

Faithful Parenting Lesson 1: The Goal of Parenting

I. Introduction:

A. Juan and Carla immigrated to this country where, through hard work and determination, they built a small business. Wanting the best for their children, they help them with their homework in their free time and Carla cleans the house of a piano teacher in exchange for lessons. Instead of sending their children to the church camps, they have them attend academic-oriented summer camps to secure them the opportunities Juan and Carla never had.

1. What is Juan and Carla's goal for parenting?
2. How would this goal lead them to parent? What expectations would they place on their children?
3. Why is this style of parenting attractive?
4. What is missing from this objective of parenting? How can this goal lead to feelings of failure?

B. Jim and Susan met in college and moved in together shortly after they met. Through the ministry of a local church they both came to know the Lord and legitimized their relationship through marriage. Keenly aware of all of the baggage they still carry from their pre-Christian lives, Jim and Susan homeschool their children, monitor their friends, screen every bit of media in their home, and lecture them about the evils of the world.

1. What is Jim and Susan's goal for parenting?
2. How would this goal lead them to parent? What expectations would they place on their children?
3. Why is this style of parenting attractive?
4. What, if anything, is missing from this objective of parenting? How can this goal lead to feelings of failure?

C. On account of Dave's job, Linda can now stay home. A high achiever, she has thrown herself into raising her children. They never leave the home without looking put together. Only the healthiest of foods enter their tummies. She teaches them to be respectful and polite. Naturally, she chronicles their progress through her Facebook account. When her friends compliment Linda on her children she says "Praise the Lord!" but on the inside she gloats.

1. What is Linda's goal for parenting?
2. How would this goal lead her to parent? What expectations would she place on her children?
3. How might Linda respond to a public temper tantrum?
4. Why is this style of parenting attractive?
5. What, if anything, is missing from this objective of parenting? How can this goal lead to feelings of failure?

D. Joe and Wendy have seen many of their friends' adult children leave the faith, and vow not to allow their children to follow the same course. With evangelistic zeal they pray for their children's salvation, help them memorize key Bible verses, make sure they are at church when the doors are open, and preach the gospel with regularity.

1. What is Joe and Susan's goal for parenting?
2. How would this goal lead them to parent? What expectations would they place on their children?
3. Why is this style of parenting attractive?
4. How would Joe and Susan explain why an older couple's college-aged son walked away from the Lord?

5. What, if anything, is missing from this objective of parenting? How can this goal lead to feelings of failure?

E. In your opinion, which couple has the proper goal for parenting?

As you can see, the goal of parenting shapes your method of parenting. Every parent has a goal for parenting, from raising high achievers to survival. But the Christian who has surrendered their lives and family to the Lord Jesus Christ must adopt His goal for our parenting. In the following study we will examine God's goal for parenting and then evaluate some popular misperceptions.

II. What Should be Our Goal?

The goal of our parenting should coincide with the objective of the Christian life. In this section we will explore God's goal for humanity as well as Himself. When this is in place we can review God's plan for parenting.

- A. What is God's purpose for His existence? What do the following passages teach us about His motivations?

Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

Isaiah 43:25 "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

John 7:18 The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

John 17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

Ephesians 1:4–6 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

- B. Is it egotistical of God to want to be glorified? Why or why not?

- C. How should God's purpose for His glory translate into how we live our lives?

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

John 14:13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

1 Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

D. What should be the goal of the Christian life?

E. What does it mean to glorify something? For instance, how can a movie glorify violence?

Glory- In the Hebrew refers to weight, worth and honor. If the president of the United States walked into this room, our attention would be drawn to him as we feel the weight or importance of his presence. When used of God it describes His intrinsic value and majestic splendor. There is something about God that makes us want to worship Him. Consequently, we live our lives for the Lord because God is worth it.

F. According to the following passages, how does one glorify/worship God?

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 Corinthians 6:18–20 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

*****Note how the worship and glorification of God translates into obedience to His will. To glorify God means to exalt His name with our lives. We obey His precepts because they come from Him. We orient our lives around Him.***

G. In light of the above, how do we glorify or worship God in our parenting? What does this look like in practice?

- H. How do some parents seek to raise their children to glorify themselves?
- I. With this said, why is it important to understand the commands given to parents?
- J. Ultimately, what should be the goal of parenting?

