

Family Matters

Part 6

Parenting Begins With Self-Examination

*“Whatever you have learned or received, or heard from me, or **seen in me** – put it into practice.” Philippians 4:9*

Mirrors are interesting things. What we see is what we get. We sometimes hope when we look into a mirror that we will see something different, but a mirror only reflects what is in front of it. The mirror may be cracked or distorted, but it still reflects. “Mirror, mirror on the wall, tell me who is the fairest of them all . . .” Well, our children are great mirrors. They imitate what they see in us. Yes, each is unique and has their own personality and responsibility before God, but we leave an indelible imprint on them every day we are with them. I would say that many of the things we don’t like in what we see in our kids, is exactly what we know and wish were different in ourselves. They expose our weaknesses, our flaws, our shortcomings, our anger, our laziness, our hypocrisy. They also show our strengths, values, and work ethic. If you see it in the kids, you will see it also in the parents, and vice versa. They follow our lead. They do what we do, talk like we talk, value what we value, down to the way we spend our money and time, even in how we honor or dishonor those in authority, even in those sarcastic responses or rolling of our eyes when we are not pleased. They are us in every way – we are truly an indelible family. Before we can address them as their parents, we must first begin with ourselves. We are the objects in the mirror.

We need to begin by examining ourselves (Matt. 7:3-5), and “see if there be any wicked way in me” (Ps. 139:24a KJV). Galatians 6:1 says, “If anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; **each one looking to yourself**, so that you too will not be tempted.” “Restore” gives the idea of setting a bone which has been broken to make it reusable, not to make it worse. Our goal is restoration and reconciliation, not brokenness and bitterness.

Promises To Parents:

God has promised His blessing on our marriage and family through our obedience. The Scripture is full of the “if . . . then” promises. Blessing follows obedience – in Israel’s case, in the church, and in a Christian home.

Proverbs 4:33 “He blesses the **dwelling** of the righteous.”

Proverbs 12:7 “The **house** of the righteous will stand.”

Proverbs 14:1 “The wise woman builds her **house** . . .”

Proverbs 14:11 “The **tent** of the upright will flourish.”

Proverbs 24:3 “By wisdom a **house** is built. And by understanding it is established.”

Proverbs 14:26 “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge.”

Proverbs 17:6 “Grandchildren are the crown of the old men, and the glory of sons is their father.”

Proverbs 20:7 “A righteous man who walks in his integrity, how **blessed** are his sons after him.”

Proverbs 31:23, 31 “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” “Give her **the product of her hands**, and let **her works praise her** in the gates.”

“The hearts of your children are being formed by your family life. Your daily schedule is teaching their hearts what is truly important about life. Their hearts are being molded by the discussions that take place, or fail to take place, around the dinner table. Their worldview, morality, and faith are all taking shape right before your eyes . . . whether you see it or not. God has granted to us as parents overwhelming power and influence in the hearts of our kids.” “We must realize that God has given to moms and dads the primary responsibility and power to shape the hearts of children. We must not delegate it to others.” “The power of a parent to wound a child’s heart is extreme. Those who are closest to us have the greatest power to hurt us.” “Our careless words, harsh treatment and angry outbursts can leave wounds that last a lifetime.” “Children need a home in which they are confident that Mom and Dad love God, love each other, and love them.” (said by a father to a child), “In order to love you the best that I can, I need to love your mother. And in order to love your mother the best that I can, I need to love Jesus.” (Rob Rienow, God’s Grand Vision For The Home. p. 20-25)

The child's most important influence comes from parents. Parents must ensure that no other influence takes precedence. Parents must never abdicate their God-given parental role. Character is not inbred by genetics. Children are taught to be what they become. As parents, we will be held accountable if we have turned our children over to other influences that shape their character in ungodly ways. Parenting is an issue of stewardship. Good parenting involves both quality and quantity time. Both are important and you really must have both together to be effective. Parenting is a full-time job. Part-time parents have minimal impact and it shows up in the kids. Absent parenting affects the final outcome. Deuteronomy 6 makes it clear that parenting encompasses the whole of a child's life (inside, outside, traveling, education, play, morning, evening, young, old) and that we are to bring all of us into how we parent. It cannot be a half-hearted peripheral effort.

