

How to Be a Christian Parent #2

A Refresher on the Family

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You know, it's through his word that our Lord really leads us and guides us. It's not through supernatural voices in the back of our head or anything like that. He's given us an objective word that we can read that has stood the test of time throughout the past thousands of years and even as we read in Mark 13 earlier, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away." And so as we come to the Scriptures, I hope that you see the wonderful gift that we have. When you open a Bible and when you read the words of Scripture, you're reading something that is more certain and more permanent than the ground that you stand on. We're reading the eternal word of God, the God of all wisdom, the God of all grace, the God of all goodness, the God of all holiness, has in his word given us everything that we need for life and godliness and that's why we focus on the Bible at Truth Community Fellowship, that's why we teach it week by week, because we want to bring ourselves under the wisdom and the instruction and the authority of God and he has revealed all of that in the 66 books of the Bible and so it's with that spirit of appreciation for Christ and trust in his word that we open God's word here this morning.

Last week, we started a series, a two part series on how to be a Christian parent and we're going to finish that up here this morning. How to be a Christian parent, and I like to tell people that Christian parenting doesn't start with what you do. So many of the parenting helps out there go directly to that and what do you do in order to make your infant sleep through the night and those kinds of things. Whatever value those things may have on a little bit of a practical level is really very secondary to the nature of the character that you as a Christian parent bring to your role that you have with your children and as we study parenting, as I said last time, we're always looking at something that applies to all of us regardless of our station in life. Whether we have children or not, whether we have parents or not, if our parents have gone on into eternity, because parenting deals with the nature of Christian character fundamentally, there is something in this for all of us to learn and to be instructed by.

Last time we looked at three principles. There is going to be a total of six and I want to just quickly review what we said last time with you. We said that Christian parenting and you could start in a number of different places, but I think a great place for Christian parents to start, knowing the different pressures and cares and concerns that parenting

bring, the uncertainty of the future both physically and spiritually for the fruit of our flesh, for our children, we have to start with this fundamental premise and it's actually listed on your bulletin which wasn't by design, but we said that Christian parenting starts by being calm. By being calm. In Proverbs 3:5 and 6 and, again we're assuming here Christians as parents. If someone is a parent and not a Christian, their first concern is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to repent and believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. But we're assuming as we gather together as the Lord's people here this morning, that we're talking to an audience of parents who are Christians and in Proverbs 3:5, the Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." I see you reciting that verse, young lady, it's good to see you. I can tell you've memorized Proverbs 3:5-6 and I'm very encouraged to see you quoting that along with me. God bless you.

You see, parenting is one overall aspect of the entire Christian life. What Scripture says and this is very important to understanding the nature of Christian parenting, is that the totality of the Christian life is to be a life that is lived out trusting the Lord our God in every aspect of our being, in every aspect of life, and the Scriptures say that when you acknowledge him in all your ways, he will make your paths straight. There will be times when you don't understand, but your trust in the Lord God is undiminished because of the nature of his character. This is what governs all of life. As I said last time, as a Christian you exist for the purpose of trusting God in every area of life; to manifest a trust and a confidence in his leading in his goodness in every area of life and parenting is a subset of everything that we do. So as you contemplate the future of your children, as you contemplate the uncertainties of decisions that you have to make and the daily demands of disciplining young children, there should be an element of serenity and calmness that shapes the way that you approach that task because we trust the Lord in all of our ways and we don't lean on our own understanding.

Beloved, God is good to his children all the time. God will most certainly in the final analysis bless us. When we are with him in heaven, with our Lord Jesus Christ, made perfect with all the saints, there will be no question about whether God has been good to us or not. We will be overwhelmed by the majesty of his being and the greatness of the goodness that he has bestowed upon us. That is the outcome of the Christian life for every true Christian and it will most certainly be fulfilled and somehow the loose ends, what appear to be loose ends in this life, God will tie those all together in a way that is perfect.

