

How To Pray For Your Children – Part 2

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Home Improvement Series

John 17

Last week I announced that I am starting a new series that I am calling “Home Improvement” which will be a series of teachings on the family. And there is no doubt those discussions of family are an “in” topic in America, whether you are coming from the political right or the political left. From the political right you hear a lot of discussion of family values and there is even now along with the Contract for America, a Family Contract With America that was put together by the Christian coalition.

But the political right is not alone in its focus upon the family. You are seeing more and more discussion of the family from the more liberal side of the spectrum – the Children First campaign, more public service announcements on putting children first, the First Lady has just written a book on child raising and is out on a book tour now. There is broad agreement across the political spectrum that many of our sociological problems, problems with crime and violence are rooted in the breakdown of the family. Everyone is saying that government cannot fill the role mothers and fathers fill in a child’s life.

I think there is almost no doubt that in the 90’s family is “in.” Of course, you certainly see that in the Christian world with the explosive growth of the Promise Keepers movement. Who would have thought five years ago that you could fill stadiums full of men who are repenting together about their treatment of their wives and children? Who would have ever thought that you might have a million plus men meeting this summer all over the country to discuss, in large part, issues of commitment to family and to God?

Now, in this series, I am not going to be advocating a return to “Leave It To Beaver” or “Father Knows Best” families and saying that life in the 90’s ought to be just like life in 1950’s. I don’t want you to switch me off saying, you know, this guy just doesn’t understand the pressures of what it is like to live with a blended family. Or I am a single parent raising two kids – I don’t have a spouse for support. Is there anything in this series for me? I think you will find me talking to you.

I am going to be talking about parenting in the 90’s in this series on Home Improvement. I am not going to be advocating a return to the 1950’s. I don’t think that the Christian family necessarily looks like “Leave It To Beaver” or “Ozzie and Harriett” where mom is always at home in a dress baking cookies, wearing a string of pearls around her neck and in a pair of high heels. And Dad is all knowing, all fearsome, always respected.

I just happen to believe that it is possible in the 90’s to have a strong, healthy family despite the pressures. And I also believe that in the 90’s, a strong, healthy family doesn’t just happen. Parents whether in a blended family or single parenting or a two- parent home have to be very intentional about creating family

life. The supports have been pulled away. We aren't living in the 50's anymore. The supports have been pulled away.

And so what I will be trying to encourage you in during this series, what I am going to try to motivate you parents to do, is to believe that you can have a healthy family, that you can have a healthy family is if you build on the wisdom found in God's word, the Bible.

Last week I began on a spiritual note as we looked at the subject of how to pray for your children and I want to finish that up this week. This is Part 2 of "How to Pray for Your Children". Let's just ask the Lord's presence.

Now, we are looking at Jesus' High Priestly Prayer from John 17 in continuing this two-part teaching on "How to Pray for Your Children". You recall that Jesus prayed this prayer on the night before he was to be put to death. It is fascinating to me that Jesus' concerns before he went to the cross were chiefly about his followers. What is going to happen to my spiritual children? I believe that Jesus' prayers reflect the natural concern of any parent for their family.

If you were told that you only had one day to live, I believe that your thoughts and concerns would turn to your family, to those closest to you, to your relationships. And you would spend as much time with your family in communicating to them your love for them, your affection, your hopes and dreams for their lives. You would try to put as many things in order as you could before you died.

Last week we began by showing how Jesus prayed for himself. Now this first prayer that we are going to look at today is also about himself. There is some debate whether verses 6-8 should be included in the first section of material in John 17 or whether it should be included in the second. In the way that I am approaching it, I really think it ought to be included in the first section where Jesus prays for himself.

So, let's look at verses 6-8 where Jesus says,

"I have revealed you to those you gave me out of the world. They were yours and you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you, for I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you and they believed that you sent me."

