

Crucial Parenting Principles

Childrearing in a Chaotic World

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Given 29-Jul-17; Sermon #1390

It is a tough time to be a parent. I think those of you who are parents now know that from experiences that you have had. It is not long ago that parents were thought to be the best judges of how to raise their own children. But now they are being second- or third- or fourth-guessed by childcare experts, social media, that is all in our faces these days. And of course, there is intrusive local governments, not to mention friends and relations. They always have something to say as well.

A parent doing any kind of public disciplining of his child will likely find himself or herself, whoever it is, the subject of a viral video because everybody has a phone that they are recording on. They will be criticized by the experts who watch that viral video and they will likely host a visit from a social worker with the power to take the child into protective custody. That is the way our world works these days.

The Charlie Gard case in the UK is an example of how little control parents have anymore. It is quite clear from the things that were said from the bench there in England that the state believes it owns and controls our children. If it is happening in Britain, well, it will happen here before long. That is the way it has worked over the past several hundred years and it will especially get worse once we get single-payer health insurance where you have the government telling us what is covered and what is not covered, etc.

We already have our own problems here. It has touched our shores already. We have in some places, in some locales, draconian child endangerment laws that take away kids and even jail the parents for what we thought was good parenting years ago, now they call neglect or even child abuse. It may be as simple as leaving even an older child in the car while you run into the store or even allowing the child to go across the street to the park and play without adult supervision. You are likely to get a knock on your door saying, "Why have you left your child alone?"

Parents have had to adjust to all this outside pressure, and I know every parent feels that pressure. But I would have to say that most parents have not adjusted well. Have you seen how parents handle their kids in public or maybe I should say, have you seen how they *do not* handle their kids in public and they let them just run wild. Very few, it seems, are willing to buck the prevailing politically correct methods of modern childrearing. For many, any kind of corporal punishment is out. They go so far as to call any kind of laying a hand on a child as child abuse despite studies that consistently say that it is effective if done judiciously, consistently, and lovingly. It works. Our parents were right. The Bible was right. Do not withhold correction when it is needed, it will work out just fine.

Instead, modern parents today opt for such tried-and-found-wanting methods as counting to 10, time outs, reasoning with toddlers (that should be like a reality show, Reasoning With Toddlers), bargaining, "Ok, if you do this, we will go to Carowinds next week. But I need you to do this chore right now," which ends up being the next one, bribing the child. And of course, there is the one that a lot of modern parents do, being best friends with their children.

Now, if you noticed that all of these things that I have just said are forms of giving in, surrendering one's place in the family as the authority figure in the family and ceding that over to the child. It is obvious that this is the case because in every one of them, the child always wins, and if the child knows he is going to win, he is going to keep it up and it is just going to snowball and after a while the parent has no control at all.

I think I am being only a little extreme in the way I am phrasing these things because you go out and see the way it is in a grocery store. Go to Walmart and watch a lady with the two or three kids go through that store and unless they have cracked the whip earlier (and I do not mean that literally) then those kids are usually screaming banshees and running wild. Of course, I am exaggerating a little bit. But there are those cases.

So it seems that here in the US at least, the days of being an authoritarian parent are over, at least in the public, in public places. In a 2012 study, researchers at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (that is a mouthful, is it not?), announced that they had found four

new styles of parenting across the country. What they did was they went out and over three years they interviewed and observed 3,000 sets of parents to get the information for this study. And what they did when they collated all the information and they looked at the commonalities between them, they found four new styles of parenting and those new four styles are (and I will tell you what they are here before we go through them individually):

First one is called the faithful. The second is called engaged progressives. The third is the detached, and the fourth, the American dreamers.

Now, faithful parents, which are about one-fifth of America's parents, 20%, have decided that they are going to stick to their religious morality and rear their children based on what they believe, on those religious teachings that they have grown up with. So they do things like they have prayer at meal times. That is all that it takes anymore to be a religious person in the United States. Just pray at a meal and you are immediately branded as a religious zealot. But they do these kinds of things, they pray at meal times and they talk to their kids about religion. Can you believe that they actually talk to their kids about Jesus and the way to live right in this world? These people believe that raising children to reflect God's will and purpose is the most important goal of parenting. Most of us, I hope would fit into this group. And hopefully on the more extreme end in terms of being religious.

