



RENEWAL
INTERNATIONAL

Raising Godly Children

Dr. Vance Hardisty

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Session 1 - Play The Long Game

Introduction

Many of us believe we will be wonderful parents, and then we had children. It is almost humorous to see couples with little children giving seminars to other parents on how to raise children. In fact, I promised myself I would never tell people how to raise kids until mine were grown, and had turned out godly and successful.

Today, I have three incredible kids. My oldest daughter graduated with top honors from college, attended law school, and is becoming a corporate litigant attorney for a large firm in America. Her husband is on the board of my ministry and they are an incredible couple, who are dedicated to following the Lord and making a difference in the world.

My son is in the Marine Corp, graduated with top honors from college, works for a company in Washington, and every day, grows closer in his walk with God.

My youngest graduated from high school, only received “A’s” all four years, was Senior Class president, is headed to college to be a child therapist, and is passionate about making a difference in the world.

Oh, and did I mention that it was hard work... no, really hard work for my wife and I. We have prayed more for our kids, cried more for our kids, talked more with our kids, and listened more to our kids than we have for anything else in life. In fact, my wife began praying for the men and women our kids would marry when they were born. See the grey hair here - my kids. But the blessing is that God has had them in His hand all along, and though raising them was the toughest job we have ever had, it was worth every tear, every hour of prayer, and every hour of listening.

Play the Long Game

Every parent, even before their children are born, should be in this for the long game. None of us should be in the parenting business to have kids, who look good for a day, a week, a month, or a year. None of us should be satisfied to have children who appear good when they go to church or when they are around our friends. None of us should be determined just to raise children who do well in life. No. We should all be parents in order to raise children who will change the world for generations to come by influencing their friends, their spouses, and their children for the Kingdom of God.

The End Goal

All of us were given two goals in life when Christ summed up the entire OT in Mark 12:30-31,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (*New International Version*).

Our two goals for all of life? Love God and love people. It is that simple. Love God. Love people. When your children leave the home and become adults, and they love God and love people - game over. You have accomplished the task God gave you.

How does this happen? “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). If you are willing to do your work when your children are small, then you will love your teens.

I didn't say they would be perfect. I didn't say it would be easy. I'm just saying that if you do your work from day one, then the rest of the days will be much easier. If, on the other hand, you neglect your work, give in too often, need your children's approval, don't set limits, and basically ignore the guidance that God has given us in His Word, then you will raise children that will bring you grief and not joy.

The Vision - Generational Impact

I was on a personal retreat so that I could write. The cabin where I was staying was on a lake, and in the morning, I would go down to the lake, get a kayak, and paddle out into the lake. On this particular morning, there was absolutely no wind. The surface of the water was so calm, it was like a mirror. So I paddled out about 600 feet or 180 meters from the shore, and just sat there, praying and meditating on God. But then I noticed something. Each time my paddle would touch the surface of the water, a little ripple would go out from that spot and seem to go a long way. In a moment of inspiration, I lifted my paddle high in the air and brought it down with a resounding impact on the surface of the water. The splash was tremendous. Then I watched

the ripples. Unbelievably, over the next few minutes, those ripple travelled clear to the shore 600 feet/180 meters away. The splash that I had made with my paddle was being felt on the shore.

It was then that the Lord seemed to say, “That is your life”. You have the opportunity to make an impact, but never think that your impact stops with you, or with those closest to you. Your impact reaches far beyond what you could even imagine or think. Your impact extends beyond those with whom you are personally involved to people you have never met. And then, your impact extends past your lifetime to influence many generations of people.

Scripture

Paul is talking to Timothy when he reminds him of this incredible impact, generation to generation. “I am 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” (II Timothy 1:5). In this passage, it is the grandmother and mother who pass on their faith

“One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts”
(Psalm 145:4).

Though we all know that we will impact our kids, and they will impact others after we are gone, many of us are not intentional about this process. David Keehn, Associate Professor and chair of Christian Ministries at Biola University, says that there are three myths about passing on faith to the next generation:

1. ***It happens spontaneously.*** We hope that our children will simply catch our spiritual values by being around us and the church. Yes, more is caught than taught, but we must be intentional about teaching the "why" behind the belief, so they will understand why faith matters.
2. ***It is the professionals' job.*** Many believe that this “passing of the faith” is what the church or the pastor does. That is only partially true. You actually are the most important part of your children’s spiritual growth. It doesn't matter if you don't have all the knowledge or you have made mistakes, you are the primary spiritual influence in your children's lives.
3. ***It's not worth the effort.*** Yes, it can be hard work, and it will seem at times like you are actually going backwards and making no headway. Your children will fight you at times, rebel, question, challenge, and make you think that they haven’t heard a word you said. But that is not true. None of your words and actions are wasted and the Holy Spirit will use your faithfulness in their lives (Keehn).

Generational Impact

So, let's make generational impact absolutely practical. Let me show you why this is worth fighting for. When you struggle as a parent, when things do not go right, or you fail for the short term, or your kids have taken a detour, do not get discouraged. Never lose sight of what you are fighting for. This effort is not for you, this is not just for them, you are setting the tone, the direction, and the foundation for three generations of descendants. You are laying the groundwork for your children to influence thousands, maybe tens of thousands in their lifetimes - friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances, business associates.

Now, let me take it one step further. With no exaggeration, I tell you that as a parent, you are setting the foundation in their lives to impact your nation for the Kingdom of God, because as the children of a nation go - so goes a nation.

Many will say I am just dreaming. They will say that there can be no way that the work that each parent does will impact a nation. But let me show you how this happens.

If two parents raise two godly children, who each raise two godly children, and they raise two godly children, that means that by the third generation, those two parents have helped raise 16 godly men and women. Doesn't seem like a lot does it?

But don't stop there.

Raising two godly children does not mean that you only impact those two children. If you follow the calling that God has given you, your children should be living out their faith, and sharing their faith with other children around them. I was sharing my faith at the age of five, but let's say that most children will begin to share and live out their faith by the age of 10. And, let's say that each child influences just two people each month with the godly life they are living until age 60. Yes, they will influence people until the day they die, but let us use the age 60 for this illustration. That means that you, your spouse, and your two kids alone would impact 7,200 people. 7,200!

But don't stop there. Remember, we are talking about generational impact. If each of your children got married and had two children, you would have four grandchildren. That would be another 9,600 people impacted over their lifetimes.

If each of your grandchildren got married and each marriage had two kids, that generation would impact another 17,280 people.

So, you, your kids, grandchildren, and great grandchildren - four generations - would influence 36,000 people. 36,000 people! Just because you were faithful with your two children.

Can you see why I said that your faithfulness can change the course of a region, a state, a nation?

Vision for Pastors

For pastors, there is a much bigger dimension. Not only do you impact your immediate family, neighbors, friends, and descendants, you impact all those who attend your church with your teaching. Let me give you a vision of what you can do when you teach the truth of God's word and how to raise godly children.

If, over the course of 10 years, you have 100 sets of parents that attend your church, and each of those parents raises two children, who each grow to raise two children, who each grow to raise two children. If much of that was because of your teaching, then, those 100 sets of parents will have raised 2100 godly children. But, if you consider all the people those 2100 children will impact during their lives - neighbors, friends, family, and work associates, then those 100 sets of parents will impact 3,024,000 people. And you will have a part in all of that!

Because I train groups of pastors in local areas, often there are 50 to 100 pastors from a region in our training. So, let's see what would happen if just 10 pastors in one area taught the truth of God's Word, and showed their people how to raise godly children. Over three generations, 21,000 children would be taught how to follow the Savior, and 30,240,000 people would be impacted for Christ. Can you see now why God is so eager for pastors to have great families and teach others to have great families?

*10 churches
21,000 godly children
30,240,000 people impacted*

Don't ever believe that you are just a small pastor of a small church in a rural area, and therefore you don't have any impact. You have the ability, through raising godly children and teaching others to raise Godly children, to change the course of your state and nation. It is the reason why God chose the tiny nation of Israel, because impact is not dependent upon size. It is why He told Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18 that He would bless him and through his descendants, all the world would be blessed because of his obedience. Abraham, a man who chose to obey God, in what seemed a small and insignificant decision, changed the world.

Potentially, you and your spouse could influence millions - just you, JUST YOU!!! That is the vision. That is what is possible. You, YOU can change a nation. That is why it is worth it to do the work, with dedication, and put in the time to stand before your Lord someday and hear Him say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

Which DNA?

In Deuteronomy 27-28, God addresses the nation of Israel and tells them that they may choose two different courses of action. The one course will bring them blessings and the other will bring them curses. The principles are exactly the same for us. We bring blessings or curses on the generations that follow us by how we live our lives.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

As we live under the control of the Holy Spirit, our lives evidence these fruits and attitudes. When we live this way, we pass on to our children God's name and character.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

When we live with this purpose we pass on God's agenda.

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17).

You are of royal blood, and so are your children.

This is the DNA all of us should pass on to our children.

What are the Costs?

There are always costs to doing what is right.

Energy - It takes a lot of energy to be the parent that God has called you to be. You are not just a parent until your children leave the home. You are a parent for life. There will be times when you will long to go to bed, and your children want to talk. Praise God! They want to talk to you! So you stay up, miss sleep, and rejoice that you have a relationship with your children.

Stance - You will need to take a stance against the world and for the God you serve. Many times this will not be popular, as you already know. And when your children come to you and tell you, “But all my friends are doing this, going there, dressed like this... why can't I?” You need to stand loving and firm for what God has called you to be.

Availability - Your work, entertainment, and responsibilities will need to take second place to your family. I understand how hard this can be if you are a pastor. Everyone needs you, and they will say they need you all the time to the exclusion of your

family. You must be strong enough to manage your schedule in such a way that you are available for your spouse and children.

What are The Rewards?

If you are willing to pay the costs, there are powerful rewards.

Generational health - We have already talked about generational impact. The reason there is generational impact is because your children are living lives that are healthy, joyful, loving, and connected to the Savior.

Loving relationships - You will enjoy close, loving relationships with your children and grandchildren, and, if you live long enough, your great grandchildren. Because you raised them like you did, they will want to be around you.

Eternal joy - Generational health and loving relationships will give you joy now, and when it is your turn to go meet the Savior in heaven, then you will spend eternity rejoicing because you chose to do what was most important.

World impact - Much of that joy will come through the many people who will have found the Savior because of you, your family, your teaching, and your example. For all of eternity, you will meet men and women who will thank you because your life changed theirs for good.

Greatest Job on Earth!

Yes, parenting is the greatest job on earth.

