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Biblical Parenting: What Every Christian Parent Needs to Know

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Series: Preach
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

BIG IDEA – PARENTING IS BOTH IMPORTANT AND IMPOSSIBLE

Well, 936 weeks. If you are a parent, that is how long you have from the time your child is born until they grow up, they're 18, they graduate, and they move out of the house, hopefully to never return. You see, here's what we know. We know that parenting is a deeply personal topic. Parenting is a sensitive topic. As Pastor Kyle loves to say, there's no talking with people about their kids.

Well, today, as you know, is Child Dedication Sunday, so I thought to myself, "This might be the best Sunday possible to talk with people about their kids." So, I'm just going to take one for the team, and we're going for it. Here at Two Cities, you need to know that we love parents, and we believe here that parenting is extremely important.

Unfortunately, in our culture today, so many people view children not as a blessing but as a burden. Did you know that last year they came out with the statistics and found that the fertility rate in the United States is lower than it has ever been? Did you know that right now there are more houses with dogs than with children in the US?

In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, I was going through the drive-through at Starbucks, and I ordered a coffee, and I ordered some pup cups for my kids. If you don't know this, these pup cups are little cups with whipped cream that are free. They used to be for dogs, but they've normalized giving them to children.

So, I order these pup cups, and I pull up to the drive-through window. The Starbucks worker leans out and hands me the pup cups. Then she looks into my van, sees my children, and says, "Oh man. I was hoping I would see a puppy." When she said that to

me, do you know what I thought to myself? "There is no way someone would ever say that to me at Chick-fil-A. This is what I get for going to Starbucks."

You see, the biblical worldview is that parenting is extremely important. We value children. So, we need to start by defining parenting. What is parenting? Well, parenting is not just behavior modification, although that's part of it. Parenting is not commanding and controlling your children. Parenting is simple: it is a temporary trust from God for the discipleship of children. If you are a parent, you are not an owner of your child; you are a temporary steward of your child.

As parents, we don't just want our kids to survive until they're 18. We want our kids to be following Jesus and helping others find and follow Jesus when they turn 18. So, today, whether you're here, down in Lexington, at our Multiply Campus, or at Butner, grab your Bibles and flip to Deuteronomy, chapter 6. This is one of the most well-known passages in all of Scripture on parenting.

What we're going to see here is that Moses is giving his farewell sermon to the people of Israel. Moses is going to talk to them. This is his last message before he dies and before Joshua leads the people to the Promised Land. God is going to speak to the people of Israel through Moses.

Here's the big idea of what we're going to see today: *parenting is both important and impossible.* When Pastor Adam Griffin was here just a few months ago in March for our parenting conference, he said, "Parenting is important enough to matter, but it is difficult enough to humble you."

I've thought a lot about parenting over the last few weeks, knowing that I was going to have to talk about this. My wife Olivia and I have four kids, so our lives are full of Goldfish and pouches and temper tantrums over Band-Aids and nap times and bedtimes and all this stuff.

Even though I knew I was going to have to stand up here and talk about parenting, it was almost as if the Lord was reminding me on a daily basis recently, "Parenting is pretty hard, isn't it?" Even just yesterday, we were outside with some friends with all of our kids there, and my 3-year-old, Shepherd, found a pear tree. He had a pear in his hand from one of these trees, and he was walking around as if he was about to throw it at one of our friends.

I'm not making this up. I walked up to Shepherd. I got on his level. I said, "Shepherd, I'm preaching on parenting tomorrow. Don't let me down here. Do not throw that pear." Shepherd looked at me for a second, took the pear, and threw it up in the air. I was like,

"I should have preached on something else, I guess." Parenting is both important and impossible.

So, know that as I talk about many of these things, even in my own life, some of these things are actual, and some of these things are aspirational. Parenting is one of those things that's very easy in theory but much more difficult in practice, and we need help. Thankfully, God has something to say about parenting. So, let's look to see what he has to say.

We're going to be in chapter 6, verse 1. This passage is referred to as the *Shema*, based on its first Hebrew word, which translates to *hear*. Verse 4 says, ***"Hear, O Israel…"*** Moses says, "Listen to what I have to say." He says, ***"The LORD our God, the LORD is one."*** Now, what Moses says here is that, as parents, you should be exclusively devoted to the one true God. There are no other gods.

