

# Graceful Parenting

A close-up photograph of a smiling baby with light brown hair, wearing a light blue patterned shirt. The baby is being held by a man with dark hair and a beard, and a woman with long blonde hair. They are all smiling and looking at the baby. The background is blurred greenery.

A guide to help  
Grace Parents  
be Great Parents

## *A letter from the author...*

Graceful parenting is anything but easy. It takes more out of us than we think we have to give.

God has entrusted your kids to you for a reason and a purpose. We understand that parenting is a huge privilege but can also be a deeply painful task. "Take your lower lip and force it over your head..." Carol Burnett's vivid description of the pain of childbirth can extend to the excruciating realities of parenting!

This booklet is intended to serve as a guide for parents, summarizing some of the essentials of graceful parenting and the *art* of raising great and Godly kids. This booklet is not written from the perspective of perfect parents, but from a foundation of intensive Bible study, hundreds of hours of reading great books, and from our own failures in parenting. At the core of this is the belief that our heavenly father has provided a powerful perspective on how we ought to raise our kids. This does not guarantee that our children will turn out perfectly, but it does mean that we accept that only after our heavenly father, we are the most significant influence in their lives.

If Grace Church can be of assistance to you through this parenting adventure, or if you are interested in finding out more about parenting classes/resources at Grace, feel free to contact the Marriage & Family Ministry Team.

Blessings to you on this adventure of parenting!

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## STEWARD:

"Parenting is a privilege and an honor given to me by God."

"Our children are too precious and their time with us too short for us to neglect the unspeakable privilege we have in loving them, nurturing them, shaping them, and preparing them to step into the wide world."  
- David Jeremiah Hopeful Parenting (pg. 24)



*"A child is a precious gift from God. 3 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 5 Blessed is the*

*man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127:3-5 ESV)*

There is a big difference between seeing parenting as a responsibility and seeing parenting as a privilege. It honors God when we understand that he has given us something precious in our children. While it might not always feel like it, children are not a burden that holds us back; they are a blessing given to us to nurture and care for. They are a heritage (a gift, an inheritance). The first time you looked into the eyes of your baby, you knew this fact: that God had given you something precious, immensely valuable. He had entrusted you with a huge honor.

Then came the diapers, and the crying, and later the attitudes and the defiance. At times parenting feels more like a burden than a privilege.

God has asked us to be a steward of our children. Stewardship is the responsibility of managing another's resources for their greatest benefit. Have you ever considered that God has entrusted to you the children you are given the privilege of raising? God wants us to remember that our children are His children first and we have the privilege of caring for them (Ezekiel 18:4). In the parable of the talents, Jesus challenges His people to take the act of stewardship very seriously and that individuals will give an account for the way they handled God's resources (Matthew 25:14-30). Have you ever considered

your children as one of those resources that God expects you to nourish and grow? How might we “bury” our responsibility to encourage and invest into the lives of our children?

Stewardship of our children means that we are faithful, not perfect (1 Corinthians 4:2 ESV). God has entrusted our children to us and it is a precious gift. Being faithful to that responsibility means that we take this role seriously, that we understand our responsibility and that we grow in our ability to be better parents. Faithfulness means that we are deliberate about the ways we invest in our children, that we take this role extremely seriously (Deuteronomy 6). That being said, this is not about perfection; it is about being faithful to our responsibility and remembering that God has entrusted to us a wonderful privilege. Our children were given the very same free will to choose between right and wrong that every human being has been given. Often they will choose the wrong path. Perfection is really not an option, faithfulness is. Faithfulness means that we do not abdicate our role as parents, but that we take it very seriously.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What challenging aspects of parenting make it difficult for us to remember that our children are a blessing and not a curse?
- Why do you think God says that children are a blessing?
- What specifically would you miss about your children if they were not a part of your life anymore?
- What does parenting for “perfection” look like versus “faithful” parenting?

## TRAIN:

*"As tough as this is,  
it is my job to challenge you in grace and truth."*

Have you ever thought of yourself as a coach to your children? One of our God-given jobs as a parent is to be a personal trainer to our children. We are called to *"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6 ESV).



God offers us extremely helpful wisdom in this training process as his word offers us a playbook for successful parenting. *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV)

Successful training requires a healthy combination of giving our children both **grace** and **truth**. This combination is found John 1:17 where we are taught that Jesus brought to earth the perfect combination of grace and truth. As a parent, this combination will provide a basic equation that we want to constantly use with our children. Grace plus truth is the way that God chooses to invest into our lives giving us a powerful example of the type of parenting he expects from us.