Parenting is a HOLY job.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. . . In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?’ tell him: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in

and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-23).

The chief reason that God put parents in children's lives is so that they would know Him. You will often fail, but even in the midst of your failure, you are to introduce your children to the Savior. Your kids will question the rules and challenge you. That's OK. Do to them what God does to you. He overwhelmed you with His love. Yes, there are rules, but they are rooted in the grace and love of God. Don't overwhelm your child with justice and judgment. Overwhelm him/her with patience, mercy, and love. God revealed Himself to you in the way that He did so you would have an example of how to treat your children.

Parenting is YOUR job - Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-23

If you read those verses again, you can see that God doesn't want you to hand over your children to someone else for teaching, inspiration, and discipline. Pastors sadly fail this instruction by God in two directions. First, they are so busy trying to train and lead others that they don't take enough time for their own children. Second, since most pastors love to be important in other people's lives, they encourage people to leave the spiritual instruction of families and children up to them and the church. In short, while neglecting their own families, they usurp the responsibilities of parents in their congregation.

Though it seems so obvious as I write this here, many pastors are drawn into this failing through good motives. Pastors are called to minister to those inside and outside their church. What many don't realize in the beginning is that you will never have enough time to meet all the needs of your congregation. Never. Those within your church will want every minute of time that you will give them. If you don't draw a line to protect your family, then you will give away the time that is rightly theirs. The sad thing is that if you give away that time, you still won't meet all the needs of the people in your church, AND you will have failed your family. Don't fall for this trick that the enemy uses. Set the boundaries of your schedule, and except in rare cases, stick to those boundaries and trust God to take care of the rest.

Parenting is a LIFE CHANGING job - Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-23

Though it is easy to know what to do as a parent in general, because every one of your children will be radically different - emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and developmentally, you can never be fully prepared for what you actually need to do on a day to day basis. Just as businesses have to change and grow in order to deal with the changing markets, so parents must learn what type of child God has given them and adapt their parenting to work with that unique individual.

Paul Tripp, in his excellent book, *Parenting: The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, calls parents “treasure hunters” (Tripp 24). This is a radically different mindset. Parenting, though difficult, cannot be a chore. It must be a

joyous and captivating treasure hunt, and if you view it that way, your choices, words, and actions every day will reflect your inner attitude. So, the real question is, what gets in the way of your children being your greatest treasure? Possessions, success, work, ministry? After God, put your spouse and children first.

You CAN'T Do This

Seriously. You can't be a great parent. I know that sounds like bad news, but in reality it is just the opposite. Yes, the job is too big for you. If you try this on your own, you will fail. Be assured of that fact.

You can't be a great parent. . .on your own. But if you will seek God, He has the answers. Parenting must be a partnership between you and God. God didn't call you to be a parent because you were able, He called you because He was able.

God never calls you to do something He doesn't equip you to do. You were designed to be dependent on Him. As you seek to do the impossible task of developing godly children, you must cry out to Him in dependency. When you fail, and you will fail, your failures will be God's opportunity. Because of how parenting works, your biggest, ongoing problem in the process of raising your children will not be your children, it will be you. Parenting will put pressures on you, and when it does, who you are on the inside will spill out. Your children don't make you mad, you choose to get angry or choose to react in love. So, know that the biggest ongoing problem in your child is not your child, it is you.

When you allow God to grow, change, and mature you, your children will be changed as well.

Session 2a - Your Personal Foundation For Men

Overview

The goal:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

Men - Love God and Love People. That is the commission by God, not just for your life, but for your children’s lives. In order for you to successfully be the parent that God has called you to be, and pass this principle on to your children, you must first be the example.

Paul, as a leader within the young New Testament church, expressed a leader’s motto clearly and succinctly to the people who were his spiritual children in I Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore I urge you to imitate me.” and I Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

The pattern is clear. Children do what their parents do. Parents do what Christ would do.

For years, parents claimed that they could get away with “do as I say, not as I do”. But kids are much smarter than that, and science has proven that they pay attention 25% or less to what you say and 75% or more to what you do. If what you do lines up with what you say, then they will listen more to what you say. If it doesn’t line up, then kids will simply label you a hypocrite, nod their heads, and then do what they want to do, which is usually what their friends are doing.

If your children grow up watching you live out:
 A vibrant relationship with Christ,
 A healthy marriage,
 And a life of impact,
 then the chances of them living the same type of life are immense.

To put it in business terms, you can't sell what you don't own, and you can't teach what you don't practice. All of us want our children to grow to be happy, healthy adults, who love the Lord, have wonderful marriages, and are a blessing to others. You must be a happy healthy adult who loves the Lord, has a great marriage, and is a blessing to others.

I know, from experience, that these things are hard work. So, every time you start to doubt, or you want to give up, remember these three things:

1. It is easier to shape a child than repair a child.

Learning what each of your unique children needs in order to follow the Savior is hard work. What works with one child does not work with another. But it is far easier to learn what they need, adapt your parenting to those needs, and raise your children right, than to wait until that child has rebelled and try to go back and repair the mistakes.

2. Kingdom kids become kingdom parents.

We all want our legacy to impact generations. The family was specifically created by God to be the channel through which God's Kingdom would be modeled and reproduced in the world. When you raise Kingdom kids, they will become Kingdom parents. This is why Satan is so focused on destroying marriages and families. If he succeeds, he doesn't just get you and your children, he wounds generations of men and women.

3. Perfect parents are not required.

Through all the difficulty, hard work, and failure take comfort. Children don't need perfect parents, they need parents who know their calling, and pursue it with intention and purpose as they seek to understand and follow God's principles in their homes. Children have an immense amount of grace for your failings, as long as you are honest, loving and intentional.

A Man's Role

Men, this is what you must know - you are to be the leaders in the home.

But before we discuss what that means, listen to the Word of God:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Let me be very clear. In the sight of God, you and your wife are equal in value.

I start with this because this section on men's and women's roles is always abused by some men, and when they do, they violate the core principles of what it is to be a godly husband and father. So let me say it one more time:

According to God, husbands have no more value in eternity than wives.

With that said, let's go back to the Word of God.

“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:18-19).

God has assigned the responsibility of leadership in the home to husbands. That includes spiritual leadership.

Some men read this and mistakenly say: “Wife, I lead, you follow.”
Others say: “Spiritual leader, what am I supposed to do, be the preacher?”
While others say: “I got this God, let me do it my way.”
And others say: “It's just too much work.”

Some women read this and mistakenly say: “Why should he be the leader?!!”
Others say: “My husband is not very spiritual and certainly not a leader.”
While others say: “He can't do it, so I'll show my kids the way it should be done.”
And others say: “My husband is always doing things wrong.”

But a Godly man will say: “Dear God... please help me!”
Others say: “Dear Lord, let me be like you.”
While others say: “I pray I am strong and humble.”
And others say: “I pray I am strong yet loving.”

A Godly woman will say: “Lord, you have appointed my husband for leadership.”
Others say: “Let me be a woman of God.”
While others say: “Let me encourage my husband in his role as leader.”
And others say: “Let me be a godly woman for my children.”

Men, realize this:

You have been appointed the role of leader.
Your life will impact your wife, your children, and your family for four generations.
If you follow Christ, your family will.
If you go to church, your family will.
If you change the world, your family will.

Men, your influence is eternal. America has worked for decades to disprove the biblical theory of the man's role of spiritual leader in the family. American society desperately wants to say that men and women are not just equal, but they have the same roles, and it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman.

Research shows that this is not true. Here's how a man's life will impact the lives of his children:

- 42% of families headed by a woman were poor, but only 8% of homes with married parents were poor.
- Girls without fathers in their lives were 250% more likely to get pregnant before marriage, and 53% more likely to commit suicide.
- Boys without fathers in their lives were 63% more likely to run away from home, and 37% more likely to use drugs.
- Boys and girls without a father's involvement were 200% more likely to drop out of school, 200% more likely to go to jail, and 400% more likely to need help for emotional and behavioral problems (Haug).

Statistics show that when a father is missing in the home, life changing, life altering, life shattering experiences impact a child throughout their entire lives.

But the research goes deeper. Here's how a man's life will impact the faith of his children:

- If a child comes to faith in Christ first in a family that does not believe, then 7% of those families will follow the lead of the child and turn to Christ.
- If a wife/mother comes to faith in Christ first in a family that does not believe, then 23% of those families will follow the lead of the wife/mother and turn to Christ.
- If a husband/father comes to faith in Christ first in a family that does not believe, then 94% of those families will follow the lead of the husband/father and turn to Christ (Haug).

"It is the religious practice of the father of the family that, above all, determines the future attendance at or absence from church of the children" (Low).

- If a father and mother attend church regularly, 33% of children will be regular and 41% will be irregular. 25% will not attend church at all.
- If a father is a regular church attender and the mother is irregular, 38% of children will be regular.
- If a father is a regular church attender but mother never attends, 44% of children will be regular (Low).

However:

- If a father attends church irregularly and the mother is a regular attender, only 3% of children will be regular church attenders, 59% will be irregular and 38% will not attend at all.
- If a father doesn't attend church at all, but mother is a regular church attender, only 2% of children will be regular, 37% irregular and 60% will not attend at all (Low).

Men, that should cause you to drop to your knees and seek God with all your heart!

If a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife is, only 2% of children will become regular worshippers. 2%!!!

If a father does go regularly, and the other completely rejects the church, 44% of children will become regular worshippers. 44%!!

This is the way that God has established things. If Dad takes faith in God seriously, then the children will see that God should be taken seriously.

Pastors, you must preach this. Teach this. Pray for this. Women must band together and pray, knowing that their men have this kind of impact on the children.

Men, this is what must be inside you, and mark your life. These things should be so obvious that your family and friends know this about you before you ever say a word.

1. *As a father, you seek God first.*

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:3-5).

Your relationship with God is to be more important than your family, because God demands to be first, and He is jealous of that position in your life. Your relationship with God is for the benefit of your family.

2. *As a father, you seek God for wisdom.*

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

All of us desperately need God’s input on what to say and what to do. So we spend time with our God in prayer, learning from His Word, and listening to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

3. *As a father, you seek God for fulfillment.*

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

If we are to get the things that we truly desire, then Christ is to be a man's first line of satisfaction and joy. If a man has, as his first line of fulfillment, his wife and his children, he will regularly experience emotional trauma, because human relationships are difficult at times. Our joy is to be in Christ. This allows us a level of stability that gives us the ability to lead with excellence

4. *As a father you imitate Christ in humility.*

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8).

