

Travel Guide: Parenting
Bethany Assembly of God
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Introduction

The weather is warming up and students are getting out of school and the calendar tells me that summer officially starts this week. How many of you have some summer travel plans? When I was a kid, my family would take vacations and I don't think we ever flew anywhere. They were always road trips. We drove to grandparents' houses or to the mountains in Colorado or into Utah and things can be very far apart in the midwest. In the time it took us to drive across the state, you could visit four or five states on the east coast.

Of course, this was all before the advent of the smartphone, and to navigate, my Dad used an atlas. Trip planning was a bit different back then. Now, we get in our cars and say, "Navigate to the Grand Canyon," and a little blue line appears and shows us exactly where to go and how to get there the fastest. Back then, my Dad had to carefully pre-plan our routes because it's really hard to drive and look at an atlas at the same time.

But whether it was then or now, road trips require some planning, at least, they tend to be more enjoyable if you do some preparation. Often, we describe our lives as a journey and while our lives will all be unique, we do share a lot of common elements. Some of us may be headed for the Super 8 and others may be renting a whole lake house, but everybody's got to stop to get gas and go to the bathroom along the way. More than that, there are certain "must see" sights that almost everyone stops at. While our life journeys are unique, there are some common occurrences most or all of us experience and this summer, we're going to take a little road trip together and stop at some of these must see sights. We're going to talk about things like money, dating, modesty, sexuality, entertainment, and today, since it's Father's Day, we're beginning with parenting.

But what we want to do this summer is not just get some good tips or even principles. Anybody can give you tips that sound intelligent. We don't even want to stop with best practices. Some of those might be helpful, but God's thoughts are higher than ours and God chooses to save through the folly of the cross. He has made the wisdom of this world foolish through the cross of Jesus Christ. So on our journey, we want to ask what the Gospel—the good news that Jesus died to pay our debt and that God raised Him from the dead to give us hope and resurrection life—has to say about these stops on our journeys.

We're starting this journey with parenting. I know that not everyone is a parent, some are hoping and praying to become parents, and some may not become parents, but the pit stop of parenting is foundational to the family and to the church, and so I think it's worth addressing for all of us.

I've been a parent for 14 years and there are different stages in life and parenting and you're always learning and adjusting to new things. Recently, I was reflecting on some adjustments that I need to make and the Holy Spirit led me to some Scriptures that are helping me think about how to relate to new stages in my kids' lives. I want to share some of those Scriptures with you as we frame our understanding of parenting with the Gospel of Jesus. **You can understand parenting through the Gospel.**

Gospel Principle #1: Your kids are sinners in need of a Savior.

Your kids are sinners in rebellion against God. The Gospel begins with the recognition that we need a Savior. Listen to the bleak way the Scripture describes humanity in our fallen state of sin and rebellion, see Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1-3.

- Before they know Christ as Savior, your precious angels are actually children of wrath. They are not by nature God's children. They aren't naturally inclined toward the Lord but are in rebellion against God, inclined toward disobedience. They're sinners in need of a Savior. We need to know this as parents because the good news is still good news. See Romans 3:23-24.
- Hopefully, your kids have or soon will put their faith in Jesus and be saved, but even then they will need direction to help them overcome their sin nature. It is our responsibility as parents to lead our children to the Savior.

How should our awareness that our kids are sinners in need of salvation instruct us in raising them?

A. Discipline early and consistently.

- Discipline early and consistently. See Proverbs 13:24. This doesn't mean, "beat your kids." In fact, it may not have anything to do with corporal punishment. Yes, a rod was a stick that I suppose could be used for a whooping, but this is also the same word used at Psalm 23:4, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Those instruments were used by the shepherd to direct, nudge, and when needed, to get sheep back in the flock. Notice that this verse is not about punishment, it's about discipline. It says parents should be diligent in discipline. You should be on the lookout for opportunities to discipline.
- Gospel parenting means you're aware of the need your kids have of direction toward Jesus, and you don't want to spare the rod that will help point them in the right direction and shape them so that they won't tend toward rebellion but have a soft heart, willing to receive correction whether from you or from the Holy Spirit.

