

Parenting (Part 1): Principles

Foundational Principles of Parenting

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Given 15-May-99; Sermon #395

The aftermath of the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado has pretty much degenerated into a sometimes very heated debate over who is responsible. I listen to talk radio fairly frequently, and it is still being discussed, whether it is guns, whether it is the schooling, the school administrators, or whether it is this or whether it is that, whether it is violence, movies, video games, or parents.

I am not here to argue one side or another, but I think it is quite clear from just this that the parenting practices of the majority of Americans leaves much to be desired. There is no real standard anymore. Children basically, it seems, rear themselves in many cases. The parents are too busy doing this and that.

These kids were from a fairly affluent section of town, and they had all the things that they needed, but evidently their parents did not notice that they were pretty much worshipping Hitler, speaking German, wearing swastikas and black trench coats, and building bombs. How much apathy can you have? So undoubtedly poor or negligent parenting played a role—probably a significant role—in the events of April 20th.

People complain that for such an important position, parenting does not come with an instruction manual. They have a little fun, and nine months later a baby pops out, and here they go. They do not know what to do, they say. But it does come with an instruction manual, believe it or not. It is the Word of God. That is the instruction manual for all of life. It does not matter what part of life you are talking about, the Bible contains the *foundational* principles of parenting and childrearing. They are all there if we just take a look at them. They will produce good, fair, loving parents, and they will also produce obedient, upright, and happy children. All it takes for us is to search them out, to believe them, and to do them. God has not left us without instruction on this.

Today I am going to begin a series on parenting. It is a subject that really has not been visited for a least a couple of years—maybe even several years in this body. In a way, we have set it aside for more important matters that have affected the church, because the scattering of the church is a vitally important topic. However, parenting is part of the problem—part of the problem that the church is scattering. So it is one that we have to re-visit on occasion to get our bearings once again on childrearing, or parenting, and head off in the right direction once again.

This is a subject that cannot be ignored. Bringing up our children, as it says in Ephesians 6:4, "in the training and the admonition of the Lord" is one of our top priorities. I do not know if you have ever thought of it that way, but when we marry and we have children, rearing those children to be "godly seed" becomes very important. Our salvation in many respects centers around those relationships that we create when we have children. Most of our practice in being God is going to happen in that environment of parent and child. Of course husband to wife as well, but parent to child is also very important.

You have probably noticed as I have gone through this introduction that I have been using the word "parenting." In the past we have talked about childrearing, but I prefer the word "parenting." You may say, "Well, they're the same thing, aren't they?" Well, not quite. There is an emphasis on the word parenting that I would like to highlight, because the responsibility for rearing those children is on the parent, not on the child. I think it is important that we look at it that way, that it is a responsibility of the parent to make godly children.

Not only do we make them physically, we make them spiritually in many respects. We make them into whatever adults they will turn out to be. I know it is the old "nature versus nurture" debate, but I think the Bible is pretty clear that the end result hangs on how we nurture them. We have to deal with what nature (just to use those terms) has provided, but they do not have to stay that way. They have to be **nurtured**.

That verse in Ephesians 6:4 in the King James says "nurture." "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." It is very important that we get the focus on the right people—the parents. That is what this instruction is going to, not to the children necessarily. They can listen. They can try to behave and try to obey and help their mom and dad in their job. That is great, but the responsibility hangs on the parent.

In our society we have made children the center of the universe. Just pay attention over the next year and a half, during the Clinton administration, and if there is a Democratic administration after that, (whoever that happens to be—Bill Bradley, or Gore maybe. I doubt it.), every one of their initiatives will have the words something to this effect—"It's for our children." We have made the children the center of our universe. If it somehow adversely affects the children—their freedoms—then we will not do it.

Probably the Republicans will do this too, because they have found the Democrats have been doing this for years, and getting their programs through. But we have grown up in this society that so emphasizes the children that we have a name for it—"The Youth Culture." Everything is centered on people from age 2 or 3 to pretty much about 23, 24.

