

“Parenting in the Family of God (Part 1)”

The Family of God

Downtown

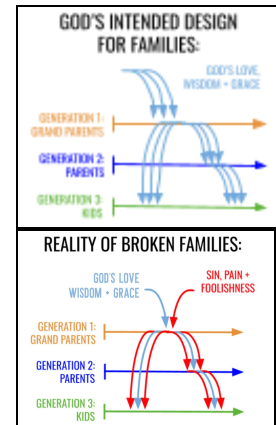
February 28, 2021

Let’s recap where we’ve been so far in this series.

Week 1 - God is a trinity who forever exists in self-giving, others-exalting love relationships. He made us in His image to walk in the same kind of love.

Week 2 and 3 - God desires to fill the world with a multi-generational family of people who love + worship Him. Introduced the Family Waterfall chart. Week 3 specifically focussed on how to deal with the red in our charts.

Week 4-8 - We’ve been looking at specific relationships and relational issues Dating, Marriage, Communication, perception, and forgiveness.



I wanted to recap both as a reminder and because all of that -- how you see God, how you deal with your past, your dating and marriage health, ability to communicate and forgive - it all comes to bear on the relationship we’re looking at the next two weeks. The parent-child relationship.

* If you aren’t actively parenting, just like in the weeks on dating and marriage, we celebrate the fact that Jesus makes us a family together with people in different stages of life. You can listen for perspective + clarity on your relationship with your parents. Or for perspective + clarity if you end up parenting in the future. I really hope you listen for ways to pray for and support your friends who are actively parenting now.

We’ll come out of Ephesians 6:1-4 for these two weeks:

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Should go without saying, but **there is a Biblical vision for the parent-child relationship.**

It should go without saying but I don’t think it does. In my experience, most parents I meet deal with significant insecurity and doubt about their role as parents and if they’re doing a good job.

But the Bible doesn’t leave us on our own to figure it out. Paul starts:

Verse 1 - “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

God’s intention for the relationship between parent and child is not the same kind of relationship that exists between spouses, or siblings, or friends. There is an authority and obedience hard-wired into this relationship. And Paul confidently says “this is right”. It’s right for children to obey their parents. It’s right for parents to instruct, shape, and lead their children.

Verse 2 - He roots this in the 5th of the 10 commandments (Ex. 20) - “Honor your father and mother.”

The word honor is the Hebrew word *kabad* - it means to put weight on. To treat someone with an amount of seriousness ... the weight of glory they deserve.

So when parents abdicate or abuse their authority... When kids rebel and reject their parents’ authority, it leads to a massive breakdown. God’s right. This is a weighty, serious relationship.

Verse 3 - Paul adds - this is the first commandment with a promise. Later in Exodus, God says obeying all His commands is “for our good always”. But this is the first time He overtly connects a promise.

If you honor your father and mother, God promises your future reality will go better. Not necessarily true

for each individual ... though probably... This is a societal promise for God's people. A people who honor God's vision for parents and children will enjoy a richer, healthier, more vibrant communal life than one raised on a kindergarchy where kids reign.

Ok... So what is His vision for the parent-child relationship, exactly?

Psalm 127 - Children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Psalm 78:4 - We will ... tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

Ephesians 6:4 - Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

In the Biblical vision:

- **Children** are a gift. A reward. An inheritance from God.
- **Parents** are loving authorities to be obeyed.
- **Purpose of parenting:** Bringing children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

That's the job. Bring them up to maturity, instructing them, disciplining them... All of it in the Lord.

Salted with the flavor of grace and wonder as Psalm 78:4 says "telling them of His glorious deeds and His might and the wonders that He has done."

* So you can try to distill out and apply the practical wisdom God has for parents but without telling of God's glorious deeds -- most specifically in the cross, that's not Christian parenting. Might be moral parenting. Judeo-Christian values. But it isn't Biblical if Jesus isn't the center.

Now catch this. When Paul says this vision is right. He's also saying any and all competing visions are not right. Worth noting, because our world is full of competing visions:

The Trophy Vision - Whether in athletics, academics, behavior, looks, or financial gain, my children are a testament to my greatness. A mirror by which I see my success and my worth as a parent. I will compare them to your puny, lacking trophies, judge you, and laugh.

The Best Friend Vision - I'm here to be their buddy. I am very concerned with whether or not my child likes me. I think about it frequently. I have low-grade anxiety about them not liking me.

The Convenience Vision - I'm mostly frustrated because my kids limit my freedom. It's hard to see my kids as a blessing or gift and my go-to parenting move is to put them in front of a screen whenever possible so they'll be contained and I can get some quiet.

