

Luke 15:11-24; Colossians 3:18-21 May 21, 2023

Parents That Give Life

We're still in the Easter season: Christ has risen. He has risen indeed! He is the resurrection and the life - the supreme life-giver. In the next few weeks, I plan to speak about "Life Givers." By that I mean to speak about being people who give light and life to others. Isn't it the case that we all prefer to be around people who are positive, encouraging, supportive, and giving? The world needs more "life-givers."

Jesus said, *I have come that they may have life to the full*, John 10:10. Filled with the life of the Father, Jesus offers to make us life-givers. The Holy Spirit working in us, causes our relationships to be life-giving. When we become life-givers through Him we are able to quit waiting for other people to fix us and our broken relationships, we're able to take our eyes off ourselves long enough to see the needs of others, we are emboldened to offer life in Jesus to those who do not know Him.

Last week was Mother's Day; a day to be thankful for moms bring us into this world and nurture us. Life giving moms understand that love is not about feelings. True love is action taken on behalf of another. They willingly sacrifice their own desires and ambitions for the sake of their child's future. Good moms are essential to nurturing good children, and let me add that good dads are just as necessary. Children have a better chance to become life-giving adults when they are raised by moms and dads who provide the spiritual and emotional foundation from which they can successfully launch into honorable womanhood or manhood. How many of us are going to heaven because a mother or father continually prayed for us?

Anyone who's been a mom or a dad knows that being a parent may be one of the most challenging roles anyone can undertake. A little girl asks "Daddy, what's your birthstone?" He answers, "A grindstone." Parenting brings you to the heights of joy or to the depths of sorrow. Now, you may think that this message doesn't apply to you because you're not a parent (or maybe you're so done with parenting you don't want to hear about it). But I ask you to listen anyway; likely you'll find a few nuggets of wisdom here. In our church family all adults can be life givers for the children and youth.

Here's my assumptions for this, and the following messages about life-giving: God created us out of love, His love gives us life, and we can be life givers, with His help, no matter our circumstances.

Begin With The Bible

How can I become a life-giving parent? Actually, there are quite a few verses that mention parents and parenting in the Bible. Immediately after God created humans in His image - male and female He created them - God blessed them and said to them, *'Be fruitful and increase in number...'* Gen. 1:28. That means have children, and that means become a parent. One Psalm says, *Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him*, Psalm 127:3.

Some of you may remember Jesus' parable of the prodigal son - which is really about a prodigal father. The story illustrates how God loves us. While the son acted as though he didn't belong in his father's family, his father knowing that he belongs, welcomed him back with open arms. This is the biblical model that underlies life giving

parenting. I know not all parent-child relationships turn out like this. Nevertheless, our guide for parenting is that God wants to redeem all and wants all to become His true children. This is what is behind St. Paul's advice, *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged*, Col. 3:21.

True Love

The word "love," as often used in the Bible, is "agape" or self-sacrificing love. That's the kind of love God shows us: *God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son...* John 3:16. God then asks of us, *Love your neighbor as yourself...* Mark 12:31. Parents who are life givers understand and practice "agape" love. Parents who raise children who become assets to family and community, must be willing to sacrifice their own desires and ambitions. *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children*, 2 Corinthians 12:14. The life-giving parent will look to the future of their children, because children so often cannot. and at the very least not place undue burdens on them. [One of my great concerns as a parent is state and national debt. Politicians who continue to vote for debt increases are placing a heavy debt on future generations in order to bribe the present generation. "Christmas is the time when kids tell Santa what they want and adults pay for it. Deficits are when adults tell government what they want and their kids pay for it," Richard Lamm. That is not "agape" love for the next generation.]

We know enough about human nature that we must temper our self-sacrifice with instruction and discipline, lest the child never mature and take responsibility for his/her own life. That is a reflection of how God treats us: if God gave us every desire of our heart, without any effort on our part, we would become mean-spirited (small in spirit), irresponsible, selfish, and demanding people. God respects us too much to allow that. We are made in His image, to be like Him in ability to give and receive true love, and to be responsible for ourselves. *The Lord corrects those he loves, as parents correct a child of whom they are proud*, Proverbs 3:12.

Growing to maturity means learning self-control and learning how to love as God has loved us. Children must be taught this. The greatest legacy we can pass on to our children is an abiding faith in God, known in Jesus Christ. *Parents will praise your works to their children. They will tell about your mighty acts*, Psalm 145:4. That's how children grow in wisdom and understanding.

Unrequited Parenting

Many people believe that the child is a reflection of the parent. *A righteous person's parents have good reason to be happy. You can take pride in a wise child*, Proverbs 23:24. Yes, if a child turns out to know and love God and is a blessing to family and society, parents have good reason to be happy. Just a word of caution: it's not really healthy to try to live out your own dreams through your children ... they must be their own person.

Who hasn't heard this one? Prov. 22:6, *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* And from that verse many a Christian parent

has entertained the notion that if they just raise their children in a godly home, bring them to church, send them to the right schools, see that they associate with kids from godly homes, then their kids will turn out good and faithful. When the kids turn out swell, parents are inclined to take all the credit, easily becoming prideful.