Then they start entering the world of adulthood, and they end up being old fogies.

Television, movies, toys, and just about everything commercial, every advertisement, is aimed at that rather actually small percentage of people, because they have found that the children have their parents wrapped around their little fingers. And so if they aim something at Johnny, who may be 13 or 14, he will bug his parents, and his parents will buy whatever the goodie is, and somebody makes a sale.

What do you think Star Wars is aimed at? George Lucas and his company have made billions of dollars because they have aimed Star Wars at about 9 to 13-year-old levels. We went into Target yesterday evening to get something there, and what hit us first were three short aisles worth of Star Wars merchandise. The movie is not even out yet. They had people trampling each other and getting into fights over the first release of this first-episode memorabilia.

They had people making very threatening gestures and saying threatening words at store managers who told them truthfully that "We've run out! You can't get your Darth Maul doll because they're all gone." "You'd better find me one, or I'll . . .!" It is that sort of thing. And why are they getting them? For their kids! Or if they are adults, it is because they are kids still.

Our whole culture is centered on the youth. We have old people who try to be young again. What is a mid-life crisis? Mostly it is men trying to be eighteen, because they think that they are not going to be accepted by people in our culture unless they act like a child—an immature youth.

When God says, "Rise up before the hoary head," a man of that age should be known for his wisdom. We have got things turned around. We over-emphasize our youth. So now they have more influence in this culture than their parents.

Look at our President. He still acts like an eighteen-year old. (Rush Limbaugh said a four-year old.) But that is how he runs this country—by his hormones, not by his gray hair. He has plenty of it if he would just use it. That is all we ask. So we see the American family crumbling at a very rapid rate, because everything is upside-down.

I think the last figure I saw was that about sixteen percent of families can be considered "traditional" anymore, where the father is the breadwinner, and a mother who stays at home and watches her biological children who live with her, and no other steps, halves, or whatever in the family. A traditional nuclear family: two-parents—a man and a woman—a man who works, and a wife who does not, and their biological children.

There is more to it than that. There are other factors that have added to the eroding of the American family—everything from illegitimate births, to a Dr. Laura term—"shacking up" (living together unmarried), adultery, and then divorce.

Women in the workforce have played a significant role in that and many other things. I think we can safely say parenting is under siege. I am sure that Satan the Devil would just love to see it fall altogether. He would love for millions of children set loose without any supervision. He would love for our society to degenerate to the point where there is no authority in the parents at all.

I think we can trace much of this assault on one of Satan's most obvious characteristics, and that is his selfishness. Think about it. Selfishness makes people prioritize poorly, because instead of someone else being at the top of their list, it is themselves. If you have yourself on the top of your priority list, where is God? Obviously He has got to be farther on down the list somewhere. Where is the family? Well obviously somewhere farther down the list. Our choices then are self-serving and self-centered rather than outgoing. What did Mr. Armstrong always say about love, about it being outgoing concern for the other person? So the real order of things is flipped again—self-serving instead of outgoing.

Rather than God and family being on the top of the list, it is "work" in our society. I include under work all our financial success, because it is by work that we get gain, and so we work in order to get, and we get in order to please ourselves. I am not saying that working hard is wrong. We are going to get to something about that in a few minutes, but it is the wrong priority to have on the top of the list.

Also very high on Americans' priority list is "play." Play can be any kind of entertainment, whether it is actual sports play, or whether it is video-game play, or going-to-the races play that I like to do, or going to a rock concert, or it could even be a classical concert. When work and play are on the top of the list and God and family are not, we have this flip again of the natural, God-created order of things. When that happens, spiritual and family life stagnates, or even stops, depending on how radical the poor priorities are, and then all of life from thereafter suffers because things are upside-down.

It is these first two qualities—God and family—that regulate our quality of life. If they regulate our quality life as parents, it is going to regulate the children's quality of life as well. That is why the responsibility is on us as parents to make sure that our priorities are right so that it can trickle down to the children. "Trickle down" is kind of passive. Rather that the children be taught by our direct example.

