

# First Steps:

preparing for baby dedication



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### MIDTOWN CAMPUS SCHEDULE:

#### Week One, March 7<sup>th</sup>

11:00—11:15—Food and conversation (cake, punch, mixed nuts, and mints)  
11:15—A toast for children, God's good and gracious gifts (Mark Franco)  
11:15—11:45—Section 1.1: Parenting with Vision (Mark & Tanya Franco)  
11:45—12:05—Breakout Session  
12:05—12:15—Breakout Review with prizes & closing prayer (Jared Kennedy)

#### Week Two, March 14<sup>th</sup>

11:00—11:15—Food and conversation (cake, punch, mixed nuts, and mints)  
11:15—A toast for parents, God's instruments for shepherding children  
(Jared Kennedy)  
11:15—11:30—Section 1.2: Parenting with the Gospel (Mark & Tanya Franco)  
11:30—11:40—Section 2.1: Your Kids and the Church Community  
(Jared Kennedy)  
11:40—11:45—Section 2.2: Your Kids and the Church Nursery (Sally Roth)  
11:45—12:05—Breakout Session  
12:05—12:15—Breakout Review with prizes & closing prayer (Jared Kennedy)

### EAST CAMPUS SCHEDULE (Meet in extra classroom):

#### Week One, March 7<sup>th</sup>

8:30—8:45—Food and conversation (Breakfast Bagels)  
8:45—A toast for children, God's good and gracious gifts (Ty Thorne)  
8:45—9:15—Section 1.1: Parenting with Vision (Ty & Heidi Thorne)  
9:15—9:35—Breakout Session  
9:35—9:45—Breakout Review with prizes & closing prayer (Ty Thorne)

#### Week Two, March 14<sup>th</sup>

8:30—8:45—Food and conversation (cake, punch, mixed nuts, mints, & pizza!)  
8:45—A toast for parents, God's instruments for shepherding children  
(Ty Thorne)  
8:45—9:00—Section 1.2: Parenting with the Gospel (Ty & Heidi Thorne)  
9:00—9:10—Section 2.1: Your Kids and the Church Community  
(Ty & Heidi Thorne)  
9:10—9:15—Section 2.2: Your Kids and the Church Nursery (Rachel Schroeder)  
9:15—9:35—Breakout Session  
9:35—9:45—Breakout Review with prizes & closing prayer (Ty Thorne)

He established a testimony in Jacob  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded the fathers to teach to their children,  
so the next generation would know them,  
even the children not yet born,  
and they in turn would tell their children.  
Then they would put their hope in God  
and would not forget his works  
but keep his commandments.  
—Psalm 78:5-7

In the last three lines of this text, we see God's desire for every generation. God wants every generation to know and trust in Him—not forgetting what he has done to rescue and save, but remembering Him and keeping His commandments. This is God's goal for every generation.

And the first part of the passage shows how that goal is accomplished. God commands parents to teach their children about his words and works. According to God's word, the primary context for your child learning about God is not in our children's ministry on Sundays. It is in your home, in your car as you drive along the road, at your child's bedside, and at the breakfast table. It happens in those planned moments when you pull out a Bible storybook. And it happens in those unplanned moments when your child has sinned or is heartbroken and you correct and comfort your child as a Christian corrects and comforts. Teaching children about God can't be done in one hour each week. It involves us parents passing on our life of trust and hope in God.

While it is clear that you parents are responsible for teaching your kids about God, it is also clear that parents share this responsibility with the entire church community. God gives his law and testimonies in the context of a believing community. Training children is a community project, because we need each other. We need one another's encouragement, one another's accountability, and one another's eyes to see what we can't see.

These are the two reasons—church and home—that we have a baby dedication service at Sojourn. You dedicate your children because you recognize your God-given responsibility as parents, and because you know that your home needs God's help. Parents come to ask for that help in the form of a commitment with our church community.



