



Foundations of Faith- A Biblical Approach to Parenting #1

The Goals of Parenting

From year to year, generation to generation, culture to culture, spouse to spouse, parenting has been the subject of heated debate and strong personal opinion. Practically everyone has opinions on parenting—doctors, psychologists, friends, neighbors, etc. Entire magazines are devoted to the topic. Even Christians have come to very different conclusions on parenting. This entire debate indicates how important this topic really is!

However, with all these thoughts and theories on how to raise children, 2 Timothy 3:1-5 still speaks of a society that has not trained individuals in righteousness in the last days.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 1 *“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, **disobedient to parents**, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, **without self-control**, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power”* (emphasis added).

How do you see these characteristics manifested in our society today?

These characteristics do NOT have to be true of your family! God’s Word has revealed how parents and children may live in peace, joy, and harmony within the family. Additionally, God’s Word has provided the answers to how a parent must function if he or she is going to place the children in the best possible position to live godly lives. In this study, we will work through some critical passages in the Scripture to help parents carefully approach parenting in a biblical manner. This first lesson begins with **“First Things First”** and **“The Christian Parent’s Goal.”**

In **“First Things First”** we will explore some preliminary issues that you must understand as you raise your children. Then we will explore what should be the parent’s goal. If you don’t know what your goal or target is, how will you know when you have hit it?

1. First Things First

Before even thinking about exactly what to do with your children, you must give careful attention to the following three key items: your relationship with Christ, your source of truth, your child’s nature.

A. Your relationship with Christ

The first key item that you must consider is your relationship with Christ. Are you a believer in Christ Jesus? A believer is simply a sinner saved through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Non-believers may see benefits in parenting through the application of timeless biblical truth, but they will not please God by their works. It is quite impossible to “parent biblically” without God’s grace and salvation.

One may ask, “Why is being a believer so important?” Please read 1 Corinthians 2:14 listed below and then answer that question.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”*

What are some other biblical reasons why only a believing parent has the potential to raise his child in a godly way?

B. Your source of truth

The second key item that you must consider is your source of truth. Please answer the following questions to help you come to some conclusions on this matter.

1. Where do people in society typically go for solutions for living? For truth about relationships? For advice on what to think about certain issues? For comfort in times of trouble? Or for knowledge about man's beginning? In other words, to what sources of "truth" does society listen?

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2. Give an example or two of how these sources might contradict biblical truth.

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3. Deuteronomy 8:3 says, "*Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.*" God expected the children of Israel (and us) to live their lives with regard to a certain source.

What is that source according to this passage? _____

4. Jesus said in John 17:17 "*Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.*"

What did Jesus call God's Word? _____

5. How then are we able to determine what is true in regard to parenting in light of all the various theories, opinions, and philosophies that are available? In other words, how does a Christian determine what is true?

If you are going to be successful in pleasing God in your parenting, there is only one approach: the biblical approach. To the degree that you value and practice biblical principles instead of simply following personal experience, popular culture, or current "expert" opinions will be the degree to which you please God in your parenting.

6. Consider Jesus' words to those who did not practice biblical principles: "*But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*" (John 10:26-27).

What are some ways that Jesus describes His sheep? _____

C. Your child's nature

The following verse is from Proverbs, which is called "wisdom literature." While written by Solomon, it was given by God for the purpose of teaching.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."
(Proverbs 22:6)

This verse is often taught as a promise for parents who do right, and an indictment of parents whose children fail. Sometimes it sounds like a guarantee regarding parenting, or perhaps a "test" of spirituality.

Some would say the verse means, "*If you punch the right buttons as a parent you will get the right product.*" However, a much stronger and more correct meaning would be this: "*If you bring up a child **in his way** [i.e. the way he is bent (as a sinner)] when he is old he will not depart from it*"

(emphasis added). In other words, this verse is a *WARNING* for parents to consider the way in which they “train” or “bring up” their children.

This meaning is consistent with the book of Proverbs, which teaches that, *generally* speaking, good parents turn out good children and bad parents turn out bad children. It is also consistent with the message found frequently in Proverbs instructing children to “choose wisdom.” Parents can and must teach truth, but their children must choose wisdom!

1. Roman 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

What is the “natural bent” that all children are born with? _____

2. What are some evidences, even in small children, which demonstrate these biblical truths?

3. Sometimes the hardest work of parenting is not training children, it is in “retraining” them.

Children who are allowed to practice “their way” and become habituated to it require remedial work – which requires great effort. For example, the child who gets what he wants by throwing a temper tantrum will throw more tantrums, which grow more severe over time.

• How could this be seen in an infant falling asleep only when held? _____

• How could this be seen in a toddler who doesn’t want to share toys or eat peas? _____

• How could this be seen in the way a teen cares for his bedroom? _____

4. As parents we must ask, “Am I training my child(ren) to be self-centered?” More specifically:

• “How do your children respond when they do not get their way?” _____

• “In what issues does my child particularly want to get his/her own way?” _____

2. The Christian Parent’s Goal

Psalm 127:3-5a states, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”

God refers to our youth as “a gift of the Lord.” And youth, like arrows shot from a bow, have the potential to hit targets far beyond the parents’ reach. They can build upon the foundation laid by parents and expand the parents’ goals, ideas, and beliefs to higher levels. However, like a warrior’s arrow, they have the potential to hit the targets only if they are “aimed” accurately. While these lessons will help our “aiming,” we have to first define our target.

