

How to Be a Christian Parent #1

A Refresher on the Family

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Good morning. It's so good to see everyone out on a bright Sunday morning. I'm glad that you're here to study God's word together as we continue a series that we've titled, "A Refresher on the Family," and last week we talked about Christian marriage and this morning we're going to talk about Christian parenting and my great fear at this moment is how you're going to respond to that, the announcement of that topic, because I don't want you to check out simply because maybe your kids are grown or you're not parents yet. This has great implications for our entire body. You know, the nature of starting a new work like we're doing here just being a little over a year old for those of you that are visiting with us, is that as you start a new work, you kind of parachute down into the middle of where people's lives are. We all come with different histories and maybe a little different sorts of streams of teaching on the family and so we just kind of meet each other where we're at and we start to develop a common life together on these issues, and if your children are already raised, let me encourage you this morning not to check out but to realize that there are things for your children and for your grandchildren in this kind of study of God's word that you can take and reinforce to those subsequent generations that the Lord has given to you; to see these things and to be alongside children who are receptive to your counsel, children who learn that maybe you were a little smarter than they gave you credit for in high school. I don't know, but to take these things and be able to reinforce them to them, even if you've made your own mistakes along the way. And for those of you that don't have children yet but you're looking forward, look, this is the way to set your goals. You have an additional advantage even if you're not in the day-to-day of parenting just yet, to be able to see these things and say, "Oh, that's what I want to set my mind to," and to be able to talk with your spouse about these things and work those things out beforehand. You'll have a big head start on some of the rest of us. And, of course, if you have children that are in those formative years, I trust that this is going to be a big help to you.

When I was married, I stand up here in a long stream of parenting failures over the years. My dad was not a Christian. I didn't have a real good sense of what it meant to be a Christian father. I kind of got on-the-job-training which I think is pretty common for all of us, and I can remember that I tried to parent as a Christian the way that my dad parented us as a non-Christian which was kind of a bullying, intimidating factor and things like that, and being early in my Christian walk when we started to have kids, you know, I kind of carried that over and I saw, "Wow, this doesn't work and I don't even

want to be this way." And you're kind of hearing a little bit of the fruit of trial and error, in one sense, on my personal experience but ultimately what we're talking about is just purely biblical; that this doesn't depend on my experience at all, but it depends upon what the word of God says.

So let me encourage you not to think about this so much as a sermon on parenting, it's actually going to extend into next week. I realized I had a little bit more than I wanted to say than I could fit into this time here this morning, but receive this sermon as you would as if we were sitting in your living room and you said, "Don, what kind of principles have shaped the parenting that you and Nancy have done over the years?" Let's approach it that way. Look, I'm on your side here. I am totally on your side. I want to help you. I want to be an encouragement to you. I want to affirm you in what you're doing right and maybe show you some things that you say, "Oh, never thought about it that way. Need to make some adjustments along the way here." That's kind of the way that I want to approach it here. If I had my druthers, I'd move the pulpit out of the way and just kind of sit down and have a talk about it, in one sense.

But there are six things that I want to say. We'll say three of them this week and then the next three next week in terms of how to be a Christian parent. In one sense, we're saying a refresher on parenting, but I want you to think about this particular title and you can title your notes this way: this is how to be a Christian parent and the emphasis is on being moreso than what you do. I'm not going to give you any mechanics on how to have family devotions. That's not where we're going. I'm not going to talk about games that you play with your kids. It's all so far much more than that, it far transcends this because the main thing, the starting principle that you need to realize in being a Christian parent is this: is that being a Christian parent is a subset of your overall Christian character. How you parent flows out of your Christian life just as every other relationship that you have flows out of the manner in which you are pursuing Christian growth, the manner in which you are growing spiritually or not growing spiritually. It's all flowing out of something bigger. It's about who you are and so we need to deal with who we are as Christian parents and not just pass over the whole issue of character and the nature of our walk with Christ in order to get down to techniques. Look, there are dozens if not hundreds of books like that where you can find that. I want to talk about who we are and what it means to be a Christian parent and what are the principles that would flow out of that.

Well, here's point 1 where it would all sort of start. I am assuming that I'm speaking to Christian parents here, people that have been born again by the Spirit of God. What is the first principle that I would encourage you to take and embrace as the foundational cornerstone of your Christian parenting, point 1: be calm. Be calm. Relax. Settle down a little bit because I understand that parenting can produce anxieties as you see your children start to stray or perhaps they've strayed very badly and there's just seemingly no outward visible way to redeem that. I understand what it's like to be young parents and to see children just continue in disobedient ways, sometimes being just very, seeming to be very rebellious at a young age and you want to, you know, and you wonder, "Is this going to get worse? They're going to end up in jail. I'm going to have to go and see them as they're having a life sentence in prison." You know, and you just accelerate and bring all

of your worst thoughts about the future and take the worst case scenario and accelerate it into the future because your two-year-old is not eating his Cheerios. You know, I get that. Our minds play really bad games on us and we need to understand how to deal with that and to live in the present and to be calm as a parent.