III. The Spiritual State of Your Child:

Simply put, the goal of parenting is to glorify God. We do this by obeying His commandments, and His commandments include raising them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The spiritual state of your child complicates this task. In this next section we will inform our goal of parenting with truth about the spiritual state of your child.

- A. What do the following passages teach about the spiritual state of your child?

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Genesis 6:5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Romans 3:10-18 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” ¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” ¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” ¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.” ¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

From the moment of conception your child has been tainted by sin. Think about it: No one needs to teach children how to be selfish, complain, or disobey. The truth is, that little bundle of joy is also a totally depraved human (though this might not be the preferred terminology for fawning parents). Lest we be misunderstood, let's define our terms.

Total depravity should be defined negatively first: it does *not* mean “(1) that depraved people cannot or do not perform actions that are good in either man's or God's sight....(2) that fallen man has no

conscience which judges between good and evil for him....(3) that people indulge in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.”¹⁴

The word *depravity* means that because of sin’s corruption “there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God,” while *total* means that depravity “has extended to all aspects of man’s nature, to his entire being.”¹⁵ In other words, our children have been corrupted by sin.

B. How does sin commonly manifest itself in children?

C. If you believe that children are born good, it will impact your parenting in many ways.

1. If you believed that children were born good, what would you see as their greatest need?
2. If you believed that children were born good, how would you explain their rebellion?

D. Why do many parents seek to shelter their children from evil? How do they do so?

E. What assumptions do the parents make when they attempt to shelter their children? How does the doctrine of depravity address these premises?

F. Does the depravity of man necessarily mean that your children will be as bad as they can be? What impact can a Christian parent make?

1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

¹⁴ 14. Charles C. Ryrie, “Depravity, Total,” *ibid.*, p. 312. See also Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1972), pp. 9–13.

¹⁵ 15. Ryrie, “Depravity, Total,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 312.

1. In this context Paul argues that a believing wife should stay married to her unbelieving husband so that her children will be made holy. In light of this, what would happen to the children if the believing spouse left?
2. What is the difference between the “holiness” discussed in *1 Cor. 7:14* and the holiness which accompanies salvation? When would we be able to discern the difference?
3. In general, what does the above passage teach about how children will respond to their parents’ faith?

Note: While the Bible teaches that mankind is totally depraved, that does not mean that they are all as bad as they can be. God can use the influence of Christians to “sanctify” unbelievers. In many cases, unbelieving children are sanctified by their parent’s faith. This should not be confused with genuine salvation.

G. Why is it important to understand that external conformity is distinct from true biblical saving faith?

H. What is the danger in assuring your children they are saved, when in reality they may simply be sanctified by your presence in their lives?

Many parents, agonizing over the lost state of their children, are tempted to take any slight hints of spiritual life as proof that they are born again. They might be tempted to give assurance to their children so their own anxieties are relieved. When we do this, we are in effect seeking to “save” our children by broadening the umbrella of gospel to include them. Essentially, we declare our children “saved!” before God does.

Yet, a proper understanding of total depravity makes it clear that even the best-behaved children are not acceptable before God. They, like the little terror across the street, need the sovereign work of grace in their lives – one which will give them a new heart. This brings us to the next point.

IV. Whose job is it to save your child?

Every Christian parent who knows and loves the Lord longs for the salvation of her children. Who doesn't tremble at the thought of his little ones perishing in a Christless eternity? So, naturally, we focus our efforts on making sure that this never happens. But should your child's salvation be the goal of your parenting?

In this section we will explore the testimony of the Bible with regards to God's role and a parent's role in the salvation of their children. Before we get too far it will be helpful to address a particular verse that has caused a lot of confusion on this front.

A. Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

1. How can ***Proverbs 22:6*** cause parents to believe that they can save their children?
2. Should we take this proverb as a promise? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of any exceptions to the following Proverbs?

Proverbs 22:4 The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

Proverbs 22:11 He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend.

4. How would people who take ***Proverbs 22:6*** as an absolute promise raise their children?
5. What is the danger of taking a Proverb as an absolute statement?
6. In view of this, what is the general truth of this passage?