It has come to the point now that many American families want somebody else to rear their children. Some people want the government to rear their children. They have all these things that they lobby the government about, whether it is a "B" chip to put in your television so that your children will not watch violent shows, or whether it is the same thing for the Internet, or the computer, to how they regulate day cares, whether they mandate bicycle helmets, whether they allow certain children into movie theatres or sporting events or whatever without the supervision of an adult. All these things they want the government to do for them, when they have it within their power—or they should—to determine those things for themselves.

If it is not the government, it is the schools. Bundle those kids off as soon as they can to pre-school or whatever, so they do not have to take care of them for eight or nine hours of the day, or more. Here in Charlotte kids get bused out at six o'clock in the morning in some places. They do not get back till five o'clock at night. That is eleven hours they are gone from home.

If it is not the government or the schools, it is the police. Within the past two or three years here in Charlotte, they have passed a curfew law. Now it is the police's job to round up your children if they are out past the curfew time.

If it is not any one of those three, it is day care. Well, my kid is not old enough to go to school, so I will trundle him off to the day care. He will stay there just as long as the children who go to school. The parent gets off work at five or five-thirty, goes pick up the kid who has been there since six or seven o'clock in the morning, whenever the parent had to leave for work, and the kid, I am sure, hardly knows who his mom and dad are, not being gone for twelve or thirteen hours a day. And then they go home, they eat, they get a bath, they play for a little while of "good quality time," and then they go to bed. They maybe have four hours a day with their parents. Is that not nice—to give four hours of quality time to our children?

If it is not the day care, it is the church, or it is grandma. How many children in this country have been reared by grandma, because her son or daughter, or his or her spouse, is out having the good life, or making the money, and grandma is at home, making sure her grandchildren at least get some training?

Maybe it is the TV. How many children have been reared by the Brady Bunch and the A-Team, and afternoon soap operas? I do not know.

But parents these days want more time to work, more time to play, more time to enjoy their hobbies or their pastimes. They do not want Bobby and Mary in the way, because

they want to "have it all,"—to "live it up." They do not want to sacrifice time, because they want to pursue the American dream. I am here to tell you the American dream is bunk unless God and family are at the top of the list.

People who think this way—who think that they want to have it all—think that parenting is a chore, and it is. It is a difficult task—24/7—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You never get away from it. Not until that child becomes an adult and leaves the home is there any relief at all. But they are still your children, and you still care, and you still try to impart advice. I have not reached that point yet, but I have seen enough people who have, and I know how they feel.

We recognize this idea—that parenting is a chore and a drag and boring and it keeps us away from all the fun things—as a cop-out. It is just an excuse. It is a way to slough off our responsibilities, because we do not want to tackle them. It is something we should think about. Have we come to think that way, even in a small way, to have this selfish desire for more, and doing it at the expense of our children?

How much time do we spend with our kids? Not quality time. I mean "time." How much time do you spend instructing your children? It does not have to be a classroom-type instruction. It could be sitting there at the workbench whittling away on a piece of wood, or teaching them how to fix the toaster, or teach them basic woodworking, or showing them how to use a hammer properly, or a chisel, or a drill. This is mostly speaking of things fathers can do.

Mothers can also teach their sons and daughters to cook and to sew, and to tend the garden, and to keep their place clean. There are lots of little things that can be done in instructing children that take some time, but it gives lots of good benefits in the end.

How much time do we help them get through their math homework, or their project for school, or help them to fix their own bike, or what have you? How much time do we actually train them in certain things? I mean drill. We should train them in whatever comes up where we think we need to help them learn something.

You say, "Okay Johnny, I'm going to teach you how to cut the grass. This is how you do it. First, let's check the oil. Make sure it comes between these two lines. Make sure you wipe the dipstick off, put the dipstick back in and check it. Then you put your gas in. Make sure you don't overflow it and get it all over the manifold. Make sure you fill it up when it's cold. If you have to fill it up after it's warm, let it cool down for awhile." It is little things like that—training, and drilling, and teaching, and instructing.

