

“Parenting”
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6-19-22

If you're a parent and say that you nailed it, that you did such a great job you should write a book, go on a speaking tour and the like, would you raise your hand?

I don't think any of us would, because if we're honest, most of us have been humbled by the task. It's not an easy one. Hence the title: Parenting, Not for Cowards. I asked my friend, Daniel, why would parenting be a hot topic? He says, well, I remember on this roller coaster ride that I was on with my dad as a kid, up, up, up, up, up, it goes up, up, up, and then the crest, and then just this screaming down, like outta control, we're gonna die kind of dissent. And he goes, daddy, make it stop. And you know, as parents, I think that we get into those spots where our kids look to us and they say, mom, dad make it stop! And there's this tension. And every bit of you wants to do just that. You want to deliver them. You want to stop what's going on, but you can't. As much as you try, you can't. So, there's tension.

Another friend, Jesse, said, there's this ideal of what we think that we're doing as parents, and how we're actually parenting. We have this model, this plan, but then there's the reality of what we're actually doing. And for some of us along the way, as we become aware, we realize, well, I've missed the mark. Or, I thought I was doing a great job but in reality, I was a bit off.

I said, hey Victor, why is parenting a hot topic? And he says, well, ask any parent, how's it going, and you'll discover why it's a hot topic. Right?

Joshua chapter one, and I'm going to say that it's not exactly the parenting chapter nor passage of scripture that is relating to parenting at all, but there are some principles that are going on here. Why chapter one? It's because God is speaking to Joshua and he's speaking to the nation and this nation had

never been to war before. They'd never seen battle. And yet they're going to go into a land that is fraught with enemies and giants. And parenting is a bit like going to war!

Those little squeakers, when they come out the gates, have a sin nature, just like you and me. You also have the influences from without, which are the enemy and a world system that is upside down. And we have to be careful not to let them that set the course of direction for our kids. So, it's a battle. It's a war. If you belong to Jesus, then you are an enemy to the enemy. He doesn't like Jesus. And he doesn't like you. And if he doesn't like you, guess what? He doesn't like your kids either.

Joshua 1:6-9,

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this book of the law always on your lips, meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Whether you are a parent or not, I would venture to say that God has placed some child, some little kiddo, some young adult into your life. And so we have this responsibility. Now he says there are three things, a few things actually to be aware of, because we're going to have interaction with them. They're going to be looking to us. We have influence. We have an example to give to them. We model something to them. And here's what he says. Number one: we have our parenting manual, the scriptures he's given us, the word of God as the blueprint. I counted over 190 verses relating to parents or the subject of parenting. And we're going to go through all of those tonight ... Just kidding. If we do

not follow the parenting manual, the blueprint that God has given to us, just like he told Joshua, it wasn't about war. He wasn't giving them the tactics of war and the maneuvers and all the things he needs to do movement wise. He says, no. The key to being successful and prosperous is keeping your nose in the scriptures. And this is the best parenting manual that I know of. It's the Lord. He wrote a lot on the subject. If we do not follow this, we are going to be prone to be all over the place and a moving target; not sure what to do, or how to do it. But He speaks into our hearts. Why? Because this right here, the manual, will speak into us, will give us wisdom and the strength and the courage that we need.

The thing that he says to Joshua, that he says to the people, he says, you have to be strong. You have to be courageous, but this is what I like about the Lord. Whenever he commands us to do something, He gives us the resources. He gives us the wherewithal to actually accomplish the thing that He's commanding us to do. Even though when we fail or when we blow it (and we will), there's a God at the end of that, who says, come to Me, come to Me and be restored. Come to Me and be encouraged. Come to Me and give Me your pain. Give Me your feelings. Give Me what you have done. Receive My grace.

Everyone has a game plan until you get hit in the face. ~ Mike Tyson.

For parenting it's like that. Those little squeakers come out and what just happened? What did this little thing do? And it just is the start, right? Because as they grow and develop, more punches come, one after another. Thankfully, the game plan doesn't change with the Lord though.

P rayer

A ffectionate

R espect

E ncourage

N uture

T rain

S cripture

As parents, as grandparents, as people that have interaction with children or young adults, we have to pray for wisdom. Wisdom is simply seeing and responding to life from God's perspective. When life comes at us, heavenly wisdom is that which God gives us so that we can respond in a way that honors Him. It's from His perspective, when we go through parenting, when we go through grandparenting, there are a lot of whys in the road, a lot of things where we've never been to before, and this is what James says. James chapter one says,

If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

That's a promise that's as good as gold. When you don't know, you go to the One who does.

