

INTRODUCTION

1. Tonight, as we conclude our series on parenting, it will certainly not be a conclusion.
2. For we will always be learning from the Word of God about this issue.
3. But as we look at the Word of God tonight, I want us to bring everything we have said to the point of priority.
4. In fact, I have titled this message, “Parental Priorities” but it could have easily been called “The Believer’s Priorities” because what I want to share with you tonight much of it is applicable to all believers.
5. We have talked about your child’s greatest need which is salvation.
6. We have talked about teaching your kids about God, about prayer, about Bible study, and about Scripture memory.
7. Tonight I want to pull all of this together by giving you 4 principles to focus on in your parenting.
8. Whether you have babies, toddlers, or teenagers, these principles apply to all kids.
9. The first is to *be consistent in your parenting*.
10. One of the downfalls of parenting is the lack of consistency.

I. Be Consistent in Your Parenting

A. This Applies to All Areas

1. In your teaching

Seek to be consistent in sharing the gospel with your kids. Remember this is their greatest need and the goal in all that you do with them.

John MacArthur aptly says, “Your top-priority job as a parent, then, is to be an evangelist in your home. You need to teach your children the law of God; teach them the gospel of divine grace; show them their need for a Savior; and point them to Jesus Christ as the only One who can save them. If they grow up without a keen awareness of their need for salvation, you as a parent will have failed in your primary task as their spiritual leader.¹

Be consistent in reading the Bible with your kids, in working on Scripture memory, in praying together.

Be consistent in teaching them about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Your daily reading of Scripture will help you with this but the greatest teaching is in everyday life not just when you sit down to do it.

¹John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting : Raising Your Child With Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Bedford, Tex.: Word Pub., 1998). 44.

2. In your disciplining

I haven't spent a lot of time on this issue in this series because prior to the start of this study, we were looking at **Ephesians 6:4 (NASB)** ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

But let me suffice it to say that the Bible teaches we are to discipline our children, which is not limited to just using the rod.

We are to use the rod as a consequence of their behavior but the focus should always be on the heart.

Tedd Tripp, in his book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, says, "The basic issue is always what is going on in the heart...Parents often get sidetracked with behavior. If your goal in discipline is changed behavior, it is easy to understand why this happens. The thing that alerts you to your child's need for correction is his behavior. Behavior irritates and thus calls attention to itself. Behavior becomes your focus. You think you have corrected when you have changed unacceptable behavior to behavior that you sanction and appreciate.

'What is the problem?' you ask. The problem is this: Your child's needs are far more profound than his aberrant behavior. Remember, his behavior does not just spring forth uncaused. His

behavior—the things he says and does—reflects his heart. If you are to really help him, you must be concerned with the attitudes of heart that drive his behavior.

A change in behavior that does not stem from a change in heart is not commendable; it is condemnable. Is it not the hypocrisy that Jesus condemned in the Pharisees? In Matthew 15, Jesus denounces the Pharisees who have honored him with their lips while their hearts were far from him. Jesus censures them as people who wash the outside of the cup while the inside is still unclean. Yet this is what we often do in childrearing. We demand changed behavior, and never address the heart that drives the behavior.

What must you do in correction and discipline? You must require proper behavior. God's law demands that. You cannot, however, be satisfied to leave the matter there. You must help your children ask the questions that will expose that attitude of the heart that has resulted in wrong behavior. How did his heart stray to produce this behavior? In what characteristic ways has his inability or refusal to know, trust, and obey God resulted in actions and speech that are wrong?"²

So we have to constantly remember what Jesus said in **Luke 6:45 (NASB)** ⁴⁵ "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what

² Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding Your Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 4-5.

is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

He said in **Mark 7:21-22 (NASB)** ²¹ "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness.

Be consistent to focus on the heart and when the behavior warrants it, spank!

Someone once said, "Children need two pats on the back. One high enough to encourage them when they do right, and one low enough to discourage them when they do wrong. Effective discipline requires knowing which end to pat.

Aryon forwarded me an email earlier this week on spanking children and it went like this: "Most of America's populace thinks it's improper to spank children. The other day I was talking to one of my younger buddies about methods used to discipline children.

We talked about "time outs", grounding, holding back "rewards" until the child displayed desired behavior etc. One of the things we discussed was the act of spanking and my friend explained that no, he does not spank any of his children.

He explained that what he does is to take the

misbehaving child out for a ride in the car and talk. He said that usually this works and that the child calms down fairly quickly and really doesn't take too much time.

