

Lecture Notes: Chapters 5, 6 & 7

1. Examining Your Goals/Reworking Your Goals (Chapters 5 & 6)

Read the story on page 39 where a mother's actions towards her daughter implied certain parenting goals.

Parents want children to be successful so they can "do well" and live happy, comfortable lives. This wish for success has a different shape and definition for different people, but every parent wants successful, happy children. However we define success, we wish it for our children. We are well aware that their upbringing has much to do with future success. There are scores of ways parents try to produce this success. Helping parents produce successful children is a growth industry with books and programs being marketed and developed by the legion. Experts in psychology, theology, education, athletics have exhausted themselves and their audience.

Let's look at some common but unbiblical parental goals and a biblical response:

Developing Special Skills

Some parents involve their children in a broad range of activities to learn special skills. Special skills like baseball, football, hockey, soccer, gymnastics, swimming, dance class and piano lessons are not evil and may have their place in our children's lives, but is the measure of the parent the number of activities provided for the child? Is the measure of the child the number of skills developed?

Will involvement in these activities have biblical content? Will your children receive biblical instruction in having an accurate self-image, sportsmanship, loyalty, poise, endurance, perseverance, friendship, integrity, rights, competition and respect for authority?

Is it biblical to build self-worth on a child's capacity to develop a physical skill alone? Are we not encouraging pride that comes from the capacity to perform?

What is a biblical definition of success?

A biblical worldview shows us that we should teach our children to exercise and care for their bodies as an expression of stewardship for God's gifts, but abilities should be developed because God has given the stewardship of talents and special capacities. Skills that would make your children more able to serve and open channels of ministry to others should be encouraged.

Psychological Adjustment

Other parents strive for more psychological goals. Oftentimes, driven by vivid recollection of their own childhood, they become preoccupied with their child's psychological adjustment.

Many books and magazines pander to parents, promoting the latest pop psychology. These materials promise to teach you how to build self-esteem in your children.

But these books do not promise to help produce children who esteem others. How can you teach your children to function in God's kingdom, where it is the servant who leads, if you teach them how to make the people in their world serve them?

Oftentimes, child psychologists appeal to your own sense of being used and offer strategies for teaching your offspring to be effective with people (manipulation made easy). Still other experts, pandering to your fear of overindulging your children, promise children who are not spoiled. The list can go on and on, and many parents are buying into these "experts" who are telling them what kind of training their children need. We must ask: Are these psychological goals for Christians, and what passages of Scripture direct us to these goals?

For example, let's think through a social issue of a bully. At times, Christian parents can give their sons the advice, "Don't ever start a fight, but if someone starts a fight with you, then knock his block off." Biblical counsel? How can we get from "knock his block off" to "pray for God's help?" Shall we pray for God's help to knock his block off?

In a biblical vision, we should instruct our children to entrust themselves to God in the face of unfair treatment.

- Romans 12:17-21 tells us that the only weapon strong enough to overcome evil is good. We are exhorted to leave vengeance with God. He will deal with the issue of justice.
- Luke 6:27-36 helps us understand how to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. It promises that we will be sons of the One who is kind to ungrateful and wicked people.
- I Peter 2:21-23 tells us to face injustice without retaliation, entrusting ourselves to God. We should encourage our children to see the needs of those around them. You should teach that a soft answer turns away wrath.

The Recap: The only weapon strong enough to overcome evil is good. Leave vengeance with God. He will deal with the issue of injustice. Love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Face injustice without retaliation, entrusting ourselves to God. See the needs around you. Be a peacemaker. A soft answer turns away wrath.

We should train our children to use occasions when they are hurt to learn how to love God and deepen their trust and confidence in Him.

Saved Children

Many parents are preoccupied with getting their children to say the "sinner's prayer", believing if their child would get saved, all the problems of living would be solved.

A child's profession of faith in Christ does not change the basic issues of child-rearing. The parent's goals are the same. The things the child is called to are the same. He requires the same training he required before. He will have times of tenderness and times of spiritual coldness. The parent's task does not change when the child makes a decision.

Having said that, when a child does have an authentic conversion, the Holy Spirit is now an inner ally with you. The amount of discipline needed for that child should go down, and you should see a true change in the child's desire to obey and please the Lord. If you do not see fruit, do not be deceived about the child's state related to his relationship with the Lord and eternal position.