So you take that overall comprehensive view of the Christian life as you raise your children and you trust the Lord to work out his will no matter what you are dealing with in the meantime. That gives you a perspective of calm, of trust, that informs the way that you interact with your children. You trust in the Lord with all your heart and that produces serenity as you do so, and that keeps you, here's why that's important, it keeps you from making decisions out of a sense of panic, out of a sense of fear, out of a sense of anger perhaps with your children. Everything that you do, the way that you think and

the way that you interact with them, is informed by this ultimate confidence in the Lord's ultimate goodness and so we're able to parent from a perspective of serenity.

Now, secondly, and I'd invite you to turn to the book of Ephesians 6 here. Again, this is all by way of review. We're just kind of running down the dock before we jump into the lake of the new material for this morning. The second thing that we said is to be consistent in authority. Be consistent in your authority, in the exercise of your authority over your children. Ephesians 6 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." And what you need to understand as a Christian parent is that obedience is not optional for your children. They are under an obligation to God; God has commanded children to obey their parents and they do not have the liberty or the prerogative to disobey and to flaunt your authority and to disregard your authority. God has called them to obedience and your job as a parent is to teach them and to implement that principle of obedience that God intends to mark the reality of Christian families.

So while we do this patiently, we do it lovingly, we do it graciously with our children, as we said last time, we're not trying to embarrass our children or to humiliate them with the things that we do, to dominate them, to exasperate them. That's not at all the mark of Christian parenting, rather we're simply to be consistent in our authority and to bring our children to understand that they are responsible to obey us because that's what God requires of them. As you are consistent in exercising your authority over your children and teaching them and training them to obey you, you are building into them the principle of obedience and submission to authority that marks all of life. Sooner or later they're going to deal with employers who have authority over them and other positions of authority, whether it's government authority or the authority of others. We're teaching them from the very early beginnings of their lives to be submissive to authority because that is the mark of a Christian home and the mark of a Christian life. So we said that we need to be consistent. What calls for discipline one day calls for discipline the next day and the next day. It's reinforced through your consistency. Erratic parenting that sometimes is too lenient and sometimes is too strict is not the best way to lead your children in Christ. We need to be consistent in our authority. That's what we said last time.

Thirdly we said: be calm, be consistent in authority, thirdly we said, be consistent in love. Be consistent in love, especially for you young parents who are prone, as I was, to be overly firm and to be too demanding perhaps with your expectations of young children. We really need to hear this and to understand that God does not give us authority as parents so that we can be a tyrant, so that we can simply subordinate our children to everything and to crush them. That's not the point of Christian parenting at all, and it's so important for us to understand that. God has given you an authority as parents so that you can establish blessing to the children that are under your roof.

Look at Ephesians 6:4. God places very clear, specific parameters on the way that we exercise our authority as parents and he says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to

anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." We have to be students of our children as much as we have to be, in one sense, we have to be students of God's word. We need to study them. We need to understand them. We need to be able to guide them in a way that puts them in a position to prosper and thrive under our leadership; to be mindful that not every child is the same, that that which irritates and provokes some children may not do so to others. We need to be mindful of this. We need to be consistent in our love. As we said last time, Christian parenting is more than a one way, top down exercise of authority. Christian parents when they're doing their job properly take into account their children's desires, their skills, their limitations, their feelings. We have to be consistent in love or we as parents are the ones who are in sin. Parents that just continually provoke their children to angry reactions are violating what God has said here in verse 4. Fathers, don't do that. Don't provoke your children to anger. Don't lead them that way. Don't frustrate them unnecessarily.

Now, with those three things reviewed from last time, that brings us to our new material for this morning and I'd invite you to turn to Deuteronomy 6 as we do. Deuteronomy 6, the fifth book of the Bible, 34 chapters. We're going to look at chapter 6 and as we look at chapter 6 and we consider the nature of Christian biblical parenting, we're going to title our fourth point this way and it's this: we said to be calm, be consistent in authority, be consistent in love, fourthly, be home. Be home. I'll explain what I mean by that. A godly impact on your children does not happen accidentally. The Bible presupposes that godly parents will be interacting with their children.