The second group are called engaged progressives. They are about as big as the faithful group, about 21% (a little larger). They center their child training on learning responsibility. So they are trying to teach their kids responsibility and teach them to make choices. But what is lost, what is not there in these engaged progressives that is there among the faithful, is that these engaged progressives leave religion altogether out of the way they teach their kids. 59% of these engaged progressives (I keep wanting to read enraged progressives) rely either on their own personal experience or on what *feels* right to them personally as how they base their child training and morality on.

Additionally, over half of them, 55%, believe that as long as we do not hurt others, we should all just live however we want. That is their motto. That is what they are teaching their kids. This group tends to emphasize honesty, and that is very good. I hope all the kids out there are learning honesty, whoever their parents are, whether they are engaged progressives or faithful

or what have you. And these engaged progressives generally feel optimistic about the world. It is getting better. It is a great place out there because they see their own causes being brought forward and made commonplace, because these are progressive, they are liberals and they like all the things that have been happening in the United States. So they are generally optimistic about the world. And their chief aim is to pass on their enlightened liberal beliefs to their children.

Third group, these are the detached. They are likewise about the same size of these other two groups, 19% of American parents are detached. And of course, from the word detached, you think they are hands off parents. Not hands on, they are hands off parents. Their motto is "let kids be kids and let the chips fall where they may," just let them go, they are not going to interfere with them. Why should they? Kids are going to do what kids do. These parents are the kind of parents that are likely to watch their kids run wild wherever they happen to be and say, "Well, nothing ventured, nothing lost, rather not get involved, just might cause a scene."

So these are what we would call laissez faire parents. For them, it is a natural response to a generalized lack of certainty in this world. We do not know how things are going to end up, so why even try? It is the way they think, and they have a very weak sense of their own efficacy, that they do not have any confidence in their own abilities to do anything in terms of helping their children. What we found out though is that few of these detached parents are actually happy in their marriage and about half of them spend less than two hours a day talking or otherwise engaging with their children, even when they are very young. These are the kinds that put their kids in their own rooms and then they go do something else like sit in front of the television. They do not want to have really anything to do with their kids. They are frighteningly self-centered parents and *very* irresponsible, not really putting in any effort to help their kids grow up.

The final group is the largest group, 27% of American parents are the American dreamers. The dreamers here is the word we have to key in on. These people tend to be very optimistic about their children's opportunities and schooling. They think that the sky is the limit for their kids. So they hope a great deal and they may actually be very wealthy and spend a lot of money. They invest in their children's education, they put away money for

college, they pour themselves fully into their family's *future* and do very little about the present. They are dreaming about the way that it is. This is the American dream, right? We are talking about you are born into this country and you have got limitless potential and all you have to do is put yourself out there and work hard and have a little luck and find the right opportunities, and you could be president of the United States if you just hope enough. That is what it seems like. They are dreaming that all these good things will come to pass and they are putting all their eggs into the one basket of the future and not doing anything about right now in terms of molding and shaping them for their futures.

Parents in this American dreamers group tend to share their emotions with their children and most of them are very positive, optimistic emotions. They are like, "You can do it! I did it. Look what I've done here. You know, if you just apply yourself and do these things, we can all be so happy and we can have so many good things!" They are talkers, they are good at being cheerleaders, but they are not really any good at rearing children. These people, these parents in this group, also are the most likely to hope (there is that word again) that one day they will be best friends with their adult children and they will go to, you know, Club Med together and do all these great things that adult people can do. These people are essentially wishful thinkers. They are believing and hoping that their kids will turn out alright, if they only provide them as many opportunities and things as they can. But they never tell them "no," they never tell them anything really except how bright the future is going to be and then they shuttle them off to soccer practice or they do something else that will help them network for their future so that they can fill the fulfill the American dream.

It is very interesting that after reading this new study, a man named Eric Herman, who is a clinical psychologist at the DMC Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit, was asked, "Ok, you've seen this, you've seen what this survey has found out, this research from the University of Virginia. What do you think the best parenting style is?" And he essentially said, "It's not here." He said, and it was astounding, he said the classic authoritarian style is the best parenting style. This is his opinion. "Parents," he says, "need to be the leader at home while being loving and kind." "In the end," he also said, "if your kids know they are loved, they will respect what you say. Parents cannot hope their children will be okay. Rather, they have to work at it.

