

God's plan for parenting

King of Kings. 8am & 10am Services.

Introduction

Good morning. We are a few weeks into our build to last series, and this week I want to deal with the 'parent child relationship.' Everyone wants to have great relationships with their children and their parents. Right? So today I want to talk about;

God's plan for parenting.

Shelley and I have been married for 18 years now. We have two children, Hannah & Nathan. Our daughter is now a teenager, I still can't believe that! Over the past few years, I have not spoken much about parenting. Even now after 14 years of parenting, I still know very little and have much to learn! I'm also well aware of my faults as a Father.

I am also conscious of the fact that parenting today is rather controversial and touchy! Right?! I mean, I would sooner speak about end-time theology, tough verses and the gift of tongues in church than tell some mama bears how to raise their kids. If you're not careful, you could get mauled!

But jokes aside. I know its a sensitive subject, and I also know its a complex subject. I think being a parent is a big deal, it is sometimes wonderful, and it is sometimes terrifying. Parenthood happens in different ways for different families, sometimes by surprise, hey, some of you know just what I'm talking about! Right? And other times, parenthood happens with a LOT of planning. Others enter into parenthood through fostering, adoptions, blended families. Today, the list goes on and on.

Parenting can be the source of great joy, and also a source of great pain in many people's lives. There are also people in our church community in many different stages of life, those who have yet to have children, those who are struggling to have children, those whose kids are thriving, and those whose kids are struggling and bringing you heart ache. We have empty nesters, adult kids who have come home again. We even have kids who are now parenting their parents. So you've got foster-families, blended-families, child-headed families, grannies in charge, as well as those, who will not experience parenthood – by choice or by circumstances. We also have many widows in our church, who are grieving the loss of family, and children who have moved away. Family is complex.

Yet, as a church, we are a family, we are all in some way are involved in the care of children in this community that God has placed us. There are some things I want to affirm at the start of today's message before moving forward. These are some basic biblical principles about parenting; Firstly...

- **Children are a gift & blessing.**

No matter how a child comes into the world, we know that they are a blessing from the Lord. Psalm 127 says;

Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. (Psalm 127:3, NLT)

Children are a blessing from the Lord. They are a gift. Plain and simple. It is important that you and I realise, and accept, that this is what children are. Now, there may be days that they feel like more of a burden, right? Be honest now! But far more than that, they are a blessing! Now this is important, because if deep down, you see them as a burden, then you will treat them as such, but if you see them as a blessing, you will speak blessing over them. Secondly;

- **Children are our responsibility.**

Biblically, we are taught that children, are the responsibility of the parents. Speaking to fathers and mothers here, please understand this; schools, churches, the government agencies and non-profits, are there to help parents, but they are not there to replace parents.

I think one of shortcomings of our culture, is that we have passed on our parental responsibilities. Your teacher is not your child's father or mother. The rugby or netball coach is not their father or mother. Our Youth Director, our Children's Director, is not their father or mother. We can support, but primarily, God holds you as parents responsible. Your child is your responsibility.

As adults, we are responsible and accountable for how we treat children in our care.

Jesus said;

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14, NIV)

Jesus also said;

It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to fall into sin. (Luke 17:2)

Jesus advocated for children; we need to do the same.

As a church we have recently updated our Child Protection Policy and worked on appointing new safety officers. We are not perfect, but we take the safety of the children in our care seriously.

Every single person in this church who is over the years of 18, and is in any kind of leadership or volunteer position working with under 18's in our church, is expected to provide a police clearance certificate, they have to provide references for their suitability to be working with children, and we screen them in every way we can.

Our church must be a safe place, but it is equally important that your home is a safe place. Parents, those little ones are your responsibility.

Next principle;

- **The point of parenting is to raise them ‘in the Lord.’**

We will touch on this a bit more in a minute, but as believers, we not only have responsibility to keep our kids safe, to educate them, and help them to grow into responsible adults, but we also want to do everything we can to help our children find faith in Jesus. Right?