God chooses to give mankind marvelous Grace. Grace can be simply defined as giving someone an unearned gift, a favor or blessings bestowed as a gift, freely and never as merit for work performed with no strings attached.

This is the essence of the good news of the Gospel (Romans 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9-10). Grace is that which God does for mankind through His Son, which mankind cannot earn, does not deserve, and will never merit. When we understand how much God has forgiven us, it gives us a pattern that we are commanded to give others. We are to be individuals

that give grace not retribution. A natural tendency of a parent is to "repay evil for evil" but actually we are encouraged to do something far more powerful, even revolutionary in our parenting. According to Romans 12:17 we are to repay evil with good in our attempt to leave at peace with one another. Jesus used a powerful story to illustrate this fact in Matthew 18:21-35. In this story we see that God expects us to be gracious in all of our encounters through the grace we ourselves have received.

The second half of the equation is that we need to be Truth givers; we need to not simply overlook our children's sins and failures. We need to be willing to engage with them in a truthful way.

Eli was a priest who had sons who were also priests but in 1 Samuel chapters 2-3 we find out that Eli knew of his sons' blatant willful disobedience yet he chose not to confront them. When he did confront them in his old age, they simply ignored him. The end result was significant judgment; *"For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them"* (1 Samuel 3:13 NIV). It is common for us as parents to fall into the trap that Bill Cosby jokes about. "Parents are not interested in justice — they want QUIET!" It often feels like it is easier to give in, or overlook the things that concern us about our children so that we can have peace and quiet. But God condemned Eli for failing to do his job. The peace and quiet was short-lived and ultimately it destroyed Eli's sons. Grace without truth has tragic consequences. Grace with truth can ultimately help our children be prepared for the difficult paths of life that are ahead for them.

No one is saying that this is easy. Giving grace requires fantastic patience and forgiveness. Giving truth requires significant wisdom, tact and thoughtfulness. We are probably naturally better at one aspect of this or the other but to combine the two requires a skill that will significantly help our ability to raise up our children.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What difficult aspects of parenting make it hard for us to remember that our children are a blessing and not a curse?
- Why do you think God says that children are a blessing?
- What might be dangerous about simply giving your kid's grace and not truth?
- What might be dangerous about simply giving your children truth without grace?

## FOUDATIONS:

Build your family on God's Word and principles.

As a parent, we get the privilege of choosing what we are going to make as the foundation of our household. This is simply described by Jesus as he illustrated this truth in Luke 6:47:

*"Let everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)*



According to this passage, we have a choice as to what type of foundation we will choose for our lives and our families. The responsibility of deciding what your household is going to be built upon falls squarely on the parents. In this process, it is extremely significant for us to determine who we are going to "serve". Are we going to serve ourselves? Are we going to serve our children's desires? Are we going to serve the Lord?

The time to decide is now! As Joshua 24:14 declares "...choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Is this the case in your home?

Unfortunately, the prevailing temptation and modern trend is to run our families according to what appears to make our kids happy. The ad

agency Digitas reported in a recent study that "American kids have \$1.2 trillion in buying power a year. Parents are running their families democratically. They are treating their kids more like adults than ever before, and allowing them to become 'a' if not 'the' primary decision makers." This cultural shift can have significant consequences. Loving our children does not necessitate that we give them what they want. God certainly loves us, but he does not always choose to give us our every desire. Our children desperately need us to help them make great decisions. If we do not, there are plenty of companies that would love to help make those decisions for them. (1.2 Trillion dollars is very motivating.) We are also often tempted to make decisions as a family based upon the ways other parents provide for their kids or how other families make decisions. Our children are quick to remind us that, "Every other kid in my class, gets to wear \_\_\_\_\_, or has seen \_\_\_\_\_, or owns a \_\_\_\_\_." That argument is as common as it is flawed. Just because others have chosen those things for their kids does not necessitate that they are what is best. In Romans 12:2 we are encouraged not "conform to the pattern of this world."

Spiritually, we have a profound influence in the lives of our kids.

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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."*

We can significantly help our kids understand the God that created them. "No one has been designed as perfectly as you to be the primary faith influencer in the life of your child." - Brian Haynes

One very practical way to apply this truth is to consider the way we spend our time. If you took an honest time "audit" of your family, what would it reveal about your family's priorities/values? How do you decide how many activities your kids are involved in? What happens when a kid's activities conflict with your family priorities such as church, ministry or family time? As parents we need to be the ones that set boundaries and keep our family priorities in order. If we do not, who else will do this for us?