Parenting is work and it's not easy. Parents that put in the time and the effort are going to get results, and there'll be good results."

Let us start here in Deuteronomy 6. Mostly what I want to show you just right here without going into all the details is the amount of effort and work that God expects us to put into childrearing, into parenting our children. Deuteronomy 6:6 is right after the Shema. You know the "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" That is a very important scripture that He was emphasizing to the children of Israel. The next verse is also a memory scripture. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." So then the next thing He says is about childrearing. This shows you how much He thinks about this responsibility that He has given us.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 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."

I will not read anymore. But get the gist of what God is telling the children of Israel here and us too about what it takes to teach godly things to your children, what it takes to bring them up in a godly way. He says you have got to be at it all the time in every situation. You have got to put your heart into it. You have to be diligent about doing all these things. So whether you are just sitting in your house and having a conversation over a meal or whatever, you should be doing this sort of thing. And He talks about when you walk by the way, when you are outside, when you are in public, when you are going one place to another, do not waste the opportunity. Teach your children these things. When you lie down, that is when you are going to bed, right, when you are sleeping. There is something in this; He is trying to get us to understand that it is an *always* activity. When you lie down, when you rise up. It never ends.

This is one of those, I cannot remember the word now, but it is a situation where it is a phrase that covers the whole of something. And in this case, when he lies down and when you rise up, cover the whole day. So He is telling us that to be the kind of parent that He wants us to be, we have to be constantly at the job of raising our children in a godly way. So it is all day,

constant, diligent activity. They, the children, need to see you doing the right thing, teaching the right thing, all the time in every possible situation because that is how they learn. They learn best by example.

So today, in the remaining time that we have, I am going to present three crucial parenting principles that parents must employ to raise their children successfully. Now, these are *principles*. They go beyond methods or styles of parenting, but go straight to the heart of the parents' attitudes and effort that they put into their childrearing practices. So "Three Crucial Parenting Principles." (That is the title I have put on this sermon.)

Before we get to them though, I want to relate the gist of an article by an English nanny. Her name is Emma Jenner. She has written several things that have been popular on the Internet, but she seems to have pretty keen insight into the area of parenting, modern childrearing. She has been an observer of these things and she is, in effect, through this article, shaking her head and saying, "Where have we gone?" The title of her article is, "Five Reasons Modern Day Parenting is in Crisis." So she writes,

I've worked with children and their parents across two continents and two decades. And what I've seen in recent years alarms me. [Then she gives her five points as follows. She says] Modern parents have a fear of their children. [That is number one, a fear of their children.] Parents essentially are afraid to upset or disappoint their kids. And the way that they show this most of all that they are afraid to upset or disappoint their kids is by saying they are afraid to say no.

Because that will make little Johnny cry and I cannot stand to hear him cry. Oh, poor kid. No! Parents need to say no. (I did not mean my Johnny. He is a little old for crying.)

The second point that she says where we have gone wrong and that is, we have lowered the bar. Parents are afraid to ask more of their kids. "Oh, don't do that. Sally, I'll get it. You don't know how to do that yet." But parents do not expect their children to be able to do anything. They take them as numbskulls or something. Or at least they are teaching them to be lazy because they do not make their kids do chores or do things that are really age

appropriate, you know, like picking up their room or helping put the dinner plates out for dinner or what have you. They will say no, go ahead and play or go watch that video, which is actually one of the other points here. But instead of making the kids do something and be responsible about something and work, they will do it all for themselves because they are afraid that they are asking too much of their kids.

The third one she laments about is that we have lost the village. What she means is that parents have no support from society. The authority figures, even the bus driver or the policeman or whatever out in on the streets, will not help you with your child. They will not enforce moral things, they will not enforce ethical things, they will not enforce good average behavior. So the parents are on their own.

