

The Call to Disciple Your Children  
CPC Parenting Conference 2018  
Kevin Nelson

**Matthew 19:14**

*“but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”*

**“Nothing is more important in your life than being one of God’s tools to form a human soul.”**

Paul Tripp

1. Your priorities: “Nothing is more important in your life...”

**Qualifications:** *Not everything about parenting is important (also, few possible exceptions: Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.)*

**A. Parenting Tired and Irritated**

Parents are so exhausted that they have little patience and grace for their children. Our parenting often comes reactionary, because we have no time or energy for forethought.

Our desire for our children to be compliant and convenient, often has more to do with our goals and less to do with their character. As we busily try to accomplish our agenda, even our agenda for them, we can fail to follow God’s call.

*“Sadly, most correction occurs as a byproduct of children being an embarrassment or irritation. Our idea of parenting does not include shepherding. Our culture sees a parent as an adult care provider. Quality time is considered having fun together. Fun together is not a bad idea, but it is light years away from directing your child in the ways of God.”* Tedd Tripp

When do you find your children most irritating? What is the greatest source of your tiredness?

There may be solutions to your tiredness...

- Do less... scale back your work, scale back children’s activities, etc.
- Expect less... dial back quality you demand of yourself and them
- Plan for more rest...earlier sleep, hiring/planning for sitting/housekeeping/better division of labor at home

There may not be practical solutions to your tiredness...

- Tiredness is a temptation to sin, not an excuse
- Tiredness is a weakness that needs to drive you to God in dependence
- You need to keep in mind your limited resources and how they must affect your expectations.

**Point:** We often don't have enough energy to think about our parenting as a high calling. We live in the moment, and our tiredness allows us to remain reactionary. Our irritation can come from misaligned priorities and misses the fact that parenting is an opportunity to do something significant in our lives.

## **B. Communicating What You Value: your time, expenses, behavior at home**

**Matthew 6:21** *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Without saying a word, children are learning what to value by how you spend your time and money. Their sense of value is skewed (i.e., you can never be home enough), however, they are learning your priorities.

What would your children say is most important to you? What habits or patterns do you display at home that inform their understanding?

- Negative: Texting, emailing at the dinner table; eating in front of the television; prioritizing cleanliness/homework/athletics over godliness.
- Positive: Prioritizing Sunday worship; prioritizing family worship; praying together in difficult situations; giving time to the Lord.

## **C. Your Goals in Parenting vs. Your Call to Disciple**

*You don't own your child.* Your role is to represent God. We must serve God's purposes for the child and not our own.

- Getting your fulfillment: getting your identity, meaning/purpose, from your children
  - Your identity is from the Lord. You represent him as you parent.
- Engineering your ideal child: trying to turn your child into something you think will be good for them (successful, happy, smart, wealthy, attractive)
  - Teach your child that his/her identity is in Christ
  - Your call is to be used by God to lead them to Christ.
- Looking for indicators to know you've been a good parent
  - You can't engineer your children. You can't make them good kids. You can't make them Christians. Your responsibility is to the Lord to be faithful and to entrust them to the One who is in control and to raise them as Christians.

## **D. Sabbath**

Sabbath observance is a gift to your family. If you communicate it like a burden, your children will feel it as a burden. It is a gift, because it frees us from the demands of the other six days. It focuses us on meaningful good news.

Leisure is not taboo, but it can be deceptively dangerous. How can leisure substitute real good news? How can sporting events or vegging out become burdensome?

## **E. Your Call**

**Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 20–23**

[4] *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates...*

[20] *“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ [21] then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. [22] And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. [23] And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers.*

Based on Dt. 6, what is your call as a parent?

How is the way God is presented in Dt. 6 compare with the way you are presenting God?

#### **F. Constantly Put Before Your Child a Glorious and Gracious God**

*“When your child questions the rules, don’t puff up your chest and tell him he better obey or else...don’t just threatened him with the law of God...don’t just talk about God as just a judge... talk about a God who redeemed them, talk about grace, talk about God as helper and friend who meets us in our weakness with forgiveness, wisdom, and strength” Paul Tripp*

Is God awe-inspiring to you and your children?

Is praise toward God a part of your home life? Is God behind the success and the helper in your inability and failure?

