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Presentation Transcript
Practical Christian Parenting Part 3: Parental Example
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February 5, 2015

We're continuing with our series on parenting and we have the third in the series going today. The title is *Practical Parenting, Part 3*. It's about *Parental Example*. In the first presentation called, *The End Goal of Parenting*, we laid out a practical doable goal – that of drawing our children into loving relationship. If you recall, we said that it was *doable*, whereas *hoping* our children would grow up to be Christians is really not within our sphere of control – *they* make that decision – nor is the hope that they will, one day, be resurrected as immortal members of God's family. We don't get to judge that. Jesus Christ does. So that's not doable, for us, either. We said that the strategy laid out for us in the Bible to accomplish loving relationship is this: to parent them the way God parents us. One of the elements of God's drawing effort, for us, is the example He sets for us. We, then, following that line, need, as a part of our plan, to set an example for our children.

Now, one of the things that we all need to focus in on here is that humans learn by watching. In 1 Peter 2:21, He says:

1 Peter 2:21 – *To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example so that you might follow in His steps. We naturally tend to follow the example of other people that we observe. And he says of Christ: He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. And when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously – all things we're supposed to do, too. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but now have returned to the Shepherd and the Overseer of your souls.*

So Peter is, here, explaining two elements of God's drawing approach and plan. Jesus showed us how to respond to suffering, injustice, disrespect and He showed us that He was willing to sacrifice for us. Both of these elements need to be a part of our parenting. His

love for us is the sacrificial kind of love. He came and showed us a better way to live in the world.

Why does this draw us? Because all humans learn by watching and imitating. If we see Jesus sacrificing for us and living a perfect example of the law, we know what to do. Children are the same. They're sponges for our actions, as well as our words.

Next, I have a few areas that seem to cause most of the problems I see in my office between children and parents, and we're going to go through them one by one. This principle is *so* important – this next one.

When children have an issue, examine yourself first. Why? Well, before we can resolve any child misbehavior issues, we need to understand it. Where are they getting it from? What's making them angry? Where did they see that? Where did they hear that? Usually, it comes from the family.

I was talking to a mom and dad some time ago. The mother had just finished telling me that she was really angry with her husband, because he shoved their thirteen-year-old daughter during a yelling match. And he said, admittedly, "I was so angry and frustrated I went over the line." And I asked, "Why were you so angry?" And he said, "She was screaming at both of us." And I said, "Okay, here's what *I* heard: You think shoving and yelling at your child will teach her not to yell at you. Of course, when you put it that way, it becomes obvious that that doesn't work, right? And then the mother added, "She was screaming at him, because he yelled at her first." He said, "That's the only thing she responds to." And I said, "Did you see how she responded? She has learned how to be disrespectful from you." He asked, "What else can I do to get her to do what she needs to do?" And you see, really, that really is the problem right there. He just doesn't know what else to do. He needs to learn a way to gain cooperation instead of resistance. The current method he's using, which he learned from his parents – who used to yell at him – isn't working. When his parents were using anger to try to control him – even though it made him angry and resistant – he learned that that was the way to parent. He didn't sit down and think, "Oh, I'm going to treat my children the same way my parents treated me. He just absorbed it. And when he gets stressed, he goes back into that same mode.

Some people take it to the other extreme, however. They bitterly resent their parents disrespectful power approach and they say, "I'm never going to do that to my child," but they don't know any other way, so they let the child run roughshod over the family – no boundaries – because they have no other way that they know of to enforce them.

So, you start out with the same parental approach and you get two different responses from adults – one, to use the power, and one, to just abdicate responsibility.

So, with this family, we started with all the worst misbehaviors that their children exhibited. Then we talked about their responses and the general tone that they were setting