Matthew 7:7,

Ask, seek, and knock. If you ask, you'll receive. If we seek, we'll find. If we knock, the door will be opened.

Now, it doesn't necessarily say how long we have to ask. Doesn't say how long we have to seek it. Doesn't say how long do have to sit there and knock. But for the sake of our kids, we keep asking, we keep seeking, and we keep knocking. Why? Because it's their life. And we're their parents. We're their grandparents. So, they're worthy of seeking, asking, and knocking. Here's the big thing you and I: we are huge, huge influences on our kids. Why? Because we're modeling (hopefully) Jesus. What they see in us, what they hear from us, what they see us doing, how they see us acting. We have to pray, dear Jesus, may I represent You? May I model You to my kids? Because they're looking to me. Dear Jesus, help me. I need Your strength. So, we pray for ourselves, but we also are to pray for our kids. I will lift up their name before Jesus. I don't always know what's going on in their lives. I don't know what fear they're faced with. I don't know what trouble they're going through. I don't know the insecurity that they feel, or the rejection. I don't know what their little choices are in that day, but the Lord does. And sometimes I've known what to pray and how to pray for my kids specifically, but then there are times where I just groan. Now, here's the good news about that. That might be the most powerful prayer that we ever pray! Why? Because the Holy Spirit, who's in us, gets the grown, gets the angst of the heart, gets the pain, or the Ugh. And He interprets that, and He takes it. There's nothing more powerful for a parent to do than to pray for your kids.

Are you anxious about your kids? Do you worry? Philippians says, you don't need to worry. Don't be anxious but pray. Bring your thanks and make your requests, articulate them, give them to God. And as we do, as we cast these cares and these burdens upon Him, what does He do in return? He gives us this abiding peace. This peace that doesn't make any sense, because it's beyond understanding. It didn't

come from you. It didn't come from me. It comes directly from Him. The thing that concerns you the most, it's usually going to be our kids. And we give it to Him, and He gives us this peace back.

Take every opportunity to pray. You're dropping 'em off at school. Pray for them. Practice, pray. Game, pray. Test, pray. They're leaving our home in a car for the first time, pray. Going off to college, pray. The P stands for **prayer**.

The A is for **affection**. Our homes need to have affection. We need to be affectionate. What's the Webster's definition of affection? A feeling or showing of affection or warm regard. Here's the thing, the heart of that is more than just touch though. It involves touch, but it also involves words. There is such a thing - I found this on web MD and I found it in other sources as well - they say that there's such a thing as touch deprivation. Skin, because it's the largest organ on our bodies in our bodies, it sends good or bad sensations to our brains. If they're pleasant like a hug, it's powerful. It's a touch. Then hormones are excreted and it makes us feel good. And it reduces anxiety, and it creates security. Over the last two or three years, skin deprivation/touch deprivation, people in isolation, they just need a good hug.

Our kids need to be hugged. Toddlers, babies need to be cuddled. They need to be touched. There are times when our kids growing up, sometimes they wouldn't say why, but you get to see it on their face. It's good for marriages. It's good for our kids. It's good for them to feel that hug. Why? Because it's good for their soul. It's good for their minds. It's good for their little bodies and their security. Until we die, I think we need to be hugging our kids.

We hug physically, but we also can hug with our words. We can be affectionate with our words. Proverb 16:24,

Pleasant words are like honeycomb: sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

There's something physiological going on as well. Those pleasant words that we speak into their lives, those affection words. I was in a meeting with some adults one time, and I don't know how we got onto the topic, but it was powerful. We went around the room and this was way more common than I thought it would be amongst the seven of us in that room: three, four of them said, I know my dad loved me. I know he did. And as tears started to stream down their faces, they said, I just wish he would've said so.

Pleasant words. I love you. I am proud of you. Good job. I couldn't have done it better. It's good healing for the bones. It messes with their little souls in a great way.

I've always made it a practice to write cards to my wife, Kelly, and to our four kids driving to my hunting trips. So, I go up to visit my son, Josh. We're going to a Beaver's football game. It's parents' weekend. And so I go into his room and there on his desk was this card. It was still there two months later, and he doesn't have a cluttered desk. He has very few things, and I saw that card and I go, oh, my word, he kept that. Our kids, I would say, feast on our affectionate words and hearing us say, I love you.

The R stands for **respect**.