## First Steps, Section 1: The Home

When you come forward with your child at our baby dedication service, you will see the following on the screen:

*Parents, will you commit to trust God's promises made to you and your children in His Word?*

*Will you commit to seek God, and seek gospel change in the way you live and parent your children?*

*Will you commit to discipline your children and show them grace?*

*Will you commit to teach God's Word to them and live out the gospel in your home?*

*Will you commit to pray for them and teach them to pray?*

*Will you commit to partner with this church community, seek their help and accountability, and lead your children to do the same?*

*Then, you will be prompted to say, "We will with God's help."*

Do the statements above sound scary? Maybe they should. You are making a huge commitment, and sometimes it sounds really freaky. But most of you were freaking out before we made it sound so formal. We don't need to be told to be good and godly parents. Most of us assume this is our responsibility. How and why we parent our children forms some of the most passionately held beliefs of our hearts. We are always observing other parents and measuring our methods and practices with theirs. Some of that is good and wise, but comparing sometimes contributes to the idea that there is "one" way to parent that is most godly, most biblical. In reality, the Scriptures provide us with a radical amount of freedom for parenting our children. Parenting is first and foremost relational and not necessarily ordered, structured or neat. So, while we will talk about methods and practices, we do so with humility toward God and one another.

### ***1.1 Parenting with Vision***<sup>1</sup>

Biblical parenting is not:

- Merely sending our kids to church or a Christian school.
- Having a verse handy to quote in the midst of every conceivable parenting situation.
- Doing parenting "right" so that you have obedient and compliant kids.
- Preaching to our kids and making certain they "get saved" and not go to hell.
- Being a good example to our kids that we hope they will follow.

So, what is biblical parenting? First of all, Biblical parenting involves trusting that what God says to us in his Word about parenting is true. We parents have the primary responsibility for teaching our children about God. Our homes are like "little churches" where parents teach their children about God's words and his works (Deuteronomy 6; Psalm 78). We creatively teach the God's Word in our lives, conversations, and active worship (Deuteronomy 6:7) recognizing that our

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Scott and Cheri Holman. "The Drama of Parenting: A Gospel-Centered Approach to Parenting Toddlers & Preschoolers." Fall 2008. Sojourn Community Church.

love for God—expressed in both words and actions—tells God’s story. Take a look at Psalm 78 again:

Psalm 78:1-8 (NLT)

O my people, listen to my instructions.  
Open your ears to what I am saying,  
for I will speak to you in a parable.  
I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—  
stories we have heard and known,  
stories our ancestors handed down to us.  
We will not hide these truths from our children;  
we will tell the next generation  
about the glorious deeds of the Lord,  
about his power and his mighty wonders.  
For he issued his laws to Jacob;  
he gave his instructions to Israel.  
He commanded our ancestors  
to teach them to their children,  
so the next generation might know them—  
even the children not yet born—  
and they in turn will teach their own children.  
So each generation should set its hope anew on God,  
not forgetting his glorious miracles  
and obeying his commands.  
Then they will not be like their ancestors—  
stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful,  
refusing to give their hearts to God.

What does this passage tell us about what our goal(s) should be? Parents are to teach their children about the greatness of God’s words and works—God’s Story—so that they will put their hope and confidence in Him. Failure to do this has resulted in hundreds of years of rebellion and confusion.<sup>2</sup> If we’re going to teach our children about God—who He is and what He has done—we need a clear vision.

### **Why is having a vision of ministry for your family important?**

- A vision keeps us focused during both the mundane and rigorous moments of parenting.
- A vision reminds us the most defining moments and best teaching moments in our lives happen in the mundane times—not during family devotions or while we’re disciplining.
- A vision unites the household. Vision keeps mom and dad on the same page.
- A vision helps us think through competing parenting philosophies, models, and goals and keeps us centered on the gospel.

### **What should I consider when working out a biblical vision for my family?<sup>3</sup>**

1. Moms and Dads are called to ministry!
  - We need an unwavering vision of redemption that can weather the blizzards, floods, and ice storms of parenting.
  - Remember: God parents us in the midst of our parenting. God will use our kids (through the Holy Spirit) as catalysts for our own spiritual growth.

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<sup>2</sup> Scott and Cheri Holman, “The Drama of Parenting,” Fall 2008. Sojourn Community Church.

<sup>3</sup> Robert and Karen Cheong, “A Gospel Vision of Parenting,” Sojourn Community Church. Spring 2008.

