

Discipleship: The Heart of Parenting

Parental Relationships

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:6,7

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph. 4:1-3

Unity and Fellowship

Fellowship is the outward expression of and therefore our experience of unity of the Spirit. When we respond together as Christians with patience, bearing together in love, and working to maintain the unity we have in the Spirit, the result is enjoying fellowship together. We must be on the alert to the various challenges that we are confronted with that can affect our unity and disrupt our fellowship.

There are obvious sin issues that we guard against like gossip, slander, and jealousy that we know will damage our unity and fellowship. There are also some issues that are not so obvious to us but can have the same challenging consequence in our relationships. One would be the way in which we communicate and receive input about our children from each other.

So much of our view of a “parenting report card” can come through the observations of others. If people see good things in our kids, then we can feel like we are good parents; if bad, then we are failures. Input is not always easy to receive from anyone about anything. Compounding this, we are naturally sensitive about our children and their attitudes and actions. God has given us the responsibility to protect them, and that can be our first instinct. However, when we begin there (protection) with other believers, we are starting with ourselves, not with the wellbeing of our children in view.

The goal is to have a level of honesty and fellowship “*walking in the light*” with other parents when it comes to our children and our parenting of them. This can be a reflection of our unity together. This is not easy, and it takes work, but the work it requires is a response to the command of scripture and will reap benefits to all.

Let us look together at some of the questions that come to mind. When do we say something? When do we overlook a concern? How do we approach another parent with a concern? When do we involve our kids in this interaction? Do we say something if we feel it won't be received well? Who do we believe—our kids or them? Again, this is not easy, but it is something that God has called us to do in maintaining the unity of the Spirit, and without it, our fellowship is limited in certain ways.

I. Parenting First with Faith

- A. Our faith must be placed upon the sovereign work of God in our lives, in our parenting and in our children.
- B. The way that we change, and the way that our children change, will never be disconnected from the power and work of the gospel. Knowing how we biblically change informs our faith and positions us to look to Christ.

“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

- C. Helping our children change always begins with helping them look to Christ. We must be aware of our position in Christ as children of God. This makes us aware of His unconditional love for and acceptance of us as believers. It then positions us to trust Christ for change—not ourselves, or others, or a process—and also opens our eyes to the way God can use others.

“Living a Christ-like life and discipling others to do the same is more than a system of change or a set of techniques. The process of change rests on the presence and power of a living, active Redeemer.” Timothy Lane and David Tripp

II. Parents Receiving Input

- A. As parents we can benefit from the observation and help of other Christians. However, it is not always easy. Here are some thoughts to make it more successful.
 - 1. Don't take the input about your children personally as a reflection of you. You may learn something and God may bring conviction to you at some point, but that is not the starting point. The starting point is to objectively (as possible) listen to the input being given.
 - 2. Listen to the input to a point where you ask questions. Work to truly understand what is being brought to you.
 - 3. Realize that your children are sinners too. Observations about their sin, or areas of temptation, are to be expected as we live out life together in a local church. It is to be an expression of our care for one another and a fruit of our fellowship.
 - 4. Have the genuine hope that God is at work, and God is bringing about His best through what might be an uncomfortable situation. (Romans 8:28)
 - 5. After listening, the next step is to pray about what you have received.
 - a) It may be accurate, it may not; it may be input given out of a family preference, or it may be input given from a biblical principle; it might be

a sin issue, or it may be simple foolishness. You can only discern after listening enough to truly understand the input given.

- b) All input needs to be considered and evaluated, but that does not mean it needs to be agreed upon or seen in the very same way. We should always express appreciation for the input, as it is not easy to do.
6. Discussing the input with your children is the next step, and how you do that is very important.
- a) You should not make them feel that are “on the witness stand” being charged with a crime. You are “on their side,” trying to understand the truth, and helping them to see what God is saying to them in the midst of this information. Remember humility is always the key and the goal, for you and for them.
 - b) Your children should always feel that you are for them (Romans 8:31). And in a sense, it is you and them teamed up together to fight their sin.
 - c) Your child may need to pray about this input as well. Give them time for that, but it is something that needs to have a conclusion and not simply be left open-ended.
7. Set a time to communicate back with the parent giving the input so that you can work to close the issue. This can ensure that your unity and fellowship is not at risk.
- B. If this is an observation or a concern that your son or daughter has about another youth or friend, this is not the time to simply leave it to them to work it through. As parents we should be a part of this interaction, either contacting the other parents, or being together with our youth as they interact with one another on the issue. They are too immature at this age for us to leave it to them to work this out on their own.

III. Parents Giving Input

- A. When we observe some concerning behavior, how should we proceed?
- B. As we walk in the light of fellowship with one another (I John 1:7), we need to ensure we are approaching these encounters as genuine opportunities to care one for another.
 - 1. We have the opportunity to observe the example of other parents.
 - 2. We have the opportunity to receive the input from other parents.
 - 3. We have the opportunity to help other parents with our input.
- C. Encouragement should be our first area of observation for anyone. Every parent is sensitive when it comes to receiving input about their children. If possible when you bring some observation, take the time to also think beyond the

corrective situation into ways they can be encouraged. This is not to be flattery, or a set up, but a genuine view of their character.

1. Correction should be given honestly, but with compassion, and from a perspective that we are only seeing a partial picture of the situation. As a parent it is best if it is from your personal observation, but this is not always possible. It is helpful to frame your input as observations, or questions, rather than conclusions or judgments.
 2. The motive in bringing the thought or observation should always be out of love for the person, a heart to help them or their child.
 3. Follow-up together can be both helpful and encouraging. It also expresses that we are concerned for them and their child, not just for working through the situation.
- D. Always remember that the goal is walking together in fellowship by helping one another care for, lead, and train our children (of all ages) in the ways of the Lord.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Titus 2:2-6 has application for this area of parenting. We need to recognize that those Christians that are older, and have experienced Christian parenting over the years, can be a source of wisdom and help those that who are younger or new to some parenting seasons. As parents, let us take the initiative to draw on the wisdom and experience of those men and women that have parented before us, who have experienced seasons we have yet to walk through.

“Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.”

- B. A good way of involving help can be to ask, "How do you think my son or daughter is doing in this area? Is there anything that I need to know or address from your perspective?"
- C. Remember the promises of scripture to build your faith for the parenting process. Know that God is powerfully at work in all of our situations, and that God is on our side in all things.

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” Philippians 1:6

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:31,32