in the home. The father said, when he blew up, he was trying to get his daughter to clean up her room. And I said, “Well, what does mom say to get her to do it.” “She nags her, but she never gives her any punishment, so she doesn’t ever do anything.” And I looked at the mother, and I said, “When you nag, what does your daughter learn from that – what *has* she learned?” She had this big question mark in her voice: “That she doesn’t have to do it?” I said, “Right! Remember that children don’t listen to what you say as much as they watch what you do. If there’s no consequence for ignoring Mom, then that’s what’s going to happen. She’s just going to do whatever she wants. So, Dad, your use of anger is seen as disrespect and that *always* meets with resistance. And, Mom, your lacking of enforcing boundaries has taught your daughter that she doesn’t have to obey you. Now, there’s nothing wrong with your daughter. She’s just reacting to your parenting. Change that and she’s going to change her response. How does she do at school and at church?” And he said, “The perfect child! Everybody likes her. She’s polite and respectful. She’s very well-thought-of everywhere she goes. She’s doing well at school. She gets straight A’s. People at church love her.” And I said, “Well, there you go. The problem is at home. One good thing to think about here is that, because she’s seen you two be respectful outside the home, she’s absorbed those values as her own. You didn’t have to do anything to get her to do that. She just knows what to do. And that’s because you people are good folks. And she’s seen the two of you misbehave at home, also, and she’s following your example there, too.”

So the more we examine our children’s reactions to our efforts, the more we need to think about what results we’re getting and why – to consider how we’re treating our children, and what effect that has on them, and if that’s causing the problem. So, okay, there we go – examine self first, search your heart, then approach your children. Is this a biblical principle? If it is, then breaking it is going to lead to bad things and keeping it will lead to good thing. Let’s see the evidence of it in Matthew 7:3. Jesus said:

Matthew 7:3 – *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own? Or, how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First, take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.*

So, what log is in your eye that’s keeping you, as a parent, from gaining cooperation with your children? What is it that’s blocking that cooperation that they naturally want to give you?

Okay, next one: *Focus on relationships, not material things.*

I know a boy who is really a neat person. He’s an artist, he’s an athlete, he’s kind-hearted. And he has dyslexia – a pretty severe case of it – but handles that with grace and creativity. He gets really good grades, and yet, he really can’t read at all. Several times, when he came to see me, he would say that he wished he had more time with his father. Now, I’ve

met his father and his mother – they’re both really nice people. But his father thinks he needs to work two jobs to provide his son with all the things that his son needs. And they have a nice house, they have two cars, they go fun places for vacation, but they don’t spend much time at home. And that message translates to his son as, “I’m not as important as money and life-style.” And it’s discouraging to him. He’s resentful about it. And he acts out quite frequently because of it, without realizing where that’s coming from. He resists his parents’ efforts to direct him. He needs his father *more* than a fancy vacation. Unfortunately, even though he doesn’t like that – the way it comes across to him and his family – what he’s learned from all this, unconsciously, is that money and life-style are more important than relationships. And, as he gets older and has more money, he talks more and more about material things rather than relationships. He’s escaping the problem at home by spending money on things that take him *out* of the house.

Look at 1 John 2:15 with me.

1 John 2:15 – *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

Did you hear it? If we put *things* ahead of family, the love of the Father is not in us. And what is the most important things that we’re trying to do with our children? We’re trying to set an example of God’s love and we try to beam that at them. So, we can’t be materialistic and do that at the same time. And the *best* way to teach children about things is to put them down the hierarchy of importance and relationships at the top, because children learn by example.

Next point: *Regulate your emotions*. Ephesians 6:4 says:

Ephesians 6:4 – *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. How do you do that? Well, think of the man that shoved his daughter. He got angry with her and it made her more angry. ...but, instead, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

So, we provoke people to anger by treating them unfairly or disrespectfully. Out of control anger is a primary way that we express disrespect. So, anger needs to go away when we’re working with our children the way God works with us. So, it’s imperative that we keep ourselves under control. One of these days I’m going to talk about anger management. I’ve talked a lot about how to *eliminate* anger, rather than managing it, because I feel that’s superior, but management, in the real world, is also an important skill for all of us, because sometimes we just can’t get rid of it that quickly. Until we do, we need to manage it. If we want our kids to be in control of their tongues, their fists, their anger, their mouths, we need to set them an example to follow.

Do you have child who is frequently out of control? Who’s he angry with? What’s causing the problem? Those are the first questions to ask.