It Begins With A Healthy Marriage

John MacArthur said, "The single most important foundation for successful parenting is a healthy Christ-centered marriage" (Successful Christian Parenting, p. 159). I fully agree! A healthy marriage patterns itself after Genesis 2:24 of leaving (our parents), and cleaving (to each other), and becoming one flesh (complete oneness and intimacy). Matthew 19:6b says, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." Nothing, not the grandparents, not divorce, nor the children, should come between a husband and wife. God's command to be fruitful and multiply (procreation), is clearly meant to take place in the context of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman for life. The priority and focus should be on being husband and wife first, not on being mom and dad to the kids. If mom and dad are doing well, it will directly affect the children. The focus of the family should be mainly on developing a good marriage first, and not so much on raising good kids. That will be a natural byproduct, if your marriage is God-honoring. Many couples, once they begin to have children, sacrifice their relationship for their all-consuming job of raising kids. Eventually, by marital neglect, you will experience distance in your relationship, and once the kids are grown and gone, there will be little left for the two of you. You spent it all on the kids. You will look at each other one day and ask, "Who are you?" Child raising is a season of life. Remember, you are training them to leave. Marriage is "till death do you part." Make yours the best you can before God, and you will have a great family with good kids.

Marriage has universal benefits to any society as a whole. Marriage is linked to higher levels of health and happiness and lower levels of alcohol and drug abuse for both adults and teens. Marriage is the greatest wealth-creating institution in the world – married people earn more, save more, and build more wealth. Those married tend to live longer, enjoy greater physical and mental health, and have far more fulfilling sex lives. Marriage is a tremendous indicator of societal health and welfare. There is an inverse relationship between marriage and crime. Where marriage is more common, crime is less common. Marriage is a society's best arrangement for helping children thrive. Marriage does more than bind a man to one woman, it also ties a man to a local congregation. Men are 57% less likely to attend church regularly if they are not married with children (Baucham, What He Must Be, p. 35, 36). Pew Research did a survey in 2010 and found that with current trends, 47% of US women in their 20's who gave birth, were unmarried. That cannot be good for the children. No fault divorce in the 1970's began this destructive trend. Malachi 2:15,16 says, "Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His, and why one? Because He was seeing godly offspring, so guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. I hate divorce."

It Begins With Genuine Faith Lived Before Our Children

In the book of *Deuteronomy* prior to coming into the Promise Land, Moses spoke to generation #2 and gave the people of Israel a charge. He outlined the blessings and curses that would come on the people based on how they would respond to God's clear instructions on how to live. He said their own heart was central to what they would pass to their children. They could not give their child what they personally did not believe or practice. Their faith in God would lead their children to faith in God. It started with their heart for God.

Deuteronomy 4:4-6a "But **you who held fast to the LORD your God** are alive today, every one of you. I have taught you statutes and judgments . . . so keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding."

Deuteronomy 4:9-10, 23 "**Give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget** the things which **your** eyes have seen and **they do not depart from your heart** all the days of your life; but **make them known to your sons and your grandsons** . . . let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on

the earth, and that they may teach their children.” “Watch **yourselves**, that **you** do not forget the covenant of the LORD.”
 Deuteronomy 6:1b-2a, 6-7a, 20a, 21a, 24b “God has commanded me to teach you . . . so that **you and your son and your grandson** might fear the LORD your God. These words, which I am commanding **you** today, **shall be on your heart** (first!) and **you** shall teach them diligently to **your** sons. When your son asks you . . . then **you** shall say to **your** son . . . fear the LORD our God for our good always.”
 Deuteronomy 11:18-19a “Fix (impress) these words of **mine in your hearts and minds**; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to **your** children” (NIV).

God’s Promise:

- There is a definite connection between being godly parents and raising godly kids. There is also a direct connection as to the consistent faith of the parents and the future faith of the children. We make our children thirsty for the gospel when we live rightly and faithfully in godly fear before our children. They see Christ in us and they come to want Christ. God uses faithful believing parents as the primary instrument in the salvation of their kids. Yes, there are rare exceptions in Scripture of good kids surviving bad parenting, or children coming to Christ in unbelieving homes, and yes, God is the one who ultimately saves, but He does so primarily through the example and relationship of the parent to their child. Those who say that their actions in raising their kids in regards to salvation are inconsequential, I believe, are wrong. God might save our kids, Lord willing, but we must be a good example of Christ before their eyes.
 Isaiah 59:21 “‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,’ says the LORD, from now and forever.”
 2 Timothy 1:5 “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in you also.”
 1 Timothy 1:2 “Timothy, my true child in the faith...” (spiritual child)
 Titus 1:4 “Titus, my true child in a common faith...” (spiritual child)