Verse 5: ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."*** In the Gospels, Jesus describes this commandment from Moses as the greatest commandment. What's really interesting here is that before Moses talks to the adults about parenting, he talks to them about their affections. Did you notice that?

Basically, what Moses says is if you want your kids to follow Jesus, guess what step one is: *you* need to follow Jesus. By the way, if you're here, and you are not a parent or not yet a parent, just know that this message is for you, because we parents need your help. We need a lot of men and women in the life of the church who can walk alongside our kids, encourage them, challenge them, and disciple them. We need your help.

Moses is talking to the people of Israel about the value of *self-leadership*. This is step one to parenting: leading yourself well. Most of your leadership energy, as an adult, needs to be given toward leading yourself spiritually. So, I want to give you three *C*'s to cultivate if you want to lead yourself well.

First, cultivate your *communion with Christ*. Moses says in verse 5, ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*** You see, every environment we have here in the life of this church is designed to help all of us do this. One of the reasons we say, "If you're in town, would you be in church?" is because this Sunday gathering is designed to do a lot of things. One of the things it's designed to do is to help all of us together love God more.

Your Community Group, in many ways, is designed to help you love God more. Everything from our Multiply Nights to the Heights Conference to DNA Groups to mission trips… These things should lead to you loving God more. The principle is you cannot lead

someone to a place that you have never been. You cannot pass on, as a parent, what you don't possess. So, we have to constantly be figuring out how to stir up our own personal affections for Jesus.

The second thing to prioritize is your *character*. Here's the question for character. You've heard it. Is private you the same as public you? Is private Dad the same as public Dad? Does Dad talk to Mom in front of the friends the same way he talks to Mom when it's just us in the house? Is Dad just as locked in and attentive at home as he is when he's in the workplace?

The character question is…*Is private you the same as public you?* But here's what the *real* question is…*Is the gap between private you and public you shrinking or getting bigger over time?* Here's the thing. Whenever someone has a moral failure and you talk to them afterward about how it happened, it's the same story every time. What was happening was that, over time, the gap between private them and public them was getting bigger.

This is why we Christians need to value confession. We have to value repentance. We have to value accountability. We have to value telling the truth in our circles of accountability. This is how we cultivate our character, because your kids are going to learn a lot more from your example than they will from your explanations. So, we have to cultivate our character.

The third thing to prioritize is your *calendar*. You see, there are two things Satan will try to attack more than anything else. He will try to attack the family, and he will try to attack the church. I've given this a lot of thought, and I think the way this often practically happens is that Satan will try to attack families by leading them to not prioritize the church or the family with their calendars.

I wonder, if Moses starts this passage telling us to love God, if an objective, non-biased person were to look at your family calendar, what would they say you love the most? Now, to encourage some of you parents, so many of you do an incredible job at this. You are serving faithfully. Your calendar reflects a value for the church and the family.

You are serving as your children's unpaid Uber drivers to student ministry. You are bringing them to church. You're doing things like reorganizing vacations so your kids can go to camp this summer, so they can go on mission trips. So, many of you need to be encouraged. But we have to prioritize the calendar. So, I want to talk about prioritizing the calendar with both the church and the family.

Let's talk about the church first. This is one of the most common things people will say when they're talking about why they don't make it to church. You've heard it. "We're just too busy." Here's what that means. When you say, "We're just too busy to make it to

church," here's what you're really saying: "Other things are more important than the church."

Sports are more important. Going on a weekend trip once or twice per month is more important. Getting a little bit of extra sleep or having more time to do things around the house is more important than the church. I'm telling you, if you find a lump somewhere in your armpit or on your neck, or whatever, and you're worried about that lump, and you get an appointment scheduled to have a biopsy done, you're not going to miss that appointment. Why? Because you will make time for what is most important.

So, the calendar must reflect that we value the church. It also must reflect that we value the family. Here's the principle: your presence is much more valuable than being able to give your kids presents. I want to talk for a minute about absent fathers, fathers who are not giving their families or their children appropriate amounts of time, appropriate amounts of attention.

