

# Christian Parenting

Rev. Stephen Farish, CHAUS Parent

Dr. David Roth asked me to write down some of the principles my wife Robin and I have sought to employ, by God's grace, to raise up our four children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Here are just a handful of thoughts that may be helpful to you. I offer these suggestions up in humility, knowing that I have a lot to learn as a parent.

1. The Christian writer A.W. Tozer said the church's greatest obligation is to pass down to the next generation of Christians "undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God which we received from our Hebrew and Christian fathers"<sup>[1]</sup> (i.e., from the Scriptures). It is true that is the central work of the church, but the Bible just as forcefully exhorts us as parents to hand down to our children the glorious picture the Scriptures paint of the one true God we call our Heavenly Father (Deuteronomy 6:7; Psalm 145:4). There is nothing more important that we parents can do than teach our children the great biblical truths about God's person and ways. The Lord will use such instruction from us to enrapture our children with His spiritual beauty and excellence, so that they will know that in His presence alone is there fullness of joy, and at His right hand alone are there pleasures forevermore (Psalm 17:11). Through us our kids will be able to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8) and that He alone can satisfy the deepest longings of the human soul (Philippians 3:8; Psalms 63:1-3; 73:25-26).
2. Teach and model for your children your own total dependence on God's grace for all things (Psalm 123:1-2), so that they will see and know that apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, they will be able to do nothing to the Lord's glory (John 15:5), the purpose for which God created us (1 Corinthians 10:31; Isaiah 43:7). Speak often of your own desperate need for God's grace, and demonstrate to them your own lack of self-sufficiency and total dependence on God-sufficiency (Philippians 4:13, 19).
3. Never discipline your children out of anger but out of love and a sincere desire for their growth in godliness. You will need God's grace to restrain your anger, so that you will never have to regret the kind of discipline you administer. Hebrews 12:7-11 makes it clear that our Heavenly Father always disciplines us for our good, "that we may share in His holiness." The Lord wants our discipline of our children, by His grace, to be modeled on His discipline of us.
4. Pray for your children "in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18), which at least means asking God daily to save their souls, to help them live to His glory, and to lead them to marry God-loving spouses. I cannot prove it from the Bible, but it seems to me in my experience as a pastor that God especially loves to answer the prayers of loving mothers for their children.

5. Seek to live out, by God's grace, the biblical vision for your marriage (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7; etc.). The best way a father's daughters will know what kind of men to marry one day is for that father to evidence the grace of a godly husband. The best way a mother's sons will know what kind of women to marry one day is for that mother to evidence the grace of a godly wife. Men, would you not love for your daughters one day to say they want to marry a man just like you? Ladies, would your heart not be thrilled if one day your sons told you they wanted to marry women just like you?
6. Make sure, so far as it is possible for you, that everything that enters your child's mind is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable (Philippians 4:8). Though television-watching is a matter of Christian freedom, the principle of Philippians 4:8 has led us to disconnect cable television for the last 12 years from our home. As a consequence we watch almost no television. To be honest, I have missed being able to watch sports on television, but the happy trade-off is that we naturally spend more time together talking as a family, and our children for the most part are dedicated readers. I would always prefer that our children read books rather than watch television, because the former actively engages their minds, while the latter is largely passive.
7. Almost nothing will replace time spent with your children. The studies I have read through the years universally discredit the idea that it is quality time that counts and not quantity. In fact the amount of time you invest in your children is critically important. In our stressed-out world in which our employers demand more and more of our time, setting aside time for our children is a task for which we more and more need the Lord's wisdom. Eat meals together. Talk together. Listen to them. Read books together. Go to your kids' games whenever possible.
8. Talk to your children often about the cross of Christ. The crucifixion of the Son of God for the sake of sinners is the supreme event of all eternity and the best news that human ears will ever hear. Pray that God in his grace would make you and your children to be like the Apostle Paul, who resolved in his life to know only "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Speak often of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17), because that good news has the power to transform the lives of your children for the glory of God.

There is much more that any of us could say, and I suspect you have principles you follow in your own family that would be important to add to this list. The "bottom line" reality is that we parents desperately need the grace of our Heavenly Father in every aspect of our child-rearing, especially in these difficult days. God bless you all with that grace!