

Biblical Parenting in Christ

Parenting is one of the greatest responsibilities in life. Having godly children is a tremendously blessed experience that fills our hearts with great joy and praise to God. The apostle John's words in 3 John 1:4 capture the sheer delight of parents with godly children – "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

God has blessed my wife and me with three children, for which we are grateful. Much as I enjoy their presence in our life, I am also overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy and fear of failure. But thanks and praise be to God for the infallible counsels of His Word, which have been our source of wisdom, help and strength in parenting our children. Through my co-labouring with my wife in our home in nurturing our children, I have by the grace of God distilled the following biblical pointers which I believe form the bedrock of Christian parenting.

1. Love Not Your Children More than the Lord

Worthy Christian parenthood can be possible only when we live with a total commitment to the glory of our God. We

must guard against our predisposition to love our children and their future more than our Lord. Our great Saviour cautions us, "he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37b). If we love our children more than the Lord, we will be miserable examples and guides for our children in genuinely and passionately loving God. Christian parents who live without a wholehearted love for God will surely mislead their children into being lovers of themselves and this world more than God.

It is significant that we do not let them be the ultimate focus of our love. By loving God more than everyone, our hearts shall be sanctified by His glory, and our children will have the greatest pleasure of growing up in the shadow of His glory which fills our hearts. They, being sinful like us, will display their streak of unhappy rebellion against our insistence to live for the Lord. But we, as parents, cannot follow our children; instead, we are to love the Lord and command our children in the way of the Lord. The shepherding of our children's souls requires the highest and noblest of motives of heart, namely the love for the Lord. This is best highlighted by the

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incident whereby Christ commanded Peter to feed “my lambs” when Peter affirmed that he loved Christ more than all else. This tells us that by first loving our Lord unswervingly, we shall be enabled to truly love our children (who are His “lambs” in our households) with pure, sanctifying love.

2. Labour to See that Your Children are Saved by Faith in Christ

Our chief concern ought to be the salvation of the souls of our children. We must not settle for mere external religiosity that is nothing more than a general discipline of life. We must not be fooled to think of their mere participation in the children’s activities of the church

as a sure mark of their salvation. We should not exchange the Christian faith for mere moralism in our children either. Our children’s good manners and social etiquette do not definitely mean that they have genuinely trusted God. Hence, we must pray purposefully and labour to see that their lives reflect a heart renewed by the love of Christ.

Be earnest in telling our children plainly of the need to repent from their sins and believe in Christ. Moreover, warn them of God’s wrath against unrepentant sinners. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”. From time to time, we must probe them for some token of assurance of salvation that comes by faith in the atoning death of Christ. Let us articulate to our children that without

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Christ they shall perish, and that if they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall be saved to the uttermost. What an invitation Scripture gives us to declare to our children – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31)!

3. Know that You and Your Children are Not Perfect

We and our children are sinners who are in need of grace. Even though everyone in the family has trusted the Lord, there is a need for us to correct ourselves and grow each day in faith, wisdom and service of the Lord. Thus, we must examine ourselves regularly in the light of God's Word and with the help of the Holy Spirit. We must be quick to repent from all sins, and be diligent to grow in faith and obedience. We must not assume we are perfect. Neither should we be complacent about our need to grow in the Lord. We should, like Job who prayed for the sanctification of his children, also be concerned about our children's salvation and sanctification (cf. Job 1:5).

4. Nourish Your Children with God's Word

The Scriptures make it plain that parents are to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of God's Word. We cannot take this responsibility lightly. Christian

parenting is impossible without the teaching of God's Word. “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12b). Providing biblical knowledge is more important than preparing breakfast, lunch or dinner. We cannot afford not to teach our children God's Word daily. Instruction of God's Word should not be just left to the Sunday school, but should be a daily affair of our homes. If we would not feed our children with God's Word daily, they will be spiritually impoverished. So, let us neither ignore nor despise the importance of the daily teaching of God's truth to our children.

