

How Kids Teach and Train Their Parents

Rich Nathan
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Parenting in an Insane World
Galatians 5:22-23

Over the past 5-6 weeks I've been doing a series on Living Sanelly in an Insane World. This month I will be talking about sane parenting in an insane world.

Now, I recognize that many of you are not parents. But as I teach on this subject over the next month, I trust that many of the things that I talk about will be relevant to you as you try to understand your own family of origin, the way you were raised, and compare it with the perspectives that we find in scripture. I want to make a promise to all of you. I will try as hard as I can this month to not make those of you who are parents feel guilty. Because if you are a parent, then you have had the same experiences that I have had – most sermons on parenting and most books on parenting and family life make you feel horrible.

I remember reading a book on family life a few years ago written by a well-known Christian author. This author was trying to be transparent, trying to be vulnerable, and communicate that he was one of us. He talked about a dispute that he and his wife had had some years before. He said that he was out speaking at a conference which really sapped his energy. When he got home from the conference he said that he was just looking forward to kicking back and

relaxing but his wife presented him with a wire brush to clean the umbrella that was out on his patio. He said that they had two conflicting agendas and as a result of those conflicting agendas, they had words.

He said that even now years later they laughingly refer to that evening as “Black Tuesday.”

At that point, I felt like tossing the book across the room and also tossing my lunch. I thought “Black Tuesday!” I know couples that have had black decades. Is that the worst conflict that you’ve ever had with your mate? Was that incident really so outstanding in your marriage that you actually labeled it and still refer to it? That’s amazing!

So many talks and seminars, and so many books create utterly unrealizable standards for parents. People sit back and nod and internally they say “no way. No way in the world could I ever pull that off.”

Today I would like to for every parent in here to breathe a deep sign of relief because rather than start off with what parents need to do to raise healthy kids who will go to Harvard, play major league baseball, compose a few symphonies, and end up as the Chief Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court and all the time bear witness to Christ, instead of talking to you parents about what you need to do, I want to talk with you about what you need to receive. Instead of telling you how

to raise healthy kids who love God, I want to talk with you about what you need to receive to become healthy adults who love God.

You know, Jesus picks the most unlikely creatures to be our teachers. We read in Matt. 6:26-27 these words from the Sermon on the Mount:

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Mt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Mt 6:27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life ?

Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, commented on Jesus' words this way. He said, "You see, he is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men, and daily should emphasize this to our eyes and ears, as if he were saying to us: 'Look you miserable man! You have houses and homes, money and property. Every year you have a field full of grain and other plants of all sorts, more than you will ever need. Yet you cannot find peace. You are always worried about tomorrow and about starving. Though we are innumerable, none of us spend his living days worrying. Still God feeds us every day.'"

"In other words, we have as many teachers and preachers as there are little birds in the air. Whenever we hear the birds singing towards heaven, it is as if he were

saying, 'I love to be in the Lord's kitchen. He has made heaven and earth and he himself is the cook and the host. Every day he feeds and nourishes me out of his hand.' And he will feed and nourish you!"

Jesus uses the most unlikely creatures to teach us – the singing birds in the air, the lilies of the field, and he especially uses children to teach adults. In Matt. 18:1-4 we read these words:

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Mt 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Mt 18:2 He called a little child and had him stand among them.

Mt 18:3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 18:4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

We adults believe that only after a child becomes an adult and they go through school and they read and study and learn will they have something to say to us. But Jesus says, "I want you to look at them now and listen to them now because right now they are an example and a teacher to you regarding the kind of person who enters the kingdom. Right now, your child is modeling something that you should aspire to become. I don't merely want them to imitate you; I want you to imitate them."

He says something similar in Matt. 11:25-26,

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Mt 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

Mt 11:26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Jesus says much the same thing, just after he cleared the temple of the money changers. He heals some blind people and some lame people and we read in Matthew 21:15:

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Mt 21:15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

The religious leaders who heard this became angered by what the children were saying. We read in Matthew 21:16:

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Mt 21:16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

In other words the religious leaders were saying: Tell these ignorant children to shut up. They don't get it. They need to study. They need to learn. They are confused about who the Messiah is. Jesus responds and says: These children may not know everything, but they know the most important thing. They see spiritually what you don't see. You adults need to learn from them.