If we fail to understand parenting as ministry:

- We will turn moments of ministry into moments of anger.
  - We will personalize what is not personal.
  - We will be adversarial in our response. Rather than “I am for you,” we will respond with, “You are against me!”
  - We will settle for quick situational solutions that don’t get to the heart of the matter--yell, punish, send to room
2. We need to train. We should train as parents as we would a triathlon. Formal and informal instruction will equip you to carry out your ministry as moms and dads.
    - Formal training – Parenting classes or conferences.
    - Informal training – Books, audio, relationships with others (ask questions!)
  3. We need to commit and be willing to do what it takes to fulfill our calling to ministry.
    - Make difficult decisions regarding work outside the home in order to minimize time spent away from the family.
    - Put your hobbies on hold until you can begin to enjoy them with your kids.
    - Sacrifice personal pleasure and “me time”.
    - Pray that you might find rest in Christ in the midst of the rigors and trials that come with being a mom or dad.
  4. We need to pray.
    - God ignite in me a biblical vision for my family
    - God guard and protect me against distraction from this vision.

### **What can distract us from a biblical vision for our family?**

Good goals can easily become ultimate goals and therefore unbiblical goals. The most natural expression of the unbiblical goals we have for our kids is our desire to see them succeed. We want our kids to be successful so they can live peaceful lives that are filled with opportunity and guarded from pain, loss, tragedy, and suffering. We strive for our kids to succeed because we rightly recognize that the soil in which our kids are raised has much to do with future success.

The goals about to be discussed are not evil in and of themselves. In fact, most of the goals below can be good goals if they do not become ultimate goals. It is when we put the goal of making our kids successful above the goal of equipping our children to know and enjoy God that we need to reevaluate the goals we have for our children.

1. Kids with Skillz<sup>4</sup>: The goal is to enlist children in as many activities (athletic, artistic, musical, etc.) as time may (or may not) allow.
  - Do I measure my success by the number of activities in which my kids are involved?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by the number of skills she has mastered?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by his mastery of any one skill or ability?
2. Psychologically Adjusted Kids: The goals for the psychological adjustment of children often drift according to the pop psychology of the day. These goals may include building self-esteem, training kids to be effective with people, or perhaps raising kids who are not spoiled.
  - Do I measure my success by how closely I align myself with a particular method of parenting?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by how much he esteems himself or how much he esteems others?

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<sup>4</sup> Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995, 2001, pp. 40-44.

3. Christian Kids: The goal is to get children “saved” as soon as possible by any means possible. The focus is on getting children to pray “the sinner’s prayer”<sup>5</sup> in hopes that having saved kids will eliminate parenting struggles.
  - Do I measure my success as a parent in relation to how my child responds to or is able to articulate the gospel? The goodness of the Father is not seen in the way his sons respond to Him, but in his faithful mercy toward them (Luke 15:11-31, “the parable of the Lost Son”). We cannot know with absolute certainty whether or not our child is saved. (e.g. Matthew 7:21-23 “Lord, Lord”)
  - Do I think that having “saved kids” would change my job description as a parent? It won’t. Our task is still to faithfully teach our kids the gospel story and tenderly encourage our child to trust God not only for salvation, but also for daily living. “Repentance and faith are not acts performed one time to become a Christian. They are attitudes of the heart toward ourselves and our sin. Faith is not just the way to get saved; it is the lifeline of Christian living.” — Tedd Tripp<sup>6</sup>
4. Spiritual Kids: The goal is to commit to and follow through as a family to have regular times of Bible reading and prayer with the understanding that “a family that prays together stays together.”
  - Do I measure my success as a parent in relation to the structure and frequency of our family worship routine?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by her willingness to participate in family worship?
5. Well-Behaved Kids: We want our children to develop poise, be kind, converse with respect to others, be hospitable, and serve others. In making this an ultimate goal, we fail to realize that this is a secondary benefit of biblical childrearing. In doing so, we emphasize modifying behavior over shepherding the heart.
  - Do I measure my success by how well I prepare or pressure my children to respond to every conceivable situation or circumstance?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by his ability to outwardly respond to my instruction?
6. Healthy Kids: The goal is to stop at nothing so that our kids are healthy, well-functioning, and safe from suffering. In making this an ultimate goal, we fail to see that suffering is inevitable, and safety has more to do with avoiding eternal death than avoiding hurt in this world?
  - Do I measure my success by how frequently I’m able to prepare well-balanced meals for our family in accordance with the most healthful diet?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by his ability to meet developmental goals or avoid illness?
7. Smart Kids: The goal is to stop at nothing to prepare our kids for educational success so that they may achieve academic awards, scholarly recognition, and eventually be recruited for privileged job opportunities. Sadly, it is possible to be well educated and still not understand life.
  - Do I measure my success as a parent by how well I prepare my child for a lifetime of education or the educational opportunities that I provide for them?
  - Do I measure my child’s success by how well she performs in school or how much she knows in relation to other kids her age?

