Session 11

BIBLICAL PARENTING

STUDY CENTER

Psalm 127:3, Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

As anyone knows, parenting today has its challenges. As the moral fabric of our society decays, families are under greater attack than ever before. Parents are having to face more issues concerning their children than in generations past. Keeping tabs on our kid's actions, friends, whereabouts, nutrition, activities and more is a challenge these days, regardless of their age.

All of this reminds us of the great responsibility we have been given as godly parents. Our children are gifts from the Lord as we see in the verse above and we need to treat them as precious. We want the Lord to be pleased with how we handle the gift He has given us in our children.

Of course, as most parents know, kids certainly come with a mind of their own, but there are some key principles for parenting them that will work for any child. Any child you say? Yes, because we find these principles in the Bible, which is relevant in every situation. The Bible has to be our source for how to raise children successfully no matter the environment. You see, when God and His ways are added to any situation, no matter how seemingly difficult, you place yourself in position to succeed. God's principles will work for biological families, single parent homes, blended families and adoptive parents. They key is the more we add the Lord and His ways, the more success we will have.

Remember Joshua 1:8, which tells us that by observing God's word, we will be successful. This applies to parenting too.

The first and most important key in successful parenting begins by developing harmony as a married couple in your approach to parenting. Parents who constantly disagree in their parenting approach, especially in front of the children, are setting the stage for problems.

Amos 3:3, says, *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"*

The first way to develop harmony in your parenting approach is to begin by making your marriage important. Remember while your children are important, you are not married to them! You and your spouse need a healthy, loving marriage, so you can in turn create a healthy environment for your kids. A struggling marriage, will always produce problems in the children. As busy as parenting responsibilities can be, make time for each other. There will be times of challenge as you walk through childbirth, job changes, financial challenges, and other family responsibilities all which can consume your time.

Brief seasons like this are fine. For example, when walking through the first months following the birth of a new baby, couples, especially new moms, can get consumed with the responsibilities. Be understanding and gracious when the two of you are going through a transitional season such as this, but also be careful you don't let the season last too long. Get the focus of your love, attention and time back on each other and make time to get away from the mayhem. Your children need your marriage to be harmonious, stable and healthy!

Of course, children need our time and attention, but they also don't mind dominating *all* our time. There needs to be boundaries to your time. This is important because you need to be strong and rested and have a strong marriage to be a good parent.

IDEAS FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES FOR YOUR KIDS REGARDING YOUR TIME.

- **Don't allow kids to have toys/belongings in the common rooms, family rooms or all around the house.** If having some toys nearby you is necessary, keep them in an closed toy box or cabinet easily accessible. Toys should be put away when not in use. An environment free of toys reminds you that you are an adult, which helps you put more attention on your spouse and less on kid-related things.
- **Make your bedroom a kid-free zone.** Reserve your bedroom as a place for you and your spouse. Don't allow kids to play in there, access your belongings, hang out or even take friends in there without permission or without your presence. Make them respect your bedroom as the "parents place."
- **Set a mommy and daddy time while everyone is in the home.** Perhaps just before or just after dinner, set aside a time for you and your spouse to just "sit" in the same room together or even separately, where the kids learn that this is "your" time. Even just an hour. You should train kids that some times for this are important even when they are very young. For example, put them in a play-pen with some toys in the adjacent room, while you and your husband sit nearby. Teach them consciously and subconsciously that not every waking hour is for them to ask for things no matter their age.
- **Have some recreational time apart from the kids.** Occasionally being without your kids just for fun is necessary. This is healthy for your kids too. If you are making them a priority at the other times, they will appreciate when mommy and daddy want to go places without them just for fun.
- **Make bed times reasonable.** It is hard to have alone time when your kids are up all hours of the night. Put young children to bed early, so you have a moment to yourself or with your spouse. Teens who often start staying up later than parents can respect your time by knowing that once you close your bedroom door, even if to watch TV or read, that this is "bedtime" and you are not to be bothered.

BIBLICAL PARENTING (cont...)

AGREE ON YOUR PARENTING APPROACH

Every parent whether biological or not, wants their children or step-children to grow up as strong, successful adults. Parental success is also found when the parents are in agreement on how to help their children reach this goal. This is probably one of the most important factors to proper parenting.

