

Parenting 101

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Parenthood may be the most responsible job anyone will ever give you with the least training beforehand. All of a sudden, you go from not having a human life to look after, to having one, and the jump feels pretty enormous.

Let's talk about some helpful ways to approach parenting found in the Bible. As many of you know, Leanne and I are blessed with four children and one son-in-law. Our kids are aged 25 down to 16.

Two have left home, and one is married. Parenting for us has been an enormous blessing, and without doubt, the greatest accomplishment of our lives. It's also been the most demanding by a mile, I would say.

Parenting is a thrill ride, filled with incredible highs and earth-shattering lows. I'll raise that a bit. You look into a child's eyes when they're born, and that little life is filled with unlimited potential.

But as the days and the weeks and the months and years go by, you start to realise they're the same as every kid. They have problems and limitations.

And though there is unlimited potential, they will have their own limitations and health issues and varied interests that aren't the same as yours as mom and dad. And you've got to work through all that.

They're unique, with unique advantages in life and unique disadvantages.

What I really like about the Bible is that when you look at it as a whole, you really get the impression that it presents a realistic portrayal of parenting, filled with both highs and lows.

So let's just have a think about some of the highs and lows you find in the Bible. Genesis 4, verse 1 to 2. There's a high.

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man. Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

A high, a high. Genesis 4, 8, you get a low. It's a few verses later.

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, Let's go out to the field. While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. The highs and lows of parenting.

A high, Proverbs 10. The Proverbs of Solomon. Wise children bring joy to their father.

The lows, 2 Samuel 18.33. The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said, Oh, my son Absalom, my son Absalom, Absalom, if only I had died instead of you, Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. Low. High, Proverbs 17, verse 6.

Children's children are a crown to the age, and parents are the pride of their children. Low, 1 Samuel 2, 22.

Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Highs and lows. High, Proverbs 29.

A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father. Low, Proverbs 17, 25. Foolish children bring grief to their father, and bitterness to the mother who bore them.

Back to High, Psalm 127, Verse 3. Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Judges 11, 35 gives us a low.

When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, Oh my daughter, you have brought me down, and I am devastated. Parenting is like a thrill ride, filled with highs and lows.

So the question today is, what do you hold on to, to make it through successfully? Here are some thoughts. Number one, hold on to the goal.

Hold on to the goal. Genesis 1, 28. God blessed them, Adam and Eve, and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.

Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. When God created man and woman in His image and said to them, Go for your life and be fruitful, He didn't leave it there.

He said, Have kids who can subdue and rule over the earth. God was saying to the first man and woman, I've made you to be the healthy incubators from which people will come who can rule over what I have made.

God made Adam and Eve to produce children who would be difference makers. People who could carry responsibility. This is the first goal of parenting.

We can't lose it. It's the goal, raising children who know God and know how to carry the responsibilities that God has given them. Is there an amen?

Every parent listening to this talk has been given the awesome responsibility to raise difference makers. You can't be a difference maker without knowing the one who makes the difference.

I know that sounds a little bit cheesy, but it's true, you can't be a difference maker without knowing the one who makes the difference yourself. There are two key things to do to produce difference makers. Number one, point your children to God.

As parents, we are the single biggest influence in our children's lives, certainly up until a certain age in their teenage years. They will get influenced by all sorts of people along the way, coaches, teachers, friends.

But nothing comes close to the power we have as parents to influence the direction of our kids, either towards God or away from God. Just sit in that for a moment. Are you pointing them to God or away?

Maybe you've got very little kids. When you look at them and they're sitting, lying in their bed, and they're going to sleep, and you come and check on them, just think, in your life, are you going to point them to God or away?

Pointing them to God necessitates you and I knowing God. This is a challenge because we're all only human. And sometimes we struggle in our own spiritual walk.

Often we do. I would encourage you to create a home where discussion about each other's spiritual walk is normal. Our kids need to know that mom and dad find the faith journey challenging.

It's normal. The bottom line is, if we're going to point our kids to God, we need to know him ourselves.

So let me ask you, are your current habits, and let's face it, you might have kids already and life is busy, are your current habits sustaining your relationship with God or diminishing it? Change one thing today.

It might make a really big difference. We must point our kids towards God. There is grace available for all of us who feel like we failed in this regard.

