

Basic Truths that Build a Family

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Home Improvement Series

Malachi 2:14 and Proverbs 22:6

This evening [morning] I am going to be continuing in a series that I have been doing on the family, a series that I have called "Home Improvement." And what I would like to do is to begin with a few verses from the book of Proverbs. Let me read to you from Proverbs 14:1 – a verse that is going to be pretty much a theme verse for today's talk:

"The wise woman builds her house but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down."

It takes wisdom to build a house or a family. But there are so many foolish myths out in the market place in the 90's, so much foolish counsel, that results in families and children and spouses, in lives, being torn down. The wise women, the wise man, builds up their family, their home. But with his or her own hands, the foolish person tears their home down.

Now, last week I talked about that time in life when it all gets torn down, all comes tumbling down, I talked about divorce. People with their own choices, their own sins, the crazy council people listen to that tears down their marriages.

Let me read to you another text on homebuilding, this one again from Proverbs, Proverbs 24:3-4:

"By wisdom, a house is built and through understanding it is established. Through knowledge, its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasure."

You know, it really does take wisdom to know how to build a home, to build a family. It takes understanding and knowledge to navigate through all the pressures of family life. The result of building with wisdom and understanding and knowledge, the writer of Proverbs tells us, is that the rooms of our homes will be filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

Now, I don't think that the writer of Proverbs is talking about tangible possessions. He is not talking about antiques and tiffany lamps, Monet paintings over the fireplace. It doesn't take wisdom and understanding to acquire material possessions. All it takes is money. The most stupid person in the world, the most foolish person in the world somehow hits the lottery or inherits a fortune, strikes it big on a land deal, happens to be in the right place at the right time – the most foolish person in the world can fill their house with material possessions. Having a lot of stuff does not mark you off as being a wise person. In fact, Jesus had nothing. He said,

"Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head."

Jesus had nothing. Yet he was the wisest person who ever lived. It doesn't take wisdom to fill your house with a lot of stuff. But it does take wisdom to fill your life with meaning, with satisfaction, with profound fulfillment. The treasures that a home would be filled with through understanding, knowledge and

wisdom are things like a good, healthy relationship between all the members of the family, mutual respect, friendship, the treasure of family members wanting to be together, the treasure of great memories, the treasure of a depth of character built into your children; the treasure of children wanting to seek your counsel and advice, the treasure of growing old with your spouse and still being in love.

The kinds of treasures that wisdom, understanding and knowledge build into a family are treasures that cannot be stolen. It is the kind of treasure that doesn't depreciate over time like a car. You know, the moment you drive it out of the lot, it is worth half of its value.

Now, how is it, friends that we are going to be able to build families that will be filled with treasures? Where are we going to get the wisdom, the understanding, and the knowledge necessary to build great memories and build great relationships?

You know, there are so many experts clamoring for parents' attention these days. So many experts telling us how to raise healthy kids and what our children need to know and what is going to fill their lives with good things. We have some dear friends in a school district up by Cleveland whose 5th graders were showed how to apply a condom to various objects in a mixed group of boys and girls. Will this fill our lives with treasures?

The experts back in the 1970's said that married couples needed to learn how to have an open marriage, to allow a little bit of sexual exploration with other partners outside the sanctity of marriage and that this would only encourage romance in marriage. The experts also told us that marriages would be healthier if people lived together first so that they could get to know one another. And then all the studies came in and said that people who lived together before marriage have a much higher chance of divorcing than those who waited to exchange vows. Because when you live together without marriage, you are sowing into your relationship a lack of commitment, a lack of vow keeping and vow exchanging.

The experts told us that divorce really doesn't hurt your children. So long as you are happy, your children will be happy. The best thing you can do for your kids is making yourself happy.

Don't spank your children, ever. Reason with them. Explain, explain, explain and your kids will grow up healthy and well.