In his helpful book, *The Legacy Path*, Brian Haynes gives practical ways

that help us build our families on the right foundation.

**1. Simplify:** "Simplicity is freedom, complexity clutters. " In our increasingly complex world, we must decide what adding more to our lives steals from our lives. Should someone stay home versus work? Should we lower our standard of living, instead of having to earn more money to support our lifestyle or buy a bigger home? Do we own our stuff or does our stuff own us?

**2. Set Boundaries:** It is helpful to remember that we cannot reclaim a second of our lives. We are constantly choosing how we spend our time. If you took an honest time "audit" of your family, what would it reveal about your families priorities/values? Some helpful ways to spend time well:

- a. Have one extracurricular activity per child.
- b. Prioritize family time together.
- c. Maintain family dinner time.

For married parents, a key to establishing your family is maintaining the priority of your marriage. One of the greatest influences parents can have on their children is as a husband and wife, rather than as a mother and father. Children derive much of their security from seeing the husband-wife relationship functioning smoothly. Therefore, it is important for parents to demonstrate the priority of the husband/wife relationship. Maintaining other relationships, date nights, special husband/wife activities, and hospitality all reinforce the fact that your children are not the epicenter of your family. Children are to be welcome members of the family, not the center of it. Children who grow up in child-centered families grow up self-centered and ill-prepared for real life. Children have an intrinsic need to know their parents are solid in their relationship. Insecurities in this area affect every other learning discipline.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- Joshua was committed to helping his family serve the Lord. If you are brutally honest, what is your family committed to serving?
- In what ways can a family unintentionally build their house on the wrong foundation?
- If “simplicity is freedom and complexity clutters”, how do the decisions you make for your family add or take away from chaos in your lives?
- What are your family priorities? What must you sacrifice in order to maintain those priorities?

## LOVE:

"I am committed to you as an individual and will be your parent no matter what.



"My children will misbehave, they will sin, they will make bad choices. This is a fact. We all know this about our children, yet why are we so surprised when they do? It is easy for me to simply withhold love when they fail, because I don't find their behavior acceptable. I may not verbally say I am withholding love, but my actions can say it powerfully.... our children need an environment of love and respect in order to be free to both receive and give God's grace. Innate in this environment is the value that children are respected because they embody the very image of God. We must speak to them and not at them and we must commit to an environment where love and acceptance are never withheld because of ones behavior." - Michelle Anthony, *Spiritual Parenting*

Parenting often requires from us more than we think we have to give. When we are tired and exhausted in our parenting, often our children seem to have the uncanny gift to know how to hurt us the most. Perhaps it is because they know us well, or perhaps it is because they are so much like us. It is crucial for us to endure through that pain and to learn how to choose to love our children regardless of how we feel about them. We also need to become experts at communicating love based upon their unique individual needs.

Do your children know that there is nothing that they can do to keep you from loving them or for them to stop being your kid?

In Luke 15:11-24 Jesus tells a story about a father that loves lavishly even when his son is painfully rebellious. In the illustration given by Jesus, we see God's patience in the process of loving his children. This

type of love goes far beyond feelings; it accepts that love is a choice, not an emotion.

It is crucial that we not only understand unconditional love but that we learn how to communicate it to our children in ways that they will hear and understand. It is powerful to observe the Words of God, the father encouraging His son Jesus, before his public ministry had begun. "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!*" (Matthew 3:17) and at the end of Jesus' public ministry, God repeated those same words (Matthew 17:5). It is amazing how important having a parent's approval can be for a child. They need to know that we love them completely, even when we do not like them very much. God's love for us is unconditional. "*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8)

Gary Chapman, in his book "*The Five Love Languages*", identifies ways individuals give and receive love. There are two sides to love – giving and receiving. Giving is the action side; receiving is the feeling side. Both are in the design of God. For love to begin in such a way that it is sensed and received by the other person, each person must understand what causes the other to feel love. In effect, each person must learn to speak to the other in their primary or native love languages.

