

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 1) **by Don Emmitte**

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** (Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV).*

Every parent loves the first three verse of Paul's writing in today's reading! It's that fourth verse that most of us have trouble with! Recently, as I was talking with Aaron, he expressed how happy he was that he had Mary and I as his parents. We had been talking about some of his friends and their parents and some of the “injustices” they felt they had suffered. Whether they really were or not is always a debatable position. However, there have been those of others that parenting made a significant negative impact.

I read the following examples not long ago. Lynette's father was a little Hitler, a tyrant, according to her childhood friends. She was not allowed to eat with other children in the dining room but was banished without reason to the kitchen. She got the silent treatment often from her father. He disliked her intensely. "Her father's treatment scarred her badly," an old friend said. "Her mother was too scared to open her mouth." When Lynette was 16 she was kicked out of the family home. Charles Manson found her crying in the street and offered to look after her. Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme later attempted to assassinate President Ford. Or we may look at Joe. Joe's father was a drunken brute who beat his wife and child savagely and often. The boy took refuge in fantasy and in his teens discovered a fictional hero called Koba. Koba was the main character in a popular Georgian adventure story about a young peasant who fought alone and with incredible success to free the oppressed. Joe always wanted to be the best, the bravest, the unbeatable comrade who was always right and never wrong ... and if anyone doubted this was so, he had better beware. Koba's revenge would be swift and terrible. Who was Joe? You've guessed - Joseph Stalin, who with Adolf Hitler shares that doubtful honor of killing more people in the 20th Century than any other individual.

Parenting is very important, and if we have children, a successful parent is something we ought desperately to want to be. But the stronger our desire, the greater may be our confusion. Should we be strict or lenient, demanding or accepting? Should we try harder or not so hard, punish or just talk, restrict or liberate our children? Should we listen to the experts or do what comes naturally? We often seesaw between the two positions. As one mother said recently, "I'm strict until I can't stand myself; then lenient until I can't stand my kids". Many parents have really tried hard, and still something can go wrong. We all know the story of the black sheep in the family, a boy or girl who "goes wrong" to the mortification of their parents as well as the other children in the family. We must not pass judgment on cases of that kind because each one is different. It is too easy to blame parents for everything that goes wrong in a family.

However, there may be room for some improvement in our parenting. With some help from God we can "rewrite the script" of our lives. What we were in the past, even in our childhood, need not determine how we will cope in the future. We do not need to be the victims of our personal history! Christianity is all about turning to God for help and strength and victory, rather than blaming ourselves or our parents or the world or the environment we live in. None of us needs to be imprisoned within our past. In the next few days I will be writing about eight specific things we can do to become better parents. In the mean time, pray and ask God to give you wisdom and strength to be the best parent you can be.

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 2) by Don Emmitte

*The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? **So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*** (Psalm 90:10-12 ESV).

As we begin this mini-series, the first principle in our course in Christian parenting is to spend time not money. Did you ever hear the story of the Prodigal Father? Some years ago Dr. Joplin wrote it.

"A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to the father, 'Father, give me the portion of thy time, and thy attention, and thy companionship, and thy counsel and guidance which falleth to me.' And he divided unto them his living, in that he paid his boy's bills, and sent him to a select preparatory school, to dancing schools, and to college, and tried to believe he was doing his full duty by his son. And not many days after, the father gathered all his interests and aspirations and ambitions and took his journey into a far country, into a land of stocks and bonds and securities and other things which do not interest a boy, and there he wasted his precious opportunity of being a chum to his son. And when he had spent the very best of his life, and had gained money, but had failed to find any satisfaction, there arose a mighty famine in his heart and he began to be in want of sympathy and real companionship. And he went and joined himself to one of the clubs of that country and they elected him chairman of the house committee and president of the club and sent him to the legislature. And he fain would have satisfied himself with the husks that other men did eat, and no man gave him any real friendship. And when he came to himself, he said: "How many men of my acquaintance have boys whom they understand and who understand them, who talk about their boys and associate with their boys and seem perfectly happy in the comradeship of their sons, and I perish here with heart hunger? I will arise and go to my son and will say unto him: 'Son, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and I am no more worthy to be called thy father. Make me as one of the thine acquaintances.' And he arose and came to his son. But while he was yet a great way off, his son saw him and was moved with astonishment, he drew back and was ill at ease. And the father said unto him, 'Son, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight. I have not been a father to you, and I am no more worthy to be called thy father. Forgive me now, and let me be your chum. But the son said, 'Not so, for it is too late. There was a time when I wanted your companionship and advice and counsel, but you were too busy. I got the companionship, the wrong kind - and now, I am wrecked in soul and body. It is too late - too late - too late!'"