### So, what is the goal of biblical parenting?

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<sup>5</sup> See Pastor Jared Kennedy’s “9 Reasons Not to Ask Jesus Into Your Heart,” <http://sojournkids.com/2008/11/9-reasons-not-to-ask-jesus-into-your-heart-numbers-1-to-3/>, Marty Machowski’s *Leading Children Towards Gospel Repentance and Faith*, Covenant Fellowship Church, 2007. [www.covfel.org](http://www.covfel.org), and Leslie Leyland Fields’ “The Myth of the Perfect Parent: Why the Best Parenting Techniques Don’t Produce Christian Children,” *Christianity Today* (January 8, 2010), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/january/12.22.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995, 2001, pp. 52-53.

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

1. The biblical goal of parenting is to help our children live out God’s call to love.<sup>7</sup>
  - We help our children love and relate to God.
  - We help our children understand their heart and self.
  - We help our children love and relate to others within the family.
  - We help our children love and relate to others outside the family.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:4-7).

2. Helping our children live our God’s call to love can only be carried out as long as we understand that the call to love starts with us as parents. Parents need to understand their own hearts first as a man & woman of God, then as husband & wife, before they can be effective parents for the Gospel.

### **How do I establish a vision for my family? How do I get there from here?**

Given this two-fold goal, take time to plan with your family. Pick a day for yourself and your family, sometime in the future (e.g., 2 years, 5 years, 10 years) and envision that day. To do so, answer as many pertinent, specific questions about life on that day as you can reasonably generate. Examples include:<sup>8</sup>

#### **Marriage**

- How often do you pray together?
- When is your date night?
- How do you take better care of one another?
- Why has your love grown?
- How has your home become a place for unplanned connecting?
- What brings you together?

#### **Family**

- How many children will you have?
- How old will your children be?
- How will they be educated at that time?
- What special attention will each child need regarding their maturation up to that day?
- Which family and friends are you closest with as a family?

#### **Extended Family**

- Which close relatives are not living?
- What is your relationship like with each close family member (e.g., mom, dad, brother, sister, grandparent)?
- How are families related to vacations and holidays?
- What has changed with your extended family?

#### **Learning**

- What areas have you studied deeply to improve your marriage and parenting?
- What marriage or parenting books have you read?

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Cheong, “A Gospel-Vision of Parenting.” Sojourn Community Church. Spring 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Reverse Engineering Your Life.” Mars Hill Church, 2007.

- What other learning experiences have shaped you (e.g., conferences, mentors, spiritual disciplines)?
- How many minutes do you read each day? When do you read? Where?

After having this conversation with your spouse, pick three things that you would like to put into practice immediately in order to help move your family toward this vision.

#### BREAKOUT QUESTIONS:

1. Which one of the “good goals gone bad” listed above frequently becomes an ultimate goal in your home? How has this affected your marriage relationship? How has this affected your parenting?
2. Have you taken the time to discuss a family vision with your spouse? If so, what did that look like? What is your family vision? What are you trying to accomplish? What kind of children do you want to produce? What kind of parents do you want to become?
3. What have your children taught you about yourself, the gospel, God the father, your spouse, or your marriage? It could range from the most simple to the most profound.

## 1.2 Parenting with the Gospel

So, we need a clear vision and a plan. But even more clearly we need God's grace. Our children will not learn to love God and neighbor because we get things "right" or even because they get things "right." We all need God's help, His mercy, His grace.

When we parent in light of the gospel, we recognize that our kids' salvation and growth is God's work. God is the starting point, the means, and the goal. Jesus has done all that is needed to save our kids through his work in history on the cross.<sup>9</sup> And unless God is at work in our child's heart, all our efforts are in vain (John 6:44a). We are out of control. We cannot change our kids' hearts.

Colossians 1:3-6 says this: "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing-as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth."

