

The Power of Parenting

I have been contemplating the timing on this message in our series on the family. Yet it seemed that in the last two weeks the discussions I have had with several people seemed to just provoke the necessity to talk about this at this point. Please note that one message on parenting cannot resolve all our parenting issues and the different aspects of raising children. But I hope that some of the seeds we plant today will provoke you to further your knowledge, wisdom and skill as a parent.

Let's start with a few facts about child development:

For fun let's begin with a question; does anyone know when childhood begins and ends? Childhood begins at the acquisition of language (approximately the age of 1 or 2 years old) till the onset of adolescence (approximately 12 to 12 years old). So you can say that infancy is from birth to the beginning of childhood and adolescence begins at the conclusion of childhood.

We are going to divide up this discussion into the segments of child development at which point we will include tips on parenting at the different stages, and we will conclude with a brief descriptions of difference between mothering and fathering. (Again in a single message, such a discussion can only be done in generalities and not with real specifics. However, if we perceive and practice the generalities, some of the specific answers to the questions we may have about our child will become evident as we live out our parenting.)

First and foremost there are a few very important things about parenting we must understand:

1. It is never too late to make the necessary corrections in your life and in how you parent your child. ***It is never too late to become the parent your child needs,*** even after they have moved out of the house and established their own family. It is never too late! Just know what stage your son or daughter is in and begin to live accordingly.
2. Being a good parent *does not occur* because you have brought a child into the world. Being a good parent is an **acquired skill** at all levels of their growth. *No one is a born parent, but everyone is a born child, which means, we are all born knowing nothing, and needing to learn everything.*
3. The secret tall parenting activities, is found also in two areas: The first is personal integrity, **keep your word** (your promises) to your children unless you specify a condition. Second, **maintain emotional stability,**

you do not lead by your explanations; *you lead your children and your family by your behavioral consistency.*

Child development comes in four phases:

- **Sensory Motor Period:** Infancy (Birth to about two years old), babyhood. There are many stages within these two years. Almost monthly an infant experiences major growth changes. *The first thing however you must master as a parent is connection.* This is where you and your child must have a spiritual and emotional connection. You attain this by holding, cuddling, talking to your child and playing with them. This applies to both parents! There is no such thing as a father who is too tired that when he has come home from work he cannot spend time with the baby. If you are too tired when you get home to spend time with your baby, then spend less time at work, whatever it takes! The time you give your baby in their infancy and their childhood years, you will reap in their teenage years. The time you do not spend with your child in those early years, you will pay for in their teenage years. Think of it this way, if you need to spend less time at work and lose some money in their baby and childhood years, you are making an investment. If you feel that you cannot afford to lose a few dollars then, you will wind up paying either in therapy or in fines when they are older. Either way it will cost you. *Better is the cost of investment, than the cost of penalty.*
- **The Preoperational and Intuitive Phases:** Beginning of Childhood, Discovery of Independence (the first seven years). This is probably one of the most important parts of a child's life. It is here a child develops their communication skills, they develop empathy (care about others) rather than just being ego-centric, they can imagine (they can think about something without it being present right in front of them). *But reality is not firm.* They do not know the difference between make believe and what is real. They do not have any real moral development; they do not grasp what is right and wrong on their own. They only know what their parents have shown them as what the do's and don'ts of life are. What does this all mean? *Mom and Dad are the definers of reality and morality.* A child at this stage can only focus on one thing at a time, so their ability to focus on more than one thought is virtually impossible. Thus, trying to explain in detail to a six year old the values of good behavior is about as productive as trying to explain them to their stuffed animals. However, because reality is not firm to a child at this stage, a parent actually explains proper behavior to their child, not by words, but how they behave: how mommy treats daddy, and how daddy treats mommy, and how mommy and daddy treat little me. **There observation determines their judgment, not the intellectual capacity for reason.** It is at

