

# A Practical Guide to Parenting

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Well, after a brief hiatus from our study of the 10 Commandments, we return to the 10 Commandments and I'm very eager to share the things from the word of God that are in front of us here today. There's no question in saying that, especially to our young families, that the things that are coming over the next couple of weeks out of the fifth commandment have the opportunity, if you will embrace them, to greatly shape the long-term trajectory of your family life in a way that you will never regret, that God will bless; and for those of us whose families are raised, it will give us an opportunity to kind of look with some perspective at the blessing of God, to give thanks for that, and also to humbly acknowledge areas where we have fallen short, certainly that's been my experience as I have prepared this material for you today.

We have spent three or four messages, I kind of lose count after a while so I don't expect you to remember either, we have spent about three messages talking about the duties of children to their parents. Children, honor your parents, children, obey your parents, those kinds of things, and so let's go back to the fifth commandment about honoring your parents, Exodus 20:12, and we'll look at this from the opposite perspective, the perspective of parenting, and today I intend to give you, this is the title of today's message, "A Practical Guide to Parenting." Exodus 20:12 which is the fifth commandment, the first commandment on the second table of the moral law of God. Exodus 20:12 says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you." Having examined the duties of children, it's only right that we would ask the question from the other side: what practical duties does this commandment imply for parents? And you know, as a parent you read this and you say, "Aha, my children are supposed to honor me," and you get a little bit ahead of yourself in your thinking, but as parents we need to be mindful of something very very important, that if parents are to receive spiritual honor, they should be spiritually honorable. If parents are to receive spiritual honor, obviously this commandment implies that in one manner or another that they should be spiritually honorable. A parent could not look at this commandment and think that, "I can live in any profane sinful way that I want and still demand the respect and honor of my children"; there is an obvious corresponding duty to parents that we'll see as we go through this over the next time or two that we gathered together. I intend to address this on Sunday and Tuesday for the next couple of weeks until we are through the commandments, so that's what's going to be ahead. If this, you know, if this matter speaks, the Lord uses this in

your heart, then it would be very wise and vital for you to be here on Tuesday as well to hear these things live as we gather together around God's word.

I want to say that for today in this particular message, that many of my thoughts that I have to share with you today were stimulated by the Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins and his work on the 10 Commandments, kind of taken his outline, adapted it to, you know, my own perspective but I owe a great debt to what that man of God taught many centuries ago, and it was very encouraging to me to see how from across centuries a man could simply teach the word of God and say things that were relevant and living and active and critical today as they were back when he said them. It gives us a sense of the transcendent nature, the transcendent power of the word of God, and encourages us to continue in the word of God with our reading, our study and our preaching because these, and these alone, are the words of life. This is where we find the will of God and we don't have to be so caught up in what's happening in the culture around us, we find in the word of God that which paves our path for the future. And we are blessed in our church to have very many earnest families, people that have raised their families and obviously made it a priority to try to do that well and to devote themselves to their family, we have young families that are looking to do that and all points in between, and so this is a rich time but we need to remember that as the word of God comes to us, the word of God comes and sometimes it affirms us and encourages us that we've, you know, that we're on the right path, but it is also the nature of a holy God in his holy word sometimes to correct us and to point out things where we're on the wrong path.

You know, if you go back to 2 Timothy and I want to point this out to you because I think it's going to be an important perspective with which to receive the word of God today, 2 Timothy 3:16 says this, we'll come back to 2 Timothy 3 in another manner later in today's message, but notice this and we're gathered together today as Christians, we're gathered together as those who affirm the inerrancy and the inspiration and the infallibility of God's word and this Scripture is key to that and it says this to us, as he's writing to believers, the Apostle Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." A genuine study, a genuine appropriation of Scripture is going to have the effect of teaching us and instructing us in doctrine and in practical ways of godly living, but there are also going to be those times where it corrects our wayward hearts, it corrects our wayward lives, it reproofs us and says, "No, this is wrong. What you're doing is not right here." And it corrects us by showing us what the way of God is and then sets us on the path to live in greater righteousness as a result of having encountered the word of God.