## 1. WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Mark Twain once said "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Verbal appreciation speaks powerfully to kids whose primary love language is words of affirmation. Simple statements such as "You look great today!", or "You must be the best student in the world!", "I love your artwork!" or "You pay such good attention to detail!" are sometimes all a kid needs to hear to feel loved. Aside from verbal compliments, another way to communicate through words of affirmation is to offer verbal encouragement. This can be done by reinforcing a difficult decision; calling attention to progress made on a current project; acknowledging a child's unique perspective on an important family topic. If a child listens to their parent for words of affirmation, offering encouragement will help him or her to overcome insecurities and develop greater confidence (Proverbs 12:18; 16:24; 18:21; Ephesians 4:29).

## 2. QUALITY TIME

Quality time is very important in a healthy relationship. It involves sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings and desires in a friendly,

uninterrupted context. A good parent will not only listen, but offer advice and respond to assure they are truly listening. Often your kid does not expect you to solve their problems. They need a sympathetic listener not always a problem solver. Quality activities are a very important part of quality time. Many people feel most valued when they spend physical time together, doing activities that they enjoy doing. Spending time together will potentially bring people closer and will fill up a memory bank that you can reminisce about in the future. Whether it's sitting on the couch and having a brief conversation or working together raking the leaves, quality time is a love language that is shared by many children starving for attention. Setting aside focused time will bless them immensely (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37, 9:2, 13:3, 14:33; Luke 9:28). Quality time is more than mere proximity. It's about focusing all your energy on the recipient. Checking your email on your phone while talking to your son or daughter about their day is NOT quality time. Unless all of your attention is focused on them, even a designated "date" can come and go without a minute of quality time being shared.

### 3. GIFT GIVING

Some children respond well to visual symbols of respect and caring. If you speak this love language, you're more likely to treasure any gift as an expression of trust and acknowledgement. Children who speak this love language often feel that a lack of gifts represents a lack of love. Fortunately, this love language is one of the easiest to learn.

If you want to become an effective gift giver, you might have to get creative as it is not always about how much you spend, but how thoughtful you are. The giver must understand that you are investing the money not in gifts, but in deepening your relationship. These gifts need not come every day, or even every week. They don't even need to cost a lot of money. Free, frequent, expensive, or rare, if the child relates to the language of receiving gifts, any visible sign of your love will leave them feeling encouraged and secure in your relationship (Ephesians 5:25).

### 4. ACTS OF SERVICE

Sometimes, simple acts of service can be an undeniable expression of support. Even simple things helping them clean their room, assisting with homework, reading a book to them etc. especially those things that require some form of planning, time, effort, and energy are well

received. Even small partnerships can be a very powerful expression to your children of community and respect. It is important to do these acts of service out of consideration, not obligation; to perform these acts out of the kindness of your heart. Someone who serves their children always out of guilt or fear will inevitably not be speaking a language of regard, but a language of resentment. Demonstrating acts of service can mean stepping out of the stereotypes. They may require a person to humble him/herself into doing some chores or services not usually expected of them. However, these little sacrifices might help ensure a happy parent/kid relationship (1 John 3:18).

## 5. PHYSICAL TOUCH

Many people feel the most esteemed when they receive physical contact from another. For a person who speaks this love language, physical touch can express to their child the heartfelt expression of their value of the parent/child relationship. A hug, a high five, a tickle, or a pat on the back can make a kid feel secure and cared for. Learn how your kid speaks the physical touch language: some touches are irritating and uncomfortable. *Take the time to learn the touches the other receives.* This can be a snuggle during a movie, or little acts such as a touch of a hand on the shoulder. Learn how your child responds to appropriate touch. At the right time a hug or 'high five' can communicate an immense amount of support and stability. A person whose primary love language is physical touch would much rather have you offer a 'high five' or a pat on the arm and be silent than to offer any advice. This love language is different for everyone. The type of touch that makes you feel secure isn't necessarily what will make another happy. It's important to learn your individual kid's dialects to enhance the effectiveness of your communication (Mark 10:13-16).

Identifying your kid's love languages can be as simple as asking them what helps them most feel loved by you and listening carefully to their answers. There is also a free online assessment that can be found at [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com).

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- Why is unconditional love so important to our children?
- Do your children know that you love them? How have you shown them today?
- What are your children's unique love languages?
- Do you see a difference in children that are secure in their parents' love and children that do not have that security?

## MODEL:

“I understand my actions speak louder than my words.”



“To be a parent is to literally shape and influence another human life. This is hallowed ground indeed and a sacred call to consider carefully the mold we form in our own life.” - Gary Thomas, *Sacred Parenting*, page 168.