The Happiness Vision - Opposite of the convenience vision... I exist to make my kids happy. This one is very pervasive... So when we hear a parent say, "I just want my kids to be happy", we hear that as love. "I'd do anything to make my kids happy." Wow, what a great mom. What a great dad.

That one is closely related to - **The Help 'em Reach the Stars Vision** - My kids are full of pure, almost unlimited potential... and the best thing I can do is to set them up to soar.

See... because there's this line where the sky... it meets the sea... and it calls me...

And no one knows... how far it goes... But if the wind in my sails on the sea... if it stays behind me? One day i'll know... if I go... There's just no telling how far I'll go.

This is the gospel according to Disney... and being totally fair and honest, who wouldn't want this for their kids? What loving parent doesn't want their kid to figure out what they're good at and scrape the ceiling of their potential?

But what if I told you that one of the reasons this sounds so appealing and right to you is actually a guy named John Locke who lived ~400 years ago.

John Locke popularized a philosophical theory called **tabula rasa** in the 1600s that has seeped into Western parenting ever since. It means "blank slate." Locke argued children are born blank with no moral

or cognitive pre-wiring. Nurture and education make them what they are.

Any evil in them is because someone taught them. I'm sorry to tell you parents, but according to Locke, every evil, selfish moment in your kid's lives... It's your fault.

You taught them to bite when they don't get what they want.

Now the first question everyone should ask about John Locke's theory is - "Well he must have had a lot of children to have based his theory on, right?... Or at least a lot of professional experience working with kids..." Amazingly, NO. He had no kids. Why? Because... He. Didn't. Like. Them.

And his theory has been crippling parents ever since.

Tabula rasa is why so many parents feel powerless and are terrified of ruining their kids.

Tabula rasa is why we feel so much pressure to give our kids "good" childhoods complete with every experience and opportunity.

Tabula rasa is why we feel so much pressure to let our kids totally, uniquely "them".

It's why so many of today's parents joke, "Welp. That's why they're gonna end up in counseling!" And when I say joke I mean... reveal the deep down terror in our souls. Thanks, John Locke.

The Tabula rasa vision of parenting:

- **Children** are blank slates.
- **Parents** are tour guides to help them find themselves. Like Joe in the movie Soul.
- **Purpose** - the highest goal of parenting is to stay out of their way and not mess them up.

Parents, I need you to hear me. The tabula rasa vision of parenting is emphatically incompatible with God's vision for parenting.

- Your job is not to stay out of your kids' way. Your job is to bring them up.
- Your children are not blank slates. They are born with a sin nature.
- Your great concern is not ruining them... They came to you in a ruined sinful state. Your job is to discipline and instruct them away from their sinful state and towards God's grace.

Your job is not to make much of them - affirming their unique, glorious wonderfulness. Your job is to make much of Him "telling of His glorious deeds, His might and the wonders He has done."

To be clear, the tabula rasa vision of parenting is so widespread and infectious that I'd bet my children's very small college fund that many parents believe this and have no idea.

"Of course I agree with the Bible. I know we're all born with sin..." but at the same time, the felt-reality is that your main job as a parent is to just be there for the kid. Y'know... Love 'em. Walk beside 'em. Be emotionally engaged and available. That's what good parenting is.

And it's not that those aren't *very* important parts of the job. They are. They are non-negotiable mandatory! But they also aren't enough on their own. We also have to train our children, help form their character. Bring them up in kindness and work ethic, perseverance and generosity. Help them see their sin and how it corrupts everything. In us and in the world. Open their eyes to see who God is and how His grace in the cross is the only hope for sinners like us.

How do we steward the gifts we've been given. How do we bring them in the instruction of the Lord. I'll give us a quick picture to set us up for the next two weeks.



Parenting is full of lots of moments and incidents. X's on the line. A temper tantrum. A broken bone. A graduation. A broken heart. And as parents, we can get really focused on how we respond to the Xs.

Which is incredibly important. It's called reactive parenting and we'll talk about it at length next week.

But for this week I want to focus on what happens before the X. **Proactive Parenting**. Proactive parenting is where the training and preparation for the big moments come. Where a lot of the big parenting battles are won and lost.

Let me give you 3 aspects of proactive parenting:

1.) Model for them - There's a keystone text for parenting in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 you may have heard before. Starts "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God; The Lord is one." It's called the Shema and in it God tells His people "these things I'm teaching you today, you shall teach them diligently to your children..." It was the foundation for Jewish parenting and the Jewish educational system.

