

Parenting Goals
May 8, 2016

Today is Mother's Day. And God has four goals He wants us to consider as parents.

Now I know that some of you are past parenting your own kids. They are grown and live outside of your home. But you can still have an impact as adults in this church influencing the children and teens of this church. You can still have an impact on nieces, nephews, and grandkids. You might have an impact on a neighbor kid. So your days of impacting children are not over. Today's sermon applies to you, so don't turn me off.

Some of you aren't even grown yet. Marriage and children are probably not even yet on the list of things you are looking forward to. But it is not too early to start. And you should start by deciding now what kind of parent you want to be. That should play into who you date. You want to limit your dating to the kind of people that will make the kind of parent you want to be. The qualities you want in yourself as a dad or mom are qualities you should look for in a person to date. Today's sermon applies to you, so don't turn me off.

I want to suggest four goals for you as parents or child influencers.

The first goal we should have as parents is to show our children the reality of Jesus.

Peter and John, two of the first Christian missionaries healed a lame man by the power of God. They were arrested by the religious authorities, not for the healing, but for their teaching. Let's see how they answered for themselves.

Acts 4:8-10 (NIV) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

We are not just to teach our children that Jesus was a historical person. George Washington was a historical person. But he is dead. George Washington WAS real. He is no longer real. Jesus is STILL real. God raised Him from the dead. And we are different because He is alive. The man was healed because Jesus was alive. Teach your children how you are different, healed, saved, and more... because Jesus is alive.

It is your responsibility to teach them this. It is not the church's responsibility to be the religious instructor of your children. It is first and foremost the Christian parent's job. The church assists you and supplements you. The church may even train you. But you are the main teacher of your children about Jesus. There is no way that any church can have as much impact on your child, in a few hours a week, as you will. For good or ill YOU will have more impact on your children than anyone else in their childhood.

Therefore you need to show Jesus as real, as alive in your life. You might need to get some training because parenting does not come naturally.

My wife and I adopted two boys, brothers by birth, just as they were turning five and six. Adopting older children is called special needs adoption. It is not the same as adopting infants. We went through some training as special needs adopting parents.

But most people don't have to get any training to become parents. You get married and one day the doctor informs you that you are going to have a baby. Some months later you visit the hospital for a few days and then bring home a baby. No one at the hospital says, "Now before you can take that baby home, you have to go through some training." The hospital does not require that. At least I don't know of any that do. The doctor does not require that. The county or state department of Social Services does not require that. No one requires that you get any kind of training to raise a child to adulthood.

Consequently most parents have no training except what they remember their parents doing. Maybe some of you went to your parents for help or asked your friends what they did with their kids. But no one requires you to do this. And since we are all sinners, we make lots of mistakes.

Life is so full and busy that the important things often get overlooked because of the pressing things. Fixing meals, washing clothes, and getting everyone to school, work, and activities can push aside the important conversations that need to take place about life and faith.

We must make Jesus the center of our families, not dad, not mom, not the children, but Jesus. We have to show them the reality of Jesus.

The second goal we should have as parents is to show our children that Jesus is our boss.

I recently heard a funny story. A child, not yet in school, was at the pool getting swimming lessons. The swim teacher was giving instructions and this one child wasn't paying much attention. So mom goes over and tells her to pay attention to the swim teacher. And the child says to the parent, "You're not the boss." At best the child just meant mom wasn't the boss in the swim lesson. But that wasn't really true. Mom and Dad are always the boss.

Now their pattern had been that after the lesson the child gets to watch a video in the minivan on the way home. And they stop and get a treat on the way home. And then there is some play time at home before bed. But today will be different.

As they are getting ready to leave the pool mom tells the child that on the way home there will be no video. "Do you know why," the mom asks. The child says no, and the mom answers, "Because I'm the boss."

The mother goes on to say, "And we're not stopping for a treat. Do you know why?" Again the child answers no. And mom says, "Because I'm the boss." And mom continues by saying, "And when we get home, you are going straight to bed. Do you know why?"

And the child, with a sad, pout says, "Because you're the boss." I think she got the message.

Jesus says to His followers...

John 14:15 (NIV) "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

We have to teach our children about authority and obedience to authority. We have to teach our children that we're the boss. We do this so we can teach them that there are consequences for disobedience to authority. They have to learn to choose obedience. They must choose to avoid the negative consequences of disobedience, choosing instead the positive consequences of obedience.

If they learn to make themselves obey you, they will then know how to obey others, such as the baby-sitter, the teacher, the employer, the Law, and ultimately God. Without learning to live such obedience they may possibly suffer the negative consequences of unemployment, jail, and hell.

How do we train them to obey? We must do so with both positive consequences for obedience and negative consequences for disobedience. We can illustrate both from our life with Jesus. We must teach them how Jesus blesses us in our obedience to Him and disciplines us in our disobedience to Him.