But there's no time like the present. Change a habit today that will move the balance of your life towards pointing your kids to God in a better way. The second thing to do is pray.

Pray that your children will go to God. As children grow older and become adults, a lot of things won't matter that much anymore. But what does matter is whether you see in them the values of a difference maker.

Faithful love, godly standards, an honourable name, contributions to the world around them. Prayer is real. I know many of us listening to this know this, but prayer works.

It moves God and God changes people. We need to pray for our kids. I was talking to my brother some years ago at the time.

He was a pastor at a church on the Central Coast. He said he couldn't sleep that week when he was talking to me. He said a few days before, it was around 3am, and he felt like God was saying to him to get up and go down to the church to pray.

As I said, he was a pastor. A couple of minutes drive away from where his church was. He wasn't that keen to get out of bed, but he couldn't get back to sleep, so he got out of bed in obedience.

He walked around the car park praying for the needs of the church in the middle of the morning, early in the morning. And then all of a sudden, he noticed there were some people hiding in the bushes in the middle of the night.

So he got into the church, turned the lights on, and waited there for a while. And then he decided after a while to go home. But he left the lights on to put off any would-be intruders.

The next day, he happens to be talking to an old prayer warrior of the church who tells him that the night before, she had been woken up by the Lord and prompted to pray. She felt sure that someone was going to break in and vandalise the church.

Her prayer at 3 o'clock the night that Murray had been down to the church was, Lord, would you send an angel to look after the church? Send down an angel. Now, I wouldn't call my brother an angel, but I'd call that an answer to prayer, wouldn't you?

Are you praying for your kids? Hold on to the goal. They need to know God.

And the only way they can know God is by faith in Jesus Christ, entering a relationship with God through Him. God answers prayer. He answers the prayers of persistent parents.

Don't stop praying for your kids to know God. Now, what if your kids are already grown up and currently don't follow Jesus? Well, you already know the answer to what you're meant to do.

Keep pointing them to God. That's the goal. Do it with your own life, the way you carry yourself, the way you show them what it is to follow Jesus, and keep praying that Jesus would seek and save them.

We point and we pray to see our kids turn into difference makers in our world. Hold on to the goal, and secondly, hold on to your time. The number one complaint of teenagers is that their parents don't spend enough time with them.

Of course, teenagers make out as though they don't want to have anything to do with us, but deep down they do.

Ephesians 5, 15-16 says, Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

You know, if the Apostle Paul was writing that today, he might have written, Make the most of your time, because the days are fast. They're over before you know it. One minute your kids are little, the next minute they're grown up.

If your kids haven't grown up yet, that is absolutely true, what I just said. I reckon it's when your kids get to, your oldest kid gets to primary school, it's like, boom, they have finished school and they're out in the world as an adult.

And it's very common for people to say that. It feels like it takes forever to get to the end of, for your kids to get to the end of primary school, and as soon as they go to high school, boom, it's over.

It is very difficult to regain what is lost if you squander the first 12 years of your children's lives. Do not see them as a hindrance to your career and lifestyle dreams. That is not how you hit it out of the park as a parent.

As parents, we are all equal on one thing. We all have the same amount of hours in each day. How we manage or hold on to our time will be a key deciding factor in what type of children we raise.

So how do I manage my time as a parent? How do you manage your time as a parent? Are you reactive or proactive?

Reactive parenting always experiences the tyranny of the urgent. This type of parent is always at the mercy of the program. Such and such must be done now.

My child will be left behind if they don't excel at this or that extracurricular activity. You might be surprised what your kids actually need to become healthy, fruitful human beings. Reactive parenting always feels a little out of control.

Busyness sweeps away the days. Stop and reflect on what is making you busy. Proactive time management refuses to leave the best things in life to chance.

Can I say that again? Proactive parenting, proactive time management refuses to leave the best things in life to chance. Proactive parenting takes the time to schedule in advance what is important in a year.

If you ever scheduled something on your kid's birthday, only discover later, uh-oh, that's their birthday. I've certainly done that before, but it's better not to. Get your calendar out and schedule the important dates that matter to your kids.

Get them in the diary. And this is something probably you haven't done, but ask yourself what each child needs throughout the year. And plan how you're going to fill those needs.

