

Parenting

The greatest delight in a Christian's life ought to be one's relationship with Jesus. After all, He's our Creator and Savior and our relationship with Christ is an eternal one. Nothing else compares! We are also blessed with earthly relationships that are incredibly significant. Perhaps none as significant as the role of parent. Psalm 127:3-5 says, ***"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."*** Do you view parenthood this way; seeing your children as a blessing and a reward from God? Some parents regret having kids and see them as a burden. I heard a speaker once talk about how society has devalued children. In summary, the speaker said that if God gifted us with a million dollars, everyone would want that reward. But if God gifts us with a child, sadly too many people are disinterested. Society has lost the value of human life.

Perhaps you have a heart of regret about how you've parented. Though parenting is very challenging, when a person's heart reflects the heart of God, there's no greater earthly joy than being a parent! This essay aims to encourage people to see children as a glorious blessing, to see parenting as a tremendous opportunity, and to encourage parents to consider some additional strategies on being a dynamic godly parent.

Father Abraham

Of the many examples of parenting we can view in the Bible, we'll look at the parenting choices of Abraham with regards to his son Isaac. Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah. We read about Isaac's life in the book of Genesis. Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety at the time Isaac was born to them (Genesis 21:5). Though their bodies were well past child-bearing years (Romans 4:19), the Lord saw fit to allow them to conceive and be the beneficiaries of the wonderful gift of a son. Would you want a newborn at the age of 100, or 90? Abraham and Sarah certainly did, they were thrilled! In fact, the name Isaac means "laughter," which described the pleasure Isaac was to his parents and also described the manner of surprise Isaac was to all who would hear of this miraculous birth (Genesis 21:6).

Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old (Genesis 21:4). This was an act of obedience as the Lord instructed Abraham to circumcise all the males in his household as a sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. As a parent, Abraham took the earliest opportunity to show that he would honor the Lord in his parenting. This is key! If you're a parent, do your parenting choices reveal or conceal devotion to Jesus? It's important to know that even if you're parenting a baby, you can pray over that child and dedicate that child to the Lord. Abraham did these things.

Abraham understood that Isaac was the Lord's. Abraham knew his role was to be a loving steward of Isaac while holding loosely to the boy so as to not allow his love for Isaac to become greater than his love for the Lord. This was critical, as Abraham's love would be tested, as we see in the following chapter. Chapter 22 picks up where Isaac is believed to be in his twenties. Here, we read about one of the most dramatic events in history; God testing Abraham's love by asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Here are some things to consider before we unpack this event. We presume that Isaac was man of faith, being raised to trust in and worship the Lord. Abraham seemed to be a good father who modeled faithful devotion

and sacrificial obedience. I imagine that Abraham initiated countless conversations with Isaac about God, the kind of organic conversations like what we read about in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, ***“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.”*** A godly parent will watch for opportunities to insert God’s Word into daily conversations. Isaac would grow up watching and listening to Abrahams praises and prayers, and eventually Isaac would assist his dad in sacrificial offerings on altars that they built. Isaac had a faith that grew by his dad’s cultivating. Now, it was time for the Lord to test Abraham, to see if Abraham’s love for Isaac had become greater than Abraham’s love for God.

God spoke to Abraham, ***“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you,”*** Genesis 22:2. Sacrifice means to give up something you love for something you love even more. Can you imagine raising a boy into a young man and then to be asked to sacrifice him? This was the test.

Here are some additional details which add to the remarkable nature of this test. We have to remember that God had told Abraham that through his son Isaac, Abraham would have a multitude of descendants, ***“through Isaac your descendants shall be named,”*** Genesis 21:12. Yet, when Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac is a single young man with no kids. How could God’s promise be kept, to bring forth descendants from Isaac, if Isaac is to be killed while childless? The answer is a bodily resurrection! Abraham knew that God would have to resurrect Isaac in order to fulfill the promise made regarding his descendants, ***“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he (Abraham) who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son (Isaac); it was he (Abraham) to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.” He (Abraham) considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead,”*** Hebrews 11:17-19.