How much time do we do that? How much time do we discipline? That is not something we want to spend a lot of time doing. I am speaking more in the manner of punishment. But even in terms of punishment, it should not be a quick thing—Whack! Whack! and good-bye. Two seconds and it is over. It is another time that one should take some time. We will get into more about that sort of thing in the second sermon.

When God set us upon this earth, He expected parents and children to be around each other a lot, to spend time with one another so that the wisdom of the parents could be passed on to the children. And not only wisdom, but skill and ideas—ways of thinking, and good habits. All those things take time.

I would like to spend the rest of the sermon just showing how important parenting is. I have already said a lot on that, but I want to go through the Bible and show some scriptures of God's mind on this, and show how God has really placed parenting at the top of His priority list, and how it should be on the top of ours as well. I think that as we go through these principles you will see this very clearly.

There is nothing in the Bible that is going to take away from this principle, because the whole thing from beginning to end—from the time God said, "Let there be light" to the very end of the Book where He says, "Here's eternity"—it is all about parenting. It is all about HIS parenting. That means that our lives should have that same principle, that same feeling of importance about parenting in it.

I think that we will see that if we begin to neglect parenting, we are beginning to neglect our own salvation. It is that important. Like I said before, parenting and the principles and all the things we are supposed to be doing, is tied up with our making it into the Kingdom of God, because we are supposed to be doing what God does, and learning His mind. His mind is all about parenting—bringing children to glory.

Let us start in Psalm 127 and get the proper foundation for this. My Bible says Psalm 127 is by Solomon. Others think it may have been written later on when the Jews returned from the Exile. It is not important really to this. I can see how it could go with either of the two. This is a very foundational psalm on family life.

Psalm 127:1-2 Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep.

This is really a very interesting couple of verses. I spent a lot of time searching into what this really means. First of all, it sets the foundation for our lives. Unless God is in it, we live in vain. Unless God is the bedrock of everything that we do, we are just living out our time. Solomon said in the book of Proverbs, "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity." That is what life is without God. He ends the book by saying, "This is the sum of everything: Fear God and keep the commandments, because this is the whole duty of man."

Everything is bound up in God, and that is where we have got to have our parenting practices founded—in God. If we do not rear our children with God in the front of our minds, then we are not going to produce godly seed for Him. It will just be a chore. We will go through the motions, and who knows what we will produce out on the other end.

This is interesting too of the two figures he uses here. He talks about a house and a city. This is very interesting in terms of what the Bible Studies have been about on the back page of the Forerunner in the last few months. He has been talking about symbols of the church. Both of these symbols—house and city—are also symbols of the church.

"House" is the normal Old Testament word for "temple." We use that term—God's temple. In the Old Testament, in Hebrew, the word that is normally used is "house." It is the "house of God." So we can look at this in this physical/spiritual way. Unless God is in the building of our families, our work is all in vain. Unless God is in the building of the church, it is in vain.

A city, or a nation, let us say, is just families grown large. The city of Jerusalem is a type of the church. Many think that Solomon wrote this as Jerusalem was being built in his reign. So we have got to look at this in this physical/spiritual light here.

Psalms 127:2a It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late. . .

This is interesting too. What he says here is that no matter how early you get up in the morning, and no matter how long you work, no matter how many meals you miss because you are trying so hard to get this project done, or let us say "rearing your children," no matter how much time you put into rearing your children, it is going to be totally in vain if God is not in it.

You can get up at the crack of dawn and get those children into line and start off doing whatever it is that you want them to do that day, but if God is not at the base of your parenting principles, there is no telling what is going to be produced. Those children might have a very good work ethic—rising early and going early to bed and being

healthy, wealthy, and wise, but if God is not in it, they are not going to be godly children.