The fourth one, she says parents rely too much on shortcuts. Parents rely on shortcuts. Parents depend too much on distractions like the television or the DVR or the VCR or whatever you use in your house to keep kids occupied or entertained. "Oh, go ahead, sit in front of (whatever the cartoon is that the kid likes most) so that I can get something done." Or (we see it all the time when we fly here and there), parents, in order to keep their kid from ruining the interior of the plane by running amok, they will put on a video through the whole flight and this kid has his ear buds in and he is just watching, you know, some Disney thing the whole time and the parent has essentially just abdicated all responsibility for the kid. We see this everywhere we go.

Kids need to learn patience, they need to wait for things. As in the example of "I'm making dinner and you just do this," well, they can wait by themselves or they can help or they can learn to entertain themselves. "Ok, go into your room and build whatever from your Legos." Do something that is moderately constructive rather than just sitting there having your mind numbed by that single-eyed monster in the living room. So what she is saying here is that you should not do that. You should not rely on these shortcuts because they are really not helping you to raise your kids. You are just actually putting things off and abdicating your position.

The fifth one she is talking about here, these five points that alarm her, parents put their children's needs ahead of their own. Anything that Billy wants he gets no matter how much the parent has to sacrifice. Parents end up

the worn out slaves of their kids. They do everything, the kids do almost nothing. But this nanny says that children from an early age can learn patience. They can learn to wait while their parents do things that they need to do for themselves, to get done for themselves. You just have to teach it. You have to make them sit down and do something, you know, write, draw, color or whatever, and to be good and wait for mom to do whatever she needs to do. Whether it is to take a shower or what have you, they should be able to mind themselves for a short period of time. But modern parents will not do that. They will give up their own needs in order to entertain the kid.

The common thread in all five of these points here is that the children are running the roost and mom and dad are fearfully (this lady used that word several times) doing everything their little taskmasters demand of them. And this flips the God-designed family structure on its head, which brings us to my first point and that is, parents must establish their authority. Point number one—the most important point of all I believe, which is why I put it number one—Parents must establish their authority. And coda to this, the earlier the better.

Let us go to I Corinthians 11, verse 3 where Paul makes a statement here where it is very clear how God wants things ordered in the world. It is in families—in His own family, in human families. So we will just pull this one verse out. He says,

I Corinthians 11:3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

So even though it is a little bit out of order there, what he is saying, and which modern liberals wish were not so, is that there is a hierarchical authority structure in families, both human and divine, from top to bottom. It is the Father, Christ, the husband, the wife, and where are children on this list? They are not even on the list because they are not part of the authority structure. They are *subject* to the authority structure. So this is the way God says it needs to be. And there is an important principle here: that as in heaven, so on earth, which is an important principle to the sermon because we are going to be taking principles that come off of that idea.

Paul gets to children in Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

So Father, Christ, husband, wife, and then kids are underneath that honoring, obeying, respecting their own parents, and of course, honoring and respecting and obeying God and Christ as well. But they are first going to look to their parents because little children do not have a concept of God. They see their parents and in their parents, they are to see God. And that is an important principle we are going to be using throughout this whole sermon. But that is how it has to be. And so in our little fiefdoms which we call families, the father and the mother are the authority figures and the children are to obey them, as Paul says here in Ephesians 6:1.

He gives us two very good reasons here. First one he gives is because I said so. No, it is because God said so! He says, because it is right. And he quotes the commandment. God's commandment says, "Honor your father and your mother." That is the right thing and so that is a good reason. He did not need to go any further than that. If God says it, then it needs to be the way it is in our families.

But he gives another one. He says, because it is the way to the best results for the child and for the whole family. He says here "that you may live long on the earth." If we follow this commandment, then we are most likely to have a long and productive and successful life. It, as he says here, is a commandment with promise. It is not just that we are not supposed to do something. It is because if we do this thing, there are great rewards that come from it. There is a promise out there of good things, blessings from God. And of course, just plain old results, cause and effect results that will bring the children a lot of benefits down the line.

What he is saying here is that you as a parent establishing your authority and the child responding properly and rightly by honoring and respecting and obeying the authority in the family, the father and the mother, that is going to lead to more and better life. And that is what this is all about. Is that not

ultimately our goal? To have eternal life in God's Kingdom, the best life there ever was? Well, that is the goal in the family. Our goal in the family is to have a long, full life under our parents. And then ultimately, later on, when we are let loose into the world, and we can have our own families. But it starts with this idea that children obey their parents because their parents have done what God has wanted them to do and established the authority of the parents in the first place.