So this is the point of Scripture and I just feel it's important to emphasize that we don't gather together as Christians at Truth Community Church, we don't gather together simply to put a moral veneer on our lives as we simply pursue worldly priorities. We genuinely, we earnestly want the word of God to be active in our lives, we want it to conform us to the image of Christ, we want it to change us because we recognize, you know, we understand that there is still a lot of sin in all of our hearts. We have not reached perfection and we won't reach perfection in this life and so we continually need

the reproof aspect of the word of God to chasten us, to humble us, and to instruct us, and we come as children who need to learn from our God, we come as children who need training, who need instruction; even if we've been Christians for 40 years or more, we still need the word of God to have that effect in our lives. And so it's with that spirit that we come, a recognition of our holy God, a recognition of his holy word and its role in our lives, and we come with a teachable spirit saying, "Lord, instruct us and help us and shape us, and if there are areas where we need to repent, Father, we come with a spirit willing to do that. If there are areas where we come and we need encouragement and affirmation, Father, we would ask Your Spirit to give that to us." So the spirit with which we approach the word of God is very very important. God's word is in authority over us and so when we hear it, we need to respond to it well.

So what I want to do today is give you a practical guide to parenting and lay out five principles of parenting and to answer this question: what is it that parents are to do for their children? What are parents to do for their children? That's a pretty important question. This is really foundational in the word of God and so we're going to look at five things, there are going to be some things in the physical realm, some things in the spiritual realm, and so we'll just walk through these things in the word of God here today.

What are you to do as parents for your children? Well, number 1: you are to provide for their physical good. You are to provide for their physical good. That may seem obvious and necessary and why would we spend time on this but, you know, mindful of the fact that our words sometimes go beyond the walls of our church, you know, we're living in a culture that butchers babies by abortion to the tunes of tens of millions over the past few decades, you know, this needs to be said. A mother that allows an intruder into her womb to slaughter the child in her womb and this is something that's relatively accepted and defended in our culture, this needs to be said, and we need to say these things to the culture and yet within our own body where we need to be able to think through these things as well. Parents are to protect their children and to provide for them. Parents are to protect their children and to provide for them, and if you think about it, even in the animal kingdom, animals will expose themselves to danger in order to protect their young and those that are at all familiar with being out in nature are aware that you are very careful not to intrude upon a mother animal's realm with her young because she will reach out and she will defend her children against the perceived danger. Animals understand this and yet we have in our culture, you know, we have fathers that will sire children and then abandon them and walk away from the mother and leave her to care for them; it is not at all obvious that our culture understands this or embraces this at all. The reality of this principle is that it convicts our culture and when you think about the nature of children being made in the image of God, children having an eternal soul, isn't it obvious that we ought to be looking after them with greater care than animals do because we're not looking after sparrows and chickens, we're not looking after baby cubs, we're looking at those that have been made in their mother's womb by the hand of God and created in his image. So these are matters of great great importance.

As we think further about the way that, you know, if children are allowed to be born, the way that they are used and exploited by predators in so many different ways, children are

weak and helpless and it is just unthinkable that they become objects of perverse sexual attraction to people in our culture. Children are vulnerable to disease and they're vulnerable to danger, and even in a loving family, our children lack wisdom and they lack the experience that they need to avoid daily dangers. So who is going to, where are they going to find their protection if not from parents who are actively looking out for their physical good? So you, as parents, are to be guardians of your children and by your skill and by your strength and by your provision to protect those young ones over the course of years until they are old enough and mature enough to take on their own responsibility. Scripture often teaches this basic human responsibility.

Look over at Matthew 7 with me. Jesus just alludes to this as he's making a spiritual point about prayer. He points to the example, he points to the recognized duty of earthly parents to illustrate a point about our heavenly Father. He says in Matthew 7:7, he says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." This, you know, he's teaching us about praying and persevering in prayer before our heavenly Father and he reinforces that point by using an earthly illustration. In verse 9 he says, "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" It is obvious, Jesus says, that an earthly father understands his duty to provide for the physical good of his children and he says this, verse 11, note that he says this to people that he knows are sinners, even sinners understand this point, verse 11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Over in 1 Timothy 5:8, you don't need to turn there for the sake of time, but in 1 Timothy 5:8 it says, "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." And so there is this biblical responsibility that parents have to provide for their children and sometimes that means that parents are going to have to make different career choices, for example, than what they might otherwise want to do, to make other career choices that will enable them to provide for their family because parents are responsible to sustain the lives in the flesh that they have produced in the flesh.

So in some way as they're young, providing for their physical nurture and care as they go along through our finances or training, parents provide for the physical good of their children, we provide and look to set them up so that they are able to provide for their own future by the training and the care and the love that they have received under our roof. This is an overarching principle that we care for them in this life, we prepare them for adult life, and we move them ultimately into independence. It is not, it is not that children are to perpetually live off of us in a slothful way, that they just live in our basement without working and without contributing to the household as they're able to do that. It's not that, but as parents we prepare them to become independent adults, we look out for their physical good and all of the different aspects of that throughout life, and that is one of the primary responsibilities of being a parent is that we care for them in their vulnerability and we prepare them for the world in which they are about to live.

