

# A Refresher on Parenting

By Don Green

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28001 Harrison Parkway  
Valencia, CA 91355-4190

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I want to address a very practical topic today that I often get asked on, in fact, in the Friday fellowship we had a week or so ago, the question came up, "What are your thoughts on parenting?" and I want to do a message to address that.

Now, before those of you that don't have kids under the age of 10 at home check out on me mentally, let me encourage you to stay engaged here because the things that we talk about here are the very things that the Scripture calls older people in the congregation to encourage the younger people in as well, and so no matter where we're at, we all have a responsibility under the Scriptures to reinforce and to encourage these principles amongst the families that are among us. And perhaps it's with your children or grandchildren who are starting their own families, perhaps it's a warm time of reflection of remembering how the Lord blessed your home life and you look back and you see, "Oh, I see how the Lord blessed these things." That's one end, the farther end of it, I guess, but we have a lot of families here that are on the front end of this and formulating how we're going to raise our family, and in the midst of developing convictions on all of that. I just want to address that there today in a way that I trust will be edifying and helpful for us all.

Now, with all of that said, do me a favor as you listen here this morning. Please don't think about this as a sermon on parenting because that's not the spirit with which I am delivering these things here today. Think of it as if we were sitting in your living room and you simply said, "What biblical principles have shaped your parenting?" by which I mean this is a pastoral time. This is how I intend that to be. This is a one time message. I can't address everything. I can't be exhaustive here. I don't want to do that. I had to overcome a lot of reluctance to even do a message like this because there is no shortage of materials purporting to tell Christians how to raise their families. You know, it's not like we need one more message on that. You know, there's a sense in which we need to talk about this here in Grace Life. I get asked this and so I have the privilege and the responsibility of being able to answer that question, "What has shaped your views on parenting?" asking the question to myself.

There are five things that I would say to encourage you and hopefully to help you, five biblical principles that have shaped parenting in our home and that I would commend to you for your own consideration as you counsel, as you raise your own kids, and as you encourage people who are in the midst of raising their families.

The first principle is this: be home. Be home. If you want to have a godly impact on your children, you need to be home and engage the task. Raising godly children doesn't happen accidentally. Having an impact on the next generation that the fruit of your body and to have an impact on them does not happen accidentally. You need to be intentional about it. You need to be intentional about it by being home.

The Bible presupposes ongoing interaction with your children. Deuteronomy 6, if you want to turn to the Scriptures here with me. We're going to go to a few different passages and I just encourage you to hear me out on everything that I say in all five of these points because there is a lot of nuance here trying to speak with care and compassion and with clarity as well. Deuteronomy 6:4 says this,

4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 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.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7. When you structure your home so that you can be with your sons and daughters in an unhurried pattern of life, you position yourself to point them to the Scriptures; you position yourself to point them to Christ; to share with them the Gospel; to confront them in their sinful attitudes and to point them to the Gospel as the remedy for their sin. And you position yourself when you are home to do that in natural conversations where they are receptive to hear you; where there are no lights shining on the situation; where there is not another audience around. It's parent and child interacting with one another in a way that deals with life issues in a natural life setting, and that happens in the home environment. If your life is fractured and people are going in a lot of different directions simultaneously and you don't have that core time together, your impact will be diminished and your desire to raise godly children, I believe, will be compromised if you are not home.

Now, what do I mean by that? Let me expand on that a little bit. First of all, I would encourage parents and especially young mothers to understand and to embrace the fact that your children are not intrusions upon your schedule. Your children are your schedule; that your children are given to you in order to have a shaping and defining impact on them. They should not be viewed as distractions. I think it's wrong to say that they are no more than welcome additions to the family. They are that, they are welcome, but your children are a gift of the Lord and you should view them that way. And of course their demands change your life, and of course they are inconvenient in terms of the task list for the day. My wife has embodied this and illustrated this in front of my eyes for the past 22 years, to welcome that and to not view children as an intrusion but to be the point of what your life is like and the point of your attention and your efforts during that season of life.