- It is a general rule that parents who obey biblical principles for child-raising will see a positive effect on the character and choices of their children as they mature into adulthood. Children who grow up in a Christ-honoring, obedient home are more likely to remain faithful to Christ in adulthood than children who grow up in homes where parents are hypocritical or disobedient to those principles. I believe there is a direct correlation between the faithfulness of the parents and the future faithfulness of the children.

Psalms 128:1, 3, 4, 6a “Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be **blessed** who fears the LORD. May you see your children’s children.”

Genesis 18:19 “I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12a “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God.”

- We must continue to humbly obey so that we are more like Christ.
 Philippians 3:14 “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
 Philippians 4:9a “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice” (NIV).
 Psalm 101:2c “I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart.”

- Only when both parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can the children be given the security which provides the basis for godly living.
 Proverbs 14:26 “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And His children will have refuge.”
 Psalms 127:1a “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”

A Mother and Father's Obedience

You can't pass something to your children you don't personally possess. You can't model something which isn't true of you. For the most part, children will reflect their parent's obedience. Matthew 10:24, 25a says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher and the slave like his master."

I also believe parents are often to blame for their child's rebellion and unbelief because of their own disobedience to biblical principles. Parents are the most influential persons in a child's life. No other influence in a child's life should take precedence over the parents.

Modeling Right Behavior

Our children will default to patterns they have unconsciously learned when they were young by watching mom and dad. How are we as parents exhibiting godly character to our children? We imitate what we see in front of us. Christianity and character are more caught than taught. Notice the examples in Scripture . . .

Luke 6:40b "Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be **like** his teacher."

John 5:19b, 20 "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is **something He sees the Father doing**; for whatever the **Father does**, these things the **Son also does in like manner**. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these so that you will marvel."

1 Corinthians 4:14b-17b "As my beloved children . . . I became your father through the gospel . . . I exhort you, **be imitators of me** . . . Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, he will **remind you of my ways** which are in Christ."

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV) "**Follow my example**, as I follow the example of Christ."

Ephesians 5:1 "Be **imitators** of God, as beloved children."

Philippians 4:9a (NIV) "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or **seen in me** – put it into practice."

2 Thessalonians 3:9b "(we) offer ourselves as a **model** to you, so that you would **follow our example**."

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, **imitate their faith.**”

- *What are we modeling before our kids?*
- *What areas of our lives do we need to be exemplary before our children?*
- *How are we modeling things that are negative to our kids?*

J. C. Ryle said, “Instruction, advice, and commands will profit little unless they are backed up by the pattern of your own life. Your children will never believe you are in earnest, and really wish them to obey you, so long as your actions contradict your counsel. Archbishop Tillotson made a wise remark when he said, ‘To give children good instruction and a bad example is but beckoning them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them in the way to hell.’” “We are always influencing those around us in one way or another, either for good or for evil, either for God or for sin. They see our ways, they mark our conduct, they observe our behavior and what they see us practice, that they may fairly suppose we think right. Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. What they see has much stronger effect on their minds than what they are told. Take care then, what you do before a child.” “Think not your children will practice what they do not see you do. You are their model picture and they will copy what you are.” “They will seldom learn habits which they see you despise, or walk in paths in which you do not walk yourself.” “The parent who tries to train without setting a good example is building with one hand, and pulling down with the other.” (The Duties Of Parents, p. 30-32)

Parenting Is Delegated Authority

Who says so? God says so! Ephesians 6:1-2a says, “Children, obey your parents in the LORD, for this is right. Honor your father and mother.” We are all under God-ordained authority. I can only declare with authority what God says is right and wrong in my home. Parental authority does not depend on us being taller, stronger, smarter, faster, bigger, older, wiser, or whether we are worthy of it because if the child ever surpasses the parent, then parental authority is diminished. Some parents are allowing their children to run over them without restraints and these homes are disastrous. Our authority is also not dependent on our physical ability to force our children into submission. We should never come to fists. Our authority is not based on these factors. We possess our

authority only because God has ordained it in the lives of our children. We are their parents by God's design. God calls us to obedience as parents to discipline and instruct our children. We are accountable to Him for our role and responsibility. We need to reflect Christ in our homes.

