his love to his Son and so should we. Do you say this to your kids? "I love you?" Speak those words before the sun has set.
- *"I am pleased with you!"* And notice, the Father says this to Jesus before his ministry has begun! This "well pleased with you" is not a performance statement, "You've done your miracles well, you've done your preaching well." Parents, "You've done your homework well, you've done well in you're a levels, you've got a promotion." No, God the Father is just pleased with his Son. Do you and I say this to our kids? They live in a critical world, among peers who can speak hurtful words, they need to hear from mom, from dad, "I'm so pleased with you!"

Beautiful words. Sometimes as a parent of a young child, you can find yourself constantly having to say "don't do this, don't, do that, don't don't!" It seems as if all our words are negative! When Yvonne and I were bringing up our kids, we were helped greatly by Rob Parsons, from Care for the Family, who suggested that parents need to take full advantage of the times (perhaps fewer in number!!) when kids do something good and say "Well done! Well done!" Never let those moments pass us by! "Catch them doing something good."

Words parents speak to their kids go deep into the soul! And they breathe either life or death into those young hearts: *“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” (Proverbs 16:24)*

Is there a parent here this morning who needs to repent of negative words? Perhaps I’m speaking to someone whose own spirit was crushed by a parent. All you can remember are rebukes and slap-downs. May the Lord bind up your own wounds, *“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)*

### **Parenting's focus should be Spiritual**

What did your parents want for you most of all?

- Good manners
- Education
- Career
- Achievement in sport or some other enterprise
- Good health?

In a well-rounded childhood, all of these have their place, no doubt, but I want to conclude this morning by showing you from the Scriptures that the parenting priority of God’s Word is always spiritual: the greatest need of our children is to know the love of God and to respond to the Gospel in faith and repentance.

We saw that in our first reading from Deuteronomy 6, *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”* The Bible, says Moses, should be the prominent topic of communication with our children:

- Talk about Scripture when you are sitting in the front room!

- Share Scripture when you're walking along the road, or in the car
- In the morning when you wake up
- At night when you settle down for sleep
- Bible, Bible, everywhere! Says Moses! Surround your kids with God's Word!

The priority of parenting is spiritual.

I said a moment ago that my dad probably failed to tell his kids that he loved them with words, but I am so thankful that he did not fail in his primary responsibility, which is spiritual. Every morning after breakfast, at the breakfast table, he read the Bible to us and we all were encouraged to pray around the table; and then on the way to our British Overseas School in Karachi, we memorised Bible verses in the KJV and then in the evening we had family devotions where he read the Bible to us again and we sang hymns together and prayed.

My parents never discussed education, career, making money, pensions, with their kids, and in this they may have failed, but in the chief responsibility of Christian parents they were successful; they shared the Gospel with us, the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the Scriptures day by day. But to this day all six kids are following Jesus, we've had our wobbles, but all are following Jesus, to God be all the glory!

This spiritual priority in parenting, is also found in Ephesians 6:1-4: *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*

How do we bring our kids up with a spiritual parenting priority? May I suggest, it happens formally and informally.

Formal is where you take time out each day to read the Scriptures to your kids. When our children were little, even before they were able to take everything in we read the Bible to them every evening except for Sundays. Not long, as much as they could take, five minutes, perhaps followed by prayer.

We began with simple Bibles (there are many versions available today, ask around) and worked our way up to the very best, Catharine Vos's The Child's Story Bible.

And then the informal, which can be even more significant, when you're in the car or out and about and they ask a question or some event takes place, which presents to you a wonderful opportunity for explaining truth.

And of course parents must bathe all their spiritual efforts in prayer that the Lord would change the heart by the power of his Spirit and breathe life into dead souls.

I want to say to parents this morning that you are responsible before God for the spiritual upbringing of your kids.

What we do in church life is icing on the cake, and very good icing it is too, but you are responsible for the cake. Nowhere in the Scriptures is the responsibility of a child's spiritual education placed at the door of the church, it is always made the responsibility of parents.

We have wonderful teaching here for kids, both on Sundays and Explorers / Trailblazers, but on the last day the Great Judge will not ask me or the elders if we taught the kids, but he will ask you, the parents. The Lord will ask pastors if they encouraged parents to take up their responsibility, to teach them that the responsibility of spiritual education lies with them.

### **Parents in Pain**

Before you know it, they have grown up and left home!

- So live a godly life before them
- Model your parenting on God the Father's love
- Make the priority spiritual

Some kids will walk away from the Gospel we have lived before them and shared with them. And Oh what sorrow that will bring to the hearts of their parents. My own mother prayed and wept for one of her daughters for many years, until her prodigal returned

home. So here's how we pray for our prodigals: *"Lord you have made a promise to every parent, "Train up a child in the way he or she should go and when they are older they won't depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) To the best of my ability, I brought them up to know and love you. I did my part, with your help, now please fulfil your promise "when they are older they won't depart from it" and bring them back to yourself."*

Don't nag them, don't put pressure on them, do something much more powerful, pray for them! That one day they will return with the words, "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you."