

Equip: Parents

Biblical parenting, the Home and the Church

Psalm 78:1-8:

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
² I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
³ things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
⁴ We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.
⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
⁶ that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
⁷ so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
⁸ and that they should not be like their fathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

What does this passage tell us about what our vision as parents should be? Parents are to teach their children about the greatness of God's words and works—God's story—so that children will put their hope and confidence in him.

In verses 5-7, we see God's desire for every generation. God wants every generation to know and trust in him—not forgetting what he has done to rescue and save, but remembering him and keeping his commandments. This is God's goal for every generation. As we teach our children about God, our hopes are that one day our children will do the same for their children, creating a generational cycle of trust in God.

And the first part of this psalm (verses 1-4) shows how that goal is accomplished. God commands parents to teach their children about his words and his works. The primary context for your child learning about God is not in the children's ministry on Sundays or a Christian school or parachurch organization. It is in your home, in your car as you drive along the road, at your child's bedside, and at the breakfast table (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). It happens in those planned moments when you pull out a Bible storybook. And it happens in those unplanned moments when your child has sinned or is heartbroken and you correct and comfort your child as God calls you to do. Teaching children

about God can't be done in an hour or two each week. It involves us parents passing on our life of trust and hope in God to our children.

While it is clear that as parents we are responsible for teaching our kids about God, it is also clear that parents share the responsibility with the entire church community. God gives his law and testimonies in the context of a believing community. Training children is a community project because we need each other. We need one another's encouragement, one another's accountability, and one another's eyes to see what we can't see.

Biblical parenting and the home

Our inadequacy to parent:

Here at CrossPointe, we love and value kids. Children are a gift from God, a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). We do not earn the right to be parents because of our spiritual maturity, intellectual capability, or economic resources. Rather, children are God's gift to us regardless of the circumstances under which we became parents: broken homes, blended families, adoption, struggles with infertility, and whether we have one child or ten. We are a weak, broken, and desperate people who need God's grace in all areas of our lives, including our parenting. Recognition of our inadequacy to parent is the very thing that qualifies us to do so.

That being said, we don't have all the answers. We deceive one another when we pretend to have all the answers when it comes to parenting our children. In and of ourselves we are totally inadequate to be parents. However, God's grace through Jesus Christ makes us adequate before God. In other words, recognizing our inadequacy to parent is the very thing that qualifies us to do so.

What biblical parenting is not:

1. Outsourcing the spiritual formation of our kids to church or a Christian school
2. Having a handy Bible verse to quote in the midst of every conceivable situation
3. Applying a practical Christian parenting model in order to produce obedient, well-behaved children
4. Going through the mechanics of Bible reading and prayer with our kids
5. Preaching to our kids and making sure they "get saved" so that they won't go to hell
6. Being a good example to our kids with the hopes that they will follow Jesus just as we do

What biblical parenting does mean:

1. It means that we (parents) assume the primary responsibility for disciplining our children. The home is a sort of "little church" where the dad leads his family in the worship of God (Deuteronomy 6; Psalm 78). Unfortunately, fathers often abandon, avoid, and abuse this privilege.
2. It means that we (parents) rehearse and display the gospel before our children. By our lives and conversations we look for ways to point them to Jesus.
3. It means that we acknowledge that the salvation of our children is ultimately in God's sovereign hands.
4. It means that we are careful to repent and renew our faith in God when we sin against our children.

Biblical parenting is parenting in light of the gospel. It begins with recognizing that our kids' salvation and growth is God's work. God is the starting point, the means, and the goal. Jesus has done all that is needed to save our kids through his work in history on the cross. Unless God is at work in our child's heart, all our efforts are in vain (John 6:44). We are not in control. We cannot change our kids' hearts. Colossians 1:3-6 says this:

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

In these verses, particularly verse 6, Paul is placing all the emphasis upon the fact that by God's power and grace it is the gospel itself that bears fruit and grows. The gospel never depends on people, not even on Paul. It is God's work and, as part of his work, it pleases God to use people. Paul's confidence is in the power of gospel—it bears its own fruit.