Now, if this *is* you or *was* you, you need to know there is so much grace. We're going to talk about that in just a second. But this is one of the ways families are attacked. It's absent fathers. Over the last eight years or so, on campus at Wake Forest, I have seen many, and I mean *many*, young women come to campus as 18-year-old girls whose dads have provided for them financially. They have a BMW. They have a Jeep. Their tuition is paid for. Their sorority fees are paid for.

So, Dad has been able to provide because he has a good job, but for many of these young women, Dad has essentially been absent. He has been overworking, not giving his daughter enough attention. Dads, I'm just here to tell you, if you do not give your daughters appropriate amounts of attention, they will find it elsewhere, and I'll tell you where they're going to find it, because I've seen it. It's going to be the good-looking sophomore guy at the frat house. I promise you he will give her some attention. I've seen it for 15 years.

We have to prioritize the family, spending quality time with those we love. We need to look at our calendars and figure out how we can not only be as present as possible but as life-giving and encouraging as we can be when we're there. The heart of all this, the heart of leading ourselves well, is that if we want to have a healthy relationship with our kids, *we* have to be healthy.

So, before we talk more about parenting, I want to reread verses 5 and 6 and show you the hope we have in parenting. ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."***

Now, if you're like me, you read this, and you're like, "I can't do this. I can't do all of these things Moses is commanding." You're right, because the hope of the Christian is not that we can do all of these things perfectly; the hope of the Christian is that Jesus himself followed all of the commandments of God perfectly. After doing that, Jesus went to the cross as our substitute, took on the penalty you and I owe, rose from the dead, and made a way for us to be forgiven, to be accepted.

Here's what I know. For so many of you, the biggest regrets in your life might revolve around parenting…things you wish you had done differently, mistakes you've made in the past. If that's you, you may need to receive the forgiveness of God. You may need to stop beating yourself up over things you've done, over things that have happened in the past. You need to trust that there is help, there is hope, and there is healing to be found in Jesus.

But some of you are still to this day carrying a bitterness toward your parents. So, what you might need to do in view of the gospel, in view of the fact that you've been forgiven, is to extend forgiveness to your parents. You need to understand that in most cases, your parents did the best they could with where they were. You see, the gospel is the hope for parents. The gospel is for those who have been wounded by their parents.

Now let's keep going. In verse 7, Moses says, ***"You shall teach them*** [the commands of God] ***diligently to your children…"*** The word for *diligently* literally means to sharpen, like you would sharpen a blade. If I were a prop preacher, I'd bring a big knife out here and show you. Sharpening a blade requires intentional, consistent friction. What Moses is doing here is he's talking about how diligent teaching requires a lot of consistency. He's going to talk about rhythms.

Let's look back at verse 7. He says, ***"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house…"*** That's the home. ***"…and when you walk by the way…"*** That's when you travel. ***"…and when you lie down…"*** That's when you rest. ***"…and when you rise."*** That's when you begin the day. Moses is going to say, "Every moment is a teaching moment."

Moses first says if you want to teach your children diligently, you need to do so as you sit in your house. So much of parenting happens inside the home. I want to talk about two things that typically happen inside the home that parents need to give attention to if they want to have a peaceful and orderly home. They're very simple: the *dinner table* and *discipline*. Both of these are extremely important, and they're often connected, actually.

Let's talk about the *dinner table* first. So many of you know the Ronald Reagan quote where he says, "All great change in America begins at the dinner table." Why does he say

that? Because there are so many different things that can happen at the dinner table. Think of it.

You can debrief the day at the dinner table. Maybe you go around and share highs and lows. You can practice gratitude. Maybe most importantly, you can practice social skills. One of your biggest responsibilities as a parent is the socialization of your child. It is unbelievably important. Think about it.

At the dinner table, your child learns, hopefully, how to socialize in a group. They learn how to ask questions. They learn how to make eye contact. They learn how to not talk too much, how to not cut people off in conversation. They learn how it's often socially inappropriate to not talk at all. They learn how to eat things even if they don't love it because it's polite.

For some of you, what you may need to do is go to your 7-year-old and say, "No, you're not just going to eat croutons and cheese. That's not how this is going to happen." Why do you need to have that conversation? Because if you don't have that conversation with your 7-year-old, before you know it, they're 17, and now they're strange, which is really a big problem.

