

# Purposeful Parenting

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. A group of expectant fathers were in a waiting room, while their wives were in the process of delivering babies.
  - 1. A nurse came in and announced to one man that his wife had just given birth to twins. “That’s quite a coincidence,” he responded. “I play for the Minnesota Twins!”
  - 2. A few minutes later another nurse came in and announced to another man that he was the father of triplets. “That’s amazing,” he exclaimed, “I work for the 3M Company.”
  - 3. At that point, a third man slipped off his chair and lay down on the floor. Somebody asked him if he were feeling ill. “No,” he responded, “I just work for 7-11.”
- B. Parenting is a challenge, whether we have one child or five.
  - 1. Those of us who are parents do not need any reminders of the challenging nature of this work.
  - 2. I pray that we not only know parenting to be a great challenge, but I pray that we know parenting is one of the greatest blessings under the sun.
    - a. “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate” (Ps 137:3-5).
    - b. When Esau and Jacob reunited, Esau asked whose children were all around. Jacob answered, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant” (Gn 33:5).
- C. Tonight, we’re going to think about the blessing God has given us in children and one of the keys to successful parenting.
  - 1. Paul Faulkner is a well-known family therapist among churches of Christ. Dr. Faulkner was, of course, part of the duo of the Brecheen and Faulkner Marriage Enrichment Seminars before they retired, and he taught at Abilene Christian University for over 39 years.
  - 2. Dr. Faulkner interviewed thirty strong, vibrant families to uncover their secrets, Tonight we want to think about one of the most fundamental truths of raising children—to parent on purpose. There are, according to Dr. Faulkner, three essential ingredients to “Purposeful Parenting”: SET YOUR EYES ON THE TARGET, COMMIT TO HITTING THE BULL’S EYE, & NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP.

## SET YOUR SIGHTS ON THE TARGET

- A. Goals are important in any area of life.
  - 1. We understand the importance of goals.
    - a. We decide at this time of the year that we’re going to lose weight, pay off the credit cards, try to be a better person, or a whole myriad of other goals.
    - b. But, in my mind, the real question centers not on the importance of goals but whether or not the goals are important.
      - 1) How much is my weight really going to matter to God when I stand before him in judgment?
      - 2) How much is it going to matter how much money I have in the bank account?
      - 3) How much is it going to matter whether or not I was a “better person,” based on how the world might define “better person”?
  - 2. If we set goals which are after temporary things, we might end up like Jimmy Valvano.
    - a. Valvano won the 1983 championship coaching for North Carolina State against terrible odds. After his coaching career, he became a broadcaster for ESPN and ABC.

- b. He, as I'm sure we are all aware, was stricken with cancer, and he came to understand how trivial his pursuits really were. Coach Jimmy Valvano said, "You get sick and you say to yourself, 'Sports means nothing,' and that feels terrible." He had spent little time with his wife and children through the years and he said, "I figured I'd have 20 years in the big time, who knows, maybe win three national titles, then pack it in at 53 or 54 . . . I was going to make it all up to them, all the time I'd been away .... It sounds silly now .... But it went on and on, that insatiable desire to conquer the world."

B. What does the Bible have to say about all this?

1. The Bible teaches goals are important:

- a. From our text this morning, we read: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Cor 9:24).
- b. "I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14).

2. Think of the individuals in biblical narratives who had goals and were thus able to accomplish their goals.

a. Think of Noah:

- 1) "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Heb 11:7).
- 2) We know that Noah likely worked on the ark nearly one hundred years.
  - a) We know for a fact that from the time God determined to destroy the world and the time of the Flood one hundred-twenty years passed: "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years" (Gn 6:3)
  - b) Had Noah not set out to build the ark in that 120 year time span, he and his family would not have survived the Great Flood. Why did Noah and his family survive the Great Flood? Precise because Noah had a goal to build that ark and he did so.

b. Think of Jesus:

- 1) The Lord Jesus was extremely clear about his goal.
  - a) When Simon found Jesus after the Lord spent a night in prayer, Jesus said, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out" (Mk 1:38).
  - b) "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).
- 2) Jesus allowed nothing to remove his singular dedication to that goal, did he? Not the temptations of Satan, not the doubting of the apostles, not the ridicule of the Jewish hierarchy, not the threat of death.

C. What goal do we need as parents?

1. It seems to me that the Bible teaches there's only one thing which really matters in our family life:

- a. "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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" (Deut 6:6-7).
- b. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).
- c. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol" (Prov 23:13-14). The discipline here is not punitive, but it's a form of instruction—the point of discipline is to save our children from death. I'm convinced "die" here means "be lost." The text doesn't mean that you can't spank too hard, but it means that through spanking, we are saving the souls of our children.

2. Is our goal to raise our children to be faithful Christians?
  - a. Are we more concerned with teaching our children manners or teaching them right and wrong?
  - b. Are we more concerned that our children get their homework done so that they can get into a nice college or are we more concerned that they knew the Scriptures so that they can get into heaven?
  - c. What goal do we have?