There is great comfort in knowing that gospel-centered parenting does not find its hope in following a particular model of parenting. Rather, gospel-centered parenting finds its hope in the power of the gospel to transform both the hearts of our children, and our own hearts as well. Our role as dads and moms is not only to help our children understand life, themselves, and their needs from a biblical perspective, but also to spend time entrusting ourselves to Jesus in prayer.

What can distract us from biblical parenting? (“Good Goals Gone Bad”)

Good intentions can easily become ultimate goals and therefore unbiblical goals. The most natural expression of the unbiblical goals we have for our kids is our desire to see them succeed. We want our kids to be successful so they can live peaceful lives that are filled with opportunity and guarded from pain, loss, tragedy and suffering. We strive for our kids to succeed because we rightly recognize that the soil in which our kids are raised has much to do with future success.

The goals about to be discussed are not evil in and of themselves. In fact, most of the goals below can be good goals if they do not become ultimate goals. It is when we put the goal of making our kids successful above the goal of equipping our children to know and enjoy God that we need to reevaluate the goals we have for our children:

1. Kids with Skills: The goal is to enlist children in as many activities (athletic, musical, artistic, etc.) as time may (or may not) allow.

- Do I measure my success by the number of activities in which my kids are involved?
- Do I measure my child's success by the number of skills she has mastered?
- Do I measure my child's success by his mastery of any one skill or ability?

2. Psychologically Adjusted Kids: The goals for the psychological adjustment of children often drift according to the pop psychology of the day. These goals may include building self-esteem, training kids to be effective with people, or perhaps raising kids who are not spoiled.

- Do I measure my success by how closely I align myself with a particular method of parenting?
- Do I measure my child's success by how much he esteems himself or how much he esteems others?

3. Christians Kids: The goal is to get children “saved” as soon as possible by any means possible. The focus is on getting children to pray “the sinner’s prayer” in hopes that having saved kids will eliminate parenting struggles.

- Do I measure my success as a parent in relation to how my child responds to or is able to articulate the gospel? The goodness of the Father is not seen in the way his sons respond to him, but in his faithful mercy toward them (Luke 15:11-13, “The Parable of the Lost Son”). The fact is that we cannot know with absolute certainty whether or not our child is saved (e.g., Matthew 7:21-23—“Lord, Lord”).
- Do I think that having “saved kids” would change my job description as a parent? It won’t. Our task is still to faithfully teach our kids the gospel and tenderly encourage our child to trust God not only for salvation, but also for daily living. Tedd Tripp states, “Repentance and faith are not acts performed one time to become a Christian. They are attitudes of the heart toward ourselves and our sin. Faith is not just the way to get saved; it is the lifeline of Christian living.”

4. Spiritual Kids: The goal is to commit to and follow through as a family to have regular times of Bible reading and prayer with the understanding that “a family that prays together stays together.”

- Do I measure my success as a parent in relation to the structure and frequency of our family devotion routine?
- Do I measure my child’s success by her willingness to participate in family devotions?

5. Well-Behaved Kids: We want our children to develop poise, be kind, converse with respect to others, be hospitable, and serve others. In making this an ultimate goal, we fail to realize that this is a secondary benefit of biblical childrearing. In doing so, we emphasize modifying behavior over shepherding the heart.

- Do I measure my success by how well I prepare or pressure my children to respond to every conceivable situation or circumstance?
- Do I measure my success by my child’s ability to outwardly respond to my instruction?

6. Healthy Kids: The goal is to stop at nothing so that our kids are healthy, well-functioning, and safe from suffering. In making this an ultimate goal, we fail to see that suffering is inevitable, and safety has more to do with avoiding eternal death than avoiding hurt in this world.

