

Parenting and Children: A Calling and Commitment

Introduction

A Sermon on Parenting and Children

- A. I mentioned last week that we were going to step out of Luke this week and talk about parenting and children and things like this.
- B. We've had some new babies born in the church, and more are on the way—which is a great and exciting thing! As a result, people have been asking me if we could do what traditionally has been called a “baby dedication.”
 - 1. I'm happy to do it and I thought a sermon on the subject actually might help us wrap our minds and hearts around it a bit more.
- C. And, just so you know, after we're done considering these things together, later in the service we'll actually have a couple of these families come forward with their little ones and we'll walk this out together with them.

Baby Dedication and Parenting Commissioning

- A. Now, to set us up for where we're going this morning, let me first say something up front about what we are calling this formal step that parents can take before God with their kids. You may have noticed in the way we've been announcing it: we're not just calling this a “baby dedication”—we're also calling it a “parent commissioning.”
 - 1. It's a baby dedication and parent commissioning. The two are not at odds with one another but are rather, really, two sides of the same coin. Let me explain.
- B. Churches often speak of doing baby dedications. You've probably seen this go down in a service or two before. Now, this is all well and good, and it is certainly, in my opinion, a wonderful thing to formally encourage and celebrate. It is good for parents to, in effect, give their children to God—to dedicate them to the Lord.
- C. But I think there is another angle on this that can sometimes be lost on us. And this is what the idea of parent commissioning starts to bring out.
 - 1. With “baby dedication” we are highlighting, in particular, the fact that the parents here are giving their child to God.
 - 2. But with “parent commissioning” we are highlighting the fact that things are moving in the other direction as well. In these moments, not only are the parents symbolically giving their child to God, but they also ought to be acknowledging the fact that God has also given this child to them. And with this gift comes a high calling, a commissioning—to labor with all one's might to reach the child with the gospel and raise him/her up in the ways of Christ.

D. To fill this out for us, this morning, I simply want to ask two questions: (1) What Is Parenting? (i.e. What Am I [as a parent] Called to?); and (2) What Are We Saying [when we commission parents and dedicate babies]? (i.e. What Am I [as a parent] Committing to?).

1. We'll spend pretty much all of our time on this first piece, and just kind of land the plane with that second piece. [Pray]

(1) What Is Parenting? (i.e. What Am I Called to?)

A. For this I'm just going to bring out six aspects from Scripture for us to consider . . .

Aspect #1: Parenting As Image

A. With this first aspect, I want to take us all the way back to where the idea of parenting first began. I want us to see parenting in light of its context in God's original creation and design.

1. When we go back to [Gen 1](#) we read that "God created man in his own image . . .; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth . . .'" (vv. 27-28).

a. With that last line there about being fruitful and multiplying and filling, we have the idea of kids and family and parenting. Here's where it all begins.

- i. And what's interesting to me is that it comes in context of this discussion concerning men and women created in the image of God. Being created in the image of God, as I've often pointed out, is this idea of reflecting Him. It's almost as if we are created to be these mirrors reflecting the glory of God in the world all around.

B. Now, there is certainly much we could say about this but one of the clear implications for parenting is that as we come together male and female in marital union and we bear fruit and multiply, part of our call is to be reflecting the glory of God to our own children. We are to image to them something of His character and ways. Parents are to be living metaphors putting the glory of God on daily display before their kids. Children ought to see in mom and daddy's life something of what they read of God in the Bible.

1. God loves. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way should also love their child.
2. God provides. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way, should also provide for their child.
3. God protects. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way, should also protect their child.
4. God instructs. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way, should also instruct and guide their child.
5. God disciplines us for our good. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way, should also discipline their child for his/her good.
6. God graciously sacrifices Himself for us. Therefore, mom and dad, in a reflecting sort of way, should also graciously sacrifice themselves for their child.