That's point 1: parents provide for the physical good of their children. Now secondly and moving into that which is in a different kind of realm, secondly, parents are to provide for their spiritual good. They are to provide for their spiritual good and we'll have more to say about this on Tuesday evening when we gather together, but it is not enough, it is not enough for a parent simply to provide for the financial well-being of his family, and we speak particularly to fathers in the audience here today. It is not enough, it is not a satisfaction and a full discharge of your duty before a holy God who has given you these children, it is not enough simply to provide for their physical good and to pay the bills and to put clothes on their back as if that was all that there was to a man because what does the Bible say? What did Jesus say? He said that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, and that applies to children as well. Your children need more than three square meals a day and more than a roof under which to live, your children need spiritual instruction that they would understand the vertical dimension of life, that they would understand that they have been made by a holy God, that they are sinners in need of a Savior, that they have a duty of repentance and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and they need to understand this and they need to understand that over the course of time in addition to matters of ongoing discipleship, of learning the character of God, learning the duties of Christian living, learning the duties of participation in a local church and faithfulness to a local body. Children need to learn these things. None of that is instilled in their heart at birth. They are born with sinful deceitful hearts and none of that is built into their hearts at birth and so God has entrusted children to parents who will teach them that and who will instruct them and order life in a way that children would understand these things and be able to understand their role in the universe before a holy God.

So as parents, in addition to the provision of physical good, there is an even more surpassing requirement to provide for their spiritual good, and let me remind you of some passages if you go back to the book of Deuteronomy for a moment, Deuteronomy 4. Those of you that have followed the Bible reading plan that we gave out in the fall, you're coming into the book of Deuteronomy if you're not already there this month. Deuteronomy 4. Moses is instructing the children of Israel before his death and preparing them for entering into the Promised Land and life that will be there. They were delivered by God, they were delivered by God from slavery in Egypt to be his people and now God is about to establish them in the land that they would become their own nation with their own boundaries, with their own leadership. This is a new aspect of life for the people of God that they are about to embark on and so Moses says and sets the context in verse 7 as he speaks, think about this, as he speaks at a national level, as he speaks to national issues, watch what follows as he does. Verse 7 he says, "what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" He says you are in a position of national blessing, and then he goes immediately to the foundation of any society and instructs the people and gives them a sense of priority of what their day-to-day lives are to emphasize in this privileged position as the people of God. He says in verse 9, he says, "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently," pay attention to the condition of your own heart, "so that

you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life." So there's this individual spiritual responsibility to remember God and to worship him and to honor him and to grow in the knowledge of him and that becomes the individual's responsibility in society is to have that priority set firm in their heart, and then consequent upon that, having done that, verse 9, "but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." Make them known to your family. He doesn't talk about political institutions after having talked about the great opportunity that they have as a nation of the people of God, rather he speaks to them about their responsibilities personally and in the family to cultivate godliness, godliness in their own heart, godliness in the lives of their sons, godliness in the lives of even their grandchildren. This is the surpassing priority, the spiritual good of the next generation.

Look over at Deuteronomy 6. The word of God here makes a full-out frontal assault on the priorities of the culture in which we live which would deny all of this, that denies absolute truth, that diminishes the word of God, that says there are multiple ways to a holy God, and thereby dilutes any sense of spiritual responsibility and conveys the idea that, well, children should just grow up and be able to choose whatever they want to believe. Well, that's the most foolish attitude that could ever be adopted because foolishness is bound up in the heart of children, Scripture says. They do not know what is true, they have no idea of discerning what is true. They need parents to teach them particularly in this age where children are the objects of grooming by perverse elements in our society. This has become more important than I can remember it being in the course of my lifetime to do this now. You know, 10 years ago, I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself and a little bit off-track but that's okay, you know, you go back 10, 11, 12 years ago, there was not a single clinic for transgender treatment of children anywhere in the United States. Just 10 to 12 years ago. Now at the last time that I checked, there's 50 and probably more than that at some of the most respected institutions for children's care all across the country. This is utter perversion and there is an entire multibillion-dollar industry that is targeting children and is declaring war on children in order to bring them in and to get them under the drugs and the surgery and everything else that would alter them so that men can profit from the confusion that they themselves inject into their hearts.