And the Scriptures tell us to reinforce that in the body life of the church in a couple of different ways. Over in Titus, if you want to turn there, Titus 2, speaking about the role of women in the church, verse 3 through 5 says this, "Older women," of which there are some in this room. I won't designate who I have in mind when I say that. I know that always gets you in trouble. I think of all of you young, let's put it that way. But some of you have more years under your belt than others. "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that 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." There is a whole dimension to the female side of the church where these principles are supposed to be reinforced from one generation to another. And I can tell you older ladies that are in the congregation, those of you that are godly and have wisdom in this area, there are a number of young women in Grace Life who are dying for that kind of input from you; to have that kind of input where you teach them how it was that you handled kids, how you dealt with a difficult husband. And they want that, they need that and that is your biblical responsibility to reinforce that in a way that teaches them to love their families and to be workers at home and to reinforce this kind of family emphasis in the church. That is what the role of the older women in the church is by the inspired word of God and you younger ladies, you younger women, you young moms, see here that what the Scripture says, the centerpiece and the focus of your affection should be that you would be a woman who loves her husband and loves her children, that you are a woman of the home. That's the idea.

Now, some practical illustrations or some practical outworkings of this. You only need one word to help you establish this pattern and to avoid all of the distractions that would come about to keep you from that. One word, everyone knows this word. It's not theological. It's all readily available right on the tip of your tongue that needs no explanation. I won't have to go to a lexicon to give you a definition of it. One word to help you establish this pattern, especially as a young family and the word is this: no. No. Just say no. When well-meaning people ask you for commitments, you may need to say no. When you get pressure to be involved in another Bible study, that's right, I'm getting very direct and personal here, and that you need to be doing more ministry as a young mom and you need to be involved in more discipleship as a young mom, you may just need to stand up and say, "No. My priority is my home. My children need me." It's not only that that is an acceptable answer, that is a good answer for you to give because what happens is if you're not intentional about this, what happens, as you know, is that you just start saying yes to different things and there is an ever increasing incremental impact that diminishes your ability to give your focus to your home.

So say no and feel good about it, about saying no, understanding that these are well-meaning people but you and your husband need to sit down together and talk through these things, especially as a young family, and say, "Yes, our priority is going to be our home. That means that we're going to say no to a lot of invitations, it's going to say no to a lot of commitments so that we can raise our sons and daughters in an unhurried pattern of life that gives us the opportunity to speak of Christ to them when they sit down and

when they rise up so that we can talk along the way in life." And I realize saying this in Southern California is like, I don't know, it's difficult, but you need to be countercultural and even in Southern California you can make your home your priority and you should.

Now, let me clarify what I'm saying here because I realize that there is a lot of difficulty, structural difficulty for some of your families in order to be able to do all that you would like in making your home your focus. I'm not saying that you should sit at home every night. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that dads shouldn't travel on business. I travel on business, I'm gone a few weeks out of the year. That's not what I'm saying at all. What I'm saying is that in your thinking and in your heart affections and in the way that you structure your time, that your home, your spouse, your children, have a center of gravity claim on your affections that is a priority to your life so much so that you shape life around it. We're talking about the center of gravity of your affections, not necessarily just being physically present within the four walls of your structure. It's where the center of the affections of your heart are, and if the center of your affections are at home, then you'll find your feet at home as well, as often as you are able to do it.

How much so? I can tell you that I declined career opportunities which would have interfered with this priority. We limited the outside activities that our children cultivated in order to fulfill this priority. My son was a one sport athlete, not a five sport athlete just by way of illustration, and it wasn't because he wasn't good enough to play, it was because we didn't want a year round commitment to certain outside activities to rule our home life. That's what I'm saying when I say be home. It affects the commitments that you make and I believe from the Scriptures that this is what God calls us to, that we make our home a priority and that means and that has practical implications to what we say yes and no to.

Alright, so that's the first principle. If you were to ask me in your living room, "What has shaped your approach to family?" that's the first one. Be home. Teach your children by your example to be faithful at home and to find contentment there, to find contentment in your family relationships, to find satisfaction there because the long term fruit of that is enormous. But the impact of not being faithful to that is not something that you measure day by day. It is imperceptible day by day when that's not your priority, but five years, ten years down the road you start to see the impact of that and what I want for you, especially those of you that are young families, I want you to enjoy the fruit of 15, 20 years down the road to these things and to not be deceived by the fact that the impact of not being faithful to it is imperceptible day by day, week by week. Look at the long term fruit and commit yourself to that. So be home.

Secondly, be consistent in your authority. Be consistent in your authority. Scripture, as you know, calls children to obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1-3 says this. Scripture calls children to be obedient to their parents. It says, Ephesians 6:1, "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." Something that's very helpful in parenting is to understand this: that your children should learn to obey you because God requires it from them. You have an

authority over your children that is God-given and that you have a God-given prerogative and responsibility to implement and to enforce. You should train your children to obey you because that is what God requires from them and it's what he requires from you.