Now, Jesus is speaking with the Father about his representation of the Father to the disciples. He is telling the Father that he understands what his mission was, and that was to reveal God to those that God the Father had given him. Jesus understood that he was to be the Word of God, the revelation of God to his followers. You see, God had revealed himself to the Jewish people in various ways in the Old Testament God spoke to the Jews through prophets. He had spokespeople. He had spokesmen.

He sent various ones to represent him like Isaiah and Moses and so on. He spoke through the prophets. He spoke through various [what are called] theophanies, different appearances like the burning bush where God appeared in fire. He spoke through angels in the Old Testament. But God never came personally. He never showed what he was like. He had another speaking for him and he came in shadows. And he came in types and in symbols and in

pictures. But he never stepped out of heaven personally and said; “Here I am” until Jesus. With Jesus, God said, “Here I am.” To see Jesus is to see God. To hear Jesus is to hear God Almighty.

In many ways I think that Jesus serves as a model for parents. Last week I mentioned two prayers that parents could pray, remembering that we start with ourselves in praying for our children. And the two prayers were these: 1) Help me to finish the work of parenting that you gave me to do; and 2) Help me to be holy so that my children will be holy.

There is a third prayer that a parent can pray for himself or herself and that is, “Help me to represent you, God, to my children.” It is absolutely the case that parents do represent God to their children, especially when their children are very young.

Dick Van Dyke, who a lot of you will remember, used to have his own TV show and was in Mary Poppins. Dick Van Dyke wrote a book about 20 years ago called *Faith, Hope and Hilarity, A Child's Eye-View of Religion* where he tells these little stories about children's perceptions of God. He has a lot of quotes from kids. Dick Van Dyke, for years, taught Sunday School in his Dutch Reformed church. He asked a group of four-year-olds, “What do you think God looks like?”

This one four-year-old boy, with total certainty said: “I know exactly what God looks like. He looks just like my daddy, only he's bigger.”

That four year old was summing up what psychologists and pastors will tell you. Parents really do represent God to their children – for good or bad. A child's relationship with God mimics their relationship with their parents.

One child said: “I know that God is just like my mommy.”

Dick Van Dyke said, “How is that God is like your mommy?”

This child said, “Well, God has a very big tummy and we all live inside of God's tummy.” Interesting.

One child unfortunately said, “God is very mean and he lives up on a big mountain and has a really big stick. And when people do something bad, he hits them over the head with a stick.”

Where did that child get that idea of God? God is just lying in wait for you to do something bad so that he can hit you over the head with a stick. Which are by the way a commonly held view is it not, adults? For some of you, isn't your first thought when tragedy strikes: “What did I do wrong that God is hitting me with this stick?” There has to be a reason for this cancer. This loss of my job. This miscarriage. I must have done something wrong and so God is hitting me with a stick.

You say: “Well, what should I be representing to my children about God?”

If I were to hang it on two things, I would say that we ought to be representing God's love on the one hand and God's righteousness on the other. If there are two attributes of God which sum up all the rest of God's attributes, it would be God's love and God's holiness and righteousness.

Let me spell it out in a bit more detail. What do I want my children to learn about God? That I might represent to them through the way that I relate and the way that I am?

I want my children to learn, first of all, that God is approachable. You know the wonderful thing about God in the New Testament is that God can be approached in safety because of what Christ has done for us. We are told in Romans 5: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we gained access, through faith, into this grace in which we now stand.”* We have access to God.

It is absolutely the case that so many parents represent a God who is utterly unapproachable. A God that you have to shrink from. What kind of message do you think is sent to children when a child has to walk on eggshells around mom or dad frequently because dad or mom is in one of their moods again and is frightening and is exploding in anger? Or has a hangover and we better not raise our voice in the house because mom or dad can't handle the noise? Mom or dad has a hair trigger temper; you just get out of the way.

Do you understand what it means to be an approachable parent? That your child is free and able to express a range of feelings to you without fear? That your child is able to come to you easily and talk to you without feeling unsafe or wary? That when your child has a need, you would be among the first people that your child would want to be around because you have made it easy to relate to you?

