



PARENTING

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Introduction	2
Lesson 1: Viewing Family with the Right Perspective	3
Lesson 2: The Power of Heartfelt Values	5
Lesson 3: Scripture in the Home	7
Lesson 4: Preventing Anger and Frustration	9
Lesson 5: Providing Your Children with Presence	14
Lesson 6: Breaking Bad Parental Patterns.....	16
Lesson 7: Meeting the Needs of Your Children.....	18
Lesson 8: Biblical Child Training	20
Lesson 9: The Painful Side of Parenting	22
Lesson 10: The Priority of Obedience	24
Lesson 11: Positive Affirmation	26
Lesson 12: The Way Your Child Should Go.....	28
Lesson 13: Preparing Your Child for Marriage	30
Appendix 1: Supplementary Audio Sessions	32
Appendix 2: Premarital Counseling Bible Study and Wedding Planning Guide.....	32

Introduction

It's tough being a parent! It's expensive, exhausting, and challenging in many ways. Yet do we focus too much on being a parent that we forget what it's like on the other side?

It's tough being a kid, too. Children face many challenges. Laziness, bullies, peer pressure, schoolwork, emotional and physical changes, and more. Yet has it ever occurred to you that the greatest challenge they face (or one of the greatest) might be you?

This thirteen-part Bible study series is designed to help you overcome this challenge by becoming a more God-dependent, Bible-based parent that doesn't "frustrate" your children but raises them to trust, love, and follow the Lord instead.

Though we're the God-given caretakers and guides of our children in their developing years, they don't belong to us – they belong to the Lord. He made them and desires to save them. It's as though we're the temporary babysitters and substitute teachers that God has assigned to raise his children in this world.

After all, if we're children of God, we should treat our children as God treats us, not as Satan treated us before we believed on Christ. Eph 5:1 says, "Be imitators of God as dear children. Eph 5:8 says, "Walk as children of light." We who are parents and also God's children should treat our children differently than parents of the world, the way that God our heavenly Father treats us.

How we raise our children should give them a close approximation of what it's like to have God as a Father. That's why it's important to participate faithfully in a Spirit-filled church and to submit to the Lord as parents first of all. When we as parents submit to the Lord, we teach our children to do the same – and that's the ultimate goal of parenting.

To use this study series most effectively, read each lesson prayerfully. Look up every Bible verse or passage and give them thoughtful attention. Write down insights that stand out to you or questions that come to your mind. Discuss these things and along with the review questions at the end of each lesson and close with prayer. Ask God to help you put into practice the lessons you learn from his Word.

If you have any lingering questions, reach out to your pastor (or his wife) or another godly leader or parent in your church. May God richly bless your study of his Word and strengthen your home for his glory!

Lesson 1: Viewing Family with the Right Perspective

A Family Crisis

The bookshelves and playlists of Christian homes are filled with resources about the Christian family. But with all this interest and information, are Christian families thriving? Not really. These resources promote some helpful things, but they promote a lot of trendy or harmful advice as well, things that sound nice, but are more popular than biblical.

Furthermore, we are experiencing a serious dilemma in our culture. Parents, for instance, are raising children, but without the benefit of having parents or grandparents that followed biblical principles before them. Imagine finding out that your swimming instructor has never himself been taught to swim. (“I see!” said the blind man, as he picked up his hammer and saw!) That’s what is going on in Christian homes today, only the results are far more serious. We’re raising a generation of young people, but we’ve never had anyone teach us how to do it God’s way apart from a few popular books and sermons.

Families for God

In all our well-meaning efforts to correct this problem, we need to avoid another problem. We may become so engrossed in correcting our family crisis that we begin to worship the family instead. In doing so, we forget why we have families in the first place. God gave them to us. They are his idea. So, it is necessary to restore God to his proper role in our families. Before we talk about daddy dates, quality time, biblical discipline, or helping our children choose a career path, we need to be sure that we are properly focused on God.

In the lessons ahead, we will talk about a wide range of family topics, focusing on what the Bible teaches about parents and children. We will also discuss a variety of ideas for how to put into practice what the Bible teaches. But if our goal is merely to fix or strengthen our families, then we are missing the point of why we have families in the first place.

Understanding God’s Purpose

When God created the world, he culminated his work by creating a man and a woman. Before he made them, he stated his purpose: he wanted them to rule everything else that he had made on his behalf (Gen 1:26). He repeated this purpose immediately after he made them (Gen 1:28). Sandwiched between this repeated purpose, he explained the means through which a husband and wife would do this: they would produce offspring, numerous offspring, and enough to fill the earth (Gen 1:27-28). By doing this they would expand God’s influence and reign over the entire earth.

So, marrying, bearing children, and training them to extend God’s influence and reign into the world is at the heart of God’s purpose for making people in the first place. You see, a functioning family is central to God’s original purpose for mankind. God did not make the earth and all that is in it to serve and exercise control over families. He made families to serve and exercise control over the world.

Family and Church

Both family and church serve an important purpose in God's plan for the world. As such, they are not competing institutions. Sadly, this does not always seem to be the case. Sometimes 1) churches press upon families overwhelming ministry schedules, programs, and influence, giving families very little time or opportunity to make decisions for themselves. Other times 2) families preoccupy themselves with so many family and extracurricular events that they have no time to involve themselves in church gatherings and ministry opportunities. Both situations fail to strike a biblical balance.

The Role of Parents (Deut 6:4-7; 2 Tim 3:14-15)

One mistake Christian parents make is relying on the church to provide their children with religious instruction and training. But this expectation can fail in at least two ways. First, they underestimate the importance of the parents' devotion to God. Parents who rely on the church to shape their children's faith but fail to cultivate a personal walk with God of their own, place their children in spiritual jeopardy by counteracting whatever their children learn at church. Second, they neglect their parental responsibility to teach their children the Bible at home. Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and sermons do not erase the necessity of parents teaching their children the Bible daily.

The Role of the Church (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21; Tit 2:1-8)

Letters to New Testament churches show us that churches play an important role in the success of Christian families. Not only do churches provide the biblical setting for all members of a church to grow and minister as Christians, but they also should provide biblical teaching about family roles and behavior. You find both purposes in Ephesians and Colossians, because (1) the letters speak to parents and children directly, which means that families were in the audience when the letters were read to the church. Also, (2) the letters provide specific biblical instructions for parents and children to follow.

Ultimately, churches and parents must work closely together, in reliance on God's Word, to prepare the next generation to serve God. Consider the dual influences that shaped the faith of Timothy in tandem (2 Tim 3:14). The Scripture influenced and transformed his life from an early age onward, as taught and modeled to him through both his family (2 Tim 1:5) and the church (2 Tim 1:13).

Questions for Review

1. What were God's instructions to Israelite parents and why are they important (Deut 6:4-5)?
2. God commanded Israelite families to worship at the tabernacle and Temple. Why did he also command the parents to teach their children God's Word daily (Deut 6:6-7)?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 2: The Power of Heartfelt Values

A Pagan Messaging Frenzy

The noteworthy “media” statistic for parents used to be the average number of hours teenagers spent in front of a television screen. This is no longer the case because portable electronics and the omnipresent internet have changed the way that young people (or anybody for that matter) consumes media and information.

The New York Times reports on [a recent Harvard University Report](#), which revealed that teens spend about nine hours every day using some form of online media. Consider that Snapchat, a trendy social media outlet favored by teens, [claims to reach](#) 41% of 18 to 34-year-olds on any given day. Furthermore, [ScienceDaily cites a survey](#) indicating that 76% of American teens age 13-17 use Instagram, 75% use Snapchat, 66% use Facebook, and 47% use Twitter. Moreover, another source estimates that the average teen spends up to four hours per day listening to audio music.