Think about all of the different things you teach a child at the dinner table. You teach them not to throw things. You teach them not to be difficult and disruptive. Now, just to be clear, I understand there are unique circumstances that lead to behavioral issues in children. I get it. There are developmental challenges. There are health challenges. That's not what I'm talking about.

But in general, if your child is consistently annoying to other adults and other kids, that is a big problem, because here's what will happen. Adults will often be drawn to a delightful child. Kids will be drawn to a delightful child. An adult will be polite, and they will often engage with your child, but other kids will not. Other kids are not going to tolerate or want to spend time with the other kid who's always hitting them, who's always throwing things at them.

So, I say this with compassion, truly, but if your 6-year-old is not well-liked by the other 6-year-olds, that's a big problem. If your 14-year-old is not well-liked by the other 14-year-olds, that is a big, big problem. It might not be your fault as a parent, but it is still your problem. So, you might need to figure out, "Okay. How can I come alongside my child and help them?"

You might need to get some feedback. Maybe you go to couples in your Community Group and ask, "Hey, how do you receive my child? How do you experience my child?" Maybe you ask them, "How do your children experience my child?" That is a scary

question to ask. I know it is. But you need to know, because as the parent, it is your primary responsibility to figure out how you can best care for your child and help them.

So, we have to give attention to the dinner table. This leads me to a much less controversial topic: *discipline*. It says in Ephesians, chapter 6, ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** One of the ways you teach your children diligently, like Moses is talking about here, is through discipline.

Godly parents will provide both high affection and high authority. Godly parents will offer both discipline and delight. Here's the truth. You know this. We need to embrace this reality: your children *will* be corrected. They're either going to be lovingly corrected by you or they are going to be corrected by others. The principle with this is that kids can learn lessons a little bit over time or all at once, and all at once is usually much more painful.

So, I want to give you five different categories to think about discipline with. A big overarching truth when it comes to all of these different forms of discipline is that before you discipline, there needs to be connection before there is correction. You need to connect with your child before you offer correction. So, here are the five categories. I got these categories and much of this content from Pastor Kyle. Because it's so good, I hardly don't want to change it.

The first category is *reproof*. This is calmly telling your child what they're doing, why it's wrong, and what's going to happen if they continue to do it. It's helpful to ask your kids not just "What did you do?" but "Why did you do this?" Let's try to get to the heart issue here. "Why did you do this?"

The second category is *deprivation*. This is a fun one. This is taking something away. Well, see, I was joking there, because the challenge here is that when you're a parent and you take something away, it normally makes your life more difficult. Right? I've heard it said before that you, as the parent, need to pay the price *now* so they don't pay the price *later*.

The third category is *isolation*. This is the classic time-out. Maybe you can have your child sit in time-out for the same length of their age. So, if they're 3, three minutes. If they're 7, seven minutes. The fourth category is *logical consequences*. This is very simple. It's "This is what's going to happen if you do this."

The fifth category is what the Bible calls the *rod*, which is *physical discipline*. It says in Proverbs 13, ***"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."*** Now, I know this is a controversial topic, and I know that many people,

unfortunately, have been on the receiving end of this not being done well, but here are a few key things to know about this.

The first is that physical discipline is how parents connect sin with pain. Physical discipline should always be done as a last resort. It should never be in public, always in private. This should usually be done between the ages of 2 and 7, and this is a big one: physical discipline should never happen if the parent is angry or frustrated.

When I was in PA school doing a rotation in the ER, one of the ER doctors at the time told me, "Whenever there's a big emergency that comes in and you feel really worked up and anxious about it, the first heart rate you need to check is your own." The same is true with parenting. Until you have gotten your emotions completely under control, until you have calmed yourself, discipline should not happen.

Then, after discipline does happen, the last step is that there always needs to be reconciliation. You need to extend forgiveness to the child, and then the relationship needs to be restored. Speaking of discipline and rhythms, a quick word to grandparents in the room. Now, I know some of you are like, "Please don't make this awkward. They're here with me right now." I know. I know they're here.

First of all, grandparents, you need to know that you are so massively important. I mean, you play a role that is irreplaceable. The ways you give and love and serve are incredibly helpful to your kids and to your grandkids. I want to give you just one word when it comes to rhythms and rules. One word: *reinforce*. Would you consider how you can reinforce the rules and rhythms your child has in place with their children?

