



Promises for Parents

Isaiah 44:3-5

David Sunday

Mothers' Day, May 10, 2015

Heavenly Father, how great is Your faithfulness from generation to generation! You've never failed us, our God. We thank You that You are there for us in all our afflictions. We pray for those who are ill within our church family and those who are grieving right now, especially for John and Karen Bieber, as they grieve the loss of John's dad. Prove to be a faithful refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). We thank You for Your great faithfulness to us as families, and I pray, Lord, as we look to Your Word that You would instill hope, renewed faith, courage, joy, plus a tenacity of prayerfulness and commitment to You to disciple future generations. Lord, we thank You for godly mothers and grandmothers. We pray, Lord, that their presence in our lives, or the memory of their presence, would serve to help us fan into flame the gifts you have placed in us, for You have not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and self-control.

We thank You for the example that godly women have been in our lives. We pray, Lord, for mothers who are expecting children right now, that You would give hope, strength, health, courage and endurance. Provide safe deliveries for them. We pray, Lord, for mothers right now who are grieving the loss of children and for women who would love to be mothers but, due to various providential circumstances, are not able to be. Lord, we pray that You would draw near and comfort them. Prove to be an all-sufficient portion for them.

Lord, we thank You for all who serve you in this vocation as parents. I pray now that You would take the teaching of Your Word and let it distill as dew. Let it bring refreshment and illumination to our minds and direction to our lives. Use this message, Lord, to conform us to Your purposes for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

This Mother's Day, I want to wish all moms and grandmas here a happy Mother's Day. I am the beneficiary of godly great-grandmothers, godly grandmothers and an extraordinary mother, who I think might be watching on livestream right now. (If so, happy Mother's Day, Mom!) I am very grateful for the influence these women have had on my life. I believe my children have been blessed with an exceptional mother themselves. I know that many of you are endeavoring with all that you have within you to be faithful in this calling.

I want to be an encouragement to all parents today. This is a message for parents, not just for mothers. It's for moms and dads. It doesn't just apply to those who have children of their

own. As members of Christ's Church, we are all vested in the discipleship of the children and future generations. We all have a great interest in seeing future generations raised up to love and serve Jesus. I hope this message will re-instill that vision in all of us.

As parents, I want to ask you this: Do you believe God intends blessing for your children and grandchildren? Do you have a hopeful confidence that God intends blessing for your offspring and future generations? My aim here is to instill within every godly parent a hopeful confidence in God's intention to do good to us and to our children. We are going to be looking to God's Word for the basis of that confidence, but, first, there are three attitudes we need to correct and avoid as we approach this subject.

The first is an attitude of presumption. Do you find yourself having these thoughts: "Well, of course, I took my kids to church. They prayed a prayer when they were little. Of course, God is going to bless my children!"? It's very possible that you are approaching this issue with an attitude of presumption. By God's Word, I would ask you to repent of that attitude. We should never think it's guaranteed that our children are going to be followers of Jesus just because they were raised in a Christian home. We should never take it for granted or act as if God is obligated to save our children.

As we think about future generations and about our own children, a good test to gauge whether or not there is presumption in your heart is to ask yourself, "Is there anything in the life of my kids that is more important to me than their discipleship or their following after Jesus?" Is their GPA commanding more attention than their spiritual discipleship? Is their success in athletics or their popularity in school or their financial well-being of more concern on my heart than that they follow Jesus and live for Him? If there is anything in your life that is more important to you as a parent than that your kids follow Jesus with all their heart, God is calling you to repent and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Attack that attitude of presumption.

Also, I hope that God's Word will address areas of unbelief in our lives. We know that the salvation of our children is not automatic. It is not guaranteed just because they are in a Christian home. We can all think of examples of very godly parents who have children who are not yet following Jesus. And I emphasize the word, "yet." We don't know what God will do. However, it is possible to infer, "Who knows if my kids are among the elect or not? Who knows if God's going to save my kids or not?"

The practical effect of that inference on your thinking is that it is cultivating passivity in your life. You look at the state of your kids and think, "I don't know. There's nothing I can do to save them." You have become passive in unbelief toward praying, discipline and hoping in God

for blessing upon your children. If that is the case, I hope God's Word will call you to the tenacious wrestling with God that Jacob had when he said, "I will not let You go until You bless me."