B. Study your child's character.

- The idea of diligently disciplining lends itself to studying your child's character. Every child is different. They all have unique gifts and strengths.
- You should celebrate those strengths. You want to build them up and encourage them with your words. They need to know your love and affirmation.
- The other side of their uniqueness is that they will have unique weaknesses and character flaws. See Proverbs 22:15. Again, that rod is not about punishment, but discipline. Discipline about teaching your kids what to do with their weaknesses. Parents need to pay enough attention to their kids that they learn their character weaknesses and can correct and direct them through those weaknesses. We can come alongside our kids and encourage them, give them wisdom, and when necessary, take some things out of their lives and put better things in to help them overcome weaknesses.

The goal of our parenting is to assist our kids' growth in character and godliness. This input and coaching will differ according to your child's age, maturity, and unique personality, you want to start when they're young because it's easier to form good habits then.

C. Lead them to Jesus.

- The ultimate responsibility parents have is we have to lead them to Jesus. This is the goal of correction, to bring them to the One who can forgive what they've done, restore, and heal them. You will never be able to discipline your children so well that they don't need Jesus.
- This takes humility for parents. You have to realize that you're not the source of life for your kids. Life comes from God. Your children need to know the life that only comes from Jesus. Only He can take care of the sin that lies deep in their hearts.
- It is the unique role of parents, whether biological or adoptive or you're a grandparent raising your grandchild, to lead your children to Jesus so that they might know the source of identity and life.

Gospel Principle #2: Your kids need to see Jesus in you.

In order to lead your kids to Jesus, they will need to see Jesus in you. What does it look like for kids to see Jesus in their parents?

A. You need a relationship with Jesus.

- You need a real relationship with Jesus. If your kids see that you don't put Jesus first, neither will they. When I say that you need a relationship with Jesus, I mean one in which your kids can see that you prioritize Jesus. You're seeking to follow His will for your life and your family in your finances, in your time, in what you give your attention to, in your

love for others, in your attitudes, in everything. They should be witnesses to repentance, to the transforming work of the Spirit in your character and in your attitude. They should be watching as the good news about Jesus transforms and directs your life.

B. Don't provoke your children to anger.

- That relationship with Christ moves us toward particular instructions God's Word has for parents. See Ephesians 6:4. The plural "fathers" in Greek, was likely intended to include both parents; so this is for both dads and moms. Discipline is essential in the home, but not just petty rules and demands that make you feel in charge. As God works in *our* lives, He disciplines us. And that discipline is for our good. He's patient with us and He doesn't just give up and resort to shouting but He directs us toward a goal.

C. Remember that servant leadership applies to your relationship with your kids.

- As you try to cultivate the character of Jesus in your parenting, you need to remember that servant leadership applies to your relationship with your kids. See Mark 10:43-45 and Philippians 2:5-7. We cannot forget that these bedrocks of Christian character shouldn't be afterthoughts in how we raise our children.

Gospel Principle #3: Entrust your children to the Holy Spirit.

- As my kids get older, the reality that there's only so much I can do sets in more and more. That's not to say that the effect of parenting is insignificant. It's not. But there does come a point where you realize you can't do anything more, and that's where you have to entrust your children to the Holy Spirit.
- He will lead them even as He leads you. You can't always be there; He can. So pray for them to walk in the Spirit. Talk to them about what that means, how He can prompt them and convict them and show them what that looks like in your life.

Conclusion

When it comes to parenting, we need so much more than just some principles; we need to apply the Gospel. When God sent Jesus to earth, Jesus revealed God as our Heavenly Father. No one had invited people into that kind of relationship with God before. Jesus taught His followers that they should relate to and pray to God as "Father." See 1 John 3:1.

God structured the family and made dads so that we could learn something about how to relate to Him. Think of how important that makes fatherhood. Think of how important that makes parenting. It puts a little bit of a different weight on parenting, doesn't it? We're supposed to show our kids the character of God. No dad reveals the character of God perfectly and there are

some dads who fail to reveal God to their kids at all. But most dads have some care or concern to protect, provide for, love, and bless their kids. Even dads that are generally bad do this sometimes.

Does your parenting reveal the character and nature of God to your kids? God is good. He loves through blessing and discipline. He made the ultimate sacrifice for us. He makes Himself available to us. He forgives. He encourages and strengthens and guides. He provides and protects. He made us, parents, to reveal that and point our kids and the world to Jesus.

Are you doing that? Are you parenting through the Gospel, remembering that your kids need a Savior, leading them to the Savior through your life and example, and entrusting them to the Holy Spirit?