No matter how accurate these statistics may be, they reveal one obvious fact. Young people are experiencing a messaging frenzy. They are consuming a steady barrage of visual and audial input from all sorts of people and places. What’s more, their sources generally have little or nothing to do with God. Performing artists, media stars, purported friends, and an assortment of perfect strangers are feeding the minds of our young people a regular diet of pagan values and a godless outlook on life. As Christian parents, we can certainly find ways to limit the amount of access some of these sources have into our children’s lives. But even so, we cannot eliminate this completely.

The Most Important Influence

Minus the technological aspects of our culture, the nation of Israel faced a similar dilemma after settling in Palestine (Deut 6:10-12). Pagan nations surrounded them. The sights and sounds of these godless people threatened to pull the hearts of Israelite children astray from God. To prevent this from occurring, Moses affirmed to the Israelite parents that they served as the most important platform for reaching the hearts of their children. In doing so, he urged them to exercise this influence in at least two ways.

Your Regular Conversations

There’s no way around it. Children need to have regular, personal conversations with their parents. Open conversations between parents and their children must occur daily, and they must regularly feature insights about God from the Scripture. There’s no other way to capture a child’s heart. That’s why Moses instructed the Israelite parents to speak with their children at four different times of day (Deut 6:7).

- First, talk to your children when you are sitting in your house. This refers to times of relaxation and rest when you are at home as a family.
- Talk with them also when you are traveling outside of your home. This refers to those busy times when going from one place to the next, running errands, sitting in traffic, riding the subway, and walking to the park.

- Talk with them when you lay down at night. This refers to your regular evening routine at the end of each day when you put them to bed.
- Talk with them when you get up in the morning. This refers to your regular morning routine at the start of each day.

Your Household Decorations and Personal Technology

Household decorations and personal technology serve as another powerful venue by which you may communicate to your children regularly (Deut 6:8-9). What kind of artwork, messages, and pictures do you hang on the wall and refrigerator? What kind of media – whether print, audio, or visual – do you feature in your home on a regular basis and in prominent places? And what about binding those “signs upon your hand?” Sounds a lot like wearable tech to me. Parents, learn from Moses to leverage all aspects of your home environment to turn the hearts of your children to God.

Loving God for Real

Parents who determine to carry on conversations with their children and to surround their children at home with godly influences will still fall short if they neglect the most important dynamic. This dynamic is the depth and genuineness of a parent’s own devotion to God. Christian parents who have conversations with their children out of duty and guard the environment of their home the same way will ultimately be unpersuasive. Why? Because a child can detect what their parents truly love. How? From the free-flowing, spontaneous conversations you initiate throughout the day.

You talk about what you love and about the things that interest you most, that fill your mind to the greatest degree. Though you may plan daily time for family prayer, this will accomplish little if you never talk about God and his truth spontaneously throughout the day and if you allow godless media and decorum to saturate your home without care.

So, to capture the hearts of our children for Christ and to protect them from the inundation of godless messaging they experience outside the home, we must have regular conversations with our children about God and his ways, and we must arrange the environs of our home to achieve the same purpose. But for this to have a genuine and lasting effect, our conversations about God and his ways must come from our heart. They must be genuine, heartfelt values that we personally embrace. To reach the hearts of our children, we must first love God with all our hearts as well.

Questions for Review

1. Apart from necessary avenues, such as school and drive-by billboards, what messaging platforms at reaching into your children’s hearts?
2. Why might you struggle to have genuine, spontaneous heartfelt conversations with your children about God and his ways?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 3: Scripture in the Home

The Basis of Faith

All of creation, the natural world, reveals in an obvious way that there is a God (Psa 19:1-6). It teaches us that God is eternal, that he is all-powerful, and that we must answer to him as God (Rom 1:20). Unfortunately, we do not naturally accept these obvious conclusions. Rather than believe, we work hard to prevent this truth from influencing our hearts (Rom 1:18). We produce all kinds of alternative explanations instead.

But even when a person acknowledges God as the creator and judge of all things, he remains only partially informed. He needs more truth about God and his ways than the natural world can provide (Psa 19:7-14). You see, the general, artistic revelation of God through the natural world makes it possible to believe that there *is* a God who exists, which is necessary to believe. But the special, verbal revelation of God through the Scripture makes it possible to believe *in* God as Savior. So, viewing the created world provides the entryway and the doormat to an eternal relationship with God, but hearing the inspired Word of God opens the door to go inside. That's why Paul tells us that faith comes through hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:25).

From a Child

Since hearing the Word of God from Scripture is necessary for personal salvation, then your child or children need to hear the Word of God for themselves. But where should this exposure take place and when should it begin? To answer these questions, you should consider the example of the man in the New Testament named Timothy. Notice what Paul says about his exposure to Scripture.

First, he knew about Scripture "*from childhood*" (2 Tim 3:15). The word *childhood* (*brephos*) refers to the earliest stages of childhood, as young as infancy, which indicates that the earlier you expose your children to the Word of God, the better. Some parents sing and play Scripture songs and quote Bible verses to their child before birth, while others begin doing this soon after their child is born. Both approaches demonstrate a serious and legitimate application of what Paul says about Timothy.

To describe this process of exposure, Paul uses two additional words, *learn* and *be assured*. The first (*manthano*) refers to taking in information through teaching, study, and reflection, whether formally or informally. The second (*pistoo*) refers to becoming personally convinced about the truthfulness of what you are learning.

But next, where does this process of exposure, learning, and persuasion take place? Certainly at church, but is that all? Paul reveals to us that Timothy received this exposure through his relatives at home (2 Tim 1:5). This detail underscores the vital importance of parents providing diligent biblical instruction for their children at home through daily conversations, both formally and informally (Deut 6:6-9). But does Scripture influence make a difference in broken homes?

Even in a Split or Single-Parent Home

You may be surprised to learn that Timothy did not have a functioning Christian (or Jewish) father (Acts 16:1). His father was Greek and was either unbelieving at the least or deceased at the most. By naming Timothy's grandmother and mother as his spiritual influences in the home, Paul seems to underscore this deficiency (1 Tim 1:5).

Many Christian parents find themselves in a similar position, raising children without a regenerate father or mother. Though a godly set of parents, father and mother, is a crucial element in God's original design for raising children, God's grace and the Scriptures are more than able to overcome this deficiency.

From the earliest days of Timothy's life, his mother and grandmother deliberately emphasized Scripture as the preeminent influence in their home (2 Tim 3:15). This decision was neither a creative solution nor an emergency stopgap measure. It was loving parental obedience to God's sacred, timeless charge (Deut 6:6-9). They did not dip the flag because their home and community were disjointed. They lovingly obeyed God, teaching Timothy to fear God and respond to his divine authority through the Scriptures.

The Dusty Family Bible

Whatever your home situation, placing a large, illustrated Bible in your living room to gather dust will never persuade your children to acknowledge God and turn to him for personal salvation. You must embrace your parental obligation to teach your children the words of God.