Grandparents, I hope that's the approach you will take toward your grandchildren and children. Tenaciously wrestle with God for the Holy Spirit's work in future generations. Do not let go until you see all your children and grandchildren lovingly serving Jesus Christ.

Finally, I hope that this message will help those of you who are struggling with discouragement right now. Raising children in this generation can be very discouraging. In my mind, I have faces of parents who have been earnestly praying, pleading passionately and persisting faithfully in presenting the gospel to their children. Right now, there is little evidence of grace, life or faith. Some of you right now have adult children who are decisively turning away from the paths of Christ, His gospel and His Church. As parents, I cannot think of anything that would be a greater heartache for Kate and me than that.

So I pray that you will have great encouragement from God as You listen to His Word

Those of you who are praying, keep on praying. Keep on loving. Keep on trusting in a God Whose goodness, grace and mercy are deeper than our worst sins and wider than our farthest wanderings. He is a God Whose arm is not shortened so that it cannot save, Whose ear is not deaf so that it cannot hear Whose heart is not hardened toward our children and Whose love for them is certainly not less than our love for our kids. I hope this message will bring you encouragement.

First, before we turn to the Word of God and look at how God's Word instills this hope in us, I want to play an audio clip that I think captures this attitude and posture we want to have as we approach the great work of parenting as Christians. This comes from Desiring God Ministries Podcast, and it is with Ray Ortlund, Jr., who was raised by godly parents, Ray and Anne. You may remember them from the Haven of Rest broadcast. Tony Reinke asked Ray Ortlund, Jr., "In what ways did your father impact you as a child, and in turn, what did you seek to instill in your three sons and your daughter when they were young?" Listen and be encouraged by Ray Ortlund, Jr.'s answer:

Let me just paint the picture of a moment with my dad that is very dear to me. We were in the front yard and I was 10 or 12 years old. I forget. And we were, I guess, doing yard work. Whatever the context was, I can't pull that up in my memory, but he turned to me and looked me right in the eye in the middle of our conversation and said, "You know, Bud, before time began, God chose you."

I think my eyes got real big, you know. In my heart I thought, "Oh, come on. You mean God Almighty in heaven way back then saw little tiny me?" And I felt so loved. I felt loved by God. It filled my heart

with wonder so that years later when I heard about the doctrine of election some of my friends with whom I was dialoging about that, they had difficulty with it, they resisted it—I had no problem at all. I thought it was wonderful. And it was obviously biblical, because my dad had really helped me—years before in a moment of theological education that I didn’t realize was that— he helped me at the level of my heart to feel the love of God in the doctrine of election.

But when Jani and I raised our kids, we just decided to love it—sometimes parents treat parenting as if it is some kind of death sentence. I mean, we loved it. We decided to love it. And, Tony, we just thought through, you know, what kind of environment are we going to create for these precious children as their most formative experience to give them the best start in life? And we just had a conviction that the glory of the Lord is ultimate reality. I thought of Exodus 33:18–19. Moses prayed, “Please show me Your glory.” And the Lord said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you.” So ultimate reality is the glorious goodness of God. We just wanted to create a home environment where our children would find that easy to believe.

We tried to in-load joy and sincerity and tenderness and love and wisdom and gentleness and laughter. You know, with discipline and boundaries, too, because that is part of God’s goodness. I don’t know how successful we were in that effort, but that is what we tried to do because we just believed that ultimate reality is not darkness and despair, but the glorious goodness of God.

“Ultimate reality is not darkness and not despair, but the glorious goodness of God.” How do we apply that to our parenting? Here is the main claim of this message (I am borrowing it from John Piper and twisting it a bit): God has ordained regularly and normally to work through some means—instruction of God’s Word, the restraint of God’s discipline, the demonstration of God’s love and the power of prayer. God has ordained regularly and normally to work through those gracious means for the salvation of the children of believers.

First, we have a responsibility here to instruct using God’s Word. Listen to Deuteronomy 11:18-21:

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

God's Word must be in us, parents. It must be laid up in our hearts and in our souls. When you are working out in the front yard with your 10-12-year-old son, talk about God's truth and God's words. Weave God's Word into the life of your family.