Look at Deuteronomy 6:4 where Moses, speaking to the children of Israel just before they entered the Promised Land and just at the end of his life. These are the words of a dying spiritual leader, as it were, to the children of Israel as they're about to enter and he's laying the groundwork for what their social domestic life was to look like as they entered into the Promised Land and he says in verse 4, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Let's stop there for just a second and let me remind you that in Matthew 22, Jesus said that Deuteronomy 6:5 was the greatest commandment of them all. You remember the lawyer came to him and said, "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?" and Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength." So this is where Jesus was quoting from; he was quoting from the book of Deuteronomy.

Now, follow this because this is very crucial and important for those of us that aspire after being godly parents. Godly Christian parents. We want to be somebody that the Lord has called us to be. You know, the Lord saved you out of sin, the Lord delivered you out of a life of spiritual bondage, and he saved you in order to sanctify you, to set you apart from a worldly mindset in order to be someone shaped after the character that his word describes, and he says as Jesus said, "The greatest, the most pressing priority on your mind as a Christian is to love this God who saved you with every fiber of your being and with every intention of your heart." That's what it means to be a Christian, to love

God completely as we saw earlier; to trust him completely. Those two things go hand-in-hand.

Well, notice as we contemplate that aspect which if you're a Christian at all you nod in affirmation and say, "Yes, that is what it means to be a Christian. We love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. How could we do anything else? How could we respond with anything other than whole-hearted devotion to this one who saved us from sin?" Well, watch where the Spirit of God goes immediately after defining that supreme obligation of the Christian heart, verse 6, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." The connection here is stunning in light of considering the topic of Christian parenting. The Bible goes from the great commandment flowing into the way that we raise our children and so we need to understand that the way that we raise our children is a direct product of loving God; that we don't separate those two. We don't look at them, we don't separate what God has joined together. We view the responsibility to instruct our children and to raise them in a godly home as flowing directly from, directly from our responsibility to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just as we trust in all of our ways and parenting is part of that, we love God with all of our heart and parenting flows out of that as well. Part of the clarity of your mission as a parent is to understand the source of the authority and the responsibility to do that. Flowing from the greatest commandment is the parent's responsibility to teach their children.

Now, let me say this: what do you mean when you say "be home"? Here's what I mean by that. As you see in this verse 7, look at verse 7 with me again. Watch how verse 7 presupposes an ongoing nature of interaction between parent and child throughout the course of life. "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." In the simple course of life, sitting down, lying down, rising up, going about your day, there is this ongoing Christian classroom of the parental relationship with their children.

Here's the implication of that: in one way or another, beloved, we need to structure our lives so that we can be with our sons and daughters in an unhurried pattern of life so that there is a context in which these conversations can take place. We point them to Christ, we point them to Scripture, in natural conversations where they are receptive and we never know when those moments are going to come. That's why we have to be available for those moments to occur. Daily structured devotions are great but that's not the way relationships work really. We can't say we're going to be on here at 6 o'clock pm and this is going to be the time. That's fine as far as it goes, but what I want you to see is that's not a substitute for what the Bible describes here as a natural course of relationship playing out over of the course of life. So we have to somehow structure our lives, evaluate our commitments, determine, think broadly about what we're doing and ask ourselves where is the room in life where these kinds of interactions that the Bible describes can take place.

How important is the home life to the Christian life? Well, let's put it this way: the New Testament makes the home life a proving ground for church leadership. Look at 1 Timothy back in the pastoral epistles. 1 Timothy, just after the Thessalonian epistles. 1 Timothy. When we say "be home," what we're saying is make your home a priority because this is what God requires from us; this is what we are responsible for; this is what we will give an account for one day before Christ. Look at 1 Timothy 3, speaking of the office of the elder or the overseer in the church, the Apostle Paul says in verse 1, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." He says, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife," there's the family life starting to bubble up in terms of what constitutes a spiritual leader, "temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money." Verse 4, watch it here, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." Leadership in the church is premised on a man having established that he knows how to raise his household; a man who interacts with his children and has them under control with all dignity. That's how crucial it is to the church of Jesus Christ. That's how crucial this home life is, is that it's the feeding ground for future church leaders and Paul goes on to say in verse 5, "but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" And one of the marks of elders in church leadership is that they're to be examples to the rest of the flock of what the Christian life looks like. Manage your household well. You're involved with your family. You're involved with your children and are guiding them and directing them and helping them and, in a sense, controlling them or teaching them to control themselves with dignity. Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, that's only going to happen if you're with them and you're only going to be with them if somehow the home is the center of your life. We have to take these things seriously because we're going to give an account for them.

