

Discipleship: The Heart of Parenting

Part II – ‘Example’

We are encouraged in Scripture to do the following... Proverbs 22:6 - *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

The emphasis is on the ‘who’ that is not mentioned in this statement – the parents. They are the ‘who’ that is to do the training; they are the ones the passage is directed to. This passage holds much hope for the parent. It is not a promise, mind you, but a principle. A principle based on biblical wisdom. Training is our responsibility, and God always gives us the grace to do what he has called us to do.

How do we train up our children in the way he / she should go? That cannot be easily defined. It really includes all of life that we live before our children. All of life is training, and it begins with something that speaks louder than words to our children, our example. Here would be the scriptural focus I would see for our time today: Phil. 4:9. This is the parents’ starting block, the lane to run in and the baton to pass...

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Phil. 4:9

Paul directs the attention of his readers in the Philippian church to practice what they see in him. This is a sobering challenge. This could also be a charge that we as parents give to our children. This charge focuses their attention, and our efforts, on the example that we display to them.

What Paul is saying here is to watch his life, both the things he has taught them and lived out before them, and to let these be the things they practice to grow in God. We all know how much it helps to see what you need to do. In playing baseball, my coach would always say, do it this way and he would show me.... Paul wants us to live so that we can say the same thing to our children...love God this way, passion for God looks like this... Lets begin there as we look at three ‘things’ that I believe Paul had in mind for us as Christians (and Christian parents) for others to observe in us and practice.

I. Perseverance

- A. None of us live the way we would like to live before our children. We are more aware of our failures than our faithfulness. Because we are sinners, in some way we fail each and every day. However, Paul also tells us (as he speaks to Timothy) that our failures can be a road to faithfulness, and have a positive affect on those watching our example.

I Timothy 1:15-17 - The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- B. The Apostle Paul calls himself the ‘foremost’, or ‘chief’ of sinners. However, even knowing this about himself, his attention goes to Christ, and what Christ displays in him as a believer. This should be our hope and comfort as well.
- C. When we fail to be the example to our children in the teenage years that we desire, the question is not ‘how could I do that’, but ‘how can I show the patience of Christ’ to them. The gospel brings forgiveness, and the bible tells us how to respond to conviction with repentance and change. This all shows the patience of Christ for us to the sinners in our home.
- D. Every failure can be a teaching moment for the glory of God, if we make it one. Humility is the greatest example we can bring. As we confess our sin, repent, and change, we give a powerful example of the work of Christ.
- E. Paul’s example was clearly one that showed his love for the Savior and his desire for more grace. Do we love grace? When we fail, do we show our love for grace by calling out to God and humbling ourselves? This example is one to follow.

II. Passion

- A. Paul was passionate for Christ. He gave his life and suffered for his Savior (2Corinthians 11:25). His passion was observable, and it affected others.
- B. His encouragement was to follow him as he followed Christ (1Corinthians 11:1). Our teenagers are to follow us, and our example serves to direct the attention of our teenagers to Christ as well. Paul’s passion was clearly observable to others. That is a good place to begin. How observable is our passion for Christ?
- C. When I want to go out to eat, my family knows where I like to go. Is our spiritual hunger as tangible and as observable to our children as our physical hunger? And is how and where that hunger is satisfied just as obvious to our children as our favorite restaurant? Here are some helpful questions to be asking about our passion for God.
 - 1. How is our passion for God displayed?
 - a) Do we have a devotional life? Is it consistent?
 - b) Do we need to be here on Sunday; is our attendance more than an obligation or routine?
 - c) Do we pray? Do we pray together?

- d) Do we make a priority of talking about what God is doing in your life and in the lives of your teens?
 - e) Do we love God? And live that way?
 - f) Do we know Him intimately? And live that way?
 - g) Do we long for His return? And live that way?
- D. Our passion often begins with the understanding of our need for God. If we live a life that is desperate for God in daily life, not just desperate in crisis, then our passion is very observable.
- E. Remember, it is not wrong to require that our children and our teenagers live within the framework of our convictions. It would be wrong to do anything else. Our convictions inform our passions, and our passions structure our lives. Those around us will remember our passions. What competes with your passion for God?

III. Priorities

- A. Our passions also inform our priorities. Our priorities reflect our lives and purpose. How can you understand your priorities? I would suggest for you to work backward. Start with where you spend your time (outside of the structured work hours). When you see what it is that you devote your time to, you will find your priorities.
- B. In our passage, Paul refers to ‘...*what you have learned and received...*’ Does our priority (time) list include some forms of discipleship? We have the responsibility to be instructing them with our words as well as our lives. Discipleship is to be all of life (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).
- And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*
- C. The discipleship of our teenagers can take on a lot of different forms:
1. Both formal and informal
 2. Both with material and our relationship
 3. Both Mom and Dad
- D. The priority of ‘spiritual conversation’ with your teenager is a way to help them wrestle with the things of God.
1. Make it a discussion item together as a family. Don’t let it become a topic that is rarely discussed, let it be normal conversation around your home... “What is God saying to you in your devotions?”

2. Have regular conversation together about it.
 3. Review their journals with them, if they have one.
 4. Have them share with the family.
 5. Make use of the time you already have
 - a) Use car-time to talk, leave the iPods at home when you go places together.
 - b) Dinner time can become discussion time
 - c) Listen to their prayers when you put them to bed. Prayer is always a good window into the heart. They are never too old.
- E. A priority as Christian parents is to work toward a consistent and effective time of devotions. Have you ever thought of inviting your teenagers to join you and having your devotions together? Our children will not be taught by our instruction more than they will be taught by our example.
1. “Keep the altars of private prayer burning. This is the very life of all piety, the sanctuary and family altars borrow their fires here, therefore let this burn well.” Charles Spurgeon
- F. As you make a priority of discipleship...*‘what they have learned and received’*... it will be an opportunity to help them understand much about God and the gospel
1. They can learn about Christ and the gospel through reading the bible
 2. They can know the Savior more and more through prayer
 3. They can experience the grace of God when falling short of their goals
 4. They can know the power of God seeing answers to prayer
 5. They can enjoy the presence of God, personally
 6. They can learn to depend upon God to help them do difficult things

IV. Application

- A. Start with a discussion with your spouse about what are the observed passions, and therefore priorities in your life? (Fathers, please lead in this discussion asking about you first). If you are a single parent, ask your small group leader or close friend for helpful input.
1. Identify one area that you desire to address.
 2. Go to God in prayer for conviction and the power to change.
 3. Make it a regular discussion topic together.
 4. Anticipate being a growing example, by the power of Christ!