As parents, we are to demonstrate and to model and to teach our kids how to respect the Lord. Another way of putting that would be that we are to model how we revere the Lord, how we honor Him, how we love Him. Ecclesiastes says,

This is the whole duty of man: to fear God, to revere God and to keep His commandments.

Deuteronomy says that *we must teach the fear or the reverence of the Lord to our little kids.*

Our little kids are watching. Grandkids, older kids. It doesn't matter. They see us. And so we're to teach respect of God to our kids, but we're also to teach them how to respect others. If we respect others, guess what? They're more prone to respect others as well. As they see us honoring other people around us, they're going to be more prone to respect other people.

I don't know if you've noticed, but it seems that we live in a generation and at a time where there isn't much respect for others going on. People don't honor other people, particularly the elderly. There's a big disrespect that is prevalent among youth. May it not be so of our kids. May we model respect to God and to others.

Our kids also need to learn how to respect us as parents and as grandparents. The scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament, teach this. Why? Because if we respect our parents, the Bible says, then it will go well with us. Ephesians teaches us, *honor your mom and your dad so that it will go well with you, and you'll have a good life.*

The E is for **encourage**. What that means is that whenever they are experiencing fear and doubt and anxiety or discouragement, the words that we give them will encourage them, inspire them, bring comfort, and give them strength or courage to push through, to overcome those fears. We, as parents, as grandparents, should be their biggest fan. You did great on that soccer field today. You did awesome playing football. I am so proud of you for how you studied for that test and did so well. We look for ways to encourage our kids.

We must be careful though, that our "encouragement" isn't laced in any way, shape or form with sarcasm, or any form of negative tone, because that leads to more discouragement. So, we must be careful. Sarcasm is not encouragement at all. Better to bite your tongue, better to cut it off than to

Speak words of sarcasm to our kids. Proverb 16:21 says, *pleasant words promote instruction*. With our kids, when we're using pleasant words to instruct, they go a long way. Our kids feast on them.

We all need to encourage our kids. Jesus encouraged His disciples. He said, *do not fear. Don't be afraid. Trust in God, trust also in me*. We can use words like those as well with our kiddos.

So, now we come to N which means **nurture**. As parents, as grandparents, as people who are around kids, who have an influence on them, we need to nurture our kids. The word nurture means this: to develop, to cultivate, or to advance. But we must keep in mind, what are we nurturing them to? What is the goal? What are we nurturing them towards? I would say the end of it all would be to honor God and to look more like Jesus. We're nurturing them to be Christians, little Christs, to be like Him. That is the goal.

I did kids' ministry for 10 glorious years. I saw thousands of kids, and the best years in ministry and having four kids, we used to always have their friends over. We wanted to see who their friends were and who trouble was and who they're not going to hang out with anymore! And so, we saw, I saw thousands of kids. Kelly, my wife, is a teacher at high school. And whenever I met a child, a young person, whether they were a good student or not a good student, a good athlete or a not so good athlete, doesn't matter, if I saw them and they were polite and kind and thoughtful of others, respectful of adults. Do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to meet their parents.

I would say that if you find a kiddo that is that way, most likely there's a set of parents or a single parent doing a phenomenal job with their kid. There's somebody behind them nurturing them.

They're just little receptacles, right? All kinds of things are coming at them: environmentally, in our homes, at school, social media, all kinds of stuff. And so, their little souls are taking in all this data. And it influences them. Our job is to monitor that. What are the inputs? But then we also not only have

to monitor it, but we have to model it. They watch us in our love and our affection with each other, the words that we use, how we use them, the tone in our home.

I've talked to single parents who say, you know what? It is tough. Why? Cuz I drop off my little kiddo at somebody else's house, and I don't know who's in there all the time. And I don't know what the data inputs are there. As single parents your job is not to change what's on the other side of that wall. It's not your job. Your job is to be the type of parent that God has called us to be. That is what we can do and need to do. Why? Because if the influence is of the negative sort on the other side, we have to counterbalance with what the Lord has given to us to nourish their little souls. We can't give up. There's too much at stake with our little kiddos. And that's why we do this.

The next letter is T. What does T stand for? T stands for **training** up the child. In the book of Proverbs, it says in chapter 22, verse six,

Train up a child in the way that they should go, and when they grow old, they will not depart from it.

So, that's not necessarily a promise, but by and large, it works. Because it is saying that if we train up our kids in the ways of the Lord, then most likely they're going to keep to it and keep at it.