Turn over to the book of Titus, a few pages to the right. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and then Titus. And, by the way, we're going to begin a study of the book of Titus in the middle of June. I'm very excited about that. I've started my preparation for that and in about three weeks we'll pick up and we'll go through Titus verse by verse so we'll be revisiting these issues in detail that we're just treating now in a summary fashion. But look at chapter 1, verse 5 of Titus where he says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." There you see it again that church leadership is premised on the way that a man leads his home life and so in those men, those church elders, are setting a pattern for the rest of the congregation to follow, that's part of their responsibility.

So what I want you to see as we consider how to be a Christian parent is that, in one way or another, that Christian father has to have the focus of his mind on home; on what's happening with his wife and children. This is to be part of the way that we live out the Christian life. It's a proving ground for church leadership and even if you don't aspire after church leadership, beloved, and church leadership isn't for everyone, if you're a

Christian at all, you have to be aspiring after obedience to God, obedience to the Scripture, and obedience to the Scripture calls us to this involvement with the lives of our children. Not remote, not distant, not letting them spin off into orbit on their own without regard to the direction of their spiritual lives, and you can only do that if you're with them. You can only do that if you're there.

Now, the Bible goes on and says that this is not only the mark of the men but this is to be the mark of the women as well. Look at Titus 2 as Paul explains the various responsibilities within the body of Christ, how men interact with men, how women interact with women. Look at Titus 2:3, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good." Okay, what's good, Paul? Tell me what's good so that we can know and follow it. How can we be good Christians? I want to know because I want to honor the God who saved my soul from sin. What's good, Paul? Verse 4, the older women are like this, "so that," verse 4, "they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored." You see, when Christians choose a different pattern of life, Paul says it's dishonoring to the word of God and so we just have to take these things really, really seriously. There is a homeward focus in the word of God that is to mark Christian families. This is just what it means to be a Christian. This is how we live out our responsibilities.

Now, let me talk through some application on this to hopefully clarify exactly what we're saying. Stay with me here. I have a few different things to say here. First of all, how can we even start moving in this direction? As I said last time, I'm mindful of the fact that as we talk about biblical parenting we're parachuting down into a lot of existing situations and there have been patterns of life that have been established and different things that have been chosen. I understand that and let me say this, that my prayer as I've been anticipating this message has not been that people would start and just make immediate dramatic changes to their existing lifestyle. I'm afraid that would be too much of a superficial response and if it's not informed by an understanding and a corresponding conviction, that even that kind of dramatic change wouldn't take root and stand the test of time. It would just be like the seed that fell on the rocky soil and sprouted up real quickly and then withered and went away. No, what I really want for you, beloved, is to think deeply about these things. Think about these things in terms of developing, first of all, is this what the Bible says, I've shown to you that it is, and to let your convictions and priorities start to be shaped by that and to just ruminate and think through, "Wow, the home. The center of the home." And many of you are already right there and I praise God for that.

You know, we're speaking to a broad group of people who are at different stages in life and so I understand that and take that into account with what I say here. Here's what I would say if you just find yourself really wrapped up in a busy lifestyle and say, "Wow, this is convicting to me," let me give you a single word that will help you start to move in this direction. It's a single word. You can write it down if you need to, although we find that most people can remember it. This one word will do you wonders. That word is: no.

No. Sometimes well meaning people come to you and ask for commitments when you're already over-committed and you just have to say, "No, I can't do that." And you say no without a sense of guilt for having somehow failed a responsibility that somebody has brought to you, rather you're saying no with a sense of assurance that this is the right thing for me to do so that I can establish the kind of structure in our home life that allows me to be the Christian parent that God has called me to be. It's not that hard. "No, I'm sorry, I can't do that now. I can't do that today."

