

PASTORAL PARENTING

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family resources

Because parents love their children the deepest, know them the best, and are with them the most, they are best suited to be a child's primary pastor who evangelizes them, teaches them, loves them, prays for and with them, and reads Scripture to them. On this point, Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children."

Likewise, Proverbs 1:8 says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching." Also, Ephesians 6:1-4 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. '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.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Both mothers and fathers are exhorted to make it their responsibility to pastor their children. This does not mean that such things as church activities or Christian school education are forbidden, but rather that they are supplements to the loving biblical instruction of Christian parents.

Integrated Parenting

Because parents are with their children at the most opportune times, they are wise to integrate their biblical instruction as God providentially provides teachable moments. It is wise for families to have regular and planned times for such things as Bible reading, prayer, and worshipful singing. Nevertheless, there are moments throughout the course of a child's day when his or her heart is open for strategic instruction. A Spirit-led, prayerful parent will capture sacred moments to instruct and/or correct their child as needed.

One example is the common occurrence of one child stealing a toy from another child. The parent present for this inevitable moment can stop what they are doing and integrate their instruction into that teachable moment. This would include sitting the children down and explaining to the child who stole the toy that one of the Ten Commandments forbids stealing and when we steal we are sinning against God and the person from whom we are stealing. We can then explain that repentance includes seeing that what they did was wrong, handing the toy back to the child they stole from, looking that child in the eye and apologizing for their sin by name and asking to be forgiven, the other child looking them in the eye and forgiving them, and then the two of them hugging while the parent prays over both

children out loud, thanking God that forgiveness is possible because Jesus died for our sins.

This kind of integrated parenting will help to ensure that the child does not grow up as a hypocrite who knows what to do but does not do it because their instruction was not integrated into their life. Perhaps the clearest command for integrated parenting is Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Preemptive Parenting

Sadly, much parenting is reactive rather than preemptive. What I mean is that rather than cultivating a biblically informed love for Jesus and others, some parents are careless in their instruction and correction until a child's attitude and/or conduct become critically concerning.

Examples include the parents of an angry boy who don't work with him until he's facing expulsion from school for fighting and even then merely take him to church, hoping that alone will fix him. Or the junior high girl who has become sexually active with her boyfriend so her parents, who have not pastorally parented, suddenly sit her down to read Bible verses to her without any relationship, hoping that magic will happen and she'll immediately act differently.

Preemptive parenting means making daily deposits of love, grace, instruction, correction, and trust in the bank of a child's heart so that when crisis moments come there is a wealth of investment from which to draw. Subsequently, preemptive parenting should begin from the womb when parents should be praying for their unborn child, and include Bible reading and instruction with the children from their earliest days.

One example of preemptive parenting is found in the life of Timothy. He is widely regarded by many as one of the finest and most trustworthy young men in all of Scripture because of his faithful and fruitful ministry with the apostle Paul. Paul recognizes the important role preemptive parenting had in shaping Timothy: “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Practical Pastoral Parenting

While every Christian parent would likely agree with these principles of pastoral parenting, most would also admit they struggle to know how to make this happen practically. So, as a pastor and a daddy, I hope to be of some help.

First, I would encourage all Christian parents to pray to God that the Holy

Spirit would give them an ongoing commitment to pastor their own children in love. Second, I would encourage all Christian parents to continually read good books that help shape a biblical view of parenting. Among the best are *Shepherding a Child's Heart* and *Instructing a Child's Heart*, both by Tedd Tripp. Mars Hill was honored to have Tedd Tripp teach on parenting, and the audio and video recordings of his sessions are available for free at http://www.theresurgence.com/shepherding_a_childs_heart_conference. Parents of teens will also be well served by Paul Tripp's book *Age of Opportunity*. Third, it is important for Christian families to have friendships with other Christian families so that there is mutual learning about God, marriage, parenting, and the like in community. Getting plugged into a church community group and pursuing friendships with other Christian families is vital. Fourth, the key is to simply develop biblical habits with your children, such as praying, reading Scripture, and attending church together.