If Christ, the creator of the universe humbled Himself, so must we. Our humility points to the grandeur of the Father, and you are the first Christ your children will see. So yes, be strong, be a leader, but live out that leadership in humility and sacrifice.

5. *As a father, you understand your family.*

“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect” (I Timothy 3:4).

In order to manage people, you must understand them. If you don't understand them, you will merely be a dictator. Seek to be lovingly attentive and learn about their needs, so that you can meet each child where they are.

6. *As a father, you know the world.*

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Your children have no idea what the world is all about and the system that the ruler of the world has put into place. But you do. You know the values that the world holds are not the values of God. You know the enemies plan for people. So you:

- Seek balance in your own life. You must have time for your family to teach them God's truth.

- Seek insight from God to fully understand the society that surrounds you, in order to be aware of the world's deceptions, and show them to your family.
- Seek to guide your family as a leader, who understands the path in front of them, you point the way that is God honoring.

Partnership with Your Wife

The foundation

“So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh” (Genesis 2:21-23).

Men, we have seen from Scripture that you bear the responsibility, the privilege, and the burden of living a God-honoring, others-focused life. Some day, you will be held accountable. But how does this impact and involve your wife? I deal with this on a very in-depth basis in the Godly Marriage seminar, but I will highlight a few foundational truths.

For thousands of years, men have exploited their role as those who are physically stronger to be the leaders in the family, but in an abusive, negative way. The basics of leadership all come down to practical human truths. All relationships, whether in a marriage, family, business, or charitable organization, need leaders. Someone has to be responsible for the direction, vision, and be the final say when there is a disagreement.

But this is a difference in roles, not value. God doesn't consider wives inferior, inadequate, less important, less intelligent, less spiritual, or less responsible than husbands. Let me repeat that again, because there are some men that refuse to listen. God doesn't consider wives inferior, inadequate, less important, less intelligent, less spiritual, or less responsible than husbands.

So men, as you partner with your wife, each of you has a vital, irreplaceable role in the structure of the family. Here are two key things to remember as you go forward.

1. Love her

There is nothing more important in your partnership than loving your wife. Treat her with tenderness, love, humility, respect, and romance her like you did in the beginning of your marriage. This is your privilege and responsibility, according to I Corinthians 13. If you will live this out, your girls will grow up, expecting their husbands to treat them in the same God honoring, child shaping manner. Your boys will watch what you do with their mom, and emulate those behaviors with their wives. Then their children will repeat the process, and your love for your wife will impact generations and thousands of people.

2. Decision making

This is one of those areas in a partnership that is usually misunderstood and abused. The general rule is that all major decisions for the family and children are made by you and your wife together, based on what it is that God has called both of you to do and be.

Each of you will have your areas of responsibility. Those areas should be based on your individual skills and desires. Within those areas of personal responsibility, minor decisions are left up to each individual based on the general direction of the family, values, and principles of Scripture. For instance, in my family, I hated doing the bookkeeping and paying bills, but I enjoyed investing. When my wife and I were married, we discovered that she not only loved doing the monthly bills, but she was good at it. So, on a month to month basis, she keeps track of our spending, giving, and income, and I handle the investing. Every few months, we will sit down together so that we can share with each other where we are. When she or I want to buy something small, or give a small donation, we simply do it. But all major financial decisions we make together, keeping each other accountable to the task that we believe God has called us to fulfill.

So what is the process for making major decisions? The first key is to remember that you are together in this as equals. Then, you take four steps;

- *Pray.* Pray individually and ask God what it is that He wants you to do.
- *Pray together.* Spend time together so that you can commit your decision to the Lord.
- *Talk together.* Talk about what it is that you believe God is leading you to do.
- *Agree.* If you have established your vision based on God's calling, most of the time you will agree and be able to move forward as a team.

But what happens when there are disagreements? Because God has made each of you unique, with special gifting, insight, and wisdom, you will periodically disagree. For some couples, this is an invitation to tension, anger, and frustration, but it doesn't have to be. When my wife and I disagree, most of the time, we delay the decision, because most decisions don't have to be made immediately. In fact, we usually delay the decision until we can agree.

However, if a decision cannot be delayed, then because God has given me the position of leadership, I make the decision, and carry the greater responsibility. How often does this occur in our marriage? Rarely. Probably a few times each year. And there are times when at the point of disagreement, I listen to what my wife recommends, and we do what it is that she wants to do.

Exceptions

For my wife and I, we have developed a process where there are exceptions to these guidelines. This is my advice, not Scripture. We have agreed that each person, a few times each year, can say to the other, "I have spent time in prayer and I feel that the Lord is guiding us to do...".

Usually, this will be about something that is difficult for either my wife or I to accept. But if my wife comes to me and says this, I set aside my feelings, and simply do what it is that she believes God has led us to do in prayer. I can do this, and my wife can do this with me, because we both know that we are separately seeking God and His guidance, we spend regular time in His Word, and we never ask the other to do something that clearly violates God's Word.

How often can we come to each other and say this? Rarely. My wife has used this privilege with me less than once a year, so when she says this, I listen. I have used this with her even less. She and I both know that if we were to abuse this privilege, then the process would fall apart.

Session 2b - Your Personal Foundation For Women

Introduction

Proverbs 31. Most teachers use Proverbs 31 in a seminar on wives, but I prefer to put it in the seminar on parenting. Why? Because women have a powerfully important role in the lives of their children. Proverbs 31 describes the characteristics of a woman who inspires great children. I had a mother who was a Proverbs 31 mother. I have a wife who is a Proverbs 31 mother. These kinds of mothers are dynamic, unique, world changing women, who raise their children to do great things for the Kingdom of God, because they are wise and their wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord.

Science tells us that children take their cues about domestic life from mothers (Craven) so let's go to Proverbs 31 and see what values a mother should have in her life that will teach children how they should interact with others.

Let's take a look at five key areas of your life, if you are to be a Proverbs 31 woman, who sets the example for your kids, so that when they leave the house, they will enter life as successful, faithful followers of Christ.

Area #1 - Marriage

The first relationship that your children will learn about, through you, is the one you have with your husband.

“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” (*English Standard Version*, Proverbs 31:11-12).

“*The heart of her husband trusts in her*” This powerful phrase is the cornerstone of your marriage relationship. Though many people say that love is the foundation of a great marriage, I

believe that trust is the most important thing that a couple can share. Without trust, love will struggle. Trust is also the first and most important trait that you as parents teach your children.

What does it mean that the heart of a husband trusts in his wife? It means that your husband knows that he can rely upon you fully as a wife, mother, friend, and lover. His deepest secrets are safe with you. Your character is trustworthy and filled with integrity. This means that when you speak, act, and live so that your husband trusts in you, God's blessing will be on your home, and your family will have no lack of gain. A husband, who knows that his wife only has his good in mind, is free mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to be all that God has called him to be.

What happens when this principle is violated? It is a foolish woman who can't be trusted. She takes some of the blessing away from the home, because some of her husband's energy is focused on protecting himself and his family from the woman he was supposed to trust. When he must live like this, his energies are divided, and the impact is seen in the family financially and materially.

How important is this principle? "Note that trust is otherwise used only of God with an exception of Judges 20:36. We are to only trust God, it is exclusively of God. This is high praise that her husband can commit himself to trust her in such a fashion" (Waltke). This is stunning! Wives are the one exception? And not just any wives, but Proverbs 31 wives. This is what gives the foundation for the reason why God says in Proverbs 31:10 that "She is far more precious than jewels."

She brings him good, not harm, all her days. And that is the reason why she is more precious than jewels. Though the Proverbs 31 wife will help a man achieve a level of financial success that he couldn't without her, her real value is in the good that she brings to him. What is money without a treasured relationship? This wife has nothing but good to say about her man. She doesn't bad mouth him, gossip to her friends about his faults, or place him in a place that would compromise his calling. This woman lives a life that is exemplary, and people who know her husband say to him, "What a blessed man you are to have such an incredible wife."

As she matures, as the years of marriage pass, as her children grow older, the sense of her goodness and faithful character become deeper and greater with each passing year.

Are you such a wife?

If you are, you will embody the key virtues of trustworthiness and honor. You are a woman who is trustworthy, one who honors your husband and acts and speaks with integrity.

Area #2 - Business

“She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard” (*New International Version*, Proverbs 31:13-16).

This woman, she is not afraid of work. In fact, she understands that work is not just work, it is something far deeper. Work is the avenue of blessing. So she is eager to embrace what it is that blesses her family and others. If she has to work hard with her own hands, she is more than willing. She is not too proud. Work is something that she enjoys.

She may be employed, work from the home, or own a business. Whatever the case, she is kind, thinking of others around her, using her business and position to bless those who are less fortunate than herself. In addition, she thinks outside the box. She is not satisfied to just do what everyone else does, but carefully considers the future and how she can use her abilities, contacts, and resources to grow her business so that it is even a greater blessing to those around her.

When she does work, she understands that there are some cultural values that violate the truths of Scripture, and is careful to avoid those things. For instance, culture tells people that the longer you work, the higher you go in the company and the more money you earn, and that is good. Scripture would tell a godly woman that neglecting family, husband, and children for a position and better pay is wrong. And so the Proverbs 31 woman, while being a hard worker, she is also wise, and places her family first.

She also understands that there are key issues to work out with her husband if she pursues working outside the home. First, he might feel threatened if she earns more money than he does, so she is careful to discuss the future with him, so that they are on the same page. Second, she knows that working will bring blessing to the whole family, but it might mean that she is unable to do all the chores within the home. So, before she makes sweeping commitments, she arranges with her husband and children the responsibilities of the home so that meals and chores are taken cared of as a partnership.

In our home, I have been called to teaching those who have little or no training and little income. As a result, I don't take a salary from the ministry so that there is more for others. The main reason that I am able to do this is that my wife is an attorney, who earns the money for our family. Because she has to work late some nights, I often cook, we do the dishes together, and clean the house together. We do life this way because we both prayed, sought God's leading, agreed on the work that both she and I are doing, and made the changes to our lifestyle so that we could pursue God's calling in our lives.

Are you such a business woman?

If you are, then you will be hardworking, kind to others and planning for the future.

Area #3 - Personal

“She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple” (Proverbs 31:17, 20-22).

Vision. Vision is a part of her life and thinking. What is vision? It is a perspective on life that is greater than just today. Vision reaches into the future, and with the help of God, prepares the best route for husband, children, and business. Vision realizes that there are problems to avoid and opportunities to be taken advantage of, and works daily to prepare for each. Vision sees that one child is gifted in music and the other in engineering, and prepares each child for opportunities to live out their gifting. Vision sees trouble brewing in the church leadership and alerts her husband, upholding him in prayer so that he is ready.