Ask yourself what each child needs to see in you as a parent in that year. To hear from you as their parent. To receive from you as their parent.

To experience as your child. You're their parents. What do they need to experience as your child?

Let's imagine you do this for your imaginary, I don't know if you have one, but imaginary 13 year old son. And you are the dad. And of course this can work for the mom just as well.

So he needs to see dad loving mom. How is that going to happen? He needs to see dad's character.

He needs to see dad's heart. He needs to hear, I love you son. He needs to hear, I'm proud of you son.

He needs to hear, you know, you're good at... He needs to receive affirming encouragement. He needs to receive life instruction.

He needs to receive Jesus in his heart. He needs to experience special one-on-one times. Certain family holidays.

Certain manhood experiences with his dad. Think about this stuff. Put it in a diary.

Put it in a calendar. And be proactive. What do they need in this season, in this period of their life?

And this can be a really helpful way of being proactive in our parenting. So hold on to the goal. Secondly, hold on to your time.

And thirdly, hold on to your responsibilities. Psalm 78 verse 72 says, And David shepherded them with integrity of heart. With skillful hands he led them.

Integrity of heart. David was the leader of the people of Israel. And we have been called to lead our families as parents.

Hold on to your responsibilities by God's grace, by shepherding with integrity of heart. Shepherding with integrity really means parenting as a whole person, not a fractured person.

Integrity comes from integer, which is a whole number, not a fraction. When it says that David shepherded with integrity of heart, it means he shepherded without hypocrisy. He was the same person wherever you found him in his life.

Now does that mean he was without sin? No way, it's David. Think about the stories of David.

It's not hard to see where David failed, but Scripture says that it wasn't the general norm of his life.

And when he failed, and it was pointed out to him, and granted he did need it pointed out to him sometimes, he repented and confessed his sin and owned it.

And in doing so, set an example of integrity, albeit from a flawed human being, for his family. And certainly for us, as we look at him reading our Bibles. The work of the Spirit of God in our lives is about character transformation.

That is, the progressive conformity of the Christian to the likeness of Jesus. As parents, we can't lead our kids with integrity of heart, without submitting ourselves to the rigor of character transformation towards Christ-likeness ourselves.

This involves modeling how to respond to failure. I have found in my life that it has been a very powerful thing to go to my kids, no matter what age, and say sorry as their dad when I have failed them.

I know how much potential I have to mess them up inside by how I treat them. And the behavior I model to them. And I don't want to damage them inadvertently by unhelpful responses at times when I might not be the best version of myself.

I need to own that stuff. The best we can do sometimes is just run to the opportunity of owning failure and apologizing and using words to reinforce what is true about your kids as you all grow on the journey of following Jesus as a family.

Sometimes our actions put our kids down or make them feel certain things that we never intended for them to feel. But we just need to clarify who they are in our eyes and build them up with our words. Shepherding with integrity is worth it.

But it's tough. You've got to take parenting seriously to shepherd with integrity. And I think there's a massive thing about the importance of words and how we see our own words.

If words matter to us, then our kids will look to our words and respect our words. If we show that our words don't matter to us, it's very hard for the kids to respect our words. So, in all of this, the power of words plays a massive part as well.

The second aspect of the psalm, a few verses that I quoted regarding parenting, is that David shepherded with skillful hands. Let me read it again. David shepherded with the integrity of heart.

With skillful hands, he led them. We have skillful hands as parents when we can define a game plan for parenting. When we know how to change our parenting style in the right seasons of our child's life, our children's lives.

From coaching in their pre-teen years to coaching through later teen years, and then on to more of a consultant role in their adult lives. We have skillful hands and a game plan when we know the unique personalities of our children.

When we've taken the time to understand their personality in detail so we can adjust accordingly. When we know they're bent, I find that word is super important. What is their bent?

And have I been able to accept their bent and encourage their bent? Just the way they are. We have skillful hands as parents when we appreciate who they are and how birth order affects every child.

Firstborns are typically achievers, aren't they? With high expectations of themselves and others, they're reliable, typically. Often fearful of new situations.

Middleborns, especially of the same sex as the firstborn, tend to look for ways to define themselves against the first. They're often very competitive, independent, even aggressive, sometimes even rebellious, like the prodigal son.

Lastborns, well, often can get away with murder, let's face it. They're the life of the party. They're fun, outgoing, demanding.