The Lord absolutely knows how easy it is for us to speak, but far more difficult for us to live out our faith. Jesus says in Matthew 15:8, “*These people honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me.*” Regardless if we are intentional or not, we are having a profound influence upon the lives of our children. More often than not, they will struggle with the same sins we struggle with. We are defining what their understanding of “normal” is even if it is painfully dysfunctional. As a parent, we ought to be able to say to our children to live their lives, like we have chosen to live our lives...The apostle Paul puts this powerfully in Philippians 3:17-20,

*“17Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven.”*

Parental modeling is extremely important, especially when it comes to

moral training. As parents we cannot demand moral performance on a greater level than what you live up to yourself. If we attempt to press values upon our children that we are not living out we will inevitably exasperate them."

"One of the great tragedies of life is that men seldom bridge the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying. A persistent schizophrenia leaves so many of us tragically divided against ourselves. On the one hand, we proudly profess certain sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand, we sadly practice the very antithesis of these principles. How often are our lives characterized by a high blood pressure of creeds and an anaemia of deeds! We talk eloquently about our commitment to the principles of Christianity, and yet our lives are saturated with the practices of paganism.... This strange dichotomy, this agonizing gulf between 'the ought' and 'the is' represents the tragic theme of man's earthly pilgrimage."

Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*

Our children know us as well as anyone in the world and very little of what they know about us comes from our words. In the words of Dr. King, they ignore the "ought" and notice profoundly the "is." Consider carefully how you can remedy this in your home to allow your children to see the values you desire to impart to them instead of simply hearing them.

In order to have a profound positive influence in our kids' lives we must choose to live lives of integrity, where there is consistency between what we say we believe and how we live. *"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'"* (Matthew 5:37a). We must accept that our kids are always watching us closely. The individuals that Jesus appeared to be most frustrated with in his ministry were the religious leaders of the day that wanted to appear better on the outside than they were on the inside.

*"27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."*

One of the things we must be extremely careful about as parents is an over-emphasis on external appearance in our families. There has always been a temptation to make ourselves look better than we truly are (Acts

4:36-5:11). It is easy to extend this temptation to our children. When we pursue “keeping up appearances” we can infect our children with an unhealthy mind-set and encourage projecting an “image” over disciplined “authenticity”. This can lead our children to put on “masks” that hide what is truly going on in their hearts. We must remember that we can never truly know from the outside what is happening in the hearts of our children. When we over-emphasize appearances we put expectations on our children that God does not put on them. As parents, we must learn from the warning of Christ. We must accept that our integrity is a primary way to positively influence our kids.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What is one area of your life that you have seen your kids learn from your lifestyle more than your words?
- What role might vulnerability play in helping our children not to repeat the same mistakes we have made in our own lives?
- Why do our kids care more about actions than words?
- How can you avoid parenting for performance?

## PREPARE:

*"I am getting you ready for the difficult paths ahead."*



As a parent, it is one of our great privileges to help unleash our children into the world. They are a blessing to us while they are with us, but ultimately they will be launched into the world. As the Psalmist declares,

*"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's*

*youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"*

We must be intentional about the ways we prepare them for the difficult paths ahead.

It is our duty to warn our children about the challenges ahead. We are encouraged by God to prepare them for the painful realities of life, not coddle them through life's challenges. While this might seem a bit harsh, it is important for us to remember that God does not choose to protect us from all of the struggles of life. Instead he uses them to develop something within us that is often healthy. If we have understood that our purpose in parenting is not that they are simply successful today, but instead that they should be prepared to launch out of the "nest". This does not happen over night but through a parent's commitment to stretch them out of their comfort zones...even times of pain and suffering.

*"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering PRODUCES, endurance, and endurance PRODUCES*

*character, and character PRODUCES hope."*

The painful reality is that by over-protecting our children from the struggles of life, we're training them to be dependent upon us. It is important to ask yourself, are you encouraging your child to have the strength to overcome life's difficult paths or are you preparing the path for your child?