But before God gets to the part about "you shall teach them diligently to your children"... He starts with "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Jesus quotes this verse when He's asked to summarize the entire law of God. Fascinating. Jesus says the most important thing to the trinitarian God of the universe is that you love Him. Almost like He is love... and He made us in His image. And He cares about His relationship with us.

And... He says that's also the foundation for teaching our kids. Because God knows that the model you set for your kids will have just as great if not a far greater impact on your kids than what you say. Your love for God is more important than anything you teach about God because God is not first and foremost after well-behaved kids or kids with lots of Bible knowledge - though both of those are good things - He is first and foremost after kids who love Him as He loves them.

Wayne Cordeiro - "We can teach what we know, but ultimately we will reproduce what we are."

We first heard that quote 12+ years ago and it had such an impact on us that is one of Midtown's leadership values to this day.

It's so easy to get distracted by 1000 things in parenting and forget that who you are. Your health and relationship with God matter most. I just want to encourage you that your love for Jesus is going to have more impact on your kids than anything else. Start there.

So for Erica and I, we want our kids to wake up to Mom and Dad finishing up time in the Word every morning. We aren't close to perfect at this, but we're working to show them that we prioritize our time with Jesus before the crazy of the day starts.

I want my kids to know that Jesus is what I love most in life and I'm willing to sacrifice for His kingdom, not just because I'm a pastor. Not just at work. But in how we treat our neighbors and how we prioritize the people in our LifeGroup.

I want my kids to hear me sing loud and wildly off-key worship songs in church and in our home because Jesus is worth singing about.

I want them to grow up knowing that I prayed for them every day.

And when I blow it... when my selfish anger boils over or I just mishandle a situation... I want them to see me confessing and repenting and asking forgiveness quickly and without excuse.

And when things are hard. I want my kids to get to see me grieve... and see me take that pain to Jesus. Been a lot of that this past year.

In the good and the bad, in my messy far from perfect way, I want my kids to get a front-row seat to me loving and following desperately after Jesus. That's modeling. It's the lynchpin.

2.) Teach them - Ephesians 6:4 explicitly tells us that we're bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord. So part of your job as mom and Dad is to spend time in God's Word with them, teaching them who God is and what He's got to say about reality in the universe.

Let me pause and say here - if you're new to all of this. If you're nervously thinking "I don't know how to teach the Bible to my kids!" ... You're not on your own. Jake Blair, our Director of Equipping, and our Milestones team work year-round to give you resources and tools to help you love Jesus, engage God's Word, and share it with your kids. Midweek Podcast!

And I'll give you some freebies here.

The car ride home after church or on your way to lunch... the car ride home after Student Groups with my

teens is money. Don't waste the car ride. "Hey what did you hear? What stood out to you? Yeah, that stood out to me too. Was anything confusing?" They are physically restrained in a seat held there by a seatbelt. You control the radio and you have a captive audience. Teach 'em!

I'll give you another go-to in our home. The dinner and breakfast table. We eat breakfast and dinner together 5-6 days out of the week. And this is the perfect time to build in some rhythms of let's open the Bible and read a chunk. Get a reading plan. Use the Jesus Storybook Bible if you've got little kids. Ask some basic questions: what do we learn about God? What do we learn about ourselves? What was confusing?

You don't have to be a Bible expert or have all the answers. Just engage with them and tell them you'll help them find answers to their questions when you don't know.

And, teach them about everything else in life too. We believe in whole life-discipleship. Teach them how to change a tire. Teach them how to tie their shoes. Teach them how to cook a meal and balance their checkbook. But don't let teaching them about God fall to the wayside. #3:

3.) Establish Normal Rhythms - Once again, the Shema helps us out here:

Deuteronomy 6:7-9

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.

The instruction here is to keep the things God has said - who He is, what he's done, his instruction and wisdom for life ever in front of you. Whatever you're doing. Sitting around the house, walking around the neighborhood, bedtime, morning routine. He says write God's words on your hands, on frontlets between your eyes, on your doors, and your gates i.e. what you see all the time.

Now literally you can take this on the nose and decorate your home with Scripture.

Erica likes to take the little things we're learning and put them around the house. One time she put tiny pieces of paper that said "speak grace" on every doorway in our house. Cause we were struggling with being ... rude to each other.

So you can go literal with it, but we'd be wise to not miss the metaphor. What you keep in front of your and your kids' eyes, what you build rhythms around becomes the normative culture of your family.

You are bringing your children up in a certain kind of family culture and it's predicated on the family rhythms you build in. What you celebrate, what you make time for, what you make non-negotiable. The ways and patterns of speaking operating in your home that are normal.

