

# PARENTHOOD

Raising Children To The Glory of God



HILLCREST  
BAPTIST CHURCH  
*Where Truth Matters*

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## Foreword

This booklet summarises a short course on biblical parenting presented at Hillcrest Baptist Church. It contains an outline only of the basics of biblical parenting. At the end of the booklet, a number of books are recommended to help you with this wonderful, yet fearful, task of raising children.

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# Session 1: The goal and importance of parenting

## 1.1 Our goal as parents

Many couples approach the task of parenting without much thought. Having children is commonly considered as the next step after marriage and is usually taken without thinking about the seriousness of the step, and what the goals of parenting may be.

It may surprise you to know that the ultimate goal of Christian parenting is not to get your children saved. While it is certainly Christian parents' greatest desire to see their children saved and walking with the Lord Jesus, they are not ultimately in control of who gets saved. This is in God's hands (Jn. 3:6-8). The promises in Scripture regarding raising children in a biblical way (such as Prov. 22:6), while providing much hope and encouragement for parents, should not be understood to mean that every single child of believing parents will definitely be saved.

Rather, the goal of parents is to be a picture to our children of God as a perfect Parent and Father. Note the emphasis on the fatherhood of God in Matthew 5:44-48, where we are told to imitate Him. Our children should be able to look at us and see a faint reflection of God, our perfect Father. For example, when we give good things to our children, we reflect something of God's character as God knows how to give good things to His children (Matt. 7:7-11). Again, in Hebrews 12:4-11, we see that human parents should pattern the disciplining of their children on God's perfect example.

This is a very high calling and goal for the task of parenting. When our children look at us, what kind of a "god" do they see exemplified? To a large degree, we are constantly shaping the type of god our children will believe in by the way we raise them. For example, it is difficult to expect our children to believe in the biblical God of love and grace if they don't see these qualities in us.

Our duty as parents is summarised in Ephesians 6:4, even though the verse specifically refers to fathers:

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

This booklet gives some basic guidance on how to obey this verse.

## 1.2 The importance of the task

As mentioned above, many couples embark upon the endeavour of becoming parents without much thought. Yet, becoming parents is one of the most important and serious things we can do in this life.

The seriousness of the task of parenting become obvious when reflecting on the following considerations:

### 1.2.1 The value of an eternal soul

In Matthew 16:24-26, the Lord Jesus tells us of the eternal value of a soul. It is a profound and ultimate loss for a soul to spend an eternity in hell. It is therefore a serious thing to bring an eternal

soul into this world. Our children will either spend an eternity in heaven or hell. The responsibility to love and nurture our children is therefore profound. Far too often parents are more concerned about and protective of their material assets, than their own children.

Although we cannot determine the ultimate destiny of our children, we need to ensure that we are being responsible, thoughtful, prayerful and self-sacrificing when raising our children. Important questions include:

- Who will have the predominant influence over the raising, discipline and nurture of our children? Ourselves, or a substitute such as a crèche?
- Am I prepared to set aside some of my hobbies and interests to raise our children?
- Have I prepared myself spiritually to raise children by seeking godly advice from Christian friends and church leaders? Have I made use of books and courses on parenthood to prepare myself for raising children?

### 1.2.2 What will the next generation be like?

Our children are the next generation of Christians, missionaries, leaders, parents, teachers, lawyers, engineers etc. They will shape the future world. More specifically, our sons could be the next generation of church leaders. What type of leaders will they be? Our daughters will be the next generation of homemakers and mothers. What type of homemakers and mothers will they be?

In the Bible, we see the wonderful influence that Timothy had in the church. He was a trusted servant of God, and Paul relied on him in ministry. Timothy, however, was shaped to be the man he was through the godly influence and nurture of his grandmother and mother (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15). They taught him the Scriptures from an early age and were a godly example to him. He, in turn, became a godly church leader for the next generation.

Christian parents can have a significant impact on the future by raising godly children.

### 1.2.3 Your parenting reveals a lot about you

Not just anyone can be a leader in the church. God gives spiritual qualifications for those who can be elders, for example (1 Tim. 3:1-7). It is important to note that one of the main criteria for the maturity and spiritual fitness of a man to hold office in the church, is the way he manages his home and how his children have “turned out” (1 Tim. 3:4-5). In other words, the behaviour and characters of your children reveal a lot about your character and maturity. Parenting tests our character in the following ways:

- Parenting has a lot to do with a battle of the wills between the children and the parents. Raising children therefore tests whether the parents are prepared to take their stand and insist on God’s word and standards in the home, or if they will cave to the wills of the children.
- Raising children will definitely test the love, patience and grace of the parents. Can parents reflect God’s faithful love, patience and goodness even when the children are undeserving and disobedient?

- Children, by nature, need discipline and correction (Prov. 22:15) and discipline can, at times, be painful (see Hebrews 12:11). Raising children tests whether the parents have the moral courage to discipline their children for their good, the way God disciplines His children.

This does not mean that the children of elders have to be Christians, but they must be well-behaved, respectful and submissive to their parents.

### 1.3 Home is where the heart is

The home is an important part of our lives. It is the place we feel comfortable, are accepted and can just be ourselves. It is important to note that as our perfect heavenly Father, God prepares a home for us in heaven (Jn. 14:1-2; Rev 21:4). Similarly, we should imitate God and provide a godly home for our children to grow up in.

Our homes are to be a place of safety, security, acceptance, love, teaching, harmony, goodwill and nurture for our children. A good exercise for any parent is to stand back and reflect on the type of home they are providing for their children.