Training means instruction, but instruction involves discipline. James Dobson, Kevin Leman, Gary Smalley. Those are like our mainstay as parents. We teethered on every book. Well, I didn't read them all, but my wife did. We just gobbled up everything that they had to say. And James Dobson said this: there are two reasons primarily for discipline. One would be when there is willful disobedience. Willful disobedience, just like disrespect, cannot be allowed. Willful disobedience is not going to fare well with our kids. Never will. The second area of discipline where it's needed is regarding their safety.

Hebrews chapter 12 says this,

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been **trained** by it.*

This is a tough area. It's not fun. And it isn't easy. This area out of all these things is probably going to mess with us the most. It's hard.

Why do we discipline? Why does God discipline us? Why? For a change in behavior. Because God knows that if He doesn't change my behavior, then I'm certain to go towards destruction. I'm going to self-implode. I'm going to do great harm to myself and other people. So, He disciplines me. If God doesn't discipline us, the Bible says, His word says, then He hates us. And Proverbs says, if you don't discipline your kids, the Bible says, you hate them.

Those are harsh words that hurts. It's like, whoa. I mean, if I don't discipline my kid, it means that I care more about me than them. We discipline to change the behavior. And so, the hard thing here is that when we speak of discipline, I'm aware that some of us, our heart rate just went up and anxiety is messing with some of you because of how discipline was done to you. Godly discipline, the discipline that honors God, is not with malice. It is not inhumane. And it always fits the injustice or the willful disobedience. God in love was having to discipline His nation over and repeatedly. Something takes place. He's getting your attention. But it's like a speed bump. You know you hit something, and you felt it. But if we continue to rebel and continue to disobey willfully, then we feel it even more for the sake of a change in behavior. And that's why Ephesians 6:4 says,

Do not exasperate them.

Be careful when you discipline that you don't do it too much or too far. There's great restraint. Whenever we disciplined our kids, there would always be a hug and a cuddle. Kind and gentle words, because they needed to know mom and dad were not mad. We weren't angry with them and we loved them.

So, the second reason why we discipline is for their safety. If we see that little finger going for the socket, right, or the pretty blue flame, or they want to go and run and play in the street for some reason, we have to make sure that we change that behavior.

Deuteronomy says, make sure that as you go along the way, as you're on the road, as you lay down, as you wake up - in other words, the rhythm of your life - should involve talking of the things of the Lord. He's a part of your discussion. You're reading to them. Family devotions. Asking about heaven, asking about death, asking about all number of things. The sweetest moments were family devotions with our kids. There was nothing better.

We want our kids to have their Bibles dog-eared, marked up, used. And so, we model that for our kids. Do you know that you could read to your baby in the womb, and they hear? You can read the scriptures to your kids. Toddlers. There are great resources that you can read to them later.

Those of you who have kids, you've raised them up in the Lord, you've trained them in the ways of the Lord, but there are some kids that all their life tend to rebel, despite your godly influence. Despite doing the acrostic here, there are kids that are just going to rebel. There are some kids who were trained up in the ways of the Lord. They loved the Lord. And then, they veer. They make that choice. My encouragement to any of you is to pray. Bring their names before Jesus. Pray and pray and continue to love them. They're making their choice. As parents, we are praying them back into the kingdom, back into the fold, praying that God will communicate to them. And He does. And He will.

We're the biggest influence on our kids. It is not social media. It is not movies. It is not their friends. It is not the world. We are the biggest influence. That is why the acrostic **P A R E N T S** is so important.

If you are a parent, God has enabled you, allowed you, has brought their little lives into your life. And during this daunting task, sometimes a punch in the face comes your way. God promises that He is with us. He does not forsake us. He does not leave us as orphans. If you need strength, good news: the Lord says, I will give you strength. You can do all things through Him who gives you strength. If you're weak, good news: His strength, His power is made perfect in our weakness. If you doubt, if you fear, He gives us the promises to quiet those fears. Everything that we have need is from Him, right here.

I felt a conviction recently. I went to all four of my kids and I said, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for when I failed you. I'm sorry for when I did not represent Jesus to you. I am sorry for when I did something that hurt you. There is confession to the Lord, but then also there is confession in going to our kids and saying, I'm sorry. It is powerful for our souls. There's a release.

Parenting is humbling. It is not always easy. We ask out of our need, dear Jesus help me! And we have these glorious moments when we see these blue parts of sky come out and we thank Jesus for bringing those little squeakers into our lives. Is there anything greater that will tug at your heartstrings than your kids? No. They're worth it. God help us. And He will!