Often you have one parent who feels that a harder approach to discipline is the right way, while the other likes the softer road, when really it takes a balance of both. Or one parent feels a particular activity is fine, while the other is totally against it. Realize you will not always agree on every point and everyone's parenting skills grow as we raise our children. We often learn by trial and error, as well as in understanding the uniqueness of each of our children (ie. what worked for one child may not work verbatim on the other). So how do you get on the same page? Here are some hints:

1. ***Decide together that you will stay biblical.*** When the Bible is your guide to discipline, love and family values, you will be set for success. If you are not clear on what the Bible says about family and parenting, take the time to read up on it. Then when you learn something new, be willing to start making that a part of your practice.
2. ***Appreciate and accept your spouse's approach and role as a parent.*** Their role will be different than yours and you need to accept that. For example, if dad decides he is going to play the heavier hand to make his son learn to ride a bike, then mom may need to "stay out of it" so to speak. If mom always steps in to protect her baby, she may be interfering with that child's overall development. It may be less about bike riding and more about dad developing his son's overall manhood. Sometimes one parent needs to back off and let the other parent take the lead. This way the child will experience the important, but differing roles of both mother and father. Blended families can also learn to appreciate the roles of both the biological parent and the step parent by realizing that biological parents may understand the child better, while the step parent may help you consider things you have been blinded to before.
3. ***Don't disagree or correct each other in front of the kids.*** Sometimes you will need to discuss how to handle a parenting situation, just do it behind closed doors. Try to understand why your spouse feels the way they do. You may find that they have a valid point. Also make sure that you support and uphold your spouses wishes and views to the children. You may have to "meet in the middle" on some things, or just decide that unless you both can agree, you may not incorporate some things until you do.
4. ***Understand that your parenting skills are always being developed.*** Parents don't read a book one day and suddenly become the perfect parent. If you allow each other room for error and the ability to grow you will be more in agreement. Your kids are quite resilient to your shortcomings, especially when you are putting forth the effort. Be willing to adjust and apologize. Newly blended families need to give their spouse a break and realize that this set up is new for everyone, and all things that succeed take time and practice. Don't forget to laugh about the funny things, because laughter makes everyone take the trivial things less seriously.

Blended families can help promote agreement by realizing that some parenting relationships were well established before the family was blended. If step parents would try to understand the long standing pattern between the child and their biological parent and biological parents would understand the need for the step parent to fit into that relationship there would be a better opportunity for unity to be established.

SHARED CUSTODY PARENTING

There are times when staying unified in parenting has unique challenges. This is especially true when two parents, not living together, share custody of their child or children and the kids live with each of them only part of the time. In this case there are bound to be lifestyles and ideals that are not going to be supported by the other parent when your child is with them. While these situations are not easily solved, considering a few principles will set the stage to help the situation rather than hurt it further. Here are some biblical points of wisdom to help.

Set a standard of living for your household. This means decide what values, habits, schedules and ideals will be considered acceptable in your home and that those standards are clearly not only meant for that child, but expected by *all* who live there, including yourself and other children. This may help soften any idea the other parent may have that you intend to control all the values instilled in the child. The idea is to make the other parent see that this is how you and your entire family live and it is not an attempt to oppose their parental ideals or lifestyle.

Be considerate and supportive to the other parent. As much as you want the other parent to be supportive of your household's parenting ideals, you also need to reciprocate that support. In some cases, there is a great deal that can't be supported (ie, secularism, worldliness, sin etc.). However, be appreciative of what you can and communicate that to your child. (ie. "it's nice that your mom/dad takes you to dance practice everyday.") Chances are the child will ultimately communicate your feelings to their other parent. When people feel appreciated and don't feel you are out to destroy their ideals or berate them, they are often less defensive about their own expectations and may even show more support for yours.

Teach the child honor toward the other parent. While you may not agree with all the other parent does, you should teach the child parental honor and obedience. In certain cases, when the other parent is driven toward an unholy lifestyle, you may still be able to encourage the child to honor that parent in the right things they do, such as setting a proper bedtime, making them eat healthy etc.

That child should not hear you talking badly about that parent to them or others. Rather than draw attention to what is wrong with the other parent's lifestyle, place the focus on the right things happening in that child's life today. The more considerately you speak about the other parent, the more the child will see your love for them as a child as being genuine and it will encourage their trust in you. Children will often gravitate toward the parent you verbally put down because they want to prove for themselves "my mom/dad can't be that bad." It will further in them the need for that parent to love them. Some will even attempt to become a solution to their parent's issue, thinking they can "love" that parent into being a better person.

No matter how bad the other parent may have acted, reducing what you say to your child promotes a healthy attitude and allows the child to learn correctly over time why things turned out the way they did. They will learn better about that parent through experience, which is far more valuable than your negative words.