Recite the Bible and sing it to them when they are infants. Help them memorize verses as young children. Give them an illustrated picture Bible early in their development. Gather your family together for family devotions before bed each night and share something from your personal devotions. Teach your children to have their own quiet time with God each day and ask them what they learned from that. And of course, talk about the Bible throughout the day and answer your child's questions from a biblical point of view. The more your child or children hear of God's Word, the more they will make sense of the natural world around them, and the more likely it will be that they will place their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Questions for Review

1. How deliberate have you been at making the words of Scripture a primary influence in your home and family life?
2. What are some ways that you can more consistently teach your child or children from the Bible?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 4: Preventing Anger and Frustration

Both Parents, but Especially Fathers

Paul urges fathers not to cause hurtful feelings in raising their children (Eph 6:4), but mothers also share responsibility in raising children well (1 Tim 5:10). Parenting is a joint venture. The Greek word for *fathers* sometimes refers to both parents, not just dads. For instance, it refers to the parents of Moses, including his mother (Heb 11:23; cf. Exod 2:1-3). Yet because Paul has already used the more regular word for *parents* in Eph 6:1, by using the word for *fathers* in Eph 6:4 he is focusing on fathers while not necessarily excluding mothers from his instruction.

The Possibility of Anger and Frustration

God expects children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20; 1 Pet 3:1-7). At the same time, parents must understand that the way they raise their children may cause bad effects in their hearts, like anger (Eph 6:4) or exasperation and discouragement (Col 3:21). Not all bad feelings in a child come from parents. After all, sin is embedded in their heart (Prov 22:15; Psa 51:5). Still, parents can aggravate this problem and Paul urges them to avoid this. To that end, let's consider some parental behavior to avoid.

Causes for Anger and Frustration

Let's survey thirteen things that can cause anger and frustration in a child's heart over time. Ask God to help you detect whether any apply to you. If you feel guilty or overwhelmed, acknowledge your failure to your children and ask their forgiveness (Jam 5:16). Also, depend on God to make definite changes for the good of your child (Jam 1:22-25). It's tough being a child. We don't want to make it harder than it already is.

Also, consider (esp. if you're not a parent) whether any of these factors caused frustration in your own childhood. If yes, then it's likely this frustration has carried into your adult life. If so, acknowledge your hurt to God and accept his grace to move forward. By giving him your hurts, you'll weed out the roots of bitterness growing in your heart and experience the transforming power of God's grace and freedom to a greater degree (Heb 12:14-16).

Repeated Irritation

The words "don't provoke" describe bad feelings that develop over time. Like your neighbor's car alarm going off every night, repeated wrong behavior by a parent eventually leads to your child becoming exasperated.

Children are very forgiving. Just as they often forget your instructions (ugh), so they also forget your failures (yay!). Yet the more frequently you fail in a certain way, the more likely it is that they'll remember the failure and be frustrated by it.

Broken Marriage

A good marriage is the foundation for good parenting (Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19). A wife who will not respect and meet the needs of her husband and a husband who will not understand, love, and care for his wife will frustrate their children.

Disunified Parents

Just because a husband and wife are married doesn't automatically ensure that they are "on the same page." Children need both parents to guide them as a harmonious team, as "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7). Disunity between parents will frustrate children and turn them away from God's grace.

This happened to Esau in the Old Testament (OT) for instance when his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, had different plans for their children (Gen 25:28). This fueled Esau's cause for bitterness, which eventually led him to an ungodly life (Heb 12:14-17).

Favoritism

Scripture indicates that when parents favor one child over another, they foster deep-seated bitterness. Consider how Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob (Gen 25:28). The result was that Esau became a bitter man himself and the hatred between his children and Jacob's children, cousins, lasted generations (Heb 12:14-17).

Unresolved Anger and Bitterness

We may easily overlook this, but bitter and angry parents raise bitter and angry children. Anyone in a close relationship with an angry person risks becoming angry too (Prov 22:24), and bitterness in a parent's heart will corrupt those in their household (Heb 12:15).

If you're bitter (towards your parents, spouse or former spouse, employer, or some other person), there's a real possibility that your anger or bitterness will infect your children.

Hurtful Words

Parents should speak in ways that encourage their children rather than tear them down (Eph 4:29). Sarcasm, derogatory names, making them the subject of jokes, speaking down about them in public (esp. if they can hear), and responding only negatively to wrong behavior but never positively to good behavior will discourage your children over time.

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov 15:1). "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness [crookedness] in it breaks the spirit" (Prov 15:4). You need to say hard and unpopular things to your children sometimes. Yet hard words shouldn't be harsh words, and unpopular words shouldn't be mean words.

Hypocrisy

Parents are responsible to correct their children's character flaws. Yet, when parents don't acknowledge and correct their own character flaws, their children will view this inconsistency as hypocrisy. Over time, they may become exasperated or upset by what they view as a double standard.

When you fail as a parent, admit your failure just as you would expect your child to do. As with any other relationship, you cannot effectively confront problems in others, even your own children, when you won't correct them in your own life (Matt 7:1-5).

Expecting Too Much

1 Cor 10:13 ensures that God will never test us beyond our true ability. We may *feel* like he has given us more than we can handle, but we know that he's assessed our ability beforehand to ensure that what he requires is within the realm of possibility with his help.

We should do the same for our children. We shouldn't expect from them more than they can handle or more than is reasonable for their strengths and stage of development. They might say, "That's too hard," or, "I can't do that!" Be sensitive to this feedback, but don't let it be the only factor in your decision. As a parent, it's your job to know the difference between what's too much for your child and what they *think* is too much.

Mothers and fathers must agree on what is reasonable for their child. Often a mother will have more sympathy than the father, but not always. After parents have conferred, the wife should support whichever decision the husband decides to make, expecting from the child what he (with his wife's input) believes is an appropriate expectation.

Ignorance of Your Child's Purpose

Parents should understand each child's purpose in life. Children need guidance to discover and prepare for "the way they should go" (Prov. 22:6). This "way" includes God's general will for any person (to follow Christ, to be a good citizen, etc.), but it also includes the way he intends for each child to go as a unique individual.

Children who reach adulthood still vague and uncertain about who they are and what they should do in life may grow embittered and angry towards their parents. Parents should aim their children in the right direction (Psa 127:4). Attentive, godly parents, better than anyone else, will know the strengths and weaknesses, personality, gifts, and abilities of their children. They should leverage this knowledge to prepare their children for life.

Absent Parents

Paul's instructions assume that parents are home with their children (Eph 6:4). "Training and admonition" are hands-on, in-person behaviors that require a parent to "be there." By focusing on fathers, Paul reveals that children need Dad at home, not just Mom.

An absentee parent due to divorce, a demanding occupation, busyness in general, or seeking pleasure (hanging out with friends, pursuing a hobby, etc.) will damage the heart of a child if it removes you from the home.

Both parents should arrange their lives and schedules to ensure that they have both quality and quantity time with their children. Eating breakfast and dinner together as a family most days of the week is a good step towards resolving this frustration.

Neglect

Parents should "bring up" their children, which means meeting your child's genuine needs. Your child has educational, physical, spiritual, and social needs (Luke 2:52). Both parents should work together to ensure that all these needs are met for their children.

Children whose needs go unnoticed will become bitter and upset. As they progress in school and other social environments and especially when they reach adulthood, they will become increasingly aware of needs that you may have neglected as parents. This can bring about deep resentment in their hearts towards you.

Permissiveness

Paul tells parents to meet the needs of children through nurture (Eph 6:4). This refers to discipline or child-training, teaching children proper behavior for adult life by using rules and consequences. In our desire not to frustrate our children, we should not make the mistake of being permissive. A permissive parent lets children do whatever they want, ignores clear disobedience, and accepts excuses for poor behavior and performance.

This approach may seem nice at first, but it contradicts how God trains us as our heavenly Father. Heb 12:3-11 teaches that God disciplines us with firm and sometimes painful consequences – not every time we disobey, but when we demonstrate firm resistance or make especially flagrant choices to sin.