## **2. Being One of God’s Tools...**

**A. You cannot shelter your child or control their environment** to such an extent that it will determine his/her outcome. On the other hand, you must not be naïve about the influences that shape your child’s life.

**B. Children don’t have the wisdom necessary to avoid dangerous influences.** However, sheltering a child can have negative consequences: it can make the taboos attractive; it can feed fear in the child; it can stunt discernment; it can engender sinful biases about others.

How do you shape your child’s environment?

#### **C. Little Interpreters**

*“The person your child becomes is a product of two things. The first is his life experience. The second is how he interacts with that experience.” Tedd Tripp 10*

Help your child process all influences in their lives, even the ones you provide.

### 3. ...To Form a Human Soul

#### **A. Step One: Admit the Problem**

Your child isn't just disobedient, rude, rambunctious, and immature. The truth is your child is a sinner and can only change in the same way that all sinners change.

It is vital to admit that you have no power in yourself to change your child. Good parenting is about accepting that inability and representing the God who alone has the power to change your child.

What happens when the parent believes that the child can be changed simply by more instruction and discipline? What does a child look like who only receives "law" from that parent?

#### **B. The Law**

Children, because they are sinful, are not able to be self-governing. They need guidance and instruction. They need discipline.

God's law provides guidance and protective wisdom. It can teach right and wrong.

Instruct your child in the Proverbs. Have your child learn the Ten Commandments.

One certain outcome will be that their sinful hearts will be exposed and they will learn the depths of their moral inability. But, with this, you must always teach your child that the God who gives us commands is the same God who gives us grace in the gospel.

#### ***K.I.S.S. Approach to the Law for Kids***

**Mark 12:28–31** [28] *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"* [29] *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* [31] *The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these."

Teach your children that all of their actions should be loving to God and toward others. When they sin, they can easily categorize their own sin as failing one of these.

This summary of the law also holds in front of them an image of the type of person they should aspire to be.

You wouldn't simply want your children to play quietly and respectfully, or even to be diligently doing their homework while someone in their family is obviously in need. Developing character

is more than just getting them to avoid rebellion. It is teaching them to become loving and selfless.

### **C. Sinful (or at least misguided) Attempts to Get Children to Obey**

*"It's not our children's sin that is in the way of good parenting; it's our tendency to make parenting about our little kingdom of wants, needs, desires, and our tendency to want our children to serve the purposes of our kingdom rather than submit to the purposes of God's kingdom."* Paul Tripp

#### 1) Shame and Guilt

*"I can't believe that you would even think of doing such a thing"*

*"When I was your age, I would never have thought of doing that"*

*"I never thought I'd have to deal with such a thing"*

*"After all I've done for you, and this is the way you're going to treat me"*

*"You have no idea what you've put us through"*

How would you respond to statements like this? It may change outward behavior, but it will drive the child from you and from God. It will begin to negatively shape their self-perception.

#### 2) Fear/Threat

We use it because it produces immediate results. Again, though, it drives the child away from you and from God (especially, when you reinforce your threat with the image of God as judge).

The child who obeys through fear will never learn the beauty of obeying God and rejoicing in a God who places authorities over us. And, there will come a time when they don't fear you anymore.

#### 3) Bribery

Another "effective" method that will produce unintended negative consequences. Bribery will teach moral economics: cost/benefit analysis of obeying. It produces selfishness. The child will not look after the interest of others. He/she will never embrace authority but is inadvertently set up as the authority.

#### 4) Appealing to Emotions

*"Please do your work. I get so upset when you don't. It makes me feel like crying. I wonder where I went wrong."*

This can be confusing to the child and damaging to your relationship. It can easily invert the parent/child relationship, making the child bear the emotional burden of the parent.

#### 4b) Taking Disobedience Personal

*"After all I've done for you..."*

We take disobedience too personally. Often the child is simply lazy or self-centered and not intentionally attacking you. Even if they do intend it personally, you must guard your own heart from riding the ebb and flow of your child's approval. Your self-worth must be grounded in Christ.

When do you tend to take disobedience personally?

#### 5) Manipulating Their Environment

Moving the cookie jar out of reach. Blocking access to the computer. Grounding the child to his/her room.

On the one hand, there is wisdom in preventing temptation that is too great for your child. On the other hand, these methods don't address the sin. They don't do anything positive for the child.