Virtuous. Some would think that because she makes clothing, as we saw in the previous verses, that how she is dressed is her focus. Not so. She cares even more about the display of her character, than the outward display of clothes. Strength and honor are part of the character of a powerful woman, and because of her dedication, these are hers and will be with her for all time.

Wisdom. Because of her dedication to living wisely, her speech is deliberate. When she speaks, her words are carefully chosen, and people sense the wisdom and kindness that she has within her that give rise to such words.

I can remember a small group of which my wife and I were a part years ago. At first, it used to bother me that my wife would say little during the group discussion. I was always jumping in with insight, questions, and advice. But she would sit, listen, and observe. Then, at the end, when there was a break in the conversation, she would speak. Her words, while carefully chosen, were offered in a humble and gentle manner. It was clear that she had been listening carefully, and asking the Lord for what to say, because when she finished speaking, we would often simply look around at each other, smile, and say, “Well, that about sums up the whole evening!” Then we would go to prayer, and her wisdom would be the last thing we heard.

As Adam Clarke says, “This is the most distinguishing excellence of this woman. There are very few of those who are called managing women who are not lords over their husbands, tyrants over their servants, and insolent among their neighbors. But this woman, with all her eminence and excellence was of a meek and quiet spirit. Blessed woman!” (Clarke).

Are you this type of leader?

If you are, your life will be marked by vision, compassion, wisdom, and humility. You will be a forward thinking woman, whose compassion guides you. Your decisions will radiate wisdom as you humbly and joyfully guide others.

Area #4 - Legacy

Sooner or later, most people seek to leave a legacy. We want to be remembered, for good, for impact in the lives of others. We want to have done something more than simply taking up space and meeting our own needs. Legacy is all about what you will leave behind you when you are gone. A good friend of mine said that it was not about dying, we all die, it was about being ready to die because you had lived a life of impact.

“Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her; ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (Proverbs 31:28-31).

Impact. The Proverbs 31 woman lives so well that she influences those around her for good. Because she has been in their lives, they consider themselves blessed to have known her. Impact happens both intentionally and unintentionally. Unintentionally through our character, actions, and words, while we live out our daily lives. Intentionally, as we see and meet the needs of those around us through what we do and say.

Children. Every mother longs for the praise that the woman received from her children. They rose up and called her blessed. This is so powerful. Many people have a public reputation and a private one. I have seen this often in ministry. At church, in small group, outside the house, your life is one way. But when the doors close, and no one out there can see or hear you, you change. This is not the way of a woman who would leave a legacy in the lives of her children. Your husband might keep silent at times when you are not doing what is right. But your children will see and talk about what you are like when the doors are closed. There was no difference between this woman’s public and private persona. She was a woman who deserved admiration and praise by her children in front of others. It doesn't get any better!

And though consistency in and outside the home takes diligence and hard work, it is well worth it. If you have changed the lives of your children this way, because they have watched how you have lived, then they will raise their children in the same way. Essentially, your life has changed the lives of generations within your family and thousands outside your family as your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren live out the life you modeled.

Husband. Some women get so caught up in the parenting process with their children that they set aside the responsibilities they have with their husbands. You definitely need to go through our Godly Marriage seminar, but know that you must prioritize your husband, if you would be a complete woman with broad influence. In fact, I do not believe that you can fulfill your responsibilities of motherhood without also being a great wife. With a little work, you will be that wife that your husband boasts about to everyone else.

Are you leaving behind you this type of legacy?

If you are, it will be simple to see. Your husband, children, and friends will honor and praise you because your life has impacted them and all those around you.

Session 3 - Love Your Children

Introduction

I want to thank Gary Chapman for developing the five love languages. It is powerful, insightful, and I have personally used the concepts in my marriage and with my kids. All that said, when we talk about loving our children, many parents believe that this is all that they have to do. The Beatles sang, "All we need is love". But that just isn't true. Love is part of the foundation upon which all the other things in this course are built. Earlier, we said that children NEED to know they are loved. However, love is not the end, it is the beginning. Upon the foundation of love, you build the house of parenting with discipline, training, guidance, encouragement, inspiration, and leadership.

As a result, this session is about the five love languages, but understand, they are your starting point. You must take the rest of this course and use it upon that foundation to develop mature, healthy, happy and impactful children. If you can, buy Gary Chapman's book entitled *The Five Love Languages of Children*, or his first book, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. In this session, I will be teaching a very focused overview.

The Foundation

Children need to FEEL that they are unconditionally loved. Please note the difference between feel and know. A child can intellectually assess the fact that his or her parents love him. But, if that sense of love has not penetrated their emotions, and they don't feel loved, then they will struggle with knowing they were truly loved all their lives.

If parents do their part and love their kids unconditionally, and their kids both know and feel loved, then, they will grow up and set aside the desire to be children and joyfully enter into being adults. If you love your children unconditionally, they will feel secure, confident, valuable, and joyful.

However, if you love them only when they please you, or only when they perform the tasks that they should, they will not feel genuinely loved. This type of love makes a child feel insecure and prevents them from moving into better self control and mature behavior. Since they

are always trying to earn your love, they will feel incompetent and will believe that it is pointless to do their best, since it is never enough to get what they truly want.

In order to deal with this, Chapman identified what he called five love languages: *Physical Touch, Words of Affirmation, Gifts, Quality Time, and Acts of Service*. Though every child will have a primary love language, meaning that one language is more important than the rest, all kids/people need all five languages. As a parent, you get to discover which language is most important to your children. Each child will be different, so it is like a treasure hunt. When you find out what they need, your responsibility will be to provide them with that type of love.

As you try to discover their language, by default, you will have a tendency to give to each child what means most to you. They, in turn, will give back to you, what is most important to them. This can lead to hurt feelings and a sense that “mom and dad just don’t understand me.” Parents can feel hurt and neglected. But, since you wear the label of parent, it is your responsibility to change the type of love you give to them to match their needs. And then teach them the type of love you need so they can reciprocate as they grow older.

The Process

At times it can be daunting to understand your child deeply enough to know what language is theirs. But, there is a process:

1. Do what we teach in this session to discover what your child’s language is.
2. When you learn what your child’s love language is, you need to be intentional about giving them that love. Go out of your way to provide them what they need.
3. As they grow older, teach them about their languages. Confirm with them which language is theirs.
4. Then finish your job by teaching them how to discover other people’s love language and providing each person with that love.

The last point is so important, because as representatives of Christ, we are to communicate the truth of the Gospel to as many people as possible. In order to do that effectively one on one and in small groups, it is much more powerful to speak to someone’s heart, where they live and how they love. When your children understand that the ultimate calling to understanding love is to more effectively communicate the love of Christ, then you will have done your job.

Guidelines

In the process of discovery, there are some clear guidelines for you. Here are things to do:

Give. The primary reason you use their love language is simply because they are your children and you love them. You don't discover what their love language is to manipulate them, guide them, persuade them, or get on their good side. You love them because Christ first loved you, and you are simply loving them the way He loved you...not for anything that you had done or would do, but just because you were. If you love them for any other reason, they will know.

Look and listen. Whenever you engage their love language, be looking for opportunities for quality conversations. As you already know from personal experience, when a person feels loved, they are emotionally and intellectually open for input. While it won't happen every time, your children will open up about their lives, struggles, and questions and then, this will give you incredible opportunities to speak into their lives.

Adjust. I would love to tell you that once you discover a child's love language, you just apply it for the rest of their lives. While that is partially true, remember that your love will have to be adjusted for your child's age and development.

Be aware. This is counterintuitive. When a child misbehaves, we want to go immediately to using discipline. However, children often misbehave because their love tank is empty. This means that they have not felt like you love them for a while, which usually means that they haven't gotten any attention from you. So, you may simply need to give them love, but a better way to do it is that you give them the love they need, then you hold them accountable for what they did wrong, then you give them more of their love language. Sandwich your discipline with love. Love before and love after.

There are also guidelines for things that you don't want to do:

Manipulate. Do not use any of the languages to manipulate your children into doing what you want them to do, think they should do, or believe that God wants them to do. Be very careful that you don't reward them for doing something good, by giving them their love language, or if they have done something bad you take away their love language. This will destroy your relationship. Just love them whether they deserve it or not.

Resent. Some love languages take time, lots of time. If you are pressed for time, you will be tempted to resent or be bitter about giving your children their love language. Just know, if you feel this way when you give them the love they need, they will know it, and your demonstration of love will be worthless.

Anger. Watch your anger. Most people, when they are tired, hungry, frustrated, or busy, don't handle their anger well. Your children will watch you closely and learn how to handle their own anger by what they have seen you do.

Along the way, your children also do some things in the process of being raised:

Learn. As we just mentioned, everything you do, your children will watch and learn from. In some ways, this is terrifying. Your actions speak louder than your words. But in other ways, it is a great opportunity. As you give the love languages to your spouse and your other children, they will watch and learn from you how to love others.

Subconscious. Before a child can talk, they understand what love is and know that you are demonstrating love to them through your vocal tone, actions, body language, and facial expressions.

Validation. Sometimes giving love is not easy. Children, especially teens, will test you when you give them their love language to see if you are serious. They will push your expressions of love away, and it may appear like rejection, but they are simply trying to see if you will overcome the problems and love them still.

How to Find Your Children's Love Language

If you have gone through our seminar on marriage, and completed the session on love languages, you will know that discovering your spouse's love language is usually just a matter of having an in-depth conversation. Adults can tell you what it is that meets their love needs and what doesn't. Children, however, cannot usually let you know until they are in their teens, and you want to engage them long before that. There are several processes that you can use to find out what is the most important to each one of your children.

Give each of your children all five love languages and see which one they respond to most. This should be spread out over a week or two. Set aside time every few days to focus on one kind of love language. When you give them the one that they need the most, their reactions should be significantly different. They should be much more animated or excited, and afterward, they should stay happier and more peaceful for a longer period of time.

Observe how your child expresses love to you and others. At a young age, they will not be adjusting the love that they give in order to meet the needs of others. They will simply be giving what they know of love, and that will be the love they identify the most. If your child makes little gifts for others, or if your child likes to sit and play, spending time with others, then those are clues for you.

What does your child ask for the most? Are they always climbing into your lap? Do they want little toys as gifts? Again, these are clues.

Lastly, you can offer them a choice between two of the love languages and see which one they choose.