At the front end of this talk, I want to gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to a book that has become just about my favorite book on parenting. It is titled *Sacred Parenting* by Gary Thomas. It is a marvelous book. And if you find echoes of Gary Thomas' book in my talks, it is because imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I've called today's talk very simply: How Kids Teach and Train Their Parents. My son told me just today there is a book out with a similar title by Don Allender. While I was unaware of Don Allender's book, I can fully recommend his book. Let's pray.

SLIDE - Galatians 5:22-23

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. –

Before we look at these verses in detail, let me make some preliminary observations. The apostle Paul clearly intends to draw a distinction between what the Holy Spirit produces in someone's life in v. 22, and what the flesh produces in v. 19.

Now, the NIV really messes up this passage when it translates v. 19 this way:

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Gal 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

It should read:

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The works of the flesh are obvious.

The apostle Paul is drawing a contrast between the works produced by someone who is not living under the reign of Christ's kingdom and the fruit manifested in the life of someone who is living under the reign of Christ's kingdom. Now, why does he contrast works and fruit? It may very well be because this list of items in vv. 19-21 suggests anxious, frenetic, insane activity, whereas the fruit of the Spirit suggests a free, peaceful, surrendered approach to God and other people. The works of the flesh breathes in the air of striving. The fruit of the Spirit breathes a different air. It is one of serenity.

In popular charismatic literature, the nine fruits of the Spirit are often compared with the nine fold gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12. Maybe you've heard teachings like this in which we are taught that there are nine fruits of the Spirit and there are nine gifts of the Spirit. But I don't believe that either list is meant to be exhaustive. I think the list of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12 and the list of the fruits of the Spirit here in Galatians 5 are representative, it is just an ad hoc list designed to show what a person will manifest in their life if they are surrendered to the kingdom of God and the agent of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit.

You can tell that this list in Gal 5.22-23 is an ad hoc list.

SLIDE – Gal. 5.22-23

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
Gal 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

You can tell that the list is not exhaustive. There is nothing on this list about humility. There is nothing about charitableness. There is nothing on the list concerning thankfulness.

Now, in much of conservative evangelicalism there is often an attempt to prioritize the fruit of the Spirit over and above the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The teaching basically says: Look at these Corinthians. They valued spiritual gifts so much and Paul is writing a word of correction to them showing them that character qualities are infinitely more important than gifts.

But as Gordon Fee, the great New Testament scholar, rightly points out, it never occurred to the apostle Paul to pit the fruit of the Spirit over against the gifts of the Spirit any more than he would have said that prayer is more important than the Lord's Table, or that Bible study is more important than fellowship. The apostle Paul believed that both the fruit of the Spirit, these character qualities, and the gifts of the Spirit, like healing, prophecy, tongues, and the discerning of spirits, are both manifestations of the same Spirit. Both are valued.

And we see this in 1 Cor. 14.1,

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1Co 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

So it is an ad hoc representative list. There are not just nine fruits. And fruit is not meant to take priority over spiritual gifts – both are manifestations of the Holy Spirit's work.

As we examine this list of the fruits of the Spirit, who wouldn't want more of these qualities in their lives? Who would say: I don't want to be a more loving person? Or a more joyful woman? Or a more peaceful man? All of us want to become better people. Is there anyone who would say: I want to become less kind. I would like my life to be more out of control.

Now, the primary way that the Holy Spirit produces these Galatians 5:22-23 qualities is through the closest relationships in our lives – our dearest friends, our spouses and our kids.

Listen, these character and relational qualities are not automatically produced in your life even if you are a Christian. There are lots of people who have friends and spouses and children, but who do not manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. One of the fundamental issues about whether these things are going to be in your life or not is whether you will receive what the Holy Spirit wants to produce in you through your closest relationships – through your dearest friends, your spouse, through your closest circle of coworkers, and through your children.

God regularly asks you a question: Will you receive what these people have to teach you? I am working through your most intimate circle. Will you accept my work into your life or will you be defensive and reject my work?