What's the defense for children against that when all of this is being celebrated by society around them? The only defense that they have our parents that will teach them the word of God, the parents who will tell them, "No, God made you," and you tell them at the youngest age. You know, the question becomes, you know, in my judgment, you know, how are we to defend them against this? It's from parents telling their children before they're even able to understand what's being said, "God made you a boy and your private parts are the indication of what God did in order to make you a boy or to make you a girl. That's how you know who you are and I am glad that God made you this way. You're my little boy and I love you that way, you're my little girl and I love you that way and I wouldn't have you any other way and God wouldn't have you any other way." And you repeat that to them over and over and over again so that that's shaped in their minds and shaped in their hearts in a way that this becomes foundational to the way that they view themselves in this world that is so perverse. How are children going to learn this and how

are children going to be defended unless they have loving, Christian, sympathetic parents that are defending them from the vultures that hover over them looking for another victim to play themselves out on? How are they going to do that if you as their parents are not helping them and preparing them before they even know that there is a danger out there?

Deuteronomy 6:4. What's coursing through my mind here is just the great responsibility that we have and the great opportunity that we have, that the little ones that the Lord would give to us would find in our home a realm of protection against a hostile world, and you become their guardian defender, their advocate, you protect them. Deuteronomy 6:4, Moses says, "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. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." So he starts with individual personal responsibility to cultivate godliness, to cultivate the love of God, and then from there he goes on in verse 7 and he says, "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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." But notice that right in the middle in verse 7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons. You 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." Scripture contemplates believing parents having an ongoing conversation throughout the day over the course of time with their children in natural situations with natural opportunities, with a natural affection, parents embracing this opportunity, being a voice of God in the lives of their children.

It's no wonder that Ephesians 6, in Ephesians 6, the New Testament says, "Parents, bring up your children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord." This is the duty. In fact, let's look at Ephesians 6 just to emphasize this. You know, I like you to see from the text where the responsibilities come from and to reinforce that this is a direct implication of the fifth commandment to honor your father and your mother. In Ephesians 6:2, verse 1, it's brief, we can do that. "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." So he says, "Children, here is God's word to you, here's what applies to you." We've just covered that here at Truth Community Church. And then notice where he goes from that, where the inspired writings of Scripture go, Paul goes from the command to children and immediately addresses parents, addresses fathers more particularly, so that the idea of duties upon parent flow naturally from a biblical understanding of the fifth commandment. So he says in verse 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

So parents, there it is. This is something that I like to say and tell parents, this goes beyond simply having a family devotional time for 10 minutes every day which some people are good at, some people aren't. It goes beyond that. The Scriptures describe an ongoing instruction that is just natural throughout the course of the entire day. You don't deal with 10 minutes and then pivot to everything else in life and ignore the things of

God, the things of God are to be central and a vital part of the ongoing nature of life. So what do we do as parents? What do we do? We provide for their spiritual good, we provide for their spiritual good. Parents, you have a responsibility in one way or another to teach your children the fundamental truths of Christian doctrine. They need to know the truth of God, to know the truth about man and who they are. They need to know about sin. They need to know about Christ. They need to know about his work on the cross. They need to know about repentance and faith. You say, "Well, you're saying I need to teach them systematic theology." Well, look, it's not that we hold theology classes with them in a formal way before they are able to even understand these things, but you should be communicating with them in daily life about these biblical realities according to their ability at their stage of life and adapting what you know to their abilities and their capabilities and translating that for them so that they learn these things over the course of time.

One of the ways that you do that is that you faithfully have your children, you faithfully have your families in the local church when the word of God is being taught so that there are occasions for you to reinforce and just a very natural thing, "Well, this is what we learned at church, let's talk about that a little bit." The church becomes an easy accessory, an easy enablement for you to be able to do that and to help you in the process and we don't need children's programs to do that. What benefits a family is when they are sitting together in the same room, at the same time, under the same teaching, hearing the same things, and then talking about it later on and working it out and you as a parent having the opportunity to answer their questions. That is one of the blessings of God in the life of a family that's seeking to live for Christ. I'll have more to say about that later but, quoting Ezekiel Hopkins for now, he said and I quote, he said, "If parents would be conscientious in the performance of their duty before their children are filled with vanity, the next generation would not generally see so much corruption in youth nor stubbornness in old age as is now everywhere too apparent." I smile at that knowing that he wrote that about 350 years ago. He was complaining about their stubbornness and it's everywhere too apparent. I can only imagine what he would say if he was able to transverse time and see things today.

