

The Bible and Parenting

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12

Preface

What amazes you? Is it the powerful speed of a tiny microchip or perhaps towering high rises of a place like New York City. When our children were small, we visited Disney World; it was pretty amazing.

But what amazes me the most is not the handy work of men but that of God. Let me go to Cades Cove in the smoky mountains or take a trip on the Blue Ridge Parkway or a boat ride in the ocean and I will be amazed. It is the great creations of our mighty God that truly amaze me the most.

I was traveling north on Greeno road coming into Fairhope from the south when suddenly on my left a huge flock of small brown birds all raised up out of a field and flew in perfect unison together. There must have been thousands of them all swirling around together. First they flew towards the highway and then made a large circle followed by a smaller circle to finally descend upon a different spot in the field. I almost ran off the road as I watched with awe and was mindful that this too was the handy work of God.

Today I want to speak about another amazing example of God's handy work; The Family. Yes, the family is truly one of God's most amazing creations. Like the flock of birds, when flying on God's path in unison, the family is a beauty to behold. The family is a powerful entity with divine purpose in God's plan. There is nothing in this world like the family.

The family is where we learn to deeply love and care for others. The family is where we learn patience and how to genuinely forgive one another. The family is where we learn, gain confidence and find strength.

When all of life's successes and ventures come to an end it will be what is accomplished in the kingdom of God and in the family that really matters.

Scripture

¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

1Thessalonians 2:11-12 NIV

Introduction

Being a parent is hard work. In fact, parenting done right is the hardest thing you will ever attempt to do. Raising a family is rewarding but extremely challenging. It takes courage, discipline and patience.

Family life can often be difficult. It is not always smiles and hugs. Sometimes it can be downright ugly and tuff. I was reminded of this one day when I saw the concern in a friend's eyes as he told of his son leaving for Iraq.

Sometimes, keeping the family in unity is hard. It can be the source of tremendous joy and the greatest source of hurt and worry.

Illus: I am reminded of the guy who was chatting with a friend. The friend asked "How are things at home?" The man replies with, "Well, let's just say I would be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip."

Most new parents see having children as giving up some of their time and adjusting their life for a temporary period of time. If you have children, you know differently. You now know that having children changes your life. Forever!

This is not to say that it changes our lives negatively, it just changes everything. I have come to the realization that I will have concerns for my children for the rest of my life.

With all of that said, our children are an enormous blessing to our lives. In a day when 25% of unborn children are aborted, God's Word

is still clear. Children are a blessing and a reward from God. (Psalm 127:3-5)

God's Word teaches that children are the fruit of the body; a gift from God. I have come to realize something very powerful. Children are God's way of allowing us to participate in His creation.

This is a responsibility that we must not take lightly. All of us desire for our children to be smart, popular and successful. However, more than anything else, our desire should be for our children to be godly. Our primary goal in parenting should be to insure our children learn to live their lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is God's command that we impress His Word upon our children.

In other words, parenting should be done with a purpose. Parenting must be intentional, effective and according to God's instruction. Parents are entrusted with children to raise-up godly offspring. Life is sacred and the responsibility of parenting is sacred business.

I would like to share the three most important things you can do as parents. Please make no mistake about it; I am speaking to fathers and mothers equally.

1. Love God with all your heart

The single most important thing you can do to be successful parents is to love God with all your heart. God's Word says, *"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."*

What if someone were to ask your children what Christ means to you? What would your children say? Would their answer be, "My daddy loves God with all his heart?" Would there answer be, "My mommy loves God with all her heart?"

You will never be perfect parents. I have never seen perfect parents. However, your children will find the most meaningful things in life through your love for God.

If you truly love God with all you heart, you will:

a. Be clear on the importance of God in your life. Just where does God fit into your life? Where does God fit in relation to your career, shopping, hunting, fishing, sports and the like? Why do so many fathers love sports but apparently do not love God?

b. Obey God's teachings in every aspect of your life. Are honesty and integrity just words with you or principles by which you live? Do your children understand that these are not your moral values but values instilled through faith in Christ? You cannot be dishonest with your own sinfulness and expect your children to understand Christianity.

c. Attend worship and fellowship with God's people. When one loves God with all of their heart, he or she does not attend church 1 out of 4 Sundays. I am sorry but that is just an obvious fact. I understand people miss church occasionally, but many Christians attend seldom if not rarely. What do you think this tells your children about your love for God?

d. Pray for guidance in every area of life including parenting. When we truly love God, we seek His counsel concerning everything. Why do people have such a difficult time praying with their spouse and with their children? Satan makes us feel guilty and unworthy. We must find the courage to pray with our family. Our children must know where we go to for answers to life's challenges.