## **COMMIT TO HITTING THE BULL'S EYE**

- A. Dr. Faulkner found that parents who did best in parenting were those who not only had goals but those who sacrificed of themselves in order to obtain the goal.
  1. Goals aren't going to work unless we are willing to sacrifice.
    - a. If we decide that we're going to lose weight but we never sacrifice what we eat and never sacrifice to exercise, we won't achieve our goal.
    - b. If we decide we're going to control our temper and we never sacrifice the urge to lash out, we won't achieve our goal.
  2. Scripture teaches us to be willing to sacrifice in order to serve others.
    - a. We talked about this at length this morning, and it is extremely important in our families that we serve one another. We often talk about Christian service, and I fear that we don't often apply this to family life.
    - b. In Dr. Faulkner's research, he talked with one father, for example, who lengthened his commute by two hours a day rather than ask his high school aged children to relocate during high school. In every family Faulkner interviewed, the needs of the children came before the parents' own needs.
    - c. Notice what Scripture says about service:
      - 1) When teaching his disciples to serve, Jesus says: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:42-45).
      - 2) "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14).
    - d. Do we ever think of serving our children like that?
      - 1) Do we think of giving up our interests and hobbies in order to helping our children in what's supremely important?
        - a) Are we willing, for example, to give up watching the ballgame in order to teach our children what's right or wrong?
        - b) Are we willing to do what we can so that we can be cheering at the ballgame when our child is up to bat?
      - 2) One of my favorite memories growing up concerns a time when I was in about the third grade.
        - a) I was in a talent show, doing some magic tricks—that was one of my favorite hobbies growing up.
        - b) Mom didn't work until a couple years later, and she happened to work up sick as a dog that morning.
          - i. She told me before I went to school that morning that she was sorry but she was simply too sick to come.

- ii. I was quite disappointed, but I understood, as much as an eight year-old could. Yet, when I was on that stage, I looked out and there was Mom sitting in the audience.
    - iii. I will never forget that as long as I live. Why? Because Mom sacrificed her needs, her own comfort, for me. That episode made a quite deep impression on me.
  - 3) One family summed up their philosophy of family in these words: “Parenting requires your best, your dedication, your attention. It involves self-discipline. Good families don’t just happen. Sometimes you have to choose between what you want to do and what you ought to do. It is difficult to be going at both golf and tennis. You have to select and choose. You have to take time and do it right. We have our children for such a short time. If you don’t do it now, it won’t get done. Early in the marriage we decided we wanted children. We also decided we would make them a top priority in our lives. Parents need to be there not just to conceive them, but to nurture them. If the parents don’t nurture their children, it won’t get done.”
- e. In Scripture, we have a wonderful example of Mary:
  - 1) Mary was minding her own business, preparing to marry Joseph when the angel Gabriel appeared and said: “You have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:30-33).
  - 2) Mary accepted the word of God and said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).
  - 3) Think of all the sacrificing Mary did.
    - a) Remember what Simeon, the old man in the temple, said to Mary and Joseph? “A sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk 2:35). I cannot fathom the horrible pain of losing a child, a pain some of you know all too well. However, could any mother’s pain be more than Mary’s. Not only was she at the foot of the cross as her child was enduring untold physical agony, but she witnessed his bearing the sins of the world.
    - b) Can you imagine the pain Mary was enduring when she and Joseph could not find Jesus on the way back from Jerusalem? She says to Jesus, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress” (Lk 2:48). And then to discover that he was simply in the Temple teaching and listening to the scribes?
    - c) Mary was willing to give of herself to raise the Messiah. Are we willing to give of ourselves to raise our children?

## **NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP**

- A. We absolutely must understand that parenting is a long-term commitment. We cannot simply throw up our hands in the middle of the game and say, “Coach, I’m tired. Take me out.”
- B. In order to do so, we absolutely must have persistence.
  - 1. Charles Spurgeon, a very famous Baptist preacher, once said, “The snail would never have made it to the ark except through perseverance.”
  - 2. Scripture teaches us to be persistent:
    - a. “After the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43).
    - b. “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up”

(Gal 6:9).

- c. "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).
3. Are we going to be persistent in our parenting?
    - a. When one of our children breaks a rule, are we going to follow through on the promised punishment, will we change the punishment to make it more palatable?
    - b. Will we continue to teach our children right and wrong, or will we stop because teaching right and wrong takes up too much time?
    - c. Just how persistent are we going to be?
- C. This past week I read about a family who are members of the church out in California.
1. They had a son who really acted out—in fact, he acted out so much that he ended up in prison.
  2. When the time for his release drew near, his father met with the preacher to discuss how he and his wife should handle the son's return.
    - a. The father told his preacher, "This time, I'm really going to lay down the law and tighten up the rules."
    - b. But the preacher's response surprised him: "I know a guy in the Bible whose son messed up bad, and when he returned him, the father gave him a party," referring, of course, to the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
  3. The parents began to rethink their response to their son's return.
    - a. When the son came home, he saw lots of cars in front of his house.
    - b. There was something big going on—a party! And come to find out, it was for him—complete with cake, candles, his relatives, and a big banner that said, "Welcome home, son!"
  4. Today that family is in church every Sunday. The son sits with his parents, and has his arm around his mother.
- D. That's persistence! That's not giving up! Will we be persistent in raising our children?