Well, as I said, parenting is one aspect of the overall Christian life as you live out your faith in Christ, and so here's what that means: to say that you're a Christian is to say, 1. I am trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for my personal salvation from sin. I trust Christ to save me. I've trusted him to save me and I trust him to bring me to heaven. That is the cornerstone of what it means to be a Christian. It all starts right there. Well, then you go beyond that and realize that the Bible calls us not only to trust Christ for our future salvation, for our ultimate deliverance from hell into heaven, but the Bible calls you to trust Christ in your day-to-day life with every detail that could ever come up and that embraces the whole realm of your Christian parenting.

Turn to the book of Proverbs 3. We're not even going to go to a parenting passage because I want to reinforce to you the idea that parenting flows out of who you are. It flows out of who you are and in Proverbs 3, we'll begin in verse 1 here, where Solomon is speaking to his own son and so there's a thread of parenting in what he's about to say even though he's not specifically addressing the issue of parenting. He says, "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart." Have these biblical principles so embedded in your inner disposition, in your convictions and in your thinking, that they could never leave; that they influence and flavor everything that you do. "So that," verse 4, "you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man."

Now look at verse 5 here, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." Verse 6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." In all your ways acknowledge him and he'll make your paths straight. Trust in him. Well, what does it mean to trust in the living God as a Christian? Well, if it means anything it means this: it means that when you look to the future, when you consider what lies ahead in your life, you think about the future from a fundamental disposition of confidence because you understand that the God of your salvation is the God of history and he is the one who is directing the personal details of your life. If you trust this Lord Jesus Christ who shed his own blood for the sake of the forgiveness of your sins and he's done the greater thing for you by securing the eternal well-being of your soul, then you trust him for the lesser thing which, here today we're talking about, to be the aspects of your parenting and the direction of your family and the nature of your children and what lies ahead for them. You trust in the Lord with all your heart and you do not lean on your own understanding.

What this verse is telling us is this: I want you to bring all of the things that might concern you about your parenting, the things that concern you about your children, about your failures of the past in parenting, I want you to bring all of those into the front of your consciousness here in light of this verse. Verse 5, with all of that context set in your

mind, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." In all your ways, acknowledge him and here's the promise: "He will make your paths straight." Listen, if the God who ordained your salvation to occur, if the God who took on flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and went to the cross and shed his own lifeblood in order to secure your eternal salvation, if he is in control and directing the course of your family, then you have the privilege, the prerogative and, beloved, I would add, the responsibility to trust him and to rest your heart and to have your soul be still, as Lynn so beautifully sang for us just a few moments ago, to be still in the presence of God as you think about your family, your children and what lies ahead. What this passage is telling us is to remember the character of God, remember the greatness and the goodness of God that we've studied in the past, and then entrust, give to him, rely upon him, trust him, to care completely for everything that lies ahead. You put your whole life, all of your cares, all of your worries and your anxieties, and you put them into confidence that this God who saved you will take care of the details as well.

Now, I know that it sounds kind of funny to talk about our children, our own flesh and blood, as details because they're so much more than that. You think of details about what color the carpet is, right? But understand what I'm saying, is that there is an overarching trust that we have in God as Christians, as the God of the Bible, this overarching trust in Christ as we've entrusted everything to him and because he's sovereign, because he's good, he's going to work everything out to bless us in the end, no matter whether we understand how that could happen now or not. In other words, we're talking vertically here, not horizontally in your relationship with your children. You have unqualified confidence. This is inherent in being a true Christian is that you have unqualified confidence that God will be good to you in the end no matter how circumstances may threaten your understanding of that conviction for the moment. So as you see your kids drift off the line and you naturally have a nature concern about that, that concern doesn't carry you away because you're anchored in a confidence in the ultimate goodness of God, the ultimate supremacy of Christ, and that he is orchestrating everything and moving everything to accomplish his perfect will in the universe and that that includes your family and that includes your children.