DYSFUNCTIONAL PARENTS

In some severe cases, something has to be said when a child wonders why his or her parent is in such a mess. Eventually children will begin to know when something is drastically wrong with a parent whether they live in the home or not. So how much do you say when a child questions, "Mommy why is daddy in jail?" In such situations, it is fine to give them basics. For example, "Your daddy is going through a hard time right now and we can't talk about everything with you, but maybe we should pray for him right now." Older children may need more facts about their biological parent, but just make sure you give them the "need to know truths" and don't get over into bashing the other because of your own anger and hurt feelings. Try not to make it a "go-to" point in your daily conversations. Remember your child's approach, however unrealistic, to that parent will be different from yours and you cannot make it your mission to *make* them feel about that person the way you do. Stay biblical. Combined with your godly guidance, let the Holy Spirit form in your child the proper view of the parent who is perhaps dysfunctional.

KEY VERSE:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

SET THE EXAMPLE

Kids learn by example. Along with your words, training by example is probably the most effective way to teach kids. They will ultimately grow up with a similar approach to life as you do. Your children will probably learn less about keeping a clean house from you telling them to do so than by how you actually do it, and then allowing them to enjoy the fruit of your labor. Also if you constantly talk badly about people at church or the pastor, don't be surprised if your children one day don't want anything to do with church. Of course, remember that they are kids and don't be discouraged if today they don't seem to be on the right path in a few areas. If you are consistent about the way you live, your kids will eventually follow your lead one day into adulthood. Look at what Paul taught young Timothy about setting the right example. This also applies to you and your children.

1 Timothy 4:12, *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* There are six ways here you can set an example for your children.

1. *In Word.* Your kids hear how you talk. They know how you talk about God, about people and about your circumstances. They know if your words are angry, fearful, hurtful or comforting and kind. They learn to use the same language you do.
2. *In Conversation.* This means behavior and your habitual way of living daily life. How do you behave when something upsets you? How do you act when you don't get your way? Kids follow our manners, good or bad, and they pick up our habits in many ways.
3. *In Charity.* Your children know if your love is real by how you treat people. If you mistreat people and do things that are unkind, they may start to think that this is an acceptable way of dealing with people. They also know if your love for God is genuine too.
4. *In spirit.* This speaks of your spirituality. Do you read your Bible and pray regularly? Kids will follow your habit in this area too. If all they see you do is watch TV, they may do the same. In spirit also speaks of your personality overall and kids will follow that.
5. *In Purity.* If you allow worldly mindsets, attitudes and compromises into your life, your children may grow up believing that these things are fine. Often children will take the vices of their parents to another level of rebellion.

Now does this mean you have to be perfect before you can be a good parent? Thank goodness no! However, we can reverse many of the effects of setting a bad example by take a few simples steps.

- *Strive to do what is right everyday.* Then when you do make mistakes your kids will automatically see the limitations of your shortcomings in comparison to your ongoing strong points.
- *Say "I'm sorry."* Kids need to hear that you can humble yourself enough to admit failure to them or to others, even your spouse.
- *Practice kindness and manners.* A little kindness can go a long way and your children will appreciate it. Then when you do have a bad day or you must express disappointment they view it as valid or as an isolated event.

1. ***LOVE***. Children need love. Kindness, smiles, hugs, touches, and tickles make them feel loved. No one can be constantly yelled at and feel good about themselves. Love also includes acts of kindness and mannerly gestures of respect.

2. ***INSTRUCTION.*** This is the time you spend teaching your children. This may include fun activities such as cooking together, or playing basketball, but it is still "teaching" them. This is also where you teach them the Bible and about life in general. Sometimes you may sit down and literally instruct them.

3. ***DISCIPLINE.*** This is the setting of rules, boundaries and structure in life. It is where you set bedtime, eating habits, or homework habits. It is also where you enforce consequences for wrongdoing according the biblical standards.

4. ***VALUE.*** Everyone wants to feel important. Here you take the time for your kids to hang-out, do fun things, listen to their ideals, and even their opinion on things. Praise them for offering good ideas and make them feel like an important part of the family. You value them by giving them compliments and value also comes from provision.

BIBLICAL PARENTING (page 4)

FOUR THINGS EVERY CHILD NEEDS
Just like we all need a daily dose of the right vitamins and nutrition to keep our body healthy, our minds and souls need certain ingredients to be healthy too. Children need four main ingredients to become healthy individuals.