So, even if the world is going one way, and I purposely said one way (this is off to the left here as I am doing it in my gesture), even if the world is going one way, against the godly order, definitely, and toward total parental abdication of responsibility, we have to be countercultural. We have to go the other way and employ proper parental authority in our families. One leads (this other one off to the left), to everyone doing that which is right in their own eyes (you might recognize that from Judges 21:25), while the other, doing what God wants us to do, will end up leading to a generation of young people who respect authority up and down the line, wherever it is, not just in the family, but in the community as well and in the church too, but especially they respect God, the ultimate Authority. And another benefit is that in doing this, we will be preparing them to do what is pleasing in God's eyes because if we do it properly, our children will be trying to please us. And that will ultimately reflect on God once they get a little bit older.

Let us go back into the Old Testament to the book of Psalms in chapter 51. If you know your chapters, Psalm 51 is David's great psalm of repentance. That might be an odd place to pull a scripture out of here but I am just going to pull verse 5 because I want to get the gist of a thought he was having here. He said,

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity [meaning he was born, his mother had him in iniquity], and in sin my mother conceived me. [He even goes further back.]

What I want you to understand here is that he is saying that from his earliest glimmer of life, he has lived in a world in which sin exists.

Let us go forward to Psalm 58.

Psalm 58:3 [David again says] The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

Have you ever heard that little baby coming out of his mother's womb and saying a lie? Children do not speak coming out of the womb. But he is trying to get us to understand a point.

And let us go to Isaiah 48 where a similar thought occurs.

Isaiah 48:8 [where God says, speaking to Israel here] "Surely you did not hear, surely you did not know; surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb."

We do not necessarily need to take all of these verses literally, that a child comes out of the womb and sins immediately. But the overall teaching that David and God here is trying to help us to understand is that human beings have the capacity to sin from a very early age. Even little kids. They are not all little innocent bundles of goodness. These verses suggest that not just the capacity, but also the seeds or the beginnings of future sin are set or instilled very young, from the womb. Whether it is a wicked environment that they live in, whether it is parental example or bad example, whether it is parental negligence or whatever it happens to be, the foundation of sin is laid in a child's early years, even in their early months. If we take it literally, right from their birth,

Herbert Armstrong used to teach that parents need to begin training their children as early as possible because Satan the Devil is not going to wait. He starts *immediately* because his program is on all the time. It is going through the airways. His attitudes of hatred and pride and selfishness, greed are out there all the time. That is what Ephesians 2:2 implies. That he is the prince of the power of the air who broadcasts these things over the whole earth. We have our little antennas up even from the time that we are just baby sprouts out there and we are taking in those attitudes. He begins immediately through these broadcasts to work on the child's carnal selfish nature, the one that will not abide by God's law. Little kid comes out and immediately it wants something, food, comfort, what have you. It wants itself to be comforted. And you could say that that is not a bad thing. Obviously you

need to do that. You need to comfort and feed, wrap up in a blanket that little baby. But it is an innate selfish need of that child and if we do not treat it properly, if we do not approach it properly, that little need can become not a desire but a demand.

Remember my sermon about all the neurons that are firing in a little baby's head. That helps, if you want to put it that way, that helps them develop their personalities very early. And if their needs are met just so quickly or whatever, if they are not taught to be patient and wait and that mom and dad are the ones that are in authority, that little seed of selfishness is set at that moment, in that early time, and it can blossom later on into outright rebellion.

Now, I am not saying do not feed your baby. That is not not what I am saying at all. But I am saying that you need to be careful even with a little baby in how much you cater to every single selfish need that that child has. It is not an easy line to walk. But as the child gets older, you can begin doing things more constructively. But you need to be aware, if nothing else, that that baby has a personality and the beginnings of a character and that everything we do is being observed by that child, and we need to be careful that we steer that in the proper direction.