Studies show that a parent's absence has destructive effects on their children ranging from low self-esteem to hunger for immediate gratification and susceptibility to group influence. Many parents have no idea what their children really think because they never give them a chance to explain. "Can't you see I'm busy?" is a put-down that ought to be banned from the parental vocabulary.

One of the songs the Beatles sang says: *"She's leaving home after living alone for so many years ..."* Woven into the poignant ballad of a runaway daughter is her parents' haunting lament: "We gave her everything money could buy". But they didn't realize money couldn't buy love. It is interesting that after buying a house for the aunt who brought him up, John Lennon presented her with a plaque, which now hangs in her living room. Engraved on it is the phrase she directed his way almost every day of his adolescent life: "The guitar's all right, but you'll never earn your living with it." It may be a good idea for parents not to be too judgmental about their kids' hobbies! Like so many things in life, parenting is about our presence more than anything else is. Spend some time with your children. Choose your words carefully. They will be long remembered, good or bad!

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 3) **by Don Emmitte**

And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’” (Deuteronomy 4:8-10 ESV).

The second principle in the quick course in parenting is to do meaningful things together. It's not enough simply to spend time with your kids: make sure this time is spent qualitatively.

There are so many examples that I might draw on to illustrate this principle from my own experience! Perhaps the most vivid is the conversation I had with my oldest son, Kyle, while we were watching a baseball game of one of my other sons, David. It was years ago, but I have never forgotten it. With no prompting at all, Kyle said, “Dad, I’m glad you come to our games. We just play better when you’re there.” It was his way of saying that my presence was important to them. It was merely a matter of being together. There have been so many memories we have built through the years simply by doing things together.

Playing family games together, going for hikes together, or building something together are merely a few of the things you may choose. The critical thing is to choose something. It will amaze you how many of their “firsts” you will experience with them. Each of these builds on the other to develop a solid foundation of values and principles of life. They become the markers of life.

If a family really battles for what one psychologist has called “superordinate goals,” the kind of unifying struggle for existence that once cemented families of pioneers, these help parents and children to pull together. Have you ever wondered why farmers' kids are so loyal to their families' goals? It is because they have achieved them together in an experience of togetherness. Whatever they achieved, they did so together. There is no better way to teach our children our goals and values than by being with them in the experiences of life. It is a principle that builds on the first we touched on yesterday. We need to spend time with our children, but that time should be used to experience life together.

Develop a plan of doing things with your children. Even if your children are older, it is never too late to do meaningful things with them.

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 4) **by Don Emmitte**

In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food? Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days. (Job 12:10-12 ESV).

Today we come to the third principle in parenting: we should be good listeners. The fifteen-year old anonymous author of "Go Ask Alice", who before she had lived her sixteenth year became one of America's 50,000 drug deaths, wrote that her parents "talked and talked and talked, and never once did they ever hear one thing I was trying to say to them ... if only they would let me talk instead of forever and eternally and continuously harping and preaching and nagging and correcting and yacking, yacking, yacking. But they won't listen and we kids keep winding back up in the same old, frustrating, lost lonely corner with no one to relate to either verbally or physically."

A few years ago Time Magazine published an excellent essay, "On Being an American Parent". In the following issue a college student from Ohio wrote: "I'm 18 years old, drink whenever I get the chance, have smoked pot, and as a result of a very eventful Thanksgiving vacation, am no longer a virgin. Why? Was it my parents or just me? I'm so confused - but who can I talk to? Not my parents. "My parents could read this and never dream it was their daughter. My friends must have corrupted me (my mother never liked my friends ... I was always 'better' than they). "I have only one important plea to parents ... Listen, listen and listen again. Please, I know the consequences and I'm in hell."

I know the common protest is that they simply won't talk! How many times have you tried to initiate a conversation with the question, "How was school today?" only to receive the reply, "Fine." It is as if they do not want to talk to you. The key is in not giving up with the initial one-word answers! Lead them into conversation. Talk to them about your day. There is a caution here: do not use your children to vent your frustrations. Share with them some of the good things that have happened during your day. Engage them in conversation and when they talk, listen! Be careful not to become merely a "fixer." Relationships between parents and their children are certainly fragile and require the most expert care. It is a delicate balance between listening and talking. But remember that the opposite to love is not hate but indifference. Give your children individual, focused attention. This will help you really hear the feelings that are often hiding among the words.