It is the same thing for staying up late. In the Hebrew this literally means, "delay sitting down," because you do most of your work when you are standing up. It could mean to even delay sitting down to eat. That is why I mentioned that a few minutes ago. You sacrifice your meals to get this thing done—parenting, or project, building a city, building a house, or whatever it happens to be, it does not matter. If God is not in it, all you are doing is a physical work.

Psalm 127:2b To eat the bread of sorrows.

This is very interesting too, because it means you are eating the bread of anxiety. You are so overwrought with making sure that what you produce is good, or whatever, and you get all nervous. Everything that you do just becomes a real chore, because you are so thinking about getting your project done, whatever it happens to be. That is what it is going to be if God is not in it. You are just going to make yourself anxious. You are going to be distraught, overwrought, worried, nervous, frightened. You are going to lose your sleep because you are getting up early and you are staying up late to try to get this done. It is going to consume your life, and what blessedness or happiness is there in that?

Remember, we are talking about these situations without God. This is what happens when we live without God, when we parent without God, when we build a house without God, when we build a city, or whatever it happens to be. We end up destroying ourselves. But then he says:

Psalm 127:2c For so He gives His beloved sleep.

There are two ways of looking at this, but the most natural one that I see is that those who really love God, and are loved by Him, can sleep. They do not have these cares. They do not have these anxieties and fears. They can rise up early just like the other man can, and they can stay up late just like the other man does. And they can eat bread like the other man, but he can sleep peacefully. He can get rest because he has laid his burden on God, and he knows that because he has made God his foundation for all that he does, that it is going to work out.

It reminds me very much of the end of Matthew 6—"Have no anxious thought." It is almost like Jesus was thinking about this when He was talking about that, because does

not He mention Solomon in there, that "the lilies of the field were arrayed more than Solomon"? I do not know. Maybe He was thinking about that. But do not have an anxious care. If you really love God, there is no reason to get all out of whack about these projects that we are doing, because God is working with us and helping us through them.

There is another way of looking at this, and that is that God blesses us while we sleep. It is kind of an interesting way to look at it. But here we do all our labor, and then God fills in the rest, while we rest. God makes up for our lack while we sleep. There is even a German proverb, that God blesses us while we sleep.

Those who put God first in their parenting will receive blessings beyond what their mere labor or their method can produce on their own, because God is in the parenting. It is not to say we should not try to have the best method—the one that He prescribes, and it is not that we should not work at it, because we should. But what we lack, God makes up. He gives His beloved sleep.

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

I do not know if the wording is very good here. If I were doing it, I would probably say, "Behold children are an inheritance from the Lord, and the fruit of the womb a reward." In my Bible, the words "is His" in the second clause there are in italics, meaning they are not in the original. What He is saying is that it is a parallel phrase here—heritage and reward—and they both come from God.

Another thing to look at here is these are not things that we deserve. Children are not something we deserve. They are an inheritance. They are a gift. They are a reward, not a wage, not something that God just normally gives. They are something that He gives out of His free will, and something He wants to give to us. We cannot earn children from God. The sense is that God gives children, not because we are deserving, but because He is good, and He wants to give us these children so we can raise them as godly seed.

Psalm 127:4-5 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Children, in God's way of thinking, are precious additions to any family, and what they

give to the family are strength, joy, and confidence, and honor, if they are brought up well. They are resources that can be used by the rest of the family to make life better and easier, especially as the parents age. That is why it says there they are "like arrows in the hand of a man," especially the ones that he has in his youth, because as he is aging, his children are reaching adulthood, and they are able to shoulder the load as their strength declines.

The idea here then is that a strong family—one with children that have been brought up, make the family into a refuge. They are like a castle, let us say, that has strong walls, and they provide a place for the rest of the family to have peace, to know that they are safe, to have the joy of one another's company, to get along, and to do those things that are mutually pleasing to each other.