Second, regarding God's discipline, Ray talked about appropriate boundaries, because fathers are commanded to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). This must always be done in love, for Paul also says in Colossians 3:21, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*" Bathe all of these activities in prayer, like Abraham crying out to God, "*Oh that Ishmael might live before you!*" (Genesis 17:18), or like Samson's father, Manoah, crying out, "*Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?*" (Judges 13:12).

So you see there are some responsibilities here, but God has ordained regularly and normally to work through these means of grace to bring blessing—salvation—to the children of believers. He is not obligated to do that. It is not an automatic guarantee. There may be reasons in God's sovereign grace and wisdom why He would choose otherwise, but we ought to be encouraged that God's regular and normal way is to work through these means to bring blessing to the children of believers.

Thank God that His blessing on our children is not dependent on how successful we are as parents. If we are humble, I think we could all say, "There are ways in which I have failed miserably as a parent." But thank God that the hope we are about to look at in God's Word is not sabotaged by our failures. God gives us great confidence and promises in His Word to fuel our hope that He intends blessing for our children.

In the remainder of our time, I want to walk through some of these great truths in God's Word. We are going to go from Genesis to the New Testament, and we are not going to deeply expound upon these passages. Instead, I want the cumulative effect of these words to press down on your heart, drive out discouragement and despair, correct any presumptions that may be there and give us hope.

First, let's open our Bibles to Genesis 17:7. This is God's covenant with Abraham which is like a paradigm for God's plan of redemption that is going to be carried out throughout the rest of the Scriptures. It is like the seedbed from which all the flowers of God's grace and salvation arise out of that seedbed. Look at what God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:7: "*And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.*" God's purposes of grace were not only for Abraham. They are for future generations. It is an everlasting covenant that God made with Abraham.

Let's fast forward to Deuteronomy 30:6. Here God made promises through Moses to a repentant people. It is really important that we understand this is for people who repent before the Lord. They are saying, "We want to turn from sin and turn to You. Lord, we want our hearts to cleave to You. We want to follow after You in covenant faithfulness." To those repentant people, God said through Moses these wonderful words: "*And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*" What a wonderful truth that you can pray for your kids before the Lord!

Let's turn to the Psalms. I know we are moving fast, but we will slow down when we get to Isaiah. Let's look at Psalms 100, 102 and 103 to see God's character revealed. Psalm 100:4 says, "*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*" The reason we should be so full of praise, thanks and blessing to the name of God is because of His character in verse five, which is this: "*For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*" How great is His faithfulness, from age to age, from generation to generation! He has never failed us.

Psalm 102:28 is a statement of confidence in the character of God that I have often turned to and used to inspire me with hope for my children and future generations. Psalm 102:28 says, "*The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.*" I want my children to be established in their faith, walking securely with God. I know that if they're following Him, they are secure. It doesn't matter what kind of dangers and calamities they face in this life; they are secure forever in Him. The Psalmist expresses that confidence here.

In Psalm 103:17-18, he gives thanks for the steadfast love of the Lord. "*But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.*"

So we see this covenantal character of our God. His work of grace and mercy is intended to go from generation to generation.

Now, what I want you to do is turn to the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah spoke some wonderfully encouraging words in his oracles of restoration that took place from Isaiah 40 to the end of the book. These were a people who were chastised for their sin. They experienced great spiritual discipline from the Lord. They became dry and weary, wondering, "Is there any hope for us?" And God spoke wonderful words of comfort to His people in these chapters.

Isaiah 44:1-3a says:

*But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!
Thus says the Lord who made you,*

*who formed you from the womb and will help you:
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun¹ whom I have chosen.
For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground.*

Parents, it starts with us coming before the Lord for spiritual revival and renewal. We must cultivate an ongoing, vital, lively walk with the Lord. We must be thirsty and continually be replenished by the Holy Spirit. Our walk with Him must be an ongoing, living relationship. God says, "I will pour water on you when you are thirsty."

Look at the middle of verse three: "*I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*" Parents, this is what our kids need more than anything. Yes, we need to instruct them in the Word, but, in addition to the Word, they need the Spirit to give them new life. They need the Spirit to give them a new heart. They need the Spirit to take the Living Word and make their dead hearts alive to it. God says, "I'm not going to just trickle a little bit of My Spirit. I'm going to pour out My Spirit generously upon your offspring and My blessing upon your descendants."