- C. Now, I could put chapter and verse on every one of those—where God says to parents: “Listen, this is what I am like, therefore, this is what you should be like.” But we don’t have time for that this morning.
1. I will at least say this about that last idea of sacrifice: if you come into parenting thinking that your child will fill you up, that they will somehow complete you, then you will be sorely disappointed, and you will make a mess of things.
 - a. The call of a parent, it’s clear as day in Scripture, is not be filled up by your child but to pour yourself out for your child and in that to showcase the love of God for them in Christ. Now, as we’ll see, there is much joy to found in this, but it comes quite paradoxically, through the laying down of our lives.
- D. It’s funny, my mom just shot out a text the other day to some in our family letting us know that one of my cousins is pregnant with what, Lord willing, will be her first child. So we all responded excitedly and things.
1. And then my brother-in-law, who has four kids of his own, chimes in with this: “*Shall we tell them to write a good bye letter to sleep now or later?! [smiley face]*” In other words, when do we tell them that when kids come, sleep goes. Can I get a witness?
- E. And it’s not just sleep that goes, right? We let go of all sorts of things for our kids: hobbies, money, time, traveling, and so forth. Or what about order and efficiency? I mean, when you have multiple little ones in the house, life is just chaos—at least it is for us.
1. Let me just give you a window into this. So, a couple weeks ago, we were trying to get Levi, my two and a half year old, going on potty training and we were putting him in those pull-up things—you know: “Mommy wow, I’m a big kid now!” Well, anyways they’re easier to slip on and off, right? That’s what they’re designed to do. But we didn’t foresee exactly how this would play out with Levi, though looking back maybe we should have.
 2. Now anyways, in the morning, we’re all up before he is, usually for an hour or two, and we usually start to hear him talk and things. Well, on this one particular morning, it’s relatively quiet, but then he starts to stir and chit chat and I hear him moving around in there. But he seems happy so we just kind of let him hang. But then I tune into what he’s actually saying and I hear this: “I don’t take want to take a shower mommy. I don’t want to take a shower. No shower.” And I’m thinking, that doesn’t sound so good. So we come down the hallway and we open the door, and I kid you not . . . the boy had taken a massive poop, and he proceeded to take off his pull-up diaper, and he’s just been playing around buck naked like that getting his stuff everywhere.
 3. Now, when you’re planning your day, you just usually don’t think to factor in that kind of craziness. You think, this is how my day’s going to go. I’m going to wake up to the birds singing. I’m going to have a cup of coffee, read my Bible and pray for a little bit. Then I’ll get some breakfast going for me and the kids. And then we’ll maybe go to the library or the park or something.

- a. Cleaning poop off the floor and furniture for an hour and then showering everybody up afterwards and things just wasn't on the agenda. But when you're a parent, it's what you do. You lay your life down for your kids.
 - i. And, in that, you reflect something of Jesus to them. They see something of the cross in the way that we serve them.

Aspect #2: Parenting As Gift

- A. I think it's because of stories like the one I just shared that a lot of people in our culture nowadays are not inclined to see children as the gift that they are. They are seen as a nuisance, a hindrance, a trouble to be avoided, rather than a blessing to be pursued.
- B. This, among other things, is what we're watching play out in the statistics these days. The cold hard fact is that Millennials, as they are coming to child-rearing age, seem to be far less interested in having kids. Consequently, the birth rate in America has fallen to an all-time low.
 - 1. That is the fact itself, and then of course there are various interpretations given as to why this is the case. Some will point to economic instability and other things as factors, and no doubt there is truth to this. But I don't think we can deny that somewhere underneath the reluctance to have children sometimes, in fact probably oftentimes, is a deep-seated selfishness.
 - a. Secularism, in particular, has idolized the individual—the autonomous self. It is my life, my needs, my thoughts, my body, my truth, my way, and so forth. And, having kids threatens all of that. How will I travel wherever I want, when I want? How will I be able to afford my designer jeans or drink my hipster-friendly, organic, locally roasted pour over coffee or whatever? If I have to choose between living for myself or living for a kid, well, I'm sorry, the choice is obvious.
 - i. And we miss it. We miss the gift that God desires to give us in children.
- C. Take [Psalm 127:3-5](#) for example. The Psalmist sings out: “³ Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”
 - 1. Three things we immediately discover here about kids here: (1) They are a heritage from God; (2) They are a reward from God; (3) They are a blessing from God. The clear implication in it all is that they are a gift . . . to us from God.
- D. And if you have kids, you know this. Is there difficulty, is there hardship, is there exhaustion—physically, emotionally, is there death to self, yes of course. But there is also joy and celebration and laughter and life.
 - 1. This is why, by the way, as a parent you'll find these strange mixed up feelings inside of you as you go along.