The other side of this belief is this: if the kids don't turn out good and faithful, then the parents must have done something wrong. The result is a lot of parents carrying a lot of guilt. Raising kids in a godly home, being godly parents is the best way to go – but it is no guarantee.

Take note: the Proverb says if they're raised rightly, they'll likely stick with it. It does not say that if they turn away from their upbringing they'll eventually come back. There is no promise of that. In the parable of the prodigal son one of the reasons the father was so joyous at the return of his son was because it doesn't happen all the time.

Life giving parents make sacrifices so their child will have opportunities to fulfill their potential for achievement, accomplishment, and contentment in life. The joy of parenting is to see those dreams come true. But when the child discards those opportunities and derails his own potential, well ... *There is nothing but sadness and sorrow for parents whose children do foolish things, Proverbs 17:21.*

But guilt over your parenting is unwarranted (unless of course you are a completely irresponsible parent). I'm talking here of parents who do their best, seek professional help with a difficult child, pray and ask God's help. Some parents heap guilt upon themselves when they have children who are troubled or challenged in manifold ways. Often adoptive parents or step-parents get caught in this guilt trap and all the emotional pain it brings. A little boy asks, "If a boy is a lad and he has a step-father, does that make him a step ladder?"

In incredible acts of love, sacrifice, and grace parents, adoptive parents, step-parents and many foster parents, nurture a child by providing a good home and spiritual foundation. Parents can be devastated when their parenting doesn't produce a fulfilled adult and solid citizen. Yes, how we raise our children is vitally important. Nevertheless, a good and godly home does not always trump the gene pool or the foolish choices of a rebel.

The Bible teaches that we are responsible for how we raise our children (teach them to know right from wrong, to revere God, to receive Jesus as Savior), but we are not responsible for the outcome. That's because the child is a player – and each person is accountable for his/her choices. Every son and daughter of Adam and Eve is born with a sin nature – a propensity for self-centered and sinful behavior. A loving home, prayers, and godly parents cannot eliminate that sinful nature. And sometimes it gets the upper hand. When it does, it's not Mom or Dad's fault, not the teacher's fault, not the home life. Each person is responsible for their choices. With God's help we all have the capacity to overcome life's difficulties. That is something we must teach our children as they mature. There are cases where a special needs child must have continued care. But many children, at some point, must be cut loose and live by their own choices, while parents keep praying for them. There are too many factors in the complexity that makes for a human life to pin it all on the parents, so put away the guilt.

From Guilt To Gratitude

Parenting is not for the faint of heart – right? Here’s a few things I’ve learned along the way striving as a Christian and a parent:

1. It is always right and good to bring your children up in the way of the Lord, giving them opportunities to receive Christ as their Savior, learn to practice agape love, and honor God.

2. Kids need good adult role models in addition to their parents.

3. Advice and critique on parenting is easy to give. But in the midst of battle it’s not so simple. Kids know how to light our fuses, and sometimes we say or do things we regret. God is still good.

4. Each child is unique and so our expectations and our methods may change with each child. We are responsible for how we raise them, not for the outcome.

5. You never stop being a parent – even when your kids are adults. Parenting has made me realize that I need God’s grace and help to be a dad.... and to reflect on how God must see me. *Here is what I want you to know in your hearts. The LORD your God trains you, just as parents train their children, Deuteronomy 8:5.*

Fifteen years ago I might have titled this sermon “Ten Rules for Raising Godly Kids.” Ten years ago it might have been “Ten Guidelines for Raising Good Kids.” Five years ago it might have been “Five Principles for Raising Kids.” One year ago it would have been “Three Suggestions For Surviving Parenthood.”ⁱⁱ

When the kids turn out great, give thanks to God and all the family and friends who helped, for it wasn’t all your own doing. And when the kids don’t turn out so good, remember we all need God’s agape love to forgive us and restore us to His likeness. So, just keep on praying for your kids. With God’s help you do your best ... then go take a nap.

Hallelujah Anyhow

Will children thank their parents for the sacrifices made on their behalf? No guarantee. Jesus healed ten lepers and only one came back to thank Him (Luke 17:11-18). We hope our kids will launch into adulthood. But if they delay or come back home after moving out well ... hallelujah anyhow!

Keep on praying for your children, in good weather and in the storms of life. Hallelujah anyhow! God’s sacrificial love is still extended to you and me and to our children. Hallelujah! Despite our mistakes in raising kids, and in spite of dumb choices our kids make, we’re not “mere mortals,” for we all have been fearfully and wonderfully made in God’s image. Hallelujah! When we, or they fall, God can raise us up. Hallelujah! No matter where you are today, with God’s help you can be a life giver! Hallelujah! He is our supreme Life Giver. He will make you a better and stronger parent, an asset to your family, to this church, the whole community, and the nation. Hallelujah!

Parents will praise your works to their children. They will tell about your mighty acts, Psalm 145:4.

ⁱAdapted from Larry Osborne, *10 Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe*, (2009, Multnomah: Colorado Springs, CO)

ⁱⁱIbid, 49.