To summarize the events that follow, Abraham trusted that God had a plan and therefore Abraham doesn’t hesitate. Demonstrating prompt obedience, Abraham arises early the next day. We pick up in Genesis 22:7-8, where Isaac and Abraham arrive at the location God had directed Abraham to build the altar. This location was a three-day journey from Abraham’s house, giving Abraham time to consider everything and not make an impulsive decision. At the base of the mountain, Isaac asks, ***“where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”*** ***Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.”*** Abraham makes an interesting prophecy here. In declaring that, ***“God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering,”*** Abraham refers to Isaac, who was the “lamb” at this moment; yet Abraham chose to not directly say that, but instead he guides Isaac to leave it in God’s hand. Ultimately, Isaac is yielded to his father’s will, and trusting Abraham, they two head up the mountain. Consider also though, that the ***“lamb for the burnt offering,”*** can also be prophetic in the following two ways. It could prophetically refer to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, which God provides in His right time to remove man’s sin, and of whom Isaac was a type. A “type” means that Isaac was a type of Christ, in that Isaac mirrored Jesus. This is demonstrated in the following examples. Isaac was Abraham and Sarah’s only begotten son just as Christ was the only begotten Son of God. Isaac would carry his wood to his sacrifice just as Jesus carried His cross. Isaac would be bound just as Jesus was bound by the Jews, then bound again to the cross. Lastly, ***“The lamb for the burnt offering,”*** could also prophetically refer to the eventual ram, which God did in fact send to replace Isaac.

Once atop the mountain, Genesis 22:9 says, ***“Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.”*** Consider this scene. Abraham is around 120+ years old and Isaac is in his 20’s. There’s no evidence that Isaac resisted Abraham, otherwise it would have been easy for Isaac to overpower his aged father. What we see is that Isaac is totally yielded to the will of his father, even unto death. Isaac was bound, but not because he resisted, but because bounding the offering was customary and useful, lest a last second reaction cause interference. We don’t know what was said, if anything, between Abraham and Isaac in these moments. Did Abraham explain how Isaac would have to be resurrected in order for God to fulfill His promise? No details are provided. In any case, Isaac, just like Jesus, agreed to be sacrificed so that the will of his father be accomplished. Remember when Jesus prepared Himself to be crucified, and He cried out, ***“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done,”*** Luke 22:42. As a godly parent, Abraham had become a parent that Isaac could trust, no matter what.

Next, Genesis 22:10-13 records, ***“Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.”*** I can imagine that after Isaac heard the voice of the Lord affirming Abraham’s obedience, that Isaac’s faith was strengthened that much more, as well as Isaac’s resolve to be like his dad. Both Isaac and Abraham walked down the mountain afterwards, just like Abraham had told his servants. Perhaps no greater test of parenting has ever happened in history.

Now jump forward a generation, Isaac was still single at the age of forty, and his father Abraham sought out a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). However, Abraham was resolved that Isaac not take a wife from among the Canaanites, who were the people inhabiting the land where Abraham and Isaac lived. There are several reasons for this decision. Canaanites were cursed to be slaves (Genesis 9:25). Canaanites were wicked pagan people, and Abraham knew a Canaanite wife would turn Isaac’s heart toward idolatry. Canaanites, in time would also be cast from the land and destroyed.

As a good and loving father, Abraham knew it was best to find a wife for Isaac from amongst his kinfolk, back in Abraham’s home country. Abraham sends his highest-ranking servant on an errand to go retrieve a wife for Isaac. Why not send Isaac himself? Afterall, Isaac was a grown man, capable of making this decision for himself. Abraham’s reason to not send Isaac is that God had told Abraham to not return to Chaldea. Abraham knew that God’s plan was to settle in another land. Additionally, Abraham knew it was potentially dangerous to send Isaac back, lest Isaac is tempted to stay in his father’s homeland and abandon God’s plan for a greater future elsewhere. These are Abraham’s choices in order to safeguard his son.

Genesis 24:2-8, ***“Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, “Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”***

The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" Then Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there! The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there." As a godly parent, Abraham had set up guardrails for Isaac, like telling his servant, **"Do not take my son back there."** Do you have guardrails set up to help keep your children on track?

