

Part 3: Parenting

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In Mark 12:30 Jesus says this the most important command is "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

In other words Jesus himself summarizes what it means to follow God like this: Glorify God and love others. We are nearing the end of our series called Gospel-Focused Relationships and Families, and if you have missed any of the previous two, I encourage you to go back and watch them. Because this series is meant to build off of itself. How we view singleness, dating, marriage, and parenting is dependent upon how we understand our current station in life through the lens of glorifying god and loving others.

However, if you've been with us in this series you know we need help in order to do both of those. Left on our own we do not know what it means to glorify and worship God, and on our own our love lacks definition and is often self-centered.

The point of this series is that it is only when we see how Jesus glorified God and loved others on the cross that we ourselves can understand what that means for us. In other words it is only in understanding how the gospel saved us that we can in turn glorify God and love others with all our life.

In thinking of ourselves as individuals, the Bible calls us to consider how Jesus as God's ideal man related to God the Father. In marriage the Bible calls us to consider how Jesus as God's ideal groom relates to the church. And today as we talk about parenting the Bible calls us to consider how God as our ultimate father relates to his people as a parent.

Now I understand that not everyone in here is a parent, but because the center of parenting is the way in which God makes us his children this message will hopefully be helpful to those without children in three ways: 1. It will prepare you for the possibility of having your own children, 2. It will equip you to serve the children in our church with the mindset and care of a parent, and 3. Because the center of parenting is the gospel, it will hopefully cause you to worship the God who saved you and has promised to grow and develop you into maturity.

This is important because married, single, parent or not, you probably already have thoughts and experiences which shape our idea of parenting and kids. For Sarah and I, when we got married we said we didn't want to have kids for five years. So needless to say when we were staring at a positive pregnancy test three months into marriage, there was a certain weight of fear which permeated our home. Children can be fearful because they bring an unknown disruption into our home, and shift our center of gravity to a new place.

Consider another experience from scripture. In the book of Genesis we read about a woman named Leah. Leah knew that her husband was in love with another woman so she attached great weight to her ability to bear children. After she bore a firstborn son she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my

affliction, for now my husband will love me." When that didn't work, the Lord opened her womb again and after her second child she said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he gave me this son also." Again in the face of disappointment she gave birth and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me because I have borne him three sons." And it wasn't until after she bore her fourth son, the son through whom Jesus Christ would ultimately come did she say, "This time I will praise the Lord." We can often view children as a means to provide for ourselves meaning, status and identity.

Also consider the experience of Adam and Eve after the garden. There was no mommy-blog for Eve to consider, no human father figure for Adam to look at. So you can imagine the feeling of helplessness the two experienced as their older son turned in violence and killed their younger one. "Where do we go from here? What hope is there for us?"

While circumstances may vary, there will be a time in your life where you consider parenting and soberly ask yourself, "How are we prepared for this?"

One journalist said of this dilemma: **"The truth is, there's little even the most organized people can do to prepare themselves for having children. They can buy all the books, observe friends and relations, review their own memories of childhood. But the distance between those proxy experiences and the real thing, ultimately, can be measured in light-years."** The author continues by pointing out that one of the difficulties of modern parenting is that we don't know what it is we are parenting our children for.

Not only do we lack the clarifying experience needed, but we don't know what the goal is. Many of the basic need for which our society once needed children (a familial legacy, workforce labor, a sustainable population for society) are now obsolete. Yet this question of what are we parenting for is the single most important question we can ask. If we do not know the ultimate end towards which we parent, then we will bounce between crippling fear or vicarious visions of success.

What we want to look at today is the greater experience and the clear end the gospel and the gospel alone provides our parenting. What we are going to do today is answer three questions on parenting: What is the point of parenting? How does the gospel define my parenting? And, what is my hope in parenting? In so doing we are going to better understand what it means to see the way in which God parented us as the center of our parenting of others.

The first question we will consider today is: **What is the point of parenting?**

If you've been in a large airport lately you've noticed that the vending machine world has stepped up its game. You can find hipster cheese plates in vending machines, Beats headphones, Ipads, cell phones and in Dubai they even have vending machines loaded with gold bullion. But there is one thing I haven't seen: a vending machine full of children.