Now with that said, you cultivate that through consistency. They need to obey on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday. It needs to be consistent and the thing that called for discipline yesterday is the thing that should bring forth discipline tomorrow. There should be a structure and a consistency to your parenting so that there is an established set of expectations that everybody knows how this family works, and that when there are violations, when they sin against God, when they are disobedient to you, that there is a form of correction that is brought to bear upon their lives that there is a painful consequence to disobedience because that is how they learn to obey.

And this is so foundational that on the male side of the church, it is an explicit qualification for church leadership. An elder, the Scriptures say, must be someone who keeps his children under control with all dignity, 1 Timothy 3:4. And what you see as you read and reflect on these principles in Scripture is that the home is the proving ground for leadership in the church. The home is what older women are supposed to be reinforcing to the younger women in the congregation. The home becomes the proving ground to test whether a man is qualified for church leadership or not. Your family, our families, are the collective building block of the nature of the local church and Scriptures make this clear. If a man cannot lead his own household, he is not fit to lead the household of God, Paul told us in his letters.

So, again, just trying to be practical, trying to be understanding and warm and yet clear, parents, you need to understand, you parents of young children, raising your young children, you need to understand and embrace and love the fact that you cannot delegate the raising of your children to a nanny or to the pastoral staff. It is your responsibility to teach your children to obey. It is your responsibility to teach them to respect authority and you can't subcontract that out to someone else that's not around. You need to be the one that establishes it and when your children say, "Why do I have to do that?" you young moms, it is more than a sufficient answer for you to say, "I am your mother and I told you to do it," and to stand firm on that and to teach them to respect your intrinsic authority as the parent because your parental authority is given to you by God himself and children are not free to challenge and disregard that authority.

Now, we've all seen and, moms, keep listening to me here, we've all seen those children that throw temper tantrums at Walmart or wherever you shop. I haven't seen children throw temper tantrums at Neiman Marcus but that's because I'm not often at Neiman Marcus, but I'm guessing that they do. I think this is a universal problem that's not tied to the kind of department store you go to. We've all seen temper tantrums from children at those stores and we've seen the parents that give in to them and, of course, your immediate thought on that is that child is so bad and, "Oh, if that was my kid, I would give him a swat on his bottom and I'd straighten that out in 15 seconds." Well, you shouldn't do that publicly, that's a different issue.

But parents, what I want you to see about that and what I want you to reflect on is this: Proverbs 29:15 gives us a different insight on to those situations than what we might naturally think. We look and think, "That kid is acting shamefully." The reality according to Scripture on that is a little bit different. Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother." Brings shame to his mother. That out-of-control child is a reflection on his mother and the mother needs to be the one who enforces discipline and brings that to bear on his life. If your child goes wild in public, you just extract yourself, you leave and you go and deal with it at home.

Now, how do you cultivate that kind of consistent authority? How do you cultivate consistent authority in the home. Well, start here, this might not be what you think but start here, and some of these things I say because I've, you know, over the course of years of ministry you see different issues come up, you need to start here: mom and dad need to say the same thing. Mom and dad need to say the same thing. What mom says is the same thing that dad says and there is not a court of appeal where, "Do I have to do what mom said? Mom, dad said this." None of that. You have to eliminate that. Husband and wife, mom and dad, you need to support your spouse to establish consistency in the home. Even if you might have a difference of opinion about a particular issue, it is more important for you to support one another in discipline and in authority in order to establish that consistent authority so that the child knows who is in charge and it's not him. It's not a five year old that's in charge by making different appeals.

So what does that mean? It means that you should not contradict your spouse in front of the children. You should not let the children play you off of your spouse. Some fathers overrule what mom has said when they get home from work. I've seen it. Not in our family but I've seen it in other families. Some fathers overrule mom's discipline when they get home from work. Listen, that is a serious mistake. That is a serious mistake. It teaches children to disregard their mother. It demoralizes the mom. And so those men among you, you need to support your wife, especially if she is a stay-at-home mom. She is smarter and more aware than you probably give her credit for and so you need to be a man that stands behind your mom and your children understand, "If mom says it, dad's going to say the exact same thing," and vice-versa.