FAMILY DINNER BIBLE STUDY

article 2

family resources

Dinner is one of the great highlights of my day. Why? Because I get to sit in my home with the woman I love, laughing, chatting, and eating with our five children whom we deeply love and enjoy.

Every time I sit at the table with my family I am reminded of the words of Psalm 128:3–4, which says, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.” As Scripture says, I am blessed.

Some months ago we started a new tradition at the Driscoll dining table that has also been a blessing. Whoever is taking their turn setting the table ensures that our “dinner Bible,” as the kids call it, is sitting in front of “Poppa Daddy,” as the kids call me.

Throughout the course of our dinner together, we chat about how the day went, how everyone is doing, and whom we can pray for, and we discuss a section of Scripture. Over the years we have always made it a point to read Scripture to the children when they were little (especially at bed time), and help them develop personal daily Bible reading habits once they learned to read for themselves. However, we struggled to find a way to do regular family devotions with five children of different ages and attention spans.

Still, the dinner Bible discussions led by Grace and me have been a huge hit. Every time we sit down for dinner the dinner Bible is in its place on the table, opened to the section of Scripture we will discuss that evening by one of the enthusiastic kids. We often have some really insightful conversations around the dinner Bible as the younger kids, especially the boys, seem to be able to handle longer and more reflective discussions when their hands are busy as they eat. Also, with the casual conversation over dinner I have noticed that everyone gets an opportunity to speak as we take turns chewing our food, and our dinners last longer than they had before because everyone is engaged.

The following steps are offered based upon my experience with our children over dinner. These steps are intended to help direct theological discussions between parents and their children while also building the children’s theological vocabularies so that they are increasingly familiar with biblical concepts.

Step 1. Eat dinner with your entire family regularly.

Step 2. Mom and Dad sit next to one another to lead the family discussion.

Step 3. Open the meal by asking if there is anyone or anything to pray for.

Step 4. Someone opens in prayer and covers any requests. This task should be

rotated among family members so that different people take turns learning to pray aloud.

Step 5. Start eating and discuss how everyone's day went.

Step 6. Have a Bible in front of the parents in a translation that is age appropriate for the kids' reading level. Have someone (parent or child) open the Bible to the assigned text and read it aloud while everyone is eating and listening.

Step 7. A parent then announces the lesson's "Word of the Day," reading the corresponding definition and/or paraphrasing the meaning at an age-appropriate level.

Step 8. Ask the discussion questions written for each day's lesson. If your kids are older (i.e., junior high and up), you might consider using the community group questions (beginning on p. 21) if they are better suited for your children.

Step 9. Let the conversation happen naturally, listen carefully to the kids, let them answer the questions, and fill in whatever they miss or lovingly and gently correct whatever they get wrong so as to help them.

Step 10. If the Scriptures convict you of sin, repent as you need to your family, and share appropriately honest parts of your life story so the kids can see Jesus' work in your life and your need for him too, which demonstrates gospel humility.

Step 11. At the end of dinner, ask the kids if they have any questions for you.

The following discussion questions are offered in hopes of helping you and your children grow in relationship with each another and Jesus. They are meant to be supportive and not constraining. Therefore, do not feel bound by any questions or pressured to follow the steps too rigidly. Follow the Spirit's leading and don't be a religious parent who is rigidly inflexible, thereby making this sort of thing something they must be do in duty rather than something they get to do in delight.

If you miss a night, or if conversation gets off track, or if your family occasionally just wants to talk about something else, don't stress—it's inevitable. For your children, the point is to learn what they are thinking about God, to help them know and love Jesus as God and Savior, and to teach them how to articulate and explain their Christian faith. For parents, the point is to lovingly instruct children and each other, thereby creating a family culture in which every member freely and naturally talks about God and prays to him together. In short, the goal is simply that your family would open the Bible and grow in love for Jesus, one another, your church, and the world.

Finally, remember that family Bible study requires a sense of humor, so make sure to have some fun, enjoy some laughs, and build some memories. Discussing the trials and witnesses found in 1 and 2 Peter is a wonderful way to see into the heart of your children, and to reveal your heart for them and Jesus' heart for you all.