You know, there are so many myths about building families in the marketplace today, how does a reasonable person make a decision about what to listen to? I assume you are all reasonable. I assume you would like your lives to be filled with rare and beautiful treasures. That you don't want to be like the foolish person who with their own hands tears life apart and tears their family apart. So, how do you choose what to listen to when every time you turn on the TV or listen to the talk shows on the radio, or read the advice columnists, or pick up a woman's magazine, the experts are telling you how to live?

You know, there is a reasonable and sane approach regarding who to listen to, what advice to take to heart when you are trying to build a successful life. You could listen to the manufacturer, the architect, the creator of life, and

follow his instructions regarding how to assemble a family or how to assemble a marriage. Or you could just do it yourself or listen to the experts.

Let me make this real simple. If you were building a house and the lumberyard just dropped a load of wood and you were trying to figure out how to frame in the house – I guess you would have three options:

You could just start nailing boards together, guessing at what the house is supposed to look like. Pick up your hammer and nails and start pounding. And if it didn't quite look right, you could work harder. Really strain at putting that house together. You could also get in a fight with the carpenters who are there to help you about how to assemble the house. You could scream and fight with each other about whose way to build the house is really the right way.

Or, you could listen to people who are driving by as they shout their advice to you from passing cars. Put a board over there. No, put one over here. You could try to build a home by guessing, coming up with your best estimate, your best guess about how to build or fight with people who are there to help you build. You could listen to the so-called experts who are driving by in their cars giving you advice.

But wouldn't it make sense for you to just listen to the architect who designed the house, who planned it? Wouldn't it make sense to read the architect's plans and have all the people who are there to help you build also read the architect's plans so that you are working off of a common design and not fighting with each other about the best way to build?

Now, many of you know where this is going. You want to have healthy children or a good lasting marriage or a family that loves and respects each other and you could choose to do it based on your brilliance. Of course, you have never lived to age 80 before. You don't know what it takes to get there because you have never gone there before. You don't know how to endure all kinds of trials because you have never encountered them. But you could decide to just start slapping life together according to your brilliant plans and your thoughts. You could fight with your spouse or your children or your parents about how to build family life. Get in a big argument about what is right and wrong. You could read a bunch of advice columns and self-help books.

Or you could sit down and study the architect's plans saying, you know, someone who created people, created me, created family knows how I am wired, knows how my wife is wired, knows how my kids are wired, knows what we all need, knows how we all best function and how we could best interact with each other, and has laid out for us an instructional manual, a guide for life called the Bible. In this church, and I will make it more personal, in my life, what me and my wife, other pastors in this church and their spouses, are trying to do is to build our own lives and urge you to build your life by consulting the architect's plan for life laid out for us in the Bible.

Today, I have called this talk on family life, "Basic Truths that Build Up a Family." Let's pray.

What I would like to do in discussing the starting point of building a family, I would like to look back at a text that we examined last week. It was actually the

last point of my talk last week. I didn't get a chance to do it. But from Malachi 2, beginning in verse 13, Malachi says:

"Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears, you weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hand. You ask why? It is because the Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."

Now, the starting point of building family life is to build a strong marriage. There is a profound myth that in producing healthy children what we ought to have is a child-centered home. Oh, it is okay if you parents neglect your marriage, so long as you pour yourself into your children, your children are going to turn out just fine. That is a myth.

Let me share with you an important truth in building your families. Parents, the most important thing you can do for your children is to love your spouse. A healthy marriage is the foundation of raising healthy children. There is nothing more undermining to your efforts to raising your kids well than a bad marriage between you and your spouse. At the very foundation of your children's lives, you are sowing this unevenness, this lack of respect with their other parent, this fighting between the two of you; this cold war where there is not open affection demonstrated and hugs. You want to have secure kids? Then secure your marriage first. Support each other. Honor each other. Stay committed to each other. The center of a home is not to be the children. The central relationship in the family is not, according the architect, the parent/child relationship.

