

## Nurturing Your Children

Various Texts

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler

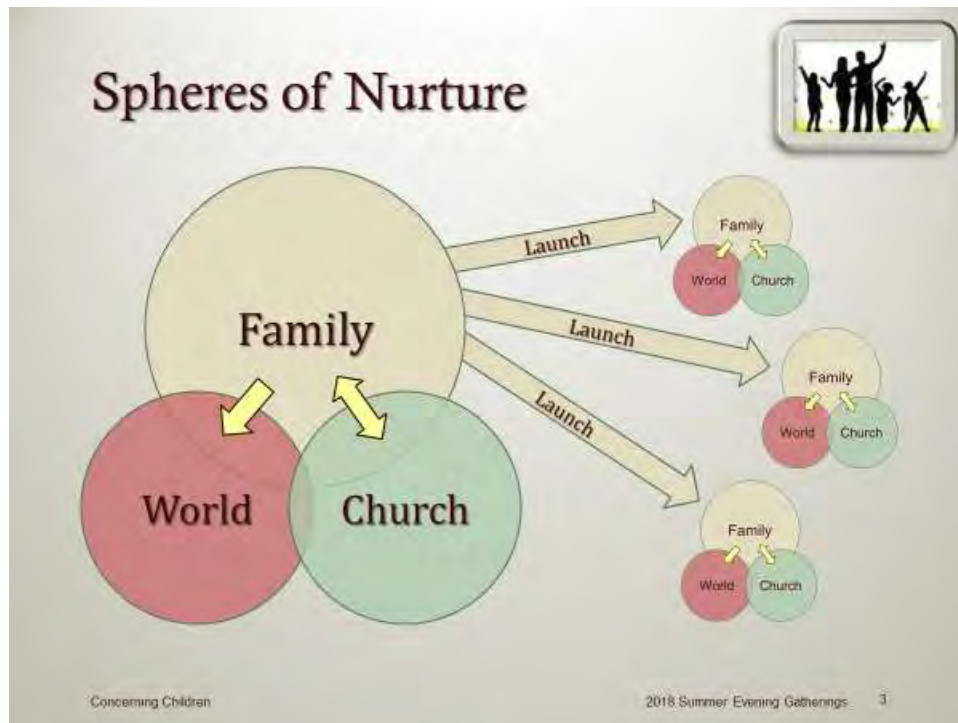
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Tonight, we continue our look into the topic concerning the nurturing and rearing of children. As we have already seen, one of the keys to biblical parenting is developing an understanding and approach toward nurturing our children. In this message, we will be focusing on Biblical wisdom and helpful counsel that is aimed at nurturing and developing our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Rather than one particular passage, we will look at several key anchor texts as we highlight three broad means or aspects of nurture that are important to parenting our children. There is much about biblical parenting that flows out of instructions specific to raising children and through the application of more general passages. Additionally, much of what I will say flows out of wisdom, principles, and personal experience. Let's pray that by God's grace, He will impart the truth and wisdom needed for us to raise children in a way that brings Him glory.

[opening prayer]