Well, how are you to do this? Well, you read them the Scriptures, you point out those things which are suitable to their age and understanding, and let me point out to you, go back to 2 Timothy again, that this is what Timothy's mother and grandmother did for him. 2 Timothy in your New Testament, 2 Timothy 1:5, for having a life in ministry it would be enough for me to have it etched on my tombstone that I had done this, whether I have are not is for others to judge, not for me to say, but Paul says to Timothy, he says, "I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well." Then look over at 2 Timothy 3:15. Paul gives a commentary on the parenting and the family life that Timothy received from the hands of these women, and notice, it's interesting that Timothy's father and grandfather aren't mentioned here. Paul commends the mother, commends the grandmother, and for those of you ladies that are trying to raise a family without the spiritual support of a willing father whether, you know, you're a single household or you're just living in an unequally yoked marriage, just take encouragement from the fact



that we have this example from the word of God where God blessed a godly mother and blessed a godly grandmother and produced a Timothy as a result of their instruction. They laid the foundation for it and take heart that God will bless your efforts as well as you deal with your children even if your other spouse is not supportive of it. 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy, "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Early instruction in the lives of children that are just barely able to walk, early instruction builds a basis for them in Christ and cultivates in their heart a love for godliness. Yes, they still need the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit to fully convert them to Christ but as you plant the word of God in their lives, as you tenderly instruct them and patiently deal with them and communicate your own love for these things, and as you teach them these things, you're planting the seeds that allow the Holy Spirit to come along behind you, as it were, alongside you, and bring fruit from that. That is a great privilege and that foundation will protect them later on in their lives from unprincipled men who seek to lead them astray.

So an early mastery of their minds will restrain future corruption. The word of God in the future will smite his conscience when he pursues a sinful course of life. All of these things, there's no guarantee of what the ultimate outcome is, there's no guarantee, you cannot guarantee that your child will end up in the kingdom of God, salvation is a sovereign work of God from beginning to end, but he uses means and he uses the faithful teaching of parents in the lives of children often in order to lead them to saving faith in Christ. Why wouldn't you want to do that? You know, your child, whatever else happens to him in life whether he lives long or lives short, whether he's successful from an earthly perspective or not, there's one thing that should continually be in your mind as a Christian parent as you look on your little ones, as you look on your teenagers, as you pray for them, there ought to be one thing that is always coming back to your mind is that, "My child is one day going to stand before the judgment seat of God and that is the ultimate thing that matters in his life and that is the thing that I'm giving my life and instruction and my priorities to, that I would do everything in my power in order to prepare them for that moment." You know, you can give your child a preparation for a career, if you haven't laid a foundation for him in Christ, ultimately what good have you done? Ultimately what good have we done if we neglect this principle, this priority of parenting to provide for their spiritual good?

Solomon said in Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way that he ought to go and when he is old he will not depart from it." The idea being not an absolute guarantee that that will be true in every single instance but rather that this is the pattern that God blesses. God blesses parents who train their children spiritually and blesses them in a way that it has an effect later on in a child's life, and if we are neglecting that, if you and I are neglecting that or if we've neglected that, we've really missed the point and we have to come to God and humbly ask him for grace and forgiveness knowing that Christ came and Christ died for even those sins of omission in parenting, Christ died even for your omissions in parenting but it would be right and good for you if this is convicting to you to go and ask for mercy from God on your soul and on the souls of your children if this has been something that you've neglected. There's no way around this. You can see why I prefaced

the message like I did. The word of God convicts us, it reproves us, and we need to be receptive to it. It doesn't do any good to make excuses. It doesn't do any good to deny this or to argue with the word of God. If we have failed, if we're guilty of sin in this area, we need to face up to it and own up to it rather than deny it and perpetuate and make even worse the failures of our earlier parenting.

So you provide for their physical good, you provide for their spiritual good. Let's go to a third principle and after all that we've said, this one is going to hurt. This one is going to hurt because, thirdly, we find that as a parent that we have a responsibility to provide a good example. To provide a good example. It is necessary and important for us to verbally instruct our children, to teach them principles from the word of God, to teach them about all of these things but, beloved, it's not enough, that's not an exhaustion of your spiritual duties before God with your family because parents need to model the virtues that they teach to their kids. Parents need to model Christian living even as they instruct their children in Christian doctrine and life in Christ, conversion to Christ, and what it means to live as a Christian child. We have a responsibility as parents to live that out.

