

CHILDREN



*are a blessing*



# PARENTING

## THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

Before we at how to's, we must look at our 'parenting foundations". From what base or platform are we building our homes, marriages, families and children? To understand this better consider what baseline fitness means to an athlete.

***We are imperfect parents who are the children of imperfect parents raising imperfect children.***

Each of us has our own story. Each of us comes from different homes and backgrounds. Some of us had great parents and some of us had shockers. One thing is sure.

***None of us had perfect parents.***

As much as they wanted to be they were not. And so we all 'parent' from a place of lack. We may have lacked:

- A good example
- Affection
- Encouragement
- Equality in the home- through being a favourite or a black sheep.

Let us look at some well-known characters in the Bible:

We know Jacob as the deceiver, a run away kind of guy, a 'mommies' boy, and a father who himself had favourites. Not surprising when we read Genesis 25:27-28  
*"As the boys grew, Esau became a skilful hunter, while Jacob was a quiet sort who liked to stay home. Isaac's favourite was Esau... and Rebekah's favourite was Jacob"*

- We know Joseph in his younger days as an arrogant and spoilt boy. Not surprising when we read Genesis 37:3 *"Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children"*
- We know of Judah as the one who sold his brother into slavery. Not surprising when we read Genesis 37:4 *"His brothers of course noticed their father's partiality, and consequently hated Joseph"*, 42:38, 44:30

Ask most counsellors what one of the main reasons for the need for counsel is? The father- either absent, distant, dominant or dictatorial.

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**The result** of having being parented incompletely at best or badly at worst is that like begets like. We pass it on. The baggage we have received is the baggage we give. However, we simply cannot afford to hide behind our baggage. Please understand that this is not an exercise in self-pity, self-analysis, introspection or parent blaming. It is simply realizing our huge need for God in the area.

**The solution** is to change our parenting base. To become 'well parented'. When we receive Christ we become children of God. This is not a nice, noble thought but truth. We must grasp it in reality and not only in concept.

John 1:12 *"But to all who receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to was to trust Him to save them"*

1 John 3:1 *"For he who dislikes his brother is wandering in spiritual darkness and doesn't know where he is going, the the darkness had made him blind so that he can not see the way."*

**God has become our Father, our parent.**

He is the perfect example of the kind, consistent, good, forgiving, compassionate, accepting, providing and protecting father and parent. The list of adjectives is endless. In order for us to be 'whole' we have to live in the Fathers affirmation where we find our sonstant security. In he 'Lords Prayer' in which He teaches us to pray we have an invitation from God to address Him as 'Father'. This is very significant. The one who is so Holy and Divine that we may not address Him by names invites us to call Him 'Father', which is a much more intimate term. In calling Him 'Father' we are confronted by His closeness, intimacy, love and accessibility.

Luke 3:22 *"This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased"*

Luke 3:49 *"... did you not know that I had to be busy with my Fathers things"*

Jesus' ministry was characterized by a 'Father' consciousness.

The result of having being parented by God is that we have a whole new base, a whole new refernce, a whole new set of experiences and memories from which to parent.

1 Peter 1:18 *"God paid ransom to save you from the impossible road to heaven which your fathers tried to take, and the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver."*

2 Cor 5:16-17 *"So stop evaluating Christians by what the world thinks about them or by what they seem to be like on the outside. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, merely as a human being like myself. How differently I feel now! When someone becomes a Christians he becomes a brand new person in side. He is not te same anyone. A new life has begun!"*

Note: This should in no way alarm those who are raising children with absent fathers. Rather this should inspire confidence that their children can now be brought up under the shadow and influence of 'The Father'.

This is all great, but it has to be worked out so don't give up.

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## What can we do?

Realize that things can get better. Where it is now does not have to be the end of the road.

- The bad can become good
- The good can become brilliant
- There are many examples - my own story.

Forgive yourself. Nothing cripples like unforgiveness.

- People get sick and have nervous breakdowns
- They lose their inheritance
- They lose their calling
- The list is endless

We always think of this in terms of others but what of ourselves. What if we fail to forgive ourselves? We have all failed and messed up somewhere as parents. All that differs between us is the size of the mess. We have all spanked or shouted at a child in anger when we shouldn't have. (eg. Dan's broken window, Shelley when we moved house). Some of us have been alcoholics, have got divorced or spent our lives at work.

### **Repent and be forgiven. You can't afford not to.**

1 John 1:7-9 *"But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and by the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves, and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to Him, He can be depended on to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong."*

Live forgiven! Guilt and condemnation will not make you a better parent.