Most importantly, don't give up. Even when it seems that your children are growing more and more distant from you, don't quit engaging them in conversation. Relationships are built and maintained through our communication with one another. This is especially true as parents.

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 5)

by Don Emmitte

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2:17-24 ESV).

The fourth principle in Christian parenting is that we be a good example. Today is a special day in the lives of our oldest son and his wife. It is their wedding anniversary and Brandy’s birthday! I can think of no better way to celebrate than to be in the midst of this series in parenting. I am proud of the way they have raised their two children, Faith and Logan, especially with this principle today. There is no sure way to guarantee that your child will grow up to be the kind of person you would like them to be. The most likely way is for you to be the kind of person you would like them to be. Study after study shows that two things are vital to a child’s later independence. First, warmly firm parents who admire each other and on whom the child can model himself or herself while breaking away; and second, opportunities to prove their competence in work and love.

Discipline comes from being a disciple; both words come from the Latin word for pupil. Children become disciples of parents who enjoy and back up one another; whose mutual respect and ungrudging praise for work well done make children draw a positive picture of themselves. But the approach must be genuine; the young mind is quick to spot the phony. The Transactional Analysis people call this “stroking”. Just as a cat or dog reacts positively to affectionate stroking, so growing human beings learn to accept themselves when they are affirmed. If children do not receive enough positive strokes, they will look for negative strokes; any kind of attention is better than none at all. And, by the way, children aren’t fools: they’ll detect what interests and hobbies have priority in their parents’ lives. Children learn more from their parents, than from anybody else. A very familiar poem says:

If a child lives with criticism he learns to condemn...
If a child lives with hostility he learns to fight...
If a child lives with ridicule he learns to be shy...
If a child lives with shame he learns to feel guilty...
If a child lives with tolerance he learns to be patient...
If a child lives with encouragement he learns confidence...
If a child lives with praise he learns to appreciate...
If a child lives with fairness he learns justice...
If a child lives with security he learns to have faith...
If a child lives with approval he learns to like himself...
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship he learns to find love in the world.

What are you really teaching your children? What you do says much more than what you speak!

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 6) **by Don Emmitte**

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV).

Today's reading is the same as that which we began this little miniseries with a few mornings ago. [For our fifth principle in Christian parenting, there was none better to emphasize *the need to understanding our children's growing pains*.](#) It is a difficult and delicate balance to achieve, but it is essential.

A couple of years ago Dr. Spock wrote an article about some of the problems of adolescence. He said adolescent boys may express their anxious competitiveness by steering very clear of their father's occupation, though some of them swing around to it later when they have matured enough to overcome their irrational fears. Psychoanalysis has also revealed that many boys who feel overawed by their father suppress their resentment and antagonism towards him and displace it on to their mother, flaring up at her over quite reasonable requests or imagined slights.

A youth finds himself through finding something similar in his friends and peer group. He mentions that he loves a certain song or hates a certain teacher or craves to own a certain article of apparel. His friend exclaims with amazement that he has always had the very same attitude. Both are delighted and reassured. Each has lost a degree of his feeling of aloneness, of peculiarity, and gained a pleasurable sense of belonging.

Two girls talk fast all the way home from school, talk for another half-hour in front of the house of one, and finally separate. But as soon as the second reaches her home she telephones and they resume their mutual confidences. A majority of adolescents help to overcome their feelings of aloneness by a sometimes slavish conformity to the styles of their class-mates - in clothes, reading matter, songs, entertainers. These styles have to be different from those of their parents' generation. And if their own styles irritate or shock their parents, so much the better.

A majority of adolescents become ashamed of their parents for a few years, particularly when their friends are present. This is partly related to their own identity. The sensitive parent will be aware of these "growing pains" and will not be foolish enough to react too strongly when their kids begin to untie their parents' apron strings. The balance between honor and understanding on the part of the child to the parent and the parent to the child is achieved through trial and error most of the time. Never be so proud that you cannot admit when you have gone too far either way. Seek the balance between being overly strict and permissive and you will find the way to truly instruct your child in the way of the Lord. Use God's example of grace and you can't go far wrong.

“A Quick Course in Parenting” (Part 7) by Don Emmitte

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
(Proverbs 22:6 ESV).

The sixth principle in our studies deals with a parenting style. *We ought to guard against being over-protective.* There are actually three basic style of parenting. First there are the helicopter parents; second, there are drill-sergeant parents; and, last there are consultant parents. We should strive to be the latter of these if we desire to have well-adjusted and positive children. Let me explain this a little.