Like I said, it is not easy and most of the teaching is done later on, as they get to be toward a year, two years, or whatever. But, those things need to be instilled because that baby is *watching*, that baby is *listening*, and we need to be enforcing and teaching that baby that you are the authority and that they need to obey you, listen to you, and do as you say. You cannot start early enough.

Notice, I did not say anything about spanking or anything. That is not what I am talking about. But a baby can learn, almost kind of like a dog learns who the leader of the pack is, and it has got to be done through making them understand that you are the boss. So they need to know that very early on and it actually will give great benefits if it is done properly. But, you put a child into this world with these things that are going on around them, obviously you have a child with its carnal nature, and then you add in a corrupt world and an imperfect and maybe an incompetent, or even worse, wicked parents, and the child's route to sin is on the fast track. We have got to stop that by understanding that that kid needs to be trained beginning

immediately, gently, but in some ways forcefully, it has to be that they know who the boss is. So parents need to make every effort to teach their children to look to them as the authorities in their lives.

Colossians 3, verse 20 here, just to pick up what Paul wrote to the Colossians as he wrote there similarly to the Ephesians. He says,

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

So parents need to train their children so that they learn that their parents' word is law and that they will obey their parents without hesitation because they trust them.

Back to the Psalms to chapter 34. I will be spending the most time on this one since it is, to me, the most important one.

Psalms 34:8-10 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! [Now, please be thinking that we need to put this on our level, not just on the divine spiritual level, but parents as the authority.] Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

We have to look at this from the analogy that parents stand in the place of God for their children. Just as we look to God to meet our needs and to guide and direct our steps in everything, so do children need to learn to look for these things from their parents. Remember, we stand in the place of God. So just as we must be taught the fear of the Lord, so must also children be taught the fear of their parents. And I am not talking, "Don't hit me again!"—not that kind of fear. I am talking about giving their parents the honor, the respect, and obedience that will smooth the way for a proper relationship and the best environment and opportunity for blessing and growth.

That is why we fear God. So we have a good relationship with Him and that things will go well with us. Right? Well, that is the same reason why we

need to teach our children the fear of us, the fear of parents, so that we will have a good relationship with them, a proper relationship, and that we can bless them and give them what they need to grow. The sooner that this is instilled, this fear of the parents, as it were, the better it will be for both parents and children.

A side benefit of all of this is that it reduces the amount and severity of any kind of correction or discipline later. If you do it early, you will not have to do it when they are older. It will already be instilled in them to respect mom and dad and what they want and their commands. It often avoids things like teenage rebellion because they have learned long before they were teenagers not to rebel. Now, I am not saying that there will be no major blow ups that come up. These things happen, but it will greatly reduce the odds that they will be truly damaging.

Point two: parents must be consistent and on the same page. A huge problem we parents have is maintaining the course, steady as she goes there, mate. Often we are all over the place. That is because we are human. This inconsistency is true both in maintaining any kind of consistency in our childrearing principles and practices, because we all slip from time to time. But it is also true as consistency between mom and dad. Every couple is different but I would be willing to wager a lot of money that one parent is usually stricter than the other. One or the other is the disciplinarian. The other one ducks out as soon as he or she can do so and say, it is either "wait till dad gets home" or, dad says something like, "Oh, your mother just got overwrought. Just don't do it again." and they do not want to do anything about it. So one or the other tends to give in when the going gets tough.

But this is when Junior or Betty learns to play the one parent off the other because he or she knows that dad is a softie or what have you or mom always says yes, if you just work on her a little bit. So the kid learns that he or she can get away with whatever he wants because he is playing his parents off one another. If he just goes to the right parent, he will get what he wants. But in this thing too, God is our example of the perfect parents. Let us quickly go to three verses.

Malachi 3:6 [This is another memory scripture, right?] "For I am the Lord, I do not change' therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

We have here three things. The Lord does not change. Jesus Christ is always the same. And in God is no variation at all. Not even a hint of deviation. As a matter of fact, this phrase here, "no variation or shadow of turning" seems to imply that He does not change and He cannot be changed. So just stop trying to change Him.

Now, it is not possible that humans can be this constant, as constant as God. In fact, we have a saying the only constant is change. That is how we are as human beings. But this kind of consistency, this kind of constancy must be our intention and our goal. It is a good goal to be like God in this way, that you will not change from what is right. Now, why is this so important, first about God? Why is this so important that God does not change, that He is always the same, that there is never any deviation or variation in Him?