By our actions, we could actually inhibit their ability to launch. From the excellent book *Do Hard Things* we see a powerful illustration of the danger of holding back our kids. The trained elephant of India is a perfect picture of the power of psychological captivity. Tamed and utilized for its enormous strength, the great beast stands nearly 10 feet tall and weighs up to 5 tons when fully grown. Its tasks may include uprooting full-grown trees, hauling great boulders, and carrying enormous loads on its shoulders. And yet, when the day's work is done and this powerful beast must be kept from wandering off during the night, its owner simply takes a piece of twine, attaches it to a small branch embedded in the ground, and ties it around the elephant's right hind leg. Reason dictates that the elephant can easily snap the twine or pull the twig from ground, and yet the owner does not worry, fully confident that when morning comes he will find the animal exactly where he left him. And it stays, not because of extra strong twine but the fact that as a young elephant the rope was strong enough to hold it, and as it grew the elephant believed that it still was not strong enough to pull itself free. While it did not have chains upon its leg, it had invisible chains around its mind.

God desires for our children to live abundantly (John 10:10) with a powerful combination of power, love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

As a parent, it is one of our great privileges to help warn our children about the challenges ahead. We are encouraged by God to prepare them for the painful realities of life, not coddle them through life's challenges.

*"He said to them, 'Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.'"*

Over-protective parenting breeds dependence, narcissism, entitlement and laziness. In her helpful book *Cleaning House*, Kay Wills Wyma writes... "Raising independent kids is counter-cultural these days. Instead of teaching our children to view themselves as capable, we step in to do everything for them. We start when they're still young, using safety as our lame excuse ("She'll fall if I don't hover"). Then we continue "protecting" them ("If I don't help him get As, how will he get into college?"). We pave a smooth pathway, compulsively clearing away each pebble of disappointment or difficulty before it can impede their progress. By the time they reach adolescence, they're so used to being taken care of that they have no idea they're missing out on discovering what they can do or who they can be...With the greatest of intentions and in the name of love, we have developed a tendency to hover, race in to save, protect from failure, arrange for success, manipulate, overprotect, and enable our kids. Freeing their schedules for sports, school, and increasingly important time with friends, we strive to make our children's lives easier or to make success a sure thing by doing it all for them. ***We shower them with accolades, proclaiming how wonderful they are—yet we rarely give them the opportunity to confirm the substance of that praise.*** All our efforts send the clear, though unspoken and unintended message, 'I'll do it for you because you can't' or 'No sense in your trying because I can do it better and faster.'

#### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What would it look like in your life to change the message you give your child from "I love you, so let me make life easy for you" to: "I love you. I believe in you. I know what you're capable of. So I'm going to make you work"?
- Are you preparing your child for the paths they will face or are you preparing those paths for your children?
- How can appropriate chores/responsibilities around your home equip your child for life's challenges?

## DISCIPLINE:

"Loving you means that I will confront you and give you boundaries."

"Children do not test boundaries hoping to discover the weak spot and be set free. They want to make sure the fortress walls are solid so they can relax and enjoy being a kid. Intuitively, children know that the safest place to be in is in the protection of someone bigger and stronger. They wonder if we can really protect them." - Lisa Welchel, *Creative Correction*

You may have heard the old cliché "spare the rod and spoil the child." The Bible describes the responsibility of a parent in more precise terms: "*Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him*" (Proverbs 13:24). It is hard to imagine a parent hating their own child but this passage teaches that we despise our children when we choose to ignore their failures.



To be clear, we are not stating that you should beat or intentionally harm your child. In fact Biblical discipline is very different from that. It ALWAYS is intended to build a child up and it is never retaliatory, in anger or out of retribution. Discipline ought to be about gentle restoration (Galatians 6:1). That being said, as a parent we must discipline our children or there will be disastrous results. Diligent discipline is a commitment to actively encourage and invest in the lives of our children.

While it certainly feels painful (for us and for them), good discipline that is predictable, reliable, and consistent protects our children. We ought to discipline out of love, as the Lord disciplines those whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6). In this process it is important that both parents work hard to be on the same page in the ways they choose to discipline. If not, your children will work to find the weaknesses between you and exploit them. This is a helpful process for successful discipline (*found in Spiritual Parenting*).

**STEP #1 - PAIN:** This is not referring to physical pain, but to something that is unique to the child, that makes them uncomfortable and helps them understand that what they have done is wrong. Often not

shielding a child from natural consequences is an effective means of pain as it is being used here.

STEP #2 - BUILD UP IN LOVE: Pain is intended to bring them to a type of submission (or allowing them to listen to you). It is necessary but you can not stay in this state. You need to strengthen what you broke down. Immediately after we bring pain, we need to bring restoration to that child (in love, reassurance and encouragement.) The person who brings pain needs to also bring the reconciliation.