Their growth is going to be vigorous. "*They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams*" (Isaiah 44:4). They are going to be public in their witness and in their testimony for the Lord among the nations. "*This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's,' and name himself by the name of Israel*" (Isaiah 44:5). They will find their identity in God and in being joined to God's people. God says, "This is what I'm going to do for you, My people." I want these types of promises to encourage us as parents to pray and pray earnestly.

Charles Spurgeon encouraged this kind of prayer. He said, "The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you." Is God moving you to pray earnestly? He said:

If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest, too. But if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy, too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child or your hearer perishing for lack of Christ and start up at once, and begin to cry, "God, give me converts or I die!" Then you will have converts.

Of course, that applies in many areas, but he was thinking first and foremost of parents praying for their children and grandparents praying for their grandchildren in such an agony that our kids cannot feel easy in their unbelief. They should always feel a challenge from our prayerful

¹ A diminutive term of affection and endearment. It is an intimate, tender term.

presence in their lives. Promises like Isaiah 44 encourage us to do that. The gift of God's Spirit also encourages us to do that.

Let's turn now to Isaiah 59:21. Here is a verse that should give us great confidence in the abiding potency of God's Spirit and Word. There may be a son or daughter here who simply came to wish your mom a happy Mother's Day. You may not be following the Lord. There are some things said here in these passages in Isaiah that I hope you will listen to and be arrested by. There is truth that God has instilled into your life that you are going to find difficult to get away from, because God loves you. God has spoken His words to you and they are living words. You can try to silence them, but they continue to exert their influence over your life. You cannot run farther than God's arm can reach. God wants you to know that you are an offspring of those who are blessed by the Lord. It is like a mark on your life. Your parents are blessed by the Lord, and you have been blessed by being raised in their home. God is not done with you. He is the Hound of Heaven, pursuing you. He is full of love and mercy, but He is also able to make you very restless and discontent with life as it is until you find your rest in God. We are pleading that you would open your heart, as He opens your heart to Him, and that you would listen afresh to the words you have known from the beginning. They are living and powerful words.

Isaiah 59:21 says, *"And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth...'"* God's people could not stop speaking His Word if their lives depended on it. We love the Word of God, and it *"shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the Lord, 'from this time forth and forevermore."*

I remember about 20 years ago there was a man some of you knew named John Smalley. He had been raised in a very strict Christian home in England, having been taught the Word of God very thoroughly. He knew a hymnal from front to back. He could quote hymns like you couldn't believe. However, from his teenage years until he was close to 40, John was as far from God as you could imagine. He did not profess any faith in Christ and he did not want anything to do with the faith of his parents. However, he went through some difficulties and pain in his life. Out of that, the Holy Spirit arrested his heart and opened his eyes afresh to the gospel. The amazing thing about John was that the minute he was converted, he could have passed a pre-seminary Bible test. He knew so much Scripture. The only difference was that His heart had become alive to the living Word of God. It was almost like he was a mature disciple right away because of the potency of God's Word that had been planted in Him, words He could not escape even though he was trying to.

God is concerned about our children and their salvation because God's glory is at stake. Look at Isaiah 61:9. Here we see God's purpose for our children is that they would be part of fulfilling the Great Commission. Through them, the name of God will be known among the nations. Isaiah 61:9 says, *"Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed."* God's purpose for our kids is that all who see them will acknowledge that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.

Let's look at one more passage in Isaiah. Isaiah 65:23-24 looks forward to the new creation, the end of all things, but the Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). So life in the new creation should already be tasted now." What we see for God's people in the new creation is this in Isaiah 65:23: *"They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity..."*

Dear Mom, God saved you and called you out of darkness and into His light. He did not weave together in your womb that child or create that child whom you so lovingly adopted years ago in vain. He did not bring that child into your life for calamity. He brought that child into a believing home for blessing, not for calamity. He is good and gracious in His purposes.

"They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Do you hear God's readiness to answer the prayers of His people?

Jeremiah 30:10 says, *"Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity."* Thanks be to God for the hope He gives us in His Word!