Teach them that you are under authority too. Children have the idea that parents can do anything they want to do. My sons thought that for awhile. They even naively thought I was the boss of the church. How little they understood. But that is the way adulthood looks to children.

We have to teach them that the employed parent has to answer to a boss, sometimes to several bosses. We have to follow the laws of the land, the laws of driving on the roads, the laws of taxes, and the laws of the property line that separates our yard from the neighbor's yard.

And we must also teach them that we answer to Jesus. We answer to Jesus as an individual, as a married couple, and as a family. That is one major reason we are different from some of our neighbors. It is not just that we believe in Jesus. It is that we answer to Jesus. When our kids start in with, "Well all the other families do such and such," we answer by reminding them that we are not like all the other families. We serve Jesus.

We have to show them that Jesus is our boss. We are in submission to Him. And that is a good place to be.

The third goal we should have as parents is to show our children the love of Jesus.

Again we look at Jesus' instructions to us.

John 13:34 (NIV) As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

How did Jesus love them? How does Jesus love us? He loves us by doing what is best for us. My sons would sometimes accuse me of just making up rules to suit me or to make their lives miserable. I tried to explain how each rule was in their best interest, to protect them, to guard them, to help them, to train them. I did this, I explained, because I loved them.

They often used the word love like the world does. The world doesn't mean much by the word love except "I like you." I use the word to mean I care about what is best for you. That is how Jesus loves us. He always, always, does what is best for us.

As parents we are tempted to make decisions for our children based on what is convenient for us, what is less embarrassing for us (Of course you can't do that to your hair!), or what we prefer. Such choices made about our children are sinful. We should always do what is best for our children.

This is how Jesus loves us. First Jesus died for us. Jesus also sent us the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us commands that are for our good. And Jesus works to eradicate sin in us.

Just as Jesus does not accept sin in us, we must not accept sin in our children. God is constantly working to transform us out of sin.

Parents, you must understand the difference here between two aspects of your children. **Personality and Character are two different things.** You cannot much change their personality. But you can help to shape their character.

And this leads to our fourth goal.

The fourth goal we should have as parents is to show our children the character of Jesus, especially His humility.

See what Jesus says to us about humility in this parable.

Luke 18:9-14 (NIV) To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

When Jesus' listeners heard this parable they were shocked. They could not believe what they were hearing. This was completely opposite of what they believed. The Pharisees, to them, were the most righteous people in the community. The tax collectors were the worst. They believed the Pharisees worthy of heaven and the tax collectors worthy of hell. They were only right about one of them.

Remember we know that one of the foundations of our faith is that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. The Pharisees did not think they needed a Savior. While most probably would admit to having some sin, they considered themselves to be so close to perfection that they figured heaven to be a certainty.

Jesus saw them differently. No one is good enough to deserve heaven. We must come to God in humility, confessing our sin, grieving our sin, repenting of our sin. This is what the tax collector was doing. He humbled himself before God and God accepts him. Jesus says that the Pharisee was not accepted.

The parable is about the role of humility before God. This is crucial to your children becoming followers of Jesus. They need to see the humility of Jesus in you.

You have to believe that you are a sinner deserving of hell. Your children have to see this in you. Let me give you several quick suggestions. They are not easy, but vital.

Let your children hear you praying for God's help to be a better parent. Let your children hear your humility before God. You will not appear to be less in their eyes, but more. They already know you are not a perfect parent. You have sinned against them. You have sinned against your spouse. Your children have seen that. They need to see and hear how a Christian responds to personal sin.

When you sin against your child, apologize. You need to learn to say you are sorry and genuinely mean it. As married couples, as parents, and as Christian brothers and sister, we must learn to communicate both love and apologies sincerely.

When you sin against your child, ask for their forgiveness. Your children will need to learn how to forgive and be forgiven. They must learn this from you.

You must be a model of Christ's character to them. Too often we model Christ's character to everyone around us except family. That means we are really pretending to others. We are real with family. We must REALLY become like Jesus so that we behave like Him to everyone, family and others.

This is where church comes in. All of our children and teens need adults around them who are modeling Christ's character. They need to see Jesus' morality. They need to hear Jesus' loving honesty from us. They need to experience Jesus' faithfulness from us.

We need to model Jesus' humility. This one we don't often think about in parenting. But it is vital to our relationship with our children.

Life for us is all about Jesus because He died for us. He did what was best for us, what we needed that no one else but Him could do. He died as the consequence for OUR sin. He did this so that we could be forgiven.

But forgiveness is not automatic. God applies Jesus' death to us when we put our faith in Jesus. We do this by receiving Jesus as our Savior and turning our life over to Him as our Lord.

Many people readily accept Jesus as their Savior. What they miss, or refuse to do, is turn their lives over to Him as Lord.

Today, won't you choose both? In so doing you are choosing to receive God's forgiveness and all the other blessings He has for the followers of Jesus.