The central relationship in the family is the marital relationship. I know this cuts counter to the way many of us live. But the lasting relationship, according to the architect, is not the parent/child relationship. The Bible says way back in Genesis 2: *"a man will leave his father and mother."* That parent/child relationship is only a temporary term of living in your home and relating to your kid as a kid. There comes a time when a parent must release their children. And some of our children need to learn how to leave us. But marriage is a permanent union until death!

The starting point of building family life is to love your spouse. Now, here in Malachi the prophet gives us three handles on marital love that, I think, summarize completely what it means to love your spouse. Note the three terms that the prophet uses in describing the marital relationship.

In verse 14, he speaks of the "wife of your youth". That is the first thing. Second, "your partner" and, third, "the wife of your marriage covenant." The wife of your youth, your partner, your wife of your marriage covenant. He is talking about three kinds of love, if you look at your outline. The wife of your youth speaks about romantic love. He is talking about the fire of passion.

Second, your partner is speaking about companionship love, the friendship of partners. And finally your wife by covenant, he is talking about committed love, the fidelity of promise keepers.

Romantic love, companionship love, committed love. The Greeks had three words to describe love, the love that would exist in marriage. For romantic

love, they used the word *Eros*, where we derive the word “erotic” from – Eros love. For friendship, companionship love, they used the word *Phileo* – sometimes we call it brotherly love, friendship love, the city of Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. And then, for committed love, covenant love, promise keeper love, the New Testament writers came up with a unique word. A word that was not very common in the ancient world. The word that described the love of God for us, the highest kind of love between partners would be “agape” love, vow-keeping love.

You want to build a family according to the architect? Then you love your spouse with these three kinds of love. Let’s take a look at these.

Romantic love. Fiery, passionate love, Eros. You know, there are so many myths that erode romance and Eros from the marital relationship. Many men think that it is not their job to be romantic. Their job is to become a provider. You know, during the courtship there was all this romance, but now that we have gotten married, the lover leaves and the providers enters. Anyway, you don’t need romance to have a good marriage. Right? We have lots of substance. Don’t need all that passion, all that fire, all that affection.

You know, a marriage without romance reminds me of trying to build a wall with good solid bricks, but with out cement between the bricks. There is no mortar, there is not glue holding the bricks together. That wall that we build, even though it has lots of great substance to it, it is easily pushed over. Romance glues two people together. There is no time when a man (and I am talking to you men, now), there is never a time in your married life where you say, “My job is done because I have become a provider.” You are always to be a lover.

Now, it is not just sex that I am talking about by becoming a lover. Romance goes beyond sex. It could be a candlelight dinner. It could be hugging your spouse and affirming to your spouse the words, “I love you.” Romance, by the way, doesn’t have to be expensive. Saying a few romantic things to your spouse is not expensive. Serving breakfast in bed is not necessarily expensive. Planning a surprise for your spouse – or, here’s one: writing a little love note to your spouse. Some of us would have to put in with our love note a little nitroglycerin pill because when our spouses unwrapped it and read it, they would probably get a heart attack.

I want to show you something because this is fundamental to basic love in the Bible. Turn with me to Proverbs 5 for just a moment. If we were to break up Proverbs 5 into two sections, the first half of Proverbs 5 would be about the dangers of sexual looseness and the last part of Proverbs 5 would be about the blessing of sexual loyalty. Verses 1-14 are the dangers of sexual looseness, where the writer of Proverbs is saying:

“Listen my son, listen to me. Don’t turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her [he is talking about the adulterous,] don’t go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth...”

He is talking about how to destroy your life. You want to destroy your life? Commit adultery. That will tear your house down like the foolish woman in

Proverbs 14. Break your marital vows. Be romantic with someone who is not your spouse. At the end of your life, the writer of Proverbs says, *"You will groan. When your flesh and body are spent, you will say, 'How I hated discipline. How my heart spurned correction. I would not listen. I would not obey my teachers nor listen to my instructor. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly.'"* He is talking about the danger of sexual looseness.