this point in a child's life their reality is being developed for them. As a general rule, the way you instill values in a child verbally at this stage of development, is by not forming sentences with more words than their age. For example: if they are four years old, and you do not want them to pull the cat's tail, you sternly say, "Do not do that!" Maybe if what they were doing could really hurt themselves or someone else, it could possibly be followed by a tap on the hand, or bottom. Taking little four year old Bobby and sitting him or her in a chair at the opposite side of the room and saying, "Bobby, do not pull the kitties tail it hurts the cat, you would like it if I pulled your tail! So now sit there for five minutes until you think about what you did." Sounds good on the surface, but you have actually complicated your problem and really not disciplined your child. After you said the words, "Bobby, do not pull..." You lost him. Then by sitting him a chair on the opposite side of the room for five minutes for something you just said that he did not understand is torture for a four year old, not disciple. For that matter after about 30 seconds when the kitty comes by little Bobby, who is now crying, what do you think he is going to do? But relieve his torture by reaching out and doing something fun again, like pulling the cats tail. You know how this will go... You then become frustrated with your frustrated four year old for what you think is rebellious and yell at him or her, only over explaining what he or she does not already understand. In Bobby or Betty's little heart, what we are establishing as reality is, that the important authorities and powerful big people are telling me I am not good and I must sit and do nothing because they don't like me. Then when they are teenagers we wonder why they don't engage in challenging situations, they just want to sit around and do nothing. As it is, when they are teenagers they are not going to want to do what they don't want to, so why set them up to feel that authority is going to tell me that I am no good; so forget it, let's pass by the agony of being told I am not good and just do nothing. When it comes to little Bobby or Betty pulling the kitties tail, it is better getting down on your knees at their eye level, looking at them and pointing to the cat saying, "Do not do that!", then get their favorite toy and give it to them saying, "Play with this!" At this stage of a child's development, telling them "No" all the time will form a reality that always says "No" to them. *This stuff sticks with us!* This is why many times even as adults we have problems with getting off of our blessed assurances and making real positive motion in negative circumstances in our lives. To us reality is just a big NO. Here is a little counsel for parents with 2 – 7 year olds, for every "No", give them a "Yes"! If possible right after the moment of correction.

- The next stage is called the **Concrete Stage of Development**. It is ages 7 to 12 years old; this is the stage just before adolescent. They now

have a sense of right and wrong based on the behaviors their parents have instilled in them in the previous stage. But it is here a very important part of their development must come into focus, **they must learn responsibility and boundaries** at this stage. Waiting for them to be teenagers to give them responsibility and boundaries is like giving them a car someone without a steering wheel; we are going to be all over the road, hit a lot of things and maybe even seriously hurt someone or themselves. If you were smart during their previous stage and when they wanted to play with the vacuum, you took the time to make a game out of it and let them try to use it while you did the house work. This way by the time they are in this stage of development, they begin associating the responsibility of chores as something of value and as a reward of growing up. When your child wants to help with something you are doing, like fixing the car, doing the dishes, painting the kitchen, cooking Lasagna or tacos, let them help! It may take you a lot longer than if they didn't help, but think of it this way, what memory do you want in their minds when they are your age. My father or mother always told me to get away, or I was too young and I was not capable? Or, I loved it when my mother let me bake the cake and lick the spoon. This teaches responsibility, children they need to have chores at the ripe old ages of 8 – 12. In addition to the chores **there must always be the affirmation of the attempt not the criticism of the result.** A 9 year old will never vacuum or dust as well as you. But you are not trying to teach them perfection; you are trying to teach them responsibility. If you criticize the result, they will hate chores and responsibility. By the time they are teenagers they will rebel against all responsibility. Like responsibility, boundaries are equally important. They need to start learning that when the big hand is on the 12 and the little hand is on the 7, they are to wash their hands and face and get ready for bed. You can make a game out of it, and make it fun, but teach them the boundary of time. There are other boundaries, like when you visit someone's house they cannot just start going through their stuff or just pick up things off the table. What do you do? You bring some of their favorite toys, to play with, and when there is something on the table they would like to see, before they pick it up, to tell them to ask first. This is instilling in them the boundaries they will need to learn to erect in their lives when you are adults and have relationships with others. Even sometimes when you bring their favorite toys and you told them not to touch anything without asking first, they may just sit and sulk, claiming that they are bored. Know this your 11 year old will never die of boredom, even though they may act like it. Thus a new responsibility and boundary is learned, life is not always pleasant be responsible and make the best of it. In the end what ever you do, know that your opinion, acceptance and values are of the highest priority to your child, even

when they don't like it. If your son or daughter feels accepted and appreciated at home, they will handle peer pressure at school a lot better.