Now let's approach the differing, but important roles that each parent plays in the home. Of course, we also understand that there are single parent homes and it does not mean that the absence of one or the other will prevent a child from growing up normally and successfully. However, God did put the roles of both into a child's life for a reason. That is because men and women balance each other and they then present that balance to their children.

Kids learn a well-rounded approach to life be seeing how both parents react and live life. It prepares them for life, marriage, parenting and responsibility. Before we discuss the unique and necessary roles of each, let's first discuss some key ways single parents can make up the gaps that exist when one parental role is absent.

WHEN ONE PARENT IS ABSENT

Be Attentive. Be attentive to the gaps your child may feel from not having the other parent in their life. Sensitivity may help you avoid trouble spots, but don't draw too much attention to trouble areas or even the fact that one parent is not present, or your kids may feel inadequate rather than empowered to be strong. As they grow up they may even use it against you if your are too sensitive about it.

Provide Role Models. If your child doesn't have a father or mother at home, getting them around places with quality role models such as at church, may help him or her relate better to dads or moms overall. Involvement of other godly family members of the same gender as the absent parent may help too.

Don't Overprotect. Sometimes single parents (and previously single parents who eventually marry) become overprotective of their children by being too defensive of their behaviors, or by ignoring behaviors that need to be addressed. They fear that allowing their child to experience healthy discipline from either themselves or others, will worsen the feeling of lacking a parent, when in turn it will probably help them.

Get Help. Parenting is a challenge with two parents, and much harder with one. Don't be afraid to get help from friends, family, teaching resources, church leaders and professionals. While becoming excessively needy can be the reverse problem and will eventually turn people off to you, getting help in a right way is healthy and perfectly acceptable for any parent especially the single parent.

Pray. Of course all parents should pray for their kids, but as a single parent, you can pray over them, lay hands on them and ask the Holy Spirit to be the parent they are missing. We have to trust that the Lord can provide a revelation of that parent's role in their life in a wonderful and supernatural way.

KEY ROLES OF FATHERS
The proper role of fathers will provide: *stability and provision. They should be a picture of the Father God who sustains life and makes us secure in who we are. Fathers can make you strong! They bring out the tough side of you that can wage war on the devil. Fathers are there to push you beyond yourself and your feelings and make you strive for excellence.*

Never underestimate the importance of fathers. Notice how Malachi 4:6 which tell us that when fathers and children are turned away from each other, a curse can come in. In communities where there is a great amount of fatherly absence, you often see excessive problems with crime. You also find that when the fatherly role is compromised people often lack a proper identity. Fathers stabilize life and create order in a way mothers cannot. That is why they should take the lead in discipline for the family. A father's proper discipline carries more power than that of the mother. Usually where mothers are the disciplinary leader there is a breakdown in the father's role and often results in sin or rebellion. Mothers need to let dad take the lead, even when he may be learning how to be dad and do the leading.

Fathers can make mistakes by being too hard and forgetting to compliment their child's good qualities. Ephesians 6:4, says, (The Message Bible) *Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.* Truth is, going the way of the Master isn't always a cakewalk, but dads should push their children toward excellence, while still making sure they are encouraging them along the way.

KEY ROLES OF MOTHERS
The proper role of mothers will provide: *nurturing, sensitivity and a place where you can open your heart. Mothers can soften you and make you see and feel the brighter side of life. Mothers can heal hurts and wounds in a special way.*

Mothers are there to bring balance to the family. They provide by healing and nurturing. Mothers are a biblical example of the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter, Teacher and Helper (Jn 14:26, 16:13). Moms teach truth, but like the Holy Spirit often remind us of truth that comes from the Father (Jn 15:26). Moms can discipline, but her role in discipline will be secondary to the fathers in that she will usually not make her child strive beyond his hurt. She will often stop once he/she feels the "hurt". The "hurt" here is like exercise. Sometimes you have to get past the pain, before you see results! Moms will have a harder time with this than dad and will often cry with their kids, rather than make them grow. Notice Isaiah 28:9. It says, *Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.* In other words, mom cannot nurture her children to the point that she helps them avoid truth, which eventually promotes immaturity. God put mom in our life to help us deal with the necessary growing pains that come when dad helps us face life's challenges with power and strength.

Mom makes mistakes when she protects her kids from dad (in his proper, godly role) or even other role models who want to push her kids to excellence even when it requires some healthy pain. Mom has to be careful she doesn't undermine dad's role and authority. She can be at risk for feeding rebellion in her children, because she is too concerned for their feelings, rather than allowing them to walk out the type of warfare sometimes needed to cut off rebellion and sin at the roots (Prov. 19:18).

NOTES