

Parenting by Grace

Why did God have kids? In other words, why did He save you and give you a new heart, a new spirit, a new birth? Was it so He could use you, that you could serve Him all your days? Was it so you could obey Him? How about to love Him? Well, why did you have kids, or why do you think your parents had you? Did you and your spouse conclude you needed extra help mowing the lawn and doing laundry? Did you have kids to be your servants or your obedient subjects, to cook your dinner and tie your shoes? Or did you have kids to have someone to love you? If so, what do you do when they hate you, reject you and disobey you? No, none of these are why you had kids. The closer answer is that you had them because you wanted to pour all your life and love into a human being who was a mini version of you—a manifestation of you and your spouse. If that's not true, why were you so interested in who the child looked like? And when they were in the Sunday School program, the band, on the soccer field or in the choir, upon whom did you set your eyes most of the time? When your kids showed out in the middle of Walmart, who got red in the face? You did! Why? Because there was some of you in that child. The child was manifesting you.

Did you know God's purpose in parenting is pretty much the same as yours? Our Father wants to see a manifestation of Himself in His kids—*Christ in you the hope of glory*. And the amazing thing is there are more ways to express *Christ in you*, through you, than you could ever count! That's why there are 100,000+ parenting books available on Amazon's marketplace but only 2 "parenting verses" in the entire New Testament, and both are addressed to fathers (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Why is that?

Intimacy with God the Father was short-circuited for us all when Adam and Eve sinned in Eden. Since it's impossible for the flesh to have intimacy with God, it's impossible for fathers walking after their flesh to model intimacy with God, drive out fear from the home, love unconditionally or provide a safe place for the children. Also, mothers utilizing their flesh tend to overcompensate for the father's passivity in his role of headship.

Parents need to address their kids' behavioral issues; however, parenting is not primarily behavioral. God parents us with the goal of intimacy in mind—affection, nurturing, understanding, correction and encouragement. Godly, intimate parenting is primarily spiritual and relational. Our Father's heart is always to draw us in with His unconditional acceptance, that we may increasingly know Him, be known by Him, and thus express Him in the earth. Therefore, godly parents parent their children the way God parents them—relationally, through intimacy. As parents experience His intimacy, they will manifest His parenting style with their children.

Ephesians 6:4—*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* Colossians 3:21—*Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.*

Do not provoke them to anger/ do not exasperate them means do not reject them. There are many ways a parent can reject a child, and these verses suggest a father walking after his flesh will struggle with feelings of anger toward his family. *Bring them up in the discipline of the Lord* means train them to apply the Gospel to their life circumstances. God disciplines us, but His discipline is not punitive. Certainly God has many children, but Jesus is the only one He ever punished. God's discipline is corrective and redemptive, to bring us back to trusting Him relationally. Punishment is making someone pay for their sin.

When enforcing discipline, most parents tell their kids something like, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." Of course, the child never believes them. But God our Father felt this way as He looked at Jesus hanging like meat on Calvary's tree. We are certainly oblivious to the many spiritual struggles involved with that Good Friday, but for sure the greatest struggle was our Father's strong desire to pull Jesus off that cross and annihilate His enemies in His stead. But He didn't because He was thinking of you.

THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN PARENTING is to reach the heart of the child so that the child will come to trust, or come back to trusting, the heart of the Father in the parent. Some ways to accomplish this are:

- A. Love and accept your child.
- B. Lead them to depend on Christ, not you.
- C. Disciple your child in intimacy as God provides opportunity.
- D. Depend on Christ in you, as His child.
- E. Enjoy your child; Have fun!

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS A PARENT CAN DO FOR THEIR CHILD:

- A. Keep "Christ as your Life" central.
- B. Model intimacy. Be vulnerable and let them know when you struggle.
- C. Don't live in ungodly fear of their sexuality or of your sexual history.
- D. Guard against idolatry with your children. They are not the "center of your universe".
- E. If married, love your spouse unconditionally and tend your marriage intimately, providing a safe environment for intimacy with God to grow.
- F. When your child's behavior is unacceptable, let them know they are still loved and accepted. Love them unconditionally.
- G. Set healthy boundaries for your children and teach the lessons of choice and consequences.
- H. Tell them how they are special! Notice them!