The Five Love Languages

1. Physical touch

Definition: Any physical contact with the child

Examples:

- Hugs
- Your child sitting on your lap
- Sitting close to each other so that your bodies touch
- Wrestling
- High fives
- Holding hands
- Group hugs with the family
- Tickling
- Cuddle toys which are soft to the touch
- Piggy back rides
- Kiss goodnight

Changes:

As a baby, holding and touch are essential for every child. Any children who are raised without this contact develop significant emotional problems. However, these types of children need extra physical touch. You will know your child's needs by how quickly they quit crying or fussing.

When they are school age, hug them before they leave for school, and when they return home. As they get older, they may still want you to hug them, but probably not in front of their friends. When you are helping them study, pull them on to your lap and read together.

Teenagers. If you have a boy, that boy will not outgrow his love language just because he is a teenage boy. They may push you away because they have been told that hugging and touching is for girls. Please let them know that men like hugging, too. If you know your son's love language is physical touch, then find ways to stay in contact.

Girls may seem easier, but not necessarily. Father's often don't know what to do as their little girls become women and develop physically. Teen girls may become sensitive with their new bodies and not know how to interact with their dads. But that physical touch is still essential. Teenage girls, who know they are loved by their fathers, relate to the opposite sex appropriately because they develop good self esteem and sexual

identity. It gives them the ability to know how to stand against peer pressure that would push them to violate their godly principles.

Neglect:

Children, who do not receive the physical touch they need, will find a way to connect with you by poking, hitting, pinching, and anything else, no matter how annoying. They don't know that physical touch is their love language. All they know is that they desperately need connection with you or their siblings. If it is not given, they will force the issue by taking it. When you give them the physical touch they need, this behavior will go away.

Caution:

There is real potential for trouble when a child's love language is physical touch and a parent's is not, or when a parent's is and the child's is not. Since it is not up to the child to adjust, it will be your responsibility. If your child needs touch and you don't like touch, then you need to do what is best for the child and learn ways to connect with your child, whether or not it is comfortable for you or not. All sorts of problems can develop when a child tries to approach a parent and keeps getting rejected. If your language is physical touch and your child is not, then again you need to adjust. Do not take it personally. They don't understand yet that you are trying to show them love in the way that you like. All they know is that you are doing something that they don't like.

One of my main languages is physical touch, and my daughter's is not. Her language is gifts. For years, I wanted to scoop her up and hug her, and she wanted me to give her food and toys. When I didn't understand the love languages, I was hurt that my daughter didn't want me to hug her, and every time she asked for a gift, I felt like she was just trying to get something from me. It created distance and tension between us, but only because I was immature. Don't make the mistakes I did. Have a long term vision of raising a godly son or daughter. Find out early on what your child needs and then give them those things, sacrificing your own desires and wants, so that you can raise them in a way that honors God.

2. *Words of Affirmation*

Definition: words that build up.

Examples:

Encouragement when a child does something right

Encouragement when a child works hard and diligently

Complimenting a child's dreams

Saying "I love you"

Saying "I love you because... (they are kind, smart, gentle, and hard working...).

You want to tell them you love them not because of what they do, but because of who they are, how they act, and their character.

Tell them how much you appreciate what they do. I put this on the bottom of the list because this is the easiest for parents to talk about, but it can easily be misinterpreted by your children. If all they hear is encouragement when they have done something right, then they will think that they have to earn your love. You want to give them words of affirmation regularly, no matter how they are acting.

There are other ways to encourage your children:

Put notes in lunches, if you make them lunches to take to school. These are written words of affirmation.

Text messages during the day. This is easy to do, but don't overdo it.

Tell them you love them and why you love them before they leave to go outside or to school.

Tell them you love them and why before they go to bed.

At dinner or before bed, tell them five reasons you are proud of them.

Let them hear you talking to others about them and how proud you are of them.

Changes:

Even before your child talks, they will know you are giving them words of affirmation. Children are brilliant and they can hear that your words are affirming by listening to your tone, seeing your eye contact, and watching your body language. So give your children with all the words that you would have loved to hear as a small child yourself.

When your children are older, you begin to change your words. Don't use "baby" words or tone with your six year old, and don't talk to your teenagers like you would your six year old. Another very important key is that, when kids are younger, they need more words. You tell them many times a day, in different ways how and why you love them. As they get older, fewer words are better. You may tell them once a day, or every few days. When you do, choose your words carefully, be succinct and to the point. Let

them know you have put some thought into what you are saying. If you tell them too much or too often, they will nod and smile, but basically, they will quit listening.

Neglect:

When a child, who needs to hear words of affirmation, does not get those words, they will quit talking with you and the only things you will hear from them are the essential points for communication. They will let you talk at them, but not with them. Until you begin to fill their need for words of affirmation, it will be like talking to a brick wall and they will not share with you what is happening in their lives.

Caution:

Since words are so easy to use, parents sometimes abuse this love language. Here are a few things you must watch out for:

Though you may think your child is the most incredible child in the world, smarter than anyone else, and more talented than every child his or her age, they aren't. They may be smarter, faster, and more talented than many, but be honest with them. You must not exaggerate or tell them things that are clearly not true. If you do, they will begin to discount and then not believe you, and when it comes to something really important, your words will have no meaning.

Though anger and angry words are destructive to all children, they are especially destructive to this type of child. Since words have extra meaning to this child, your angry words will have a multiplied impact, and though you may ask forgiveness, and they may forgive you, the wounds will be deep. It is much better to ask God to help you keep your mouth shut and control your temper so that your children do not become victims of it.

Lastly, don't tie your words of affirmation to something they need to do, something they are doing wrong, or guidance you want to give them. Often, parents combine words of affirmation when they want to teach and guide a child. So a parent might say to a child at the dinner table, "You usually keep your room clean, and that shows real discipline and obedience to your parents." The child is affirmed for keeping the room clean and taught why it is important. While this is not necessarily bad, it can be misinterpreted by your children. They can see this as manipulation to keep cleaning their room, so they miss the words of affirmation. It is better to "catch" your children doing good things, like cleaning their room, and then tell them how much you appreciate what they are doing right then and why. That way, you find the good and compliment them, instead of telling them what they should be doing.

It is far more effective to teach them good things in this way, than to catch them doing something bad, and then try to teach them the right thing by getting upset and criticizing them. If you do this, children will rarely listen and may even do the opposite just to demonstrate their control.

3. *Quality time*

Definition: undivided attention.

Examples:

- Extended one-on-one times
- Eye contact
- Mealtimes including talking about the day
- Overnight trips
- Going on errands
- Bedtime stories

When it comes to quality time, it is not what you are doing, but that you are doing something with them.

Changes:

Younger children will be satisfied with shorter unplanned times. Their attention span is not as long, and as long as they feel that you have given them your attention for a game or wrestling or playing with dolls, they will be satisfied.

As children get older, the times you spend with them can become more infrequent, but those times need to be intentional, which means that they need to be better planned out and take longer. So, for example, where a four year old will want to play with dolls or toy cars for 20 minutes every day, a 10 year old might want to play catch, or go to the store for an hour a couple times a week, and a 16 year old will want to go for a long walk once every week or two.

Neglect:

When your children are constantly bugging you for attention, or it seems like they just aren't satisfied, they are telling you that they haven't had enough quality time with you. Chances are, you will think that they have already received enough attention, but they don't feel that way, so set aside what you are doing and simply give them 15 minutes of undivided attention, and that will let them know they are loved. Then you can go back to work.

Caution:

This is one of the hardest love languages to provide, because it requires the very thing that we feel we have the least of - time. When you are rushed, exhausted, in high demand, working late, and feeling pressured, it is always easiest to cut out the time that you spend with your children. If this is once or twice, then, that is not a problem. However, if it becomes a habit, your children will know that you have prioritized everything else above them, and they will grow resentful.

When you do spend time with them, do not multitask. Though it might be tempting, no texting, reading, social media, or phone calls while you are with them.

Do not multi people. In other words, do not try to meet the needs of other people while you are giving your children quality time. This is especially important for pastors. If you are out in the community, there will be people who know you and want to talk. Be polite, and then explain that you are spending special time with your child and you will have to find time to talk later.

Keep distractions to a minimum.

Bottom line: give your child your complete and full attention.

4. *Gifts*

Definition: something undeserved that you give your child, in a special way, simply because of who they are.

Examples:

In this section, I am going to define the examples, because gifts are too easy to do wrong. In order for a gift to mean something to your child, you need to know what is special to them. Don't buy a toy car for a child who likes airplanes. Don't get a doll for a child who likes food treats. Don't get them gifts that you would like. Yes, you can have variety, but know your child. The gift doesn't have to be big or expensive. It can be something you found or made, as long as it looks like it took some thought on your part.

When you give it to them, make a big deal of it. Wrap it up, celebrate, set some time aside to show them that you have thought about them and this present, and you want them to know they are loved.

Be careful about giving toys. There are exceptions but, first of all, there are just too many toys. They are cheap, easily bought, easily broken, and carry little meaning. Second, think about what that particular toy communicates. Is that toy's message what you want your child to learn?

Changes:

We have said that in order to give a gift with meaning, you must know what your children like. And just because they love animals at three doesn't mean they will love them at 13. In fact, most children regularly change, and you need to pay special attention so that when the changes occur, you can match the gifts to the next season in their lives. That is one of the ways that your child knows that you love them. Not just because you have given them a gift, but also because you cared enough to know who they are, what they are thinking, and how they've changed.

Neglect:

When you have failed to give your child anything for a while, he/she may reject a gift you give them. What they are trying to find out is if you are giving them that gift because you want them to do something. Remember, the key to giving someone their love language is that you give them what they need, not to get something, but just because of who they are. If your child rejects the gift, don't get mad. Just leave it for them, tell them you love them, and you hope they enjoy it. Then make sure that you don't wait so long to give them something the next time.

Caution:

Since gifts can be so easy to give, don't give gifts to get away from providing the other love languages. Many parents have failed in this area. Success in business and ministry often comes with a huge time commitment. That success often brings financial resources. When it does, parents think they can make up for their prior neglect of their children by showering them with gifts. Although a child may get excited about the gifts, don't be fooled into thinking that they think you love them. They are not blind. They know your priorities and if they are not top on your list, the gifts will only serve to convince them that you are simply trying to buy their love, instead of really knowing who they are.

Be careful that family members don't overdo gifts. Grandparents can be especially bad with this. I have seen children's rooms so full of toys that they couldn't possibly play with a fraction of them. I have watched children at Christmas time open so many gifts that they simply tear open the wrapping, see what is inside, then throw it aside to grab the next one. When people give to a child in such a way, they hurt the child and make the child self centered and ungrateful.