By removing the child, in this case his son, from the immediate situation and providing a change of scenery, the child is allowed to focus on something different. Once the child has the opportunity to change perspective, things get better quickly and the child has better understanding of his place within the family and begins to understand the family's concept of acceptable behavior. He kindly shared a picture of the process which I share with you now (screen).”

B. Your Child Takes Advantage of Your Inconsistency

When you say things like, “If you don’t stop, I’ll...” Or “If you do that again, I will...” But when you don’t follow through they think you’re not serious. They learn quickly that your form of disciplining is “threats” usually accompanied with “yelling.”

Even Dr. Noel Swanson, who is a medical doctor and child psychiatrist, agrees that “When you are not consistent, you expose your weaknesses and your children learn to manipulate you and play one parent against the other”

(<http://www.goodparentingmagazine.com/content/view/234/135/>).

The Bible shows us what happens when you're not consistent or when you neglect the discipline aspect of your parenting:

1. **Proverbs 13:24 (NASB)** ²⁴ He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

William MacDonald says, "The Bible teaches corporal punishment, whether the modern "experts" agree or not. To withhold punishment from a child when it is deserved is to encourage the child in sin and thus to contribute to his eventual ruin. The parent **who spares his rod** might think he is manifesting love, but God says it is hatred.

For years Dr. Benjamin Spock encouraged parents to be permissive. After living to see a generation of bratty, pesky children, he admitted that he had been wrong. He said, "Inability to be firm is, to my mind, the commonest problem of parents in America today." He placed the blame, at least in part, on the experts—"the child psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers, social workers, and pediatricians, like myself."^{20, 3}

²⁰ (13:24) Benjamin Spock, taken from the Tampa Tribune, Tampa, FL, January 22, 1974.

³William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Pr 13:24.

2. **Proverbs 22:15 (NASB)** ¹⁵ Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

Foolishness (*ivveleth*) here implies the love of mischief, the waywardness and self-will, belonging to children, bound up in their very nature.⁴

Matthew Henry says, “Sin is foolishness, it is in the heart, there is an inward inclination to sin: children bring it into the world with them; and it cleaves close to the soul. We all need to be corrected by our heavenly Father.”⁵

3. **Proverbs 23:13 (NASB)** ¹³ Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.

To **withhold** something means to refuse to give it, for whatever reason.⁶

⁴*The Pulpit Commentary: Proverbs*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004). 424.

⁵Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997). Pr 22:15.

⁶William David Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000). 494.

4. **Proverbs 29:15 (NASB)** ¹⁵ The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.

Not only do you need to be consistent in your parenting but you also need to...

II. Play with Your Kids

For teenagers we usually don't use the word "play." We replace the word "play" with the words, "Spend time" but I like the words "play" because they indicate something special.

Whatever words you choose, the point is simple. God has blessed you with these little ones and you need to have time with them. This usually is addressed to the father because he is away from the home and their children.

One of the problems with Eli the priest in the Old Testament was that he didn't spend time teaching and warning his kids about their sin so that when they grew up they would fear God. When he finally confronted what they were doing at the doorway of the tent of meeting, they would not listen.

If you ignore the responsibility that you have with your kids, the results will be devastating and you will produce a generation that no one will want to be around.

In other words, If we let a child go his own way, make no consequences for his misbehavior, let him run his own life,

and give him liberation, society will not want to live with what it's going to get.⁷

That's why J.C. Ryal says, "Tell them of sin, its guilt, its consequences, its power, its vileness: you will find they can comprehend this."⁸

In **1 Samuel 2:22-30 (NASB)** ²² Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ²³ He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? ²⁴ "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. ²⁵ "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men. ²⁷ Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? ²⁸ 'Did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel? ²⁹ 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My* dwelling, and

⁷ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1981, 1985), 102.

⁸ J.C. Ryal, *The Duties of Parents*. Sermon.
<http://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/PARENTSJC.HTM>.

honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'³⁰

"Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.

David's sin of adultery and murder also affected his family so that part of his punishment was that God would "raise up evil against you from *your own household*" (2 Sam.12:11).

David's son, Solomon, later wrote in **Proverbs 6:32-33 (NASB)**³² The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it.³³ Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out.

David's sin was forgiven as 2 Samuel 12:13 says but he still had the consequences to live with: "the swords shall never depart from your house" (v.10), and "evil...from your own household" (v.11) and "the child that is born to you shall surely die" (v.14).

I was reading from Richard Strauss' book *Confident Children and How They Grow*, where he talks about the many hats dads wear. In the scenario he gives, he shows how dad's who are more focused on themselves and their problems will eventually drive their kids away and ultimately destroy the family. Listen to the scenario with me:

It was thirty minutes later than usual when Harry Hasselmore turned into his driveway after work. The

contracts his boss requested at the last minute had given him a late start for home and he had gotten caught in that miserable freeway traffic jam. The heat was unbearable and his head was splitting. A good dinner and a quiet evening of relaxation—that's what he needed.