- Now we enter **adolescence** 12 years old and above. Here parents need to make sure they are buckled in to their rollercoaster seat for the coming ride. Depending upon how the first 12 years went, can determine how many dips, loops, and high velocity turns you are going to go through, but there are no guarantees. On the rollercoaster called adolescence, anything is possible; the issue is having faith in God to bring the family through and have confidence that all the good things you taught them in the first 12 years of their life will reemerge at some point during the ride. What most parents do not realize is the need for their child during these years to discover their independence. Many times we interpret this as rebellion, but it is not and in some cases it is, but like your board child when he was 11, and he had to make the best of it. Mom, Dad, rebellion is not going to kill you, it is not pleasant, you can deal with it, just remember you are the adult and don't act like an angry adolescent. When your child enters adolescence, you will actually find out how mature you are emotionally and mentally. Sometimes it is a good time to take an inventory of your life, and get things straightened out, with God, your relationships and even your own parents. Dealing with a teenager has several aspects to it that did not have before.
 1. They bounce around between childhood and adulthood as erratically as bumper cars at an amusement park. Remember they do not know they are bouncing around, all they know is you are being annoying by pointing it out! Your approach is everything when it comes to a teenager, reminding them they are only teenagers can be insulting to them in the heat of an argument. They are entering adulthood, and as an adult you or I do not like to be insulted when we are corrected, do not do it to your teenager they will resent you for it and the next time they rebel, you may be to blame.
 2. Boys and Girls are different! Radically different at this point. Because of the way estrogen behaves in a girl's body, she is able to actually use her logical side of her brain better than a boy, even though males are usually the more logical of the two genders. Boys on the other hand are a massive gland going somewhere to happen. Their biological development is actually ahead of their mental and emotional development at this point. Girls are a bit different in that their mental and biological development is about the same; however their emotions deal with all the chemical changes that are going on. In the last 30 years medical science has really created an understanding of PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome). Know this; your 14 year old may deal with

PMS just like Mama who is 40. The key is your daughter is not being rebellious, intentionally nasty, or possessed by a legion of demons, she is just premenstrual! The issue is when she is in a good mood and not howling at the moon, have discussion about PMS and see if you can help her prepare for what is very normal in a woman's life. A boy on the other hand, well there is only one chemical that is flowing through his veins, testosterone. You could say that as testosterone levels change; boys can be aggressive, sexually driven and moody. It is the boy version of PMS, but unfortunately there is no actual period to bring relief. Rather they seek to release their aggression through fighting and other destructive behavior. This is where it is good to put your son in some kind of sport or activity, where such focus and aggression, can be transformed into motivation and competition. Regarding their sexual passions, for a boy it is like living with another brain attached to your body and when it starts thinking the regular brain seems to short circuit. Know this, your child does not have a lust problem, he is not fantasizing with demons, he is just trying to get a handle on his sexuality. Help him do that! Let him know that is not a freak with these urges, that he is very normal and there is a way to get control of this, but it will take time and most of his puberty and part of his early twenties to understand it. (Story of Buster... I did not have the heart to tell him because of the pitiful look on his face that you really start learning how to control things when you are in your late teens and early twenties and I was in my mid-forties and still was working on it. In Plato's writings he once said that now that he was an elderly man and his desire for sex had waned, he can now think upon the important things in life.) If anything take him or her out to a restaurant, sit in a private area and talk with them about sexuality. One thing you want to let them know for sure, is that what ever their friends are saying about sex is most likely wrong and at best really inexperienced. The reality is, if they are 16, you can assure them regardless how much sex their friend says they are having, you have been doing it longer than he is been alive and know a few things. Regarding those times when your boy is moody, usually he will retreat to a place that parents once called his room. Now, because of all the bear skins, lion manes and coats of other such animals he calls his clothes which are thrown all over the floor and what could appear to pieces of carcasses of food remains, he enters what is now called his cave. At least if there really aren't bears skins and other such things, on occasion it smells like it. So what does a good parent do? You respect your child's privacy, but you still be a parent. In other words, give them alone time, but check in on them, and depending upon your child, you may want to put firewalls on your computer to prevent certain types of internet usage, position their computer so it can be

seen from the doorway. In some cases, do not even have the computer in their room but in a place where it can be seen by all. There is nothing wrong with going through your child's school backpacks, closets, and draws if you suspect anything that is detrimental to them like drugs or the like. It is good to go through such things with them, not for drugs or suspicion, but to help them straighten up the cave, just in case other cavemen would like to come over to do homework or play a video game.