Paul's call to Timothy, Paul speaks to Timothy a lot, he speaks to him as "my child," and so Paul saw himself as something of a spiritual father to Timothy and so he has this mindset, this parental mindset even though he was not Timothy's biological father, Paul's words to Timothy are helpful to us as we contemplate parenting. Look at 1 Timothy 4. We've talked about physical provision for our children, let's just take a look at the broader context of 1 Timothy 4, beginning in verse 6 where Paul speaking to Timothy as an aspiring minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ uses principles that are helpful to us to discern righteousness in our own parenting. 1 Timothy 4:6, he says, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following." So you see the faith, the sound doctrine that were embedded in Timothy's heart from childhood. Paul warns him against straying from the teaching. He says in verse 7, "But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit." Note that and think about that in the context of parenting. The physical good of your children is only of ultimate little profit if it's not accompanied by godliness, by godly teaching. Life is more than the body. There is more to life than the physical aspect of it and so Paul tells Timothy, it's not that it's of no profit, it's just of comparatively little profit, "godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Do you see it, my friends? I said the thing that you need to keep in mind is the life to come, the judgment seat to come for your children. If you've neglected that, if that's just not part of your matrix through which you think about your responsibility of parenting, you need to rebuild your matrix according to the word of God because it's not just about this life, it's not just about what your children can do now, it's about the life to come. This is essential to a Christian worldview.

So Paul says in verse 9, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the

Savior of all men, especially of believers. Prescribe and teach these things." All of that context for what I wanted to say about providing a good example to your children, what Paul next says to Timothy for his responsibility before a congregation is equally applicable to the parent before their children in private family life. Verse 12 he says, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." Now I say this gently, what I'm about to say here, I say this tenderly to you knowing that my own example has not been all that it could have been to my children over the years, but we need to say this, you need to hear this and take it to heart: parents who teach one thing to their children but live in a different way that contradicts the teaching should not expect their children to grow up to fear God. How will they love godly living if they do not see it in you? How will they understand that these principles affect life if when they see Christians from the closest perspective, they see a disconnect that contradicts what you're saying? How will they learn that? How will they learn to love God? How will they learn to fear God if you don't fear God enough for what you say you believe to determine the way that you live? How can that happen?

The practice of parents, the practice of parents forms patterns in their children and whatever your rules may be, your example is greater, and I want to give you a means of practical illustration for this that I think is quite important to understand and to hear, and we all need this and it applies in multiple areas of the lives of children, not just the particular aspect of illustration that I'm going to use here. Our son played high school football and we enjoyed every minute of that experience with him. We would do it again if we could. So having said that, keep that in mind with what I am about to say, okay? You know, our son had experience in athletics. We enjoyed that and we supported it but we need to speak directly about these things and it could be sports, it could be arts, it could be anything else that a child, you know, what you point, the direction that you point a child's life in. We're just using sports as an opportunity. There are parents who would never have their kid miss a practice and yet these are parents who will easily miss church for a variety of reasons. It's not that any individual decision not to be at church on any particular Sunday or Tuesday, it's not that, you've got to listen to me really carefully here, I know that I've stepped right into the private area of life here with what I'm saying but I've got a responsibility before God to say this and that's all I care about right now is what God thinks about this after I'm done, everything else is secondary. So there are parents who would never have their kid miss a sports practice, who easily miss church for a variety of reasons. Now listen to me, it's not that any individual decision to miss church is blameworthy. I'm not saying that. We don't even take attendance here and check how people come week by week, but as a parent what you want to be thinking about, in my judgment, is this: decisions accumulate over time, decisions like that accumulate over time and those kinds of decisions become habits, and habits imperceptibly instill priorities in the lives of your children, and priorities establish the direction of future lives. This happens incrementally. This happens one by one, brick by brick, you're not even aware of what's happening or what you're doing if you're not careful about it, but over the course of 30 years of ministry, I see this over and over again. "We can't miss practice. We can't miss the game." But church, faithfulness to the local church, that's negotiable. Now in light of what we've seen so far in today's message, isn't it obvious that that's a flipping

of priorities, that's a flipping of perspectives in a way that the culture justifies and even the evangelical church culture practices? I get that but the question isn't what the evangelical culture is or even what our church culture might be, the question is what's the priority of God and what is that to mean to the parent who is establishing these decisions and determining the outcome of things to come. Listen, I say it in love and I say it for your eternal good, I say it because I'm thinking about your child being before the judgment seat of God one day. That's what I care about and you being before the judgment seat of God one day, that's the only thing I care about as I say this. I don't care about anything else so I have to say this. Beloved, your child is not going to be a professional athlete, your child is most likely not going to be a professional musician and make his living at music, but your child is going to stand before the judgment seat of God and it is critical, critical for you as a parent to shape the life of your family in a way that reflects that reality and reflects that priority.