When enemies come from the outside, they are also safe. They can rally around one another, and grow and use each other's strength to keep their enemies at bay. This could mean they are talking about physical enemies, or spiritual enemies. It does not matter. The family is a strength in either case. At the end it says, "They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate."

This word "speak" has more of a contentious side to it, that someone has brought an accusation against one of the members of the family, and they all bond together, and as a family speak to defend their member that has been accused. A righteous family then will most of the time be in the right in that case. Normally they should be able to solve the problem because of the strength of the family. One commentator said even judges quail at strong families, because they know they have to take on them all, and not just one. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken. That is the idea here.

We can think back on this analogy of the physical and the spiritual house again. A church is as strong as its families. A church composed of strong families is a strong church, and knowing that they are themselves a larger family under God makes them even stronger, because now it is not just individual members, it is bundles of families. I am thinking of the three-fold cord analogy, or the arrows in the hand of a person. You take one stick, and you might be able to break it over your knee. But if you take three, or four, or five, or six and try the same thing, it is probably not going to break. Then if you get bundles of these and put them all together and try to break those, you are not going to break anything. Your knee is going to break. That is the way the church has to be.

That is why it is important for the church to have strong families so that the church can band together during hard times and be impossible to break. Not only are there strong families making up that church, but there is God at the center who is supporting all

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those strong families, because they are living their lives based on Him. He says that such people will be blessed and "shall not be ashamed."

Let us look a little more then about how God thinks of parenting.

John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

What this tells us is that there are two. There was God (as Mr. Armstrong used to explain it) that was the family name; and there was One who was not the Word. He was known as God by the family name. So there was God and the Word.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

So now we know what the other One is called. He is the Father. And the Word is called the Son. That is a parent/child relationship. The Word did not become the child—the Son—until He was born of Mary.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

What was one of Jesus' major purposes in coming to this earth? To reveal the existence of the Father, to let everybody know that the purpose of God is to have a family, just like this, a Father and a beloved Son.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

Do you understand what that says? This world still does not know that God is a family. Only those whom the Son has revealed this knowledge know this. We do. Do you remember how much grief Mr. Armstrong got from the world when he preached that God is a family? They think it is just an analogy. That is wrong! It is not an analogy. Mr. Tkach and his son, Joe, Jr., laughed at Mr. Armstrong about this, and they called it "an

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analogy that he took too far." It is in some of their writings, especially under the idea of the trinity, because if you have a trinity, you have a closed godhead. You do not have a family. The Holy Spirit is not a mother. So they had to debunk the idea of God as a family—and they tried hard.

The Bible overwhelmingly shows that God is a family. There is a Father. There is a mother. That Jerusalem above. There is a Son—a Firstborn—Jesus Christ. There are many sons and daughters that are going to come into that family as firstfruits. And then that family will grow as people in the Millennium, and at the end of the Millennium in the second resurrection. They will grow and overcome and become sons and daughters as well. Of the end of that government—that family—there is no end. The whole purpose of God is *family*.

Let us go to Matthew 6:9 and just see this.

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: "Our Father in heaven."

That is what He wants to be known as. That is how He wants us to identify Him—as the Father. He is the Supreme Father. That is His job. That is all He is concerned about—being Father. And all of His other attributes, in many ways, flow from His being a Father. The Father is the Sovereign of the family. The Father is the Provider of the family, for the family, and to the family. The Father is "all in all." He is everything. And Jesus Christ, His firstborn Son, is His agent to us, to bring us into that family by the Spirit, through the church, through His family. That is how important it is to God.

If God sees this whole process, His whole purpose as family, then that is the reality of things. If we try to think of it in a different way, we are fooling ourselves. He wants sons and daughters. He wants to perpetuate His kind—the God-kind. How many other different ways can we put it? The family analogy works so well because it is the way—the purpose of God.

God has this same relationship with the physical nation of Israel.

Jeremiah 31:1 At the same time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.

Just connect that with what I said about the church. Do put this in this physical/spiritual type. God is the God of all the families in the church, "and they shall be His people."