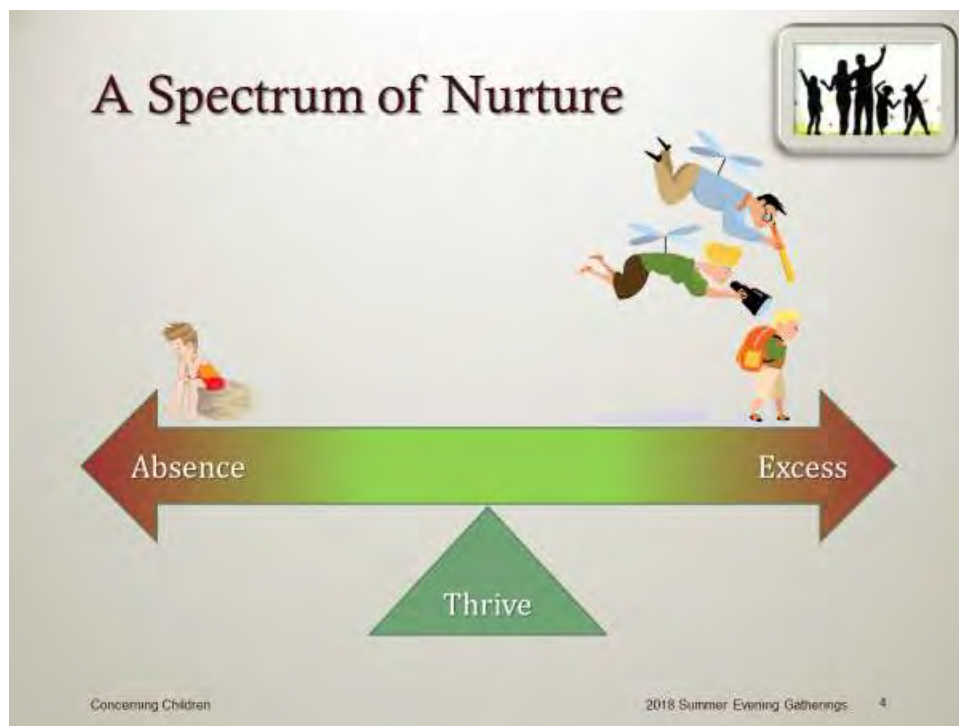


Before we get started let me review two important concepts that provide a general framework for understanding and providing an environment of nurture for our children. The first of these is the spheres of nurture. The bible gives us three contexts or spheres in which we must nurture our children. The first of these is the family. The family is designed to be the primary place where children are nurtured in terms of relationships, instruction, and modeling a Christian life. Parents are given the responsibility to instruct, guide, and care for the children God gives them. The family is ideally and generally a place of trust and care suitable to nurture. And it is often a place where we let our guard down exposing the idols of our hearts.

The second sphere is the church. Whether as unsaved or young believers, the church is also place where children are to be nurtured. But the church is a secondary means of nurture and is

not meant as a substitute for parents. It is a place where one-anothering, care, and help is provided to supplement what parents are doing to rear children. And it is a place where parents should be guided, taught, and helped by others to do this in a way that honors the Lord. Personally, I can only begin to express my gratitude for the godly impact of this church on my children over the last 30 years. The solid doctrine and practical instruction given to my family has been an essential element of our child rearing. I cannot imagine raising a family without a strong church where there is more for children than babysitting young ones and making sure older kids have fun.

The last sphere is the world. I add this here because we must be aware that in rearing children we are in battle with the world. In the absence of biblical rearing by parents, our children will be nurtured by the world. Even in a spiritually strong home, you are in a constant battle for the hearts and minds of your children against the nurturing they will receive from the world. Moreover, as parents we are to prepare and nurture our children so that they may go out and live in the world to the glory and honor of our Lord. As parents, we launch our children into the world and hopefully into the church as they grow and start families of their own. As such, we have a responsibility to raise them in a way where they can biblically nurture children of their own.



In addition to the three spheres of nurture, we must also understand that there is spectrum of nurturing that we should be mindful of. Think of this spectrum along the lines of the story of Goldilocks and the Three Parents. In this version of the story, Goldilocks tries out three parents. The first were always too busy and she was often left alone with no one to love and care for her. The second set however, were too attentive and overly careful. They were ever present helicopter parents who rarely left her alone or allowed her think for herself. Now the last set of parents, of course, were just right. They knew when their presence was needed and

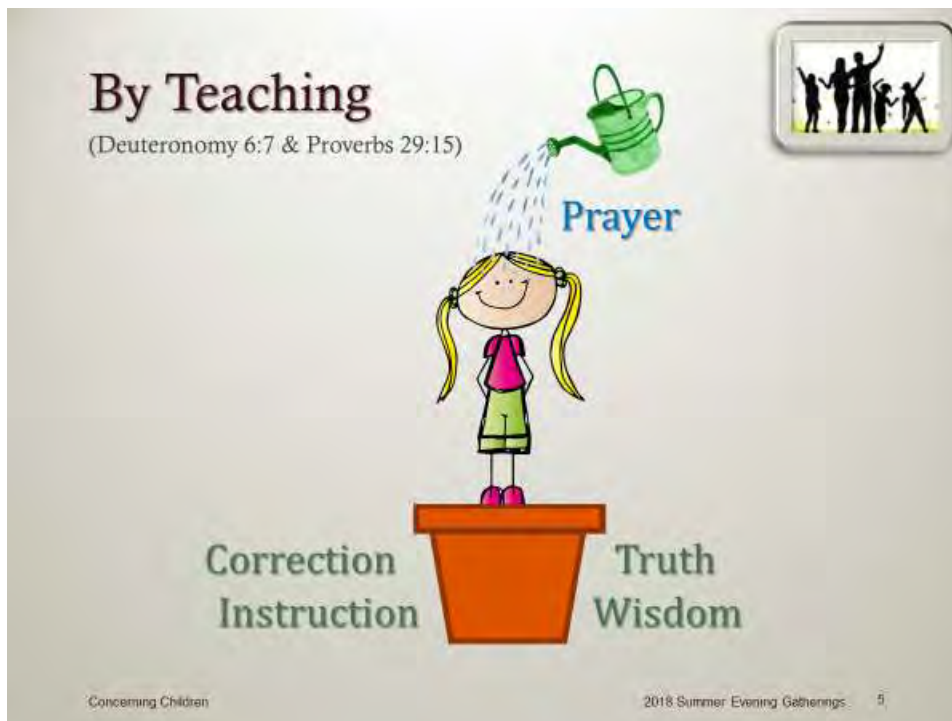
when to let her be on her own. They had developed a biblical balance of instruction and trust in God and so Goldilocks chose these parents and thrived under their care.