And it goes the other way too. Some moms will criticize dad to their children. Don't undermine the principle of authority in your home because of issues in your marriage. You need to be able to separate that out. If you've got problems with each other, talk about them with each other but don't inject that kind of disharmony into the relationship with your children because you undermine the principle of authority that God has established in the home.

Now, a little bit more practical input here. How else can we establish consistent authority? A couple of simple things. 1. Be clear in your expectations. Your child should not get punished for disobedience if he didn't know it was a rule in the first place. Don't multiply a lot of house rules. Don't have a bunch of house rules about a lot of different things. Just keep a few important ones, things that will keep people from suffering serious

bodily harm, you know, no bricks to the head of your little brother. That's a good house rule. But don't over-regulate the lives of your children. Keep it clear. Keep it simple. You know, those of you that have been in the workplace, you don't like a boss that micromanages you, right? No one likes that. No one likes someone standing over with their thumb upon them and criticizing them all the time and all of that. Well, your kids don't like it either and they don't have the capacity to tell you, "Hey, I don't like that." They don't even know how to express that in words. They just know the stifling effect of being over-regulated. Don't be a parent like that and remember that your children's minds and hearts are slow to learn. They are slow to learn and so they need consistent patient authority that will embed those heart lessons into their minds and hearts over time. Consistent authority over time is the goal, not necessarily dealing with this particular issue at this particular time.

That's the end of point 2 there but let's step back for a moment and just let me help you understand exactly what I'm trying to do here. What we're talking about is establishing an environment. I realize that your home is going to be different than mine. The way that you handle situations and the things that you think are acceptable, you're going to have different preferences than I do, than Nancy does, and that's fine. That's okay. I'm not trying to make your family like mine. Chances are if you knew the details of my family life, you'd say, "I don't really want to be just like that. Thank you very much." That's okay. Our families are going to be different, I understand that. You're going to have economic circumstances that make you have different decisions than what the other person next to you might make. We're talking about establishing an environment in which you can raise your children, where they understand that home is the place of your affections; that they understand that authority is real and that they're responsible to obey it and they learn to respect you, to respect their parents, and if one of your kids is not respecting your spouse, they respect you but they don't respect your spouse, you intervene and say, "Listen, you respect them too, not just me." That's critical because the obligation for a child to obey goes to both parents, not just one, and you need to teach your children to respect authority no matter where it's at in their lives.

So be consistent in authority. Be home. Be consistent in authority. Third point now and I like this one the best and I would venture to say that this might be where sometimes more serious Christians can fall short. Third point is this: be consistent in love. Be consistent in love. This is very important. Do you know how I know that it's very important? It's because here in my notes it's italicized. I have the word "very" here and "very" is italicized. It's very important. That's how I know it's important, it says so right here in what I'm looking at. It's very important.

Listen, if there was ever a time where I wanted to grab some dads by the collar of their shirt and just pull them straight into my face and look right in their eyes and be as firm as I could possibly be, it would be on this point right here. God does not give you authority in the home in order for you to be a tyrant. He doesn't give you authority so that you can spew out dictates so that it's quiet when you want it to be quiet, and that there's never a distraction that's around you. He doesn't give you authority so that you can establish a bubble around you where there are no intrusions or interruptions that you find personally

inconvenient. That is not why God gives you authority in the home at all, and I'll tell you, it upsets me when I see dads act that way and I thank God for an opportunity to say this from this pulpit.

Listen, that's the negative side, the positive side is this: God gives you authority in the home for the singular purpose that you can establish blessing to those that are under your roof. God gives you authority in the home so that you can establish a Christian, godly, biblical environment that acts as an umbrella over those that are under your roof so that they can experience the blessing of being in a Christian home. It is not for you to exercise to your own benefit. God gives you authority so that you can exercise it to the benefit of others and, dads, that means that he gives you authority in the home so that you can establish an environment that is a blessing to those around you, not so that you can get your way. That's despicable. That is a despicable mindset to carry around in your family and if you knew the illustrations that I have in mind that make me animated about it, you would understand why I'm animated right now.

Listen to Ephesians 6:4. God gives us this authority as fathers, as parents, but he tells us how to exercise it. It is not an unbridled authority. If you respect the authority of God and want your children to obey, then you're going to also respect the limitations that God puts on your authority. Anything else is just tyranny. Unbiblical, sinful, home tyranny that needs to be repented of. If we believe in the authority of God, the authority of Scriptures, then we're going to bring ourselves under all of its authority and we're going to realize that it has implications for the way that we do things as well as those who hold authority.

Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Colossians 3:21, turn over to the right a couple of pages there. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart." There is an amazing amount of wisdom bound up in that. There is an amazing level of presupposition that goes into that. That kind of instruction, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger," means that you need to know your children. You need to know them. You need to know what their skills and weaknesses are. You need to know their likes and dislikes. You need to know what provokes them and what they can live with and you shape your instruction in a way so that you don't unnecessarily anger them or provoke them or exasperate them. You need to know them and you need to conduct yourself in a way that your expectations on them are not so pressing and immediate and difficult that you put your children in a position to fail.

I'll give you a negative illustration from my own parenting from many years ago. This is just a simple thing but it will help you see what I'm talking about. You don't make such unreasonable demands and then punish them for failing to meet demands that they couldn't meet in the first place. That's just shameful that some parents are like that.

I remember a time years ago when there were certain parenting philosophies that were dominant in our circles, and so many people wanted to make such an issue of first time obedience and children should obey when you tell them to obey, okay? I'm not getting



into all of that. But if you're going to be committed to a principle like that and say, "You have to obey me when I tell you something to do," then you as the parent have a responsibility to make sure that whatever you say when you're wielding that kind of power and influence in the home is reasonable and attainable and you put your child in a position to succeed.

I remember a time, I'm kind of collapsing a few different things here, the details are a little fuzzy because this is many many years ago. But under the influence and the pressure of that environment when our children were young, I remember a situation, our kids were playing a game, they are engaged in their game, and I see a pair of socks on the floor someplace and I walk up and stick my nose in their game and say, "Go pick your socks up." Well, no big surprise that they weren't immediate to jump up and go do that. The whole way that I dealt with that was entirely wrong. Can't you see that they're doing something? Are the socks a physical threat to anyone in the house right now? I don't remember exactly what happened. You know, under the influence of that, I'm thinking, "I've got to correct them. They need a spanking." No! No, what needed to happen there was dad needed someone to smack him upside the head and say, "What are you doing?"

Dad, dad, don't exasperate your children. Don't provoke them to anger. If they were about to run into the street and a car was about to hit them, then scream at them, "Stop!" But when it's simply a matter of your convenience and you want something to look different than it does, recognize that for what it is. It's just a matter of you imposing your preference on them at an inconvenient time because they in their little world are engaged in a game that they're having fun in. You don't need to step in to do that to get a pair of socks picked up and then spank them in the name of enforcing first time obedience. That's shameful. I mean, that's just wrong and I thank God that he helped me see that before my kids grew up and were out of the home and I didn't have opportunity to change the ways of it.

Don't make your demands so pressing and immediate and difficult that they're bound to fail. When your children rebel against you, when your children say, "No!" in that defiant way, you need to discipline them, you need to be consistent, they need to learn authority but you need to understand also that there are restraints of love that go into the way that you wield your authority as a parent and you should delight in doing that.

Paul, the Apostle Paul, used loving parenting to describe his apostolic ministry. Look over at 1 Thessalonians 2 for a moment and let this sink into your hearts as young parents. Remember, we're just sitting around the living room, as it were. We're in your living room talking about principles here. 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul is recounting the history of his ministry when he was present with the church in Thessalonica and he uses an analogy to describe the warmth and gentleness of his ministry among them.

Look at verse 7. He says, "we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." There is is: tender care. This is so much assumed in the biblical record, in biblical authority, in biblical teaching about parenting, that Paul could say, "My ministry was like a nursing mother," and everyone knew what he was

talking about. "Oh, a nursing mother, one who is tender with her children. One who cares for them and tends to their needs with a glad spirit of being able to serve them and minister to those little children."

Verse 8, "Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." Using an analogy of parenting and what I want you to see from the parenting analogy that Paul uses here but he's describing a loving model of parenting that was a ready obvious example of what his apostolic ministry was like.

Go on down to verse 10. He makes a comparison to the Father. He says, "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as," here's the analogy again, "a father would his own children." He says, "You know what fathers do, right? Everybody understands this. A father encourages his children. He implores them. He dresses their heart. He exhorts them. He calls them to obedience but he does it in an encouraging way." He knows his kids, he interacts with them on issues of life, corrects them when they're wrong, rebukes them when they're wrong, but has a spirit of encouragement of wanting to bring his children closer to his own heart, closer to Christ through his own model and his own example.