Now, this doesn't mean grandparents can't spoil their grandkids. Of course. Spoil them. But in general, it's not very helpful if the kids go spend a few days with Grandma and Grandpa, and the rules and expectations with Grandma and Grandpa are completely different from the rules you have at home, because then what ends up happening is the kids end up coming back home, and it's a really difficult two to three days as the parents are trying to re-teach the rules and expectations. So, would you consider, "How can I reinforce the rules and rhythms of this home?"

Parents, grandparents, we love you. We're grateful for you. Let's keep going. Let's reread part of verse 7. It says, ***"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way…"*** When Moses says you should teach your children when you walk by the way, what he's talking about is when you travel.

Think of these as side-by-side moments. I've heard from many parents over the years that some of the most life-giving, meaningful conversations they have with their children are during the side-by-side moments. Maybe it's in the car. Maybe it's going on a walk.

Think of the side-by-side moments as coaching moments, because as your child ages, there are going to be fewer commands and more conversations, because they're getting more and more responsibility and more ability to make their own decisions. It's helpful to remember that the role the parent plays in the life of his or her child is going to evolve over time.

Think about it this way. I've heard these categories. Between ages 0 and 3, the parent's primary role is caretaker. Between 3 and 9, the parent's primary role is cop. High levels of authority. Right? From ages 10 until 18, the parent is primarily a coach. Then from 18 onward, the parent serves as a counselor and companion.

About a year ago, I was talking with a pastor, a godly man in a different part of the state, and he was sharing about how his 18-year-old son is in a season of rebellion. It's very sad. It's really difficult for all of the obvious reasons, but this pastor told me that a good friend of his told him, "Hey, man. Unfortunately, the days for you being your child's coach are now over, so you're going to have to figure out how to relate differently to your child. You're now going to have to transition into a season of counselor, of companion." It's very difficult.

So, Moses says to teach your children in your house and when you walk by the way. The third category is when you lie down. This is when you rest. Let's talk for a second about bedtime. Does anyone else feel like they turn into a hostage negotiator at bedtime? You know, you drive your kids home from school, and they don't want to talk to you, but then at bedtime, they're talking your head off, and they're asking you whether or not penguins have knees. It's like, "What is going on here?"

To be totally transparent, bedtime is very difficult for me. Very difficult. I don't know what it is, but after working all day, coming home, trying to help with dinner, and then play a little bit, by the time bedtime rolls around, I'm just tired. Then, what often happens is my wife Olivia will say my least favorite sentence, which is "We need to give the kids baths."

Two things that would happen way less often if it were up to me are baths and changing the bed sheets. They would not happen nearly as often. So, in these moments… It's 8:00. I'm tired. It has been a long day. I have to remind myself this. It is the responsibility of the parent to get bedtime right. It's no one else's responsibility.

You've heard before of sins of *omission* versus sins of *commission*. A sin of *commission* is when you commit or do something that God forbids. A sin of *omission* is when you fail to do something that is a good thing. James 4 talks about this. Now, for years, I've talked about sins of commission and said that what a sin of commission says is "I know this is wrong, but I don't care."

Well, I've given this a lot of thought, and I think I know what the sin of omission says, especially with regard to parenting. It says, "I know this is right, but I'm too tired." Parents, it is your responsibility to get bedtime right. I know it's not easy, but we have to discipline ourselves to finish the day strong.

We normally talk about the categories of *read*, *pray*, *sing*. We heard these from Pastor Adam Griffin back in March. Let's just go through them. We do this as a family in my home. At bedtime, we'll take some time to read. Now, what you read or how long you read is going to depend on the age of your child. If it's a 4-year-old, you might just read a few pages of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. If it's a 14-year-old, maybe you read a chapter or maybe even just a passage of a real Bible.

Speaking of reading, this is really interesting, and this should be very important to Christian parents. There was an article that came out a couple of weeks ago by the Associated Press, and what they found is that teenagers are reading for fun much less than ever. The number of teenagers who are reading for fun has dropped drastically over the last 15 years.

Of course, this is related to smartphones and screens. Only 14 percent of 13-year-olds read every day for fun. What this means for parents is that we have to figure out how to cultivate a love for reading in the lives of our children, because if we want our kids to love and read the Word of God themselves, we have to figure out how to help them learn how to read.