Parents Are Ambassadors

We are a representative of God to our children. The Bible gives an analogy of God dealing with his spiritual offspring like a father to his son. We manifest the character of God in a small way to our children. I must exhibit truthfulness, celebrate life, be kind, loving because that reflects who God is. God is ultimately the source of truth, life, love, and compassion.

Deuteronomy 1:31b "The LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son."

Deuteronomy 8:5b "The LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son."

Warnings To Parents

God has also warned of what our sin will produce. It always bears consequences – either in the present or in the future. Every action will have a reaction. A parent's sin will directly affect the child in some way.

Proverbs 3:33a "The curse of the LORD is on the **house** of the wicked."

Proverbs 14:1b "The foolish (woman) tears (her house) down with her own hands."

Proverbs 14:11a "The **house** of the wicked will be destroyed."

Proverbs 15:25a "The LORD will tear down the **house** of the proud."

Proverbs 15:27a "He who profits illicitly troubles his own **house**."

Proverbs 17:13 "He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his **house**."

Jeremiah 22:13a "Woe to him who builds his **house** without righteousness."

Matthew 12:25b "Any city or **house divided** against itself will not stand."

Ezekiel 16:44b "Like mother, like daughter."

J.C. Ryle said, "There is a great danger of (parents) coming short of their duty . . . Men can see the faults of their neighbors more clearly than their own . . . They will often bring up their children in the very path which they have denounced to their friends as unsafe . . . They will be quick-sighted as eagles in detecting mistakes abroad, and yet blind as bats to fatal errors which are daily

going on at home. They will be wise about their brother's house, but foolish about their own flesh and blood." (The Duties Of Parents, p. 2)

When you look at the whole Middle East conflict, you can boil it down to its ultimate cause. It is a family gone bad. They are all related. Those people hate each other today because of the sins of their families in the past. It all started with Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel, Abraham and Sarah with Ishmael (the Arab nation) and Isaac (Hebrews) and with Lot and his two daughters (Moab and Ammon), and Isaac with Esau (Edomites) and Jacob (Israel). Added to that are the mixed marriages with King Solomon, and the Babylonian exile, and the Samaritans of Jesus's day. It is one complicated family tree. When we disobey God as a family, conflict is inevitable, and it will have an effect on future generations.

The Reality Of Parent's Sinful Condition

If you think that Christian parents rarely sin and certainly never in front of their children, you are mistaken. That is the struggle isn't it? We are imperfect parents, yet we are called to be good examples to our impressionable children. All the more reason we need the power of Christ. If they never see us confessing sin, asking forgiveness, or seeking reconciliation, we have missed an opportunity to model before them the genuine Christian life. We are all sinners saved by grace. There are no perfect parents. No perfect kids. No perfect families. All of us are sinful people. We will fail. We come to our parenting with imperfect habits and patterns. Martin Luther once said sin is like a man's beard. If you shave it off today, it will be back tomorrow. All the more reason why we need to constantly depend on God to be the parents He has called us to be. If your life isn't right before God, you can bet it will affect your marriage and show up in your kids. They copy everything. Sometimes it is funny, most of the time it is not.

Parents Are Sinners

Parents are sinners and need reconciliation found only in Christ. We are still in process ourselves, an ongoing work of God's grace. Many times there is a gap between what we know and what we practice (James 1:22-25 hearer/doer). Luke 11:28 says, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." We tend to parent as we have been parented (good & bad), or we react to difficult things we experienced in our own upbringing and overcompensate. We tend to learn by trial and error in the school of hard knocks. We need to avoid either extreme: authoritarian parenting or permissive parenting. We need

balance. We need to discern between so many voices (friends/parents/media/secular psychology). Bad parents can raise children who turn out good (through Christ). Seemingly godly parents may have a rebellious unbelieving child within the home. This is possible, but could it also be possible that our sin is directly affecting our children and is why they are what they are?

3 Ways Parents Fail In Modeling:

Luke 17:2 says, “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would **cause one of these little ones to stumble.**” How do we as parents cause our kids to stumble?