Consider the trust that is collectively being demonstrated in the seeking of Isaac's wife. Abraham has trusted this major event to the Lord. Isaac had trusted his dad to find him a suitable wife; if Abraham thought Isaac would be un-submissive to this plan, all of this would have been in vain. Abraham further trusted his servant, to be a part of this plan and honor what was best for Isaac. In all of this, Abraham's care for Isaac is in full view. Abraham cared for Isaac's soul; not putting Isaac in a place of temptation by sending him to his former homeland. Abraham cared for Isaac's future; putting Isaac in the best position to succeed and follow the will of God. Abraham cared for Isaac's family; wanting Isaac to be married to a woman that would be a blessing to him. Afterall, nothing grieves a parent more than to see your children's household in distress. These details compel the following questions. Does my parenting demonstrate care for my family's soul? Do my choices set my children up for success? Am I trusting the Lord with my children? Am I praying for my kid's future spouses, or their current spouses?

Abraham had people in his life that he trusted would do what was best for Isaac. In this case it was Abraham's highest servant. Are there people in your life that you can trust to do what's best for your kids? As a godly parent I need to create opportunities for other godly adults to be a part of my families' lives, people like pastors, youth pastors, or other godly mentors.

MUL8 and ICNU

Yes, you read that correctly; MUL8 and ICNU are not typos. I'll explain what these mean in a moment. Speaking from a man's point of view, I know the temptation to want to be admired and respected. I think all men have an innate desire for these things. The problem is that admiration and respect can often be meaningless flattery depending on what they are based on. A person can be admired for his character or his car. If you're a parent, do you aim to be admired or respected by your kids? If so, let me push you to strive for a greater goal; the goal that your kids would want to emulate you! Emulate (or MUL8 for those that like to get creative with short-hand) means a desire to become like you. I can think of people that I admire or respect for one reason or another, yet I don't desire to become like them. In the same way there may be aspects of your life that your kids admire, but are you a parent that your kids want to grow to become like?

To be emulated by others, because others see Christ in us, should be a prominent goal in each of our lives! Consider what the apostle Paul said, **"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ,"** 1 Corinthians 11:1. What a massive statement! How many people can honestly say, *"If you imitate me, you'll be imitating Jesus."* Yet, that should be our aim; to live such a Christlike life that our kids say, *"Dad, your faith inspires me. I want to be just like you."*

Jesus made it clear that His mission was to emulate the Father, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”*** Jesus was such a perfect depiction of the Heavenly Father, the ***“exact representation of His nature,”*** (Hebrews 1:3), so much so that the Heavenly Father spoke down from heaven in front of a crowd of people to tell everyone how proud He was of Jesus, ***“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased,”*** Matthew 3:17. Later, the Father did this again in Matthew 17:5, at Jesus’ transfiguration, the Father repeated His approval of Jesus, ***“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”*** Publicly, the Father said, ***“I’m proud of You.”*** Then the Father told others to emulate Jesus, ***“Listen to Him.”*** When’s the last time you told your kids you’re proud of them?

The Heavenly Father affirmed what He saw in Jesus. As a parent I need to affirm what I see in my kids when they’re doing well. Catch your kids doing something right, and let them know it! This is the ICNU statement, meaning, ***“I see in you...”*** Let your kids know you’re pleased with them. ***“I see in you a humble heart, and I’m proud of you.”*** Or, ***“I see in you a desire to serve others, and I’m proud of you.”*** ICNU statements affirm a positive identity within our kids, and those sentiments stay with our kids forever.

Proper Authority

Early and often our kids need to understand that in every aspect of life they’ll be under authority. None of us should ever think that we are the god of our universe. These authority figures will include parents, teachers, bosses, the government, and God. We sometimes wrestle against authority when we experience unhealthy earthly authority. When I’m yielded to the Holy Spirit, I know my parenting is modeling healthy authority. Otherwise, when I’m operating apart from the Spirit’s control, my parental authority will be spoiled; selfish, controlling, angry, etc. As a parent of two kids, I’ve admittedly failed in this area, many times. When my flesh took over, I would yell in anger and squelch my kids’ spirits. Thankfully, my kids have seen me grow through the years as I’ve become more sanctified (the process of maturing and becoming more like Jesus). Now my kids see me as a godly authority, one they can trust for counsel, who will be patient, giving, loving, serving, and humble with them. I strive to exercise the kind of parenting that God exercises with me.