When God created Adam, he made him, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Then when God made Eve he made her from Adam. But after Adam and Eve were made God ceased his inorganic means of creation. God designed therefore children to not be made out of nothing, but to be made in the confines of a mother and a father.

God wanted children to have parents. It was part of God's good plan for his glory and for our good. When God created Adam and Eve he commanded them, "Be fruitful and multiply!" In other words the

infrastructure of father, mother, and child was originally part of God's good and perfect design. It could only produce good. The point of parenting was to glorify God and expand the experience of his kingdom.

But then sin came. And our experience changed. The first parents failed to keep the peace in their own home and blood was shed. Noah's family encountered shame and brokenness due to his drunkenness. Lot failed to protect his wife and daughters. Abraham refused to care for his child born out of wedlock. Rebekah favored one child over the other and in so doing caused much sin in the home. David's sin brought pain and division into his family. Solomon failed to parent even according to his own proverbs. Eli's sons were wicked. And James and John's mother sought recognition through her boys.

And then there's you. You have may have been hurt by your parents. You know the brokenness inside your own parenting. We know the burden of the influence of our parents. If only we could find that vending machine.

Why parents? Because God gave us the experience of parenting because parenting itself is tied to God. Listen to how Jesus prays in John 17 and pay attention to the aspect of time in his words: **John 17:24-26**. Did you hear the perspective Jesus gave? Before the foundations of the world, God the Father loved Jesus the Son.

Just as we looked at last week with marriage, the same is true this week with fatherhood. Before Adam and Eve ever bore a son. There was already a Father. God was Father. The relationship which God the Father shared with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit pre-existed our experience.

God gave us parents because as part of being made in the image of God, God wanted our experience in life to help us understand what our experience with God should be like. The problem was that sin severed us from this relationship.

In the book of Hosea, God dynamically shows this separation. He calls Hosea to marry a prostitute who would be unfaithful to him, and when Hosea and his unfaithful wife have children listen to the way in which sin disrupts the relationship of God's people. When they have their first child, God tells them to name her, "No Mercy" then **Hosea 1:8-10**.

Our sin has separated us from our Father. Just like the prodigal son, our sin severs all of our familial relationships and says, "I don't need you, I can make it on my own." We have forsaken our birthright and have no way to come back. But God says there is a way in which he will say to those who are "Not my people" "Children of the living God."

Maybe that is your experience with God. In a perfect world you desire a relationship with God which brings joy yet you feel the relational tension that there is something in between your efforts and God's affection that you can't break through.

How is this overcome? This is why Daniel read from 1 John earlier. Look with me at **1 John 2:28-3:1a**. Do you see the difference in perspective between Hosea and John? One day you will be children of the living God. Now we are children of the living God! What happened in between? What is it that John is calling us to see, to look at to consider? Where is this love?

Paul answers this question for us in: **Ephesians 1:2-6**.

How did God parent you? He parented you by granting you salvation through the adoption we have in Jesus Christ. God parented you, God adopted you, through the costly sacrifice of his own son. We who were once "Not his Children" were made his children through Jesus the Son.

You do not become a child of God simply by being created. You become a child of God by being saved by the son of God. On the cross Jesus not only removes our sin, but gives us his relational status with God the Father. It is only through Jesus Christ that we see the Father.

Meaning if you want to understand the point of parenting you must look at the experience you have inside of your own salvation. The point of God's parenting is to unite us to himself, therefore the point of our parenting is to point our children to God the Father through Jesus Christ. That's it. That is both the experience which shapes us and the end to which we give our lives to the glory of God and the love of others.

The goal of parenting is to love our children with the gospel so that our interactions with them actively proclaim to them the love which is meant to be theirs in God.

This is where we must consider our second question today: **How does the gospel define my parenting?**

What does it actually mean to look at the experience we have in the gospel and to let that define the way in which we parent our children? It means this: we parent our children in the same way God parented us in Jesus Christ.

C.S. Lewis has a helpful illustration on this principle. When he wrote the Narnia series he was writing in a sense to "baptize a child's imagination." He wanted to create a framework for a child's interaction with Aslan that supported a child's interaction with God if and when that child came to faith. His goal was that a child would see Aslan as strong and gentle so that when they saw the God of the Bible they would be able to say, "God is like Aslan."