- Do I measure my success by how frequently I’m able to prepare well-balanced meals for our family in accordance with the most healthful diet?
- Do I measure my child’s success by his ability to meet developmental goals or avoid illness?

7. Smart Kids: The goal is to prepare our kids for educational success no matter what so that they may achieve academic awards, scholarly recognition, and eventually be recruited for privileged job opportunities. Sadly, however, it is possible to be well-educated and still not understand life.

- Do I measure my success as a parent by how well I prepare my child for a lifetime of education or the educational opportunities that I provide for them?
- Do I measure my child’s success by how well she performs in school or how much she knows in relation to other kids her age?

Small Group Question:

Which one of the “good goals gone bad” listed above frequently becomes an ultimate goal in your home? How has this affected your marriage relationship? How has this affected your parenting?

For Christian parents, God intends parenting not only for the discipleship of our kids. He also intends parenting to serve for our own sanctification.

As parents, we learn from our kids:

1. God's love: As we consider the deep love that we have for our own kids, they in turn teach us about the inseparable love the Father has for us through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

2. God's instruction: As we think about how to raise a generation of children who love God, we learn how to talk about the story of the gospel in a way that is beautiful, simple, and clear (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

3. God's discipline: As we discipline our kids for their good that they may experience our love for them, we express thanks and grow in our understanding of the discipline we endure as sons and daughters at the hand of our Father and the peaceful fruit of righteousness that is produced (Hebrews 12:7-11).

4. Our weakness: Being a parent is relentless. It is exhausting. It is demanding. It consumes our thoughts. It is even painful at times. Being a dad or mom reminds us that as much as we'd like to be or even try to play the part, we are not God. We will mess this up and we cannot do this alone. We need God's strength and the support of the church community to raise our kids and teach them how to walk with God.

5. Our need of the gospel: Just as God is more concerned with the heart as the well-spring of life (Proverbs 4:23) rather than our outward actions, so should we parent in such a way as to concentrate our instruction and discipline on the internal overflow of our kid's heart rather than on the externals of behavior. Yet, as we diligently teach our children that straying behavior displays a straying heart, we are ambushed by the stark reality that our own hearts have become controlled by something other than God. Often, in our efforts to correct and discipline we find we can provoke our child to anger because she had the audacity to disturb our comfort and rest (Ephesians 6:4). As a result, we have now just disciplined our child out of frustration and retribution rather than out of patient understanding and a heart of reconciliation. It turns out we both need Jesus. Children often expose and intensify sin and idolatry that we thought was safely hidden within our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). So, the most important thing we must do is to remember and rehearse the gospel. The gospel cements and saturates all we do as Christian parents.

Three "regular rhythms of life" to help us parent biblically:

1. Faith-talks are a time, at least once a week, when a family gathers together to hear the Word of God. "Family devotions" and "family worship" are other terms that describe the same practice. The idea is not to replicate a church worship service but to prioritize a particular time each week to root our lives anew in the gospel by turning to the Scriptures together as a family. Through faith-talks, we respond to God's Word to teach our children diligently (Deuteronomy 6).

2. Faith-walks are the discussions in the course of daily life that turn a child's attention toward the presence of the gospel and the providence of God in every part of life. These are the spontaneous opportunities as parents that we have to discuss God's truth throughout the day. Faith-walk moments remind us that, because God is working all things together for the good of those who love him, even the most mundane events of life can call attention to God's glory and God's story. You can't plan for faith-walks, but by consistently studying God's Word and praying for guidance and wisdom, you can be prepared when "faith-walk" moments present themselves.