What I want you to understand is that we're not speaking just superficially about, "Can you go bowling Friday night," or whatever. What we're talking about, this is so far reaching, this is so life shaping that men may need to adjust their career aspirations in order to honor this principle. Ladies may need to scale back on some of their involvements so that there is an anchor in the home that the children see and can respond to, especially you young parents or you aspiring parents. This is just really, really crucial, and you don't need to feel guilty because you're not involved in eight dozen Bible studies or that you're not involved in every aspect of community service that you could possibly be in. If you're out and away all of the time as a pattern of life, over the years, do you know what's going to happen? One day you're going to be like the armies that Israel fought, as you've been drawn out of the fortress of your home, you're going to look back and see that the enemy has set fire to it and it's burning down behind you and then all of the activities aren't going to mean anything when your family falls apart because you neglected it over the years as a pattern of life. You see, I love you too much not to say these things. I love you too much not to make it so that you think about these things and contemplate the consequences of lifestyle choices that you make, and especially for you young people.

Now look, and just to clarify what I'm saying, I'm not saying that you have to sit at home every night. I'm not about to say what this looks like for you because my greater concern for you is to take the heart, the priority, and then if you just do that, I know that the Spirit of God will guide you as you seek to apply it within your own individual family lives. I'm not setting your schedule for you. That's the last thing I want to do. I have enough trouble setting my own schedule and guarding my own without trying to take on 200 more. I just want you to embrace the priority. To say, "Yes, this is what the Scriptures teach and how does this apply, my spouse? How does this apply? How do you think we work this out where God finds us right now?" That's the issue. But if you're never home, something's wrong and this is a wake-up call.

Look, I understand. Dads have to take business trips, I'm about to leave for 10 days next Monday. So I just want you to understand what I'm saying and what I'm not saying. I realize life takes you away, the question is: where is your anchor? The question is: when life does take you away, what are you thinking in order to keep the home fires burning properly? Your home should be such a conscious priority in your life that you shape life around it. How else are you going to talk to your children when you sit down and when you rise up and when you lay down and when you walk about the way? How are you going to do that if you're not home? I can honestly tell you, I personally declined career paths that would have interfered with this priority. I said no to jobs that I knew were

going to keep me from being this kind of parent. Nancy and I closely monitored the outside activities that our children were involved in and didn't let things run away with that so that our family life wasn't being run by other people who had their own schedules and agendas. When I say "be home," that's what I'm talking about.

Beloved, teach your children, especially you young parents with young children, teach your children to find contentment in the home because do you know what happens when you've taught your children to find contentment in the home? Do you know what happens? They probably grow up and teach their children to be content in their homes and you start to establish, even if you aren't the recipient of this kind of parenting, if you haven't been, start a generational line that will carry this on, huh? Start it if you haven't received it because the long term fruit of that is enormous. It is incalculable. And as our society becomes increasingly hostile to the things of God and to the nature of Christian life and more openly hostile to Christ and the Scriptures, beloved, it's all the more important. This is so urgent. It is all the more important for you as parents to establish a refuge where your children find safe harbor of the things of God under the roof that only you can supply to them. You're the only one who can do that. You're the only one who can supply that to them. Once they step outside the bounds of your home, it's different. You know that. I don't even need to emphasize it. As a Christian parent, then, you have to say, "My environment is going to be one where the Gospel is honored; where Christ is loved; where children find safety and harbor and refuge under my roof." And if you're going to have that kind of home, you've got to be there to establish it. It's not going to happen by accident. So be home.

