

Biblical Portrait of a Parent

By: JT

1. Teaching

Even the world recognizes the need for fathers to be teachers. Confucius the Chinese philosopher said, “The father who does not teach his son his duties is equally guilty with the son who neglects them.” But what are Christian fathers to teach? ***First and foremost biblical truths.***

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

This concept of teaching biblical truths as the foundation of all teaching goes all the way back to Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 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.”

Fathers [and mothers] are to be the *primary* teachers to their children—not the church, not the schools, not grandparents, but parents! The call is clear. But notice what Moses says in verse 6 to parents: “These commandments are to be on your hearts.” You cannot give what you don’t have! So, parents should first of all be diligent in their personal study of the Scriptures. So, parents, are we diligent students of the Scriptures ourselves? I hope the answer is yes. Only then, we can impart biblical teaching to our children. The word, “impress” in verse 7 has the idea of engraving letters by chisel on a stone. It takes hard work. But that’s the call.

We are to strive at all times, as indicated by the words, “sit at home...walk along the road...lie down...get up” to put biblical teachings into the hearts of our children so it stays permanently. This does not mean we must always keep quoting the Bible. It means we must help children see how biblical truths affect decision making in all walks of life.

There should be set times every day for clear biblical instruction—a regular and systematic time for family Bible reading and prayer. Over and above those times should be the general teaching of the Bible as it applies to various walks of life. That’s the idea here.

We need to teach them to fear God, to obey his commands, warn them about the dangers of sin, about the judgment of God on sin, about the cross, repentance, forgiveness and so forth. In other words, the main thrust is for their salvation.

2 Timothy 2:15 “how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Timothy was taught Scriptures from a young age by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois that eventually led to his salvation and means used were the Scriptures that point them to Jesus Christ. The words of John Piper regarding this issue are worth quoting:

“Parents, successful parenting is more than compliant kids. It is gospel-saturated living and teaching. Show your children how Christ, crucified for our sins, and Christ, raised for our justification, and Christ, showing the Father’s love, and Christ, guaranteeing the Spirit’s daily help—show them how this gospel is not just something that begins the Christian life but empowers it and shapes and sustains it. Pray and love and teach your children until Christ breaks in on their hearts and becomes their Treasure.” [Let No One Despise Your Youth sermon]

So, we need to teach them biblical truths. We need to get them a Bible in a translation that is age-appropriate for their understanding. No point in giving them something they cannot understand! We need to read with them, read to them and help them to read on their own as well.

We need to teach them to ***memorize and meditate on Bible verses***—even 1 verse a week is great. Asking them to explain what the verse means is a good way to help children study the Scripture on their own. We need to help them apply biblical principles in their daily lives.

We need to ***teach them about prayer***. Fathers should pray with the kids, for the kids and help kids pray on their own. We need to teach them to learn to talk to God on their own. Children should be encouraged to pray about everything and that nothing is to be done without prayer. They should be taught to give thanks to God for all his blessings, including small ones! They should be encouraged to go into their rooms and privately talk to God. Even 5 minutes of closet-prayer, when they are very young, helps cultivate good habits in them. And the best way is to model it to them. Fathers, if they see us on our knees calling to the Lord frequently, they will also be encouraged to do the same.

We need to ***teach them about non-retaliation***. Sad to see many Dads telling their children when they complain of some other child hurting them to go back the next day and beat them up. Rather than encouraging the kid to pray for the offender and if needed, taking the matter to the teacher, they teach them how to retaliate. What a reversal of Christian principles. Hopefully, they don’t see us retaliating against those who offend us—then our teachings of non-retaliation will be useless.

We need to ***teach them about the value of work***. We need to explain why work is a good thing and how the Bible commands good and honest labor.

We need to ***teach them how to manage their money***. We need to teach the value of things—not just the cost of things. We need to make sure our children don't grow in an environment where they get whatever they want—as long as they persist.

We need to ***teach them to share their resources*** with those in need. We need to teach them to be very generous from an early age.

Fathers, let us take this teaching role very seriously. George Herbert, a believer of the past said, "One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters." True words!

So, teaching is the first means we must employ of the What fathers ought to do command.

2. Disciplining

When the teaching aspect mentioned above is not being followed, then part of that teaching involves corrective training. I understand disciplining is a very sensitive subject in our day and age. Some may even disagree with this aspect. But, at the end of the day, as believers, we need to ask, "What does the Bible say regarding this issue of discipline?" It's not about our feelings, but about God's word! That's where the real authority lies.