This isn't about whether your child can play sports, it's not about music, it's not about the arts, it's not about anything like that. The question that we are talking about, the issue that we are talking about are comparative priorities, what is it that you give the greatest priority to, what is it that you structure life around because what you structure life around is where your real heart priority is. Your life is displaying your priorities. This is unavoidable. Better to address it now in life, in time while there is time, while there is time for confession and repentance if those days are behind you, while there is time to shape a child's view of what's important in life, better to do that now than to regret it at the judgment seat of God. There is no denying that. There is no denying that. Our example and the way that we structure the lives of our family have a great great impact and I just go back to say there's just no denying the fact that the way that we live now and the example that you set not only by your personal life but by what you shape your family and the direction you take your family in, these have long-term eternal ramifications and I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I didn't passionately tell you that and urge you to go before God and to work out these principles in your own life because your example matters more than what your children hear from you day-to-day. If there's a disconnect, they'll go with what is the lower priority, they'll go to the lower example, not to the higher element of your teaching. There's no way around.

So when godly parents speak in tender words to their children, when godly parents structure the family's schedule around godly priorities and walk in them, they are showing their children the priority of life, they are showing them how pleasant godliness can be. And for those of you that have structured your family this way, those of you that make the things of God and the people of God, make that a priority around which you live, God bless you and take confidence that God will honor the way that you have sought to honor him long-term and how that applies in individual lives, I'll let the Spirit of God sort that out for the rest of you.

Point number 4. What else are parents to do? Well, they are to provide physical care, they are to provide spiritual care, they are to provide a good example, fourthly, they are to provide discipline. They are to provide discipline. When children disobey your instruction or your example, your godly example, as parents you have a responsibility to

correct them. In Proverbs 13:24 Scripture says this, Proverbs 13:24, it says, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Let me read that again, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Now look, we've raised six kids, they're all adults now, Nancy more than I knows this, that discipline is never pleasant. We all understand that and one of the reasons that discipline is never pleasant is because the rewards are not immediate. You know, you're doing this on Monday, you discipline on Monday and you do it on Tuesday and you're doing it next week and next month. You know, I remember one issue that we dealt with with one of our kids, you know, we were dealing with something for six months and there was not even incremental progress to encourage us on it. It was just a seemingly thankless task day-by-day for months and months and months. Utterly thankless. I say that to say I understand and sympathize with the difficulty of it but, beloved, as a Christian parent it's a battle that you must win over time and you must win the mastery over your own heart to be consistent in it even when it doesn't seem to be producing any results. And discipline, biblical families, biblical parents understand that sometimes we must use corporal punishment and spankings when children are young and little in order to affect the correction that they need. I like to say it this way thinking of little children: pain on the bottom corrects sin in the heart. Pain on the bottom corrects sin in the heart. They need to associate disobedience with pain. They need to understand that there are consequences to disobedience rather than thinking that disobedience is something that they can get away with over time.

So use correction when the child is old enough to consciously rebel against you, use correction before they harden against the fear and pain of correction. You know, the challenge and perhaps I'm not aware of anything like this in our church, I wouldn't be surprised if it were true, I'm just not aware of it, don't have anyone in mind when I say this, the challenge in biblical discipline is that some parents abuse it, right? Some parents discipline in anger and they injure their children in the name of correction and discipline so that correction turns into abuse. That is wrong. That is sinful and that will not profit children at all. It breaks their spirit rather than forming it. It breaks their spirit rather than shaping the heart. And you could say the same thing about overly harsh physical discipline, you could say the same thing about overly harsh verbal correction. Biblical correction is not abusive, biblical correction is an act of love, and biblical correction by Christian parents is done with a spirit that never forgets the fact that, "I myself am a guilty sinner before God who has shown grace to me and my dissatisfaction and my disapproval of my child's actions has to be shaped and tinged with a sense of mercy just like God's actions with me have been tinged with mercy." That's at the core of biblical parenting. The greater problem is not parents being too strict, it's being too permissive and I just want to encourage and help you. It is not the parent who corrects their children that is hateful according to Scripture. The one who hates his child is the one who doesn't do that and as Ezekiel Hopkins says, correction is also the path of comfort for your own soul. Generally speaking, if you correct your child in their younger age, they will be a comfort and joy to you later in life, and even if they don't, even if they rebel, even if they've turned against all of your loving appeal, instructions, correction, they turn against all of that, you can at least have the benefit of a clear conscience before God knowing

that you did your duty to seek his good. So we can't avoid this element of correction in our parenting.