"In Col. 1:6 [Paul] is placing all the emphasis upon the fact that by God's power and grace it is the gospel itself that bears fruit and grows. The gospel never depends on man, not even on Paul. It is God's work in which he is pleased to use man."<sup>10</sup> Paul's confidence is in the power of the gospel-it bears its own fruit.<sup>11</sup>

There is great comfort in knowing that gospel-centered parenting does not find its hope in ascribing to a particular model of parenting. Rather, gospel centered parenting finds its hope in the power of the gospel to transform BOTH the hearts of our children, and our own hearts as well. Our role as moms and dads is not only to help our "child to understand life, himself, and his needs from a biblical perspective"<sup>12</sup> but also to spend our time entrusting ourselves to Christ.<sup>13</sup>

### **FOUNDATIONS FOR GOSPEL CENTERED PARENTING:**

Kids are not trophies we earn for having it all together. Rather, kids are living examples of God's grace poured out to moms and dads who need Jesus. It is God's grace that in all of our efforts to teach and train our children in the way they should go, we end up being the ones who learn and grow the most.

#### **We learn from our kids:**

God's Love: As we consider the deep love that we have for our own kids, they in turn teach us about the inseparable love the Father has for us through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

God's Instruction: As we think about how to raise a generation of children who love God, we learn how to talk about the story of the gospel in a way that is beautiful, simple, and clear (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

God's Discipline: As we discipline our kids for their good that they may experience our love for

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<sup>9</sup> Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, and Bud Burk, *Helping Children Understand the Gospel*, Children Desiring God, 2009, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Colossians*, Baker Books, 1995, pp. 52,

<sup>11</sup> Mark Prater and Andy Farmer. "Framing a Gospel Centered Children's Ministry," Breakout Session from Sojourn Community Church's The Gospel, Counseling, and the Church Conference, August 2009. Handout.

<sup>12</sup> Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995, 2001, pp. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Kimmel, *Grace Based Parenting*, Thomas Nelson, 2004, pp. 16-19.

them, we express thanks and grow in our understanding of the discipline we endure as sons and daughters at the hand of our Father and the peaceful fruit of righteousness that is produced (Hebrews 12:7-11).

Our Weakness: Being a parent is relentless. It is exhausting. It is demanding. It consumes our thoughts. It is even painful (just ask the moms). Being a mom or dad reminds us that as much as we'd like to be or even try to play the part, we are not God. We will screw this up and we cannot do this alone. We need God's strength and the support of community to raise our kids and teach them how to walk with God. We do not earn the right to have kids through spiritual maturity, intellectual dexterity, or economic stability. In fact, we sit here before one another in this class much like we throw ourselves on the couch after a long day of instructing and disciplining our kids. We are a weak, broken, and needy people who are struggling to walk with God and love one another.

So, as moms and dads, let us boast not of our own proven methods for parenting or our kids and their (our) accomplishments, but rather let us boast of the things that show our weakness so that we may be strengthened by the power of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:9) and encourage one another in the trenches of being a mom or dad.

Our Need for the Gospel: Just as God is more concerned with the heart as the well-spring of life (Proverbs 4:23) rather than our outward actions, so should we parent in such a way as to concentrate our instruction and discipline on the internal overflow our kid's heart rather than on the externals of behavior. Yet, as we diligently teach them that "straying behavior displays a straying heart", we are ambushed by the stark reality that our own hearts have become controlled by something other than God.<sup>14</sup> Often, in our efforts to correct and discipline we find we can provoke our child to anger because she had the audacity to ruthlessly disturb our comfort and rest (Ephesians 6:4). As a result, we have now just disciplined our child out of frustration and retribution rather than out of a patient understanding and heart of reconciliation. It turns out we both need Jesus. Children often expose and intensify sin and idolatry that we thought was safely hidden within our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9).

We deceive one another when we pretend to have all the answers in life and in parenting. The grace that God gives us through Jesus Christ is our only qualification to parent. So, the most important thing we must do is remember and rehearse the Gospel. This is the first and last thing. It cements and saturates all we do as Christian parents.

### **What keeps us from hearing the gospel and learning from our kids?**

SIN. Being a parent is so hard because of sin. We worship ourselves. We make parenting difficult when our own desire for control, self-rule, or self-pleasure comes before our God-given responsibility to shepherd the hearts of our children.<sup>15</sup>

Sin comes in many forms. We have personal idols:

- Idol of Comfort. We desire our life to be easy. A 24/7 all-inclusive vacation where we are served and do only what we want when we want. We live with a sense of entitlement and try to live with a peacetime mentality. We fail to understand that life is war. Our enemy is Satan, not the baby who is crying in the middle of the night.
- Idol of Respect. Respect rules. Every issue with our kids or spouse becomes an issue of

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<sup>14</sup> Tripp, Ted, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995, 2001, pp. XI.