STEP #3 - HELP THEM BE SUCCESSFUL: Talk them through what change you expect and help them to acknowledge that they will need God's help to do this. Help them find out how they can navigate differently should the experience arise again.

Our children desperately need boundaries from us whether they think they do or not. Children are similar to a security guard that tests doors to see if they are locked. The testing is a part of the quest for security. Excellent discipline is based upon a parent's ability to communicate their expectations clearly. *"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6).

"Clear expectations are essential for children to understand what they should do." We must not assume that they inherently know how to behave appropriately (Burke and Herron). This might be the most helpful parenting principal in this entire little booklet.

Christians ought to discipline in grace. Few people will acknowledge feeling just as loved in their sin as they do in their success. But this is a biblical concept of those who are in Christ. *"There is nothing that can separate us from God's love..."* Romans 8:38-39. Our standing with God is not shaken when we need correction; rather, our hearts needs healing. What better time to receive love than when you are wounded?

The purpose of discipline is not merely to have my child incur such a negative experience that he or she doesn't want to do it again.

Ultimately the purpose of discipline is to create an environment where the root problem is exposed and healed so that it no longer causes negative behavior. This is true spiritual formation, or discipleship. As parents it is our privilege to disciple our children. So often we settle for behavior modification. As Michelle Anthony says, "It is tempting in busy schedules to settle for a discipline model that demands, 'Just stop that

ugly behavior NOW!' However, spiritual parenting digs deeper to the heart to give the child a glimpse of his soul and his motivation toward sin."

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- Why is discipline such a challenging task?
- Why is discipline so important?
- What ways can you improve your methods of discipline?

## INSPIRE:

“I will encourage you to go against the flow of our culture.”



One of our great privileges as parents is to encourage, or fill our kids with enough courage to go against the flow of our culture. Biblically, we are reminded, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Romans 12:2). In other words, there is a “pattern of this world” and we do not want our kids to be pressured into it. When we hear them say things like “Why can’t I? Everybody else is...” we need to recognize that their argument might be very flawed and even dangerous for them.

As a parent, there are several practical ways we can combat this trend. First, be weird and be prepared for their questions (Exodus 26; 13:14). It is common in scripture to see the phrase “when your children ask...” This is referring to a parent doing something that might be considered unusual and the questions a child might ask in reference to those questions. In other words, when a kid observes a parent worshiping God they might say, “Dad, why do you act so peculiar?” and that father is to be prepared to give a great answer. We need to do this with our kids. Be a bit weird and then when they ask, have great answers to their questions. A second strategic way is to stand your ground now, so that you can stand your ground later. When it comes to rules, it is often helpful for us to be very clear and not make them a negotiation but for them to be clearly communicate. A third strategy is to teach them the art of discernment versus simply protecting them. A parent should impress and encourage the ability to choose by one’s self what is right or wrong. In a society that has such a loose moral compass, this can be particularly necessary. In other words we emphasize that fact that “just because you can, does not mean that you should.” Alcohol drinking age, gambling, night clubs...etc. provide examples of things our society says are acceptable at particular ages but rarely does it communicate the

pitfalls and dangers of participating in these activities. It can be very valuable for us to embrace the uniqueness of our children and accept that God made them unique and for a purpose (Psalm 139:13-16; 1 Corinthians 12:14-26). We can do this well by listening to them, watching them, and encouraging them.

A great parenting principal is that you reproduce what you honor in your household. If you celebrate academic achievements, but ignore athletic achievements, it would be common that your kids start to trend towards academic achievement in order to seek your approval. This can be very negative for a child (Ephesians 6:4) especially if you expect them to love what you love. Or by negatively comparing them with other kids. "Why can't you do your homework like your brother?" Answer: Because he's not his brother. This can also be very positive for a child (Joshua 4:5, 21). We can give great blessings to our children (Genesis 49:22-28). A way to do this is to identify key steps of maturity in their lives; to observe and point out their strengths. We need to also cautiously warn them of their potential weaknesses (which is often their greatest strength.)

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- In what ways are our children pressed into the "pattern of this world"?
- What does helping your children go against the flow of our culture look like in your family?
- How are your children uniquely gifted?
- What are you doing to help encourage their gifting?
- What do you "honor" in your household?

## PRIORITIZE:

**"I will put nothing before my God,  
even my children."**



Deuteronomy 6 contains perhaps the most significant teaching in all of scripture about parenting. It reminds a parent that they must keep their priorities straight even when it comes to such an important task as parenting. Our first job as parents is to LOVE GOD COMPLETELY.