So the physical good, the spiritual good, the good example, the discipline, one final one to kind of wrap all of it and to give all of it a spirit of dependence and calling upon God for grace, number 5 is to pray for your children. Pray for your children because prayer and the work of the Spirit of God in your heart as you pray, prayer is what makes your other duties effective. Look at Philippians 1 with me and we'll close with this. Philippians 1. As you're turning there, I just say it once again, your child will not be a professional athlete but he will stand before the judgment seat of God and you need to shape your parenting in accordance with that reality. Philippians 1:9, the Apostle Paul gives a pattern of prayer here, one that would be quite appropriate for parents to adopt as their own for their own flesh and blood. Verse 9, "this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

My friends, this text for the church gives a pattern for parents as well. When you come to the throne of grace in prayer, bring your little lambs with you in your heart. Ask God to help you be the parent that you need to be. Ask God to forgive you for how you have failed in the past. Ask God to provide for your children physically as though they were his own children. He provided a land flowing with milk and honey for the Israelites, "God, could you at least give what my children need for their daily bread? Would You provide for them? Would You provide for them now? Would You provide for our family now and, Father, after I'm gone would You provide for my family then as well? Would You look after them?" As you go to prayer, carry your children with you and ask God to lead them to faith in Christ and into his heavenly kingdom. "God, whatever else they do, whether they are prominent people of prosperity or they are lowly people of modest means, God, what matters is the fact, God, I plead with You," you know, you stir these affections up in your heart, "God, I plead with You to have mercy on my children because whatever happens in this life, one day they're going to stand before Your judgment seat, one day they're going to give an account and they were born with a foolish sinful heart that they inherited from me, O God, what are they supposed to do, God, if You don't have mercy on them? God, have mercy on them, have mercy on them in Christ. Let them see the glory of His person. Let them see and understand the glory of His work on the cross. Let them see the high glory of His Lordship and give them new life so that they would believe and embrace that, Father, because if they're with me around the throne of God in eternity, nothing else matters by comparison. So God, grant me that, grant me the greater thing. You showed mercy to me as an unworthy one and then made me their parents, O God, show mercy to them. God, what chance do they have? They're living under my example, they see my failures up close, O God. God, won't You have mercy on them and have mercy on me in the process?" And there's this spiritual component to the way that you pray that is utterly different than just asking God to bless their day-to-day work and activities.

So much for us to soak in and contemplate, isn't there? Let me just close by saying this: parenting is a noble but demanding profession, not just demanding in time, it's spiritually demanding. It is a high calling and we all need the help of the Holy Spirit to live it, we all need grace for our many failures, and when I think about that, look back on my own checkered career as a parent, it just renews my gratitude for what Scripture says that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Some of you, your children are already gone and you look back and, you know, with some heartache, good memories, some heartache mixed in. Don't look to your memories for comfort, look to Christ, look to this gracious one who promises to be gracious to everyone who comes to him when they are weary and heavy laden and know that he will give you rest. It's for his sake that we contemplate these things. It's for his sake that we raise our children. It's for his sake that we go to his word for what it's to be like.

So with that, I commend these things to you, I remind you we'll be teaching on these things more over our next couple of times together. Let's close in prayer.

*Gracious Father, we are all children of parents and many of us are parents of children, and to speak about these matters from Your word about the family is to go to the very heart of the things that most of us hold most dear and certainly love things that most animate our thoughts over the course of time. I pray that You would be gracious to the parents in our audience, to appropriate these things, that Your Spirit would encourage and affirm them where there are things pleasing to you to affirm, and Your Spirit would graciously deal with them as they realize, "Do you know what? I've fallen short here." Father, may Your Spirit be swift to remind them of Christ and assure them of Your love while at the same time bringing the change and conviction that is necessary in order to respond to the word of God as You apply it to our hearts. Father, be merciful to us, be gracious to us, and in this season when we remember the coming of our Lord, we thank You that He came not only to save us from our sins, He also came to empower us to live the way that we should live in response to His saving work in our lives. Help us to that end we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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