Christian parents should do the same. They should establish clear, appropriate boundaries, with proper consequences for wrong behavior (Prov 13:24; 22:15). They should also receive appropriate recognition and reward when they choose good behavior.

Contrary to popular opinion, parental discipline does not discourage children. It encourages them to do right. It encourages them even more, then, when they face larger challenges and setbacks in life but they know how to handle them, leading to greater personal success and helping them avoid greater problems.

Sometimes they need you to say no and correct your child's wrong behavior. If you never do this and never enforce appropriate boundaries with appropriate consequences, your children will be frustrated in life in larger ways when they're fired from the job, dumped by their spouse, or incarcerated because they broke important rules in adult life and society.

Silence

Paul also tells parents to meet the needs of a child through admonition, or teaching that informs their mind (Eph 6:4). Doing this includes warnings, with an emphasis on talking with your children and helping them understand the significance of what you are saying.

Admonition emphasizes comments and conversations that warn against wrong behavior before it happens (1 Cor 10:11) and corrects wrong behavior after it happens (Tit 3:10).

Parents should talk regularly, positively, and proactively with their children, not just reacting when they misbehave. We should do this when we're relaxing around the home or busy running errands, during our evening routines and our morning routines (Deut 6:7).

While it's good to have family devotions at night before bed, if that's all you do, your children may be frustrated. Talking about God and life should not be relegated to formal, sit-down lectures by mom and dad at the end of the day. This should happen in your conversations throughout the day, just as you talk about anything else.

Talking to our children regularly about everything from God to their favorite toys is an important part of building a relationship with them. Children want to have a relationship with their parents, so parents who don't talk with them will frustrate them deeply.

Talking regularly to your children also provides a valuable platform to shape your child's thinking and values. Don't just correct them. Teach them. Dream and envision things together. Share your passions and interests with them and let them do the same with you. This is an important part of admonition. It's about all kinds of talk, not just correction.

Questions for Review

1. Did you develop any anger or frustration as a child? Apart from your own sinful nature, what may have helped to cause this?
2. Which of these possible causes do you already seek to avoid? Which ones may you be overlooking?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 5: Providing Your Children with Presence

The Need for Present Fathers

A man who abandons his family, which is the place where he belongs, is like a bird who flies away from his nest (Prov 27:8). When he does this, he neglects his children, leaving them without the provision, protection, and perspective that God expects him to provide for his family. Furthermore, when a Christian father does this, Scripture teaches that he also abandons his public testimony as a Christian.

This does not mean that a father should live at home and never work a late shift or take a business trip. After all, that's what birds do, right? They fly away from their nest to return with whatever their family needed them to provide. In this way, a father should go out into the places of business and commerce to generate the primary source of income that his family needs. Nevertheless, he should always return to his family, because his children need more than money and material provision. They need a father who is with them to provide safety and security, affirmation and affection, interaction, and insight.

The Need for Present Mothers

Children also need their mother to be present but in a different way. Mothers with young children should be “home managers” (1 Tim 5:14) and “homemakers” (Tit 2:5). The first expectation here means to “direct a household,” while the second means to be “busy and working at home.” In this way, home life should identify the role of a mother just as a career or profession should identify the role of a father.

We know that mothers are neither required to work *only* in the home nor prohibited from generating income from outside the home. We learn this from the example of the ideal, virtuous woman (Prov 31:10-31). Still, the work that a mother does should be more directly associated with the home than the father's work will be, and should allow her to make home life her primary focus. Furthermore, whatever income she generates should be supplemental, not primary, allowing her to focus on meeting needs around the home, including being there for her children (Prov 31:11)

Two Kinds of Absence

Children need more than material provision. They need a father and mother to be present at home in a physical way. They also need them to be present in another way, through personal interaction.

Physical Presence

Parents certainly remove themselves from their children's lives when they are not with them in a physical sense, as when they are absent and simply not there. This happens when a child's parents never marry or when they divorce. It happens when parents send away their children to a boarding school indefinitely. It also happens when one or both parents – though married – overcommit to professional pursuits or prioritize personal recreation, favorite hobbies, persistent addictions, or a social life over family involvement.

Personal Presence

Parents may also be absent from their children's lives when they are not with them in a personal sense. This happens when parents are physically present at home but are distant nonetheless. This distance (or relational absence) occurs when parents fail to listen to and talk with their children in regular, meaningful ways. Fathers, for instance, may retreat to their "man cave" for hours on end and mothers to their phone conversations or Facebook page. "Screen time" too often takes the place of personal interaction and relationship building, creating a kind of "virtual absence" even for parents who are in the same house or room as their children.

Solving the Problem

Sadly, absentee fathers (and mothers) have become an epidemic of alarming proportions, and this crisis is not limited to non-Christian families alone. For a variety of reasons, Christian families also suffer from this crisis. One reason is that many Christian parents have the distinct disadvantage of having been raised as children in a dysfunctional home. Their father or mother or both did not provide them with an example of physical and personal presence. For this reason, Christian parents should carefully and prayerfully evaluate their condition.

How can parents increase their presence in their children's lives? There are many ways. Establish a basic morning and evening routine of eating breakfast and supper together. Pull the plug on hobbies and unnecessary social involvement, and pull the plug on unnecessary screen time as well. Avoid wasteful spending and debt, and learn to be content with a basic lifestyle that you can afford, one that does not require multiple jobs, odd shifts, and regular overtime. Then, when you are together with family, be sure to talk together, play together, and enjoy one another's company.

Questions for Review

1. Were your parents "present" when you were a child? How or how not?
2. Are you present at home? In what ways are you absent and how can you solve that?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 6: Breaking Bad Parental Patterns

Repeated Aggravation

The biblical instructions that parents “don’t provoke” their children to anger are given in the present tense (Eph 6:4). This indicates that bad feelings develop in a child over time as the result of a parent’s (or parents’) repeated failure or wrong behavior. Like a dripping faucet, wrong parental behavior repeated over time eventually leads to exasperation in the heart of your child.

Children look to their parents for hope, more than they look to anyone else. So, when they find that you repeatedly misunderstand them, hurt them, or let them down, they lose hope. They grow angry, embittered, or frustrated instead, but not only towards you. They grow bitter towards life and towards God as well.

It is interesting to note the way that Paul gives these instructions. He assumes that causing frustration in the hearts of our children is our natural tendency as parents, just as disobeying parents is the natural tendency of children (Eph 6:1). That’s why we need a warning like this that urges parents to break this harmful pattern. How can we do this?

Cleaning Out Your Eyes

As parents, we are responsible to guide and correct our children. However, in our noble attempts to do this, we may easily overlook an important precondition. Before we can effectively correct the failures of our children, we must correct our own flaws and failures first. If we don’t, then our failures become hurtful patterns that discourage our children over time.

This general principle applies to any relationship (Matt 7:1-5). It especially applies to child training, though, because our children often display the same weaknesses as we do. After all, they inherited their personal traits and tendencies from us.

For this reason, parents should learn to ask themselves first whether they are committing the same errors as their children. Jesus describes this as removing a “log” from your own eye before you extract a “splinter” from the eye of someone else. When parents refuse to acknowledge their own failures and weaknesses but seek to correct the same problems in their children, their children will grow weary of this correction.

Correcting Known Offenses

Sometimes as a parent you are aware of a way that you have caused frustration for your child. Perhaps you made a promise and failed to keep it, or perhaps you spoke in anger and never apologized. There are many possible scenarios.