3. The difference between fathers and mothers. This may sound like a no brainer, but after being married for almost thirty years to the same woman and raising a two children one of which is now 22, I can tell you there is a difference between mothers and fathers. First of all, mothers are nurturers. There is a connection between them and their children that Dad will never grasp. There can be no feeling like having a child grow inside you and you be its life source. There is nothing like birth, having only watched my wife go through it, I cannot conceive of what it is for someone to bring life into the world. In the end regardless of how involved I was as her birth coach and all that, I was really still a spectator, even the doctor could only assist in the small areas, she was the star and champion of the event. For fathers this is really not negative, because your lack of this experience will come in handy later on. Mothers continue to nurture by breast feeding, or if that is not practiced still the feeding preparation when the infant comes home, the changing the constant life-giving nurturing source, even in the early development of discipline and schooling. Fathers at this point should as soon as possible begin by holding, loving and being involved as often as possible. Why? You did not have this connection that Mom has and you need as a kind of outsider need to build a relationship with your child for what is to come. By the time a child reaches that 8 year old mark, while Mom is still very involved and nurturing, Dad should be significantly involved in their child's life. There is no such thing that raising the kids is woman's work. It is as much Dad's work as Mom's just a little different. By the way, Dad if you can be under a car getting your hands full of grease, or taking a live worm and put it on a fish hook, you can change a diaper, baby poop is not radioactive and Haz-mat suit with goggles is not necessary. By the time adolescence begins is really when the power of fathering takes on a new level. It is at this point, father must help their son or daughter cut the umbilical cord of dependence, into the affirmation of manhood and womanhood. Dad you have the power to transform your son or daughter into a man or woman. The idea that only mothers should deal with their daughters in their teenage years regarding sex, menstruation and the like, is neither biblical, nor wise.

Dad, first by your conduct in the home and the level of communication you have with your daughter, can actually define the woman she is becoming and the man she is going to marry. Mom, first your conduct in the home and the way you treat your sons, can define the kind of men they become and the women they marry. Mom, if you treat your teenage son, like a boy and don't respect him as a young man, you can castrate him before he ever leaves the house. Mom, scolding him and telling him how to be a man will only enforce to him that he is not. Stop! Rather, even if he is behaving like a moody, aggressive caveman, discipline him for the inappropriate behavior, but never disrespect that potential man that is being formed in him.

- **Concluding with some advice and scripture:** Based on the previous statement, there is no such thing in world of godly parenting, of telling your son or daughter, that when they give you respect you will respect them. That is like saying I will put coal in the barbecue when it gives me some heat. You are the parent; your children will follow you! They will give you back what you put in them. It will take time, which is why this called parenting, but eventually they will get it and so will you. When your children are young, you are their manager, you tell them what to do, how to do it and what not to do. When they are teenagers you become their coach more than a manager, you help them think for themselves, empower their individuality and guide them, if you have to become their manager on a regular basis something has gone wrong at some point. It may be necessary for a season, but it should not be permanent. In many causes, because as parents our lives were not in alignment with God and His principles and we still had children, sometimes at a young age, in their teenage years they require more management than we think we should be giving. This is not to feel guilty about our past mistakes, just a point of transformation. If we as parents do not repent for our mistakes when I children were young, we will not correct our behavior towards them and apply the pureness of heart we need to mature them now. On that note, if there is anything I have said to you today that you are going to remember, remember this! Humble yourself and ask your children to forgive you for past mistakes and when you make present ones. If you screw up everyday then repent to God and them everyday. Hopefully, you will adjust what is going on, on the inside of you, so you don't have to keep repenting, but that humility will teach your children amazing things, how to love, how to forgive and how to ask for it. Most children ask for forgiveness, because they do not what to be spanked, punished, and most importantly rejected by their parent. They will learn forgiveness from you. You teach them forgiveness by your asking for forgiveness and actually letting them forgive you, it will do something in their heart that will have eternal value. This doesn't mean you ask them to forgive you and you

then you tell them now they have to forgive you. They may say that they don't want to right now, or can't right now. Respect that let them learn what it feels like to forgive. You cannot coerce any person to forgive you. It will never be genuine and it will actually damage your child's spiritual perspective of God, if you coerce them to forgive you, or others. It will take a while, but they want their relationship with you, so when you ask them to forgive you, they will come to terms with repairing their relationship with you.

- On a final note regarding parenting, every adult today started their spiritual perspective of God based on their relationship with their parents. If your parents were harsh and negative, in most cases when we think of God, we see Him harsh and negative or condemning. If our father for example was always out working, trying to provide, but never spent quality time (not so much quantity, but quality time, yet there is a balance), we grow up perceiving God has good, but distant and one I really cannot have a relationship with. You get the picture. Mom and Dad, especially to your young children, you are shaping how they will first perceive God. The older your children get, they need to see repentant parents who for their mistakes go to God for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

I would like to end with the statement I started with. Men and women of God, Moms and Dads, whether you have not had a child yet, or your children are teenagers or even out of the house living with their own families; it is never too late to start being the parent your child needs. God is in the business of reconciliation even reconciling you to your children. Let God love you and love them through you!

Prov 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. NKJV

Resources:

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

<http://www.kidsgrowth.com/>