

The Bible's Surprising and Straight-Forward Counsel on:

RAISING GREAT KIDS—*OUTLINE*

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Being a parent—a good parent—is no simple matter. As much as we would like to believe our romantic, pre-children ideas that *doing our best* and *just loving them* will make us adequate to the task, the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. Instead of hopeful thoughts about what we're *going to do* as parents, most of us regret what we *have done* since becoming parents. We're looking back with feelings of guilt and futility, instead of looking ahead with hope.

Why? What has happened along the way? Why did parenting turn out to be so much harder than we imagined? How come nobody prepared us for this?

I. Why is Parenting so Complicated?

- A. Our part in *making* kids is easy, enjoyable, and fairly natural. It is laced with excitement, anticipation, and fulfillment! And it feels so good. Dad's part in the creation process is quick; mom's larger role is mostly passive. So, new parents aren't usually ready for the reality that *raising* kids is very, very different than *making* them.
- B. We are not the only ones in the equation. A Creator created us. Children are a gift from God, not just the product of passionate evolution. Consequently, parents have dual sets of responsibilities: one set of obligations to children to provide for them and care for them; the other set, to God, to take care of children according to His instructions.
- C. Being a family means being in covenant with one another. Covenants and their promises are powerful, spiritual forces that have incredible and inevitable consequences—for good or for trauma. All family breakdowns and dysfunctions can be traced back to some aspect of violated covenant.

II. Parenting in Obedience.

In many ways, parenting is more about disciplining ourselves than it is about disciplining our kids. Good parenting is a consequence of following God's instructions ourselves; being obedient to His word enables us to become far better parents than we would be if we just did *our* best.

Frankly, doing what a parent should do is as disagreeable to our *natural selves* as are all other spiritual callings. Just as we must learn to walk by faith, not by sight; and as surely as we must, by faith, choose to follow God's pattern for our finances, our marriage, our friendships, our grievances and our illnesses, so too must we set aside our natural or cultural inclinations in order to follow God's design for parenthood.

Our struggle of obedience would be tough enough with just the laziness and inattentiveness of our own carnality. We do not like the constant hassle and bother of *diligently* nurturing our kids and shaping their responses to life. It takes lots of time, energy and determination. We're eager to *let things slide*—"Just this once!"—Not out of *compassion*, but out of *exhaustion*.

But we do not contend only with our own natures as fallen creatures. We must also withstand the expert *opinions* of well-meaning psychologists and family counselors who tell us to follow their advice on how to be good parents. They warn us that if we do not do it their way, our children will suffer grave consequences.

These very people who attempt to refute the advice of the Bible, actually do the very thing they accuse the Bible of doing. Both the Bible and psychological theory tell us how to raise our kids. Both describe the fall-out if we do not follow the pattern they prescribe. The real question, then, is whose advice we're going to heed—the psychologists who make theories, or the God who makes children. At any and every point where the theorists disagree with the Creator, it makes sense to go with God...

III. Parental Instruction.

Most people acknowledge Proverbs as the most practical and obvious discipleship book in the Bible; it truly is filled with "excellent things of counsels and knowledge" (vs. 22:20) that help any reader grow in wisdom and spiritual stature. Verse after verse teaches us how to live, how to think...and even how to behave *in the face of a boss' anger*.

Few people recognize, however, that Proverbs was never written as a discipleship curriculum; it is, instead, basically a collection of parental instructions to children—the teachings of a father to his offspring: the fruit of his lips spoken to the fruit of his loins.

Jesus tells us all to make disciples, to invest what wisdom and understanding we have been given into the lives of people who look to us. The believer has no higher calling than to disciple others with godly counsel and instruction, yet even this spiritual mandate is superseded by a parent's primary charge to make the truths of God such an integral part of the family's daily life, that the children of that home learn them.

A. What Insightful Instruction Accomplishes on the Behalf of our Children.

1. Adorns their personality with beautiful accessories.
2. Enables them to recognize, receive and adhere to wisdom.
3. Prevents them from going their own way.
4. Teaches them to discern the fear of the Lord.
5. Makes knowledge pleasant in their soul.
6. Adds length of days and peace to their life.
7. Keeps them from falling into evil company.
8. Teaches them how to recognize and avoid life's deceptions.
9. Watches over them and talks to them in their heart.

IV. Giving Advantage to Our Children.

- A. The Only Legitimate Goal of Parenting is to Advantage Children for Life—to give them an edge of insight, an extra bit of understanding or training to insure their lifelong fulfillment. Too easily, the desire to be a *good parent* can shrink to little more than a parent's desire to acquit themselves honorably of their duty.