Parents, ask yourself honestly: Are you as approachable as you ought to be? Are you representing the easy access that God provides for us? Or are there lots of off-limits topics, off-limits issues? Don't talk to me about that. Some off-limits emotions. I can't handle my child's anger, or tears. Stop that. Don't cry. Or fears. You should not be afraid. You should never be angry. Or whatever it is. Are you as approachable as you need to be?

None of us are. And so we pray: O God, help me to represent you to my children.

Another thing that parents would represent to their children is the forgiving nature of God. God is after all said to be forgiving in the Bible. He is slow to anger. The God who is abounding in steadfast love and patience. God is said, in the Bible, to remove people's sins from them as far as the east is from the west. And the new covenant is all about God choosing to remember our sins no more.

You say: How can I as a parent represent God's forgiveness? By refusing to hold a child's sin over their heads. Our children will sin. They will at times, need to be disciplined. But once a matter is dealt with, then forgive the child and don't hold the sin over the child's head. Don't bring it up anymore. Don't remind the child over and over again of the thing that they have done wrong.

I remember when my son was little; he got in the car with the little girl next door. The car was on an incline and somehow they put the car in neutral. The car rolled down the hill and across the street and smashed into the car across the street. It bent in the neighbor's door and broke some taillights, I believe, in the little girl's parent's car. In any case, they were scared to death. I heard the crash and went outside to discover what had happened. Daniel was laying hands on the car to try to pray that it would be healed. And he came in the house and we

talked. I noticed, as I was inside, that Daniel kept walking over to the window looking out. He would look at that car that was damaged and burst into tears. He would walk away and then look outside again and cry again. He needed to know that he was forgiven, that this matter was taken care of. You know, children have very sensitive consciences. Parents, you have to represent the forgiveness of God.

The third thing is that you never use God as a threat to your kids. How foolish is the Christian parent who communicates to their child that if the child does something wrong or disobeys a parent that God is going to get them. You talk about distorting a person's view of God for life. I have talked with people in the 30's and 40's who still have this view of God. That because of the way they have goofed up or messed up that God has been lying in wait for them. So, what do you think they do? They run from God. They try to hide from God and stay away from church and anyplace that God is. They dislike discussions about God because they say, "I know what God is like. He is out to get me." Like that little boy said, he is the one on top of the mountain who has a stick and he is waiting for someone to do something wrong so that he can pound them on the head, rather than the God who sent his Son, Jesus, to hang on a cross for our sins. Never, never use God as a threat to your children.

And in terms of representing God, I am going to do a whole talk on this, but I do believe that God is not religious, but rather is fun to be around in the sense that if Jesus, indeed, represented God, that people liked being around Jesus and went to parties with him. In the most natural settings, he would talk about God not just in church but also at parties and when they were fishing and when he had the guys with him walking on the road. I want my kids to think that it is a really wonderful, exciting and good thing to be a Christian. It is not just a religious thing. And so we pray: O God, help me represent you well to my children.

You know, this business of being special because you are related was expressed really well by a little girl in Cincinnati. She was a member of the Taft family. You know, the political family that has been in Ohio and national politics for the last century. When little Martha Taft was in elementary school in Cincinnati, she was asked to introduce herself. And so she stood up in front of her second grade class and she said, "My name is Martha Bauer Taft. My great-grandfather was President of the United States. My grand-father was a United States Senator. My daddy is an Ambassador to Ireland. And I am a Brownie."

Your child may just be a Brownie, but boy if they can feel as special as that little girl, you have represented God well to them.

And then Jesus prays that God would protect his followers from the world. Verse 11:

"I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so the scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world so that

they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your Word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world anymore than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one."

Jesus is praying a prayer of protection for his disciples from the world. Now, you need to understand that the word "world" is used in two different senses in the Bible. The Bible describes the world in two different ways. On the one hand, the world is loved by God. It consists of men and women who God loves so much that he sent his Son to die for them. And that is what the scripture teaches in John 3:16, that most famous of verses. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life."* The world consists of people whom God loves and whom he sent his Son to die for.