Paul says, look at verse 12, "so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." This is the third passage, beloved, this is the third passage that we've look at here today that makes home life, godly home life a model for what life in the local church should look like. Start to see a theme here? Start to see a recurrent idea? We establish these things in our home because this is the way our character is supposed to be, and if it's established in our home, it's going to flow out in our church relationships as well.

A nursing mom is tender toward her children, or at least she should be. Many many years ago, again, we were with a family and they just threw their kids in cribs and let them cry themselves to sleep. It didn't matter if they were crying for 90 minutes. You want to call that tender care in the name of Christian parenting? Give me a break! I don't buy it. We should show tenderness. There should be no doubt in our children's minds that we love them; that when they come to us with a sincere heart, they're going to get tenderness and care in response.

So I'll go back and ask you the question as a parent, "Have you ever chafed when someone abused their authority over you? Boss, your own parents? Do you remember chafing at that?" That's not fair! Let that negative stuff that happened in your life, learn from that and say, "Do you know what? I see that and I'm going to be a different kind of parent than that. I didn't like that but I'm not going to impose that on my kids. I'll be different because I know what it feels like." And if you've had a leader, someone in authority over you that you responded to, you knew they cared about you, well, think

about how they dealt with you and emulate that in the lives of your kids. Let them benefit from those that blessed you.

Oh, beloved, please, please be gracious to your kids. Speak kindly to them. Love them. Treat them with dignity. Don't criticize and spank them in front of their friends or in front of their siblings. Take them alone privately and deal with their sin just like you would want someone to do with you. If you wouldn't want to be humiliated in front of someone else for something that you obviously had done wrong, then say, "Do you know what? I won't do that to my child either because that wouldn't be loving, that wouldn't be gracious. Christ certainly hasn't dealt with me that way, why would I deal with my own flesh and blood that way?"

On the positive side, make time to do with them what they want to do. Talk with them about what they want to talk about. For me, sometimes that was a 15 second conversation about another Barbie house. Fifteen seconds was all I had in me.

On the negative side, don't discipline them in front of others. Don't yell at them, embarrass them in front of their friends. Don't spank teenagers. Seriously. I know too many examples of that to count. With corporal punishment as they get older, there is just a declining amount of corporal punishment until it's no longer appropriate. You have to deal with them differently at a certain age. When my girls started to change physically, there was no longer any corporal discipline from me. It just wasn't appropriate anymore.

Here's what I want you to see: good parenting is more than a one way exercise of authority. It's not about domination and it's also not about capitulation and the kids do whatever they want. You establish authority but you do it in a loving gracious way. Take your children's desires, their skills, their limitations and their feelings into account and deal with them accordingly because that's what you'd want, right? Do unto others what you would have them do unto you and why not do that with your kids while still establishing authority in their lives? You and I as parents need to be consistent in our love or we're the ones who are in sin. It's that simple.

Now fourthly: be patient. Be patient. One of the challenges of good Christian parenting is that you don't see immediate results necessarily. You discipline the little four year old kid five times for the same thing and one day and you turn around and they're doing it again six times the next day. That's okay. Be patient. I've often told parents to take the long view of parenting. Your goal is not to establish external compliance at the age of three so much as to establish a long term trust over many years so that your emerging adult children want to seek you out with their major life decisions when they're in their teens and 20s. "Dad, what do you think about this? Dad, I've got this problem at school. I've got this teacher that wants me to do something. What do you think about that? Dad, what do you think about this person that I might want to...I think I like him, what do you think about that?" That's where you're aiming your parenting at so that the transition from childhood to adulthood that they go through is something that you're involved in and you're a part of and they trust you and love you and want you to be a part of that. Then,

you know, later on as they're parenting, "Hey, you remember when you did this? What did you think about that?"

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." Even when he's old. Scripture there on a key parenting text tells us to take the long view. Look down the road. Don't stress out so much about today. Just persevere through today and take the long view. That verse, by the way, is a statement of principle, not a guarantee. It's not that every child of every Christian parent comes out right, but generally speaking, children who are raised properly show the effects of it later in life and the fact that there are exceptions do not mitigate the overall truth of it.