It is our task to faithfully teach our children the ways of God. It is the Holy Spirit's task to work through the Word of God to change their hearts. Children need to learn about the pervasive effects of the fall on the human condition. They need to understand the subtleties of the malignancy of their own hearts. They need to know the dangers of trusting in themselves.

Thus, they need nurturing. Tenderly encourage them to trust God. They need to trust Him not only for salvation but for daily living. Teach them how knowing God impacts on the experience of being bullied in the school yard. This will make a difference in how they interact with their failures and successes. Knowing God will make a difference when they are afraid, angry, hurting, sinning, or sinned against. Knowing what God is like will speak to them when they are tempted. Knowing God will affect the long-term goals for their lives. You must help your children understand the rich treasures of living in the vitality of a robust and lively faith in Jesus.

You must always hold out to your children both their need of Christ's invasive redemptive work and their obligation to repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are not rites of initiation to Christianity alone. Repentance and faith are the way to relate to God through His Son, Jesus. Repentance and faith are not acts performed one time to become a Christian. They are attitudes of the heart towards ourselves and our sin. Faith is not just the way to get saved; it is the lifeline of Christian living.

Your children must understand what it means to repent, not just of "all my sins" in some generalized way, but of specific sins of heart idolatry. They need to know the cleansing and refreshing forgiveness of God, not just once to get saved, but daily. They must understand that the Christian life is not as simple as living according to a biblical code, but as life in faith, commitment, and fellowship with the living God.

Well-Behaved Children

Social graces, like having poise, making guests comfortable, responding with grace under pressure, are necessary to be successful in our world. However, having well-behaved children is not a worthy goal.

Having well-behaved children is a secondary benefit of biblical child rearing.

When being well-behaved is severed from biblical roots in servanthood, manners becomes a classy tool of manipulation. Your children learn how to work others in a subtle but profoundly self-serving way.

Manners detached from the biblical moorings of being a servant produce self-serving manipulators. In a biblical vision, manners are an expression and application of the duty of loving my neighbor as myself.

When saying “please” and “thank you” are rooted in what it means to look out for the interests of others, they become expressions of biblical love. Waiting to eat until all are served is not just an empty social convention; it is a way to show consideration for those around you. The apostle Paul said he saw these rare qualities in Timothy: “I have no one else like him, who takes genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:20-21).

Good Education

What about academic goals? Are good grades a biblical objective? What scripture passages would support this objective?

Unfortunately, scores of disillusioned and broken people are thoroughly educated. It is possible to be well-educated and still not understand life.

The issue of grades is about training your child to learn to do his work diligently for God. God has promised that he will reward the faithful. Knowing that gifts are abilities from the Lord that require stewardship, your child’s objective should be faithfulness. You need to train your child to find in Christ the strength and power to work for God’s glory.

Teaching your children to live for the glory of God must be your overarching objective. You must teach your children that for them, as for all of mankind, life is found in knowing and serving the true and living God. The only worthy goal for life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

2. The Biblical Warning Against Cultural Influence

It is one thing to be aware of and reject unbiblical objectives; it is another thing to embrace scriptural objectives. What goal is broad enough and flexible enough to be suitable to all stages of child development? What general biblical objectives will guide and focus your view of life and therefore your training of your children? What is a worthy goal? The familiar first question of the Shorter Catechism answers these questions.

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

You must equip your children to function in a culture that has abandoned the knowledge of God. If you teach them to use their abilities, aptitudes, talents and intelligence to make their lives better without reference to God, you turn them away from God. If your objectives are anything other than “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” you teach your children to function in the culture on its terms.

We mustn’t teach our children to find their soul’s delight in going places and doing things. We mustn’t attempt to satisfy their lust for excitement. These things are distractions from God. In terms of Godward orientation, we are training them in the idolatry of materialism. Years spent denying the

importance of a deep conviction of scriptural truth will not develop into godly piety during adolescence or early adulthood.

Your objective in every context must be to set a biblical world-view before your children. From their earliest days, they must be taught that they are creatures made in the image of God--made for God. They must learn that they will only "find themselves" as they find Him.

3. Discarding Unbiblical Methods

We cannot be indifferent to methodology. Biblically, the method is as important as the objectives. God speaks to both issues. He is concerned not only with "what" we do, but also with "how" we do it. Our culture does not provide us with biblical models. Here are in the area of goals, we must identify and reject non-biblical approaches that vie for our attention. Biblical goals require a biblical approach; only godly methodology will bring glory to God

Some prevalent examples of unbiblical methods are:

"I Didn't Turn Out So Bad"

Using the methods and practices of your parents without assessing if it had a good impact on you or if it is biblical.