At either end of the spectrum we are outside the bounds of biblical nurturing. At the one end we cannot be absent or uninvolved in rearing our children. At the other end, we cannot exasperate our children with a smothering kind of love that does not trust God or give our children room to grow on their own. And let me encourage you that there are times it is ok to let your child fail. In doing so you will let them experience the consequences of their decisions and learn in ways they cannot if you shield them from failure.

Our nurturing will ebb and flow with wisdom applied to each situation and the maturity of each child. Each parent and each child are different. So what this looks like for each of you each day must be worked out with biblical wisdom and fervent prayer. Don't believe anyone who tells you there is a single formula to parenting. Nurturing is a dynamic place where you consider God's word, apply wisdom, and sometimes just trust God that you are doing the right thing. There are no guarantees and it is often a thankless job. But by God's grace and Christ's presence in you, you can nurture your children well and bring glory to God in the process.

One more layer to add here is that this spectrum applies to both fathers and mothers. You must both work toward the center of this spectrum in a way that complements one another. Having one parent at each end of the spectrum is not the kind of balance I am talking about. Having one absent parent and one overbearing parent is not a biblical balance or a helpful model. As parents God has given you strengths and weaknesses in your ability to nurture. Find ways to help and encourage each other as you bring up your children. Work together. It is hard enough to parent without working against one another.

Fathers, you do not have the freedom to delegate all of the nurturing of your children to your wife. Mothers, be careful that you do not exclude your husband from their nurture, even if you get to spend more time with them. Talk to each other and pray about how you nurture. Fathers, you are to lead and not abdicate your role in nurturing. Mothers, you are to help and support in whatever ways you agree to. Developing a sense of unity and a balanced approach to nurturing will give you strength and help your children to spiritually thrive.



For the remainder of this message, I want to leave you with three biblical means to nurturing your children. These are in no way an exhaustive list. But if you were to ask me what are three ways in which you should nurture you children, this is what I would tell you. Each of these is an important aspect to help your children to grow in their understanding of what it means to live a Gospel changed life. The first of these means is to nurture your children by teaching. This is perhaps the most foundational way in which you establish a nurturing environment.

In Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19, the Israelites were commanded to teach their children. Listen to this. Speaking of God's commands to the Israelites it says, *"You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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."* I believe this same idea is brought forward into the New Testament by Paul where he commands Fathers in Ephesians 6:4 to bring up or nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

If you will allow me a helpful illustration here, children need the fertile soil of biblical truth to grow. The truths of scripture answer the fundamental questions for life. Why are they here? What is their purpose in life? Not that they will understand it all at first. But as they grow, God's word will provide a foundation for them to build their lives upon. More importantly, the truths of scripture will provide all they need for godly living, provide biblical principles and wisdom, and provide an understanding of the Gospel. Additionally, being well grounded in truth will help them learn to identify error and foolishness when you are not around. Nothing you do as a parent is more important than teaching them to know God and His word.

Understand that the kind of teaching I am talking about here is more than just superficial instruction or reading bible stories. Even at a young age, children can be taught the real meaning of scripture and be pointed to Christ, no matter how simply. The sense of the

Deuteronomy passage is this. First, parents are to teach diligently. It implies regular teaching and a commitment to keeping at it even when it is hard and your lives are busy. As parents, you will have to work on this together. Encourage and help each other to make teaching happen.