- a. On the one hand, when you have little ones, sometimes you're so exhausted and fed up with it that you're just thinking man I can't wait until they can get more self-sufficient, until they can start wiping their own bottoms, until they can start contributing more and cleaning up after themselves and things. Please God!
- b. But then, strangely enough, on the other hand, there's a part of you that grieves how fast they are growing up. Megan had some severe complications in the last pregnancy with Levi, so much so that the doctors said we can't have kids again. And I'll just tell you, watching Levi hit the milestones and stuff—his first smile, his first crawl, his first steps, his first words, even when he was finally weaned. . . I was just a mess. Because I know this will be the last time we get to experience these things with a little one. I mean, at this rate I may even shed a tear on the day I change my last poopy diaper.
 - i. There's something special about it all. And, while some days you long for it to be done, on other days you see it and you wish you could capture it and hold onto it forever. It truly is a gift from God.

Aspect #3: Parenting As Stewardship

- A. I wonder if you've ever heard of "re-gifting" is? Maybe you've even done it. You get a gift for your birthday or Christmas or whatever, you're not all that into it, so you wrap it up, put a bow on top, and pass it on to someone else. You "re-gift" it.
 - 1. Under normal circumstances re-gifting is a bad idea. It would certainly be unthinkable to re-gift it to the very person who gave it to you. That would just make for an awkward Christmas morning, wouldn't it? "Aren't these the polka dot pajamas I gave you last year?"
- B. But, when it comes to our kids, giving them back to God is one of the most important things we can do. What I mean is this: God has given us these children as gifts, entrusting them to us, that we might care for them, provide for them, instruct them, and reflect Him to them. And one of the first things we need to do at the start in all of this is re-gift our kids back to Him so to speak—to surrender our plans and desires for our kids and let God have His way with their life.
 - 1. This is the idea of stewardship. "My kids, ultimately, they are Yours not mine. You have gifted them to me. I want to, as an act of worship, re-gift them back to you."
- C. It's this aspect of parenting as stewardship, I think, that brings out what we typically think of when we think of baby dedications. And we see the idea of it, in principle at least, in many places in Scripture.
 - 1. We see it first in [Exo 13:2](#) where God calls for the consecration of the firstborn sons there in Israel (cf. [Neh 10:35-36](#)).
 - 2. And later we see this play out with Hannah and Samuel where she receives Samuel as this gift from God in answer to her prayers and so she, consequently, dedicates him to the Lord's service there in the temple at Shiloh ([1 Sam 1:27-28](#)).
 - 3. We remember how this played out in our Lord's own life as Mary and Joseph take Him as a baby "[up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord](#)" ([Luke 2:22](#)).

4. And perhaps this is the heart behind what we see in [Luke 18:15](#) where we read that parents were “bringing . . . infants to [Jesus] that he might touch them.”
 - a. The point in all of this is that: “Okay, yes, you’ve given me these kids, but ultimately they are not mine, they are yours, and I don’t want to get in the way of what You have for them. I want to partner with you in that.”
- D. If you let this idea of stewardship sink in, you’ll find it’s really going to challenge you. We’re all prone, I think, to a sort of idolatry in our parenting. We have these plans, these dreams for our kids, we have these thoughts of what they should be and do, what we need them to be and do, for us to feel successful and things. We can make it about us.
1. We’ve all probably seen that guy on the sidelines of his kid’s basketball game or whatever (maybe you’ve even been that guy)—screaming and yelling, kicking over chairs and things, picking a fight with the refs. His boy doesn’t care that much . . . he’s five. He just wants the snow cone after the game or whatever. But because this dad played ball in college his boy has to be heading for that too. It’s not about this boy. It’s certainly not about God. It’s all about the dad and how he thinks this whole parenting thing should go, what his boy’s story is going to be.
 - a. The tragic irony is that we really hurt our kids when we don’t re-gift them back to God and let Him have the first and last word on things.
- E. We all are prone to this sort of thing in our own way. Maybe you don’t care if your kid’s an athlete but boy he better be getting straight As. Or “I don’t care about my girl’s grades but she better be beautiful and popular.” Or “I’ll know I’ve succeeded as a parent when my kid is a perfect little Christian in his behavior—he doesn’t sleep with a stuffed animal or something, he sleeps with his Bible.” We have these dreams and we push and we pull to get what we want for them.
1. But what we’re saying here is that good, truly successful, parenting can’t even begin until you just lay all of this down, and you put your kid in God’s hands and say: “You make of my kid what you want him or her to be. Help me not to chart my own plan for their life, but to draft off of and partner with You in the accomplishing of Your plan.”

