



## The Goal of Parenting and One's Hope

In all of eternity, there has been only one perfectly faithful parent, and he had the only perfectly faithful son. Of course, we are talking about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They loved each other perfectly and never sinned. The Father was *always* pleased with the Son. The Son *always* carried out the will of the Father. Neither one would ever sin because they are holy. What a beautiful picture!

Now imagine a father driving his family on vacation with his wife in the passenger seat and their two children in the back seat. Suddenly, one of the children begins to scream, "He's looking at me!" Next, a free-for-all breaks out in the back seat. Everyone in the car is instantly unnerved and sinning in one or more ways. Not so beautiful a picture.

Parents and children need help, a lot of help. They need help from the one who is perfect, who does understand our

need, and who helps us—God himself. That’s what this book is about. *The Faithful Parent* gives a practical, biblical perspective about bringing children up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,” through and because of God’s grace to us (Eph. 6:4).<sup>1</sup> Our aims are to present the underlying biblical basis for this discipline and instruction, to give you a picture of everyday life with your children, and to challenge you to become a faithful parent who perseveres and leaves the results to God.

### The Right Goal

The goal for the Christian parent is to be *faithful to God’s Word by his grace and for his glory*. You see, in Christ we have the great hope that we can be faithful whether our children are faithful or not.

What does it mean to be faithful? The word “faithful” occurs many times in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, “faithful” is used to describe God. It means to be “permanent, true, certain, of long continuance, steadfast, sure, trustworthy and carries the idea of a firm and sure support.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the New Testament, the word translated as “faithful” means “to be trusted, reliable, or true.”<sup>3</sup> So, given what we learn about the word “faithful” in the Scriptures, if we are to be faithful parents we will be steadfast, trustworthy, and true concerning our commitment to God and his Word.

1. Unless noted otherwise, all Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

2. James Strong, *The New Strong’s Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 10 (#539).

3. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* (Old Tappan, NJ: H. Revell, 1966), 72.

We will also be like God, reliable in our parental care and in our commitment to our children's good.

An example of parents' faithfulness is shown in the following story about Stuart and Zondra Scott's daughter, Christa, when she was three years old. She was to be a flower girl in her uncle's wedding. Her family traveled to a distant city for the wedding, and they stayed with Martha and Sanford's family. One of the Peace family members was their sixteen-year-old son David. David was a tall, rather skinny kid, who probably barely noticed the little girl. Christa, however, upon being introduced to David, was wide-eyed in wonder. With much excitement she told David's mother, "Come and see David. He killed Goliath!"

How much fun this was for everyone who was there that day! Even though Christa did not quite grasp the huge historical time gap, it was obvious that she had been taught Bible stories and that she believed with all her little heart that they were true. Stuart and Zondra were being *faithful* to teach Christa about the Lord and his Word.

Faithfulness, not perfection, is rewarded by the Lord. That's because we can no more live a sinless life than we can make our children do the same thing. Only our Lord Jesus is he "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). He never sinned, but we do, and he knew we would need his help and encouragement to raise our children faithfully as he desires. The astounding good news is that by God's grace Christian parents have been placed in a position where they *can* learn and obey God's will more and more, because they have God's Spirit indwelling them. A person who is striving to honor the Lord in parenting, repenting, and changing is a faithful parent. Although we will not be perfect parents, we can, day-by-day, learn to live out

God's instructions. Some day, we *can* hear the Lord say to us what the master told his slave, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

How can we know whether we are faithfully living out God's instruction? We know it when we are seeking to live habitually according to God's Word. The Scriptures are God's revealed will to us (Deut. 29:29; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). God himself speaks to us directly through the Bible. The Bible is unlike any other book, because it is God's Word. Therefore, it is sufficient to tell us what we need to know to parent faithfully.

The Scriptures don't give us step-by-step details on every decision a parent makes. They do, however, provide truth in the form of direct commands or principles for us to follow. For example, a general principle would be "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

The Scriptures also tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ and how to become a Christian. Second Timothy 3:15 tells us that "the sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." So, parents can live out God's Word faithfully only if they are, first of all, born-again believers.<sup>4</sup>

Once we are saved, God begins the work of sanctification in our lives. The root word for *sanctification* in the original Greek has the underlying meaning of being *holy*.<sup>5</sup> This is a process of spiritual growth that begins at the moment of your salvation and will be completed in heaven (Titus 2:11–14). Our children are often one of the main means that God uses to show

4. For more information about how to become a Christian, see Appendix A.

5. James Strong, *The New Strong's Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1 (# 38).

us our sin and mold us more and more into his likeness. It is common to hear a young mother say, "I did not know I had an anger problem until I had children!" So, in order to help overcome sinful tendencies and make us more like Christ, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father on our behalf, "Sanctify them in the truth; *your word* is truth" (John 17:17, emphasis added). We as parents must keep in mind that our children are not the only ones in the sanctification process.