They can be manipulative. They often draw others in to help them accomplish things because that's how they grew up. Skillful parenting has skill in understanding birth order.

We have skill when we learn to dream with our kids. I think this is a huge part of it.

When we understand their bent and their personality type and their experiences in life and their birth order and their spiritual gifts, we're better able to dream with them about what God may want to do with their lives.

And this is the most amazing part of being a parent and having invested in their younger years so that when it comes to their older years, they're actually interested in what you think.

This is something that Leanne, my wife and I have spent a lot of time investing in. Over 10 years ago, we decided to home school our kids, and Leanne took the big part of doing that for four kids.

But as a dad, I was working full time, and I played a role in it too, but she carried a massive part. That idea, that decision to home school was one of the most positive life-impacting decisions we could have made.

And one of the benefits for us in home schooling was that we just got to know our kids really well.

So that when it came time for them to become adults, which they nearly all are now, we were able to process their options from a place of intimate knowledge of their personality and strengths and weaknesses.

I cannot encourage you strongly enough to take seriously getting to know the uniqueness of your kids so that when it comes time to process the big decisions of early adult life, you've got a voice to help them.

In contrast, I've seen absent parents turn up when their kids are becoming adults, who suddenly get excited about having input, only to find their kids are pretty unreceptive.

Build a platform to parent well by getting to know your kids over the long haul. Hold on to the goal. Hold on to your time.

Hold on to your responsibilities. And finally, hold on to your spouse. I know many of us have lost our spouse through death and others through divorce.

But it doesn't change what I'm saying. I want to encourage you. Do everything you can as a parent to hold on to your spouse.

It's generally accepted that two of the most stressful times of parenting are when couples have very small kids, and often more than one, and when couples have teenage kids with all of the associated new stresses that come with that stage of life.

At these times, when time is being squeezed so tight, one partner can become resentful of the other. And resentment builds to bitterness. And bitterness is really unhelpful if you want to hold on to your spouse.

A lot of things are being done for the kids at these times of stress in parenting, but little can be happening for each other. The focus is all about the kids, especially if you have a special needs kid.

I mean, it's just so hard for mom and dad to spend adequate time together. Husbands and wives need to invest time in their own relationships for the sake of their kids. And guess what?

I know. I'm not telling you anything new. But are you investing?

Are you investing the time? It's hard to do if finances are tight. Leanne and I found that in our life.

It just felt like, gee, sort of hard to get away. And if you don't have babysitters and all that. But yeah, let's just highlight the fact that our kids benefit when our marriages are strong.

You know, nothing could be more helpful for our kids growing up than to have a husband and wife who love each other. You need to get away without your kids for your kids. Is there an amen in the house?

I heard someone say once that they had finally organized to get away from their teenage kids for a full break, about four days. And they were on the beach. The water was lapping against their feet.

They're sipping some drinks and eating nibblies, and the husband says to his wife, sweetheart, this is so good for the kids. And he was right.

It's been shown without a doubt that the most important aspect of an adult's development is their EQ more than their IQ.

You don't need the highest IQ, intelligence quotient, to have a fulfilling life, but you do need a healthy EQ, emotional quotient. The ability to cope with the emotions involved in relationships.

EQ comes largely from parents loving one another in front of their kids. The greatest gift that we can give to our kids is to love our spouse, really. Hold on to your spouse.

Scripture says, do not embitter them. Do not treat them harshly. From the moment we hear the words, it's a boy or it's a girl, these little people quickly consume most of our time.

There will be sleepless nights and fevers, nappies and story times, lost teeth and soccer, athletics, carnivals and dance recitals, netball, braces, birthdays and spiritual discussions.

There will be broken bones and camping trips, school plays, driving lessons, science projects, vacations, formals and Friday night heroics. There will be dates, tears, laughter, confrontations and graduations, and leaving home.

Before you can imagine it, and many of you have walked through this a long time ago, I know, the light is turned off in their rooms and they are off. The question is with what? Hopefully pointed to God.

Hopefully with great memories dancing in their heads of time spent with you. Hopefully with big dreams to pursue. Hopefully with a clear image of what it means to live with a man or a woman for a lifetime.

May God bless you as you continue in the enormous privilege of parenting. Amen.