B. According to the following passages, whose job is it to save a sinner?

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Romans 8:29–30 For those whom he foreknew¹ he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Ephesians 1:3–6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

- C. Why might the above verses be discouraging to parents who want to save their children?
- D. How might these verses be encouraging?
- E. According to the following passage what MUST take place for someone to come to saving faith?

Romans 10:13–15 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

- F. According to the following passage, what role do humans play in the salvation and sanctification of others? What is God’s role?

¹ Foreknowledge does not speak of God basing his electing choice on those who would choose him, so much as God’s covenantal love and affection for the people he has chosen.

1 Corinthians 3:5–7 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

- G. Why might this truth trouble many parents eager to see their children saved?
- H. How does this perspective help us in our parenting? How does it help us to refine our goal?
- I. What is the danger of believing that you can save your children? What will you be tempted to do?
- J. If your goal in parenting is the salvation of your children, how would you be tempted to interpret the ***1 Cor. 7:14*** signs of holiness in your children?

Clearly, these passages state that salvation and sanctification are works of God. In spite of all their efforts, parents simply cannot save their children. They can present the gospel and water the seed, but unless God decides to germinate the seed there is no hope.

Every Christian parent who knows and loves the Lord longs for the salvation of their children. Who doesn't tremble at the thought of their little ones perishing in a Christless eternity? So, naturally, we focus our efforts on making sure that this never happens. While this may be a noble aspiration, it is accompanied by certain dangers. We presume upon ourselves to do something only God can do. Additionally, parents who make the goal of their parenting the salvation of their children set themselves up for disappointment and failure.

With these realities in mind, this study will demonstrate that no parent can save her child. Try as we might, the salvation of our children is outside of our control. So if their salvation is not our goal, what should be? The answer – faithfulness to the parenting commands in Scripture. While this might be discouraging to some, it will be encouraging to others as it will drive us to depend on God - not our parenting - to bring the souls of our children to Him.

V. Questions for Reflection:

- A. What has been your motivation for parenting your children? Has salvation or good behavior, your own glory or something else been your goal?
- B. Have you looked down on parents whose children have rebelled? What might this suggest about what you believe your parenting will accomplish?
- C. Why is it important to remember that your children's salvation is out of your hands? How will this impact your prayer life? How will this impact the way you respond when your child goes through a rebellious time?

VI. Conclusion:

The goal of parenting is the glory of God. So often parents see their children as an extension of themselves, and vicariously live their lives through their children. Their parenting serves as a means to glorify themselves. Other parents want to protect their children keeping them unstained by the evils of the world. This unbiblical assumption does not reckon with the inherent nature of the child. Finally, some parents who desperately love their children seek to impart the greatest blessing known to man – eternal life!

Unfortunately, rather than just desiring this, many parents seek to secure it. They try to “save” their children by leading them through prayers, or searching for any shred of spiritual life, or assuring their children that they are indeed Christians. In doing so, they compromise the gospel and minimize the miracle of regeneration and fabricating fruit. Those who question the salvation of their children will be met with an angry “You don’t know my child!” While they may think their actions noble, this is actually the selfish thing to do. It deludes both their children and themselves about the child’s true spiritual state.

In contrast, there is the parent who seeks to raise children to the glory of God. They see their parenting as an act of worship. These parents make Jesus Christ the center of their family, because Jesus is the center of their lives. They have a high view of God and a reverence for His Word, and it’s clear to their children that they are under authority. These parents consult the Bible for leadership, wisdom, and direction. And while they are not perfect, they continually seek forgiveness from the Lord and from each other freely imparting and receiving God’s grace.

The gospel is not only preached in this home, but believed. And these parents freely share it because they want to give God’s greatest blessing to their children. At the same time, they earnestly bow down in prayer knowing that the salvation of others does not rest in their power. They don’t measure their success by results. Rather they measure their success by their faithfulness, both to God and His commandments.

All this to say, to worship God in your parenting, you need to know how to discern the will of God. The Bible is full of commands given to parents, and the rest of this curriculum will be devoted to helping parents understand the will of God with regards to parenting.