Whenever this happens, speak to your child about it. Admit your wrong behavior and request forgiveness (Matt 5:23-24). Not only does this simple step release your child’s frustration and restore their hope, but it teaches him how to seek forgiveness whenever he sins against you as well. This serves as a powerful teaching opportunity.

It takes a strong and mature Christian parent to confess your faults to your children (Jam 5:16). Furthermore, any parent can do this, even after their children have become independent adults. This action can go a long way towards reaching the heart of a wayward child and persuading them to return to a vibrant walk with God (Mal 4:6).

Questions for Review

1. Did either of your parents ever apologize to you? How did this affect you?
2. Have you ever apologized to your children? Was it hard to do? How did it turn out?
3. Is there anything that you need to apologize to your children today?
4. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 7: Meeting the Needs of Your Children

Bringing Up Your Children

When Paul teaches parents to “bring up” their children, he uses a word that means to *feed* your children. Feeding children certainly includes giving them food, but it means so much more than this. In a more general sense, it means to provide your children with whatever they need. It also does this with a specific goal in mind, which is to bring them to a point at which they are prepared to lead an adult life responsibly. Then, when a child reaches adulthood, he or she should be able to meet their own needs and no longer rely on their parents.

To accomplish this, it is important to understand what your children need so that you can properly meet their needs. Thankfully, the childhood development of Jesus provides you with a good example to follow. While it may not provide a complete pattern, it sets you in the right direction by emphasizing four categories in which your children need to develop. They need your help to progress in: (1) his education and skill set, (2) his physical health and maturity, (3) his relationship with God, and (4) his relationship with other people.

Meeting Educational Needs

To “increase in wisdom” means that Jesus improved in his ability to understand things and to make wise choices as a result. This kind of wisdom encompasses both general education and a specific skill set. By the way that Jesus taught people and interacted with his critics, it is obvious that he learned how to communicate well. Your children likewise need to receive a comprehensive education, featuring reading, writing, and speaking, but also mathematics, science, history, literature, and other crucial subjects. Furthermore, they need to be trained on how to apply this knowledge in useful and responsible ways.

Additionally, your children should learn one or two basic life skills which will prepare them for basic employment and further specialized training. This is especially true of boys. Jesus, for instance, learned carpentry skills from his father (Mark 6:3, cf. Matt 13:55), whereas the majority of his twelve disciples were fishermen (John 21:2-3) and Paul was skilled at tent-making or leatherwork (Acts 18:3). Similarly, girls should learn domestic skills for managing a household with efficiency and skill (Prov 31:10-31; Tit 2:4-5).

Meeting Physical Needs

To “increase in stature” refers to physical development. This goes without saying. Children need parents to provide them with a proper diet. Care should be given to providing nourishment that causes neither malnutrition nor indulgence. A balanced, moderate diet is necessary, and so is a lifestyle that provides them with proper rest, physical activity, and medical care. Ultimately, children need parents to provide them with opportunities to apply their knowledge and their physical abilities into meaningful work opportunities, through chores and more (Lam 3:27).

Meeting Spiritual Needs

To “increase in favor with God” refers to a child’s relationship with God. Children need parents to guide them towards a personal relationship with God and a life that pleases God (Psa 34:11). That is why you must ensure that your children receive consistent exposure to the Word of God at home (Deut 6:6-9; 1 Tim 3:14-16). You must also ensure that your children participate together with you as you involve yourself faithfully in a Bible-teaching church (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25). As your children develop, it is important that you model for them, instill in them, and expect from them a personal walk with God for themselves (Prov 20:11; Josh 1:8; 2 Tim 1:5).

Meeting Social Needs

To “increase in favor with men” refers to a child’s social relationships, whether inside or outside the family. Not only do they need to learn how to show proper respect to an adult (Lev 19:32), but they also need to learn how to be friendly (Matt 18:24). Furthermore, they need to learn how to avoid the wrong kind of friends (1 Cor 15:33). Altogether, parents should meet the needs of their children so effectively that they learn to respect other people so genuinely that other people learn to respect them. This includes people who are Christians and people who are not.

The Responsibility of the Parents

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of both parents – father and mother – to meet the needs of their children (Eph 5:4; 1 Tim 5:10). It is not good enough just to provide a house for your children to live in and food for your children to eat. It is not enough to enroll them in school and then expect the school to do all the training (whether it be a public school, private school, Christian school, or homeschool). And it is not enough to send or take your children to church and expect the church to meet their needs.

Overreliance on any one source to meet the needs of your child will inevitably cause deficiencies. God holds parents responsible to understand the needs of their children and to make prayerful, biblical, deliberate choices to ensure that all of these needs are met so that their children will progress in education and life skills, in physical health and stamina, in a vibrant relationship with God, and in a respectful, vibrant relationship with others. Where deficiencies appear, parents should do whatever they can to meet those needs one way or another without expecting someone else to do it for you.

Questions for Review

1. Did your parents do well at meeting your childhood development needs? In what categories did they excel? In what categories did they fall short?
2. How are you doing at meeting the development needs of your children? In what categories do you excel? In what categories did you fall short?
3. What can you do to be more effective and more balanced at meeting these needs?
4. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 8: Biblical Child Training

If you are a Christian parent, you are responsible to eliminate personal behavior in your life that will frustrate and embitter your children over time. Furthermore, you should nourish your children by identifying their needs and meeting those needs, whether they be education and skillset needs, physical and healthcare needs, spiritual needs, or social needs. On this foundation, then, Paul teaches you to provide two vital services to your children for them to accomplish God's will for life (Eph 6:4)

Provide Them with Discipline

The Greek word for *nurture* or *discipline* is a specialized word that means "child training." It focuses on establishing rules to establish proper behavior. This involves both punishing wrong behavior with appropriate consequences and rewarding good behavior with appropriate benefits.

It is interesting to observe that the book of Hebrews uses this same word to describe the way that God responds to your wrong behavior as his spiritual child to transform you to become more like Christ (Heb 12:5-10). Of special note is that this child-training (or discipline) process may be unpleasant and painful.

Provide Them with Instruction

Admonition or *instruction* here means "teaching or warning." This word focuses on the words that parents use to teach their children, while the first word for "child-training" emphasizes the parents' methods. Furthermore, it emphasizes the kind of instruction that parents give to warn against wrong behavior before it happens (1 Cor 10:11) and to correct wrong behavior after it happens (Tit 3:10). The primary purpose of this is to raise awareness of what is wrong and to encourage a new and better perspective in the heart of your child.

Let the Bible Be Your Guide

So, as a parent, where should you receive guidelines for child-training and insights for your parental instructions? Notice how Paul says that the training and admonition you provide should be "of the Lord." This means that you should get your parenting methods and insights from the Lord, or more specifically, from Scripture. Knowing this, you mustn't raise your children based upon popular psychology (i.e. *Parenting Magazine*), cultural traditions, worldly wisdom, personal intuition, and methods simply handed down to you from your parents and grandparents.

Ultimately, God holds parents responsible to train their children to follow his way. We know that Abraham did this for instance because Moses tells us that he "command[ed] his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19). Consider how Isaac obeyed his father by carrying wood for a sacrifice on Mount Moriah and even obeyed his father by allowing him to bind him on the altar (Gen 22:6-9). Then contrast Abraham to Eli the priest. Samuel tells us

that “his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain [or correct] them” (1 Sam 3:13). They committed immorality and theft in the tabernacle and Eli did nothing.

Child Discipline from Scripture

Thankfully, the Bible provides a remarkable resource for parenting. First, it provides important guidelines for discipline. These guidelines especially appear in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, but they appear elsewhere as well (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:6; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17). These are the practices that Jewish parents continued to follow in the first century and carried over into the church. Gentile believers would also have learned these and adopted them as they became acquainted with Scripture.