Let me apply this to our parenting. Parents, if you adopt the attitude that children should be seen and not heard, “it’s my way or the highway,” “hey, I was in the military; I was in the Marines and I run my home and relate to my kids the way my Drill Sergeant related to me as a recruit when I was in Boot Camp” – forget it!

If you are a parent who says: “Look, I’m just relating to my kids the way my father related to me; my dad didn’t listen to me or try to reason and explain things. He just took off his belt and started to swing. And so I’m going to make my kids basically pay for what happened to me as a child.” If you relate to your kids with the continual attitude that I’m older than you; I’m bigger than you; I’m smarter than you; you have nothing valuable to say to me; I’m the parent; I’m the expert; I’m the boss – then forget about your children being a channel for the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life. You have closed yourself off from one of the major agencies of God’s work in your life – your own kids.

But if you adopt an attitude of humility and say: You know, Lord, you don’t only want to produce something in my child’s life or in my wife’s life, [or husband’s life], or in my friend’s life through me, you put me in this circle of relationships because you are trying to work through them to produce fruit in me. Then, friend,

you will change and you will change for the better. If you take a receptive listening ear to your child, if you bite your tongue and humble yourself to receive what God might want to do through your child in your life, if you watch and observe, you are going to change for the better.

So, what are those qualities that the Lord wishes to produce in your life? The first one is love. Galatians 5.22,

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Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Now, there are lots of different definitions of love today. Most of them are quite self-centered. They describe a person's feelings towards another person or object.

- I love chocolate chip cookies. That means I feel really good about chocolate chip cookies in my mouth.
- I love what you've done with your hair.
- I love the movie *Life is Beautiful*.

The biblical definition of love is not primarily concerned with your feelings. Does this other person make you feel warm and gushy all over? Do you just break down in tears every time you watch the movie *An Affair to Remember*, when

Cary Grant sees the wheelchair that Deborah Kerr is trying to hide from him and she says to him, “Oh, it’s nobody’s fault, but my own! I was looking up; it was the nearest thing to heaven and you were there...” And then he rushes over and kisses her.

While that is very romantic, the mark of love in the Bible is not primarily our feelings. The mark of love is the cross. 1 John 3.16

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1Jn 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Paul echoes this in Romans 5:8,

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Ro 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Love in the Bible is, in other words, the exact opposite of self-centered obsession with our own feelings. Love in the Bible is the self-sacrificially giving yourself away for the sake of another person. Parenting teaches you all about self-sacrifice. In fact, almost nothing in the world can teach and train you to live beyond yourself than having a child. Moms are trained in self-sacrifice from the moment they discover that they are pregnant.

I admire my daughter-in-law so much as I watch the way she relates to the baby that she and my son are going to have in January. She is very careful about what she eats, what she drinks, what she does with her body. Many of you moms know this one. You begin sacrificing certain things – coffee, wine, certain cheese, medicines, and if you are a smoker, cigarettes, from the moment you discover you are pregnant.

Parenting is all about training you in self-sacrifice. When you have a baby you learn to sacrifice sleep. Moms, dads, how many undisturbed nights of sleep before your kids turned age 2? And if you answer: My daughter slept 12 hours every night after the first month, please keep that bit of good news to yourself. Those of you who have had children who are the least bit colicky, were fearful, or if you have a child who demands the nightly ritual, the pillows having to be put in the bed in this order, “I need Bear-Bear, Spiderman, or my Princess Leia doll,” who is out in the car parked in the snowy street, – parents, you understand sacrifice as you trudge out at night in the snow to get Bear-Bear. There are few people on earth more tired than parents of a couple of kids in diapers.

Parents of toddlers sacrifice great morning prayer times. Oh, I know this one! I love getting up early in the morning to meet with God. But the first few years of my children’s lives – forget it. I want to sit on daddy’s lap while I drink my juice at 5:30 a.m.

Love means that some of you parents will be taught and trained to sacrifice job opportunities. I remember talking with some parents at my son's baseball games. One of the moms said to me, "My husband has been offered a job which requires him to travel a lot. He would be away from home 6-8 months a year."

