

**Jan 17            What Kids Need From Parents I    2 Sam. 22:1-3; 17-20; Prov. 3:11-12**

A five year old was showing grandma the family picture album and at the very end there was a photo of his entire family. O that is a wonderful picture, the grandmother exclaimed. And you look so handsome in your coat and tie. I like it too said the grandson, but mommy doesn't. She told me she wants to blow it up.

Sadly, families are blowing up everywhere. And those that haven't seem like they could at any minute. That's why we get verses like this: *The first half of our life is ruined by our parents, and the second half by our children.*

*Or this from a tired parent: Before I got married I had four theories about bringing up children; now I have four children and no theories.*

Dr. Diana Garland has written a book on the family, suggesting better ways the church can do family ministry and not just individual ministry. It is called Family Ministry, A Comprehensive Guide. At 627 pages, it ought to be fairly comprehensive. I hope she was paid by the word. For this sermon, I have borrowed her statistics and ideas.

Garland describes why parenting is more complex and pressured in today's culture.

1. **There are a growing number of children being reared in homes without two parents.** There are single family homes or children being reared by grandparents. This is not to say that single parents and grandparents can't do a good job. It is to say that doing so is twice as difficult unless you are Wonder Woman or Superman. The church has a responsibility to give more support to these families.
2. **Nuclear families are often separated from extended family so parents have no back up when kids are sick or they need to get away.** From biblical times to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there was no distinct nuclear family—husband wife two kids and a dog. The NT term “household” for instance describes an extended family living in the same home or compound—everyone from Grandma to servant. Even when family members lived in separate housing, they lived in the same village or town within walking distance of a host of relatives. Rearing kids, therefore, was the work of the entire household, not just one or two parents.

Many young families today have no such family support. That is why they need extended church family to help. Many of you worked with children in this church when you had children at home, but now you've turned that over to parents with kids at home. That approach no longer meets the need. We need you to come out of retirement so that you can be the extended family many parents do not have. We need empty nesters and retired adults to bless our church's children.

3. **There are more and more choices of extracurricular children's activities today, but these options turn into expectations.** It was not always so, but now there are multiple kids' activities on every day of the week. This has led to a cultural expectation that you need to involve your kids in a wide variety of these. We don't seem to realize that there is a tipping point where more becomes less; where adding subtracts. We make parenting harder than it needs to be.
4. **Our culture strongly suggests that problems with children reflect a parental failure.**

This creates enormous pressure and guilt. Consider this written by a sociologist in the 50s. *We believe any parent who has a lost, straying, and wandering child will find upon honest self-examination that he has failed in some basic way to bring up his child in the way he should go... Generally, the downfall of every character can be traced to some defect in the home life.*

But now we know there is no simple cause and effect relationship between good parenting and good kids. Parents can shape their children, but we can't change their DNA or brain chemistry. This is why we all know good families with troubled kids and exceptional people that come out of dysfunctional families.

Bottom line is that we have many overwhelmed parents and when we're overwhelmed, we seldom do parenting or anything else very well.

When our first came along, I thought the most challenging part of being a parent would be changing dirty diapers, especially since we used cloth diapers. By the third kid, we were done with that. Next, I thought sleep interruption and deprivation would be the hardest. Then, I figured it would be the terrible twos and then school and then adolescence and raging hormones and then driving and then college tuition. What I discovered was that every stage completed seemed easy looking back and every stage coming was heartburn.

Alas, the Bible does not offer us ten steps to effective parenting. There are 66 books in the Bible and none of them are named the **epistle to parents**. What we do get are good models and bad models of parenting and some general guidelines. This is the only way it could be. Parenting is not a color by numbers process. You can buy software to help with your taxes but there is no such program for parenting. One size doesn't fit all, so the Bible can't tell us to fold flap A into slot B. Parenting is an organic not a mathematical activity. God gives us big picture goals for our children, allowing parents to custom fit their approach to each child.

**The primary model for how to parent in the Bible is God's paternal and maternal relationship to Israel and the Church.** The best parenting we ever do is that which reflects God's parenting of us.

As we look at how God nurtures and guides us, we can glean our basic responsibilities to our children. American parents tend to give their kids lots of league sport; name brand clothes; electronic games; cell phones; fast food; internet and television. But what do children really need from us if God's parenting is our standard?

1. The first answer from social science and Scripture is **Safety and Security**, the foundation of love and trust.

Dr. Garland says that when her kids were the age of playing sports and she attended all their games and competitions, she used to jest with them: *I want to remind you that I clothe you; I feed you and protect you from the elements. Your job is to entertain me.*

Entertainment or not, our kids need safety and security from parents. This too has become more difficult.

My parents and others before them knew that safety and security was a community responsibility. Every parent looked out for every kid. If your child went out, you knew they were being watched by many sets of adult eyes all of whom would treat them like they were their own. Not so today when many of us don't really know our neighbors and our streets are less safe.

We see throughout Scripture that this is what God gives to his children. We heard a beautiful song by David in 2 Samuel that describes the safety and security that God gives to us. *The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior... He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of mighty waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy... he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

If we could call up memories of when we felt most safe and secure, they would probably be childhood memories for most of us. I would think of my head in my mother's lap during a thunderstorm. Maybe you were comforted by knowing that **Barney Fife** had a bullet in his pocket. Children who don't feel safe don't socialize well. Actually, that's true of adults too. If kids are insecure, they are distracted from learning. And most of all, when safety and security are absent, kids do not learn to trust, a vital skill they will need in their relationship to God.

2. If God is our model, the second gift our children need from us is **Discipline**. We heard this earlier from Proverbs 3: *My child, don't turn away or become bitter when the LORD disciplines you. The LORD disciplines everyone he loves, just as parents discipline their favorite child.*

As one psychologist wrote, *Too often we give our children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.* Discipline is that fine art of enabling our children to become self-disciplined. This is God's desire for us and our goal in parenting. We don't just give our children bread. We teach them to make bread. The goal of parental discipline is nurturing self-discipline.

Divine discipline is an act of love by God. Parental discipline should be the same for our children. The word is not punishment. The two words are not etymologically similar. We will address the famous biblical phrase, *spare the rod, spoil the child* next week.

In medicine, physicians will treat symptoms, but their goal is to address and cure the underlying disease. Parenting can't be limited to the treatment of symptoms like bad behavior. Like God, parents must learn to look on the heart, not just the appearance. Discipline addresses the heart of a child, not just their actions. We will unpack biblical discipline next week.

My own dad did not spare the belt on me, but even as a kid, I could tell the difference in what he did and what my across the street neighbor did to his son who was my age. Looking back, I think Mike's dad was probably an alcoholic, but as a kid I just thought he was mean. What was very apparent to me is that my father's belt was nothing compared to what Mike's dad did to him. I witnessed it once in their carport as I was walking to Mike's house. He grabbed Mike by the shirt and slapped him all over his head and face. This was accompanied by yelling about what Mike had done or not done. Mike's mom rescued him and this made his dad even angrier.

I don't know what became of Mike, but statistics tell us that he likely did to his children what his dad did to him. One of the greatest challenges parents face in giving safety and discipline to their children is unlearning unhealthy patterns from their parents. If we don't, we repeat the dysfunctions over generations.

In the US, we like to believe that our kids can do better in life than we did. Instead of working so our kids having a higher standard of living and education, let us become parents that prepare our kids to do a better job of parenting than we did.

Michael Levine: *Having children makes you no more a parent than having a piano makes you a pianist.* Parenting skills and goals can be learned if we are willing. An ACCESS parenting seminar begins this Wednesday at 6:15. Don't settle for having children. Become an equipped parent.