Child Instruction from Scripture

Second, the Bible provides a treasure trove of insights for warning and correcting your children regarding wrong, ungodly behavior. Consider how Paul tells us that the Old Testament examples of the Israelites’ failures in the wilderness are recorded in Scripture to warn us from committing the same errors today (1 Cor 10:1-11). What’s more, Paul tells Timothy that *all* Scripture is for teaching (2 Tim 3:16). So, when you warn or correct your children, don’t just tell them what you think, tell them what the Lord says. After all, you’re parenting them for him anyway, so they need to know what he says.

Questions for Review

1. What kind of practices do you follow in providing your children with discipline? Are your practices biblical? If not, where did you learn them?
2. What kind of instructions do you give to your children? Are your insights biblical? If not, where did you learn them?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 9: The Painful Side of Parenting

Behavior and Consequences

Paul uses a specialized word to describe one essential way that parents should meet the needs of their children (Eph 6:4). This is the Greek word for *nurture* or *discipline*, which means “child training.” It focuses on establishing rules to establish proper behavior. This activity involves both punishing wrong behavior with appropriate consequences and rewarding good behavior with appropriate benefits.

This practice recognizes the universal law of sowing and reaping. According to this inescapable reality of life, you will receive appropriate consequences or rewards in return for the choices that you make (Gal 6:7). This is especially true for a born-again Christian who enjoys a parent-child relationship with God. As a good father, God does more than give good gifts to his children (Matt 7:11). He also meets your need for spiritual development through child-training (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11).

Biblical child-training requires teaching children the consequences of wrong behavior. Parents often withhold consequences, choosing to say nothing, feeling that it is the loving thing to do, or choosing to get angry instead. Neither response teaches the truth about the real world, which is governed by the providence of God.

What is life like in the real world? When a grown man drives his car at 90 miles per hour, a police officer will issue him a very large fine. Then again, he may find himself admitted to the hospital with a life-threatening injury. When a grown lady oversleeps multiple days, despite repeated warnings, she will likely find herself without a job. She will also carry a damaging referral on her resume.

Children need to learn these realities early in the microcosm of their home. They should learn to obey rules and respect authority. When they fail to do this, they should receive appropriate consequences as a result. In the adult world, the government, employers, and the providence of God will carry out these consequences and teach these lessons in serious ways. But God holds parents responsible to teach children these same painful lessons early, while they are young.

An Unpleasant Experience

The New Testament reveals that the child-training process God provides for his children may be painful and unpleasant (Heb 12:5-11). But this should not surprise you, because parenting like this is a very loving thing to do, even when God himself is the parent (Rev 3:19). In fact, a parent who refuses to discipline this way is demonstrating the opposite of love, which is hatred (Prov 13:24). Ultimately, it is a normal expectation that parents (especially fathers) will do this (Heb 12:7; Prov 13:24; 23:13-14).

The NT associates the word *scourging* with this child-training process, which speaks of severe punishment, even whipping (Heb 12:6). This indicates that proper child-training will be *painful*, involving a measure of mental pain and anxiety, which leads to regret and

sorrow (Heb 12:11). This inner experience in the heart of a child should enable his inner propensity to make the wrong decisions to wear down, as when the disciples were *physically* worn out in the olive grove the night before the crucifixion (Luke 22:45).

The Rod of Correction

The Old Testament book of Proverbs gives practical and timeless parental advice, which the NT book of Hebrews echoes. It teaches that child-training is necessary because thick-headed, stubborn foolishness is strongly fastened to the heart of a child (Prov 22:15). Proverbs 13:26 reinforces the kind of discipline that Hebrews 12:6 portrays, urging parents to practice this earnestly and early in a child's development. Parents should not refuse nor hold back from doing this (Prov 23:13).

Proper loving discipline is painful, but it is not destructive. In fact, it is destructive *not* to provide this kind of training (Prov 23:14). Though proper child-training is unpleasant for the parent and child alike, in the end, it leads to a wise and respectful child who brings delight and rest to the hearts of his parents (Prov 19:18; 29:15). When you refrain from doing this, however, the opposite occurs. Consider the tragic example of Eli, who lectured his sons, but did not restrain them through child-training (1 Sam 2:22-25; 3:12-14; cf. Deut 21:18-21). The rod of correction is an important and necessary part of child-training.

Two Necessary Cautions

A parent must take every precaution to ensure that he or she practices child-training in an appropriate, loving way that does not cause harmful injury. Proverbs 19:18 makes this very clear when it says, "*do not set your heart on his destruction.*" This means that a parent should never discipline in a way that causes injury or worse. Parents should know the difference between appropriate discipline that is painful and improper behavior that causes injury and physical harm.

Also, parents must remember that proper discipline in child-training should occur in concert with all that parenting entails: teaching Scripture in the home, preventing anger and frustration, providing your children with presence, breaking bad parental patterns, meeting your children's needs, and providing them regular, clear conversations about what is right and what is wrong. Altogether, this prepares children to respect authority (God, parents, etc.) by obeying immediately, completely, and with the right heart attitude.

Questions for Review

1. Did your parents practice this aspect of child-training? If yes, did they do so in a biblical manner? How or how not?
2. Do you practice this aspect of child-training? If not, then what is preventing you from doing so?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 10: The Priority of Obedience

Hearing and Doing

The word *obey* means doing something in response to hearing something (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). More specifically, it means hearing what you are told to do and do it. In the most literal sense, the word is a combination of two words, *hear* and *under*, meaning to place yourself under the authority of someone else by doing what they tell you to do. In Acts 12:13, the word translates as “answering the door” when someone asked to enter, which vividly portrays what it means. Knowing this, God expects parents to give good instructions to their children, and he also expects children to do what their parents tell them to do.

Learning to Listen

The first step in the process of teaching children to obey is teaching them to listen to the voice of their parents. Parents should teach children to hear their voice when they speak to them or give them instructions. The young boy Samuel provides us with an excellent example of this (1 Sam 3:1-10). He had learned to obey the voice of his surrogate father, even in a late-night hour from bed.

This kind of hearing involves more than listening to the sound of a parent’s voice. It requires a child to “pay attention” or “listen attentively” (Prov 1:8; 4:1). It also requires a child to understand what a parent is telling them. Children do not naturally listen to their parents this way. They may hear the sound of a parent’s voice, but they respond with, “I couldn’t hear you,” or “I didn’t know what you were saying,” or, “I didn’t know that you were talking to me.”

While it is true that a child may not always hear well, a lack of hearing is not usually the problem. If a parent mentions that there is some chocolate dessert in the kitchen using the same volume and tone of voice, the same child who couldn’t hear a previous instruction will run to the kitchen immediately for the dessert. In this way, children suffer from a chronic case of selective hearing. Parents need to discern when a child has willfully refused to pay attention to instructions and provide proper consequences when the child has indeed refused to hear.

Responding to Instruction

In addition to listening, children should learn to respond to what they hear from their parents as well. And how should they respond? They should respond right away, all the way, with a joyful heart. Delayed obedience is incomplete obedience. Children need to learn this first, and they need to learn this early (Psa 119:60). They also need to learn to obey instructions completely. The moment when God rejected Saul as king over Israel vividly illustrates this point (1 Sam 15:14-23). God had commanded him to entirely eradicate the Amalekite nation, but he only obeyed partially. God did not accept this partial obedience. Finally, children need to learn to obey parental instructions joyfully (Psa 100:2; 1 John 5:3). As children learn to obey immediately, they can then learn to obey

completely. As they learn to do this, parents may then teach them to obey joyfully. Teaching this requires patience on the part of parents, in tandem with clear teaching and consistent child-training consequences for disobedience.