But on the other hand, the world consists of a set of attitudes and practices that are in rebellion to God and that don't take account of God. The world is that sphere of things that is running away from God and has its back turned on God. The world has its fist up to God and says I have no time for you, God. I want to construct a universe in which you have no place. I want to put together a system of government that never mentions you. Thanks for life, thanks for the planet, now leave me alone and let me call the shots in my own life.

So whereas on the one hand, the Bible has a very positive view of the world and the sense that God loves every single person, so much so that he offers every person eternal life if only they would come to Jesus. On the other hand, the Bible has a very realistic view of the world in that the attitude that characterizes the world is a God-denying, God-defying attitude.

And you see this in verses like 1 John 2:15-16 where John writes: *"Do not love the world or worldly things. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love is not in him. For everything in the world, sinful desire, a craving for what is seen and pride in one's lifestyle derives not from the Father but from the world. And the world with its desire is passing away. But anyone who does God's will remains forever."*

And so, when Jesus is praying for protection from the world, he is using the world in the second negative sense. He is talking about all that characterizes the world in terms of its God-defying, God-denying contents.

Now, parents have great difficulty in knowing exactly how to allow their children to relate to the world. It is no wonder because Christians throughout history have had great trouble negotiating this tension that Jesus sets up in John 17:15 where Jesus says, *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world."*

Jesus is putting us on a high wire here. He is telling us on the one hand that our children and we ought to remain in this world and on the other hand that our mindset and our attitudes are not to be characterized by the mindset and attitudes of the society around us that denies God and defies God. The mindset and attitude that says, "Give me my life and give me blessing and give me health and give me wealth, but I really don't want to, in any way, be answerable to you

God or have to bow to you God or have to acknowledge you God or have to be judged by you God or have to put you as number one in my life. Give me, give me, give me, but then get out of my way. Because I want to live life without reference to God.” That is the mindset of the world.

I want to solve the problem of crime, but I don’t want to get religious about it and relate the problem of crime to people’s violation of God’s commandments. I want to solve the problem of our schools, but I don’t want to get religious about it or relate it to children’s need for God to fill the void in their lives. I want people to be ethical and honest, but I don’t want to get religious about it and I don’t want to base our ethics on whether people believe God will hold them accountable for their sin. I would like teenagers to be sexually responsible and I would like to deal with the mega-epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, but I would like to do by way of information and education without ever referencing the teenager’s thirst for God. Or suggest that God has anything to do with one’s sexual morality.

You see, the attitude of the world is that life can be fulfilling and significant and purposeful and ethical and live well and securely and all of that whether or not one has a relationship with God. It makes no difference. And so Jesus prays: Protect us from that mindset even while you’re around it all the time.

Now, Christian parents, like Christians throughout history, have great trouble negotiating the high wire of letting their kids to live in this world, among the people of the world, and yet not be drenched in the attitudes of the people around them. And what I see in Christian parents is that they tend to swing to one extreme or the other regarding their children’s relationship with the world. Either parents are uninvolved or underinvolved so that they let their children get soaked in the God-defying, God-denying attitudes of the world; their kids get thoroughly drenched with the value system of the world around them.

Or they are overly protective and they try to pull their children totally out of the world. Let’s erect the 50-foot walls around our homes. They don’t stay on the high wire of being in the world, but not of the world. Friends, it is no wonder that Christian parents have so much difficulty in negotiating this, as I said, Christians throughout history have had difficulty negotiating this.

Back in the early middle ages, Christians in order to protect themselves from the mindset of the world, this God-defying, God-denying attitude, they pulled away from the world. They escaped behind high monastery walls while other Christians became soaked in the world and allied themselves with the Roman government. They believed that Christianity would be spread at the point of a sword. This pendulum has swung back and forth throughout history.

The Amish and Mennonite communities believe that you need to pull away from the world in order to not be of the world and to protect your children. And on the other hand, you have the social action, political, revolutionary rhetoric of the 19th and 20th centuries where Christians have said, “No. The way to approach the world is to dive into the world.” The world will be Christianized through social action and political action and by taking over the levers of government. Back and forth, back and forth.