Now, most of you would say that you trust God. That's why you're here. You appreciate the word of God. You want the word of God to inform your thinking but, beloved, you've got to think about your children in this context that we're talking about here. As you think about your children, do you truly look forward to the future with confidence or is your fundamental disposition about your family one of regret and anxiety and concern that just dominates your thinking? Maybe you put a plastic little mask on it for Sunday so that I don't know it. What's really in your heart is what I'm asking you to consider. You see, you have to take what you affirm to be true about the character of God, about the goodness of his intentions toward his people, and then just work out the implications of that and say, "Oh, that means that somehow, perhaps in a way that I don't understand, he is going to be good to me and he's going to bless me in the end as a Christian parent." You have to live that way otherwise you're not trusting him with your whole heart; otherwise in all your ways, you're not acknowledging him the way that you should and the way that he deserves. Listen, isn't our Lord Jesus Christ after he's gone to Calvary,

suffered on our behalf, gone into a grave, defeated death, and risen into heaven where he's at the right hand of God interceding for us until he returns, isn't he worthy of trusting him for the most precious things in your human life, the fruit of your own flesh? Is he worth that kind of confidence or not? And if he is, then you have to just kind of open up your hand and say, "Lord, all of these concerns and regrets and everything, I'm just going to give them to you because I'm going to trust you for who you are."

Now, let me hasten to say something very, very important. When we talk about being calm, when we talk about trusting God for our children, you have to understand what we are trusting him for and what we're not saying here. We do not trust God to necessarily bring about a certain result. It's not that while we...and let's just go right to the core of what concerns Christian parents, the salvation of your children. Let's go right there and just go right to the button of our heart there. When I say to trust God for the direction of your family and the future of your family, we pray for our children to be saved, we trust God to save them, yes, but that is not, that is not what it means to trust God in the comprehensive, full, unqualified, unrestrained sense that we're talking about here today. We trust God to manifest his faithfulness to us no matter what. "Whether my children get saved or not," you say to yourself as you look in the mirror, "I am going to trust God for that and, God, I pray that you would save them." But then you go another step further as you contemplate yourself in the presence of God and you say, "But God, even if you don't, I will still trust you to be good and to display your faithfulness to me in the end." You trust him completely without qualifying that trust. "God, I'll trust you as long as my children get saved." Well, that's not really trusting God, that's leaning on your own understanding. That's saying, "If it goes my way, I'll trust you." That's not trusting God. Trusting God says, "I'll trust you even when I don't understand. I'll trust you even if my children break my heart. I'll trust you even if I'm weeping over them. God, nothing will shake me from that foundational confidence because, God, I love you more than I love my own flesh." That's what he calls us to. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. You'll have no other gods before me.

So how is it that we get off track? How is it that good Christian people are dominated by anxiety as they contemplate their children? In large part it's because we haven't really grasped the significance of the end of verse 5. Go back to Proverbs 3:5 with me. You should still be there. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." "God, I don't know what I'll do if my child doesn't come to Christ. I don't know what they'll do if they don't come back to me. I don't know what I'll do if they don't break up that sinful relationship. God, I don't know what I'm gonna do." Start wringing your hands about it. Listen, I'm here to help you, right? You remember I said that. I'm on your side as we talk about these things. You've got to understand that. When anxiety starts to dominate you like that, "I don't know what I'm gonna do. How am I gonna respond? How will I ever get over this?" When you hear those kinds of things rattling around in your mind, when you hear those things coming off of your own tongue, what you're saying is, "I don't understand. I've got to know." And you're depending on your own understanding. What's supporting you is you lean like this and what's keeping you up, what's supporting you is what you understand that's going on in the lives of your children and when it's not going the way that you want, that starts to shake.

So the problem at that point, understand that the answer to that kind of anxiety is not to manipulate your children into being what you want them to be. The answer to that kind of controlling anxiety about your children, about the fruit of your own flesh, is to come back and realize that you've got to forget about your children for a moment and look back up at the God who saved you, the God who said, "I am your Shepherd. I will guide you. I will lead you." And you come back to his character, his promises to you, which are independent of your children and you say, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." You see, beloved, what I'm saying to you is that when you're dominated by this controlling anxiety and concern about your children, that is a symptom for you to come back to God, to come back to Christ, to remember his character and affirm verbally to him in prayer, "I will trust you no matter what. I'm going to trust you even if I don't understand."

That is what it means to be a Christian. In the spiritual realm, it means that to trust God means that you're confident about the future, not because of what you see going on around you, but because you see the character and promises of God revealed in his word. Look, that's in your heart in seed form already if you're a Christian. That's why you were lifted up. You wanted to affirm the words of Lynn's song, "Still, my soul be still. I will trust in you." You know, when you recognize the aspirations that that song is expressing as a mark of a Christian and where all of this leads us, coming back to the point, is where all of that leads us in our parenting whether our kids are grown or whether they're infants, be calm. Be confident. Be trusting that God is at work no matter what.