Focusing on the Goal

The goal of this child-training process is first to raise children who will learn to make regular, voluntary decisions that please their parents *without* parents telling them what to do (Prov 1:8; 6:20-22). The second and ultimate goal, then, is to raise children who learn to obey the Word of God properly – immediately, completely, and joyfully.

Paul described these objectives in the context of spiritual growth when he urged the Philippian believers to obey God not only when he (Paul) was present as their spiritual mentor, but also when he was absent. In fact, he urged them to obey God “much more” when he was absent (Phil 2:12). John shares a similar sentiment when he said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

Being Consistent

As you teach your children to obey, you should be careful to avoid unnecessary commands, focusing on what really matters. Furthermore, you should be careful to respond to disobedience consistently, not offering veiled threats like, “If you do that one more time, then I’ll...” Doing this does not teach immediate obedience. In the earlier years of development, perhaps it is wise to insist on immediate obedience. Once children learn this, they perhaps they should learn complete obedience, and then joyful obedience.

In the way that you choose to guide this process, be sure to be consistent. Expect your children to hear what you say. If they do not respond, then evaluate whether their failure to hear is legitimate and respond accordingly. God has delegated to you the authority to give your children instructions, and he expects them to obey you. It is your responsibility to train them to do so.

Questions for Review

1. Did your parents train you to obey them immediately, completely, and joyfully?
2. Are you teaching this to your children? If not, what is preventing you? If so, then what challenges have you faced in doing so?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 11: Positive Affirmation

Children need parents to warn them against wrong behavior and to provide them with consequences when they make wrong choices. But they need more than warnings and consequences related to bad behavior. They also need parents to encourage good behavior and to recognize when they make good choices. We may call this affirmation, and for whatever reason, parents often struggle to provide this.

The Precedent for Affirmation

Many unfortunately view the Bible as a book filled with difficult instructions, elusive expectations, and judgment from God. This limited perspective fails to recognize that positive affirmation runs throughout God's revelation, whether in the Old or New Testament. In the beginning, God announced that he would make people to reflect his image and to accomplish significant things in the world. He repeated this sentiment soon after he created them and called his creation "very good" (Gen 1:24-31).

Even after the Fall, positive affirmation continues, in addition to difficult instructions and judgments for wrong behavior. Consider what God said about Job. "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8)? Also consider what godly people say about others, as when Paul affirms Timothy: "You know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel" (Phil 2:22). As you study Scripture for yourself, you will discover frequent statements of this nature.

The Twofold Basis of Affirmation

As you encounter affirmations in Scripture, you should notice two important facts about what you find. First, affirmation is based upon reality. In other words, it recognizes what is actually the case and does not resort to wishful thinking or fictitious platitudes. Attempts at affirmation that do not reflect the truth are nothing more than flattery or dishonesty (Psa 12:2-3; Eph 4:25). In contrast, true affirmation notices something that is true about a relationship, an action, or a pattern of behavior and responds with personal recognition.

To each of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3, God says, "I know your works." On this basis, two of the seven churches receive only positive affirmations, Smyrna (2:8ff.) and Philadelphia (3:7ff.). One, Laodicea, receives no positive affirmation (3:14ff.), while four get mixed reviews: Ephesus (2:1ff.), Pergamum (2:12ff.), Thyatira (2:18ff.), and Sardis (3:1ff.). This demonstrates that affirmation is important, even when correction is also necessary, but only when there is really something to affirm.

Second, the affirmation should account for God's role in the good that you observe, for there is nothing good apart from God. For instance, notice how Jesus affirmed Peter's spiritual discovery that Jesus was the Son of God. He didn't say, "Good job, Peter! I knew you could do it!" Instead, he said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16:17). Minutes later,

Jesus would correct Peter for his subsequent wrong behavior (Matt 16:23), mixing affirmation and correction together in the discipleship process.

Parents should learn to do the same. As you correct your child's wrong behavior, learn to point out what you see God doing in his or her life. You can do this in at least two ways. You can remind them about what God is doing in a general but real way. For example, you can say, "I love you, and God loves you even more" (John 3:16). Or you can say, "I am looking forward to what God will do through your life" (1 Thess 5:24).

You can also recognize specific ways that God is bringing about real, observable change in your child's life. You can say, "I've noticed how patient you are with your brother lately. I can see that God is working in your life." Or you can say, "Remember how you used to keep on playing when I called you? Now you are coming right away. You are really growing in the Lord." Whatever the case, look to God for wisdom to know when to say things like this and to know what to say. Thoughtful, God-focused words of affirmation, in addition to correction, go a long way towards guiding a child in the right direction.

Some Means of Affirmation

Parents may provide affirmation to their children in a variety of ways. Here are three possibilities. A good approach will certainly involve words, but other means as well.

Affirming with Words

Words may be the most powerful form of affirmation and should not be neglected (Prov 18:21). As presented previously, a parent should continually recognize opportunities to say things to their child that build them up in general and specific ways, while acknowledging God's personal involvement (Eph 4:29; Phil 2:13).

Affirming with Eye Contact

Focused interaction is a powerful form of affirmation. Give your children concentrated eye contact when they speak to you, and give them the same kind of focus with your ears when you listen to them, as God does for his children (Psa 34:15; Jam 1:19; 1 Pet 3:12)

Affirming with Physical Touch

There is a time to embrace (Eccl 3:5). A big hug, a kiss on the cheek, a hand on the shoulder, a pat on the back –repeated expressions of affection give affirmation, especially in significant moments. (Gen 33:4; 48:10; Psa 139:5, 10; Jer 31:3; Mark 8:22; Rom 16:16).

Questions for Review

1. Did your parents provide you with affirmation? How or how not?
2. Are you providing your children with a regular flow of affirmation? What ways do you do this and how can you improve?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 12: The Way Your Child Should Go

When you fill a balloon with air and let it go, it flies around in all directions then falls to the ground. This illustrates what can happen in parenting. When parents let a child run free, that child will later cause emotional distress for his or her mother (Prov 10:1; 29:6). Children need parents to guide them with intentional effort and care. To become a mature and responsible adult, a child needs parents to train him (Prov 22:6).

Understanding a Proverb

Good people debate the meaning of Proverbs 22:6. It says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” A proper understanding of this proverb finds a balance between two opposite interpretations. For instance, some people call this a promise. Others portray it as an ideal outcome with no guarantees.

The *promise* view misunderstands the nature of a proverb. A proverb makes a general observation about life from God’s perspective. But it doesn’t say everything possible. Consider Proverbs 22:4, which says, “By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life.” This observation is generally true, but humble people who fear the Lord do not always enjoy fortune, fame, and good health.

The *ideal* view also misunderstands the nature of a proverb. Though a proverb doesn’t say everything possible about a situation, it does speak the truth about reality. Consider Proverbs 22:4 again. Humble people who fear the Lord do not always enjoy fortune, fame, and good health. In fact, they may suffer instead (2 Tim 3:12). But humility and the fear of God are the only legitimate way to fortune, fame, and good health, nonetheless.

To understand Proverbs 22:6, you should read it as neither a guaranteed promise nor an elusive ideal. Instead, you should read it as a proverb that gives a true perspective about parenting, even though it is not comprehensive.