So, it is no wonder that parents are confused. How much exposure do I allow my children to have? I think there is a middle ground. I think parents need to watch themselves in terms of either no involvement; no discernment regarding the soaking influence of the culture on their children and an overly protective perspective, which I think, is equally dangerous. If a parent does not discern and protect their children and their influences, they are going to raise a child that looks exactly like non-Christian kids in the culture. They will be a child whose thoughts about sex and material and authority are no different than the God-defying, God-denying culture around them.

On the other hand, a parent that is overly protective is going to raise a child who will almost certainly kick away violently at some point. There comes a point when smother love is rejected by a child. I have seen too many good Christian parents who really do want the best for their kids, make the mistake of smother love, of being overly protective. And I have watched children, in an effort to establish some independence, some breathing room, just kick away and become more rebellious than parents that took a middle ground position regarding this tension with the world.

I've seen either extreme. Just having an "anything goes" attitude with my kids and somehow everything will turn out all right. I don't have to pay attention to the influences in their lives. They will do all right. The school will take care of my kids. They can watch anything and listen to anything and be exposed to anything and they will be okay. That is just foolishness.

And on the other hand, trying to lock your kids up away from the world: if we keep our kids away from other kids; if we deny our children television and we deny our children to exposure to these kinds of foods and these kinds of records, our kids will be safe. We will lock them up behind the monastery wall. I think that is equally dangerous.

I have noticed kids who are totally denied something. They become almost obsessed with it. Back in the 70's and late 80's there was a strong move to not let little boys play with guns. You know, if you let your boy have a toy gun, he would turn out violent. And I noticed that with so many of the kids who were not allowed to play with a gun, they turned everything into a gun. They became gun obsessed. They would get a little doll and it would be bang-bang with the doll. They would turn toilet paper tubes into guns. And they were completely obsessed with guns.

I think that there are no hard and fast rules in this area of how much of the world and what forms of the world do we permit in. There are no rules here. People are always asking the church or some person in authority: "Well, tell us, what is acceptable for our children to view. Tell us what is acceptable for our children to listen to in terms of music. Why don't you teach, Rich, on getting rid of your TV?"

I don't think that is the appropriate place for a pastor or a church to be. I don't think that the church ought to be adding rules to people's lives that are not found in the Bible. That is legalism. It is your responsibility to pray for wisdom and discernment. Pray that you might be kept from the extreme of over protectiveness, which will create rebellion, or the extreme of uninvolved naiveté.

Let me take the issue of television watching to boil this down and to illustrate for you parents how I try to negotiate the middle of the playing field as a parent. I am giving you, now, my counsel. This is not Bible. This is not the Word of God. This is my counsel to you as a fellow parent.

I do not, as a parent, believe that it is wise to remove television from my home. I believe in this culture that if you are to live in America, you are going to be creating in your child's life a greater appetite for TV by totally removing it, than you would by bringing it into your home and allowing it to be used wisely and with discernment. I have watched this over and over again in parents who attempt to steer clear of television by getting rid of the set, that their children are absolutely obsessed with TV much like the children I described before were obsessed with guns. There is something about the nature of human beings that being totally denied something creates a greater appetite for it than allowing it in healthy moderation.

On the other hand, parents, I don't think we swing to the other extreme of allowing our children to be exposed to anything all of the time. And so in our home, we have developed a few rules for TV watching. You need to develop your own rules. You may disagree with mine, that's okay, but you need a clear set of your own rules. In our home, the kids cannot watch TV before dinner, generally. The television is off all day long until dinner. They are not allowed to watch TV before their homework is done. Before their various chores are done. Before they do their lessons, whether it is music lessons or sports or whatever. So there are times that we allow television and there are times when we don't allow television.

In order to limit TV viewing and because I do believe there are more constructive things to do with one's time than watch television, we don't allow the kids to have a TV in their rooms. Now they would like one, but we just won't have it because we know that will simply increase the number of hours before the set.