I hope you know that we are not just out to raise obedient kids. You can raise obedient pets, but they don’t have a love for the Lord! You can raise a very moral, good kid, who has sterling manners, and they might still go on to want nothing to do with Jesus in life. Your goal is not just to raise a good kid, your role is to help lead them to Jesus in every way that you can. Because we all know, none of us could ever be good enough. Only through Jesus blood and righteousness can we be saved. Next principle:

- **The Holy Spirit knows your children better than you do.**

God loves and cares for the children in your life. In fact, He knows them better than you do. He knows how they think. He knows how they tick. He knows when they are afraid. He knows the sensitive ones, and he knows the hard-willed ones. He knows what your child is thinking and feeling even when they are too young to articulate that to you. The Holy Spirit understands your child in a way that you and I don’t. So, don’t be afraid to ask for his help. I pray for my kids every day. I pray over them, asking the Lord to help them, to help me know how to help them.

Each is an individual – different from their siblings, different from you and that can be a point of frustration, but it is also a gift to get to know and understand them as individuals. This is why prayer is so important – The Holy Spirit can help us when we don’t know what to do or how to best care for a specific child.

So, how then can we parent in a way that we can build lasting, meaningful relationships? As a Father I have always been drawn to this verse from Ephesians 6:4;

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4, NIV)

Yes, this speaks to fathers, but it applies to all parents. Don’t ‘exasperate’ them, don’t provoke them to wrath, don’t rouse them to anger, don’t irritate them in a way that ‘really pushes their buttons.’ Some of us really know how to push buttons. Don’t do that. Our job is not to bump heads with them all the time, rather, we are to do our best to teach and train our kids. Which begs the question:

How do you train a child?

Well, remember, it is not just training a child, but training a child ‘in the instruction of the Lord.’ There are so many programmes you can follow in teaching children to be clever and academically good, or to excel in sport, and hey, that’s great. I’m not playing down the importance of that, but as Christian parent we have a responsibility to lay a foundation of God’s truth for our children.

When a child is born, just like you and me, they have a sin nature, they have no knowledge of what sin is, of God’s laws, of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. In fact, there is very little difference between some kids and a terrorist! The main difference is that they are just too small to inflict as much destruction! Okay, maybe that was a bad joke. But I hope you get the point, children are born with a sin nature. A natural inclination to sin. So you’ve got to teach them.

Now this is really important to understand, if you don’t teach them, someone else will. The world we live in will do its best to train your child according to its ways. So stepping back from this responsibility is not a kind thing to do to let your child ‘find their own way,’ it just allows the world to step into the gap of our silence and abdication of responsibility.

We need to be intentional in helping our children know how to live life in a way that is fulfilling and honouring to God. And yes, when they reach a point of independence, they will need to make their own decisions about what they believe and don’t, but we need to do the best we can in laying the foundations of truth in their lives.

So where do we start? Here are some biblical truths from Psalms and Proverbs. In fact, these are lessons that we as adults may need to learn for ourselves.

Train them to find their worth in Jesus

Our children need to understand how God views them – they are precious, they are created by him, they are not an accident, He has a plan for them. They are loved. The psalmist writes in chapter 139;

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13-16 NIV)

We need to help our children find their identity in a world that has so many pressures and opinions. They need to know they are loved. We can help them see that they are special, that they have a purpose, special gifting, a unique contribution to the world. We need to take an interest in who they are.

Our staff were speaking this week about an older couple in our church who always show an interest in the lives of the young people and let them know that they are praying for them – this is such a blessing and encouragement.

We need to show our young people that they are valued, and loved, and that God has a plan for them. That is something we can do as a church community.

Train them to fear the Lord.

Not 'fear' in the sense of God is this 'mean' person who I need to be afraid of, but the 'respectful righteous fear of the Lord' in our lives.

One of the dangerous ideas out there is this idea that love trumps truth. The bible teaches me that we need to live in this tension between love and truth. Proverbs 1 says;

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7 NIV)

Are you teaching your kids truth. Are you passing on a legacy of faith to you children? Kim & Mike Porter, who lead our Youth Alpha with the grade 5-7s, is fond of telling the young people that 'God does not have grandchildren'. By that she means, that each person must come to a decision for themselves about what they believe.

We as parents and a church community need to model for our children what ordinary everyday faith looks like. They need to see us living out truth. Do they witness the fear of the Lord in our lives? Do our kids see us praying? Do they know how we make important decisions? Does our faith impact our ordinary every days lives?

It is such a joy when you know your child is walking with the Lord. I know this is a heart ache for many of you – but each child (even adult children) need to make that faith commitment for themselves in their own time – we cannot force them. All we can do is model our faith and pray pray pray. I believe that praying parents, praying grand-parents, and church families are a wonderful blessing for our children.

Here is the next point;

Train them to be responsible.