I said, "Are you guys seriously thinking about him taking the job?"

She said, "Well, it would be a strain on the family, but the money is great!"

I remember she repeated that phrase several times – "The money is great." A year and a half later I heard that couple was going through a divorce.

Our executive pastor, Craig Heselton, took a different approach to his life. He was an executive in the chemical industry for 25 years. On several occasions Craig was offered a promotion in his company, which would have meant a significant boost in pay, but it required him to move his family away from Columbus. I remember praying with Craig several years ago about the job offer. He said to me, "You know, Rich, I really don't care about the boost in pay. Linda and I are doing just fine now financially. The fact is, our family is plugged into this church that we love. Our kids are doing well here." As he prayed, he really felt the Lord speak Matthew 6.33 to his heart:

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Mt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Craig sacrificed several promotions because he was concerned about his children's spiritual well-being. Matthew 6:33 is, by the way, a key verse in making decisions about your future.

Your kids will train you to sacrifice time in love for them. My son, Daniel, played baseball on a traveling team here in central Ohio. One summer, when he was a teenager, they played 81 games, half of a major league schedule, in three states. I went to virtually every game I could go to. I don't believe my wife, Marlene, missed any games.

Love means that parents often sacrifice sex in order to connect with their children. Again, talking about my son, Daniel, when he was a teenager, he used to come home from spending time with his friends, or being out on a date, and he liked to download his entire day with us at 11:00 at night. I would hear the knock on our door, and Daniel would come in and sit on the end of the bed and tell us everything about his day – all the people he talked with, all the thoughts he had. Marlene, of course, would sit up and completely engage him in conversation, while I had a divided heart: This is really, really good stuff, Dan. How about if we tackle it in the morning while I get on with my plans for the evening.

Kids teach us how to love, how to put another person's needs above our own, how to promote the interests of someone else other than yourself.

Kids teach us joy.

SLIDE

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Do you know, the larger culture knows so little of joy. It was one of the apostle Paul's favorite words. He mentions it 21 times. No one else mentions it more than 9 times. Paul's understanding of real Christianity is that real Christianity is always going to be distinguished by radiant joy. As one theologian put it years ago, "a gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms."

Now, I just want to parenthetically say that one major reason why more folks don't become Christians is because they have the idea that Christianity is depressing and boring. They think that Christianity is all about giving up a lot of stuff – living with lots of rules and regulations. Becoming a Christian means that all the fun and zip will be taken out of your life.

Listen to me on this. The view that Christianity is a negative thing, saying no to a lot of your bad habits is one of the biggest lies that Satan has ever lied to us about. That Christianity is a negative thing is the lie of false legalistic Phariseeism that Jesus fought so hard against, that Paul continually fought against in Galatia or in his letter to the Colossians. But legalistic Christians and legalistic churches have communicated widely the idea that Christianity is essentially a negative thing. It is all about what you are giving up. It is all about not partying, not smoking cigarettes and not getting drunk and not sharing juicy gossip, not going to clubs.

There is one reason – listen, this is the truth – there is one reason why you say no to bad habits in your life. There is one reason why Christ has set you free already and then by the power of the Spirit enables you to live out your freedom and walk out your freedom. You choose to say no to a bad habit so that you can say yes to God. See, Christianity is not about saying no to a stubborn habit, it is about your capacity to start choosing to say yes to the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

C.S. Lewis, in his essay called “The Weight of Glory” said the problem of our desires is not that they are too strong, but that they are too weak. “We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child, who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea, we are too easily pleased.”

Christianity is not about the denial of your pleasures; it is not about the satisfaction of your pleasure. It is about saying no and choosing to say no to certain habits so that you can more fully say yes to infinite pleasure. Christians are people who say why go scavenging for some old half eaten McDonald's in a dumpster when you can enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Think about this. Given a choice about what to eat, a banquet spread in this gorgeous banquet hall, beautiful tapestries on the wall, and great decorations, incredible music playing in the background. There is this banquet table in the banqueting hall – incredible salads and hot bread, the aroma of which is just filling the room, steaks cooked to perfection; prime rib and 2½ pound lobsters, drawn butter – everything that you would want to eat. And desserts that just make you want to cry – chocolate desserts of all kinds that look so good that you just want to put your face in and pies that are screaming, “Eat me.” If you saw the enormous banquet, would you say, “Just a second, on the way here I passed by a dumpster and I just want to climb in and see if there are any old moldy french fries thrown in or some sour milk, some rotten old lettuce.”