Aspect #4: Parenting As Mission

- A. And this really moves us into the next aspect: Parenting As Mission. In all the stuff I just mentioned, clearly I’m describing parents on a mission, right? I’m on a mission to make him that athlete, make her that student, etc.
1. But the problem is, none of these things are fundamentally the mission that God has put the parent on for the kids. It may be a part of it, but it’s not the bottom line.
 - a. Whether they’re an all-star athlete or stellar student, all that is secondary to God’s desire that they come into a life-altering, life-transforming, soul-saving relationship with Jesus Christ—that they are reached with the gospel and raised up in the ways of the Lord. That’s the mission.

- B. In [Gen 1](#), if you remember, the call was to simply multiply and fill the earth with image bearers. But as we often talk about here, that image was marred in the fall. Things change in [Gen 3](#) and now we and our kids are not born naturally reflecting all that God is. We are born selfish, twisted, little sinners.
1. If you have kids, you know what I'm talking about. I'm sure you've heard it said, you don't have to teach your kids how to say no, mine, and all that. It's just in them.
- C. It's the equivalent in human terms, what we see in gardening and things. The idea in [Gen 1-2](#) is that there in Eden the good fruit would just spring up quite naturally with minimal cultivation and things. But in the fall, after sin and the curse, now it's thorns that come up and if you want fruit it's going to be by the sweat of your brow and the breaking of your back.
1. If you've ever gardened, you know this. Weeds are easy. They just come up with no effort at all. But fruit, man you've got to get out there and tend to things day after day.
 - a. Your kids are like that. They need to be cultivated in the gospel. They need to be instructed in the ways of the Lord or their going to get lost in the weeds.
- D. This is the sort of thing that Chap Bettis is referring to in his book [The Disciple-Making Parent](#) when he writes: "To realize our child's need for the gospel, we must start by realizing his true state. The Bible makes it clear that my little bundle of joy, the light of my life, is both made in the image of God and filled with a rebellious heart. He is given the special advantage of being born into a family that names the name of God (Acts 2:39, 1 Corinthians 7:14). But he is also born with a heart bent toward evil. Left uncorrected, that trajectory will take him away from God. He is a sinner by birth and by choice. Scripture says he is born in these conditions: dead in trespasses and sins, by nature under God's wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3), with a heart that loves darkness and hates light (John 3:19-20), with a heart that is inclined to evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21), on the road to destruction and hell (Proverbs 22:27, Matthew 7:13).

J.C. Ryle elaborates with this countercultural declaration:

The fairest child, who has entered life this year and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as his mother perhaps fondly calls him, a little 'angel' or a little 'innocent,' but a little 'sinner.' Alas! As that infant boy or girl lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which is bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. . . . The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy's own heart, and not in public schools [or wherever else we might like to place the blame!].

[Bettis concludes:] Each of our beautiful children is born with a defective spiritual heart. The only cure is radical surgery—a heart transplant" (pp. 73-74).

1. In other words, your kids need to be reached with the gospel. They need to be evangelized and discipled, saved and sanctified. They, just as you, just as everyone else on the planet, need to see Christ crucified for their sin and raised for their justification. They need to repent and receive Him and, with Him, His Holy Spirit whereby they are forgiven of all their sin, given that new heart, and can, in fact, start to walk in the ways of God!

E. That's why here at Mercy Hill we talk of our kids as the front-lines of the mission field. I've read this to you before, but this comes straight out of our Mercy Hill Kids Training Manual (we're always looking for volunteers by the way!): "When we think of the mission field we often think of someplace on the other side of the world with a sea or two in between. We talk about the 10/40 window and unreached people groups. But do we realize that with the birth of every child it's as if God brings that 10/40 window to us?! We take an unreached person home with us from the hospital wrapped warmly in a blanket and strapped tightly in a car seat. The boundary line of the mission field lay not out there somewhere across oceans, but right here across from us in the living room, sitting next to us in high chairs around our dinner tables. To be sure, we desire to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. But we begin by bringing the gospel to our children."

1. You see, your kids are a mission field, and God has sent you, mommies and daddies, to reach them. This is not first the church's job (although, in just a moment you'll see we're happy to partner with you in this), it's your job.

F. I love how Deut 6 describes the parents' mission from God and shows us what it might look like: "4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (vv. 4-9).