So, we read, and then we sing. Songs are sermons you remember. There's something unique about singing that takes the truths of Scripture from your head down into your heart. In my house, we often will just sing the chorus of a song, and that's it. We move on.

So, we read, we sing, and finally we pray. Maybe you could ask your child, "What's bothering you? What can we pray for?" Then, as long as it's not totally bizarre, pray for it. Just do your best. Maybe you give them an opportunity to pray themselves. We read, we pray, and we sing.

We need to have realistic expectations when it comes to all of this, because almost never are these moments going to be these unbelievably spiritual, rewarding moments, but consistency is what we're shooting for…consistency over these high reward moments.

Okay. Finally, Moses says to teach your children when you rise. This is when you begin the day. I want to encourage your family to consider this question: Are there any life-giving rhythms you could implement that would be meaningful to your children as you start the day?

Maybe it's going on a walk in the mornings. Maybe it's taking a moment to pray for 20 seconds when you drive them to school. Maybe it's asking about what they're looking forward to in the day. One of our pastors, Zack Trantham, has been in student ministry for years, and for the last few years… He has three kids. He's gone from the home all day on Wednesdays. He doesn't get home until after the kids are in bed.

He wanted to communicate to his sons that even though he's going to be gone all day, they still come first, so he started something called *Waffle Wednesdays*. What he does is he alternates between his sons, wakes them up early, and takes them to Waffle House or somewhere.

They sit there, and he asks intentional questions. They debrief the week. They talk about any disciplinary issues they need to talk about. He tells me it has been super fruitful. So, are there any rhythms you need to put into place? Maybe your next step is to sit down and give some thought to what rhythms and life-giving things you can put into place in the mornings.

All right. Let's keep going. Let's see what Moses says in verse 8. He's going to talk about the culture of a home. He says, ***"You shall bind them*** [God's commandments] ***as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."*** What that means is that God's Word needs to be constantly in view. Verse 9: ***"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."***

What Moses is doing here as he talks about the doorposts is he's saying God's Word should be visible and clear to everyone who walks into your home. Moses is talking about creating a culture where Christ is at the center of a family. A culture is created by what you create, teach, and tolerate. So, I want to give you three quick ways to create a Christ-centered culture in your family.

The first is *public repentance*. This is how you create a Christ-centered culture anywhere, but especially in the family. Your kids need to see Dad apologize to Mom and Mom apologize to Grandma. When you lose your temper with your children, they need to hear you repent and ask for their forgiveness. There needs to be public repentance.

The second way to create a Christ-centered culture is *relationship over rules*. Our homes need to have minimal necessary rules, because if there are too many rules or if the rules are super goofy, what happens is the kids don't end up respecting the good rules that they really need to obey. Now, trust me. I know this is not easy. This happens every day. This literally just happened yesterday.

I see my kids wrestling, and as they're wrestling, I'm like, "Do I need to die on this hill? Do I need to stop them from wrestling? There's a 90 percent chance this is going to end with one of them crying, and there's a 5 percent chance this is going to end with an urgent care trip and stitches." So, I understand it is challenging. We have to figure out how to prioritize relationship over rules, because rules without relationship is what will lead to rebellion.

The third way to create a Christ-centered culture is to *create memories and milestones*. As Christian parents, we should be super-fun parents. We need to give attention to having fun with our kids. Having fun with your kids is going to solve a wide variety of problems. We need to not take ourselves so seriously. Maybe on vacations or on the weekends you say "Yes" as much as you possibly can so that when you say "No" it means something.

We need to create memories, but we also need to create milestones. When Pastor Josh Miller was here a couple of weeks ago, he told me how much he was looking forward to going on a trip this summer with his 13-year-old son. What he's going to do on that trip is he's going to say, "Hey, buddy. I want you to know that you were awesome when you were 4. I've loved you your entire life, but I am uniquely thrilled about what the Lord is doing in your heart right now as someone who's about to turn 13. Welcome to manhood." We need to value memories. We need to value milestones.

We've covered a lot of topics about parenting, about relating to kids, but I know from being in ministry for so long that so many parents feel discouraged. After the last service, a lady came up, a mom in her 50s, and said, "I wish I had heard many of these things 30 years ago." Some of you are discouraged. You feel guilt. You feel shame about where your kids are. You feel shame about things your kids have done.