But then, the writer's attention turns to the blessing of sexual loyalty. He says:

"Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love."

Here is what the writer of Proverbs is saying. One of the ways to drive out sin is to find something far more compelling in life that is good. The Bible doesn't say, "Married people, keep yourselves from an extramarital affair, keep faithful to your spouse as a grim duty." It says no, have something in your life more compelling, more wonderful, celebrate romance with your spouse.

By the way, this is a method that the Bible writers often use for driving sin out of our lives. Bible writers will often tell us to discover something more compelling. Wrap your heart around something better than sin. For example, if you are struggling with lust, Jesus says, *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."* The reason to get free from lust, men and women, is so that you can enjoy God. There is something better than carrying lust around in your heart. The enjoyment of God is better.

And so here, the writer of Proverbs says that sexual love between a man and a woman can be so wonderful. He describes it as running water. He is talking there about the refreshment of affection. How it will water your soul. And in verse 18 he tells to rejoice in the wife of your youth. The wife of your youth is the term in the Bible that often refers to romantic love, the love of the honeymoon. And the thought finishes up with *"May her breasts satisfy you always, may you always be captivated by her love."* Literally, the writer of Proverbs says be intoxicated with romance.

Men and women, if you are married, don't let the passion die. And if it has died, light the fire again. Surprise your spouse. Turn the television off one evening. Actually say to your spouse, "I love you." Romantic love.

And then there is companionship love. Malachi talks about the wife being the wife of your youth and then he goes on and says, "though she is your partner." We are talking there about the friendship of partners. Your partner in the Hebrew literally communicates the thought of sharing. Of taking two individuals as pieces and gluing them together so that they have a shared life. I will tell you what breaks friendship down. When married couples stop sharing. When they both start developing their own individual spheres of life, there is not much sharing. When couples develop the attitude of okay you do your thing over there and I will do my thing over here. That is your department, this is my

department. I go to work. You cook the food. I have my bank account and you have yours.

Do you want to destroy your marriage? Let the passion die and let the partnership dissolve. Stop being in it together. Stop being friends. Become too busy to share communication with each other.

The wisdom of the Bible says that if you want to build your marriage, this friendship love, then husbands and wives, start multiplying the number of things that you share together.

You say, "Well, like what, Rich?"

Well, if you are both in this church, how about if you share a ministry together? The two of you team could teach children's ministry. The two of you go down and work together at Fruit Of The Vine. The two of you get involved with teenagers. If your marriage is healthy, maybe the two of you could become marriage peer counselors. How about a novel idea, you share ministry together. Certainly share meals together. When spouses and family members don't eat together, I think there is a problem in the making. Everyone is just grabbing something and eating at all different times. In our home, as much as possible, we fight the dragon of busyness and try to have as many meals together at dinnertime as we can. Now, there is the pressure of modern life, sports, ministry and all of that, but you have to take some time to share. You share your finances together. Husbands and wives, don't have separate accounts. Mine/hers. No, it's ours.

You share the good times. You share the bad times. I love marrying people, as a pastor, I love marrying two people who have a sound, healthy foundation of friendship that goes beyond romance and infatuation. I love it when people tell me, "before we went out, we were friends for six months or a year or two years" because I know they know how to share with each other.

The wife of your youth. Your companion. And then the writer speaks of the wife of your marriage covenant. I call this committed love, covenant love. It is the fidelity and faithfulness of a promise keeper. You know, the writer here is advancing in terms of higher degrees of love from *Eros* to *Phileo* to *Agape*, the highest kind of love. He is talking about love that goes beyond warm feelings. Love that goes beyond sharing. I stay with you because I am a man or woman of my word. I stay faithful to you because I promised that to you when we got married. Over against the experts who say you stay married until the passion dies and then you look for someone better. Or you stay married until you stop sharing or communicating. Committed love says that there is no "until" in my marital vows. It is not marriage "until", it is marriage for keeps.