Satan's tactic is to rob us from enjoying of the banquet. He lies to us and says that even if a banquet like that existed, you could never enjoy it. God would never want to give you love, joy, peace, patience and kindness in your life. You are too

hopeless, too helpless, too much of a mess, too much of a loser. God might want to give the banquet to someone else, but not to you.

Satan's tactic is to say, "You can't eat at the banquet" and then on top of that he tries to make the dumpster look really appealing. We watch movies portraying the incredible pleasure of eating out of a dumpster. We get some sexy actors and actresses, really good-looking young people to celebrate dumpster living. They're laughing about the fun they are having eating dumpster food. They mock and make fun of the miserable people who go to banquets and how boring they are. The actors carry on discussions regarding whether or not the banquet even exists and they conclude that the only thing we know for sure is the pleasure of a dumpster. We will get some really great hip song writers to write songs and music videos celebrating eating from a dumpster.

God says, "My will for your life is so much more than just getting you to stop a habit. It is to get you to experience joy." Joy is what you have always been looking for. It is what you have always wanted, joy. You have never been able to get joy from pornography or partying or destructive relationships. God has you say "no" to sex outside of marriage so you can say "yes" to Jesus and get the happiness you have looked for your whole life. God's will is to give you joy. His goal for your life is not abstinence, it is joy.

Parenting can be a great source of joy, if you let it. One of the things that used to really warm my heart regarding my daughter is that as she was growing up, if we got her something in the grocery store – candy, or something, she always said: “You need to get one for my brother, Daniel, also. Don’t forget Daniel.”{ If we bought her a gift, it was always: “Where is Daniel’s?”

Now, I’m a grandfather. Grandparenting is such an enormous source of joy. My granddaughter lives with Marlene and me. Every night, my granddaughter Naomi accompanies me as we walk the dog. She sits on my shoulders. A couple of nights ago we were walking along the bike trail. I put her down and waited for the dog to do his business. Naomi grabbed my legs and looked up at me and said: “Grandpa, I love you!” Those moments can’t be traded for anything. No career success, no possession, no size house is as sweet as your child or grandchild looking at you with adoring eyes and telling you that they love you.

I want to make a sincere plea to those of you who are parents here – don’t miss the joy! Carolyn Mahaney, from Covenant Life Church in Maryland, once said in a message on parenting that she had a conversation with a woman on an airplane. She noticed the woman addressing envelopes. The woman explained that she was sending out graduation invitations for one daughter and wedding invitations for the other. Carolyn was just about to say: Congratulations that is such good news for you, when the woman looked at her and said: “It is so nice

to be getting rid of both of my kids at the same time.” Don’t miss the joy, parents, through hardening your heart, through busyness, through trivialities, through selfishness. You can miss the very best things in life.

And peace...Galatians 5:22

SLIDE

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

You can’t raise kids without feeling guilt. I was a great father on vacation days, after I got to sleep in and after I ate a good breakfast and I had no responsibilities other than to race my kids across the pool. I was a great dad when we went camping and hiking for a week. Get me rested and well fed, take away all of my church responsibilities, put me on a beach, I could win Dad of the Year. But give me more work than is reasonable for two people to do, and make me raise \$6 million to pay for a church building, have me deal with the collapse of the marriage of dear friends in the same week that I perform a funeral for a 6-year old, and have a fight with my wife over the checkbook balance, and suddenly I’m not winning any Dad of the Year Awards at all.

You cannot parent without feeling guilt. Is there anyone more guilty about their parenting than most single moms? Some of you single moms constantly live with

the feeling that you are never doing the right thing. If you are working, you should be with your children. If you are with your children, you are not doing enough to satisfy your boss. If you sit down, just to relax, you should be exercising. If you exercise, you wonder why you are spending so much time and money on yourself instead of on your kids.