So for you young parents, you have a young child who is persistently disobedient, you're disciplining them for the same thing day after day after day and there doesn't seem to be any progress, or you have a loved one, an older child that has rejected Christ and is living in sin, understand that your hope, your calmness is not premised on seeing that child get saved or an immediate change in their behavior. Your trust is rested not in what a human being is going to do, especially a two or three year old. You can't set your trust in that. What an unstable foundation upon which to try to stand. No, your confidence is in seeing the character of God and you have a settled expectation that God will show his faithfulness to you in the end even if you don't see anything change. And do you know what? That's certainly going to happen. When we are in heaven, when we are face-to-face with our Lord Jesus Christ, when we're transformed into his image and we're made like him and we share in the glory of his resurrection, beloved, trust me, better yet, trust the word of God, at that time, there is not going to be any question that God's been faithful to you. Throughout all the halls of eternity, in the bliss of heaven, in the perfection of Christ, gathered together with the saints of all the ages, there is not going to be any question that God was faithful to you. That's impossible. It can't come out. You see, God's character, God's plans for our eternal futures is such that it can't come out any other way and because we know that God's going to bless us in the end, we take that blessing from the future and it informs the way that we respond to the present and that makes it so that as a parent, you can be calm. You can trust. You see, we're really not talking about parenting at all, are we, at this point.

What I want you to see, I've said this from this pulpit before, I'm sure I'll say it again. I tend to repeat myself in my older age. Some of you know what that's like. Knowing God and trusting God like what we're talking about here today, is not a secondary aspect of your Christian experience. Knowing God and trusting God so completely that if the walls cave in around you you still stand firm and you still have a calmness and serenity in your soul, to know God and to trust God like that is not secondary – listen, listen to me – to know God and trust God like that is the reason that you exist. You thought you existed to do your earthly vocation. No, as a Christian you exist to know and trust God and everything else flows out of that.

Look at verse 5 with me again, Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart," there it is, the totality of your being is directed toward this confidence in the Lord God of the Bible. Verse 6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him." In all you ways trust him and he'll take care of everything else. "He'll make your paths straight."

And so, beloved, regardless of what happens with your children, you as a Christian know for certain that God will bless you and you must trust him for that. Do you know what happens if you don't? When you don't trust God completely like that and you end up putting your hope in what your children are doing or being or what they'll become, all of that, inevitably you either become an anxious parent, "This isn't going the way I want it to! Stop!" You become an angry parent, "This isn't going the way I want it to! Stop!" Or you just become very manipulative, "This isn't going the way that I want it to and so I'm going to manipulate you emotionally and with what I say and I'm going to do all these other things so that you'll do what I want to do." All of that manipulation, that anger and that anxiety is a direct result flowing out of the fact that you haven't known God and trusted him like you should. The final blessing of God in your life is certain and therefore you can and must be calm. You trust him. You trust him and you realize that you're going to trust him most, your trust is just tested when things are not going the way that you want them to go. Look, you wouldn't have to be a Christian to trust God if everything was going according to your desires, right? If all of your children were lined up in a row and everything was perfect, you wouldn't need to trust God for that at all. Your test as a Christian parent comes when your children are a little bit off track and you say, "Oh, okay, am I going to trust God even for this? Yes, I am, because I'm going to honor the principle of Proverbs 3 and I'm going to trust him with all my heart. I'm not going to lean on my own understanding. In all my ways I'm going to acknowledge him being present, directing, accomplishing his will and, God, I'm going to trust you to make my paths straight." We're not talking about Christian parenting here, we're talking about being a Christian and parenting is just one application of that.

Well, secondly, someone said, "What are the principles that have informed your parenting?" Here's a second one that I would say: be consistent in authority. Be consistent in authority. Scripture calls you to control your children. It calls you to manage your household well. For that, let's go back to Ephesians 6 and we're going to look at verses 1 through 4. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well for you, and that you may live long on the earth." You young people that are still under the

roofs of your parents' authority, see yourself right here in this passage, right? Those of you that are 8, 10, 12 years old, maybe a little bit older, understand that you have a fundamental obligation before God to honor your parents. You need to stop being so sarcastic. You need to stop being so rebellious. You need to stop the backtalk and to give them the place of honor in your heart that God has established them to be in your home. Honor your father and mother, not just with external compliance but out of the attitudes of your own heart. That's the only proper way for a child to be. But going on, verse 4, since this is a passage about parenting not childrening, verse 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Parents, here's what you need to see from those four verses and it's this: your children should obey you because that is what God requires of them. You don't have the option to cultivate, to allow a child to develop a rebellious, continually disobedient lifestyle because you're under an obligation to bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. You need to be consistent in your authority and you cultivate that obedience from the beginning; you cultivate it from the very start. Now, like I said, I realize that we're parachuting in and some of you, your children are already grown and their teenagers and all of that, but that doesn't mean that just because we're coming at this from different points of life, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't honor the Scripture and see what God has to say about it.