Parents, if you want to teach your children to be strong and healthy, to not run away from their problems, but to work through their problems, then you don't walk away from your problems. You work through your problems. If you don't want your children to be quitters, then you don't be a quitter.

We are talking choices here. Something that begins in the will. This is not the emotions. This is the will. The will to sacrifice. The will to put my spouse's interests above my own. The will to hang in there. The will to persevere. And you can choose to stay committed or you can choose to run away.

You know what tears this down? Scorekeeping tears down committed love. I have given and given and given and have received nothing back. Committed love is not a matter of scorekeeping; it is a matter of vow keeping. I made you a promise. More than that, my wife, my husband, I made God a promise. The writer of Malachi says that God was a witness. A vow is a vow is a vow. We made a promise for better or worse, till death do us part. Those words were promised before God. Did God hear you when you promised? I am being facetious. Of course, God heard you. Does he take vows seriously? Ecclesiastes 5 says that when you make a vow to God don't be late in paying it. For he takes no delight in fools, pay what you vow. He not only takes vows seriously, he remembers our vows.

And what is it that God commends us? Pay what you vow. Keep your word.

Now, no amount of psychological therapy, no amount of fooling ourselves or support from a counselor or support from a friend or support from your parents can remove your responsibility to keep your vows. You are responsible for doing that.

Here is the starting point of building: loving your spouse with the fire of passion, the friendship of partners and the fidelity of being a promise keeper.

But there is a continual process of building and that involves knowing your children. Some couples are so marriage centered that they give nothing out to their children. The parents are always escaping on little romantic vacations. Someone else is responsible for raising the kids. You know, we drop the kids off at 7:00 a.m. and don't pick them up until 7:00 p.m. at Grandma's or at Preschool, elementary school, coach, but someone else is taking care of the kids.

Want to know the secret of raising children? If the secret of marriage is loving your spouse, the secret of raising your children is knowing them. Let me give you a new look at an old verse. Turn with me to Proverbs 22. Proverbs 22:6. It is, perhaps, the most famous verse of child raising in the Bible. Proverbs 22:6 says, *"Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it."*

Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it, will not depart from it.

Let me give you a classic interpretation of this verse. Train up a child in the way he should go. Well, you know, you teach your children from a young age about God. You teach them the Ten Commandments. You bring them to church. You make sure that they watch you praying and even though they may rebel in their teenage years, even though they get a good healthy dose of the world, when they get older and are done sowing their wild oats and get in their late 20's, 30's, 40's or 70's, they will remember the lessons at Mama's knee about God and they will turn back.

Well, you know, there is truth in that perspective. We ought to raise up children with a spiritual foundation. And for the most part, although not without exception, for the most part, I have seen that parents who take their job seriously of communicating spiritual truths, kids after a period of rebellion often do return. Now, this is not infallible. This is not an absolute promise that if you have raised

your kids spiritually, with a spiritual foundation and a knowledge of Jesus that every one of your children will, absolutely, make a Christian commitment without fail. Even Jesus didn't bat a thousand. He lost one of his disciples, Judas. Our children do, still, make choices.

But what I would like to do is give you a new look at this old verse. You see, I don't think that the writer of Proverbs is talking about raising up a child according to the way he should go. The way he should go. The writer of Proverbs is saying, "Raise up a child according to his way. His way. That is literally what the Hebrew says. Raise up a child according to his way. It says "Raise up a child according to his wiring" according to his temperament, according to your child's gift mix; raise up a child according to what God has made your child to be. The word "his way" literally means "his bent". It is used of the bent of a bow in Psalm 11.

Here is the bottom line of what I am getting at, parents. There is no standardized way to raise a child. There are standards, standards of respect, standards of spirituality, standards of the 10 Commandments, there are standards in a Christian home, but there is no standardized, cookie-cutter, one size fits all way to raise a child.