Your children are agents of the Holy Spirit meant to teach you the lesson of peace. I believe that peace is not just an inward quality of serenity, but rather is concerned with peace with God. Romans 5:1 says:

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Ro 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Peace with God. In family life you are confronted with fundamental issues of your faith. Do you believe that God loves you and wishes to bless you in spite of the fact that you are a sinner, and in spite of your guilt regarding your parenting? You look at your parenting and you say: How could a good God love me and bless me when I feel so guilty with what I should be doing, could be doing, did do, or didn't do?

The apostle Paul says: do you understand this wonderful doctrine called justification? Do you understand that God sent his Son into the world and as Romans 3.25 puts it,

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Ro 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

This means that God laid our sins upon Christ and poured out his wrath against sin upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only because God has done that that God can look upon us sinful parents and sinful people with favor. God can pardon us, forgive us, and reconcile those who entrust themselves to Christ to himself. The death of Christ was necessary so that the wrath of God could be appeased.

Now God looks at us and deals with us in an entirely new way. He looks at you parents in light of what Christ has done for you. Every time you feel terrible about your parenting, you look at your children and say: I should be doing more; I should be doing better – God wants to work through your kids to teach you again the lesson of peace with him.

What are you basing your relationship with God upon – your performance or the death and resurrection of the Son of God for your sins?

Kids teach us patience and faithfulness.

SLIDE

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness**,

Patience means forbearance or even better is the old King James Version of Galatians 5:22, long-suffering. I love 1 Cor. 13:4 in the old KJV. It reads:

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Charity [love] suffers long and is kind.

It implies bearing with, putting up with, continuing on with painful, inconvenient circumstances, or putting up with, bearing with people who oppose your agenda.

Parenting is often a lesson in long-suffering. Parenting is often God's primary way to teach us to bear with great pain. The same Mary who received the announcement from the angel that she was to be the mother of the Savior of the world, and joyfully proclaimed in Luke 1:46-49,

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Lk 1:46 And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

Lk 1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

Lk 1:48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

Lk 1:49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

Also received this prophecy from an old man named Simeon when Jesus was just 8 days old:

SLIDE – Luke 2:34-35

Lk 2:34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
Lk 2:35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

A sword did pierce Mary’s soul many, many times as she watched her boy being rejected, mocked, spit on, beaten, stripped, and nailed to a cross. Mary learned the lesson of long-suffering through her son, Jesus.

God teaches and trains parents in patience through their children, through the daily grind of raising children, if you let the Holy Spirit train you. I can remember car rides down to Florida in the summer in my little Toyota that didn’t have any air conditioning. My wife and I would drive down with our two kids in the backseat. It was so hot you would begin to chemically bond with the seat vinyl. The kids were fighting in the backseat. I remember my daughter crying one day. She said: Daniel is deliberately looking out my window. The sad fact was that she was telling the truth. He was deliberately looking out her window just to torment her.

Love suffereth long.

For some of you the long suffering that you are learning in parenting is the pain of raising children with multiple disabilities. Parents, you cannot raise a child without being vulnerable to pain, the pain of having a child who is left behind because they are just not getting it, the pain of watching your child ride the bench, or strike out again, or not be invited to the prom. The pain of raising a child who is disobedient and who rejects what you value and believe. Some of you know the heartaches of raising a child that has at least for now turned their backs on the Lord and on you.

No one in the Bible knew the pain of parenting more than King David. David's son, Absalom, worked against David by stealing people's affections away from David. He recruited some of David's closest advisors. He publicly slept with some of his father's concubines. Finally, he sought to kill his father. Absalom humiliated his father publicly. He challenged his father. He hunted his father down like an animal. And yet, David never stopped loving his son. We read in 2 Sam. 18.2 the orders that David gave to soldiers who were loyal to him.

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^{2Sa 18:12} But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.

Don't treat Absalom as a traitor. Treat him as my son.