Giving Grace

A godly parent understands that though he/she is in a role of authority, grace is also required. A wise parent looks for opportunities to dispense grace, knowing that doing so will produce a greater relationship with the child, and develop a sense of graciousness within the child. I remember when my son was going through a season where he seemed to want to test the limits of my authority. As parents, my wife and I had different degrees of consequences with our kids; loss of privileges, to time outs, to being spanked. One time my son had done something disrespectful and he knew his behavior warranted a spanking. He was sent to his room where he had to wait. That waiting time in the bedroom is an intentional part of the consequence; forcing him to ponder his choices, cool off, and consider what he might say or do to reconcile the situation. After I prayed about the situation, I went to his room and sat next to him on his bed. I saw this as an opportunity to extend grace. I wanted him to learn from his mistakes, but also see my authority in a positive light. I explained how hurtful his behavior was. He was able to express his remorse and he apologized. He knew a spanking was still forthcoming. As I saw him anticipating the spanking, I extended grace. Grace means undeserved favor. I wanted him to realize that grace didn’t mean that he was innocent, but instead, grace

means he is loved. I said that instead of getting spanked, we were going to go out and get some ice-cream. He looked up with tears in his eyes and was shocked. I told him that I loved him and that I wanted him to know that God gives us grace when we don't deserve it. We hugged, prayed, and enjoyed a trip to the ice-cream parlor.

Loving Discipline

Our kids will certainly make bad choices that we as parents aren't aware of it. Other times though, God makes our children's poor choices known to us. This is a demonstration of God's love for both the parent and the child. God makes a kid's bad choices known so that the parent can discipline the child. God disciplines those He loves (Proverbs 3:12) and a godly parent will discipline their kids. This is a blessing, even though in the moment it's unpleasant, as Hebrews 12:11 says, ***"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*** The next time you're aware of your child's poor choices, pause and pray, *"Lord, thank you for showing me another area where I can lovingly discipline my son. Without being corrected, his future is in jeopardy. Help me now to be calm and guided by Your Spirit as I consider how to discipline him."*

Model Repentance

Would your kids say that you own your offenses? Do you apologize when you've messed up? Kids need to see genuine repentance and humility in their parents. I've gone to my wife and kids many times to apologize for my anger, my tongue, or controlling behavior. They see it anyway, and if I'm not owning it, then I'm a hypocrite. James 5:16, ***"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another."*** Proverbs 28:13, ***"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."*** Everyone in the household is impacted by my choices, and when I win, my family wins, but when I lose, my family loses. When I'm expecting or demanding that my kids apologize, yet I'm unapologetic, then I'm exasperating my kids. Colossians 3:21, ***"Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart."*** If I'm going to be the best husband and parent that I can be, then the sin I tolerate the least needs to be my own.

Christian Household

Christian parents ought to create a Christian household. A Christian household is more than just a home where the family claims to believe in Jesus or simply attends church. It's a home where Christian standards permeate daily decisions. To start, a Christian household will worship the Lord together. This entails parents initiating reading God's Word together, sharing prayer requests as a family, and singing songs of praise. These times are often called "family devotions." They can be regularly scheduled times, but should also be fluid and arise organically from little opportunities throughout the day. We see this in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, ***"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up."***

A Christian household also sees the value of being active in a healthy local church. After all, the church is one of the two institutions that the Lord has established for us (marriage being the other). The local church is a place to serve with our spiritual giftings, hear from pastors that God has called to shepherd us, grow through

life with other believers by experiencing fellowship and accountability, a place to engage in corporate worship. Growing up, my parents took us to church, even forced us when we didn't want to go. I hear some parents say, *"I don't want to force my kids to go to church, otherwise I'm afraid they'll resent God and the church."* This is such a wimpy excuse. As parents, we force our kids to do many things they don't want to do because it's best for them; school, homework, doctor and dentist appointments, chores, eating vegetables, etc. Why apply a standard to church that I don't apply to any other area of their life? Even if they eventually blame *"childhood mandatory church attendance"* as their reason for being passive about God, that's not the real reason, it's just their way of blame-shifting.