<sup>15</sup> Tripp, Paul. *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, P&R Publishing, 2001, pp. 29-38.

respect where every interaction functions as a pass/fail test. In that sense, we are even willing to disrespect others in order to “get respect”. In worshipping the idol of respect, we only see our kids in relation to ourselves and not in relation to God.

- Idol of Appreciation. We must remember that parenting is a sacrificial sport. We do a lot for our kids. Appreciation becomes an idol when we begin to live for and even demand appreciation from our kids. “I serve you. You appreciate me.” While our kids should appreciate us, this should not be our ultimate goal.
- Idol of Success. We tend to approach parenting with an “A+B=C” mentality. If only we do this, then that will happen. The outworking of this is that we parent with a sense of ownership as if the obedience of our kids is our God-given right. As discussed above, we parent to produce trophy kids. Perfectly obedient, adorable, above average children who obey, love, and respect mommy and daddy all the time. NO EXCEPTIONS. The outworking of this is that when our kids fail to live up to our expectations, we fight against them and not for them. And we grieve for ourselves instead of them.
- Idol of Control. This is the typical idol as we parent through the early years of our kid’s lives. We are in control of nearly everything over our kid’s lives. We enjoy the power. Control becomes an idol when we parent out of fear, desiring to control our children’s world, their safety and our sanity. We get sad and disappointed when our kids don’t turn out the way we dreamed. But who is truly in control?

Ephesians 1:22: “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

So, we can either trust God, his ways, and his will or we can continue to try to be God. “Successful parenting is the rightful, God-ordained loss of control. The goal of parenting is to work ourselves out of a job [and] to raise children who were once totally dependent on us to be totally independent, mature people who, with reliance on God and proper connectedness to the Christian community, are able to stand on their own two feet.”<sup>16</sup>

Our Idols are not the only danger. We’ve been sinned against in the past. Experiences from our childhood are shaping influences for how we parent our children. We must learn to interact with those shaping influences and seek balance between extremes:

- Denial v. Determinism
  - Denial says, “I am unaffected by my early childhood experiences. I am who I am because that is who I am.”
  - Determinism says, “I am a helpless victim of how I was raised. The reason I get angry at my kids is because my parents got angry at me.”
- Nature v. Nurture
  - Nature—*their physical and spiritual makeup*. It is helpful to be reminded that, though important, a proper environment will not necessarily produce a proper child. Good shaping influences will not automatically produce good children. Proverbs 4:23 reminds us that the heart of the child is the fountain from which life flows. Our child’s heart determines how he responds to our parenting. Sadly, children are

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<sup>16</sup> Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995, 2001, pp. 36-37.

“wired” for sin, and only God is the master electrician who can “re-wire” them. That is why we place our hope in a gospel that by itself produces fruit.

- Nurture—*shaping influences on their lives*. Shaping influences include a child’s life experiences and their God-ward orientation. Parenting involves (1) providing the best shaping influences you can and (2) the careful shepherding of your children’s responses to those influences.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 122.



## First Steps, Section 2: Church Community

Parents share their responsibility with the entire church community. Training children is a community project, because we need each other. We need one another's encouragement, one another's accountability, and one another's eyes to see what we can't see. Every Sojourn member is responsible for the children who will be dedicated at the upcoming service. So, after the children are presented, every Sojourn member present will be asked to stand. Then, a pastor will say the following:

*Parents, look around you. You are not alone. This is your community of faith. Sojourn, will you commit to seek God and seek gospel change in the way you live before these children?*

*Will you commit to pray for these children—that they will grow to love Jesus and trust in Him?*

*Will you commit to teach them the gospel through both your words and your example?*

*Will you commit to partner with these parents—holding them accountable and confronting their sin?*

*Will you commit to pray for them and encourage them as they face the trials of parenting?*

*If so, please read the following:*

*With joy and thanksgiving,*

*As Christ's church,*

*With God's help,*

*We promise to love, encourage, and support you*

*As you follow Christ and train your children in the faith.*

### ***2.1 Your Kids and the Church Community<sup>18</sup>***

The family and the church were created to work together, but in many cases they do not. In many church contexts parents have handed over their biblically assigned role to let the "professionals" teach their children about God. In other contexts, parents pull their children out of all kids and youth activities and try to disciple their kids alone. Neither is biblical. Neither is ideal. The family and the church need each other, like two pedals on a bike.