And then, of course, we have rules regarding what the kids are permitted to watch. And so we try to skate that middle line of allowing television, and understanding it as entertainment and so on, but we simply won't have trash pouring over the airwaves into our homes. Now, what we consider trash and what you consider trash may be different. But that is the parental role, to discern that, not everything though is okay and not everything is fit for your child to consume. It is inappropriate for you to have a cavalier attitude: Ah, it really doesn't matter. They can be exposed to violence all day long and not be coarsened or hardened. Or they can be exposed to explicit sex and not be coarsened or hardened in their perspectives on sex.

And so we have a rule on what they are permitted to watch. And there are lots of shows that we will not allow in our family.

Now I just use this first illustration, T.Verse – but you, parent, need to use discernment regarding all the other influences in your kids' lives: their schooling, their friends, and their dress. Try to avoid the extremes with your rules. Avoid anything goes and avoid the over-protective-smother love. Pray for discernment and a reasonable set of rules.

Of course, you should know what the major protection is from worldliness. It is not "Thou shalt nots" and restrictions and rules. It is being filled with the love of God. We want to send our children out into the world filled up with God.

Let me give you a simple illustration. If you take a dried out sponge and throw it in a bucket of dirty water, that dried out sponge will absorb the dirty water from the bucket into every pore. It will be thoroughly filled with filth.

But if you take that sponge and soak it in olive oil or some kind of vegetable oil, just thoroughly soak the sponge in oil and then throw the sponge into the same bucket of dirty water, none of that water will be pulled into the sponge. The major protection for our children and for us from worldliness is to be filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit." That is the protection.

In many Christian families where there are a lot of "Thou shalt nots" and lots of rules about the world, the children have not been filled with anything better. They have never tasted and seen that the Lord is good. They have never enjoyed the presence of the Lord. They have never had a dramatic encounter with the Holy Spirit or seen his power at work physically to change people. Mom and dad don't seem to enjoy their relationship with God very much; God doesn't thrill mom and dad. When they have free time, mom and dad just watch more television or accumulate more stuff. Mom and dad clearly communicate that pleasure in life is found in the world. And yet they say to me, "Don't do this and don't do that."

But if mom and dad enjoy the Lord, find pleasure in talking about God, find God to be wonderful and absorbing, then maybe children will be filled with the Lord as well. You see, we fill our kids with something better than the world. Jesus says in verse 17: *"Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth."* Our kids would be filled up with the word of God. Our kids would be filled up with the Spirit of God. Our kids would be filled up with the worship of God. There is something better going on in our homes than in the world. And so we pray for our children's relationship with the world.

And then real quick, I want to finish with this. We pray for our children's relationship with their brothers and sisters. And this is particularly applicable to you parents who have more than one child. Verses 20-23: *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one even as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they also may be in us so that the world will believe that you did send me. And the glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity, and that the world may know that you sent me and do love me, even as you did love me."*

Pray for the unity of our kids. You know if there were one thing that concerns most mothers almost above everything else, it would be the fact that their kids fight with each other. Over and over again, when mothers are surveyed, "What is it that you would like to fix in your home?" it is "To get my kids to stop fighting so much with each other."

And so, in our prayers for our children we are not only praying about their relationship with the world, we are praying about their relationship with each other. You say, “Why do my kids fight with each other so much?”

Understand that sibling rivalry was one of the first consequences of the fall of man. What do we see occurring immediately after the story of Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden and their removal from Eden? We read the story of Cain and Abel. And throughout Genesis, what we see is this competition and comparison of brother and brother. We see sibling rivalry from the beginning.

I do not believe, parents, that you can eliminate all of the rivalry and natural competition between your children. That is something that is inherent in their nature. They will compete. And to some degree, they will fight.