Listen, here's how that helps you in your parenting. This is how you encourage someone if you're not a parent. You tell them, when you're short on sleep and it's been 10 days or 10 weeks since you had a decent night's sleep, take the long view. You won't always be tired. Your kid won't always wake up in the middle of the night. But, but your devotion to good parenting will pay off later in life. When you're correcting the same problem as you were six months ago, take the long view. Training occurs over time, not overnight. Hasn't your own Christian life been an illustration of that? How many of you are dealing with some of the same sins in your life that you were dealing with five, ten years ago? Maybe not as often, not as severe, but you know what I'm talking about, right? Well, don't expect your kid who is four to change instantly if you as a spiritual adult, as a Christian, are still dealing with some issues yourself years after your conversion. Be realistic about this. Be honest about your own state of growth in obedience and be patient. If you want the Lord to be patient with you, and he is, then be patient with your kids as well. It will pay off in the end.

Fifthly: be prayerful. Be prayerful and there's a whole lot wrapped up in this little point here. Parenting is humbling. Parenting is humbling. It will expose your own sinfulness and inadequacy. You get angry with your kids, you get discouraged with your kids, you get tired of it, you want to do something else. It exposes your own sinfulness, parenting does. When you commit yourself to this, you realize, "Man, I fall short in this." Stated differently, what that's saying is that you need grace. You need grace. You need God to be gracious to you and I've got good news for you. I've got good news for you. In all of the inadequacy that you feel as a parent now or looking back and saying, "Do you know what? I really blew it and now they're out of the house and it's too late for me to do anything about it." What then? You can't go back and redo it. You don't get a mulligan. What then? I've got good news for you: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, 1 Timothy 1. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, Romans 8. If your kids are gone and you have a sense of, "I didn't get the job done," ask God to be gracious to you. Ask God to bind up the wounds of your heart with his grace and to cover your failures with future grace in the lives of those that have been affected by it.

If you're a parent now in the midst of these issues, just day by day ask God to be gracious to you, to cover you and to make you a better parent today than you were yesterday. That's a great prayer, "God, make me a better parent today than I was yesterday." That's always appropriate, right? And to remember that we have a gracious God who saved us

from our sins in order to bless us and to make us a blessing. "God, I know I get in the way of that a lot. Would you just somehow be gracious and sort this out in a way that would honor Christ and make me a blessing to those around me?" Be prayerful in your need for grace.

Remember this too: as you are praying for grace in your own parenting, think about this, if you as the Christian adult need grace, how much more do your children need God's grace, right? You're the Christian here. You're the adult here and you fall short? Then step back and say, "Oh, how much more grace my child must need as well." And you look beyond their daily lives, you look beyond their disobedience, their defiance of you and you see their need for grace and you get down on your knees and you pray day after day after day, "God, be gracious to this little one that I love but is still such a sinner. Be gracious to him, O God."

Think about it this way: the Apostle Paul dealing with his fellow Jews said, "Beloved, the desire of my heart, I pray to God for their salvation." Well, if Paul could pray that for his kinsmen according to the flesh, according to his fellow Jews, how much more you and I should just be pleading with God, "O God, save them. Be gracious to them. Show your favor to them. God, they've got a really bad sinner as a parent. How are they ever going to get by? They've got to deal with me, Lord. O God, be gracious to them." If Paul could pray for the salvation of his fellow Jews, beloved, you and I as Christian parents should be devoted to ongoing prayer for the salvation of the fruit of our own bodies, right?

Inconvenient? No, these are the wellsprings of my heart. No, these children are not a pain to me. I want to see them saved like God saved me. "God, be merciful to them." And just remember as I close, God has not stopped being gracious. He's not going to stop being gracious. God was gracious to you in the past, he's being gracious to you today, and you can count on the fact that he's going to be gracious in the future and so trust him and ask him to manifest that in your family. You can go to Christ in all your failures, fatigues and frustration and find a fountain of grace in your parenting.

Listen: I say without fear of contradiction because I believe in the doctrine of divine providence, God shaped you for that child and God shaped that child for you. He is always working out his purposes and so be faithful to the principles, the biblical principles of good Christian parenting and over time watch and expect God to display his ever greater faithfulness to you in those treasures of your heart, those gifts that he has given to you, because God never fails, Christ never betrays his people.

Let's pray.

*Father, we commit these things to you. Oh, the joy, the potential for joy and the potential for sorrow that our families bring to us, O God. Be ever mindful of each one in this room, of each child and grandchild that is represented here and interpose your grace in the formation of their young characters so that they would rise up and become a generation that would declare your glory to a generation yet to be born. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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