**Apologize where needed.** These three words are a gift from heaven. As a boil is lanced to bring healing and does so quickly, so too does an apology. So often there is nothing else to say that is of any value or that holds the way forward. So often we have blown it so badly it is all we can say.

Not - 'I am sorry, but...'

Rather - 'I am sorry for... please forgive me...' or 'I was wrong... you are not at fault...'

Children are most forgiving.

**Change your expectation.** We all want to be perfect parents. That is a good thing. We must aim for it. Yet as important as it is, it is still no guarantee and our children can still get by despite our flaws. Look at:

- Samson
- Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah
- The way Shelley sees me, 'To be perfect, just like you...'

Sometimes a 'bar' preoccupation takes the life out things. "Right now everyone, it is time for fun", is a demand we often hear a father try to make. It does not work. Guilt, condemnation and the responsive organization it produces, squash the joy and life.

**Realize you are Gods project.** He has not finished or given up.

Ephesians 2:10 *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance for us to walk in."*

We can so focus on our part that we loose sight of the greater part that is Gods.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 *"Who am I, and who Apollos, that we should be the cause of a quarrel? Why we're just God's servants, each of us with certain abilities, and with our help you believed. My work was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollo's work was to water it, but it was God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts. The person who does the planting or watering isn't very important, but God is important because He is the One who makes things grow."*

This verse is in the context of ministry but is equally applicable to parenting.

2 Corinthians 3:18 *"And we who without unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into the Lord's likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."*

**We all do this differently, thank God.**

## COMMUNICATING WITH OUR CHILDREN

We cannot over emphasize the importance or priority of communication in our families. It makes or breaks them. It holds all the other areas of family life together. Without it parents and children can fail to connect even when they both desperately want to do so. Some people are more able to communicate than others. They seem to be naturally gifted as if they are 'wired' to engage. For them, sharing heart, both speaking and listening, seems to come easy. One thing is for sure. It does not matter how we see ourselves. We can certainly learn to communicate a whole lot better than we do, and it is a responsibility that we must embrace. If not, we run the risk of seperating from our children like the fork in a road and one day looking back with regret and wonder.

### ***A correct attitude in communicating:***

- We have to perservere in this priority. When things like time restraints, personal inclinations and a lack of reciprocation make us want to give in, we simply cannot. We must stay patient and 'keep sowing'.
- We must have the resolve to push through the 'awkward barrier'. When it seems like we have nothing in common with our children and we don't know what to say, we can't drop the responsibility. Even if the only thing we can communicate is to be honest about our lack of knowing how, that is better than nothing at all probably a good place to start.
- We msut push through the phases that have the potential to create and establish distance. So often when this happens ground is lost that is never recovered. This can happen through things like miss-understanding, disappointment or age gap. Here are some examples of those things that can create gaps.
  - A boyfriend or girlfriend
  - Puberty. An area of privilege and responsibility that we must not avoid.
  - Seeing a pattern or trait that we don't like
  - When our children seem to not need us any more and appear independent
- We cannot hope to communicate with our children if we don't exemplify it in the way we relate to our spouses. We must demonstrate the correct way to talk.
- We must respect our children. We cannot expect them to respect others if we don't respect them. If we don't want to be shouted at by them we should not shout at them. Respect for them is not only a matter of speaking. It includes things like knocking on their doors before we enter theri rooms, not opening their mail and not interrupting when they speak.

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## **Practical communication**

- There should be no 'out of bounds' areas when it comes to their being able to talk to us. even if we feel the subject is unimportant, uncomfortable or even wrong, we must let them speak. It might be difficult at the time but we appreciate it later. One area that we have to take the initiative in most times, and that we must, is in the area of puberty. For the most, our children will not find it easy to approach us with their questions and struggles. They will find it 'easier' to battle by themselves or learn from friends. I would rather my children learn from us their parents. It does not have to be a scary domain but can be a fun and light-hearted point of discussion, one that they can learn to feel comfortable in sharing about. I am sure it is us as parents who bring the awkwardness into the subject. However you feel about it, find some courage and broach it.
- We have to learn to listen. We must try to understand what they are saying and not be formulating our answer in our heads before they have even finished. We must try and take off the preconceptions that we have and acknowledge their individuality. They are neither like us their parents, or each other. When we listen we should make eye contact, drop what we are doing and give our full attention or arrange to do so. The time will come when such times will be some of our most treasured memories.
- This is very hard to do but when it seems like it is 'just not happening' and our expectation for communication is not being met, give them space. It is very difficult at times for our children to respond to intimacy and explanation on demand.
- Have family times. These can include things like praying together, reading the Bible, planning family happenings or an important event in one members life. It might also be an opportunity for discussion around a relevant topic.
- Do things that make you laugh as a family. Not all communication is about having 'D and M's'.
- Initiate communication that builds them up. Find areas to encourage and thank them. When you need to, apologize to them.
- Communication is more than words. When God wanted to communicate with mankind He did not shout from heaven. He sent His Son as a living word. Here are some possible areas of relating.
  - An activity of their choice
  - An interest that they have
  - A gift of flowers
  - An outing
  - Gestures. Be a gentleman to you girls and a fan to your boys
- Physical touch is a strong way of communicating. God demonstrated His love through Jewish and not the British culture. In the story of the prodigal son there is lavish affection demonstrated. The Bible tells us to greet each other the holy kisses.