Not related to anger – but some other issue – I have an example here of a fourteen-year-old who called me one night about midnight. She was in a panic because she'd been on the Internet and saw some comments about *The Purge*. Have you heard of that? It's this movie where one night is set aside as a law-free night where people can do whatever they want without legal consequences. She thought she would soon see people walking the streets with guns and swords and clubs to go on a killing spree. Well, where did she get all the anxiety that garnered around that movie and her experience on the Internet? Well, guess who else is super anxious at her house? Her mom. She just soaks up her mother's anxiety, like she's a little anxiety sponge. Her mother is aware of the problem and has tried to do some therapy for her own anxiety, but she was too anxious of her own feelings to see it through.

If we want regulated children, we need to set an example of regulation with our kids.

Next point: *Be consistent, predictable and trustworthy*. Psalm 23:

Psalm 23:1 – *The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. You know, that's what sheep need. He restores my soul. Sheep need time to rest up, and eat, and drink, and rehydrate. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

How did David learn that God was going to take care of him? Well, it was because of his experience with God. God was consistent, predictable and trustworthy. If we want our kids to pick up their rooms, be on time for school, not cut class, do their homework, keep their promises, then we need to teach them that – not by nagging or bullying, but by example.

One of the areas where kids learn to be *inconsistent* is where we don't consistently hold boundaries with them. I'm tempted to go to the *baby in the crib* model, but I'll cover that next time.

I often tell this story of visiting my daughter and son-in-law. They had fraternal twins – a boy and a girl. At that time, they were not quite a year old. I was down in the family room early one morning, before anybody else got up. I could hear the twins starting to stir and make baby noises in their room. Pretty soon, I saw Mike come down the stairs in his sweats and T-shirt. He went to their bedroom, changed them, talked baby talk to them, tickled them – laughing. They had a good time. Pretty soon, he came right by me into the dining room, a baby in each arm. He put them both in high chairs and went to the kitchen to heat up some bottles. They looked at me some, but most of their attention was on dad

and the coming food that they were anticipating. He gave them their bottles, which they were old enough to hold on their own, and then started making himself and them some food for breakfast. Their eyes were mostly on their bottles by that time, but they would still roll them his way, knowing what was coming next. After a while, they also began to look upstairs at their parents' bedroom – the stair landing just outside their parents' bedroom. And soon, as expected, their mother appeared at the top of the stairs. She was dressed for the day. That's what she'd been doing while Mike was getting the kids ready. They looked up at her, and smiled, and wiggled with delight while they nursed their bottles. When she came downstairs, Mike went upstairs to get ready for work. Mom took over breakfast. They had a system going. And I was thinking how settling that was for my grandchildren – to start every day in a completely nurturing and predictive manner. It happened the same way every work day.

Our parents lead us beside still waters and green pastures. They'll always be with us. That's what little kids need to feel and believe. Children thrive on consistent, predictable and trustworthy care. And that's something kids can't produce for themselves. They need their parents to produce it for them. If we do that, it'll be much easier to detect that God will treat them the same way, and we will not only be drawing them into relationship with us, but also, eventually, with God.

Now, when a person is filled with anxiety, it's very hard for them to be consistent, predictable and trustworthy. So what does that point to? Does that mean that anxious people can never be good parents? Well, what it means is, they need to get rid of their anxiety. They need to do the inner work and find out what's causing it and reduce it as much as possible. You know, it's hard to hide anxiety from your kids. They have radar for emotion, so getting rid of it is the best way.

Next point: *We need to be drawing, not domineering.* If we're to be drawing rather than driving or domineering leaders in our home, there are things we need to do. In this scripture I'm going to read you – it's in 1 Peter 5:2 – Peter's talking about the elders, but the principles apply parents, who are also spiritual leaders in the home. Peter says:

1 Peter 5:2 – *Shepherd the flock of God that's among you – not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

The Bible says tells us we are to direct our children and have them under submission. At the same time, it tells us not to dominate them. So, how do we do the one without the other? Well, that's the simplest, easiest, most fun thing you've ever seen in your life. You're going to love doing it when get to that part in this series. We're going to learn how to draw our children rather than dominate them by considering how God deals with us as individuals.

You know, when I was a child, I never got spanked. Neither did my brother. Rarely did my parents ever lay down hard rules. And yet, I was relatively obedient to my parents, because I *wanted* to be, because I knew that they loved me and they gave me enough freedom so that I didn't have to always be resisting. And it's not because I'm, by nature, a docile and compliant person. I'm rather hard-headed, actually. It's because of the way my parents treated me – with respect.