1. You caught it, right? The basic idea here is that evangelizing/discipling your kids for Jesus should be, in some ways, a part of everything that you do. The word, the truth of God is woven into your everyday life.
 - a. And so parents need to come together, chat, pray and figure out: "If we've been set on this mission by God, how are we going to bring the gospel to them?" You may use the drive to school in the morning. You may use the dinner table, which is what we often do. You might use the time before bed. But you got to do something. They need to hear this from you!

Aspect #5: Parenting As Partnership

- A. And this really leads into the fifth aspect now: Parenting As Partnership. There's a couple things I mean by this and I'll, obviously, have to be brief on both.
- B. The first thing I'm referring to here is the partnership that should exist between the mom and dad. In one sense, this is an implication that emerges simply from biology, right? The bottom line is you just can't get the kid if you don't have both a mom and a dad. It takes two coming together to make the third.
 1. Now that's true physically and I think it also holds weight spiritually. If mom and dad aren't together in the mission to see their kid born again in Christ, then that mission is going to suffer some setbacks.

- C. So this is a chance to stop and ask where mom and dad are on things. We know those homes probably where the dad acts like his job is just to make money, and when he gets home, he's done his deal, he's made his contribution, it's time for dinner, Sportscenter, a beer or two, and then bed. The mom is left alone to figure out how to disciple the kids or not.
1. But it can't be this way. You are to be partners in this together. It doesn't mean you don't divide up roles and functions and things, it just means you have a meeting of the minds, you pray, you chart a course, you're in it together.
- D. But the second thing I'm referring to here is the partnership that should exist between the nuclear family and the spiritual family, between the home and the church.
1. Too often we go to one of two extremes. Either we keep the church at a distance and try to disciple our kids and things on our own, or we take our kids into church and just expect that they're going to do everything for us. Instead there should be this synergy between nuclear and spiritual family between home and church. We're here to partner with you in this.
- E. And here's what's beautiful about this, if you don't have kids, there's still a massive mission for you in this. It might be that up to this point you've been troubled by the fact that you don't have kids, maybe you're not even married or whatever. And it's been hard to even reflect on these things. You feel passed over. You feel like a second class Christian or something.
1. But let me remind you Jesus wasn't married. Jesus didn't have kids. Paul wasn't married. Paul didn't have kids. I'm pretty sure those guys are not second class, subpar, right? Paul would even say to the Corinthians: "I wish you could be single like I am because there's a lot that opens up for you missionally" (1 Cor 7:7).
 - a. You see, in one sense, physically, biologically, maybe they weren't married and didn't have kids, but, in another sense, spiritually, they certainly were and did. The church is called the bride of Christ, right. Jesus is married to you and I by way of the Spirit. And Paul talks about being the father of many in the faith—that because he leads people to and disciples people in Jesus, they are like his kids in a spiritual sense (1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4).
- F. So the point I'm making here, then, is that all Christians, whether they have kids or not, are called to participate in this call to reach kids for Jesus and raise them in His ways. We all have an important part to play in this mission.

Aspect #6: Parenting As Plea

- A. Back at the front, if you recall, I said that parents are to be living metaphors putting the glory of God on daily display before their kids. Now, I wonder how many of you parents heard that and said: "O no! I'm blowing it. I can't do this." You want to say in view of your call to parent what Paul said in view of his call to ministry: "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:16). "I don't have it in me."
1. You're right. And that's why I close with this idea of Parenting As Plea. Parenting will lead you to the end of yourself, and that's a good thing. You might not be sufficient, but His grace is. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor

12:9). So we plead with God. Give me grace—grace to cover my sin, and grace to lead me in a better way.

(2) What Are We Saying? (i.e. What Am I Committing to?)

- A. So what are we saying when we do these parent commissionings and child dedications? Well, I think we're taking all that I've said of parenting here, and we're simply expressing our desire to walk it out.
1. If parenting is image, then in these moments the parents are expressing their commitment to try to reflect the glory of God to their child.
 2. If parenting is gift, then in these moments parents are expressing their commitment to celebrate their child and receive them with gratitude as the gift from God that they truly are.
 3. If parenting is stewardship, then in these moments parents are expressing their commitment to daily surrender their child and seek God's will for their life not their own.
 4. If parenting is mission, then in these moments parents are expressing their commitment to bring the gospel to their kids and see them reached and raised up for Christ.
 5. If parenting is partnership, then in these moments parents are expressing their commitment to work together with one another and with their church family in pursuing this mission.
 6. If parenting is plea, then in these moments parents are expressing the fact that they can't do this without God's grace and Spirit. They too need the gospel they are called to proclaim.