

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## FAMILY LIFE

### LESSON 4: BIBLICAL PARENTING

As with marriage, money, health, opportunity – indeed every good gift – the purpose of the God-given gift of children is not the children themselves, but rather the glory of God as reflected in our children and in our diligent parenting of them. As we follow Biblical principles in our parenting, the Lord’s spirit will increasingly shine through our children.

The Bible makes it clear that children are a blessing from the Lord. Children are not to be seen as interruptions or complications, neither are they to be seen as idols! How we raise our families indicates much about our relationship with the Lord and our understanding of His purposes for parenting.

“Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.”

Psalms 127:3

The ultimate goal of parenting is not to have ‘perfect kids’ or ‘successful kids’ but rather, to have children who have grown to be adults who reflect the character of God to a watching world.

The Psalms tell us that children are an inheritance – a blessing, a reward – from the Lord. As with our finances, we need to see that such a gift coming directly from the hand of the Lord must have been given for our good and for His glory. He has a purpose in mind in giving you these children, and so you ought to seek to be a good steward of the children He has given you. How does the Bible instruct us to parent? What are the goals that we ought to have for our children?

Depending on where you live, you may be overwhelmed with parenting advice and resources. Countless books and websites have been dedicated to teaching the ‘right’ way, or the most ‘sure to succeed’ way to parent. Often you may receive wholehearted, yet extremely conflicting, advice from well-meaning friends, neighbours, and family members. What advice should you listen to? How do you know what is truly expected of you in your parenting?

Regardless of the cultural framework in which you are raising your children, you need to remember that, as a Christian, you are first and foremost a citizen of Heaven. Therefore, in your parenting you need to follow your Heavenly King’s expectations above the traditional or cultural expectations that may be upon you. This is not to say that every traditional or cultural expectation is wrong or ungodly, but when they come to be at odds with what the Bible teaches, you must make the difficult choice to follow the Lord’s leading over the world’s pressures.

Before you consider parenting styles, you need to lay a firm guiding principle or foundation for yourself and your family. What is your goal for your children? As with every area of the Christian life, the ultimate goal is not to have ‘perfect kids’ or ‘successful kids’ but rather, to have children who have grown to be adults who reflect the character of God to a watching world. While they are young and learning they can still model and mirror Christlikeness. As adults they absolutely must do so, and will be able to, when we, as parental figures, set the example and lay a Biblical foundation of moral living.

Therefore, in your discipline style, in your teaching, in your family worship, in your conversations and relationships, remember that the goal is godliness. Truly, this kind of parenting is not easier than what the world would recommend. So much of the advice available seeks to make your life easier in the short-term. Perhaps you have heard of techniques of how to make your kids obey, or how to raise a successful child. Maybe you have been taught rules to make your children have the appearance of ‘nice people’ but no amount of external pressure and behaviour modification can replace the life-altering heart-change that the Holy Spirit can work in your children’s life. And no child can perfectly please their parents or God without God’s Help! We miss the opportunity to teach children reliance on God and His perfect love and grace if we expect them to be good all on their own. Parenting towards that end

does take more time, more effort, more intentionality, and more sincerity of faith in your own life! But it is infinitely worth it.

The best way to parent well is to live well. As parents, you are the greatest influence in your children's life. They are constantly watching for your reactions to situations, your responses to people, and your regrets to your own shortcomings. When you are quick to run to the Lord for strength and guidance and joy, then they too will be quick to go to the Lord. If your spiritual walk looks formulaic or fake then they will not heed your instructions to them to be sincere in their faith. Modelling Christlikeness is certainly the best type of parenting you can undertake.

Of course you must also consider the daily, practical, minute-by-minute details of family life. How do you define obedience? What kinds of conversation will you allow in your house? What does respect for others look like? And how will you enforce all of these things? This is the real life and hard work of parenting. But, again, in order to rightly answer these questions, you must begin from a framework of doing all that you can to build Christlikeness into yourself and your children.

Teaching godliness to our children is something that won't happen by accident. It requires intentional actions on the part of both parents (or whomever is raising the child !). It can be as easy as talking about the Word of God throughout the day, or sharing the story of how you came to faith in Jesus. When talk of what God is doing becomes a natural part of our conversations children will learn to understand God is at work in all things – even their own lives. Above all, as a parent you should rely on the strength and patience God provides, and pray often for and with your children.

If you are not a parent, the Lord still has a role for you to play in this spectacularly important part of life. You can still be a parental figure in the life of a younger person through discipleship or mentoring .There will surely be children in your life who do not have godly parents. Your example in their life may be the only picture of Christ they ever see. If you know of a Christian family or a single mom who is struggling with the demands of home and family life, you could consider coming alongside that family as an extra help to the mom and as a friend to the children. While you may not have biological children of your own, through 'adopting' children in these ways (or by literally adopting a child into your family) you can help to raise the next generation of godly men and women. What a calling, and what a gift to the Church to have families and individuals who are intent on reflecting the character of God in their own lives and in the lives of the children in their midst.

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## IN REVIEW

- When considering parenting styles or advice we must remember that having 'perfect' children is not the goal: accurately reflecting the character of Christ is.
- It is critically important that we choose to follow Biblical principles over cultural traditions when they are at odds with each other.
- Even those who have never had children, or those whose children have grown up and moved on, can fulfill a type of parental role in the children in their lives through discipleship, mentoring, and being a help and support to families.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- Take time to evaluate your goals for your children. Do they all have to relate to occupation, education, and success, or are your goals more in line with what scripture teaches us is ultimately important? Write down these goals. Pray and ask the Lord to give you a heart for His goals for your children.
  
- Have you ever considered that your children are merely 'on loan' to you from the Lord? How does seeing yourself as their steward change how you parent? Do you see that what you want in your family needs to line up with what the Lord wants for your family?
  
- If you do not have children at home right now, pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to see the needs around you and to help you find a family that you can serve and encourage.

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