So far we have seen that the parent's goal is to be *faithful* to *God's Word*, but certainly there is more. The only way we *can* be faithful is *by his grace*. God's grace is his unmerited favor and help toward his children who are fallen and hopeless on their own. This grace is available through the person of Jesus Christ who provided salvation for those who believe in him. God's grace is over all his creation in a general way, but also enables his children to be more like the Lord Jesus on a daily basis. Although we do not deserve it, God has supernaturally gifted us with the motivation and the strength to do his will. Although we have the responsibility to "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling," it is "God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13, adaptation added).

Certainly, we are to prayerfully strive to obey, but it is only by God's grace helping us that anything good and pleasing comes out of our lives. At times, parenting can be a rather daunting task, but God's enabling grace is always available and sufficient because, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . ." (2 Peter 1:3). With God's help we can be more consistent in our training and instructing in love. It doesn't take a parent

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long to realize that it takes great patience and perseverance to work with children, but all the grace we need is available. We may have old thinking and old parental habits that need to be renewed, but God *is* able to help us change as we do our part and prayerfully depend on him.

One young mother we know is a new Christian who has struggled with anger and impatience, especially toward her seven-year-old son. It seems that her son often felt the brunt of her mood-of-the-day. His mom was convicted that she was being unkind, and she began confessing her sin to God and her little boy. She also began to rethink her thoughts when she was tempted to respond in anger. One day in the kitchen of their home, her son did something that would normally have sent her into orbit. That day, however, was different. The Lord enabled her to think, “Love is patient. I can show love to him in spite of his sin.” She responded to her son with loving discipline and with joy as she realized that God was helping her to become a loving Christian mother.

Change must begin with the parent. In Deuteronomy 6:6, God tells parents, “these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” Our children need to see in our own lives daily what we want to see in theirs. The Lord can give us grace on the spot to refrain from sharp reproof and hurtful words. He can keep growing us so we can be more and more faithful to bring him glory.

Because it is only by God’s grace that we are enabled to renew our minds and be more like God, God gets all the credit. In other words, he gets the glory. God’s glory involves the display of *his* beautiful perfections (sometimes accompanied in the Scriptures by brightness, Ex. 33:18–23). To glorify God is to give him the honor, literally “the weight,” due his

perfections.<sup>6</sup> This beauty of God's perfections is to be reflected in all Christians' lives as they live obedient to his Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of what God has done in us through Jesus Christ, there is nothing, however mundane, that we cannot do for his glory. We like to think of it as being a "living sacrifice" for the Lord (Rom. 12:1). The apostle Paul explained what it means to glorify God in clear, practical terms: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do *all* to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31, emphasis added).

*All* includes faithfully fulfilling the biblical responsibilities of a parent. Parents have two primary biblical responsibilities toward their children, to bring them up: (1) in the discipline of the Lord, and (2) in the instruction of the Lord.

### Your Basic Biblical Responsibilities as a Parent

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.  
(Eph. 6:4)

The Greek word for discipline in this verse is *paideia*, which has the basic idea of training one's external life.<sup>7</sup> This is a broad term that encompasses some sort of structured guidance and restraint, whether by practical guidelines for living, encouragement, reproof, or chastisement (for either disobedience and/or sinful attitudes and, of course, as appropriate

6. The Hebrew word for glory is *kavod*, meaning weight, splendor, or copiousness. Strong, *Words in the Hebrew Bible*, 62 (#3519).

7. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 753–58.

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for the age of the child). Instruction, on the other hand, is the Greek word *nouthesia*, which means to “place or set in the mind.”<sup>8</sup> The idea here is addressing one’s internal mind/heart. The parents are to teach their children (as faithfully as the parents can) to think biblically about God, man, Satan, the world, and life.

For example, we must teach our children what it means to fear and love God (Prov. 1:7 and Matt. 22:37–40). They need to understand that their lives are, first of all, about a relationship with God. Living in a Christian home should facilitate honor and respect of a worthy God and encourage wholehearted delight and allegiance toward him. As you demonstrate that you love God with all your heart, it will be easier to find examples of God’s faithfulness and ways to give him the love and honor he deserves.