With few exceptions, don't make gifts expensive. The gift is not about the dollar value, but about the significance to the child.

Don't give them gifts so that they have all the latest and greatest things that every other kid has. This is terribly destructive to their future lives, focusing them on things in this world instead of eternal values.

5. *Acts of Service*

Definition: doing something for your child.

Examples:

- A special breakfast treat just for them
- Something special in their lunch
- Wash their clothes, fold them, and slip in a gift
- Help them with homework and include cookies
- Pick up their room and add a flower

If you are doing these acts of service for them every day as a part of your normal routine, then all that is required is that you go above and beyond to make that act of service something special for that child. That is why I suggested that you include a cookie with homework, or a gift with their clothes. This sets the act apart and they know that you are doing something special because you love them.

For the parent, who doesn't do the laundry or cook breakfast, just doing those things once in a while for your child will be enough to say loud and clear that you love them and are doing something special for them.

Changes:

Just like gifts, in order to serve them with meaning you must know what they like. And just like gifts, the things that they like will change rapidly as they get older.

Neglect:

When a child comes to you and asks for help on simple things, they probably don't need your help, they just want you to be around. If you haven't done anything for them in a while, don't think that they are trying to get out of something or that they are being lazy. Go help them, serve them, and spend time with them.

Caution:

It can be easy to mistake your loving service for labor. When you normally cook breakfast, to take extra time to make it special for one of your children can simply feel like you have increased your workload. If you view it this way, you will lose out on the power of this gift of love and your child will sense resentment. Your act of service must be internally motivated by the desire to give your energy to your child in order to bless them and show your love.

Don't do for them what they should now be doing for themselves. For instance, when your child reaches a certain age, they should clean their own room, cook, do the dishes, clean the yard, etc. Don't clean their room every week as your act of service, and

take this responsibility away from them. You can clean it, or do one of their other chores every once in a while as the gift.

Do not serve them only when you are pleased with their behavior. Again, you are to give them their love language because of who they are, not because of what they have done.

You are there to serve your kids, but not to please them. Yes, serving them will please them. But, you are not to tailor your behavior in order to get their approval and make them happy. Do what is best for them. Serve them to demonstrate your love. Serving them just to please them is doing something for them in order to make YOU feel better.

Session 4 - Talk With Them

Scripture

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

The Hebrew word for “*start*” means to “*train*”, “*dedicate*”, “*narrow down the way*” that your children should go.

“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

The Hebrew word for “*impress*” means to “*teach*” or “*to sharpen them diligently*”. The Hebrew word for “*talk*” means to “*speak*” or to “*arrange words*”. It has a sense of intentionality to it. The verse says that we are to do these things when relaxing, in the home, on your way, and in the morning and evening; it means that this is to be a way of life. This is to be a part of everything you do, everything you say, and how you live with your children.

Keys to Conversation

At times, one of the most difficult things that parents experience is the process of carrying on a conversation with their children. At other times, it is simple, which is what leaves many parents confused. Of course, the reasons for silence, or one-word answers differ widely. Usually, it has to do with the love languages that we have just dealt with. If a child has been given what they need, they will usually want to talk. There are other reasons and we will deal with these later. For now, here are the keys to opening up conversations with your children.

1. **Love.** This has been repeated over and over, but here, the idea is simple - kids may talk to someone who doesn't love them, but they will not share from the heart. If you want your kids to talk, and you want to hear what they really are dealing with, they must know and feel that they are loved.

They will know this, not just as you supply they love languages, but listening to:

- *Your words.* They must be inviting, open and kind.
- *Your tone of voice.* It should be soft, fun, kind... all the things that you would want to hear if you were going to share your heart with someone else.
- *Your body language.* It needs to be open. Don't cross your arms and legs. Don't turn away from them. Lean into them like you want to hear what they are going to say. Your eyes should focus on them and there should be a smile and a look of concentration on your face.

2. ***Safety.*** This doesn't mean safe from physical harm. That should go without saying. This is about you being a person who is safe emotionally. They know that you are on their side. You won't laugh at them, condemn them, be shocked at their confessions, or get angry at their mistakes. They can confide in you. And remember, they are looking carefully at your facial expressions. They can see when anger, irritation, and shock run across your mind, even for a moment, because it registers on your face. So, be careful that your face does not betray you and it continues to shine a look of love and partnership with them.

That doesn't mean that you don't disagree with them at times, it is just that you understand them. You remember what it was to be a child or teenager. You remember the struggles and the mistakes that you made, and you are open for them to learn their lessons as well. You are delighted and honored that they would be willing to confide in you because that gives you the opportunity to feed truth into their lives.

3. ***Connection.*** Work on connecting your hearts. My wife heard it described really well years ago. Each day, work on tying strings of connection between your heart and theirs. That means that you are constantly looking for ways to love them, show them love, and understand them. Be excited about the things that they are excited about. Be sad about the things that they are sad about. Listen carefully so that you hear the things that cause hurt, worry, and fear in their lives. And when they talk, look them in the eyes when you can.
4. ***Timing.*** Know that most of your best conversations will happen when you least expect them. You cannot schedule them. You cannot make a child talk only when you are free to talk. They talk when they are feeling the need. They talk when they sense a connection with you. So, at the end of a long day, after you have prayed and put them to bed, you may hear, "Dad?" And the conversation will start that will go for an hour. Stay. Talk. Go to bed late. You can rest tomorrow, but you will only rarely have the chance to talk in depth with your child. Those talks may come after you have gone shopping, or on a long hike and you are in the front yard of your house. You are ready to get going with all the things on your list when you hear, "Mom, can I ask you a question?" Say, "Absolutely!" Then sit down. So what if dinner is late. Listen. Talk. Share. Love.

5. **Listen.** This is the biggest section in this session on talking with your kids. Why? Because most people love to hear themselves talk. I have been in conversations with people for hours and not once did they ever ask about my ministry, my family, or me. It was all I could do to get a word in edgewise as they talked almost non-stop.

If you do this with your children, and you haven't taken the time to listen to them, and understand where they are in life, your kids may sit there and look like they are listening, but their minds will be wandering and all they will hear is "blah, blah, blah".

Definition. It seems odd to have to define listening, but it is necessary. Listening is when you want to know what the other person is really saying because words and emotions can cloud the real issues.

How can you accomplish this? If the goal of every conversation is to listen for what is really being said, then here are some tools you can use:

Ask why at least three times.

If your child comes home and they received a good grade in class, you can find out what they are so happy about.

"Mom, I got a great grade on my test!"

"Really, that's wonderful. You seem really excited. I'll bet you wish you got A's on every test."

"I sure do."

"Why? What makes you so happy?"

"Oh, all the kids used to say I was dumb, but now they think I'm smart."

"Ahh, I see. Why did they think you were dumb?"

"Well, I didn't say much in class."

"Oh, really? Why didn't you speak up?"

"Because, I was afraid I would say something wrong."

"So now you know you can get good grades, are you going to speak up?"

"You bet!"

In that conversation, by asking "why", the mom was able to learn some really important things about her child.

When a child comes home crying.

"Son, you seem really upset."

"I am, the kids say I'm ugly."

"They do! I'll bet you wish that they wouldn't be so mean."

"Yeah. They say really mean things."

"Why would they say those mean things?"

"Oh, there's this mean kid in class and he started calling me Ugly bugly, and now all the kids do it."

"That doesn't sound very nice. Why would he do that?"

"He's mean to a lot of kids, but especially me."

“That’s sad. Why do you think he is mean to you?”

“I think it is because the teacher said I’m smart, so he tries to pick on me.”

“Oh, I see. Well, it doesn’t sound like anyone really thinks you are ugly, it sounds like they might just be jealous of you.”

“Yeah, maybe so.”

Instead of getting upset about the mean kids, this parent helped her child to see why the kids were being mean and view himself/herself in a different light.

There were other tools I used in the above conversations. In the moment, when things are raw, mad, sad, upset, and frustrating, here are what makes a conversation go well:

1. *Identify.* Listen for and identify the underlying emotion.
2. *Acknowledge.* Acknowledge and name their feelings. “You seem really excited.” Or “You seem really upset.”
3. *“I’ll bet you wish...”* Express the ideas in such a way that they will keep talking.
4. *Listen and repeat.* You want the conversation to keep going and sometimes, you don’t have to say a word. They just need to vent. Then there are other times when you need to understand what is underneath it all, so you need to keep asking why questions until you hear them work things through.

Why this process works:

- When you accept what they have to say, you are accepting them, their frustration, and all the hurt or excitement they are feeling.
- When you reflect on what they are saying, you tell them that what they say is important and you value them.

If you follow this process, pretty soon the whole story will come out, as your questions encourage them to work through their emotions. Just because you accept and reflect on things with them, you aren’t agreeing with the feelings, you are acknowledging them and giving them value. This is vital. Giving value to the emotions is key to ongoing conversation. The more you tell a child they shouldn’t be feeling that way, or that they need to change their feelings, the more they want to hold on to them. When you allow them to express their emotions, and you don’t get angry, correct them, or look shocked, your child will feel accepted, and it gives them the permission to let the feelings go.

After the initial explosion of excitement or frustration, and after you have talked everything through and calm has returned, you can deal with how they expressed their emotions. Many times, when a child is excited or angry, they will say things they shouldn’t say to you, or they will say them in a manner that is rude and wrong. Correcting them in the heat of the moment will always lead to more trouble. Waiting until later is key.

When things are calm, gently say, “Son/daughter, when you say things like ... or you talk to me like..., it hurts my heart. I don't say things like that to you, because I love you. So in the future, even when things are really emotional, please try to say what you really mean instead of lashing out at me. I love you too much to let you think this is a good way to communicate your frustration. Does that make sense to you?”

What Not to Do

In the process of learning how to effectively communicate, there are some very important things that you must not do.

Small don'ts:

- Don't be too cool or too intense.
- Don't use their exact words when reflecting back their thoughts.
- Don't say, "I understand how you feel". You think you do, but they won't believe you.
- Don't ask them how they feel, they don't know how they feel.
- Don't psychoanalyze. "Has it ever occurred to you that the real reason you are feeling this way is because...".
- Don't defend the other person. "Well I can certainly understand why that boy was mean...".
- Don't pity. "Oh you poor thing." No one wants pity, they want understanding.
- Don't get philosophical. "Yes, life is like that".