Fifthly, be patient. Be patient. I've always thought that one of the greatest challenges of Christian parenting is that you don't see immediate results. You discipline young children one day five times for the same thing, and then you turn around the next day and you're doing it five times for the same thing that you just did the day before, and then the next day, six times, and you wonder, "Is this ever going to change? Is this ever going to get better? I'm really getting frustrated here. Why don't they get it?" Well, look, I've often told parents to take the long view. Take the long view of your parenting especially when your children are really young, in those really young years, those preschool years. You have to take the long view. Listen, listen, if you will embrace this one thing it will change your perspective on dealing with that ongoing frustration: your goal as a Christian parent is not to bring about perfect external compliance in your child at the age of three. If that's your goal, you're going to be frustrated because children don't work that way. They have sinful hearts that are going to find new and different ways to manifest rebellion and disobedience because that's what's driving them. The Spirit of God isn't in charge of their life yet and so be ready, expect the fact that this is going to be an extended time. Your goal isn't age three, your goal isn't what's happening today, beloved. Your Christian perspective should be this, in my judgment: that you want to parent in a way, you want to be home in a way, you want to interact with your children in a way that through all of the ups and downs that inevitably happen as your children are growing, when they hit their late teen and early 20 years, when they become young adults, you have established a relationship of trust with them so that you can have input in their life when they're making life determining decisions and, look, nothing life shaping is really going to

happen at the age of three. As I said last time, if your kid isn't eating his Cheerios at the age of two when you tell him to, that's probably not a safe indication of whether he's going to go to jail when he's an adult or not. So be calm. Be patient. Relax. Take the long view and understand that the reason that you consistently discipline these things when they're young is because you're trying to shape them, you're trying to establish a character in them and character like the city of Rome is not built overnight. It's built over time. It's built over years.

The verse that we looked at in Deuteronomy 6:7 says "teach them diligently." It presupposes the fact that this isn't a one-off event. Diligently, repeatedly, time and time again. Taking the long view that you're pouring a foundation upon which their life will be built on and skyscrapers aren't built on foundations that were poured in six hours. There's a lot of digging, a lot of rebar that's established and you don't even see it when the building is completed, but all of that preliminary work was necessary so that the building would stand on that foundation. You've got to take that perspective to your parenting. You have to so that you don't over-react to incidental things day-by-day when they're young and so that and, beloved, this is what I really want for you, so that, especially those of you with young families just coming up, your infants are just now starting to gurgle, what I want for you is that you'd have the blessing of seeing a good outcome if at all possible, if the Lord gives grace and the Lord gives blessing, it's the outcome when they're young adults and beyond that you're looking for, not what's happening today. You're going to forget about the Cheerios. You won't forget the life shaping conversations when you've taught your children to trust you. You won't forget the way their decisions are shaped by your influence and your opinions and your advice when they're old enough to start making decisions on their own. That's what I want for you, but what I want you to see is it doesn't happen by accident. We've got to think long term; we've got to be patient; we've got to realize that that good result that everybody wants at the end doesn't happen randomly, it's the result of being home and teaching them diligently over time. This is the biblical pattern.

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." Like all Proverbs, that's a statement of principle. It's not a guarantee. Sure, there are times where Christian parents honor God with their parenting and the child goes south anyway, but that's the exception and you honor the pattern that God's called us to and you expect as the order and the nature of the universe that good results will come. Generally speaking, children who are raised properly show the effects of it later on and the fact that there are exceptions don't mitigate the overall truth of it. Beloved, the fact that there are exceptions doesn't mean that you dismiss your responsibility and disregard these things. We honor God as in all of life, we honor God with our parenting. We do it the way he's called us to do it, and then we trust him for the outcome.

Now, here's how being patient helps you in your parenting. When you are really tired because that kid has been up for the sixth consecutive night, take the long view. Beloved, you won't always be tired, but your devotion to good parenting will pay off later in life. When you're correcting the same problem that you were correcting six months ago and

there's no seeming bend in your child's attitude, take the long view. Take the long view. Take the long view because training occurs over time, not overnight. One of our children when they were very young had an anger problem. I mean, we're talking about taking blocks and driving them into the skull of the sibling. I mean, this was not good. This was a long, long, long, long time ago, okay? Because it's really hard to even use any illustrations like this because I don't want you to descend on my kids and ask them, "Who was that?" No, there's got to be a little veil, a little circle of privacy, and still be able to be helpful as a preacher. But an anger problem that was just severe and just continued on, and I was in seminary at the time. That will help you date it so that you know that I'm not talking about this week. You know, we were starting to think, "Man, can I continue on in seminary with this problem going on in my family?" You know, and sometimes you're just kind of holding your breath and waiting to see what tomorrow brings. Well, you just take the long view. Take the long view consistently in your authority, consistently in your love, patiently, humbly dealing with things in the home and trust the Lord to direct this and to bless the fruit of your perseverance and your faithfulness to it. You can't over-react when you recognize an ongoing issue. Take the long view. Be patient. Do what the Lord has called you to do.