I want to encourage you with a passage from the Proverbs that at first doesn't seem like it has anything to do with parenting, but I think it's going to be God's Word for you right now. It says this in Proverbs 21: ***"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."*** If God can direct the heart of a king, he can also direct the heart of your child.

Some of you are discouraged about where your 16-year-old is or where your 26-year-old is, or maybe it's your 46-year-old. You're discouraged. You feel hopeless, and you are on the verge of giving up for your child. I'm here to tell you, on the authority of God's Word: don't do it. Don't give up on your child, because here's the truth. Parents' responsibility is to guide. What God does is he governs the heart.

We've talked a lot about parenting, all of the different things parents should do, all of the things parents should *not* do, but here's the truth. At the end of the day, so much of parenting and what happens in the lives of our kids is a mystery. I could rattle off a list of well-respected pastors and theologians who right now have adult children who are not walking with Jesus. Did those pastors all blow it? Well, I'm sure they didn't parent perfectly, but in general, I'm sure they did a pretty good job. It's just a mystery.

So much of what happens in our children's hearts is a mystery. Think about Jesus. Jesus did not have any biological kids, but he did have disciples. Even Jesus had a wayward disciple, Judas. Think about how perfect of a leader Jesus was. Think of how Jesus led himself perfectly. Jesus was totally in submission to the commandments of God. He gave perfect attention to his disciples.

Think about all of the different things Judas would have been there to see. Judas was there when Jesus fed the 5,000. He probably helped him do it. Judas was there when Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount. Judas was there when Jesus raised people from the dead. Yet, despite all that, for whatever reason that we don't understand, Judas did not follow Jesus.

You see, so much of parenting is a mystery. It is a spiritual battle. So, parents, you need to understand that good parenting is not going to save your child. Only Jesus saves kids. Only Jesus saves your 3-year-old. Only Jesus saves your teenager. Only Jesus can save your adult child. You see, parents guide; God governs the heart.

As we close, I'm going to ask you to do three things. They're very simple. I'm going to ask you to *repent*, *release*, and *respond*. Right there where you are, with your head bowed, I just want to give you a moment to repent of the things you need to repent of. Maybe it's not rightly prioritizing your own spiritual health. Maybe it's not rightly prioritizing the church or the family with your calendar. Some of you need to repent of how you have treated your own parents. Maybe you need to call them later and ask them for forgiveness. Where do you need to repent?

The second thing I'm going to ask you to do is to release. Release to the Lord the things that belong to the Lord. This includes your child's salvation. This includes unknowns

about your child's health, unknowns about your child's future. Maybe it's your desire to have children. I'm going to ask you to release those things to the Lord.

Finally, in just a moment we're going to stand and sing together, and as always, at all of our campuses, our elders and prayer team will be down front, and I'm going to ask you to come forward to pray for your kids, to pray for your grandkids. The altar is open. Coming forward symbolizes "I am doing my best to get it right."

Some of you need to come forward because you don't have the capacity to think about parenting because your marriage is in a difficult spot. Some of you feel anxious about the unknowns for your future with your kids, with your grandkids. Maybe you have a big decision to make. I'm going to invite you to come forward to pray about it.

Maybe you need to pray about how the Lord might want to grow your family through foster care or adoption. Some of you feel burdened by the unbelieving brother in your family, the unbelieving sister, the unbelieving parent, and I'm going to invite you to come forward to pray for them.

For some of you, your kids are flourishing. They're doing well, and you may need to come forward and tell the Lord, "Thank you, Lord. Please continue to bless them." Others of you, in a new way, need to commit to praying for your child's salvation. You see, God is the Creator of all, but he is only Father to some. So, I'm inviting you to come forward to pray that your kids will be adopted into God's family.

Father, I pray for all of the parents in this room. I pray for all those who *will* be parents and those who *desire* to be parents. I'm reminded this morning of just how much we need you. We need your mercy. We need wisdom from you. We need energy. We need you to help us to lead ourselves well. Lord, we need you to intervene in our lives and in the lives of our kids. So, I ask that you would do it. Would you help us in all these things? I pray in Jesus' name, amen.