Powerful teaching is not ultimately about the teacher's techniques or the teacher's sayings but about the teacher's heart. Our children are impacted by the things we devote our lives to; the things we love.

Do you love God with all your heart?

Children don't always listen to their parents but they almost always imitate them.

2. Love your spouse with all your heart.

Children must know that you love your spouse with all of your heart. Too often this is where many young parents begin down a slippery slope that ultimately finds them terribly far apart.

We must always remember that our children are an offspring of our love for one another. One of the greatest things you can do for your children is to let them know that the marriage doesn't exist for them but rather they exist as a result of the marriage.

Too often, the mother devotes so much time to a newborn that there is no time for the husband. The husband then buries himself in his work or other things and soon there is this gap. Fathers often end up feeling separated from the family. Children soon pick up on this gap and learn to play each parent against one another. This gap eventually leads to separation and ultimately divorce.

Illus: I hesitate to use my own experiences because we are in no way perfect parents. We have done some things right and some wrong. However, one thing we have done right is to let our children know through our actions that our love for one another came first and will always be at the center of the family unit.

Pam and I tried to let our children observe our love for one another. That can be down right fun at times. You should have seen the reaction of our teenagers when we kissed in front of them. We could often tell they were thinking, "How can two people that old still find each other attractive?"

Children need to have the solid foundation of knowing their parents love one another and that their parents are going to stay together. This means we must honor the marriage covenant. We must remain committed to one another through the difficult times.

Illus: "Most of the time your love keeps the marriage together but, some of the time, the marriage keeps the love together." Marriage requires commitment.

Young parents need to understand that everyone has trouble in a marriage. If anyone tells you they never argue, they are either a liar or they have their head in the sand. Marriage is not always easy. Society says, if your spouse doesn't make you happy, divorce and find someone who will make you happy. God intendeds for marriage to be a man and a woman for life.

I know there are extreme circumstances where divorce is perhaps unavoidable. However, in every case, it can be avoided if the both partners are committed to God and committed to one another. Let go of the past and remain committed to the marriage. Make up your mind you will never, never, never give up. Seek God and godly counsel and He will honor your marriage.

Illus: Marin Luther, the famous Protestant Reformer once said, "Let the wife make her husband glad to come home, and let the husband make the wife sorry to see him leave."

Give your children the wonderful gift of parents who love one another for life.

3. Love your children with all your heart

"³ Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." Psalm 127:3-5

It would seem to go without saying that we must love our children with all of our heart. However, in today's society of self centeredness, many parents take their focus away from what is best for their children to focus on their own ambitions. How else do we get to an abortion rate of 25% and a divorce rate in excess of 50%?

Even parents who are dedicated to properly parenting their children, often find themselves feeling cheated. They often reason that they have missed great careers or opportunities. Make no mistake about it, no work anyone does is more important and honorable than raising

children in God's way. There is no higher calling. There is no accomplishment more meaningful, I don't care what anyone says.

a. Love your children with your time. The most important thing you can give your children is your time; yourself. When you are tempted to get involved in some energy-draining, time-consuming opportunity that will only increase the distance between you and your family, ask yourself hard questions about the price that will be paid.

Illus: My fondest memories of my children involve simple things such as fishing, hiking and bike riding. I recall when Morgan was small, she could swing for hours. If I let up with my pushing, she would say, "Swing me daddy, swing me more."

Give your children the absolute best of your time.

b. Love your children with God's teachings. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15)."* We must teach our children to love God by obeying God's Word. As previously stated, this is taught but also demonstrated by our example.

Today in America most of the training of our children is not done by the parents and is not done by the schools. Most training is done by the television! From the television, our children get their ideas about what is right and wrong, what is desirable and undesirable, and ideas about God, sex, marriage, family and life. This cannot be!

We must not entrust our children's training to the writers and actors of today's television.

c. Love your children with discipline.