Now, that brings us to our final point for this morning. Today we said: be home, be patient, sixthly, be prayerful. Be prayerful. Speaking from personal experience, parenting is humbling. Parenting will inevitably reveal your own sinfulness. Parenting will show forth your own impatience, your own anger, your own selfishness. When you start to recognize that, I understand that the potential for discouragement is really great. Well, beloved, at that point, step back and remember what we're talking about here: we're talking about how to be a Christian parent. And when we talk about being a Christian and we focus like a laser on that word "Christian," that changes everything and here is where you find the fuel to carry on and to be refreshed day-by-day. You see, when we say "Christian parenting," we're talking about you being the recipient of grace. The fact that God has been gracious to you, God is aware of your sinfulness, knew what your sinful life was going to be before you were born and graciously, sovereignly saved you anyway; that you stand in Christ complete before him, all of your sins forgiven, the righteousness of Christ applied to your account before the throne of God. Yes, you need grace, but that's why Christ came. He didn't come to save you because you were such a great parent, he came in part to save you because you're not a perfect parent. Your life is marked by failure and sin and your parenting has been less than it should be. Welcome to the realm of grace. Welcome to the realm of the goodness of God, that he has extended favor, he has extended kindness even though you didn't deserve it. Welcome to a remembrance of the word from Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15 that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Welcome to the realm of the Holy Spirit who Romans 8:26 says helps us in our weakness.

Let your failures as a parent and for some of you maybe it's too late to reverse those failures, I get that. To whatever extent these things convict you, let it humbly drive you back to the cross and say, "Lord, this is why you came and you're a friend to sinners." We sang that all morning long, didn't we? "What a friend to sinners. Hallelujah, what a Savior! God, you're good to me anyway. Lord, I'm going to renew my trust in your

grace." And if your kids are still at home, ask God to cover you and make you a better parent today than you were yesterday. This is grace. He delights in answering that prayer. Let me take it one point further as we talk about being prayerful. Remember this. There is so much that I want you to remember but remember this especially if your kids are rambunctious and disobedient and it's been a struggle with them, be mindful of this, set your heart on this: if you as the Christian adult need grace and you've received grace and your confident of the Lord's forgiveness of your sins, then look at your children through those eyes of grace. If God has been gracious to you, if you as the adult need grace, beloved, how much more do your children need grace? How much more should they be the objects of your compassion, the objects of your prayers for their salvation, if you yourself have needed to be an object of grace yourself? If you come to God as a destitute sinner saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner," then when you look and see, "My goodness, my wife and I have produced other sinners," then let your heart cry for grace for your own soul inform the way that you look at your children and bring you to pray for grace on their souls as well and just as you want God to be gracious to you in your Christian life, be gracious and patient with your children in their earthly lives.

Look beyond your frustrations and your disappointments. You know, your children don't exist to meet your emotional needs. Your children aren't there so that they can meet your emotional needs. You are there in your lives to be an example of Christianity, to instruct them, to guide them, to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and maybe they won't return gratitude to you for that fact. That doesn't change what you do. And when they're ungrateful, when they're rebellious, when they show no sign of the love that you have shown to them, step back and remember that you have received grace and you've got another person in front of you that needs grace as well, and let that feed your prayers for them. "God, you've been gracious to me. You saved me from my sins and here I have this rebellious child in front of me. God, be gracious to my child just like you were to me, in fact, God, be more gracious to my child than you have been to me because, God, they not only have to overcome their own sin, they have to overcome my own sinfulness and failures in my own parenting. God, if you're not gracious, the deck is really stacked against them."