You know, one of the myths that tears down children is this notion that I don't have to know my child's wiring or how they are bent. I can just apply a set of principles to my kids and produce a good result.

Listen to me. You can get generic counsel from the experts and standards that will be helpful. But I want to tell you that regarding your child, you parents are supposed to be the experts. No one should know more about raising your child than you. Sure, other people can give you advice and Dobson can give you helpful counsel. But Dobson doesn't know the way of your child. He doesn't know your child's sensitivities. He doesn't know your child's temperament.

Listen, you want to fill your child's life with rare and beautiful treasures? Then know your child. See, I believe that very often rebellion in a child comes from a child feeling like my parent doesn't know me at all. Dad or mom doesn't have a clue regarding what I feel or what is in my mind, what I want. So much of rebellion and acting out is a cry for attention, a cry to be understood, a cry to be known. Dad, Mom comes along with this standardized approach to raising a child with a set of rules. But Dad and Mom haven't taken the time to know the child.

You say, "Well, how do I know my kids?"

How do you know anyone? It takes time.

Listen, Barbie ought not to live in a better house than you do. What your daughter needs from you is not more stuff for her Barbie house, the Barbie dream house and the Barbie car, the Barbie accessories and the Barbie clothes store. It is not a matter of spending money on your children that will allow you to get to know them. That won't cause you to know them. You must spend time with them. Over the years, I've done dozens of things to carve out time alone with the kids. For years, I aimed at spending a couple of hours alone with each of my children per week. One evening would be dessert or shopping with one of

the kids and then one evening would be the other. Take your kids with you when you run errands. Get alone with your kids. You have to spend enough time with your kids to ask them specific questions about their lives.

Dads, I am talking to you now. I am talking to us as men. Some of us as men and as dads have basically adopted a view that the specifics of our children's lives are not our department. They are our wives department. Some of us can't even name the school that our children go to, much less their teachers or what tests they had yesterday or today. Dad, I want to tell you something. It is not your wife's department to know the details of your children's lives. It is your department. You ought to be able to ask a question about the biology test that your child took today. You ought to know the names of your children's friends and who their parents are. Who they are dating. Who their teacher is and what she is like. It's time.

And it takes listening. You can't know someone by lecturing them. You have to put the paper down, turn the TV off, stop doing chores around the house, stop cleaning for a little while, mothers, and look at our children. Are they quiet tonight? Do they look upset? Do they look nervous or anxious? Or angry? And then listen. Asking questions without lecturing or shaming. That's stupid. Don't be a baby.

Do you know what you will discover, parents, when you stop, when you take time, when you listen, you are going to discover that your child has certain bents, certain inclinations. You are going to know your child, both regarding their good bents and their bad bents.

Psalm 139, which I don't have the time to go through, talks about our father in heaven's knowledge of us. The Psalmist says: *"O Lord, you have searched me. You know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely. God, our father, knows us so well and yet he loves us so tenderly."*

The Psalmist goes on and says: *"You created my inner being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

Every parent ought to look at their children and say, "You are fearfully and wonderfully made." You are absolutely unique in the way that God has formed you together. I want to bless your temperament. I know you, you are an optimist. You are melancholic. You are a gifted musician. You are a gifted artist. You are kind. You are a sharer. You are sensitive. You have a pastor's heart. You have a gift of leadership. You have a prophetic gift.

My children, I know exactly the way you are wonderfully made. And I love you.

But you know, knowing your child means not only knowing their good bents, their gifts, and their temperaments. But knowing your child well enough to know their bad bents. You want to build a family and build your kids? Then know them completely. The good and the bad and the ugly.

So, let me finish with Psalm 51. Here is the utter side of the coin of your darling little child and my darling little children. Psalm 51:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Do you know a major mistake that parents make that ends up tearing down the lives of their children? They believe that this little butterball of a baby, this growing toddler, this elementary school child, this teenager intends only good and is not corrupted with a sin nature. That the parent's job is only to nurture the gifts of their children. That all we need to do is to provide a loving environment, to nurture and to understand, to reason with our wonderful little children. And they will grow up strong and healthy.

