

The Duties of Parents – Ryle’s Insights – Part 06

VI. Train them to a habit of prayer

Ryle says, “Prayer was the distinguishing mark of the Lord’s people in the day that there began to be a separation between them and the world. ‘Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord’ (Gen. 4:26).”

Consider that: Just after Cain killed Abel and we have the beginning of civilization, this is the final statement in Genesis 4. What set believers apart from unbelievers? *Communion with God in prayer*. They ‘called upon’ the name of the Lord. A mark that you love someone is you *talk* to them. Parents who pray little will have children who pray little.

Ryle says, “Prayer is the turning-point in a man’s soul. Our ministry is unprofitable, and our labor is vain, till you are brought to your knees. Till then, we have no hope about you. ... Show me a growing Christian, flourishing Christian, and sure am I, he is one that speaks often with his Lord. He asks much, and he has much. He tells Jesus everything, and so he always knows how to act.”

The great victories you long to see as a parent: It’s wonderful when they get their catechism questions down pat. It’s wonderful when they understand theology. It’s wonderful when you see their minds’ ability to discern truth from error is growing. But more than anything, what we long to see is our children *on their own initiative* taking their Bible to a quiet place and praying to their God – loving Christ, praying, confessing their sins, and seeking to live their lives for the glory of Christ. That is the victory we long to see. That is the goal of everything. *But it is awfully difficult to impart to our children what we ourselves know little or nothing of experientially.*

Questions for our consideration: When we as parents have free time, what do our children observe us doing? We can instruct and be faithful in teaching, but how does our expenditure of time show them God in our lives?

Discussion Question #1: How have you tried to teach your little ones to pray? How do you help them / teach them?

Incredible Ryle quotation: “Parents, if you love your children, do all that lies in your power to train them up to a habit of prayer. Show them how to begin. Tell them what to say. Encourage them to persevere. Remind them if they become careless and slack about it. Let it not be your fault, at any rate, if they never call on the name of the Lord. This, remember, is the first step in religion which a child is able to take. Long before he can read, you can teach him to kneel by his mother’s side, and repeat the simple words of prayer and praise which she puts in his mouth. And as the first steps in any undertaking are always the most important, so is the manner in which your children’s prayers are prayed, a point which deserves your closest attention. Few seem to know how much depends on this. You must beware lest they get into a way of saying them in a hasty, careless, and irreverent manner. You must beware of giving up the oversight of this matter to servants and nurses, or of trusting too much to your children doing it when left to themselves. I cannot praise that mother who never looks after this most important part of her child’s daily life herself. Surely if there be any habit which your own hand and eye should help in forming, it is the habit of prayer. Believe me, if you never hear your children pray yourself, you are much to blame. You are little wiser than the bird described in Job, “ which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear” (Job 39:14-16). Prayer is, of all habits, the one which we recollect the longest. Many a grey-headed man could tell you how his mother used to make him pray in the days of his childhood. Other things have passed away from his mind perhaps. The church where he was taken to worship, the minister whom he heard preach, the companions who used to play with him,—all these, it

may be, have passed from his memory, and left no mark behind. But you will often find it is far different with his first prayers. He will often be able to tell you where he knelt, and what he was taught to say, and even how his mother looked all the while. It will come up as fresh before his mind's eye as if it was but yesterday. Reader, if you love your children, I charge you, do not let the seed-time of a prayerful habit pass away unimproved. If you train your children to anything, train them, at least, to a habit of prayer."

VII. Train them to habits of diligence, and regularity about public means of grace.

Recall the sermon I preached titled, "The Indispensable Church." The situation we see today in American Christianity is really quite unprecedented. There are "free-floating" Christians all over the place – people who zealously proclaim their Christian commitment, but have no local church they regularly attend or are members of. Children of parents who are sporadic in their church attendance will likely be sporadic in their own church attendance.

Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

In recent times there has been an overreaction against formality and "churchianity." But the reaction to this has been extreme in that many see church attendance as expendable, non-essential, etc.

Discussion Question #2: Why is training our children to "habits of diligence, and regularity about public means of grace" so vitally important?

Discussion Question #3: Parents (and grandparents) are the ones tasked with the discipleship of their children, but what about pastors and elders in the lives of your children? Are they essential and important too?

Application: Young people struggle mightily to connect with local churches. Train your children while they are young to **be there** when the churches door are open for worship and to be there on time. Teach them to see the value of the Lord's Supper, the public singing of hymns and Psalms, the public reading and teaching of Scripture. When you listen to preaching, have your Bible open and listen attentively. Sing at the top of your lungs. Do all these things primarily out of love for God, *but also because those little eyes are watching you.*

Ryle says, "I call it a sad sight in a church when nobody comes up to the Lord's table but the elderly people, and the young men and the young women all turn away. But I call it a sadder sight still when no children are to be seen in a church, excepting those who come to the Sunday School, and are obliged to attend. Let none of this guilt lie at your doors. There are many boys and girls in every parish, besides those who come to school, and you who are their parents and friends should see to it that they come with you to church. Do not allow them to grow up with a habit of making vain excuses for not coming. Give them plainly to understand, that so long as they are under your roof it is the rule of your house for everyone in health to honour the Lord's house upon the Lord's day, and that you reckon the Sabbath-breaker to be a murderer of his own soul."

Ryle then says that you should have your children sit near you. He wrote, "Neither do I like to see what I call 'a young people's corner' in a church. They often catch habits of inattention and irreverence there, which it takes years to unlearn, if ever they are unlearned at all. What I like to see is a whole family sitting together, old and young, side by side, men, women, and children, serving God according to their households." Ryle then references these texts:

Exodus 10:9 And Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord."

Joshua 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

Exodus 34:23 Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the Lord God of Israel.

Acts 21:5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Application: Clearly, everyone of all ages were together, *by families*. That is the Biblical pattern.

Discussion Question #4: Why might it be dangerous to have what Ryle calls a 'young people's corner'?

⇒ In Cincinnati, the balcony in the sanctuary was the 'young people's corner' and it was a constant source of difficulty, disruption, and irreverence.

Encouragement from Ryle: "Parents, comfort your minds with these examples. Be not cast down because your children see not the full value of the means of grace now. Only train them up to a habit of regular attendance. Set it before their minds as a high, holy, and solemn duty, and believe me, the day will very likely come when they will bless you for your deed."

Application: Always remember, Ryle's "funnel" analogy: "Their understandings are like narrow-necked vessels: we must pour in the wine of knowledge gradually, or much of it will be spilled and lost." Our discipleship efforts are for the long haul. Little by little, we hope and pray to see that they embrace the Lord Jesus and the life He desires for them.

VIII. Train them to a habit of faith.

Ryle says, "I mean by this, you should train them up to believe what you say. You should try to make them feel confidence in your judgment, and respect your opinions, as better than their own. You should accustom them to think that, when **you** say a thing is bad for them, it must be bad, and when **you** say it is good for them, it must be good; that your knowledge, in short, is better than their own, and that they may rely implicitly on your word. Teach them to feel that what they know not now, they will probably know hereafter, and to be satisfied there is a reason and a needs-be for everything you require them to do."

Ryle again, "Tell your children, too, that we must all be learners in our beginnings,—that there is an alphabet to be mastered in every kind of knowledge,—that the best horse in the world had need once to be broken,—that a day will come when they will see the wisdom of all your training. But in the meantime if you say a thing is right, it must be enough for them,—they must believe you, and be content."

Discussion Question #5: Did your parents tell you, "you will understand this when you are older."? Did your parents seem smarter to you when you got older and moved out?