This is a hard one and a source of frustration for many. But the bible is clear; Proverbs 6;

Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise! ⁷ Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work, ⁸ they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. (Proverbs 6:6-8 NIV)

Whether it is getting homework done, doing chores, or tidying their room, it is hard to teach kids to be responsible. Yet is it is so important as when they grow older,

you will not be there with them all the time, to pick up for them, or for the things that they cannot do. Some parents need to stop doing everything for their kids, because you are going to end up raising soft entitled people who expect everyone else to do everything for them.

Teaching responsibility also involves discipline. This is something that each family needs to decide how they will manage for themselves – but children need discipline to show them right from wrong, to teach them responsibility.

As adults, we also need to self-discipline ourselves, so we need to give our kids a good start to life by teaching them responsibilities and how to discipline themselves.

As we launch them into the world, we want to do so with confidence that they can be wonderful contributors to society. Here is the next thing we want to train them in;

Train them to watch their words.

The control of our tongue is something that as adults we struggle with, let alone our kids. Proverbs 4 says;

**Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.
(Proverbs 4:24 NIV)**

We need to be modelling healthy speech at home – not just enforce it on our kids. They need to hear us speak positivity about other people and our country. When you whack your finger with a hammer, what comes out? Your kids hear it. It is always a shock the first time a kid parrots back to you something you have said that you wished they did not hear! We need to be self-parenting our thought life and our speech and helping our kids to do the same. This next one is big;

Train them to carefully select friends.

We cannot police our kid's friends, but we can advise and try to encourage them to make careful decisions. Our kids are shaped more by their friends than we like to accept. So are we. Proverbs 13 says;

**Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.
(Proverbs 13:20 NIV)**

We can teach them the value of good friendship and being a good friend. We want our kids to have friends who support them, rather than lead them. Get to know your kids' friends, get to know their parents too. Encourage them to be kind in the way they treat others and in the way they deal with people who are different than themselves. Next one;

Train them to guard their minds.

There is so much more that our kids have to navigate in the world today that we had to – so many voices that have access to their time.

I found this shocking statistic this past week – South Africa has identified as having the largest screen time in the world! Take a look at this infographic. That might be a bit small - but South Africa is topping the world with screen time. Scary.

<https://media.citizen.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/screen-time-south-africa.jpg>

While there is so much in technology that is good, there is so much that is also harmful. How do we teach our kids to filter the information? We cannot ban screens – that would be a pretty tall order – so how do we equip our kids to manage their time, manage their content and have a foundation of truth to be able to be wise and discerning? That is our job to help them navigate this age of technology.

We are also living in a time of great mental health pressure and our kids are feeling it too – anxiety and depression are on the rise. I wonder if there is a link with the social media? We need to help our kids know how to look after their mental health, just in the same way we make sure they eat their veggies etc for physical health. Our minds are so important to our faith and our outlook on life.

One or two more;

Train them to manage God's money.

Are you training your kids to have a proper perspective on money? Proverbs 3 says;

**Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.
(Proverbs 3:9 NIV)**

Everything we have comes from the Lord and we need to honour God in how we steward the resources we have. Kids learn from watching us – how you spend your money reflects your belief. Billy Graham famously said: “Give me five minutes with a person’s checkbook, and I will tell you where their heart is.” We have duty of care to our kids to teach them the proper value of money.

Finally;

Train them to be generous.

While we need to teach our kids how to manage money, we also need to teach them and show them generosity. Proverbs 11;

**A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
(Proverbs 11:25 NIV)**

Generosity is not just about money and stuff; it is an outlook on life that shows it is not all about us. Other people needs and happiness is important to us. Our sinful

nature makes us selfish and inward looking. I think many of us have been shocked by how soon that word 'Mine!' makes it into a toddler's vocabulary! Are you modelling generosity with others in your home and as you engage with other people?

As a church family are we generous with our time when it comes to kids?

I think each of these points of training is something we can all get behind – whether you are in the thick of parenting kids or teens. Whether you are a grandparent, a family friend, or part of our King of Kings family. We can all come alongside and support a parent. We can all pray for a child and model for them how to live out their faith in an everyday way. We can all take interest and encourage our kids to see how amazing they are, because God has created them and has a plan for them.

Amen.

Let's pray together.

Next Steps

Future parenting plans – 16 June Gavin Fish in Father's Day service

Parenting workshop Tuesdays 11 to 25 July – special focus on preteen age group.

Church Update