First of all, God the *perfect* parent disciplines his children. There is our role model! Hebrews 12:5-11 explains that his disciplining us is for our good [vv. 10-11]. And this passage assumes that human fathers will also discipline children [12:9] for their good as well!

The book of Proverbs filled with wisdom for the daily practical living has so many instructions calling for parents to discipline their children when required. Here are a few.

Proverbs 13:24 "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them."

Proverbs 19:18 "Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death."

Proverbs 23:13-14 "13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. 14 Punish them with the rod and save them from death."

So, it is clear God that commands parents to discipline their children. Of course, no parent is to resort to any sort of abuse or disciplining out of frustration. It should be done in a proper way. And when the Bible uses the word, "rod" we should not think of it as a reference to a rusty old

metal pipe! A wooden paddle is more likely the idea and that could be used as the means for discipline when applied properly on the behind.

Again, the call is not to abuse, but inflict a small amount of pain so that the child understands there are consequences for disobedience. By disciplining our children, we are teaching them a far bigger principle: Sin has consequences—at times long-term consequences. And the only way to be protected from it is to run to Christ for forgiveness. Parents ought to pray with the child seeking God's forgiveness for the child's disobedience after the disciplining process and also encourage the child to pray out to God seeking his forgiveness for disobedience. Even at a young age, this can be encouraged by teaching them to say phrases like, "Sorry Jesus." As they grow older, they can be taught more words to pray when seeking forgiveness! No need to worry if they don't understand everything. We are creating a good habit of going to the Lord for the forgiveness of sins at an early age.

So, you see, disciplining is not just so that kids will be obedient to parents. Rather, the more important issue is that they will run to Christ for salvation when they grow older; that should be the hope of all disciplining. It's for the good of the child. Parents, by faith, must have this conviction. It's not good to raise rebellious children behind whom parents are constantly running and trying to keep them in check. That's why disciplining should start at an early age. The command in the Scriptures is "Children obey your parents" [Eph 6:1] not "Parents obey your children!"

By the way, the command to discipline *applies to both parents—not just the fathers!* Failure to do so on either parent is sin and the result—God will discipline the sinning parent[s] for failure to discipline their sinning child!

Also not all disciplining needs to be physical even at a younger age. At times, certain pleasures can be withheld as a form of punishment. Where talking and other softer forms of punishment don't seem to work, physical disciplining is to be done. Yes, a time will come when we cannot physically discipline them and only talking will do. But, there is a time where physical disciplining will enable them in their growth.

So, in addition to teaching, we need to discipline them as needed. This is the second means of the What fathers ought to do command.

3. Loving

Fathers, love your children; all of them equally! Don't see them as an intrusion in your life. Show love by spending time with them. Speak loving words. Be there as much as possible when they participate in events. I understand one cannot be there for every single event. But as much as possible, show love by your presence. Talk to them without being distracted by looking at your

phone or TV. Look them in the eye and communicate. Show love by being a good listener. Often, kids desire just the company of their parents more than the gifts.

Never underestimate simple acts of love. One cannot parent their kids and show love by absence!

So, in addition to teaching, disciplining, we need to love them.

4. Being a good example

Teaching is important, but living out our teaching is the key. The truth of God's word is like a nail, our life is the example that drives the nail in.

If we tell our children to read the Bible and pray regularly, but don't model it, how effective is our teaching? If we tell them about the importance of telling the truth and punishing them for lying, and they see us telling lies—even in small things, what example is that? Or, if our children constantly see us talking about money, material things, what do we expect them to learn?

Yet, if our children see us trusting God in everything, studying the Scriptures, praying, being humble, being truthful and gracious in our speech, seeking to further God's kingdom, displaying a forgiving spirit, what an example will that be? The Lord will work in their heart despite all our failures and hopefully, will draw them to himself.

So, in addition to teaching, disciplining, loving, we need to set a biblical example before them. This is the fourth and final means of the What fathers ought to do command.

For many single moms and dads who perhaps do not have a wife who sees the biblical priorities in life, don't lose heart. Keep up the good fight. The Lord knows your heartaches. Continue to trust in him, he will carry you through all the struggles.

Fathers [and mothers], my sincere appeal is this: Let's learn to parent on our knees. We must constantly be interceding for our families. If the greatest man to have ever lived on earth, the sinless Son of God, gave himself continually to prayers, can we afford to be negligent in our prayers? If our words are to have any effect on our children, we must spend much time on a daily basis speaking to the One who alone can change their hearts! Our Lord put it plainly, "Apart from me you can do nothing" [John 15:5]!