We want our parenting to prepare our children to follow God as their parent. We want them to say, "Ah, that's how my mother loved me." Now we are not God, and cannot do any of this perfectly, but let me show you a couple ways in which looking at your own experience in salvation can shape the way you parent your children.

First, when God adopted us through Jesus Christ, he prioritized our eternity. Look with me at **1 John 5:3-5**.

Those who are born of God overcome the world. That isn't to say that we will not suffer in this world, or face trial in this world, or be broken in this world. It means that through faith and obedience we will outlast this world. God parents us into eternity.

It can be really easy in our parenting to meet the felt needs of our children. We can give into their demands or tantrums because it seems to be easiest for us. It would have been far less costly for God to simply make us all happy, but God chose the costly route of sending his son because our problem wasn't that we were unhappy. Our problem was we were unhappy because we were separated from God.

But because God prioritized our eternity, we seek to parent our children by preparing them for eternity as well. We play the long game. We refuse to believe that their greatest need is to succeed in life, to get

good grades, to provide grandbabies and to be well behaved. Those are all good and great things, but none of them are eternal things.

There are often times where in your own life you must consider the costly call to obey God. It will be costly to love others and glorify God in our parenting. What makes this costly obedience not burdensome is the experience you had in the gospel. You know that in the end obeying God will always work out for your eternal good.

This is what Augustine said of his own experience, speaking to God he said: **"I panted for honor, for money, for marriage and you were laughing at me. I found bitterness and difficulty in following these desires, and your graciousness to me was shown in the way you would not allow me to find anything sweet which was not you."**

We parent our children with the end in mind, because it is only when the end is Jesus that our children will find the satisfaction they so ultimately seek. Our parenting prioritizes eternity.

Second, when God adopted us through Jesus Christ, he empowered us to obey. Look at what Jesus promises in **John 16:13-15**.

God has called us to obey. That's part of his process of parenting us into eternity. But God has not called us to obey alone. Nor has he called us to obey without help. If all God did to us was save us, and then say, "Now obey me," we would be in the same predicament we were in prior to our salvation. We aren't strong enough to obey God on our own.

God gave us new hearts. He has given us his Holy Spirit. He has given called us to seek him in moments of hardship and he is faithful to help us when we turn to him. Think of your own experience in salvation. Most of the times we give way to sins is when we try by the power of our might to white knuckle our way through the challenge. In those moments we always see that our strength is not sufficient.

In contrast most of us will find greater success not when we try and out muscle sin, but when we realize that we are broken and need help. When we come to God and ask him to help us through his Holy Spirit. Paul rebukes the people in Galatia for thinking they can follow God without the ongoing help of the Spirit, we should realize our need in our own lives as well.

What does this mean for us? It means that sometimes I have to go through the burdensome task of helping my child obey. This can look like two things in my home. With younger kids, if I ask them to not touch an outlet, I will get up and move them away from the outlet. I want to help them obey. If after I help them, they still return to it, then we can talk about discipline. But I want to model to them what God has given to me in the Holy Spirit, a helper in times of ever-present trouble.

For our older kids a question we have gotten used to asking in our home is, "How can we help you obey?" It takes wisdom to know when you are enabling, but God has promised to provide for us help, we can at times do what it takes to help our children obey too.

A final example, when God adopted us through Jesus Christ, he did not discipline us in his anger. Consider the prayer of David in **Psalms 6:1**.

The Bible is very clear that discipline is needed for children. In fact the author of Hebrews says that we know we are loved by God because God disciplines us as his children. But God doesn't discipline us in his wrath. In all of his interactions with us, though we provoked God, we angered God, God never acted towards us in a lack of self-control.

Why? Because God knew that sins were ultimately and finally going to be punished on Jesus Christ. God never had to overreact to anything because Jesus got the proper punishment we deserved. We don't discipline our children in anger because we know the full punishment of their wrongdoing will either be faced in themselves before God one day, or in Jesus Christ on the cross.