Well, the reason is because this is the divine virtue that allows us to have faith in Him. If God were variable, if He was all over the place, if He was inconsistent about the way He judged or the way He enforced things, if He was whimsical, "Oh, today, I think I'll make another planet" or whatever, if He were capricious or always changing His mind, that is, if He were like us (which is how we are, we are all those things), we could not trust Him. We never would know where He stands on anything. He might change His mind, "Oh, faith's right out and love, that's not good anymore." You know, that would be silly. But it is something that we can depend on because we know He never changes. Love is love and faith is faith, always has been, always

will be, so we can depend on that. He is consistent and constant and because He is, we can rely on His Word. It will be the same today and tomorrow, as it was yesterday, as it was 1,000 years ago, as it was in the days of Paul, as it was in the days of David, as it was in the days of Moses, as it was from the foundation of the earth and eternally before that.

It is always the same. God does not change.

And that is how He wants us to be. We then are to be consistent in the same way, as much as possible, so that our children have the same trust and confidence in us as we have in God. That is why we must be consistent because we are God to them when they are little. They do not understand the true God. But we have to be as much like God as we can so that when they do begin to understand that we can point Him out to them and they can say, "Oh yeah, my mom, my dad, they're just like that." And so they have a proper understanding of God.

So children need to know beyond any doubt that what their parents say is unquestionable, that their commands *must* be carried out. That their threats are sure. You know, if you say, "If you don't clean up your room, I'm going to give you a a spanking!" or if that threat is out there, the parent had better be consistent and follow up on it because the kid has to know that what you say is true in every case. But also they have to know that their parents' love and mercy and kindness are true and absolute and totally dependable. That they could always fall back on those things. They have to know that there is no wiggle room to play with.

And the husband and wife have to be calling plays out of the same playbook. They must see eye to eye on their combined, their mutual principles and methods so that their kids are not confused. "Why won't dad let me have this. Mom always does." Or on the other hand, they see a chink in the armor say, "Aha! I'm in the money. Mom and dad will give me this because dad has an open pocket book if I just say this or do that." And they will use that because they are very devious things and they know how to work any kind of situation if you give them enough time and ammunition. So parents need to support each other, they need to have each other's back. Never, never, never, ever, ever undermine your spouse—*ever*—because the kid will get wind of it and you do not want to think about what might happen.

I Corinthians 15, verse 58 to pull a principle out of here. It is just as important in the family and in childrearing as it is in overall Christianity.

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

You are doing something good. So be a rock in parenting your children and that consistency is going to pay dividends. This verse nicely sums up this point of parenting and it actually steers us into the final point. Once we have established proper parental authority and we have tried to become consistent in our childrearing, then we must be truly engaged in our child's or children's growth and development.

And that is point three: parents must be involved with their children. We cannot be just interested observers. We have to be down in the trenches with them. We have to be available both to help in time of need, if there is any kind of struggle and they need help, or, and maybe this is even more important: to celebrate their successes with them, to be there in the good times, not just to be a hand up all the time, but to say, "Hey, great, you did it right that time." and to give them encouragement and help.

The strong, silent, withdrawn dad who maybe once in a while peers from behind his newspaper is not a good role model for a Christian father. Now we know that, because of the way life is set up in these United States, in most cases, dad will ultimately spend less time with his kids than mom. That is usually the way it happens. But he must make the effort when he is at home to take the burden off mom and to engage with the kids in one way or another. Whether it is just talking with them or playing a game, reading to them, teaching them whatever skill or showing them a hobby or something like that, doing crafts, showing them how to build a playhouse or what have you, doing chores, whatever it is, they do not really care. They want the time, they want the attention.

Now understand, that when parents decide to have a child and that little bouncing baby boy or girl comes into the world, they have signed on for at least 18 years of hands-on toil. It is hard work, real work. It is a dirty,

wearing, seemingly never-ending job where, like we showed in Deuteronomy 6 there, God wants us to be at our post all the time teaching them, bringing them up, maturing them to be God-fearing people. Sometimes you just wake up tired and you go to bed exhausted and it seems like it never ends, but it is also fun and full of joy and accomplishment that makes all of that hard work worth it. But parents and children will only get the most out of it if the parents are totally committed to and engaged with their children.