Pop Psychology

Bribing our kids to do what is asked of them or to ensure things that we want are done by making deals, making contracts, etc. These approaches are superficial, and the child is not taught to look out for the interests of others. The child learns nothing about being under authority because God is God and the parent is His agent. The child does not learn biblical reasons for integrity, responsibility, etc. Unfortunately, the heart is being trained, but it is not trained in biblical motives or goals.

Behavior Modification

Behavior modification is parenting that focuses only on behavior and does not address the heart. The idea is simple. Reward good behavior in some tangible way; ignore or perhaps punish bad behavior. Praising children for doing what is right is fine except that children should not be rewarded for fulfilling normal responsibilities.

Behavior modification provides a reward for doing what is deemed good. Junior does well with a household chore, so he gets to go out for ice cream. If he fails to do some assigned task, he receives privation. The heart is trained towards greedy self-interest and obtaining rewards. The point of the appeal is to Junior's greed. Now Junior lives a lust-driven life in which he will perform for ice cream and other goodies; the program seems to work. But our methods inevitably instruct the heart—the heart determines the behavior.

The problem is that the heart is addressed wrongly. Changing behavior without changing the heart trains the heart toward whatever you use as your means. If it is reward, the heart is trained to respond to reward. If approbation, the heart is trained to strive for approval or to fear disapproval.

The God who knows our hearts calls us to right behavior for the purpose of honoring Him. He honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

Emotionalism

Read the example of the story of the mom and little girl at the airport on page 58 as an example of parenting by emotionalism.

Emotionalism is using emotional control and manipulation over your children to produce a behavioral outcome. It can play on their fears or to shame them to perform in ways that exhibit behavior that is deemed acceptable. The approach is ineffective in addressing the heart biblically and will not train children to discern the specific issues of the heart that their behavior reflects. While it may work in the short run, over time children will likely become hardened to this method of discipline and may be driven by a life-long desire to please parents and secure approbation. Or they may distance themselves from their parents to insulate them from further hurt. Whether they are compliant or rebellious, they will not learn to live out of a desire to know and serve God

Punitive Correction

Punitive correction is when parents use the threat of punishment to control their children. There are many variations on this theme. The punishment may be being hit or yelled at. The punishment may be simple privation of something that the child desires. The attempt is to keep the child under control through negative experience of punishment. The heart is being addressed but not biblically. Children may learn how to cope with the punishment but may never learn the things that a godly parent desires for him to learn.

Erratic Eclecticism

This approach is exactly what the name implies. It is erratic in that it moves about. There is no consistency. It is eclectic as it freely draws from many sources. The parent tries a variety of methods from bribery to emotional appeals to spanking to making deals or contracts until they get bored with a method or it ceases to work. Mostly Mom and Dad feel frustrated, scared, and maybe yell a lot. The children are confused and not sure what Mom and Dad want and what system is in effect now. In the end they are worse off than if Mom and Dad picked one methodology and stuck with it.

4. Evaluating Unbiblical Methods

Where do these unbiblical methods take us? What kind of fruit do they bear? While we have discussed several differing approaches, they all lead to the same problems. They lead to superficial parenting rather than shepherding the hearts of our children. They only address behavior. Hence, they miss the point of biblical discipline.

Biblical discipline addresses behavior through addressing the heart. Remember, the heart determines the behavior. If you address the heart biblically, the behavior will be impacted.

Superficial parenting that never addresses the heart biblically produces superficial children who do not understand what makes them tick. They must be trained to understand and interpret their behavior in

terms of the heart motivation. If they never have that training, they will drift through life, never understanding the internal struggles that lie beneath their most consistent behavior.

When experts tell you that you must find what works with each child, they are saying that you must find the idols of the heart that will move this child.

Parenting that addresses only behavior, never gets to the cross of Christ. It is impossible to get from preoccupation with behavior to the gospel. The gospel is not a message about doing new things. It is a message about being a new creature. God does open heart surgery, not a face lift. He produces change from the inside out.

Prayer

- Consider a parenting struggle you encountered this week.
- Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Using this passage as a guide, pray for the Lord to give you direction and encouragement.