But whereas I don’t think you can eliminate all the competition, I do believe that parents you either increase that competition and increase that fighting or you can by your actions and your prayers dial it down. If children are fighting in an undue degree, if they are hitting each other regularly, if there is lots of name calling, if home is just a continual battle ground and parents are at their wits end about how to control their kids, you know what I would suggest? That parents first look at their own behavior and how they are relating to their children, rather than address their children first.

You know, the scriptures have so many practical lessons for us on mundane matters like sibling rivalry and how we can deal with them. Back in Genesis God tells us how parents’ behavior can increase this natural competition and rivalry between siblings. It is parental favoritism and an inequality of treatment.

In Genesis 25 we read that in Isaac and Rebekah’s home there was continual fighting between their two sons, Jacob and Esau. Why was there such intense rivalry—this continual battle between Jacob and Esau? Because it says in Genesis 25:28 that Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Whenever parents play favorites, whenever parents give a blessing to one child and withhold blessing from the others, there will be more intense rivalry. If your kids are at each other’s throats continually, then parents I would pray about whether you are in any way giving a blessing to one of the children and withholding it from another.

Do we not see that in the story of Jacob’s treatment of his twelve sons? He gives a special coat to his son, Joseph. Treats Joseph as the favorite, which intensified the hatred and jealousy of Joseph’s brothers to the point that they want to kill Joseph. And if you are taking notes and want to follow up on that story, take a look at Genesis 37. It says Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons in Genesis 37:3 because he had been born to him in his old age. And he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of the others, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Parents, you say, “Ah, I would never do that. I love my children equally.”

And yet you can set your children up for rivalry by praising one of your children continually for a certain attribute and never praising your other children for the same attribute. “O, Johnny is so smart. Look at Johnny’s papers.

Johnny is so wonderful. Johnny does so well in school.” What do you think Johnny’s little brother, Billy, feels like when he hears Johnny praised for his intelligence continually?

Most children, given their natural insecurity, will say, “I am not even going to try to compete in that area.” Unless Billy is incredibly resilient and has a competitive fire in him and says, “Well, if Johnny did this, I am going to beat him at it.” He then throws himself into the task either athletically or academically or in music. Unless that child is incredibly resilient and there are a few of those, most children will just give up.

You wonder why a younger child doesn’t want to get involved in school like one of the older children do? It could be temperament. But it could be there is an unequal amount of praise. You so heap up praise on one of your older children for their intelligence, for their schoolwork, in the hearing of their younger sibling, the younger sibling has said, “I know what I am. I am just a dummy.” They have given up.

I would be very careful about praising a child’s looks, which is all-important in this culture, without praising your other children. I would be very careful about praising a child’s academics without praising your other children. Catch all of your children doing something well and bless that.

You know, parents, be wise. Beauty is the most prized quality for girls in America. Be careful about what you say to your daughters, particularly if you have two daughters, regarding their looks. If you praise one, make sure you praise the other.

And if beauty is the most prized quality for girls in America, it still is, then athletics is the most prized quality for little boys in America. And I want you to hear how deeply wounded a child can be by being beaten athletically by his brother.

I want to read a note that was written by a nine year old after his eight year old brother beat him in a race. This is what the nine-year-old brother wrote to his eight-year-old brother. He says this:

“Dear Jim, I am the greatest and you are the baddest. I can beat everybody in a race and you can’t beat anybody in a race. I am the smartest and you are the dumbest. I am the best sports player and you are the baddest sports player. You are also a hog and I can beat anybody up and that is the truth and that is the end of the story. Yours truly, Richard.”

Do you understand this child’s motivation? Here is a child who was stung and humiliated by being beaten by his younger brother. And so he came home and he went to war. And he is going to probably take the next number of weeks to make sure that his younger brother pays for beating him in that race.

And in steering this middle ground and cutting through sibling rivalry, we have certain rules in our home. Again, this is Rich’s rules. This is not the Word of God. But in our home we will not allow our children to hit each other. They may not hit one another. And we will not permit in our hearing put downs, personal attacks on the other sibling. They may not use names. Around our dinner table, we require them to respect each other and not interrupt, to listen when the other sibling is talking.