Some stuff that is normative culture in our family.

- Morning prayer. Every morning before we head out to work and school we circle up and pray. God help us be shaped by you more than by cultural norms. Jesus help us believe Your love so we don't look for it in empty cisterns. Spirit show us people around us who are hurting or left out and need your love today.
- Sabbath. Friday night to Saturday night is no work time. We kick it off with Friday movie night and try to do meals that require minimal dishes and clean up. It's rest and play time to rejoice in God's rhythm of rest He hardwired into creation.
- Physical affection: We are a fun-loving big hugs, cuddling warm and fuzzy kind of family. Go study the research and you'll find that hugs help kids' brain development, and physical development. This is incredibly important ... especially if you have sons. And especially especially if you have daughters. And even more so if you have sons.
- Verbal affirmation: We asked a woman in our church family one time what her dad did well to help her turn out awesome and she said "I dunno. I mean he was a good dad. And there was this

one annoying thing he did where every single day he would tell me he loved me and he was proud of me.” So every single day I started telling my kids I love them and I’m proud of them. First time I told my oldest daughter, after I said I was proud of her she said “WHY?!” She had a hard start to life and often is fighting to not be in trouble and not do poorly in school and she has a hard time believing I could be proud of her. So I said because you’re my daughter. You don’t have to do anything to make me proud of you. I’m proud of who you are.

And that’s a great example of reality in all of this. I need to warn you that you are going to get a lot of pushback. You’re going to get a lot of eye rolls from your 5-year-olds and your 15-year-olds. There are going to be times when this feels fruitless and like nothing is getting through. But I have great news.

The Biblical vision says you are not beholden to your child’s eye rolls. You don’t have to be enslaved to their feelings or what they perceive to be best for them. You are the parent. You are the one with the Biblical vision for where you’re growing them.

I heard this story. Might be an urban legend. A farmer had a cornfield. And he had his sons working in it every day. His neighbor said "why do you have them out there every day? The corn doesn’t actually need that much work." And the dad responds, "because I am not raising corn."

That’s the kind of paradigm shift we’re talking about here. The competing visions of tabula rasa, happiness-based, stay out of their way and just let them be their true selves are constantly competing and putting pressure on you to lose sight of God’s call on your life as your child’s parent. Don’t lose the vision. You’ve gotta be doggedly committed to a Jesus-centered vision for your kids.

And I’ll tell you one problem with the predominant cultural vision. We are raising a generation of kids who can’t handle weight very well. A generation of kids who find the normal of difficulties and responsibilities of life to be crippling.

One of my friends Jake - he’s got three young kids aged 6, 4, and 2. He and his wife decided that each of their kids are going to do something hard. As part of their proactive formation. And so his 4-year-old son does karate... which he doesn’t always love going to karate practice. And every time on the way to karate, Jake tells his son “If you learn to do hard things even when you don’t want to when you grow up that will be your superpower.”

That’s it. In the Biblical vision of parenting your goal is to be out here giving your kids superpowers. They won’t get the superpowers today or tomorrow... But 20, 30 years from now. Listen to this encouragement from Hebrews 12:11.

Hebrews 12:11

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This is our goal as parents. Not just for pleasant comfort now. We’re parenting our kids so that later when our kids are 35 they’d come back and give us a hug. That someday far down the road they would go, “Ohh I get it now.”

Maybe that’s the encouragement some of you need to hear this morning. You aren’t raising a 5-year-old. You’re raising a future 25-year-old. The eye rolls of a 5-year-old are well worth them being a well-adjusted 25-year-old full of godly confidence.

You aren’t raising an 8-year-old. You’re raising an 18-year-old who’s going to be leaving your house. Will they be trained and prepared to handle the reality of life when they leave?

I want to take a few minutes to just pray over y’all who are parenting:

I pray for y’all as parents.

I pray that you don't waste these short and vital years that you get with your kids. I pray that you pour so much love into their lives. I pray that you are such a picture of God's wisdom and His grace and His love and His loving authority in their lives.

I don't want you to waste your parenting years deathly afraid that you are beholden to your child's emotional whims and pendulum swings.

I don't know what your parenting pain points are.

I don't know what kind of model you got from your parents.

I don't know where you're exhausted. I know this year has been a wild marathon for parents.

But I take a lot of courage in the beginning of Hebrews 12 that says Jesus, for the joy set before Him endured the cross. He did the opposite of what we do so often. He traded a short-term negative for a long-term positive. The joy of forgiving your sins and lavishing His love on you and redeeming you and healing you and graciously training you how to bring up your kids in Him.

Let's Pray.