Let me tell you, parents, that in the garden of your children's heart are not only wonderful plants that need tender loving care, but there are weeds in your child's heart that need pulling up. And a good parent knows that nurture without correction is incomplete. Psalm 51 embraces the reality of fallen life, fallen children. The Psalmist says: *“I was sinful at birth.”* Every one of your darling children is born with their back toward God. The experts don't say that. The experts say that your children are born good and loving and kind.

You don't have to teach a two-year old to say, “Mine.” To grab, to get red-faced when their will is being defied. You don't have to teach a two-year old to throw a tantrum. They will do it on their own.

Parents, you need to embrace the reality about your children. They were born as sinners. There is a bent in their nature toward doing what is evil. The Psalmist uses the word “transgressions” in verse 1; “iniquity” in verse 2; “sin” in verse 2. Transgression means literally “rebellion or revolt”. There is a part of every person that says, “Well, God, maybe that is what you say, but I want you to know something, I am not going to do it. Maybe, mom, that is what you say, but I am not going to do it.” Transgression, rebellion, that's what it means. Iniquity literally means to twist. God, maybe that's what you say, but I am going to twist your words. I am going to alter it. I know you tell me one thing, dad, but I am going to twist it and make it sound like something else.

And then sin literally means to miss the target. To go off track. I know that the goal is over here, God, but I am going to go after my own goals, my own agenda.

Parents, here is what it means to embrace reality and know your child. You ought not to be surprised when someone reports that your child has done something wrong. Some parents are shocked. My little baby acted up in class? Impossible.

No – not impossible. They are sinners. We embrace reality about our children and then we emphasize responsibility. The Psalmist says, “I know my transgressions, my sin is always before me. Against you have I sinned.”

You know, parents, the way to build your children is to hold them responsible for what they do that is wrong. One of the worst things that you can

do for your kids is to constantly make excuses for their bad behavior. The children that I have seen that have grown up to be failures, unable to hold a good job, veering off into drugs and everything else, very often have parents who continually made excuses for their bad behavior. Oh well, Johnny is not responsible for that bad choice. It is because of the experience that he had when he was a child, that hospital stay, that traumatic experience. Little Johnny is not responsible for his behavior, it's his allergies. Little Jeanie is not responsible, she didn't get enough sleep. Little Jeanie is not responsible, it is her genes. You know, Grandmother was just like that. Her Daddy does the same thing.

Parents, embrace reality about your children. They are sinners. And emphasize their responsibility. The way you treat your child with respect and the way you treat yourself with respect is that you don't blame shift. No. You and your child can make a choice regarding your responses. However tired you are, whatever you're allergies, whatever your uncle Fred was like, whatever your past was like, you can make a choice regarding your responses.

You adult, you child, you have the ability to choose responses. That is what responsibility is all about. You don't have to come apart at the seams. You don't have to scream and yell. Or hit, or be disrespectful. Or walk away from God.

We embrace really emphasize responsibility and good parents enforce the rules. Let me give you a little illustration in closing. Imagine a basketball game where the rules keep getting violated but the ref, instead of blowing the whistle and declaring a foul or an out of bounds or traveling, kept yelling at the player or threatening them? "Next time you push a player you are really going to get in trouble!" "How many times do I have to tell you, keep the ball inbounds!" "I am going to count to three and if you don't stop traveling with the ball...one...two...two-and-a-half..." Be clear about the rules parents and then blow the whistle on your kids and enforce the rules. If curfew is 11:00 p.m. then no argument. No threats when they come in at 11:10 p.m. or 11:30 p.m. If chores are to be done before TV and you come in on your kids lying in front of the set, blow the whistle. If hitting or name-calling is out of bounds in your home, as it is in mine, blow the whistle. No arguments, no screaming, there is a rule infraction. Let's pray.