Big don'ts:

- Don't deny feelings. "That's not true", or "You don't really hate that guy."
- Don't correct. "What were you thinking?" Or "Why didn't you...?".
- Don't overreact. You were a teenager with a wild side and you said words that didn't mean much at the time. What they say in anger, fear, or passion doesn't always need to be corrected. Let them blow off steam physically or verbally. Even if you talk about issues later, don't pick at the small things. If you have to address something, only deal with the heaven or hell issues, the issues that are key to salvation.
- Don't interrupt. If you listen actively and hear what it is that they are really saying, soon they will run out of steam, stop talking and want you to talk, or they will ask for advice. Then, you have the freedom to talk. When they do, don't jump in too quickly to give advice, instead, ask questions to find out more.
- Don't give advice (unless asked for and then, only after you ask more questions to get a clearer picture). Remember, advice given when it is not asked for is rarely received. Resist the urge to try and make it all better by telling them what to do. If you give them advice, you will short circuit them figuring it out themselves. First, accept, reflect, and soon, you will get the whole story. When you do give advice, do it after you have asked them what they think they could have done and should do in the future. Whatever you do, don't lecture and don't preach. Talk. Talk to them like you would your best friend.

What happens if you do “the don’ts”? It will lead to your children’s silence. Children don’t want to talk to someone they can’t trust emotionally. When they can’t trust you emotionally, that leads to distance in the relationship. Once the relationship begins to deteriorate because of a lack of trust, your children will begin to act out, and do things to prove their independence. They will draw closer to their friends and begin to take their cues from them instead of you. As they get worse, most parents react even worse, which furthers the breakdown of trust, and creates more distance in the relationship. It is a terrible cycle and hard to break.

Share with Them

If you will work hard at not doing those things that drive a wedge between you and your children, you will get the opportunity to share your life and God’s truth. This happens after you have listened, listened some more, and then, asked them questions and listened some more. And when everything has been said and they are finished talking, you will get to share life and truth.

When you share, tell about who you are. Don’t lecture, teach, or just talk about the good things in your past. Share with them your life struggles, your victories, and defeats. Talk to them about what God has shown you. Show them what you have read in Scripture, and how you sometimes ignored it and suffered, and how you obeyed it and prospered. Talk to them about your journey, doubts, fears, and joys.

Children learn from these things. It will not diminish what they think of you when you share your failings, it will give them reason to admire and believe you in the future.

Which leads me to one of the more important things you can do, as you learn to communicate with your children. Apologize. Apologize often. All of us make mistakes and sometimes, on a daily basis. Because you do, and because you want you kids to keep trusting you, you must apologize. In the beginning, it will be hard. Really hard. It will hurt your pride. It will seem like you are failing as a parent. But nothing will bond your children to you more powerfully than knowing you have made a mistake, admitting it, and asking for forgiveness.

When should you apologize.

As soon as you possibly can. Sometimes you are too angry, too frustrated, or too bitter. Fine. Take a few minutes, talk to the Lord, and ask him for strength. Then, be an adult, pull your kids in close and say, “I need to apologize. I yelled at you and lost my temper. That was wrong. Please forgive me. I love you.”

Your tone must be one of sincerity so that the kids know you mean it. That means that you own up to the wrong that you did. And when you do, don’t look for them to forgive you, apologize for what they did wrong, and tell you how wonderful you are for apologizing. Just do what God has called you to do.

If you did what you did in front of the entire family, then pull the whole family together, and apologize to everyone for what you did.

I can still remember the day when my son and I had a loud argument, and he stomped away. About an hour later, he found me out in the yard. He walked up and I thought he was going to continue the argument, but instead, he said, “Dad, I am sure sorry. I was pretty rude to you when I got angry.” At that moment, my son had become a man. I had not told him to apologize. But over the years, he had heard and watched as I and his mother apologized to him and the other kids. Now, he was just doing what we had modeled. Though it will be one of the more difficult things you have ever done, you will see the benefits for a lifetime.

Your Rewards

The rewards for learning to talk with your children are vast. It will impact you, them, their friends, and their future families. The impact will last for generations.

You will see:

- Trust
- Sharing
- Listening
- Learning
- Asking for advice
- Opportunities for input

Your long term relationships with them and their children will be blessed.

Session 5 - Let Them Ask

Introduction

Through the years, my wife and I have met many families who seemed to be raising their children in the right way. They were followers of Christ, took their kids to church, went to youth groups, even put them in Christian schools, only to see their children reject the faith of their parents once they left the home, and live lifestyles that were anything but Christian. Both of us also met a number of fellow students in our years at Christian College who were raised in Christian families, but once they got out from under their parents' control, they started doing everything they could to assert their independence, not just from their parents, but from everything their parents held dear.

I can remember my children playing with the kids of another family. That family was very strict, conservative, they never missed church, and kept their children in every Christian group they could. Today, they have one child who is a missionary, one who became a lesbian, and the two youngest girls will have nothing to do with their faith.

Another family we met had three kids. The two boys were especially impressive. They were brilliant, experts in speech and debate, and scored high in every class. The family was very strict, very conservative, and was always in church. Those two boys both left the home and have completely rejected everything to do with their faith.

Another family, this time with just two boys. Again, very strict and very much involved with the church. One boy got heavily involved with drugs and the other would regularly sneak out of the house to seduce as many young ladies as he could. Today that young man is married, but will have little to do with his parents.

Over and over we have seen this happen. From the outside, it seems crazy. These parents seemed to be doing everything to raise their children to follow and serve the Lord. So what happened? We can never know for sure, but I know that there are certain things that each of these families did that you can avoid.

Where It Starts

Questions are not allowed.

I'm not talking about normal questions, everyday questions, and questions about things that don't really matter. I'm talking about questions about faith, the church, morality, the Bible, God, and all the things that we hold sacred.

Everyone has questions. Especially about our faith and things that don't seem to make sense. Why do we live the way we do? Why do we do things differently than the society around us? Why don't we watch certain entertainment? Why don't we go to certain places? How can we believe in a God we can't see? Why do we believe the Bible is the Word of God? Why do we obey the Bible? What about the things in the Bible that don't seem to make sense? Why does our church do the things it does? Why don't we have sex before marriage? Why do we dress modestly? Why can't I go out and get drunk with my friends? I could write 50 pages of questions and still miss many that kids and teenagers ask their parents every day, or should I say that kids and teenagers should feel free to ask their parents every day.

The problem with families where the kids leave the faith is that when they ask these crucial questions, they get answers like:

- We don't talk about things like that.
- Because I told you so!
- Because that's the way we do it in our family!
- God said it, I believe it, that settles it.

Questions are shamed.

This is worse than not allowing questions at all. Instead of dealing honestly with an honest question, a child or teenager is meant to feel like a fool for wanting the answer to something that is troubling. Parents give the following answers because they are afraid to answer, they don't know the answer, or they just want to shut their kids up. Whatever the reason, answers like this are very destructive.

- I can't believe you would ask such a thing!
- That's crazy.
- They're crazy.
- Why would you say such a thing, you know what we believe!

What kids think

When parents use the answers above to honest questions, kids will be quiet and parents will think that they have taken care of the problem or the "rebellion" as they might see it. But they haven't. They have made it so much worse. Instead of dealing with the issue, they have pushed it underground in the minds and hearts of their children, and the issue does not grow away, it starts to fester like an infected cut. The reason is that the child is thinking:

- My parents don't respect me enough to answer.
- My parents don't trust me enough to answer.
- My parents don't know the answer.
- My parents know the answer and it is not good.
- My parents are ashamed of the answer.
- What else are my parents hiding?
- What else have I been tricked into believing?
- Hey, wait, maybe none of this Christianity stuff is true.

How kids respond

Rebellion. At a foundational level, this is all about respect and trust. Parents want their kids to respect them enough to obey them, and trust them enough to confide in them and share their lives. But when a parent won't answer challenging questions, this throws all that into jeopardy. If you won't trust them, they won't trust you. If you don't respect them, they won't be honest with you. It is a circle of trust where you as the parent must take the first step and lead the way. When you trust them with the hard, difficult, confusing, and challenging issues of your faith and life, they will trust you with the hard, difficult, confusing, and challenging issues of their lives.

Secrets. When children consistently have their questions not answered or shamed, they will begin to hide what they are doing and cut their parents out of their lives. They figure if you won't share with them, they won't share with you. I remember talking to a young man in one of the families I mentioned in the beginning. He told me that when he was a teenager, he was very popular with the girls. He would wait until his parents had gone to bed, then he would climb out his window and go have sex with the girls he knew. He said that he had done this so many times that he couldn't remember all the girls. His parents had no clue that he was like this, in fact, they thought he was the model example of a wonderful Christian young man.

Silence. They will refuse to communicate. Again, if you won't communicate honestly with them, they won't with you.

Searching. Most kids will consciously or subconsciously determine to find another authority figure to answer their questions. They may find them on the Internet, or in school, or at a club, or on social media. Wherever they find them, that authority will be opposite from you in your beliefs.

Kids Who Stay True

It may seem like the answer to keeping kids aligned with Biblical beliefs would be fairly easy, but it is very challenging. Let's go through what is needed.

What are children looking for?

1. **Honesty.** I realize that many cultures teach the opposite of honesty in almost every area of interaction. Cheating, lying, dishonesty, and bribery are a way of life. All of these are the polar opposite to a Christian life. You cannot live a life that is dominated by these things and call yourself a follower of Christ. This is especially important when dealing with your children.

- If you don't know the answers, tell them, and then go find the answer.
- If you don't have a good reason for doing or believing something, then tell them so, and explain why you have chosen your belief. (tradition, your parents, a feeling... whatever)
- If you don't have a biblical answer, say so, and tell why you came to that conclusion for your own life, and then give them the responsibility to come to a conclusion in their own lives.

If the church has said it is biblical, but you can't find it in Scripture, then admit that. They are not stupid, and your honesty will pave the way for more conversations.

If you thought it was biblical, but you can't find a clear Scripture, again, admit it, and then talk through what that means in the life of your family.

2. **A safe spot.** This is all about what a child feels. Your children want to be assured that they will not be shamed, scorned, or reprimanded for their questions, doubts, and fears. You will make them feel safe by not looking, acting, or sounding:
 - shocked,
 - surprised,
 - embarrassed,
 - flabbergasted,
 - disgusted,
 - hurt,
 - sorrowful,
 - angry,
 - or irritated.

In order to prepare yourself, think of the most difficult or frightening question your children might ask you, and then practice nodding, smiling, listening, and asking questions in a calm, loving, gentle voice.

I know that there are some questions that will sound like your child is losing their faith, or going off the deep end morally, or questioning the very foundation of your life and beliefs. But if you will be open and accepting of their questions, you will have the opportunity to feed God's truth into their lives over and over again.