"⁶Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Proverbs 22:6 NIV

Disciplining children takes the time and hard work of both parents. Some poor approaches to discipline include:

Guilty Approach - We have all seen families where one or both parents feel so guilty about working such long hours that they fail to discipline their children when they get home. These parents often

deal with their guilt by showering their children with material things (McDonalds everyday). If that describes you, change your work habits or your work environment. Trust God to provide for your family. They need your time and your discipline.

1-2-3 Approach – Some parents use the 1-2-3 method. When a child misbehaves, they start by warning them followed by a forceful, "That's one!" When the child continues, they proceed to "Two" and then to "Three". If you are one of those people, I want you to know that you are teaching them they can get away with things for a period of time. You are not teaching them right from wrong, you are teaching them to try it and push the limits. If you can teach them 1-2-3, you can teach them to obey to start with.

Illus: This reminds me of the family with a new cat they were house training. Every time the cat would use the bathroom in the house, they would swat it and throw it out the window. Eventually, the cat learned the lesson. He did his business on the carpet and then ran and jumped out the window.

Double Standard Approach – Some parents have two sets of standards. Some behavior is acceptable at home but not in public. If you are at home it is ok to do certain things but when we are in public, you are embarrassing me. This is unbelievably confusing to children. I have seen children get away with things at home only to get spanked when they did it in public. What matters the most in this case, parenting or public opinion?

You Handle It Approach – There are parents who let the spouse do all of the disciplining. One parent is the bad guy and does all of the correcting while the other sits back and watches. The children know they can get away with anything with one parent and very little with the other. If this describes you, you are lazy when it comes to disciplining your children. You need to work with your spouse and stop sending your children mixed signals.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:11

God’s Word clearly teaches that just as God disciplines His people, we are to discipline our children. We must teach them respect and train them up in the ways of the Lord. It is not easy and it will take work.

d. Love your children with grace. There are no perfect parents just as there are no perfect people. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God has shown us grace. We must also show grace and forgiveness to our children. As important as it is to discipline, we must also provide room for forgiveness.

Illus: I recall instances with my own children when they did things that really disappointed us. We were angry and could not believe that they would do such a thing that they clearly knew would upset us. Even when we were discussing what disciplinary action we would take to insure that they learned their lesson once and for all, we were also discussing grace. We would look for the words to say to begin restoring their dignity and assuring them they could overcome their mistakes and become the person God intends for them to be. We want them to know they have done wrong but also know we love them and forgive them.

In America, every 7 minutes a child is injured or killed by a gun; every day 100,000 children are homeless, every day 135,000 children bring a gun to school; every day 6 teenagers commit suicide; every day 2,989 children see their parents get a divorce. This doesn’t even touch on the statistics related to alcohol, drugs and sexual conduct. It is very tough being a kid these days. Your children need your love and they need God’s love.

You know your child is going to face struggles and difficult times. Where do you want to turn? Do you want them to turn to God or to drugs and alcohol? Your words and your actions today are teaching them how to deal with tomorrow’s problems.

Conclusion

Illus: I have a friend who raised his three children in a Christian home. His youngest son Daniel has always been a pistol. He has always been opinionated, quick to speak and reluctant to listen. After finishing high school, he joined the army which made no sense because he does not like authority. He is now overseas. This past week he was one of five men in a vehicle that flipped twice. One soldier was killed and the remaining four were injured including Daniel. Below is an email he sent his mother.

“Hey Mom. I Just Wanted to let you know again that I’m okay. Got a few stitches on my neck and head and a few other bumps and bruises. There was 5 of us in the truck.. only four of us made it. The truck flipped twice. None of us in the back had our seatbelts on, one was thrown from the truck and they said they don’t know how I wasn’t thrown from the truck. I don’t remember anything but they say I made my way out of the truck before anyone else and pulled the other guy out of the back seat. They should let me out of the hospital soon. Seargeant Pedraza was driving...his arm is broke. Duvall had a pretty nasty black eye and a fractured rib. Hasbrouk has a broken leg and some messed up ribs.. so I’d say I made out pretty good. There had to have been an angel holding me in that truck. I love you mom! Don’t worry about me I’ve got some good doctors taking care of me and an awesome God keeping me safe!”

Daniel got it. Through all of the talking back, the struggles and challenges, he was listening and he knows God loves him. Never give up. Keep parenting. Keep telling them about God. Stay the course.

Through God, you can parent successfully regardless of your childhood. God will see you through.