1. Bad Example

Every one of the bad kings of Israel and Judah were directly linked to following the sin of Jeroboam – their great grandfather. (1 Kgs. 13:34; 14:16; 15:34; 16:2,19,26; 22:52; 2 Kgs. 3:3; 10:29,31; 13:2,6,11; 14:24; 15:18,24,28)

2. Hypocrisy

Are we guilty of a double standard (say one thing, do another)? Children know when we are not consistent with what we claim to believe in the Bible and how we act daily before them. James 1:23-26 says, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was, but one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.” Also, Jesus specifically addressed the Pharisees in their hypocrisy in Matt. 23.

v.2, 3 “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”

v.4 “They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

- v.5a “They do all their deeds to be noticed by men.” (superficial)
- v.13b “You shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”
- v.14 “And for a pretense you make long prayers.” (false religion)
- v.23b “You tithe . . . and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”(inconsistent)
- v.25b, 26 “You clean the outside of the cup . . . but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence . . . first clean the inside . . . so that the outside of it may become clean also.” (unconfessed sin)
- v.27b, 28 “On the outside (they) appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (deceptive)

This is a scathing rebuke to anyone who lives a double life before others, and a sharp rebuke to false religion. Are we as parents living hypocritically before our kids? Titus 1:16 says, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

3. Injustice

We may have falsely accused our child by jumping to conclusions or prematurely judging them in haste before getting all the facts right. Possibly we have punished them unjustly because of our own mistake. This is a good place to confess our faults and ask forgiveness. The twelve most necessary words in the world are “I am so sorry. I was wrong. Would you please forgive me?” A good policy is not to punish a child until we know we have all the correct details. Always remember, there are two sides to every story (or accusation – Acts 24:5, 6, 12, 13).

Proverbs 18:17 “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.”

Proverbs 17:26 “To punish the righteous is not good.” (NKJV)

Proverbs 18:13 “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”

If we come to our senses and make a change in our parenting late in the process, it is good to communicate to the children how we biblically came to this conclusion, and what the child can expect from here on in our expectations and discipline. Admitting your failures is not a sign of weakness, but of God's grace and mercy in our homes. Every day is a new day to act rightly in obedience.

Challenge To Parents:

"How can we exert a godly influence if we ourselves are not godly? Answer: We can't. How can we set a godly standard if we ourselves are not godly? Answer: We can't. How can we communicate a godly message if we ourselves are not godly? Answer: We can't. The young people whom God has committed to our spiritual oversight will never develop such a heart if we do not possess one ourselves. (Dewey Bertolini, Back To The Heart Of Youth Work)

Questions: (If someone asked your kids, what would they say?)

- *What are your kid's greatest struggles? Do you see that same struggle in yourself?*
- *What are the little things your kids do that reflect them imitating you?*
- *Do your kids see you reading your Bible at home?*
- *Do you refer to God's Word in conversation or just state your personal opinion?*
- *How healthy is your marriage? What do your kids see?*
- *How important is church attendance and serving to you? How involved are you?*
- *What are you modeling in your speech? Is it edifying? Is it loving and kind? Is it pure?*
- *Are you seen as an angry person? Do you control your temper at home?*
- *How are you with managing money? What does your credit card say about you?*
- *What are your kids learning about stewardship as they observe your spending habits?*
- *How much time do you spend on your phone on social media?*
- *When is the last time you had a meaningful conversation with your kids?*
- *Are you known for working hard or do you tend toward laziness at home?*
- *How do you spend your leisure time? Selfishly? Independently? With others?*
- *How do you respond to God-ordained authority? Honorably? Obediently?*
- *Do you have a clean conscience before God? How is your thought life?*
- *How is your attitude displayed before your wife and kids? Are you patient? Kind? Happy? Forgiving? Gracious?*

- *Is your life sending your children a message of hypocrisy and spiritual indifference or of genuine, humble faith in God?*
- *Would it be said of you that you fear the Lord and walk in His ways? How are you growing? What would your kids say? How do they reflect your love for the Lord?*

May your life be exemplary of Jesus Christ in all that you do and say so that your children are without any excuse, but to have followed what you have modeled before them, which was pleasing to the Lord. May we never be a stumbling block to the weak (1 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 18:7).

Dale Payne