Understanding the Words

To embrace this proverb, you must understand the words. First, the Hebrew word for *train* means to provide verbal and hands-on guidance that develops proper behavior. As such, it resembles the Greek word that Paul used for child-training (Eph 6:4). This underscores the vital role that parents play in forming good character in the hearts of their children.

Next, the word *child* refers to a child of any age, from infancy to late adolescence (Gen 37:2; Exo 2:6; 1 Sam 1:24; 2 Kings 2:23). And the word *old* refers to independent, mature adulthood. In this phase of life, a child no longer needs parental training. Together, these words show that God intends for parents to provide guidance throughout the development process. Though needs may change, children need consistent hands-on parental guidance from birth to the start of adulthood.

In a physical sense, the word *way* means a path, road, or route that leads to a destination. In a figurative sense, it refers to the habits and objectives that serve as a pathway to guide

a person through the journey of life. To describe this further, the phrase “which he should go” explains that every child has an assigned “portion” in life, not just a generic template for all people. He or she needs parental guidance to identify this individual life-plan.

Understanding the Way

God gives parents the profound opportunity to guide their children into the life-plan God has for them. They should be like an expert archer who shoots arrows at a target (“the way he should go”), not a scientist who experiments by releasing a balloon (Prov 127:4). To guide your children in the right way, you should consider three related concepts.

Use Appropriate Words and Methods

As children move down the road of life, they pass through various life stages, from infant to toddler and beyond. A parent should adjust to each stage, understanding needs, using the right vocabulary, establishing the right expectations, and providing appropriate opportunities.

Emphasize God’s General Will Revealed in Scripture

Every child is unique and so is their God-given life-plan. But each one needs to follow the guidance of God’s Word (Deut 6:6-9). Wise parents will instill the teaching, values, and worldview of God’s Word into the hearts of their children from infancy to adulthood. This approach can guide a child both to genuine salvation through Jesus and to every other good work that God wants him or her to accomplish (John 14:6; 1 Tim 3:15-17).

Encourage God’s Specific Will

As you raise your child and pray for him or her, you will discover a unique personality, set of strengths and weaknesses, and interests. (After a child believes on Jesus, you also will be able to discover spiritual gifting.) You should help your child identify these factors in his or her life. Most importantly, you should teach your child to submit to God by following him in a personal, direct way (1 Sam 3:7-11). Teach the difference between selfish, independent living and surrendered, God-dependent living (Prov 3:5-6; Rom 12:1-8).

Understanding the Big Picture

Though Proverbs 22:6 doesn’t answer every question and give every detail about the human heart and the child-training process, it provides a basic template for parents to follow. From birth to adulthood, parents should use all the resources at their disposal. In reliance upon God, they should help each child discover and pursue God’s purpose and plan for his or her life. To the degree that they do this, the child will succeed in adulthood.

Questions for Review

1. Did your parents instill God’s will from Scripture into your approach to life? If so, how?
2. Did your parents help you to discover God’s specific will for your life? If so, how?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Lesson 13: Preparing Your Child for Marriage

The Bible does not provide children with a specific method or strategy for finding a spouse. In fact, cultures and families follow various models, each with variations. For some it is arranged marriage, for others it is courtship, and for others it is dating. Knowing this, the Bible does provide basic guidelines and principles for Christians to follow. Therefore, you should adjust your cultural and family approach to follow biblical teaching (Psa 119:105; Prov 3:5-6; Rom 12:1-2).

The Principle of Parental Involvement

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Eph 6:2-3)

Any approach to finding a spouse should involve wholesome parental involvement. Parents should be involved in the process from the beginning, and they should be able to provide their children with a candid perspective along the way. Children should welcome any guidance from their parents and should give serious attention to any input they provide. As such, it is generally unwise to pursue or enter a marriage without a parental blessing. Some forms of dating, for instance, wrongfully minimize this principle.

The Principle of Parental Understanding

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)

Just as children should embrace input and guidance from their parents, parents should take to heart any input and feedback from their children. In providing guidance, parents should avoid exasperating or frustrating a child by forcing him or her to make certain choices. While parents should not support a child’s unbiblical choices, they should remain flexible and understanding in areas of personal preference and feeling. Some forms of arranged marriages, for instance, wrongfully minimize this principle.

The Principle of Purity

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality ... that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified ... (1 Thess 4:3-8)

Under no circumstance should your child’s approach to finding a spouse include sexual activity. Though the unbelieving world generally disregards this principle, believers should take it to heart. Furthermore, a believer should avoid interacting with a prospective spouse in any way that “takes advantage” of him or her. This refers to using a pre-marriage relationship selfishly to meet needs in a way that is reserved for marriage alone.

The Principle of Compatibility

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Cor 6:14)

It is better to remain single than to marry a person with whom you are not spiritually aligned. Paul teaches this principle by repeating an Old Testament proverb (Amos 3:3). On this scriptural basis, a born-again Christian should never pursue or enter a marriage with an unbeliever. This does not mean that a believer should divorce an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12-14). Nevertheless, you should teach your child that a believer should not knowingly consider or enter a marriage with an unbeliever.

The Principle of Spiritual Maturity

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. (Psa 127:1)

This psalm underscores the importance of building a family on the foundation of God as Lord. This means that a husband and wife should agree to pursue biblical ideals, embrace biblical roles, and follow biblical guidance. Before a believer marries another believer, he or she should discuss one another's views on important biblical values and teaching in matters of marriage and family. Enrolling in a series of premarital counseling sessions with your pastor can help your child to do this.

The Principle of Financial Preparedness

Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house. (Prov 24:27)

He who is married cares about the things of the world – how he may please his wife. (1 Cor 7:33-34)

Before your child begins a serious search for a marriage partner, you should help him or her honestly assess their readiness from a financial and material standpoint. In particular, a prospective husband should evaluate whether he can provide housing, food, and other necessary living expenses in a marriage. If not, then he should refrain from pursuing a marriage until he is financially prepared to meet the daily needs of himself, a wife, and children who may follow. Furthermore, a man shouldn't count upon the income of his prospective wife to make ends meet (1 Tim 5:8; Tit 2:5). Though her income may be helpful or supplemental, it is wise to refrain from depending on her for the necessary budget. A prospective wife should carefully evaluate whether her prospective husband can provide adequately for the daily needs of life and family.

Review Questions

1. Which of these principles, if any, did you follow in finding your spouse?
2. How can you take steps to follow these principles together with your child(ren)?
3. How can your family put into practice what you have learned from this lesson?

Appendix 1: Supplementary Audio

The following audio sessions correspond with several of the lessons in this series. To enhance your study, you can listen to the corresponding audio if one is available.

[Viewing Family with the Right Perspective](#) (26 min.)

[The Power of Heartfelt Values](#) (38 min.)

[Scripture in the Home](#) (35 min.)

[Preventing Anger and Frustration](#) (38 min.)

[Providing Your Children with Presence](#) (33 min)

[Breaking Bad Parental Patterns](#) (34 min.)

[Meeting the Needs of Your Children](#) (61 min.)

[Biblical Child Training and Discipline](#) (37 min.)

[Positive Affirmation](#) (35 min.)

Appendix 2: Premarital Counseling Bible Study and Wedding Planner Guide

The following link provides an overview of an entire premarital counseling Bible study guide used by Faith Baptist Church in Corona, NY. It includes a thorough premarital inventory survey and even a wedding planner guide. With the link provided below, you can view the premarital sessions overview with a full PDF download link at the bottom of the page. This resource coordinates well with the final lesson of this parenting Bible study series, *Lesson 13: Preparing Your Children for Marriage*.

[View the Premarital Counseling Overview and Download the Complete Guide](#)