Deuteronomy 6:4

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7You 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. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. 10And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— 15 for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth."*

As a parent, loving God is our most significant priority. The problem is that our hearts are naturally drawn to idols that lure us away from loving God. "The human heart is an idol factory. Every one of us from our mothers womb is an expert in inventing idols." - John Calvin. As parents we are deeply tempted to embrace false idols. "Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer's arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions..." - Os Guiness & John Seel

Perhaps this is the first time you have considered idolatry in your own life as a parent. We naturally have a false understanding of the type of idolatry God detests. "An idol is not simply a statue of wood, stone, or metal; it is anything we love and pursue in place of God, and can also be referred to as a 'false god' or a 'functional god.' In biblical terms, an idol is something other than God that we set our hearts on that motivates us, that masters or rules us, or that we serve." [Ken Sande] Often these are good things created by God for our enjoyment. "It [idolatry] may well come in the form of an over-attachment to something that is, in itself, perfectly good...An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero - anything that can substitute for God." [Richard Keyes] There are many great things that we can turn into an idol "Some of the good things that we elevate to God things are...sex, food, comfort, approval, success, or control. When created things subvert our worship of the Creator we have a big problem... False gods never fail to fail." [Chris Wright]

This leads us to the natural idols of a parent's heart. It is crucial that we remember that God is not in the conformity business; He is in the *heart* business ( Jeremiah 17:9-10). "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ." [Blaise Pascal] It is powerful for the parent to remember "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." [Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*]. As a parent ,we can make many things idols: our appearance, our kid's success, even our kids themselves can become false idols. The good news is that it is possible through the Gospel to cast down these idols. This is the hope of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What are some of the idols of the people that are around us?
- What idols are especially tempting to parents?
- What are the most tempting idols in your life as a parent?

## PARTNER:

**“I am a huge influence in your life, but not the only influence.”**



*“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”*

As attractive as it might be, parenting cannot be “outsourced”; it is our God given duty. *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). I want my kids to learn about spiritual truth and other important truths (like their sexuality, financial wisdom etc.) from US, before they learn them from anyone else. This is significant because we believe we can offer them the best truth in a way that is most suited for them to receive it. This means being strategic about what we say and when we say it. We also realize that in our sexualized culture and tech filled culture, we want to do our best to explain truth to them versus them discovering things out on their own.

It is clear in scripture that parents have a significant impact on their children but other Godly individuals can also have a very positive impact upon our kids lives (Samuel and Eli, Paul and Timothy, etc). We believe that other individuals that are communicating the same values upon our kids are invaluable for the growth of our children. We believe some of the wonderful ministries at Grace Church, like the youth groups, kids’ church, Christian camps, etc., are valuable tools for investing in our kids. We can take great joy in their development through these types of opportunities. While we understand that we are an extremely important voice in the lives of our kids, we realize that we are not the “only” voice in the lives of our kids.

It might seem obvious to you as a parent but it is also crucial that we entrust our children to the Lord through prayer. We believe in the power of prayer and we believe God knows the future events of our kids’ lives. He knows who they will marry, he knows their life story and their true hopes and dreams. It is our privilege to entrust this reality of our children to the God that made them. The following list can be a powerful guide for you as you entrust your kids to the Lord.

1. SALVATION: *Lord, let salvation spring up within my children, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.* (Isaiah 45:8; II Timothy 2:10)
2. GROWTH IN GRACE: I pray that they may *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (2 Peter 3:18)
3. LOVE: Grant, Lord, that my children may learn to live a life of love through the Spirit who dwells in them. (Ephesians 5:2, Galatians 5:22)
4. HONESTY AND INTEGRITY: May integrity and honesty be their virtue and their protection. (Psalm 25:21)
5. SELF-CONTROL: Father, help my children not to be like many others around them, but let them be *"alert and self-controlled"* in all they do. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)
6. A LOVE FOR GOD'S WORD: Father, help my children grow to find Your Word *"more precious than gold, than much pure gold; and sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."* (Psalm 19:10)
7. JUSTICE: God, help my children to love justice as You do and to *"act justly"* in all they do. (Psalm 11:7, Micah 6:8)
8. MERCY: May my children always *"be merciful, as their Father is merciful."* (Luke 6:36)
9. RESPECT(for self, others, authority): Father, grant that my children may *"show proper respect to everyone,"* as Your Word commands. (1 Peter 2:17)