For you young parents, young moms, look, Nancy and I know what it's like to have a lot of young kids. We had four kids under the age of five at one point. We know about the short nights of sleep and children going lots of different directions and throwing up at all kinds of inconvenient times of the night. We've been there. We know what that's like and so, again, I just want you to know I'm saying these things from sympathy, but the fatigue and the discouragement that comes, you have to find your purpose in your parenting and realizing what God has called you to do. Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You're shaping their lives in accordance with the call of God to do that. And here's one of the things that that means, just in terms of being consistent, bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. As a parent, one of the most important things that you can do is to be consistent in your discipline of them. The disobedience that called for discipline yesterday receives discipline again today and also tomorrow. You just continue on. You're consistent. You don't let something pass and then discipline them for it the next day. That inconsistency really pollutes the whole environment of your home.

Being able to manage your home is a qualification for church leadership even. Look over at 1 Timothy for a moment and then we'll come back to this principle, but I want you to see this. 1 Timothy 3:4, the mark of someone who's qualified for church leadership among other things in 1 Timothy 3:4 if this, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." There is an order. There is a structure to the Christian home that God calls us to. And, parents, let me say this: you can't delegate that. You can't delegate it to a nanny, not that I've got anything against nannies but you can't delegate the raising of your children to someone else. You can't delegate it to a youth group. You can't delegate it to a youth pastor, not that that's an

option here at Truth Community Fellowship. That doesn't even exist here, does it? What I want you to see is from Ephesians 6, is that it's the parents who have to establish this in the lives of their children. If you have children, you have to embrace that responsibility. It's a non-negotiable aspect of your existence as a Christian, and God holds the parents responsible for this kind of order and discipline.

We've all seen children throw temper tantrums in stores, right? And you're tempted to want to go over and you want to grab the kid and shake him and say, "Straighten up." But, you know, it's interesting, and you see the parents give in to that. Proverbs shows the reality of those kinds of situations. Turn back to Proverbs 29:15. I want you to see this. Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother." You see, Scripture places the responsibility for that kind of out-of-control behavior on the mom, on the parent that's involved there. You are meant to keep your children under control. You have to be consistent in authority. You can't let them run wild. You can't let them be crazy, disobedient and throw tantrums in the store. When that happened when our kids were little, sometimes you have to realize that these principles are more important than that daily task list and so sometimes when that happened, Nancy would just put things back on the shelf and would just leave the store, take the child out and come and deal with that situation privately, sometimes in the extreme situations, go home, deal with it and the shopping can wait because the shopping will be there tomorrow but being consistent in your authority, your parental authority, is something that is an overarching principle that has to guide what you do. You can't take shortcuts for the sake of convenience and you have to realize, "Huh, this is what God calls me to. This is part of my accountability before God is to exercise proper authority over my children."

So how do you cultivate that kind of consistent authority that we're talking about? Start here, I'll try to make this real practical for you. And for those of you that are single, I see you out there, these are things to talk about with a potential mate before you get married. Be of one mind and give yourself a great head start. How do you cultivate consistent authority? Start right here: mom and dad say the same thing. Mom and dad say the same thing when an issue comes up. You support – listen – you support your spouse in front of your children no matter what in order to honor this principle of consistent authority. A spouse should not contradict the other spouse in front of the children. If you have disagreements about it, you need to get off by yourself, you need to talk about it privately and work that out. You don't play out your disagreement in front of your children. Don't contradict your spouse in front of the children. Don't let the children play you off of one another. "Mom said I could do this and now you're telling me you're not." No, we're not going there. Just stop it.

Let's just think through this and work out the implications of what we're saying. I want to be specific in the applications here. Some fathers will come home from work and then overrule the mother's discipline when they get home. "She did that? No, no, don't. You don't have to do that." That is a profound mistake. That's really, really bad, and if you're a father that's been given to do that, you need to repent of that because it teaches your children to disregard their mother, first of all, and it absolutely demoralizes the mom. If

she's going to be at home with your children or dealing with the children in one way or another and you don't support her, it demoralizes her and you as the dad can't do that. You need to support your wife especially if she's a stay-at-home mom. You're the only adult contact she has a lot of the time after dealing with diapers and whiny kids and all of that. If you come home and on top of the challenge of that you contradict her in front of the kids, she feels like, "I might as well throw up my hands and quit." Well, you as the dad have the ability to set a tone in your family where the mom knows that even if the kids are a pain right now, I know that when my husband comes home he's going to be strong and he's going to support me. He's with me, and you can give her the confidence and the courage to continue on. You have to do that. This is part of loving your wife and I'll say without fear of contradiction to us men, that your wife is smarter and probably more aware of what those children need than what you give her credit for. We as men just kind of have to humble ourselves there on that point and reinforce the mother to the children. That's part of being consistent in authority. This is part of instructing them. Look, by honoring their mother, you're teaching them by example that that's what they do too.