When I became a minister – once I got a little older and passed the whips and scorpions approach I learned in college – I found myself treating my congregations the way my parents treated me – tried to *earn* their respect and cooperation by showing respect, rather than lording it over them. Now, I'm not boasting here. I really didn't think that out. It just came naturally to me. That's my fall-back mode. I really had very little to do with it. I was operating from the experience provided by my parents.

So, what do we do instead of dominating? Well, that brings us to a scripture and leads us to the next point.

And that point is: *Sacrifice for your children*. Luke tells us that the disciples once had a dispute about who would be the boss. And this is what Jesus said in response – Luke 22:25:

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Luke 22:25 – *And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and those in authority over them are called benefactors” – I think He might have put that in quotes – “but not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as the one who serves. For who is the greater – the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not he who serves? But I am among you as one who serves.*

So, parents draw their children into loving relationship by sacrificing for them. How do we know that? Do I have to quote it again? I quote this all the time. Jesus said, “When the Son of man is lifted up from the earth” – when He makes that sacrifice – “He will draw everyone into relationship with Him.” When He makes that great sacrificial, loving commitment to die for us, we're going to get it and it will draw us to Him. If we sacrifice for our children, they will know that we love them. It might take years for that to become a reality, but one day they will look back on our sacrifice for them and *know* that they were loved.

But, then, this parenting plan is long-range. It's not about immediate results. Look at God's plan for us. He gives us a *lot* of time to change, doesn't He? In the meantime, what are we supposed to do with our children who are unappreciative and unthankful? We're supposed to do what Jesus did with us. And we can find some of that in Romans 5:8.

Romans 5:8 – *But God showed His love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* So our sacrifice for our children is to be ongoing, whether they're obedient or not. *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.* So our job is to tolerate the unthankfulness, just as Christ tolerated ours, knowing that we would all change later.

On another of our trips to visit my youngest daughter, I was watching my grandson one day. He was pitching a tantrum when he was about 3, and my daughter looked at me in frustration, and said, "Did I ever do that?" And I smiled a big smile, reveling in the moment, and said, "Oh, yeah!" So, they figure it out as they go.

So, the next point, then, is: *To live the law.*

Is there something we can point to that sums it all up – a principle, a road sign or map – that guides us in every situation? Yes, there is. Let's look at it in Galatians 5:14. You know, there are a lot of people who are New Testament Christians, who believe that you don't have to keep the law anymore. Sorry. Galatians 5:14:

Galatians 5:14 – *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word – "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

When our child is calling us names or being disrespectful, what do we want? We want respect. The law of God tells us, then, to extend respect to our child. It's all right there. So, just for example, how would you extend respect to a child that's calling you names? Well, you could say something like, "I really don't like it when you talk to me that way. Why don't you go in your room until you can figure out a more respectful way to talk to me?" See, you're talking to them respectfully. You're reasoning with them, but you're not putting up with what they're doing either. So, if we just think about that – how would you like to be treated in the given situation? So, God's law tells us, then, to extend respect to our children. All we have to do in think, "How would I like to be treated?" and then, extend that to them – but contextually appropriate.

What would the father – that we started with today – have said to his daughter, instead of shoving her? Well, he could have said, "I see that you're really angry with me and don't have respect for me right now, and I'm wondering what I did to cause you to be so angry with me?" Do you think that's going to evoke an angry response? Yes, it is. So, if you talk logically about why you think that happening and what you've done to cause it, eventually, you'll get to the bottom of it. Is it instantly going to fix the problem? Well, no, but it's certainly a move toward discussion – away from picking up a room to what really needs attention, which is their relationship. The reason she is resistant is because she doesn't feel like her father loves her and respects her. And this is a good girl. She wants to get along with her parents. They're just a few sentences away from the beginning of the solution, but he has to take the lead and start treating her with respect and empathy. He's the father. He's

been acting like a child. He needs to act like the father. If he does that, things are going to start going the right way.

Okay, that's a wrap for this one – *Parental Example*. What's next? Well, next we're going to talk about the *Baby In the Crib – The Importance of Attachment* – and how it affects our children – for good or for bad – all the rest of their lives.