

25.05.2019 SEASON OF PARENTING

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Psalm 127:3

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment. Genesis 18:19

For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be granted to the Lord." So they worshiped the Lord there. 1 Samuel 1:27, 28

We do not own our children. They are God's good gifts to us. We are but stewards who are entrusted with leading our children to Christ and helping them choose to become citizens of God's kingdom.

The Joys and Responsibilities of Parenting

We are not left to fend for our own when it comes to raising children. The Bible has many instructions for parents.

1. For the children to be right, the home must be right. Deuteronomy 6:4-9
 - a. There must be a revelation of God...*'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.'*6:4.
 - b. There must be a response to God...*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*6:5
 - c. There is a responsibility: As parents, God's Word must be in our heart (6:6); God's Word must be taught to our children (6:7) and God's Word must govern our conduct (6:8, 9)

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Deuteronomy 6:7

2. Remind your children constantly of God's goodness. Psalm 78:1-7
Remind them of God's work in general (Creation and Salvation) and in particular towards you and your family.

That which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done...that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. Psalm 78:3-4, 6-7

3. Train up a child in the way he should go. Proverbs 22:6

In childhood: A child's concept of God is primarily obtained from his parents. To a child, his parents' values reflect God's values and character. That is why it is so important that God's Word is in our hearts and governs our behaviour.

Older Children (pre-teens/mid-teens): Children begin to test God's values against their parent's values. Are their parent's values the same as God's values, or do they follow the values of modern society?

Late teens/Young adult: Children decide whether the God of their parents will be their God.

4. Communication
'My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother' Proverbs 1:8...

As parents we need to recognise that we must give godly instruction to our children. But communication is more than just teaching them the Bible. We need to communicate to our children, both verbally and non-verbally, that they are unconditionally loved and that we desire what is best for them, physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

In the parents' unconditional love, they will get a glimpse of the God who loves them unconditionally and who accepts them 'just as they are'; the God who wants only the best for them and their future.

5. Discipline

We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:9-11

Discipline or 'discipling' is essential in parenting. The passage above tells us what the true purpose of discipline is; it is moral in its nature. Many parents make the mistake of thinking their child must be given free-will from infancy. But the human will is self-centred and tainted by sin. Before the age of reasoning, before the child '*knows to refuse the evil and choose the good*' Isaiah 7:16, we are called to train the will. The godly parent recognises that every child has a sinful nature and the tendencies of the nature must be curbed lovingly but firmly in childhood. When the child reaches the age of reason, he will choose the good because his parents have explained to him the reasons why making the right choices are best (as opposed to demanding or forcing the child to obey them without any explanation - this is called 'animal discipline' not moral discipline, because it is the way we discipline animals).

As God teaches us to submit our wills to a greater Will (His) for our good, so Christian parents must train their children to submit their wills to their parents for their good. In obeying the Christian parent, the child will learn true obedience and as he grows up to independence, will know the importance of submitting his will to God, his heavenly Father.

Obedience must not be exacted or demanded harshly, but with the authority of love. Love will draw our children near to us and near to God.

6. Teaching Responsibility

Children need to grow to be responsible adults. Parents are integral to teaching and training children responsibility. From a young age they can be given little chores in the house; as they grow older, they can be involved in some of the decision making that goes on in any family. This gives them the feeling that they are involved and important to the family. To a large extent, it protects them from going to unsuitable peers to get that sense of importance and worth.

7. A Time to Let them Go

'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother...' Genesis 2:24

Our children are our children for only a short while. God gives them to us for the great joy they bring us. But He also reminds us that after we have raised them to adulthood, they will leave us when they are emotionally and financially independent of us (as we left our own parents). This is also God's plan for families.

Many parents seem to be unable to 'let go' of their children. Wise parents prepare themselves for the time when their children will fly the nest. If God (instead of our children) comes first in our lives, it will be easier to let them go.