And it goes the other way. Some moms will criticize dad in front of the children. You can't do that. You just can't do that. You can't undermine the father's authority by being openly critical of him in the home because you're teaching your children to dishonor their father. You don't have the liberty and prerogative to do that as a Christian parent. You can't by your example and words teach your children to disregard what God commands them to do: honor your father and mother. You show them by example, "Hey, I honor your father and that's what I expect from you too." I greatly appreciate the fact that my wife has raised our kids that way. I never, ever worry about what my wife is saying about me to my kids or to anyone else. It's not that she doesn't have lots of things that she could be critical of because she does, but she honors me privately and that creates a great stability in our relationship. That has been a blessing in our family and a blessing to me. People come and Nancy's talking to them, I'm confident, confident of what she's saying. This is what Christian wives are to be like.

Now, how else can we establish consistent authority in our homes with our children? Let me say this, one thing that I think I've seen a lot of parents do that isn't helpful is that they've just got a bunch of rules. They just multiply the rules in their house and this is where the shoes go and this is where the socks go and, you know, we've got to be here at this time and there are just rules, rules, rules, rules everywhere, most of them not all that important. You need to be clear in your expectations with your children, talking especially of young children. Don't multiply the house rules. Keep a few important ones if you feel like that's necessary, but don't over-regulate the lives of your children. Don't micromanage them so much that they just feel utterly constrained and imposed upon. Remember, especially when your children are young, the hearts and minds of children are slow to learn and if you put a stack of rules in front of them, they're going to give up. Keep it simple, keep it important and then don't sweat the details.

That's part of how you encourage them is by exercising your authority with wisdom which leads us into our third point for this morning and we'll close with this one and then

we'll pick up the rest of them next week. Thirdly: be consistent in love. Be consistent in love. Authority as a parent and love as a parent are like two wings on either side of an airplane, you need them both for the thing to fly right, otherwise it crashes. This is very important. We start with authority and, by the way, let me say one other thing about the authority thing: some parents it seems are afraid of their authority. They obviously are making it their number one goal to be their children's friend. We'll cover some of the things that motivate you in this point on consistency and love, but God hasn't put you in your children's lives to be their friend, to be their buddy as if you were their peer. God has given you authority. Children need their parents to provide leadership; to provide accountability; to provide direction. You can't be a peer. You can't treat them like you're just their friend and do what you're supposed to do as a parent with authority. You have to lead them. You have to instruct them. You have to discipline them. And all of that assumes an authority relationship where they are accountable to you and you provide oversight to them. Parents that just want to be friends to their children are doing them a real disservice and ultimately they lose the respect of their children in the end. Don't be afraid to stand up and be a man, to be a woman, to be a father, to be a mother, to your kids.

I remember, and sometimes this just comes out in the simplest, most unscripted, spontaneous ways. Nancy has a brother and his wife and we were together with them and one of their kids was kind of backtalking to the mom and Holly just cut her off and said, "I am your mother. Don't talk to me that way." Bingo. That's it. "I'm your mom. I don't have to explain anything if I don't want to on this issue." That's all she said was, "I'm your mother," of course, me, I pick up two words and it goes on for ten minutes, right? She said, "I'm your mom. That's the end of the discussion." Exercising authority and teaching that child to do what was right and to honor her appropriately. It's absolutely appropriate for a mom to say that to her kids, "I'm your mom." Now, that was kind of a postscript to the "be consistent in authority" aspect of it. I wanted to say that. You've got to be more than a buddy to your kids. You have to. You can't manifest biblical authority in the home by just being a buddy.

Now thirdly, be consistent in love. This is very important and it's important to say this right on the heels of the authority issue. God does not give you authority in the home for you to be a tyrant. God has established parental authority in the home so that you can establish blessing to those that live under your roof. This is a principle of leadership that I never get tired of talking about and it applies everywhere. It applies in politics. It applies in the workplace. It applies in the church. It applies in the family. If God has given authority to someone, if you are a Christian and God has given you a realm of authority, he has given it to you so that you can exercise that authority so that it will be a blessing to those that are under your leadership and parents have to understand this with special clarity.

You know, I talked about some of my own failures as a parent and one of the things that I remember failing in this particular area is that there were times when our kids were really little and I was still just, you know, kind of feeling my way through these things and I would say, "Pick up those socks," and they'd hesitate and I treated that as an occasion for

discipline. Well, that's terrible to just be immediate, arbitrary and then just go straight to discipline is just really not too good, especially when you're doing it with the angry spirit that I brought to the task back then. That is not the way that we exercise our authority. It's not so that we can get what we want as the dad and mom. We use our authority so that it communicates and passes on the blessing of God to those that are in our household.