Jeremiah 31:2-3 Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest. The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.

Is that not what a loving parent would do? Love his children with everlasting love and try to draw the children to himself? Of course it is.

Now let's go to verse 9. This is after they rebelled.

Jeremiah 31:9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.

That is how He always acts and works. It is the pattern. He becomes a Father, and then He pulls us along to bring us into full adulthood, like Him, and He does it through the family.

Let us go now to Deuteronomy 32. This is very interesting because He uses this family analogy way, way back here. This is the "Song of Moses."

Deuteronomy 32:7-9 Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you: When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.

So as God gives us an inheritance of children, He took Israel as His inheritance of children. He treats Himself just like He treats us.

Deuteronomy 32:10 He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.

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Does that sound like parenting to you? He guards them. He instructs them. He keeps them close as precious things.

Deuteronomy 32:11 As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings.

Meaning He is teaching His children to fly from the nest, teaching them to be adults, teaching them to be able to act as God on their own—taking this all the way in its spiritual implication.

Deuteronomy 32:12 So the LOORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.

God is the Parent of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:15a But Jeshurun [another name for Israel] grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you are covered with fat.

I just get this idea of this cow that's about three times the normal size, because it is all fat.

Deuteronomy 32:15b Then he [Jeshurun] forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the rock of his salvation.

What do we do when children rebel? What did God do?

Deuteronomy 32:19 And when the LOORD saw it, He spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters.

"He spurned them." Is that not interesting? They got pretty bad. This was not just a normal every-day rebellion. This was full flat-out total rebellion against God. So what did He do? He spurned them.

Deuteronomy 32:20 And He said: I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is

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no faith.

They had no faith or loyalty to their Father, and they had shown that they had none.

Deuteronomy 32:23 I will heap disasters upon them; I will spend My arrows upon them.

Deuteronomy 32:28-30 For they are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their rock had sold them, and the LOORD had surrendered them?

Boy! He just totally gave them up. They were His children. Where He told them at one time that one would chase a thousand, now a thousand fled at one of the enemy, because God had sold them down the river. He had given them up—but not totally. He had just allowed them to be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

Deuteronomy 32:36 For the LOORD will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their power is gone and there is no one remaining, bond or free.

He will let them be totally humiliated, let them be totally humbled until they do not have that pride and that rebellion in them anymore. They decided to go a certain way, and He let them go, and He will take it up with them later when they finally have gone through all the rocky times that will bring them to this.

There is a happy ending to this though.

Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people. . . .

Now why would the Gentiles rejoice with His people? Because at that time Israel will not be alone. There will be Gentiles among His family—added, grafted in, as Paul said. And if the wild olives can be grafted in, how much more can the natural olive be re-grafted into the plant.

Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.

God parents to the very end. We are talking about physical Israel mostly here, but that is how He parents. Of course He has a much longer view of things than we do. He has the second resurrection to deal with also in all this, so He can take this long-range view. But it gives us an idea of how He works, how He acted as a parent to Israel.

When we do our parenting, we know that we have the Supreme Parent behind us who still has this longer range plan in mind. We can do things in faith, knowing that He is going to work that problem out for us on down the line. We do not have to get all bent out of shape for it, because they are His children, and He, using this example, will work with them to the very end, whether we are successful in our phase or not. That is something to be hopeful and thankful about.

Zechariah 2:6-9 Up, up! Flee from the land of the north, says the LOORD; for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says the LOORD. Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus says the LOORD of hosts: He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants Then you will know that the LOORD of hosts has sent Me.

Verse 7 uses the word "Zion," and that is the family now that God is working with—Zion the church. Among those people in Zion will be the Gentiles we talked about before—people who were considered outside of Israel that God will work with as His family in this meantime.

Let us see a summary of God's parenting technique in I Peter 5:10. If you wanted to have a nice outline of wanting to be a godly parent, this is the way to do it.