#### 6) Reasoning with the Child

"Don't you want to eat lunch right now? It will get cold if it sits out."

"Wouldn't it be more fun to share?"

It obscures the line of authority. Parents can also be "outwitted" by the immature responses given by kids.

#### Traps

- Repeating yourself
- Raising your voice
- Tolerating small acts of disobedience
- Waiting until you are too angry

#### **D. Gospel Parenting**

Every sin your child commits, every failure, every time they struggle, every moment of weakness/inability, every success, every victory, every conversation is an opportunity to lead your child to Christ.

Will you see it as an opportunity to lead them to Christ? Will you view it as a Divine appointment to pastor your child's heart?

First, realize that God doesn't ask you to be able to transform your child; he asks you to be a willing tool for his work in their hearts.

Your greatest asset is your need of a savior.

- When your first instinct is to act out of anger and frustration, you need a savior to repent to and to ask forgiveness of.
- When you are filled with self-righteousness or hardness of heart, God's grace can make your heart tender toward your child.

- When you know you've failed and sinned, God's grace can forgive and free you from regret.

Because you know your sin, you can find empathy with your child. You can point them to the same Savior that they need. Knowing that they are at heart a sinner like you will prevent you from condemning them or expecting them to change simply through your commands.

Know your child's Idols [See Idol Chart]

A major part of discipling your child is learning their idols, exposing them, and showing how dangerous they are. They need more than an authoritative "no;" they need to understand their own heart.

- What is the child struggling with when she says, "I'll be the only one who doesn't go. How embarrassing is that?"
- What does the child need when he chooses to play instead of doing his work?
- What does she struggle with when she is crushed by an imperfect grade or is despondent because of a harsh comment by a teacher?
- What is the real issue when your children fight over a game, and he says, "I had it first"?

If you share the same idol as your child, you can either ignore it and justify your sin, or share your struggle with your child and point them to the savior.

It's important to spell out for the child how the idol they follow promises good but will always frustrate them and leave them miserable. And, God desires to free them and satisfy them in much deeper ways.

### **Set Before Your Child A Beautiful Savior**

"Your job is to open the eyes of our children to the stunning glory of God." Paul Tripp

You must go beyond telling them how bad sin is. You need to give them a vision for the abundant life that God is offering: Who wouldn't want to live in a world where everyone was kind, loving, humble, patient, giving, and serving? Who wouldn't want to live in a world where no one ever stole anything, where no one ever took another person's wife, where there was no violence for murder, where no one was ever jealous or eaten by envy, where governments weren't corrupt, and where people were always truthful?

And, when they fail to live up to this, tell them the story of a God who has redeemed them and offers forgiveness. Tell them about the new heart that God intends to produce in them, as we follow him. Empathize with their struggle and help them to see that you need this Savior, too.

### **Take the Long-view**

Parenting is not a series of one-off victories over problems in your child's life. It is a long battle of continuing to guide, confront, mold, and encourage.

## How do you Parent a Fool?

**Proverbs 22:15** *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”*

Children need the Law to help them understand their folly and to teach them what godly character looks like. But, they also need to know the savior that has redeemed them from their folly.

### Practical Suggestions

The “why did you” line of questioning never works with children and rarely works with adults. Here are some more productive questions:

1. What were you feeling when you hit your sister?
2. What did your sister do to make you mad?
3. Help me understand how hitting her seemed to make things better.
4. What was the problem with what she was doing to you?
5. In what other ways could you have responded?
6. How do you think your response reflected trust or lack of trust in God’s ability to provide for you?

### Punishments

**Hebrews 12:11** *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

**Wrong moments to discipline:** inability to perform, accidents, before having all of the facts, while you are angry

Punitive/retributive punishment is not designed to do something for a child; it is often done to do something against a child. This approach produces distance between parent and child.

*“If correction orbits around the parent who has been offended, the focus will be venting anger or, perhaps, taking vengeance. The function is punitive. If, however, correction orbits around God as the one offended, then the focus is on restoration. The function is remedial.”* Tedd Tripp

### Guidelines:

- Discuss what the child has done wrong and why it is your responsibility to punish
- Guide the child in thinking through what he should have done
- Do not punish in public: do not humiliate or embarrass
- Take time for reconciliation
- Require the child to make restitution