Look at Ephesians 6:4 and we're going to put this alongside another verse as well. Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Don't provoke them. God puts limits on your authority and he tells you as part of it to properly channel that authority in the right direction. He says it negatively, "Don't provoke them to anger but positively bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." If your parenting constantly makes your children angry, you might need to step back. It might be that your child is just rebellious and sinful and all of that. They certainly have plenty of sin in their own heart to go around, right? But if your children are constantly responding to you with anger, something's wrong. You have to step back and look at the big picture and say, "Something's wrong here. Is there something that I might need to change? Do my children know anything of a soft tender side to me or do they just see me as a sergeant? Am I just a sergeant in the family?" That's a problem.

Look at Colossians 3:21 along these lines. What I'm wanting you to see is that there are boundaries to your authority; that God directs your authority and it's not just unlimited, arbitrary exercise of a tyrant. Chapter 3, verse 21 of Colossians, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart." And so by way of simple application, don't make your demands so pressing, so immediate and so difficult that your children are bound to fail and then punish them on top of that. That's not good parenting. That exasperates them. Our children will learn obedience more easily if we lead them well and that they see that there's woven through our authority is a thread of gentleness and care and concern that is just as evident as the exercise of authority.

Turn beyond Colossians, the next book in the Bible is 1 Thessalonians. I want you to see this in 1 Thessalonians 2:7. The Apostle Paul used loving parenting to describe his apostolic ministry. He's using parenting as an illustration of his own life here. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, let's start in verse 5, he said, "We never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed - God is witness - nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though," watch this, watch this, watch how Paul handled authority, he said, "even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority." Verse 7, instead of asserting our authority, "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." I love that picture of spiritual leadership, the tender care that's there.

Verse 10, he says, "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children." Exhorting them, teaching them, instructing them, encouraging them, manifesting gentleness, loving concern, pleading with them. All of those things illustrating what true

Christian parenting looks like. A nursing mother is tender, gentle as can be with her infant. Christian dad, building on that, a Christian dad has the good of his children in mind and interacts with them. Not a remote dispenser of orders, but one who's involved relationally with his children. This is the biblical pattern of Christian parenting.

Let me ask you this. We've all been here in what I'm about to say. Have you ever chafed when someone abused their authority over you? Boss? Government? "Oh, that's...he won't listen. He just sets forth orders and then I can't interact about it." And you chafe under that. "It's not fair. I've got things I want to say. I want to interact on this." Well, keep that in mind as you're leading your children. You know, if you know what it's like to chafe under arbitrary authority, then learn from that arbitrary authority and keep it out of the boundaries of your home. Be gracious to your children. Speak kindly to them. Love them. Treat them with dignity. They're a gift from God to you and when they become Christians as they get older in life and my kids and I have talked about this, when they become Christians, do you know what? Your own flesh and blood is a brother in Christ to you. Your own flesh and blood, your beloved daughter, is a sister in Christ, and there's a whole other dimension to the relationship and all the more reason just as we extend love and care to one another in the body of Christ speaking corporately, oh, all the more reason to do it when your children know the Lord.

So on the positive side, make time to do what your kids want to do. Talk about what they want to talk about. On the negative side, don't, please don't discipline your children in front of other people. Make that a matter of privacy. Go off in a room, to the bathroom, someplace, and deal with that privately. Don't discipline them in front of even their own siblings if you have to administer corporal punishment. Get them off to the side. Protect their dignity that way. I remember hearing a story as things kind of flow together in my mind after time, but where a guy wanted to just deal with his kid and spank him right in front of company. Oh, oh, that's really bad. That's really bad to humiliate your kids that way. Don't yell at your kids in front of their friends. And I'll say this as well: I don't believe that parents should spank teenagers. There just comes a point where spanking is not appropriate and when a kid is old enough to drive, you probably need to deal with them differently. I think about it this way: there is kind of a sliding scale. You primarily deal with really young kids through physical discipline when they're young; that's kind of the way that you have to correct them because they're not old enough to engage rational thought. But as they start to get older, the physical discipline declines and you're dealing with them more on a heart basis and talking with them, still exercising authority but not in the same physical corporal way. You want to alienate a kid whose almost old enough to vote, spank him. If you don't, then deal with him differently. Draw upon your resources in Christ. Draw upon your love and authority as a parent and deal with them that way because you'll exasperate them if you don't. You'll alienate them.

So good parenting is more than a one way exercise of authority. You take your children's desires and skills and limitations and feelings into account. You have to be consistent in love with your kids or you are the one who is in sin. You see, your authority as a parent doesn't insulate you from your own accountability to God. We're all accountable and he's shown us in his word what he wants from us.