Then David hears that the troops loyal to Absalom have been routed and that David's army has won a great victory against the traitors. David asks the question that every parent who has been trained in long suffering and faithfulness would have asked in 2 Sam. 18.29,

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2Sa 18:29 The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was."

David doesn't care about his success. He doesn't care about the fact that the enemy has just been defeated, or that now he's been protected and that his kingdom will come together. Instead, he has one question: Tell me about my son. When he is told that his son Absalom has been killed in battle, David has an emotional meltdown and we read in 2 Sam. 18.33,

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2Sa 18:33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Any parent who has had a disobedient child, a child who just rejects you and rejects what you stand for, knows the inner conflict that was going on inside of David's heart. On the one hand, great hurt and anger, humiliation and frustration that his son Absalom had rejected his life and had sought to publicly humiliate him. On the other hand, a love that would not let go. Long suffering. Patience. Faithfulness. That is what our kids teach us.

Let me switch gears for a moment and tell you why you ought to allow your closest relationships, your friends, if you are married, your spouse, but particularly, parents, your kids to teach you and to train you, why you should allow the Holy Spirit to use your children as agents to produce fruits in your life. One very simple reason is because you will leave a legacy to your children and your children's children regarding what you became, the kind of person that you allowed yourself to be formed into.

In his book, *Sacred Parenting*, Gary Thomas tells the story of a woman named Sonia Keppel, who used to watch flowers and orchids delivered to her home every day by royal coachmen sent from the English King Edward VII. This little girl saw these flowers delivered and she so admired her mom. She thought: What sort of goddess must this be that the King of England is sending her flowers and orchids every day? She didn't know that the reason for the flowers was that the King of England was having an adulterous affair with her mother.

But this was the late 19th century and Mrs. Keppel's affair with the King didn't destroy her marriage, or her reputation, but Mrs. Keppel did leave a legacy. Sonia's granddaughter and Mrs. Keppel's great-granddaughter grew up to be Camilla Parker-Bowles, the long-standing mistress and now wife of Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales.

We do leave a legacy – good or bad. We shape the future. The oddest things

can be bestowed to our children. My son Daniel walks like me. He shares many of my interests. His wife, Melissa, says that Daniel and I have exactly the same look on our faces when we think someone is saying something stupid. She said: "You both look like you pull your faces away. You both look like you just smelled sour milk in a milk carton."

Daniel picked up his mom's mechanical abilities and her kindness and a little bit of her perfectionism.

My daughter, Sharon? Three years ago my father-in-law died. We held a memorial service for him here at the church. My son Daniel, and my daughter, Sharon, both said they wanted to share a few words to honor the memory of their grandfather. Throughout the day of the funeral, my wife, Marlene, kept asking my daughter, Sharon: "Have you prepared your comments?"

Sharon said: "Well, I'm thinking about it"...while she did her nails. She watched TV and took a bath.

Marlene said: "Sharon, it would be really good if wrote some things down."

Sharon said: "Sure, Mom. It's OK. I'm just thinking about it."

We held the memorial service and I spoke, my son spoke and then my daughter, Sharon, spoke. In the course of five minutes she had people laughing, she had people crying. I probably had no less than ten friends come up to me and say: "Sharon has your gift, Rich. She does what you do when you speak."

Why should we parents seek the fruit of the Spirit in our lives? Not just for ourselves, but so that we can leave a legacy of these character qualities in the lives of our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren. Let's pray.

How Kids Teach and Train Their Parents

Rich Nathan
October 1-2.2005
Parenting in an Insane World
Galatians 5:22-23

- I. What God Uses In Our Lives To Teach Us (Mt. 6.26, 27; 18.1-4; 21.12-16)

- II. What God Seeks To Produce In Our Lives
 - A. The Fruit Of The Holy Spirit

 - B. Illustrations Of Fruit
 - 1. Love (1 Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5.8)

 - 2. Joy (Phil. 4.4)

 - 3. Peace (Rom. 5.1)

 - 4. Patience And Faithfulness (Lk. 1.46-55; 2.35; 2 Sam. 13-18)

- III. What To Seek To Produce In The Lives Of Your Children