Therefore our discipline is firm and fitting, but kind and gentle. It shows self-control and long-suffering not a short fuse and finality. You brothers and sisters, when you encounter the discipline of God also face his love for you. He disciplines those he loves. So too should our discipline be self-controlled and loving, even in moments when physical discipline is needed.

In seeing how God adopted us in Jesus Christ we see far more than a rigid list of parenting do's and don'ts. We actually see the very heart of God towards us. We can see how God loved us, and we can in far less ultimate and less costly ways, choose to love our kids in a similar way.

This is where I want us to answer our last question: **What is the hope in parenting?**

In this room there are a variety of experiences when it comes to thoughts on kids and parenting. What we want to do is bathe those thoughts in the glory of God and the service of others. Because the sum of the matter is this: Parenting is costly. Parenting is exhausting. Parenting is overwhelming. But parenting is worth it because it allows us to think deeply on our own relationship with God, and model to our children the experience we want them to have with God.

Fathers, you cannot escape the biblical weight by which God will hold you accountable for your family. The majority of the biblical commands given to parents are given directly to fathers. You must know the gospel and know the cost of it if you want to glorify God and love your kids well.

Mothers, your care for your children is often a far more emotional and personal cost from you. Biologically you are built so that others may live. One female writer says motherhood echoes the words of Paul saying: death is at work in you so that life can be at work in them.

I press into this because you will fail. Fail in your humanity not in your sin. It is no sin to be a human parent. We cannot know that our love will always be perfect. Our discipline will not always be fitting. Our advice will not always be wise. But we are not God, and that's ok.

Love your children like God, and repent like a parent. In moments where our humanity or our sin disrupt our relationship with our children rejoice! Rejoice that in our brokenness we may grab the hands of our children and remind them of the one who was broken for us. The Father whose knowledge knows no bounds, whose actions are good and perfect always. The one parent who will never let us down. The God who is known only through the giving up of his only son.

He is who we give away in our success, he is who we cling to in our failures. There is hope, endless hope for parents in the gospel which made us children. For parents who feel they have lost their way, the cross is the way back. You can cast your failures on God, seek his help, and by God's grace you can make

progress. If Jesus redeemed the whole of your brokenness in his death, how much more can he redeem your parenting in his life?

To the single parents, you may feel insufficient. But that's only because you are more realistic than the rest of us. We are insufficient. We are wildly in over our heads. But that's exactly where God wants us to be so that we may turn to him, and his mercy, and rely on his strength in our weakness. Christ is sufficient for you and for your children. Church, help them.

To couples whom God has not opened the womb, Christ is your firstborn. He didn't come from you in order to grant you familial standing and joy, he came for you. He is your legacy. He is your prize. Let your adoption in Christ stir you to adopt informally those in your church who could use it, and formally those in our community who need it as well.

To the parents of unbelieving children: God was longsuffering for your salvation, continue to be longsuffering for the salvation of your child. Your faithfulness as a parent, your love for your child is not judged by the way in which you parenting makes men Christian. God has not given to you, or to any parenting structure, that power.

God has given you to point to Christ, to plead with your children, and the pray for their salvation. And because of God's great love for us in Jesus Christ, know that there is no parenting mistake too strong and no unbelieving heart too hard for God's saving grace.

There is only one parent who can effectively produce faithful children, and he has spared not his own child to that end. Trust him with yours.

To those who don't have children, you will at times be called to parent our children in children's ministry, to parent our youth in youth group, to even parent your parents as they age. Your experience with the gospel in your childlessness has equipped you to care like a parent for those in need.

The central experience in the life of the believer is the process of adoption by which Jesus made us children of God on the cross. If our Father has done that for us, wouldn't we want to worship him? If our Father has done all that for us, wouldn't we want to obey him? For in the gospel we see the love and plan of God laid bare for all to see, never will he disappoint us and never will he cause us harm. So what this means for all of us is that the path to singleness, marriage and parenting actually starts with the posture of obedient children.

God has called us to endure the costly call of glorifying him and loving others. It may cost us our very life to do this, but because we have been adopted through Christ, it will cost us nothing at all. So we trust our Father, and we obey him in all things for we were once not his children, but now we are children of the living God.