- B. Instead of Focusing on *Preparing* Their Kids for the Bewildering and Uncertain World Before Them—too many parents think only of *surviving the ordeal* of kids.
- C. Bad Things Sometimes Happen to Good People—but most of the human tragedy we witness today is the consequence of bad choices made by adult children of neglectful parents—moms and dads who did not realize how vital their counsel and instruction were to the proper formation of their kids' thoughts, feelings and will.
- D. *If I Knew Then What I Know Now, I Would Have Done Things Very Differently*. All of us have thought that. And that is an excellent summary of good parenting: teaching our kids the very things that would have made a difference in our life. Parenting is essentially passing along the lessons, insights and awareness it has taken us a lifetime to accumulate.
- E. Raising Kids Isn't About Getting Them Off To College—it is about getting them started in their life, from about the place where I have managed to reach in all the years of my life.
- F. Children Are Meant to Receive an Invaluable Advantage—a head start—from their parents' teaching, advice and counsel. That is why good parenting is primarily about sharing with our kids, and modeling for them how to live. Parenting should be proactive not reactive.

V. Parents Teach Children.

- A. About God.
 - 1. He is great and good.
 - 2. He loves and adores them.
 - 3. His word and way is truth.
- B. About Themselves.
 - 1. They are wonderfully made.

2. They have a special future in God.
- C. About how life really works.
1. The flesh fights against the spirit (Galatians 5:17).
 2. What they sow, they will reap (Galatians 6:7).
 3. The way that seems right to them is not always the best (Proverbs 14:12).
 - a. About how to obey (Hebrew = To hear intelligently; Greek = To hear under, attentively).

VI. Parenting Behind the Scenes.

When we think of parenting, most of us jump immediately to questions about what we should or shouldn't do with our kids. In other words, we imagine that being a good parent involves what we do when we are in the presence of our children. Even though some obvious parental duties (like making dinner or providing a home) are done when the kids are not around, we still presume that parenting mostly involves activities and actions in direct proximity to our kids.

The foundation for exceptional *child-raising* has more to do with us, as parents, than with our kids. How we live our life and how we process the world that surrounds us shapes our children much more than anything they bring with them when born. Though it is tempting to identify our children as “strong-willed,” the real issue is still ours as parents: what will we do to contour our “special” children into everything God intends for them to be?

A basic axiom or rule of parenting (or nurturing) is that we produce in others what truly exists in us. The moral and spiritual condition of our own private and particular life—does as much to shape our children, as anything we do or say in their presence. If we are full of contentment, they too will come to be at peace with life. If we neglect them, they will not take good care of themselves. If we are bitter, our kids will be so too.

1. Proverbs 13:22—“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children...”

2. Proverbs 14:26—“In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and his children have refuge.”
3. Proverbs 20:7—“A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.”

VII. Banishing the Fool.

- A. Over and Over Again, the Scriptures Warn Us About the Fool, and Contrast Godly Behavior with Acts of the Fool. There is nothing comical about the fool; he isn't a court jester in a silly outfit. Foolishness, as it is described in the Bible ruins a person's life by constantly urging him to make bad choices. Foolishness sabotages and undermines people's plans and relationships. Our word for foolishness is immaturity. We even know to comment on an 11-yr. old who is “immature for her age.” What we mean is that she is foolish for her age.
- B. As a Consequence of The Fall, Sin and Foolishness Have Formed an Alliance and Conspired with Each Child's Heart. Foolishness perverts our way and makes the wrong ways seem right, and it has compacted itself deeply into the soil of every child's heart. Only by halting the flow that foolishness and by restraining its sway over a child's heart, can it be made to recede from its place of dominance—for it rules the alliance with the heart.
- C. Good Parenting Seeks to Break the Unhealthy Alliance Foolishness Has Made with Every Child. Unless we establish loving patterns for our children's thought and behavior, they will follow the wayward course for life suggested to them by immaturity. Firm boundaries and adequate corrections of discipline will remove the relationship between the heart and folly.
 1. Proverbs 22:15—“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”
 2. Proverbs 19:3 —“The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.”

VIII. Correcting with Hope.

- A. Children Need Boundaries. They crave limits and order, within which they can freely “exercise” their growing personalities and “try out” the thoughts, feelings and attitudes they are progressively discovering within themselves. Children are looking for what works in life and how they ought to behave. If parents do not provide their children with a well-defined, safe “laboratory” in which to experiment, then those children will do themselves great harm by basing their future life on faulty, erroneous data.

- B. The Hope We Have for Our Children—that they will be wise, righteous and safe—should prompt us to discipline, correct, bind and reform them now. Giving children rules, and making very clear and very sure the consequences of breaking those rules, trains children to choose the right paths in life. The boundaries parents set, the rules they make for their children, should be established out of love and a desire to see those children given every advantage for a prosperously happy and fulfilled life.

- C. Consistent Discipline Lessens the Likelihood of Rebellion. Non-existent or inconsistent discipline not only encourages rebellion but also furnishes a child with the very instrument of his personal destruction. Discipline is an act of love; “whom the Lord loves, He disciplines” (Hebrews 12:5-11). Our discipline should be like God’s...and not for convenience of parental flesh; relief of parental guilt, or, a flash of parental anger.
 - 1. Proverbs 19:18—“Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death [future destruction].”
 - 2. Proverbs 13:24—“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently [day in and day out].”
 - 3. Proverbs 29:17—“Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul.”
 - 4. Proverbs 23:13-14 —“Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you smite him with the rod, he will not die. You shall smite him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol [hell].”

5. Proverbs 29:15—“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. “
6. Proverbs 22:6 —“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
7. Ephesians 6:4—“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”