I Peter 5:10a But may the God of all grace

The word "may" is not in the Greek. Listen to how it is actually in the Greek.

I Peter 5:10 "But the God of all grace who called us to His eternal glory by

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Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, will perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

It is not one of those things where just "possibly" He will do this. Peter was very specific—"God WILL do this." He was not leaving it up to chance. God will perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle His children. These are very interesting words.

God also lets us suffer a little while, because there are a lot of things to learn in suffering. Peter talks a lot about suffering in this book. It is not something that we should be overly concerned about, because it is part of God's plan for us. It is how He parents. He lets us suffer for a little while, and after that happens, He perfects us. That is His goal. He wants perfection. He wants a copy of Himself.

He will establish us in all that is good and right. He will strengthen us by His Spirit and by all the things that He gives, so that we will live better. He will settle us down so that we are a solid rock of Gibraltar like He is. That is what we should be doing with our children. Do not always pull them out of the fire. I am using that figuratively. The suffering that they do, the troubles that they go through will teach them something. But all the while, we are perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and settling them.

It is interesting. Our generations—Generation X and also a lot of the Baby Boomers—are known for their wildness. They are not settled at all, and God says He wants settled children.

I want to give you this thought in Genesis 18. This is the chapter after God gives the covenant to Abraham. This is so interesting. God confirmed the covenant to Abraham through the circumcision, and Abraham was 99 years old when he went through this.

We will first go to Genesis 17 to see the covenant.

Genesis 17:4-6 As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

That is an oblique prophecy of the "King of kings," as well as the other kings that came from Him, not all of whom are of Judah.

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, [forever and ever. Amen] to be God to you and your descendants after you.

He could have just as easily said "Father."

Genesis 17:8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Genesis 17:13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17:18-19 And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before You! Then God said: No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.

At least three times in that chapter He calls this covenant "an everlasting covenant."

God had just come and told Abraham that Isaac would be born. Isaac had not come yet. God, and those that came with Him, were about to get up and go to Sodom.

Genesis 18:17-18 And the LOORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him [particularly through Jesus Christ—"in your seed shall all nations be blessed"]?

Now listen to the way that God puts this. What did He figure out about Abraham? And why did He establish a relationship with this particular man? Very interesting.

Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that [or because, or so that] he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LOORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LOORD may

bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

Do you catch what God said there? That is incredible! He chose this man for his childrearing practices, for his character, so that he could teach his children the way of God so that it would go on forever. It is the faithfulness of Abraham that has allowed us to come to know the truth, because God gave it to a man who was capable of doing it, of establishing his children in His way forever.

It says in the Ten Commandments that when somebody does good, it lasts for thousands of generations to those who love Him. That is what happened here with Abraham. We have not been thousands of generations yet. The good that Abraham did through his childrearing practices lives on to today. "I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD."

What about that final clause there? This was also why He chose Abraham. "That the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

Is that not interesting? God chose Abraham so that the blessings would come—all the way to the Kingdom of God. Maybe that says a few good things about why parenting is so important. God was hanging everything on the faithfulness of Abraham to pass on the knowledge of God to future generations so that eventually He could bring about His Kingdom. He could give him the promises of the everlasting covenant that He had made with him.

I do not think I am overstating this at all, because what is Abraham? What is the name we know Abraham by? He is called "the *father* of the faithful." Is that not interesting? Abraham is a human type of whom? God the Father. That is how important parenting is to God.

Maybe I have given you something to think about today, about where we should prioritize our parenting of our children. It is not something that we can give to somebody else to do. It is our responsibility to rear godly seed.

Malachi 2:13-16 And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, for what reason? Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your

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companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.

God says He allows us to become man and wife, and he wants us to stay man and wife to produce for Him godly offspring. It is in the plan. It is in the second chapter of Genesis. He made Eve for Adam so that they could produce offspring for Him. And that is the reason why the two become one flesh.

It is all wrapped up in the family and parenting.

The next time I speak we will get into the more practical matters of parenting.