While teaching and disciplining their children, parents are not to provoke them to anger. This principle is expressed in a slightly different way in Colossians 3.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Col. 3:21)

Every parent has at some time or another unnecessarily provoked a child, but this verse is referring to an ongoing, habitual activity. Often parents are bigger, stronger, and more coordinated, and they know more than their children. In this case, it is easy to provoke children to wrath by demanding more than the children are capable of accomplishing. Other ways that parents provoke their children are by being cruel, making fun

8. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 544–45.



of their children, reacting in a harsh way, overreacting when disciplining children, withholding love, or not expressing joy in them.<sup>9</sup> The Scriptures are clear about protecting those of whom we can easily take advantage, and that includes children. So instead of provoking them to anger, parents have *two* responsibilities toward their children, to bring them up in (1) the discipline of the Lord, and (2) the instruction of the Lord.

Parents are not the only ones in a family who can glorify God through being faithful. If the child is a Christian, he or she can do so, too. Like their parents, children have two basic biblical responsibilities: (1) to obey their parents, and (2) to honor their parents.

### **Basic Biblical Responsibilities of the Child**

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”  
(Eph. 6:1)

Children are to obey their parents unless a parent asks them to sin. We find the command *obey your parents* clearly stated in Ephesians 6:1, but it is qualified by God. They are to obey “in the Lord, for this is right.” The Lord would never ask them to sin and neither, of course, should the parent. In addition, Acts 5:28–29 makes it clear that those in authority do not have the right to ask those under them to sin. Peter explained to his own authorities that “we must obey God rather

9. For a more thorough study on ways parents provoke children to anger, we recommend Lou Priolo's book, *The Heart of Anger* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1997), 29–51.

than men!” when a ruler’s requirement conflicted with God’s. God is always the highest authority.

The Greek word for “obey” is *hupakouo*.<sup>10</sup> This is a compound word made up of *hupa* (“to be under”) and *akouo* (“to listen” or “to hear”). We derive our English word “acoustic” from *akouo*. Acoustic is “relating to the sense or organs of hearing, to sound, or to the science of sounds.”<sup>11</sup> So, the responsibility of the child is to listen, *akouo*, to his parents’ instruction with the *intent* of obeying. The reason being, the child is under, *hupa*, the parents’ authority.

Obedience leads logically to the second basic responsibility of the child.

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (Eph. 6:2–3)

When this commandment was given, it included a beautiful promise of a long life. As a child obeyed, he would live well and longer, especially since the result of rebellion was stoning. In his letter to the Ephesians, God through Paul is highlighting how important and beneficial it is for a child to honor his parents. Indeed, a child honors his parents when he speaks *about* them and *to* them in a gracious, respectful way, and when he seeks to submit to his parents’ authority while in their home.

So far we have seen that children are under the authority of their parents and that children have two responsibilities: (1) to obey their parents, and (2) to honor their parents. We

10. Strong, *Words in the Greek Testament*, 10 (#5219).

11. G. & C. Merriam Company, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977), 26.

have also seen that for God's glory and by his grace, parents can faithfully fulfill their two basic responsibilities: (1) to discipline their children, and (2) to instruct them in things pertaining to the Lord.

### **Our Hope**

Each child whom God gives us is a special blessing from him. He blesses us not only with the child but also with the promise that when we need help, we can always "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). God has promised that *he* is "faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability . . ." (1 Cor. 10:13).

We have great hope not only in God's provision of daily grace to help us, but also from the help that is in God's Word. The Bible was, among other reasons, "written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). A recent television commercial claimed that "children do not come with an instruction manual." Well, that simply is not true. The Bible *does* tell us what we need to know, and God will give us supernatural help to be *faithful to God's Word*.

### **Conclusion**

Some people think children are not a blessing, and they are looking for a "return policy!" But children are, indeed, a wonderful blessing. Others think that children do not come with

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an instruction manual, but they do. We could call it a wisdom manual. They come with instructions from the one who created them and, for the Christian parent, they come with personal help from God. We can, with God's enabling grace and for his glory, faithfully honor God as we parent, even through the teen years. We can do it for *our* perfectly faithful Parent, whether even now the children are screaming at each other in the back seat of the car or thinking that David Peace killed Goliath!

### Questions for Review

1. How does the goal of being faithful differ from typical goals of parents?
2. What do you think has been your main goal as a parent?
3. Do you have any questions about whether you are a born-again child of God, forgiven of your sins and looking to Jesus Christ alone as your Lord and Savior? What questions do you have? (See Appendix A and/or your study leader for further help.)
4. What would you say it means to be faithful as opposed to perfect? How does progressive growth (sanctification) fit into parenting?
5. What are the two basic responsibilities of the parent?
6. What are the two basic responsibilities of the child?
7. How is God using your children to sanctify you?
8. Who gets the credit for any faithfulness on your part and why?