Helicopter parents can't stand to see their children suffer, so they hover over them and then swoop down to rescue them whenever they are in trouble, she explained. This parenting style carries the unspoken message to a child, "I'm going to rescue you because you're not capable." Drill sergeant parents bark out orders and tell children their only responsibility is to do as they are told, Bird noted. Their actions teach a child, "I'll tell you what to do because you're not capable." Consultant parents guide their children, point them in the right direction, and then let them bear the consequence of their own actions, unless their bad choices are life threatening.

Brenda Bird offers the following suggestions to help parents develop more of a consultant style. They are seven "C's" to use as a guide for building strong families:

1. **Choices.** Instead of making threats or rescue attempts, give children non-threatening choices you can live with.
2. **Control.** Teaching children to make choices empowers them and gives them more control over their lives, as they grow older.
3. **Consequences.** Allow children to "own" their problems by helping them to see that the choices they make have real consequences.
4. **Count.** Kids must know that they count and that they matter to someone.
5. **Capable.** Teach children they are capable by giving them tasks, allowing them to make mistakes and letting them learn from those mistakes. Then give them the same task again, showing them that you trust them and that they are capable."
6. **Connections.** Children need to feel connected to someone older, preferably a responsible parent or a positive adult role model. If kids don't feel that they count, if they don't feel capable, and if they don't feel connected at home, they'll find it someplace else, perhaps in a negative place.
7. **Courage.** By encouraging children, adults can inspire them to have the courage to learn new things, make new friends and take risks.

How are you training up your child? While it is much more difficult to be a "consultant," it is the only way to truly instill positive self-esteem and godly values. It is the only way to prepare your children for successful adulthood. Try the seven C's!

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 8) **by Don Emmitte**

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:20-21 ESV).

Yesterday we saw that it is essential to be consultant parents in our style of discipline. Today is a continuation of that principle. *We should discipline our children lovingly.* Parents' discipline should be based on four F's: firmness, fondness, frankness and fairness. Giving children choices in our discipline is not permissiveness. It merely means that "no" should be said as lovingly as "yes". Deal with the situation, not the person. Always deal with the action rather than the actor.

Most discipline problems consist of two parts: angry feelings and angry acts. Each part has to be handled differently. Feelings have to be identified and expressed; acts may have to be limited and redirected. There is no good substitute for thinking before we act in our discipline.

The Police Department of Houston, Texas, has issued these ten easy rules for raising a delinquent:

1. Begin at infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. This will make him think he's cute.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is 21 and then let him "decided for himself".
4. Pick up everything he leaves lying around books, shoes, and clothes. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on others.
5. Quarrel frequently in his presence. In this way he will not be too shocked when the home is broken later.
6. Give a child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them?
7. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. Denial may lead to harmful frustrations.
8. Take his part against neighbors, teachers, and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
9. When he gets into real trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with him".
10. Prepare for a life of grief. You are bound to have it.

Firmness, fondness, frankness and fairness – these are principles that will help us achieve balance in our discipline.

“A Quick Course in Christian Parenting” (Part 9) **by Don Emmitte**

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7 ESV).

Over the past week we have looked at seven different principles for Christian parenting. Today we'll see the eighth and final for this little series. *There is no substitute for showing your children the truth through the Scripture.* Teach your children to know God and bring them up in the Church. Parents will build a secure foundation for their children if the Bible is read regularly in the home, grace is said at the table and family prayers take place regularly. While it is best to start as early as possible, it is never too late to share Scripture with your children.

Every time I encounter a strong, vibrant human being, I always remind myself that that individual did not come to such strength all by himself or herself. At the back of every healthy personality lies one of the oldest and most significant of all human arts, namely, the art of parenting. Here is human creativity at its highest.

But these days the task of parenting ought to include far more people than just two biological mates. It is becoming painfully obvious in our day that the isolated nuclear family cannot bear the full load of parenting. In fact one of the finest missions a church could assume would be that of "compensatory parenting" where the natural family structure has broken down for one reason or another. Back in the days when people lived in clan-like groupings, if a child's parents became incapacitated in some way, other family members stepped in to fill the vacuum. The same needs exist today, only we no longer live in clans, so some other mechanism needs to function here. The Church could be an expanding family which monitors what is happening to whom and then steps in to help a child grow into those two most important realities, who they are and why they are.

Finally, to really succeed as a parent one needs above all a happy heart, free of worry and care. This allows one to carry the heavy responsibilities of raising children with joy and confidence. That's why parents need above all a good trusting relationship with their Heavenly Father.