3. Having a faith-process in place simply means having a clear idea of what needs to happen next in the spiritual formation of each of your children. Timothy Paul Jones says, "In conversation with Christian parents, when I ask, 'What needs to happen next in your child's spiritual development?' the parents typically respond something like this: 'Well, he needs to stop doing this.' What that reveals is that we are thinking more in terms of managing behaviors than forming souls." Our encouragement to parents is to develop some goals and directions for your children's spiritual development. Look for the heart issues behind the behaviors, then pray and work toward transformation. Jones says, "My two girls each have a journal for chronicling their spiritual growth; each week, I spend an hour or two with each one individually, talking through her current spiritual struggles and developing spiritual direction for the coming weeks." However this may be accomplished, the goal is for parents to know where their children need to grow spiritually and to guide them in that growth.

Small Group Discussion:

Has your family ever engaged in something like a "faith-talk"? What did you do? Do you have any goals for your children's spiritual development? If so, what are they? How can you guide your children to grow spiritually?

Biblical parenting and the church

Your Kids and the Church:

The church and the family were created to work together, but in many cases they do not. In many church contexts parents have handed over their biblically assigned role to let the "professionals" teach their children about God. In other contexts, parents pull their children out of all kids and youth activities to try to disciple their kids alone. Neither is biblical. Neither is ideal. Like two pedals on a bike, the family and the church need one another.

The church is an important part of God's plan, and so is the family. Christ loved his Bride (the church) and ordained her with several purposes. It is easy to understand the church's responsibility to teach adults, but notice that both family and church have been given the task to teach young people. Those of you with kids can often see God's wisdom in that plan. Here are just a few reasons why church ministry to children and students is needed:

- The church is needed to surround young people with godly adults who can provide love and care, truth they can build their lives on, and a model to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 5:2)
- The church is needed to reach out to and model the gospel for children who do not have Christian parents (Matthew 19:14; 28:19-20)
- The church is needed to reinforce a biblical view of the world. A child will sometimes listen to a children's or youth ministry servant, even though they have heard that same truth from their parents again and again (2 Timothy 4:2)
- The church is needed to be a neutral third party serving as an important advisor between parents and children, bringing about reconciliation when there is major conflict (2 Corinthians 5:18)
- The church is needed to connect believing young people with other Christians who support, encourage, and keep them accountable (Hebrews 10:25)

- The church is needed to provide opportunities for young people to use their gifts while serving the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- The church is needed because it fights for truth and sound doctrine. It protects families from being drawn away by false teaching (1 Timothy 3:15)
- The church is needed because spiritual growth generally happens within the context of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16)

But it is not only our kids that need the church. Parents need the church as well. When the responsibility to teach our children about God is overwhelming, the church is there to help. The church teaches us how to teach and trains us in how to train. God shows parents great grace when he blesses them with a church community. The church is our partner in the task of teaching our children about God.

CrossPointe’s Children and Youth Ministry Philosophy

CrossPointe Church exists to assist parents in the discipleship of their children and youth. Our goal is to help children and youth become followers of Jesus Christ by:

- Teaching children and youth the gospel of Jesus Christ, not just Bible stories or moral lessons.
- Using methods of instruction and interaction that are both excellent and age-appropriate.

We have a responsibility as a church to walk alongside parents as they train their children in godliness. We want to equip parents to pray and plan for the spiritual development of their kids. We believe that only the gospel can change children, families, neighborhoods, and schools. As we minister the gospel to children and youth, we participate in CrossPointe’s larger vision to see Gospel-transformation take place in ourselves, Columbus and the world.

Small Group Discussion:

Do you tend to have a “drop off” mentality—thinking of the church’s ministers as professionals or church’s volunteers as free childcare? Or, do you have a “nuclear family” mentality—thinking you can handle things on your own without the church? How do the truths taught in this lesson inform and change your thinking?

Most of this material was adapted from and, at times, taken verbatim from the following resources:

- Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Wesleyan Publishing, 2011)
- Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus* (Crossway, 2011)
- Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Shepherd’s Press, 2001)
- Steve Wright and Chris Graves, *ApParent Privilege* (InQuest Publishing, 2010)
- Parenting Resources at www.sojournkids.com