3. ***A guide.*** Whether it seems like it or not, your children want a guide who has been to where they are going, and is willing to help them make wise choices. And they want a guide who is going to be honest about what they do and don't know, and will share where they succeeded AND failed. No one wants a perfect guide, because everyone knows that perfect guides don't exist, and anyone who looks perfect is simply covering up and lying.

What is required of you?

In order to pull off this most important role of your life, there are certain things you must do in preparation. You can't do this off the top of your head. Study is required.

1. ***Examine your faith -***

“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

God honored those who questioned the Apostle Paul himself. The Bereans wanted Paul to prove, from the Bible, where his beliefs were grounded in the Word of God. If you are going to live a life that honors God, you need to actively challenge your own beliefs, and then go to the Bible for answers. Pastors and leaders should be encouraging their followers to question. God is not afraid of questions and He is not worried that He doesn't have answers. Believers who question their beliefs find answers that make them stronger followers.

As parents, in order to be prepared for the questions that children will ask, means that we ask. We seek answers. We question. We search the Scriptures. Just because our church says it, just because we have done it a certain way for generations, just because the pastor preaches it, just because our parents said so, doesn't mean that it is true to the Word of God. Find out. Know which beliefs are based on God's truth and which beliefs are simply traditions developed by good men and women over the years. Don't be afraid to admit that some beliefs are tradition and not based on the Word of God and as such, can be discarded or changed. If you are willing to be honest, then your children will learn to trust you, and their faith will grow to be a dynamic and living process connected to the love of the Father.

2. ***Be honest.*** As humans, we like to define things in black and white. The reason is that when we do, we no longer have to think or reason. We want to know exactly what we should do, say, and be in each given situation so that there is no question. We also love this when it comes to communicating our faith to our children, because black and white is simple. Exodus 20:15 “You shall not steal.” This is a black and white. There are no exceptions. God has stated things clearly. So we can easily tell our children that they should never steal.

The problem is that for many things, there are no black and white statements in Scripture. Many of us have been raised being taught and even believing that there were, but when we search the Scriptures, the commands are not there. There are principles but no commands.

Take one of the touchiest issues in many churches today. Alcohol. I was raised in a home that said all drinking was wrong. I believed it, until I was older and searched the Scriptures myself. Here are the facts:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,” (Ephesians 5:18).

There is one clear statement about alcohol in this verse. Don’t get drunk.

“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (I Timothy 5:23).

Paul counsels Timothy to take a little wine for the sake of his health.

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (I Corinthians 8:9)

This verse is echoed in a much longer passage in Romans 14:13-23 where it makes it clear that while we have liberty, our liberty must not be used in a way that it hurts someone else, either because of their beliefs or because at some time, they were tempted to abuse alcohol.

So what principles are clear in Scripture?

Alcohol is not wrong.

Getting drunk is wrong.

Being a stumbling block to your brother or sister is wrong.

It is easy to see why some people just make the whole thing black and white by saying all alcohol is wrong. That makes it simple to live by and simple to tell your kids, and makes it so that we don’t have to think. But that is not honest. If you want to maintain open communications with your children, then you must pursue one of two paths. First, you tell your children that all alcohol is

wrong. Then you explain that this is not God's command, but you have chosen to live this way so that you don't take the chance of getting drunk or being a stumbling block. Second, you can say that God does not say all alcohol is wrong, but we must be careful not to get drunk or to be a stumbling block, and that means that we can have a drink, but we must always walk wisely so that we don't allow the enemy to use that for evil in our lives.

That is the honesty that children need and deserve.

For you, it may not be alcohol, but there are many other things in our culture and in the culture of our churches for which there are no black and white guidelines in the Bible. Music, entertainment, devotions (how often, how long), business principles, eating, dancing, gambling - and the list goes on and on. For each one, we must seek principles in Scripture that can guide our actions and then, wrestle with the Holy Spirit for His leading in our lives and families. Once we have decided what it is that God is leading us to do, explain the process to our children honestly.

Where there are no black and whites, we must be willing to have our children make decisions on their own, as they, too, wrestle with the Holy Spirit, and we must be willing to trust that they will be guided by the same God who loves them so much, He was willing to die for them.

What is this wrestling process?

“One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. . . . But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:5, 23).

The wrestling process occurs only with issues that are not clearly black and white in the Bible. On each issue, you search the Scriptures for the truth that God would reveal. Then, you ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom as He promised in James 1. Then you make your decision based on:

It is not sinful,
It is honoring to Christ, and
It is the best way to act in this situation.

One last thing about the wrestling process. God's leading on any particular subject that is not black and white can change in the future. In other words, He might call you to a different approach at a different time or with different people.

This is why people want the black and whites. They are so much easier. But, if you want to maintain great relationships with your children, do not take the

easy path. Your children will need to use this process throughout the rest of their lives, and you need to teach them how to pursue it. So, grow, learn, and listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit together.

3. ***Know your faith.*** As with life principles, there are clear teachings that God has given us about Himself, salvation, heaven, and a multitude of other things. But, God did not make his Word exhaustive. For many things, there are no answers. The sovereignty of God. Clearly stated in the Bible. The freewill of man. Clearly stated in the Bible. How to put the two together. Not stated in the Bible. We serve a good God. Absolutely. There is terrible evil in our world. Yes! How do those go together? Not clear. Why did this bad thing happen to me? Why didn't God answer my prayer? And the questions without answers go on and on.

Teach your children by explaining the "trust" process. This is where our faith in God supersedes what we see or experience. Our society tells us that there is always an answer or a reason for everything. But we may not know what that answer is until the day we stand before God. We must be willing to trust God, trust that He loves us, and be willing NOT to have the answers.

This is exactly what happened to Job. After going through the most terrible process that anyone could ever experience in life, Job sat on the garbage heap outside the city and heard the counsel of four friends. Verse after verse, chapter after chapter, they drone on, giving Job advice that was mostly wrong and useless.

Then God shows up. And for two chapters, God asks questions for which only He has the answers. "Where were you when I...". The experience is brutal and humbling, and when Job finally gets a chance to respond, his words are words that we should take to heart.

"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer— twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4-5).

But God is not finished. And for two more chapters, He challenges Job, and by extension us, every time we question Him and don't understand why He is doing what he is doing. And when He is done, Job speaks once more,

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, "Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes'" (Job 42:2-6).

This is the faith of Hebrews 11. Live it. Teach it to your children. When there are no answers... trust!

4. ***Trust the Holy Spirit.*** At no point in our lives is the challenge to trust the Holy Spirit more difficult than when it comes to your kids. But God calls us, from pages of Scripture to trust Him to work within the life of your child to guide and direct them, even if they take the wrong path for a time period. If you have given them the truth, then God will work in their lives. Believe Philippians 2:13 “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”
5. ***Trust your children.*** If you try to force your children not to make the mistakes, or protect them so completely they will never fail, you might succeed, but only for the time period that you have control over their lives. The minute you are out of the picture, they will go their own way and with a vengeance.

So, allow them to make mistakes. The older they get, the bigger mistakes you can allow them to make. If you will follow this process, you will achieve three things.

- You will preserve your relationship with them.
 - They will trust you and be willing to confide in you in the future.
 - You will release them into the hands of God and when they realize their errors and turn back to God and their faith, it will be their decision and it will last for a lifetime.
6. ***Be aware.*** If you don't guide them about the questions in life and faith, and show them truth from the Word of God, then the world will be happy to tell them what they should believe and why. The power of the world's reasoning is that it will be surrounded by pressure - social pressure, job pressure, and approval pressure. If you have done the job that God has given you to do as a parent, then those pressures will not overwhelm the truth of God's Word. If you have refused to do your work and study, and if you have neglected to engage your children in conversation, then they will be overwhelmed and persuaded by lies.

As a parent, you should view questions like they were gifts. Questions give you a window into your child's heart and mind. Your children should know that they have a family culture of thoughtful openness. Your children should feel as if they can ask any question, at any time, on any topic. You want thinking children. Having questions is not a spiritual flaw, in fact, I would argue it is absolutely essential to maturing in their faith. You don't want your kids to hear a question from the world that they have never heard before at home or in Sunday school or church, and wonder if they've been tricked into believing something that is not true. You want your kids to have already heard or asked the questions and worked through the answers. You want your kids to wrestle early not just with challenges they get from the outside, but challenges that you bring to them, so that they don't face them first with the social challenges of the world bringing on extra pressure.

Is there a method to answering questions? Yes.

When you get a question where the timing is not right, or you will need more time to answer, then you can explain that you want to answer their question, but you are going to do so later at a better time.

If you have older and younger children, then your answers should be age appropriate. Don't answer a 13 year old question about sex with a three year old listening. Don't tell a six year old what you would do a 16 year old.

There will be times when things are urgent, when you are questioned by your children and your answer is simply, "do this because I said so." There will be questions from your three year old where you simply say, "Do this because I said so." You have to, you are a parent. You have the rights and privileges to set rules, and you don't have to explain everything all the time.

But, be careful that you don't get in the habit of using this authoritarian approach too often or too long in their lives. Use most questions to teach and explain. You want to give reasons because not to do so is foolish. If all your children know is that they believe something "because my mom/dad told me so", then, they will be fair game for any professor in a biology or philosophy class who will pick them apart and tell them how foolish they are for believing a bunch of lies.

This is why you teach your children to question and seek for answers. So when they are challenged by the world, they will do the same thing and return to God's truth instead of simply accepting the world's answers.

In summary, your responses to your children need to be honest, personal, unemotional, and biblical.

If you are going to prepare yourself for your children, then you must know what you believe, why you believe, and what God's Word says on the following subjects:

- Cursing
- Sex
- When the Bible seems to have made a mistake
- Bible vs. Science
- LBGTQ
- Sex before marriage
- Alcohol
- Church rules
- Dress standards
- Life habits
- Differences between us and the world

Why can't I do..... when everyone else is doing
Why we disagree with culture
Bribes and cheating

Conclusion

“[Some of us] live in post-Christian [nations and some live in nations that were never guided by the principles of God’s Word.] We also live, in many ways, in a post-rational world. Our culture is not one of pluralism and tolerance (in the good sense of these terms). There is one “right” view about almost everything (e.g., gender, sexuality, politics, morality, etc.). And fitting in to this is almost impossible to resist unless we plan to seclude and shelter our children from the rest of the world FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES!!! OR we teach our kids to think critically so that they may see the truth, goodness and beauty of Christianity. I’m going with the latter” (Dickinson).

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