Write down your response to the following statement: “If we aim at nothing, we will hit it every time!”

A. What is the parent’s target?

Many parents have never taken the time to think through the question, “What kind of a child do I want to produce?” or “What do I want my son/daughter to look like when he/she leaves home?”

To answer these questions we have to turn to our source of truth, the Bible, and determine what kind of young adult would please God. Please answer the following questions to determine this more specifically.

1. At Jesus Christ's baptism in Matthew 3:17, God the Father states, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." What does God's statement about His Son tell you about His attitude toward Him?

2. According to John 8:29, why did God have this kind of attitude toward his Son? In other words, what was true about the life and character of Jesus Christ that made the Father well pleased with Him?

"And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him [God the Father]" (John 8:29).

3 After reading these passages, please answer the following question.

Isaiah 64:6 "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

Romans 3:9-12 9 "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. '"

What can you conclude that God thinks of all others besides Jesus? _____

4. In light of your answers in 1-3, it is not surprising to find what God's goal is for every believer in Romans 8:28-29.

*"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to **become conformed to the image of His Son [Christ], that He [Christ] might be the firstborn [i.e. in rank or position or importance] among many brethren**" (emphasis added).*

So God is well pleased with what kind of adult? _____

5. Our target has been defined now! Parents' efforts must be directed toward "**bringing up the children to handle life in a Christ-like way.**" (A "Christlike way" will be defined more in the next section].

What is the important difference between the phrase "Bring them up" (from Ephesians 6:4) as opposed to the typical worldly view "Let them grow up to handle life . . ."? _____

While all of the parent's efforts in regard to the children must be directed toward this target, sometimes, as discussed in number '1 C', a child still choses to rebel. What truths should a parent remember and act upon if he or she has diligently pursued this goal, but the child still rebels? _____

B. What does the target of "Christ-likeness" look like?

1. Consider how the following verses of Scripture describe our model in Christ:

“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.” -- Isaiah 52:13

- In this passage Jesus Christ is called _____.

“And He [Jesus] went down with them [Joseph & Mary], and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them.” (Luke 2:51).

- Jesus was _____ to his earthly parents.

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10).

- What words could be used to describe Jesus in this passage? _____

“I glorified Thee [God the Father] on earth” (John 17:4).

- What did Christ do while on the earth? _____

“And while being reviled, He [Christ] did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him [God, the Father] who judges righteously” (1 Peter 1:23).

- How did Jesus handle trouble? _____

2. Jesus Christ was perfect in character. The Scriptures give us a concise list of Jesus’ characteristics so that we can more easily understand what “Christlikeness” looks like. These characteristics are called the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

As a parent, in which fruit of the Spirit do you particularly need to grow? _____

C. What are some wrong targets?

1. What wrong goals or priorities might these statements reveal?

“I just want peace and quiet.” _____

“I can’t do that -- he might cry.” _____

“I just want my kids to be happy.” _____

“I don’t have time for this, I have work to do.” _____

“It is just a phase-- ignore it; it will pass.” _____

“I just want my daughter to be popular.” _____

“I just want him to have friends.” _____

“Don’t embarrass me.” _____

“I must win.” _____

When the **highest** goal is “winning,” “success,” “treasure,” “pleasure,” “the world’s applause,” or “ease,” these are wrong priorities that God cannot bless.

2. What are some potential results if parents or children pursue these goals?

3. Where do we go from here?

It is easy to focus on the “negative” or what needs to change in our children. But Romans 13:7 gives us a principle to follow, “*Give honor to whom honor is due.*”

What are some reasons we should praise the strengths of our children?

Listing strengths and weaknesses helps provide a right balance in your evaluation. Strengths should be praised, and should be used to help in overcoming weaknesses. Keeping Galatians 5:22-23 (fruit of the Spirit or Christlike character qualities) in mind, complete the following:

Child's name:	Strength	Weakness
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Consider the following steps to address these areas:

- 1) Praise an area of strength in each child.
- 2) Look at the weaknesses and consider which fruit of the Spirit would most specifically address the weakness.
- 3) Begin to consider how your regular daily activities could be used to teach and foster growth in this area.
- 4) Begin to consider special activities that could be helpful.

For example: *PATIENCE*

- How could this character quality be seen at the dinner table?

- How does it relate to getting ready for school in the morning?

- How would it be seen in playing a game?

- What occupation would be a strong example of this character quality in action?

- What are the natural consequences my child may see as a result of lacking this quality?

If you as a parent can see a common thread in your child's behavior, such as a lack of attention, or a lack of thoroughness, you can then work on the common thread when the various behaviors arise.

Remember: “*Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God, or pleasing self.*”