“What are those bikes and wagons doing in the driveway?” he fumed to himself. “I've told those kids a thousand times to put them where they belong.” Harry spied the kids in the neighbor's yard and screamed, “Get over here and put these things away. You kids are getting more irresponsible every day.” It didn't seem to matter that their friends were standing there listening to his embarrassing tirade. As they crossed the yard, Harry spied the rip in Ralph's jeans. “Look what you've done!” he yelled. “You kids must think I'm made of money.”

Leftovers for dinner didn't help his disposition much, and he grumbled through the whole meal. It never occurred to him that Helen had used considerable creativity and much time to make those leftovers appetizing and save him some money. And then the kids—their manners were always atrocious but it was particularly annoying tonight. Harry rose to the occasion in this characteristic manner: “Don't eat so fast. Don't talk with your mouth full. Will you please stop smacking your lips. Do you have to lay all over the table? Stop this confounded bickering at mealtime! Can't you kids give me any peace?”

He had just sunk into his easy chair with the newspaper when Joanie said, “Daddy, will you fix my doll house?” “Not tonight,” he snapped. “And besides, if you were more careful with your things they wouldn't get broken.” He

didn't notice the hurt on her face as she walked slowly to her room.

Just about then Ralph came bouncing in. "Hey, Dad, wanna play catch with my new ball?" "When are you kids going to learn that I have more important things to do than play, play, play?" Harry growled. It had been a long time since Ralph had asked his dad to do anything with him. It would probably be quite awhile before he asked him again.

"Harry, I must talk to you about the children." Helen was finished with the dishes now and desperately needed his advice on what to do about the children's latest malicious neighborhood prank. "Look, Helen, get off my back, will you? Whatever it is, I'm sure you can handle it. Now leave me alone tonight." While the day may have been a little worse than usual, Harry's attitude was not much different. He was becoming increasingly irritable and impatient, and while not realizing it, he was systematically destroying his family. His wife was getting discouraged and depressed, and his children were becoming more and more of a problem.

The Bible reveals that Harry holds the key to correcting this tragic situation. You see, not only has God set us a perfect example of fatherhood to follow, he has also said some pointed things in his Word about a father's responsibility in the home. But until Harry opens his mind to these truths and expresses a willingness to obey them, there is little hope of improvement. A father's role is not an easy one. It is momentous and many-sided. We must understand the many hats dad wears and learn how to wear them.⁹

⁹Richard L. Strauss, *Confident Children and How They Grow* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975).

Be consistent in your parenting, play with your kids, and...

III. Always Point Your Kids to Jesus

This goes back to some of what I said regarding consistency.

Teach them in the middle of life's circumstances about the Lord Jesus.

Teach them that "He is faithful and righteous" (1 John 1:9).

Teach them that their heart is always the issue, therefore, they are to always "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut.6:5).

Teach them that God hates sin and that they are to see their sin not just against their parents but first and foremost against God.

Proverbs 8:13 (NASB) ¹³ "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.

Psalms 51:4 (NASB) ⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

So everything you do in rearing your children should point them to Jesus!

Lastly...

IV. Maintain the Right Priorities

This is where I think our problems begin.

Your first and foremost priority as a parent is your own heart—in your heart you must keep...

A. Jesus First

This includes church. If you are hit and miss, not only are you teaching your kids that church is not a priority but you are revealing a serious spiritual problem in your life.

When the writer of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB)** ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near," he is not just talking about missing church but the place where the saints assemble to worship God.

When you forsake the assembly, you are forsaking the corporate worship of God.

God is always to be first! **Matthew 6:33 (NASB)** ³³
"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

William MacDonald says, "The Lord...makes a covenant with His followers. He says, in effect, "If you will put God's interests first in your life, I will guarantee your future needs. If you **seek first the**

kingdom of God and His righteousness, then I will see that you never lack the necessities of life.” This is God’s “social security” program. The believer’s responsibility is to live for the Lord, trusting God for the future with unshakable confidence that He will provide.¹⁰

Colossians 2:6 (NASB) ⁶ Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him.

Colossians 3:1-2 (NASB) ¹ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

“Set your mind” can also be translated “think,” or “have this inner disposition.” As a compass points N, the believer’s entire disposition should point itself toward the things of heaven. Heavenly thoughts can only come by understanding heavenly realities from Scripture.¹¹

Fixing their attention decisively toward “things above” involves centering their lives on the ascended (Eph.