A Christian home will also have boundaries with regards to media, scheduling, friends, etc. For example, there are software services that you can use to clean up the movies that you stream in your home. VidAngel is one of them, where you can filter out things like profanity, blasphemy, nudity, sex, etc. in movies and television shows. Beside these filters though, a better standard is just being willing to forgo bad media all together. Before streaming services like Netflix existed, when my kids were still in the home, all movies were on DVD/VHS. We had a standard that we wouldn't have any movie in the house that we didn't feel comfortable having our babysitter watch after she put the kids to bed. I'm not saying this is a perfect standard, but it's an attempt to take care of what media is available in our home. Having boundaries on music is important too. Just because your kid's friends are into certain bands, doesn't mean your household has to embrace whatever is in the Billboard top 40. So much mainstream music preaches rebellion and sexuality. Sit your kids down and talk through the messages of the music their generation clings to. Let them understand why having boundaries is important.

When it comes to media the rule of thumb is inspect what you expect! As you put healthy boundaries on their computer, phone, and other media, make sure you inspect what you expect. In other words, don't have rules that you don't enforce. It's important to occasionally look in to what they're viewing and listening to. This is shepherding; tending to the needs of the flock. A good parent, like a good shepherd, will keep watch over the household; careful to protect loved ones from the schemes of the enemy.

Another element of a Christian household is looking for ways to serve as a family. When my kids were young, I'd take them on short-term mission trips. We'd go to Mexico and partner with the local church there to do community outreach. Trips like this exposed our kids to a bigger world, and to a measure of poverty that they'd not seen or experienced before. We were a middle-class family and still are, but going into impoverished neighborhoods in Tijuana and Mexicali was very eye-opening. We'd sometimes do ministry in San Francisco, where we'd join ministries like Youth With A Mission, where you'd spend a week on the streets and minister to the homeless. Sometimes we'd go serve in a local food pantry, etc. The bottom line is to look for opportunities to serve as a family and to teach your kids to be others-minded.

God Has an Answer

It's important to teach your kids that they can rely on the Lord and His Word. When challenging questions and problems are faced, open up the Bible and show them what God has to say about it. And, when you may not know the answer, don't make it appear that an answer is available. A wise and humble parent will be able to say, *"I'm not sure about that, but I know God has an answer that's right. Let me do some research in God's*

Word and from seeking wise counsel, and I'll get back to you soon about this." Today, I can confidently say that I've never encountered a situation where God hasn't had a right response for me to apply. God is not a God of confusion, but a God of wisdom and direction. I often answer my kids questions with Scripture, and also direct them to pray and seek God's guidance for themselves. James 1:5, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*** Being ***"without reproach"*** means to come to the Lord in faith, and not doubting. The person who doubts ought not expect to get anything from the Lord (James 1:6-7).

Don't Lose Heart

Maybe you're reading this feeling that you've already blown it with your kids. Maybe you're estranged from your children and they don't have a heart to want to know you. Don't lose heart! Malachi 4:6, ***"He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers."*** God is in the business of reconciliation and He can restore relationships even where trauma has brought so much destruction. God can restore what the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). As you chose to submit yourself wholly to the Lord and you begin to model a real faith before your kids, God can soften even the hardest hearts. My prayer for you is that one day you can say, ***"I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth,"*** 3 John 1:4.

Other Important Lessons to Learn

There are countless lessons to instill in our kids. Here are other lessons that ought to be taught early and often. These are not in any particular order.

Lesson #1, Your value and worth come from God. Psalm 139:13-14, ***"For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well."*** Romans 5:8, ***"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*** The world will certainly not be a faithful source of affirming your value. No matter how cool or successful you think you are, you'll fail at some point, and the world will be sure to let you know.

Lesson #2, Life's not fair and fighting it won't help. Job 21:7, ***"Why do the wicked still live, continue on, and also become very powerful?"*** Contentment in Christ is the only thing that is ultimately satisfying. When your satisfaction is in Jesus above all else, you'll be equipped to handle whatever bad hand life deals you.

Lesson #3, Failure isn't final. Proverbs 24:16, ***"For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again."*** Learn from your mistakes and from the mistakes of others. This is how greatness is achieved.

Lesson #4, Have faith that can suffer. Philippians 4:13, ***"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."*** In this verse Paul speaks to his constant suffering, but knows he can handle any suffering by the strength God supplies him. Do you have faith that can handle life's struggles? 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, ***"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."***

Lesson #4, No job is beneath you. 2 Thessalonians 3:10, ***“If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”*** 1 Timothy 5:8, ***“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*** Flipping burgers or digging ditches is an opportunity. Even mundane jobs are to be an act of worship. Colossians 3:23, ***“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.”***