So be prayerful. Look beyond the external manifestation of sin in their lives and be faithful in your prayers for them. Look beyond your own frustrations and disappointment and see their need for grace. And if you're a child still under the authority of your parents' home, still under their roof and all of that, and you see your parents' failures, realize that your parents need grace too and there's nothing keeping you as a child from praying for them and being gracious in your own attitudes toward your parents. We're part of a fallen human race and even in a Christian home we're part of a fallen Christian home, an imperfect Christian home, and when we realize that, we no longer can view it from the same perspective of anger, hurt because we didn't get what we wanted. Just say, "Lord, grace! Grace! Grace, Lord! More grace because that's what we need." And when you're conscious of your need for grace and conscious of wanting grace for your children, the tracks have been laid for the train of God's grace to run through your home and deliver blessing upon blessing upon blessing because God is good to his children all the time without exception.

So if Paul could pray for the salvation of his fellow Jews in Romans 10, we as Christian parents all the more should be devoted to prayer for the salvation of the fruit of our own bodies. And, beloved, there are not guarantees. We get that. We understand that. Our focus isn't on the outcome of our parenting so much because that's under forces beyond our control, but as we're faithful to the principles of good Christian parenting, we can be confident that in one way or another our faithful God is going to display his faithfulness to our obedience and he's going to bless us for it and that's what we want. That's what we can trust. That's what we'll wait for as we go through life together at Truth Community Fellowship.

Bow with me in prayer, would you?

We're done a little bit early here this morning and I just want to give you a moment as a Christian parent, as a Christian child, to just take a moment in the silence that's about to come to just ask God to help you in this area of the Christian family. Ask him to help you be a faithful parent. Ask him to give you grace to be willing to change if there's areas of change that are needed, and to refresh your heart of love toward those with whom you share the same blood. Do that now, would you?

And if you find yourself in the midst of a family where your children have gone off track, renew your trust in the Lord to bring good even out of that situation because you remember, don't you, that the Bible says that our Lord God causes all things to work together for good to those who belong to him, who are called according to his purpose. Even if you don't understand, Scripture promises you that God is going to work out his will and he's going to be good to you in the end and that covers even the worst of your broken heartedness over your family life. Renew your trust in him for that.

And a word to those of you with very young families just on the precipice, maybe married and not having children yet, would you just pray and ask the Lord to seal these biblical convictions to your heart and ask him to help you be the Christian parent that his word calls you to be even to the point of saying, "Lord, I'll change career trajectories if that's necessary just so that I can be faithful to this high calling of being a Christian parent."

Those of you that are older, won't you take a moment to pray for those young families that are in our midst? Commit yourself to praying, maybe pick out one or two and say, "I'm going to pray for that family this week that I sit by week-by-week. I'm going to pray for them." And then find it in your heart to say a gracious word to encourage them because you know from experience it gets hard and it gets long. We can encourage one another in these things.

Father, we have all manner of the spectrum represented here: aspiring parents, young parents just on the verge and the future is filled with hope and high aspirations. We have others where the life is further along and we look back and there's disappointments that just really hurt. Father, we just ask you to take us in our current situation and meet us

with your grace. Father, where parents have children that are walking with the Lord, let them be grateful and give thanks to you. Thank you for the faithful children you've given to me, Lord. What a blessing and delight they are to my heart. I know other parents join in that prayer of gratitude.

Father, for those that are having struggles, maybe even going through them right today, Lord, would you just intervene and show your grace and somehow with your power turn the situation, show a token of good and grace that's unexpected that would refresh hearts and say, "Oh, I see the Lord's hand in this. How good he is to meet me at my point of need." We trust your word. We trust you with all our heart but, Lord, sometimes we need those tangible tokens of grace as well. Would you supply that where the need is great even today?

Father, we yield our families and we yield this church to you. We pray that in the years to come you would raise up leaders who have been faithful in the home, who know how to lead a family. Father, may as the generations that come and go at Truth Community, people that we haven't even met yet, perhaps won't even know in this lifetime but will inherit the work that has been begun here, Father, bring to this place men and women who want to love their families and live out these principles and let them form the foundation of leadership for a generation beyond them yet to be born. We love you and we honor you, Father. We realize that you've been good and gracious to us and we thank you for that and we pray that you would help us be faithful Christians and in the process of being faithful Christians, that we will be faithful Christian parents as a result. We commit these things into your hands and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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