¹⁰William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Mt 6:33.

¹¹John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997). Col 3:2.

4:10), glorified (John 17:5; Phil. 2:9) **Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God.**¹²

B. Spouse Second

Some put their spouse before Christ. I believe your love for your spouse should be so strong that it looks like it is first place in your life.

If you love Jesus first, then you will love your spouse in the same manner.

Ephesians 5:25 (NASB) ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Titus 2:4 says that “young women” or wives are “to love their own husbands.”

The Greek word for “love” (philandros) in Titus 2:4 means to be a “husband lover.” It is to be a characteristic of a wife.

C. Children Third

One of the problems in homes today is the children are running it and not the parents. This is what Lou Priolo refers to as a “child-centered home.”

¹²John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). 2:680.

He says you can know when you have a child-centered home when a child interrupts adults when they're talking. They use manipulation and rebellion to get their way. They dictate the family schedule, take precedence over the needs of the spouse, have an equal or overriding vote in all decision matters, demand excessive time and attention from parents, they speak to their parents as though they are their peers, they are the dominate influence in the home, and they are entertained and coddled (rather than disciplined) out of a bad mood.

Lou Priolo, says, "A child who is at the center of a child-centered home believes that he and his desires should be the focal point of the entire household. It is in the context of a child-centered home that many children grow up believing that society owes them a living."¹³

Yes children are a gift from the Lord as Psalm 127 says but they are also the responsibility of their parents and as such they are to obey them as Ephesians 6:1 says.

Throughout the Proverbs we hear statements like this: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching; indeed, they are a

¹³ Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger : Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY (P.O. Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701): Calvary Press Publishing, 1997). 31.

graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck” (Prov.1:8-9).

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we hear the father instructing his son and calling him to obey his teaching.

1. **Proverbs 1:10-16 (NASB)** ¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. ¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; ¹² Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; ¹³ We will find all *kinds* of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; ¹⁴ Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse," ¹⁵ My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, ¹⁶ For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.
2. **Proverbs 2:1-6 (NASB)** ¹ My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, ² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; ³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding.
3. **Proverbs 3:1-2 (NASB)** ¹ My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my

commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

4. **Proverbs 3:21-22 (NASB)** ²¹ My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck.
5. **Proverbs 4:1-2 (NASB)** ¹ Hear, *O* sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, ² For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction.
6. **Proverbs 4:10 (NASB)** ¹⁰ Hear, my son, and accept my sayings And the years of your life will be many.
7. **Proverbs 4:20 (NASB)** ²⁰ My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.
8. **Proverbs 5:1-2 (NASB)** ¹ My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding; ² That you may observe discretion And your lips may reserve knowledge.

The phrase “my son” occurs 23 times in the book of Proverbs.

The word “hear” is used 3 times, “listen” 8 times, and “do not forsake” 2 times—all in relation to a son hearing, listening and not forsaking the teaching of his father.

D. Job or Home Fourth

Again, this makes its way to the top constantly but you have to remember that Jesus is more important than your job.

Those of you that are self-employed and control your schedules, there is no excuse for missing church because of work.

You might say that you weren't finished and couldn't leave the customer you were working with. That's not an excuse. That's just poor planning. Why not schedule your Wednesdays and Sundays where nothing will interfere with your corporate worship of God?

Ephesians 6:5-9 (NASB) ⁵ Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. ⁹ And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

The parallel passage in **Colossians 3:22-4:1 (NASB)** ²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from

the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. ¹ Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Both passages indicate that your work is “to the Lord” and “not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-6 and Colossians 3:23).

Men are to provide for their families and wives are to be keepers of the home as Titus 2:5 says but this should never come before God.

There are many wives that put their house before everything. There are many husbands who put their jobs or their hobbies before everything.

This is also a problem with the last priority...

E. Others Last

Yes, we have spiritual gifts and we are to minister the “one another” but not at the expense of our relationship with God.

Some husbands and wives drop everything to spend time with friends or family at the expense of forsaking their relationship with God, or with their spouse, or with their children, or with their job.

Parents you need to *maintain the right priorities!*

CONCLUSION

1. So are you consistent in your parenting?
2. Are you playing with your kids?
3. Are you always pointing them to Jesus?
4. Are you maintaining the right priorities?
5. Remember, it all starts with you!
6. Let's pray.
7. If you're here tonight and haven't repented of your sin and started following Jesus, I want to urge you to do so right now.
8. **Romans 10:13 (NASB)** ¹³ for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."
9. Call on Him now as we pray.