

# Discipleship: The Heart of Parenting

## The Extremes, Borders, and Heart of Parenting

*Ephesians 6:4 Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

*Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*

*Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.*

*Proverbs 22:15, Proverbs 23:15, Proverbs 29:17*

### I. Avoid Unwise Extremes

#### A. Avoid Exasperation

1. Hypocritical Parenting
2. Angry Parenting  
*When my idols are worth more than my children*
3. Selfish Parenting  
*Avoid Unnecessary Burdens*
4. Legalistic Parenting
  - i. Unbiblical Burdens
  - ii. Requirements without Relationship
  - iii. Law Without Grace

#### B. Avoid Neglect

1. Neglect because of sin
  - i. Laziness in the difficult parenting task
  - ii. Fear of reputation or failure
2. Neglect because of doctrinal inaccuracy
  - i. "Experience is the best teacher"  
*Truth: God's Word is the best teacher*  
*Experience may only teach the pleasures of sin. It is possible for foolishness to only lead to greater foolishness. It is a Biblical evaluation of experience, not experience itself, that provides the opportunity for wisdom.*

- ii. “Genetics lead to godliness”  
*Truth: Regeneration by the Spirit of God and sanctification by the truth lead to godliness (John 3)*
- iii. “Unsaved children should never be instructed corrected, or encouraged, but only invited to respond to the gospel.”  
*Truth: Moses (Deuteronomy 6) and Paul (Ephesians 6) tell parents to discipline and instruct children in the way of the Lord, surely including those children without certain evidence of salvation.*
- iv. “Since God is sovereign, my actions don’t matter”  
*God’s sovereign gift of salvation and transformation are provided through the means of his Word, which we are called to deliver to our children. (Romans 10:13-17)*

In the midst of our parenting, all of us will recognize that we have wandered into one extreme or the other, or even both! Areas of parenting failure are an opportunity to experience the forgiving, restoring, and comforting grace of God, who invites us to come to him in our need and experience his love. We must remember in our moments of weakness or conviction that God does not count our sins against us and understands our weakness and frailty and is eager to extend sustaining grace to us.

## II. Embrace Wise Parenting Borders

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### A. Active Protection

#### 1. Restraint

- i. Physical Protection
- ii. Spiritual Protection

#### 2. Correction

- i. Correction is Not Punishment
- ii. Correction is the Gift of Reality

## B. Humble Trust

Our children belong to the Lord. Our protection and discipleship are God's means of speaking the invitation of his grace into their life, but our efforts cannot ultimately replace our dependence on his Sovereign power. We cannot parent our children into the kingdom of God. Our demeanor, prayers, and our choices to extend certain permissions to our children over the years should reflect our desire that they encounter the convicting, protecting, and sustaining grace of God on their own. We cannot ultimately be their mediator with God.

Humble Trust is revealed in our prayer life. It is also revealed in certain occasions (varying and likely increasing with age) where we lead our children to face new opportunities to express their love for God, Biblical convictions, and obedience to God's Word. They will not always succeed in these moments, but these opportunities are an important part of our parenting. The following three steps should be considered whenever a "permission" is in view.

### 1. Prepare

- i. Teaching a Godly Worldview
- ii. Perceiving Probable Temptations
- iii. Promoting Self-distrust and dependence on God and wise counsel
- iv. Anticipating accountability
- v. Prayer

### 2. Permit

- i. God does not lead us into temptations without a way of escape; we should not permit our children to engage in temptations they cannot bear.
- ii. We can trust God to provide grace to help them in real times of need, leading them to encounter the grace of God in other decisions in life.

### 3. Evaluate

- i. The Bible expects Christians to evaluate their walk and parenting should include this as a normal part of the child parent conversation. The experience will not be useful unless success in wisdom and godliness are celebrated and failures are identified and confessed, and the gospel is shared.

Suggestion note:

Though both these borders are Biblical and will always be a part of godly parenting, our experience normally informs us that there is a shift in emphasis from young childhood to young adulthood. Young children normally experience more protection while children growing in self-distrust, wisdom, and years should normally experience a greater level of freedom to face new situations so that they can experience God—while we still provide advance preparation and post evaluation.

### **III. Pursue the Heart of Parenting**

Wise parenting should embrace both borders (protection and trust) and not choose one or the other as the primary parenting direction. Wise parenting is also more than a seesaw between one border and the other, as though godly parenting is merely the wisdom to know when to say yes, and when to say no. Rather, discipleship is the heart of Christian parenting, consisting in reflecting the following four categories.

- A. Prayer
- B. Example
- C. Relationship
- D. Teaching

These categories will also form the heart of the instruction that will follow in this course.