The Prodigal Child

Despite our best and most sincere efforts, some of our children will choose not to follow the God of their parents. Before immediately assuming that you as a parent are to blame, remember that the parent of the prodigal son in Luke 15 loved his son unconditionally. The Bible does not tell us that he did anything wrong in the raising of his son. Furthermore, once a child has reached the age of reason, he is accountable for the choices he makes.

The Bible is of great comfort in such a situation:

1. God understands your pain... *the LORD hath spoken, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."* Isaiah 1:2
2. Pray without ceasing for your prodigal child.
3. Have the heart of the prodigal Heavenly Father when your child returns... *But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.* Luke 15:20

4. Claim the promise that God will contend with Satan for your child... *For I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. Isaiah 49:25*

Single Parenting

Single parenting is the lot of those who have lost a spouse to death. Sometimes a spouse can become mentally incapable of being a parent. Unfortunately, single parenting also happens due to the unfaithfulness of a spouse, often resulting in separation or divorce.

This is not the ideal, for children do best in a two-parent family where father and mother have complementary roles in raising children.

Every Christian who is in this situation should not despair. God knows every circumstance of our life. He is our Heavenly Father and Mother (Isaiah 49:15). If we ask Him, He will be in a very special way, a parent to our children. If we ask for wisdom, He will guide us aright in every plan and decision we make as a single parent. Your child will still have a two parent family, if you, the single parent, do two things: 1. Depend on God for wisdom in raising your children and 2. Constantly affirm to them that in addition to their earthly parent, their Heavenly Parent will provide all their needs and assure their future.

And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. Isaiah 54:13

The church family also has a vital role to play where children have a single parent. In the church, they should be able to have godly mothers and fathers in Israel who will be a source of wisdom and a model of godliness to them. They can also help in practical ways by inviting such parents and children to their homes for fellowship and meals.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27

Childless Parents:

Our study guide focuses on childless couples who were blest in later life with the arrival of a child. But there are many childless parents, who have never had the joy of having their own child. Others, who would have loved to marry and have children were denied this experience of life.

Some are childless by choice, recognising the call of God to minister to the church or community without the responsibility of raising children (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Though probably a great source of sadness, all who are in this situation should recognise that their lives are in God's hands and He always does what is best. Knowing this is the source of the Christian's contentment... *'I have learnt in every situation to be content' Philippians 4:11*

Many of the most-loved members of the church are childless couples or unmarried members who have taken the children of the church or the children of their extended family to their hearts. They are role models to the children, they lend a listening ear, and they comfort and encourage and teach them about a loving God. In turn, are loved by these little ones.

Conclusion:

This study is not just for parents. It is for every member of the church. Whether we realise it or not, we too are role models for the children in our churches. We all have a part to play in the nurturing of our children. All too often, our children leave the church, not because of their birth family but because of their church family. They do not see in it the compassionate, caring and comforting community that the Lord wants His church to be.

"Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me... But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." Mark 9:37, 42

Ours is a solemn responsibility indeed.

All of us want the best for our children. Most of us have tried to do our best for our children, and yet, with the best of intentions, we feel we have failed. Others of us look back in remorse and say, "I have not done what I should for my children." Many of us have burdens in our hearts for our children and the children of our church and wider community.

The wonderful news is that we can cast all our burdens on Jesus. Give your children to Him and He will do marvellous things for them. He has exceedingly great and precious promises for you about your children and His children. He loves your children with an everlasting love and has bound them to Him with loving-kindness (Jeremiah 31:3).

"It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Matthew 18:14

Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments. Deuteronomy 7:9

The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them. Psalm 103:17, 18

The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You. Psalm 102:28

He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great. The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. Psalm 115:13, 14

I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed. Psalm 37:25, 26

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families...Psalm 68:5, 6

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. Proverbs 14:26

The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him. Proverbs 20:7

'There is hope in your future', says the LORD, 'that your children shall come back to their own border.' Jeremiah 31:17

...Your children are holy. 1 Corinthians 7:14

I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring. Isaiah 44:3