5. Lead Your Children in the Service of God

For all those who love God, nothing is more enjoyable on earth than serving their God. Joshua said it best – “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). Our homes itself must be a place of service to God and His people. Hospitality is one of the best ways we can serve God. Together with our children, we can serve others in Christ's name. We can welcome unbelieving friends (even our teenage children's friends) and tell them of the Gospel. We can entertain, comfort, counsel and strengthen believers and servants of God. We can be loving hosts of the fellowship meetings of our

church and visiting missionaries. We can be compassionate and zealous in praying together as a family for fellow brethren, leaders of the church, missionaries, missions and the church ministries.

As a family, our major family activities can be participating in church activities, serving in various ministries and cheerfully giving for the work of the Lord. Whenever possible, use the family car to fetch those who have difficulty in getting to church or fellowship meetings. When Christian parents make serving the Lord their main preoccupation, their children will have a compelling pattern to emulate.

6. Be Patient with Your Children

Impatient parents will drive children to be bitter, disillusioned and uncooperative. We must show them the same longsuffering and patience that the Lord graciously extends to us. Parents must pay attention to not being easily irritated or quick-tempered. Colossians 3:21 gives this advice: “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” Likewise, Ephesians 6:4 counsels, “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

We cannot be in a hurry to get our children to cultivate godly thinking and attitudes in their lives. We need to have the patience to guide them and help them to overcome their sins, and nurture in them godly virtues. In the process, we also find ourselves being shaped for His glory.

7. Be Firm with Your Children

Patience is needed to firm up our children in the way of the Lord. Being patient does not mean we allow our children to

misbehave or live foolishly without fear of the Lord. Proverbs 27:5 reminds us that “Open rebuke is better than secret love” (cf. Proverbs 28:23). By the same token, Proverbs 19:18 puts parents in mind of the need to rebuke and chastise their children when they stubbornly err – “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” Indeed, Proverbs 13:24 warns, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (cf. Proverbs 22:15).

8. Be Joyful Parents

Though parenting is full of toil and, at times, even agony, Scripture calls us to be joyful parents. Jesus spoke about the joy of motherhood in John 16:21, “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” Not only the birth, but also the upbringing of the child is to be a joyful experience. Psalm 113:9 assures every mother that with the Lord’s help, she can “be a joyful mother of children”.

Chastening our children is no easy or enjoyable process for either the parent or child. Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” A father or mother who corrects the child is advised to say, “My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things” (Proverbs 23:15-16). Truly, parents who patiently and firmly follow the biblical counsel on nurturing their children are promised greater joy concerning their children – “The father of the righteous

shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice” (Proverbs 23:24-25)!

9. Be a Mutually Loving and Respectful Couple

Nothing makes children sadder and more disgusted in a home than their quarrelling and quarrelsome parents. Where the husband and wife remain faithful and love one another sincerely and tenderly, children will find much joy, encouragement and comfort as they grow up. Do not let our marriage fail or lack vitality. “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9a). The health of our marriage is paramount to good and effective parenting. Our mutual commitment and fidelity will be an example for our children as they grow up to love their own spouses and children. Children should learn from us how to love, forgive, forbear, strengthen, protect, respect, nurture and care for one another. In fact, Scripture pronounces a blessing on a loving couple’s offspring – “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” (Proverbs 5:18).

10. Be Prayerful and Dependent on God to Build Up Your Children

Parents should guard against depending on their own wisdom and strength. Apart from the Lord, we cannot nurture our children for His glory. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up

late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:1-5). Ultimately, we must wholly entrust our children to our heavenly Father’s care. True, we love our children and desire their good, but we have not the power to secure it. Let us trust Him who knows how to give good gifts to His children (cf. Matthew 7:11).

These ten biblical lessons are foundational to Christian parenting, which is all about the biblical nurturing of our children. May we examine our habits and attitudes in the light of what has been discussed in this article and, if found wanting, be willing to correct ourselves and make changes to them. Only then can we have the blessed experience of effective Christian parenting, and thus be able to spiritually nurture our children for God’s glory. Amen.



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they labour in vain
that build it: except
the LORD keep the
city, the watchman
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(Psalm 127:1)

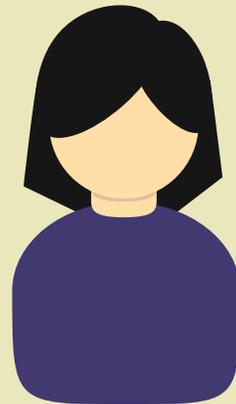
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