Second, this passage speaks to teaching in the everyday going of life. Teach when you sit down at a meal or whenever you gather as a family. Teach when you walk, that is in the everyday situations of everyday life. There is nothing wrong with having family devotionals. But don't limit your teaching just to scheduled times together. Your children will learn more as you teach them in the daily messes and struggles of life. Show them that God's word is trustworthy and reliable as you walk through life together.

Lastly, teach when you lie down and when you rise. Spend time with your children as they go to bed. This was something Sheila was especially good at with our children. She took the time as she put them down for the night to have long conversation with them. She prayed openly with them. Over time, she established this as a regular time of personal sharing. You will find that this can become a time of tender moments and transparency for both parent and child. Also, start your days with prayers and conversations about the day ahead. Remind them of God's love and care over them that they may trust Him as they head out into an ever difficult and challenging world.

As you teach them truth, teach them also to be wise. Listen to Proverbs 29:15 which says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." There are two ways here that you can impart instruction to your children. First, by discipline or the rod. It is a means of teaching that is to be used carefully and not handed out vindictively as punishment. The purpose of the rod is to drive out foolishness and develop self-control in child.

The other part of teaching in this verse is reproof. The sense here is of corrective instruction. Help your child understand the biblical reasons for the error and foolishness of their actions. Point them to the selfishness and sinfulness of their hearts. And finally take them to the grace and mercy found in the Gospel that they may understand their daily need for Christ.



A second important aspect of nurturing your children is to live faithfully. In other words, if you want to nurture your children well you need to practice what you teach. Nothing will reinforce or undermine truth and instruction in the minds of children more than our own example. Paul instructs the Philippian believers to imitate him and those who walked according the example they had provided. While the context of this verse is to the church and not directly to families, as we strive to lead and nurture our children I believe these truths apply here.

Listen to the words Paul writes in Philippians 3:17. "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." Perhaps even more than believing adults, our children learn as much or more from us by what we do than by what we say. They are born imitators and are keen observers of how we live before them. Whether you like it or not, they will join in imitating you – good and bad. And if they see that you say one thing and do another, they will understand that they too do not have to walk the talk.

It has been fun watching Matteo grow and begin to talk over the last year. And even though we have reared four of our own children, I am still amazed to see how he imitates those around him. He imitates his mother in the way he says certain words in reading books. He imitates his grandmother and her manner of saying certain phrases. He even recently imitated one of his nursery mates in saying the phrase "Oh my goodness" as a part of growing his vocabulary.

Not only do children imitate what they hear, they also imitate what they see. Paul encourages the Philippians to keep their eyes on the example of those who were more mature in faith. As parents, live your lives with intent before the eyes of your children. Set an example of steadfast faith. Model wise and right living. Strive to be faithful to God in all you do before them. Engage them in decisions large and small so that they may see how you apply God's commands and biblical wisdom. When you sin, let them see your brokenness and what godly repentance

looks like. As you point out your own need for the Gospel, you will be pointing them to their need as well.

As an example to your children whose eyes are upon you, let me encourage you to look hard at what your choices say about what you treasure. I say this because we will be faithful to what we love. Did you catch that? We will be faithful to what we love. And you can be assured that your children will see it. Why is this important? Because what we treasure in our hearts will drive what we say and do.

As believing parents, the core of what we treasure and who we are is Christ. The power of the Gospel has changed us. Our children need to see that above all else, we love God, treasure His word, and care for His body the church. If your life choices demonstrate an example of faithfulness to Christ, you leave a powerful example for our children to follow. Conversely, if your life choices demonstrate a lack of faithfulness, you show our children that Christ is not as important as we say He is.

Now I know what I am going to say next may sound hard or as Pastor Street used to say, I'm going to be meddling in your lives. But I would ask that you listen to carefully to a few practical examples to see if these may be areas you need to work on. I say this because we live in a day when our young adults are leaving the church in great numbers. I believe this is due in part, because they have seen parents whose lives do not exhibit authentic faith. So please understand that my intent here is to be helpful and not judgmental.