***For some of us as parents this area of communication has gone reasonably well and for others it is an ongoing nightmare. For all of us this is a long haul and one that we must not give up on.***



## ***Practical discipline***

- Where possible the father should exercise the discipline. We see this in the scriptures. In this he protects his wife for whom discipline is often a most stressful thing and can make her vulnerable to abuse from the child. Proverbs 1:8 makes it very clear that the father is to uphold the authority of the mother in the eyes of the child. This cannot be overstated enough. Somehow, for the most part, children have a natural respect or 'fear' for their fathers but not always for their mothers. When he speaks, they listen. He has to bring them to the point that when she speaks, they also listen.
- We must have the right heart motive, that being the good of the child. The objective is not punishment but training, changing and maturing. Punishment may very well be part of the discipline. The child needs to know that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable, not the child.
- Both parents need to be in agreement. They need to support each other in the process. The greatest gift a parent can ever give to a child is to love the child's other parent.
- Be consistent. Discipline should not be based on mood, circumstance, time restraint or energy levels. Done correctly, discipline is hard work!
- Discipline should be exercised with control. Not in anger, rushed or with shouting. Remember these words - wait, why, wack, wait, warmth.
- Respond, don't react. Get your own thoughts and emotions in a straight line.
- Do not be intimidated as a parent. You have God given authority to discipline your child. Whether it is the tantrum of a child at the shopping mall or the threat and moodiness of a teenager, do not back down. Be careful not to allow your child room to blame others, which frees them from having to take responsibility for their own actions.
- Remember that no rebellion is worth the destruction of your family.
- Discipline is meant to be painful.
  - take away the cell phone
  - Grounding
  - Reducing any allowance
  - No TV
- You need to think through what you enforce. For example adding household chores or stopping from attending youth might give a negative spin to a normal and healthy part of life.
- The application of discipline may vary from child to child but the level should not. Learning the love language of your child is important.
- Most often discipline should be done privately. The object is correction not humiliation
- When discipline has been handled wrongly, apologize.
- Remember this is a marathon not a sprint.

## ***Proactive discipline***

- Pray for your children
- Help and guide them to reach their own convictions. Let Godly peers help them in this area. It is much easier to hold them accountable to their convictions than yours. When it comes to such matters as dating, clothing or body-piercing, guide them through whatever it means to have a Godly and biblical view. This won't necessarily be quick or easy, but do whatever it takes.
- Have clear and well-understood boundaries. Don't make foolish demands or threats. 1 Samuel 14:24 *"Saul had declared, "a curse upon anyone who eats anything before evening - before I have full revenge on my enemies."* Don't make issues out of non-issues. Ask yourself these questions. Is this a matter of death or destiny? (Cathy De la Hunt) Does this requirement have value or is it simply my preference, like the women who used to roast the leg of lamb in two pieces without knowing why. Realize, recognize and respond to the different 'phases' in your child's life. For example the 'odd phase' when he is neither boy nor man. He seems to want to show off, correct you or embarrass you. Will you react to that or respond to it.
- Give alternatives to what you are 'outlawing'. Growing up should not be just a whole bunch of 'don'ts'. Wherever possible, say yes.
- Don't be afraid to let their bad choices, and the consequences thereof, correct them. be careful what you add or take away.
- Give them the chance to change their attitudes. Try and find easy and helpful ways to do this.
- Be a role model. Read carefully the instructions given to the young 'up and coming' worship leaders in the time of David. 1 Chron 25:1-8. Remember this. This loudest and most visible picture of God the Father, to your children, is you. The most influential example in their lives, of how you live, is you.

***May God our Father help us.***