Now, three more to come next week but let me say this: what about all your mistakes and mine? A message like this kind of sets out some aspirations but it also highlights those areas where you failed. What about that? Maybe failed fundamentally. Maybe failed before you were even a Christian and now you can't go back and undo it. What about all the stuff that you can't undo? You can't change it now. It's too late. They're out of the house. What about that? Well, what about this one word which marks God and the Christian life: grace? We're trusting God with all of our heart, this God who has revealed himself to be gracious to extend favor where it's not deserved, to forgive us of sins even though we don't deserve that, to show kindness where we ourselves didn't show kindness to others. This is the nature of grace, beloved. This is the nature of God with us as Christians. He forgives us. He doesn't hold it against us. Sometimes he'll reverse the consequences and things will come out better even though we didn't do it right to begin with. We trust in him so completely that we bring our failures even as parents and we just lay them before him and say, "God, I can't change this. I did it wrong. Be gracious to me. Be merciful to me, the sinner." And then trust him. And then be calm.

Maybe for some of you there's opportunity here to go back and to talk to your adult children and say, "Do you know what? I messed up. I'm sorry. I'd do it different. I can't but I just give you my love and my sincere confession of my own faults before you. Don't expect anything back in return from you. I just want you to know. I want to make it right from my end. How you take it, it's up to you but I'm growing in Christ, you know, and I just want to make it right while I can. I love you. I'm sorry." And you just humble yourself under that level of confession and as you do that, you purge your conscience, you cleanse your conscience of those things and then you can go forward in peace. This is part of being a Christian. We can all go to Christ with all of our failures, our fatigues, our frustration, and we find a fountain of grace. He's good to us even when we haven't earned it. None of us have, right?

And let me say this one final thing, especially to those of you that are still at home. You're raising your kids and you're conscious of things that you did wrong even this past week. Understand this: because we believe in a sovereign God, because we believe in a wise God who is directing everything to accomplish his purposes, you can say this with absolute certainty as you look at your kids and you remember your failures, hopefully some of you encouraged by, "Hey, do you know what? We aimed our life that way." Remember this: God shaped you for your children. He shaped you for the particular children that he gave to you and he shaped your kids for you as well. You're not a parent to these children by mistake or by accident and now, today, we can't do anything about the past anyway, but even your failures, even what you did wrong, has informed and shaped the parent that you are today. Trust him. If you're going to trust him for the eternal disposition of your soul, trust him for the smaller temporal things as well about your parenting. God shaped you for that child. It's not a mistake. Be encouraged. Be confident even in your weakness that, "Whatever else I say about this, God made me this child's dad, and however much I messed it up in the past, I'm going to step forward to the plate now." That's just bringing forth the fruit of repentance, manifesting the realities of grace.

Wherever you're at on the parenting spectrum, grandparenting many of you now, be faithful to the principles of good Christian parenting. Those of you that are starting with infants, holding them in the back, a lot of them, a lot of infants in here, all the hope and promise of parents and new life and the joy that those little ones bring to you, understand that God gave them to you to bless you and for you to be a blessing to them. What we've talked about here today is the means by which he does that. You approach life with a calm serenity in the sovereign goodness of God. You realize your position of authority and you exercise it in love, and you trust God for his grace when you fall short. With that, we trust him again. Whatever the outcome is, we trust him for it. And the one who bears the scars of nails in his hands and in his feet, beloved, is worthy of our trust, and he will accomplish his purposes without fail.

Pray with me.

Father, we do want to just come to you. We thank you for the parents that you gave us. Father, I thank you for my mom and my dad. For all of their strengths and weaknesses, Father, they were the parents that you appointed for me and their influence in my life was incalculable. I thank you for that. Thank you for those times with my dad before the end of his life.

I pray, Father, for the parents that are here, especially the parents of the young ones, Father, and all the uncertainty, "Am I doing this right? Am I doing it wrong?" Father, help them to go beyond the day-to-day things and see the great principles of Christian parenting and to trust you and to live those things out. Help husbands and wives to talk together and to aim life together and to come to agreement on these things while they can. Father, may the outcome of this be sanctified Christian homes with great blessing upon them.

Father, for the parents where the kids have already moved on, Father, for those that have children that love them, that are walking with Christ, we rejoice, we thank you, we give you the glory for that. For those whose lives are wrecked in sin and have just been a continual heartache, Father, we detect by the fact that we're still breathing and that those children are still breathing that perhaps your work is not done yet. Maybe, just maybe, you're not done being gracious. We trust you for whatever the future holds. For those who weep tears of grief, Father, may you take their tears of grief, their broken hearts over the way life has turned out, Father, may you look with compassion upon those broken hearts and see in their tears prayers that come up to you, "O God, be merciful to us! Be gracious to us! Help us, our God!" May you take their tears and respond to them with that level of boundless grace.

Lord, we thank you for the clarity of your word. We pray that you would take what we've discussed here today and make it useful for the cause of your kingdom and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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