Let me tell you a story about St. Augustine, who was probably the greatest theologian the church has ever known and one of our greatest pastoral leaders in the first thousand years of Christian history. It has universally been said by those who wrote of Augustine that the most constant spiritual influence on his life was his mother, Monica. Monica struggled with alcoholism when she was younger, so she was a flawed woman just like us. She wasn't perfect, but she loved Christ. She prayed for her son. Her husband at that time was not a believer. In Augustine's Confessions, he mentions his mother's presence at important turning points in his life. When he was becoming an adolescent, she took him aside and privately warned him to flee from sexual immorality, advice that he did not heed. She watched as he lived an immoral lifestyle. She grieved, prayed and shed tears over him. Later in life, he was so brilliant that he joined the sect of the Manicheans, a philosophical and theological heresy. It distressed her so

greatly that for a while she would not let her son into her house. She went to the bishop and pleaded with him, "Please take my son and try to convince him to turn away from this sect." The bishop said, "He's too brilliant in rhetoric. I don't want to argue with him, but I am sure that someone with so bright a mind cannot continue in that error for long." Monica kept praying and pleading; she continued going to the bishop, crying. Finally, the bishop became exasperated with her and said with a mixture of frustration and compassion, "Go! Go! Leave me alone! Continue what you are doing, praying." (If you come to any of your pastors or elders, I hope we will never tell you to leave us alone.) What he said then was so beautiful. Listen to this: "Continue what you are doing. It is not possible that the son of so many prayers and tears should be lost."

Think about that. How many prayers and tears have you shed for your sons, your daughters, your grandchildren? Is there anything you care about more than their spiritual vitality and them following after Jesus? If you are a son or daughter who is here to bless your mom today, I want you to know that your godly mother wants nothing more than that you love and follow Jesus. There is nothing more important than this. If you are the subject of prayers and tears like Augustine was, watch out, because God has His eye on you. God has not let go of you. God is not done with you.

We could go to the New Testament and see Jesus saying, "*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 19:14). The Apostle Peter preached at Pentecost, "*For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself*" (Acts 2:39).

What is your response to these descriptions of God's heart? When you hear these promises, do you say, "Oh, yes, that keeps me hoping, encouraged and praying"? Or when you hear these promises, do you say, "Yeah, but..."? You are so focused on the difficulties of right now and so discouraged over what you are seeing that that has become more real to you than what God reveals of His heart in His Word. Don't give up. Don't lose heart. Don't stop praying. Don't stop loving.

Church, let's be an encouragement to one another. I hope we will never be the type of people who see parents doing a good job disciplining and raising their kids, who are nice, compliant and looking good, and say, "Those kids are going to be blessed because their parents are doing so well." But if we look over here and see some kids who are really struggling, I hope we will never be the type of church that says, "What's wrong with those parents? What are they doing wrong?" We know that salvation belongs to the Lord. It is not guaranteed by our good works, and it is not sabotaged by our failures. There are many godly parents who are crying out to God at this moment for children who are not walking with Him. What can we do to come

alongside and encourage them in that? We must promote an atmosphere of grace and prayerful intercession.

I would encourage you to go on the Desiring God blog and read [an article](#) that was written this week by a woman named Kim Ransleben, called, “Parenting in the Valley of Dry Bones.” She talks about the squabbles, the incessant complaining and the attitudes that mothers have to deal with, as well as friends who trouble you, tweets that alarm you and secrets that worry you. She asks, “Do you feel like all you see is dust and death?” Her counsel is, “Do as Ezekiel did to the Valley of Dry Bones. Speak God’s Word. Pray for God’s Spirit.” Listen to how she wraps up her article:

We can face the areas of sinfulness in them we once feared, convinced that the God Who speaks life is able to breathe life into them. He is able to make them know Him and live for Him forever. He is the One Who said the harvest of His people is plentiful, greater than the number of stars in the sky. He is the One Who sent His only Son so that your son or daughter might proclaim the wonders of His grace...

Do not fear the death you see in their lives. God knows what to do with it. After all, dry bones are all He’s ever had to work with in His people.

Let’s pray.

Lord, we come to You very aware of our need and also very encouraged by Your promises and presence. Help us, Lord, not to take anything for granted. Helps us not to be presumptuous. Forgive us, Lord, when we have allowed other priorities to transcend that which is of first importance. Lord, where we are weary, fearful and discouraged, breathe hope. We need You, Lord, and we plead with You for our children. Lord, would you save them? Would you make them a mighty testimony for You in this world? Would you cause future generations that arise from this church to be stronger, more alive and more vital for Jesus than any of us are right now? Would you cause Your glory to be seen from generation to generation through this church and through our families? We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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