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Parents—What Not To Do [The Negative]

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children.” The term “Fathers” is primarily in reference to fathers, though it is used on occasions to denote both fathers and mothers as in Hebrews 11:23 where it is translated as “parents” in reference to Moses’s father and mother.

Paul issues a clear command to the fathers: “Do not exasperate your children.” The word “**exasperate**” means “**to cause them to be angry**, to be aggravated, provoked and irritated.” In a parallel passage in Colossians 3:21, Paul wrote to the fathers these words, “Fathers, do not **embitter** your children, **or they will become discouraged.**” In other words, Paul commands fathers not to act in a pattern that will make the children become angry, bitter and **discouraged**.

How are some ways parents can cause children to be exasperated, irritated, angry and even discouraged?

1. **Overprotection**

Many parents are so fearful of what might happen to their children that they are always behind them. They constantly keep telling their children, “Don’t do this, don’t do that.” They even shield their children from contact with other kids.

You may think, “Wait a minute, with all the negative influences, should I not protect my children?” Yes, children should be warned and watched over. But there is an extent. If one gets to the point of *over*-protection, it only ends up in frustrating the child and he or she can develop a resentful attitude.

2. **Favoritism**

Showing favor to one child over the others. **Isaac favored Esau over Jacob; Rebekah preferred Jacob; Jacob preferred Joseph.** Each of those actions **resulted in disaster.**

Favoritism is shown for many reasons. Perhaps one kid is meeting your expectations than the rest and thus becomes your favorite. Maybe that kid even has the same hobbies as you

do; perhaps that one is even smarter than the others. And so, you show more of your love to that one.

As a result, the favorite one can get away with anything while the other kids get punished for the simplest of reasons. **Favoritism, in the long run, leads the neglected child or children to become bitter, angry, and discouraged.**

3. Unjust Demands

Many parents want their kids to accomplish what they would like for them to accomplish or what they themselves failed to accomplish. They want to live their lives through their children. "Be a doctor, be an engineer, excel in sports, etc." **Pushing them to be over-achievers. That can lead them to get angry.**

Now, **is it wrong to expect kids to excel? Not if our motives are God-glorifying and if that is what the Lord wills for their lives.** However unjust demands only push kids to be discouraged and bitter. Kids can develop the feeling that they can never fail and that parents will love them only if they perform to their expectations. Keywords here I believe are; **Knowledge, Wisdom, Guidance, but allowing them to fail and learn and mature as they navigate life, as long as they are surely walking with Jesus.**

4. Lack of Love

Some fathers see children as a hindrance to their life. "I like my freedom. But with children, I have lost that freedom. I'm unable to do what I want with my time" is the feeling. So, love is withheld. Plus if children stop the mother from working and building her career, then children are seen as a hindrance to financial success and stability.

Another way, many dads fail to love the children is by failing to spend time with them. Why? Because they are so preoccupied with their material pursuits or other worldly pleasures, or as I call it worthless pursuits, they have no time to spend with kids.

Over a period of years, the child will see that he or she never mattered to Dad for whom his own pursuits were more important. This will lead to bitterness and resentment.

Ptr. Nomer Trinidad once said if you fail with your kids or family, you have failed miserably!

5. Harsh Punishment

While some Dads *never* discipline their children, some go to the other extreme and punish them harshly. They inflict injury, not pain. In anger and frustration, fathers at times thrash children. No proper reasons as to why the discipline is administered.

Kid gets to think, “At times, I do not even know why Dad punishes me. Perhaps he is very angry. I will just keep quiet.” Sometimes, they go and complain to the mom. Poor Mom, what can she say?

Over a period of time, the child can develop a deep resentment toward the father for his harsh punishment.

President George W [the son] in a discussion with Josh McDowell said, “Growing up, I had the freedom to fail.” Children should feel they have the freedom to fail without fearing harsh punishment!

6. Hurtful Speech

Words like, “You are such an idiot. Worthless. Incapable of doing anything right” can hurt very much. Now, this does not mean we never correct children. The second half of Ephesians 6:4 does indeed call us to correct children when they go astray. However, the issue here is using hurtful words. **When a parent uses demeaning words, anger and resentment build up in the children on the inside and sooner or later, the relationship goes beyond repair.**

The opposite is not good either. Constant flattery as if your kid is the best in the world is an unhealthy way of pumping up their ego. Of course, we must acknowledge them when they do good and correct them when they are wrong. But we need to be cautious in our words when doing such evaluations.

7. Comparing with others.

Comparing with other kids is one of the most common ways to hurt children. “Look at so and so. Why can’t you be like that?” Some kid does something; immediately we want our children to do the same—whether God calls them for it or not! It is not wise!