The church is an important part of God's plan, and so is the family. Christ loved His Bride (the church) and ordained her with several purposes. It is easy to understand the church's responsibility to teach adults, but notice that both family and church have been given the task to teach young people. Those of you around kids often can see God's wisdom in that plan. Here are just a few reasons why church ministry to children and students is needed:

- The church is needed to surround young people with godly adults who can provide love and care, truth they can build their lives on, and a model to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 5:2).

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Steve Wright and Chris Graves, *ApParent Privelege*, InQuest Ministries, 2008, pp. 99-110.

- The church is needed to reach out to and model the gospel for children who do not have Christian parents (Matthew 19:14; 28:19-20).
- The church is needed to reinforce a biblical view of the world. A child will sometimes listen to a children's or youth ministry servant, even though they have heard that same truth from their parent again and again (2 Timothy 4:2).
- The church is needed to be a neutral third party serving as an impartial advisor between parents and children, bringing about reconciliation when there is major conflict (2 Corinthians 5:18).
- The church is needed to connect believing young people with other Christians who support, encourage, and keep them accountable (Hebrews 10:25).
- The church is needed to provide opportunities for young people to use their gifts while serving the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12).
- The church is needed because it fights for truth and sound doctrine. It protects families from being drawn away by false teaching (1 Timothy 3:15).
- The church is needed because spiritual growth generally happens within the context of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

But it is not only our kids that need the church. Parents need the church as well. When the responsibility to teach our children about God is overwhelming, the church is there to help. The church teaches us how to teach and trains us in how to train. God showed parents great grace when he blessed them with the church community. The church is our partner in the task of teaching our children about God.

## *2.2 Your Kids in the Church Nursery*

For too long nurseries have been part of church life because “somebody” has to take care of the infants and toddlers while their parents participate in Sunday gatherings. But the nursery is more than a babysitting service. At Sojourn, we see it as a launching pad for nurturing the faith of the next generation. From their earliest years, our infants are taught basic Bible doctrines and stories as they are spoken in blessings and prayers. And our one year-olds are taught four foundational Bible stories. In this way, our nursery forms an integral beginning for our children's ministry.<sup>19</sup>

We want it to be obvious to you as you enter the nursery that this is a place of loving-kindness where nurture is shown to our smallest children. We work hard to create an atmosphere of calmness and joy, where gentle and appropriate music and prayer permeates.

Nursery servants intentionally direct their conversations to God. Though a baby may not understand the words “Jesus loves you” or “God made these little toes,” we shouldn't underestimate what God might choose to do through our speaking simple truth. Words of blessing and prayer are spoken over a child as he is placed in a crib or as he leaves the nursery. One of the model prayers is based on Psalm 1:

*May the Lord bless you!*

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<sup>19</sup> This first section is adapted from Sally Michael, *A Sure Foundation: The Fragrance of the Knowledge of Christ, A Philosophy for Infant Nursery Ministry*, Children Desiring God, 2005.

*May the Lord give you the courage not to walk in the counsel of the wicked;  
the faith not to stand in the path of sinners;  
and the resolve not to sit in the seat of mockers.*

*May you always delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night.*

*May you be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither*

*May the Lord prosper all that you do for His glory,*

*And may the Lord watch over your way all the days of your life so that you can stand in the day of judgment and join the assembly of the righteous forever. Amen!<sup>20</sup>*

#### BREAKOUT SESSION:

1. What idol(s) tends to rule your heart daily as you parent? How does a particular parenting idol shape the way you respond to your child?
2. What events have been pivotal in your family history? How have these events affected you? How do you think they have affected (or will affect) your children?
3. Do you tend to be a determinist when you look at your kids? Do you think a Christian or non-Christian future is inevitable? How do the truths taught in this lesson inform and change your thinking?
4. Do you tend to have a “drop off” mentality—thinking of the church’s minister’s as professionals? Or do you have a “nuclear family” mentality—thinking you can handle things on your own without the church? How do the truths taught in this lesson inform and change your thinking?

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<sup>20</sup> Adapted from David Michael, *A Father’s Guide to Blessing His Children*, Children Desiring God, 1999, pp. 30-31