There are simple rules that you can lay down in your home and say, "This is the way it will be in this home. You may not hit. You may not call names. You may not use each other's stuff or property without asking permission first. You simply may not."

And parents who will step in and deal with this from an early age, will find that the tone of their home has more peace in it than when we just allow anything to go and a free for all, *Lord of the Flies*, kind of existence.

Finally, Jesus prays for the disciple's relationship with God. Verses 24-26: *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world doesn't know you, I know you and they know you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I, myself, may be in them."*

Jesus prays for the disciples' relationship with God and we parents, we pray for our children's relationship with the Lord. We pray that when they die, verse 24 would be fulfilled in their lives. That they would be where Jesus is. They would be with Jesus in heaven and that the glory that Jesus has would be shared with them. That they, too, would be glorified. They would look like the Savior.

And we also pray that the love that God the Father has for his Son, Jesus, would fill our children's lives that they would love Jesus. Verse 26 is Pastor Jack Deere's life verse: the love that the Father has for Jesus would be in himself. That is what we pray.

I want to finish up with a little acronym a lot of parents don't know. What does it mean for my child to love God? To love Jesus? What does it mean? I would like to use the acronym "Lord". When you teach your children to love God, it means L-O-R-D. That Jesus becomes their Lord. A person who loves the Lord will, first of all:

L - Love the things that Jesus loves. Psalm 119:97 says, *"Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day."* A child who loves God will love what God loves. They will love God's Word in a growing way. They will love righteousness. They will love doing what is right. They will love sharing their faith. They will love the poor. They will love other Christians. We love what God loves. That is part of what it means to love Jesus.

O – They will obey. If you love Jesus, you will obey his commandments. You know, it is so easy to lift our hands in worship and express our love for God. It is so easy to say, "O, how I love him." But John wrote, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments aren't burdensome." 1 John 5:3. He also said, *"He who says, 'I know him' and doesn't keep his commandments is a liar."* Jesus himself said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments."* John 14:15. *"He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*

A child who is trained to love God will obey God's commandments. They will be trained to not lie. They will be trained to not steal. They will be trained to

handle money ethically. They will be trained to treat people kindly and to love others. They will obey the commandments. To use the name of Jesus correctly. To honor the Sabbath. To obey and honor their father and their mother. O – obey.

R – A person who loves God will want to have a relationship with God. And that means spending time with God. Getting together with God and getting together with God's people will become an increasing passion in your child's life. The Psalmist says, *"As the deer longs for water, Lord, my soul longs for you. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* Psalm 42.

And a little later, he wrote: *"O God, you are my God. Early will I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh longs for you as in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory because your loving kindness is better than life. My lips shall praise you. Thus will I bless you while you live. I will lift up my hands to your name."*

A person who loves God will want to spend time with God and with God's people. You know, Scott Peck talks about the connection of time and love in one of his books. He says, "When we love something it is of value to us and when something is of value to us, we spend time with it." Time enjoying it and time taking care of it. Watch a teenager in love with their car and you note the time that they spend admiring it and polishing it, repairing it, tuning it, vacuuming it.

Or an older person with a beloved rose garden and the time they spend pruning and mulching and fertilizing and studying. When we love something, we spend time with it. Parents who love their children spend time with their kids. And children who love God want to spend time with God.

And, finally, D. L-O-R-D.

D – A child who loves God is taught to despise what God despises. To love the Lord means you hate what God hates. Psalm 97:10 says, *"You who love the Lord, hate evil."*

Proverbs 8:13 says, *"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."*

Roman's 12:9 says, *"Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good."*

If you love the Lord, you hate what he hates. And so we are praying for our children to have instilled in them a hatred of everything that God hates. God hates drugs. God hates sexual immorality. God hates Satan and every thing associated with Satan. So, kids, you should hate that too.

What you are watching on television or being exposed to in the media. I know it is put in an alluring, "isn't this fun, isn't this attractive" package, but God hates it and we want you to hate it also because that is what it means to love God as your Lord.

Conclusion.