Let us go to Psalm 139 to see another analogous principle from God. We will read the first ten verses. God is our pattern here. What does God do? How does God parent? Well, probably this has not been used in terms of childrearing, but I think it is a good principle. We can understand how involved God is.

Psalm 139:1-10 O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

God is not a withdrawn parent at all. God is hands-on, God is with us forever. He knows everything about us. If we go here, He is there. If we go there, He is there too. God is very involved in the lives of His children. He knows every word that they say. He knows their thoughts. Now, we cannot reach that level. But this shows that God as a parent is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-helpful—all the time. He is there in every case. Put it this way. Who knows us better than God? Who knows what is best for us and how we will react in any kind of situation? Who is always there to lead and to guide us? Who is our constant protector? Who comforts and shares with us all of our experiences? Who never leaves us nor forsake us? It is God.

In the same way we need to be a similar kind of ever-present teacher, companion, guide, shield, and cheerleader to our children. We need to model His intimate involvement with us to our own children so that as we let them go as adults, when they get to be 18, 20, 22, 24 whatever it is, they will be able to transfer that love and faith to God because they will have seen it in their parents. They will grow up confident and skilled and understanding and prepared to face the world of adulthood because they have seen it in their parents. They have seen how it works.

But notice though that God has chosen to be invisible to us. He is involved, that is for sure, and knows everything about us. But He does it without being overbearing or stifling. He lets us do an awful lot of stuff whether it is good for us or not. And then when we finally figured out it was not, He is there to comfort us and put us on the right path.

So I am not talking at all about being helicopter parents. You have probably heard that term. Those parents are always protectively hovering over their children, just in case they may happen to scrape their knee or something. This tends to produce anxious even neurotic kids because they always feel like they are in danger. Nor am I speaking about lawnmower parents. Have you heard about lawnmower parents? You got helicopter parents and lawnmower parents. Lawnmower parents are always one step ahead of their kids, smoothing out the way for them so that when they come through, they just slide through and have no problems at all. Now, this kind of parent produces entitled narcissistic kids who feel like everybody should be preparing the way for them and treating them like royalty and just giving them all the things that they need.

We need to find some middle ground here, a balance in which the parents are intimately involved in what their kids do, and they provide them with opportunities and support that helps them to gain experience and confidence and will encourage proper character growth without being so suffocating that we inhibit them or even warp them, which is the case with making neurotic or narcissistic kids. So we need to figure out what that balance is, but we need to be involved with them. That is the bottom line. We need to be involved with them so that they can learn and grow under the most ideal conditions with dad and mom at hand to help and encourage as needed.

Listen to this. Genesis 28, verse 15. God is just about to begin the process of conversion, the process of maturing or childrearing one of the most wily, stubborn, and willful children that maybe He has ever had. His name was Jacob. What did God say?

Genesis 28:15 [He says] "Behold, I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Is that not reassuring? That even though He had a cantankerous kid to raise, a stubborn kid that would probably frustrate Him to no end over the next 20 years or many more years than that. But we are talking Jacob here, Jacob had some problems. He was there and saying, "Ok, I'm going to be with you every step of the way. I'm going to be with you when you go there and when you come back and I'm going to finish what I started. Give you what I promised." If we have the same mindset, put these same principles in action, it is going to work for us too.

So let us end in Proverbs 19. Actually, we are going to go to two scriptures here. Proverbs 19:18 and Proverbs 29:17. We will put these together to come up with a final principle here.

Proverbs 19:18 Chasten your son [I do not want you to look at this in terms of spanking the kid. I am talking about discipline. I am talking about childrearing in general.] while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

Proverbs 29:17 Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul.

When we take these two proverbs together, we distill a truth: that child training, childrearing, parenting, disciplining your children is essential. If we neglect it, as in Proverbs 19:18, we are complicit in his destruction. But if we are diligent in our responsibility, Proverbs 29:17, we will receive the peace and delight that only principled successful children can bring. And that is a marvelous goal to have.