So what does authentic faith look like? If you say that you treasure God's word, then let your children see you reading and studying it and attend a church where it is faithfully taught. If you say you love to worship God, then let your your children see you in fervent worship at home, at church, and throughout your day. If you say you trust God, then let your children see your confidence in His sovereign provision – even in the midst of tears, fears, and sorrow. And if you say you love God's people, then let your children see that you are committed to gathering often with the body and serving it; even when it means sacrifice. I could give you many other examples, but I think you get the idea.

My point here is that your choices will expose whether you truly believe the truths you have taught them and will reveal the true treasures of your heart. For better or worse, your lives will provide a pattern and example that your children will likely follow. I think this is largely the sense of Proverbs 22:6 which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." This is verse is as much a warning as it is an encouragement. Your children will be trained largely by the example of your lives. And when they grow older they are likely to continue to follow in it.





So, nurture your children by teaching them. Nurture your children by living faithfully. And my last point for tonight, nurture your children by giving them grace. This is one I wish I had learned much earlier in my parenting role. The Christian videos and books that were popular when my children were younger were all about good behavior and how to get immediate obedience. This made for a harsh style of nurturing that was often absent of grace and the gospel. Thankfully, at Clearcreek we have moved beyond that approach with many good books from Paul Tripp, Elyse Fitzpatrick, and others that we can commend to you to shepherd and help your children deal with the sin in their hearts.

Giving grace is about dealing with your child's sin and foolishness in a way that balances discipline with words and actions that convey the Gospel, reflecting both God's holiness and his forgiveness. Let's look at Ephesians 4, verses 29 to 32. Here is what God's word says. *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*

I want to focus on verse 29 and verse 32 for the purposes of our topic of nurturing. Again, these verses are speaking to believers within the body. But again, these words still apply to the nurturing of children within a believing family. As parents, what we say to our children is to build up in a way that is fitting and helpful to the situation. This means that our words are to be used to nurture in a way that fits each child and circumstance. Our words are to have the tenderness and appropriateness required to nurture and help our children see Christ.

Work at developing a kind tone to your words. Be aware when you are tired and worn out so that you can guard against being harsh and demanding. Trust me, I know this is not easy. But words filled with grace and warmth will help our children to see Christ in us. It is a battle worth fighting. And as I spoke about earlier, this too is an example that can launch your child into a pattern of communication that they will use with their siblings and others as they grow. There is so much more to say here, but I will leave that to your own further study.

So what about when your children fail? And they will fail. Your children are either lost or in the early stages of spiritual growth. They are often filled with the foolishness of youth. When they fail, give them words of grace that reflect the patience and forgiveness Christ has shown to you. When they fail, teach them about the foolishness and danger of sin. And when they fail, tenderly teach them about their need for Jesus who died to pay the penalty of that sin so they may live with him for eternity. Because each time they fail it is another opportunity for them to hear the Gospel.

So what about when you fail? And you will fail. Raising children is hard and will often take your patience beyond the breaking point. Your heart is also an idol factory and when your children do not do what you want, it will well up with frustration and anger. When you fail, tell your children that you struggle to do the right thing too. When you fail, remind them how sin damages relationships and if appropriate, seek their forgiveness. When you fail, tell them that you need Jesus too. Because each time you fail it is another opportunity for them to hear the Gospel.



Let me wrap this up with a few words of encouragement. Who doesn't want to really nail it when it comes to parenting? But if we're honest, we often find it a bit overwhelming. And I can assure you there are very few children who would say that their parents nailed it when it

came to raising them. But I don't want this message to leave you discouraged. So remember, there are no perfect parents and there are no perfect kids. Humanly speaking they don't exist. Even on your best days, you will struggle as parents. Just like your children, you are on a journey of growth and God will give you grace and strength to parent in each moment. That doesn't mean perfection; simply all you need to work through either success or failure.

Let me also encourage to establish a biblical measure of parenting success in your mind. It is not perfection nor is your goal as a parent primarily good behavior and an obedient child. That would be wonderful, right? But one, it is impossible. Two, you will likely end up feeling defeated. And three, it misses the real goal which is to glorify God. When you define success this way, you can focus on the parenting approach and trust the results to God. True success as a parent is found in nurturing and rearing children in a way that brings glory to God. That can happen both in success and in failure. And know that God often uses our weaknesses and trials of life to help both us and our children learn what it means to glorify God. Success then is not the absence of failures in our families, but in the presence of Christ and the Gospel as it is brought to bear on the hearts and lives of our children for the glory of God.

[Let's pray]

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