### 1.4 The scope of parenting

The scope of parenting is wide and should address all the needs of their children. Parents are to provide for the following needs of their children:

- **Physical** needs such as food and clothing. God does this for His children (Matt. 6:25-33).
- **Emotional** needs such as comfort, encouragement, love and affection. God does this for His children (2 Cor. 1:3-4).
- **Educational** needs, which include schooling, but also practical wisdom for life. God does this for His children. He gives us wisdom for life, for example, in the book of Proverbs.
- **Social** needs, such as interacting with friends, courting etc. God does this for His children as He places us in families, church fellowships and gives us friends.
- **Spiritual** needs, such as helping them to know God, His word, how to pray etc. God has done this first and foremost for His children. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3).

### 1.5 The parenting team

God has designed the family to have both a father and a mother for raising children (see, for example, Prov. 6:20; 15:20). However, they have slightly different roles.

Fathers have the overall responsibility for what happens in the home, which includes ensuring that all God's wisdom and commands for parents are applied to the children. This does not necessarily mean that fathers will do everything, but that they are responsible to oversee the home. Note the consistent emphasis of Scripture on the dominant role of fathers when it comes to parenting (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Heb. 12:7-9). The common picture of a husband selfishly pursuing his hobbies and

career, while leaving the home and all the parenting to the wife, is profoundly unbiblical. God will largely hold husbands responsible for what happens in the home and how the children are raised.

Wives are designed by God to be a helper to their husbands (Gen. 2:18). This is not a demeaning role, nor does it imply that women are spiritually inferior to men. It is a matter of roles. We have already noted the important influence of Timothy's mother and grandmother in raising this godly leader in the church (2 Tim. 1:5). In the book of Proverbs, the role of the mother is often highlighted (see for example Prov. 31).

Fathers and mothers, therefore, form a parenting team to raise children (Prov. 1:8). They have differing roles and responsibilities, which will be elaborated on later. Importantly, the well-known passage instructing parents on how to raise their children is directed to all of God's people, including husbands and wives:

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut. 6:4-7)*

One of the important issues to discuss in pre-marital counselling is the differing views on raising children, as this could be a major source of conflict in a marriage if there are significant differences.



## Session 2: The “how to” of family devotions

In the previous session, the issue of the spiritual nurture of children was mentioned. In this session, the vitally important role of family devotions is discussed briefly.

### 2.1. A word to fathers

The previous session stressed the vital role of fathers, and their overall responsibility for raising children. The book of Proverbs is filled with instructions to children to listen to the words, commands and training of their fathers. This means that fathers have a significant role to play in the regular teaching of their children. It cannot just be left to mothers.

Fathers therefore need to prepare themselves to give this instruction. This preparation includes:

- Regular study of God’s word for their own growth, so they are able to instruct and direct their children.
- Praying for wisdom and insight to help their children with questions they may ask.
- Structuring and preparing specific, regular family devotions.
- Selecting topics or books to use for the devotions.
- Having a healthy prayer life, so they can help their children also develop a prayer life.
- Being an example in the home, so that their instruction to their children is matched by a godly, consistent life.
- Setting aside time in the day to give this instruction, usually in evenings.

### 2.2 A word to mothers

Mothers are also involved in the teaching of children, and the preparation mentioned above would also apply to them to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the circumstances of the household.

Society today tends to look down at stay-at-home mothers as if they have chosen a sub-standard existence or are doomed to never fulfil their true potential. In contrast, the Bible speaks of the high calling of being a home maker and a mother (Titus 2:4-5). In this role, mothers can apply the instruction of the Bible during family devotions, to the lives of their children. For example:

- Shopping: praising God for His provision, and warning of the dangers of materialism.
- Selecting clothes: speaking about the need for modesty.
- Eating: thanking God for His provision, speaking of health and nutrition so they can live fuller lives to God’s glory.
- Doing chores in the home: speaking of doing all things to God’s glory with a cheerful attitude, and how God is One who loves order.

The above considerations are not meant to place guilt on mothers who have to work due to economic hardship, or single mother households. In these circumstances, mothers need to ensure

that their children are left with responsible, Christian influences during the day. The role of the local church may be to assist mothers in such circumstances.

## 2.3 Structuring age-appropriate family devotions

The discussions below need to be seen as general guidelines only. The age categories are only guidelines and will vary from child to child. There are certainly other ways of achieving similar outcomes, but the approach below reflects what happened in our home.

The book of Proverbs is a rich source of practical wisdom. It is especially given by God to help train those who are young, giving wisdom to the simple (Prov. 1:1-4). The themes in the book include teaching about God, marriage, wisdom, finances, sexuality, modesty, choosing friends, obedience to parents, alcohol, greed, the peril of crime and the gospel, to name a few. This means that parents should be using the book of Proverbs regularly in family devotions and general instruction of their children.

### 2.3.1 Ages 0 to 5: Laying the foundation

Family devotions can begin at a young age - certainly before the child can read and write. Basically, as soon as they can begin to understand words and sentences, the Bible can be taught.

During this stage, the child is taught more of the “what” to do and believe, with limited explanation of “why” they need to do it.

Activities include:

- (i) Scripture memorization. This can start off with very basic verses, and gradually become more detailed. At a very young age, this introduces the child to the language and vocabulary of Scripture, even though they do not understand it all. In our family devotions, we used simple sheets of paper with verses written out as shown below. Diagrams 1 to 3 below reflect the increasing complexity and level of detail as our children got older. There are also free printables to be found online.

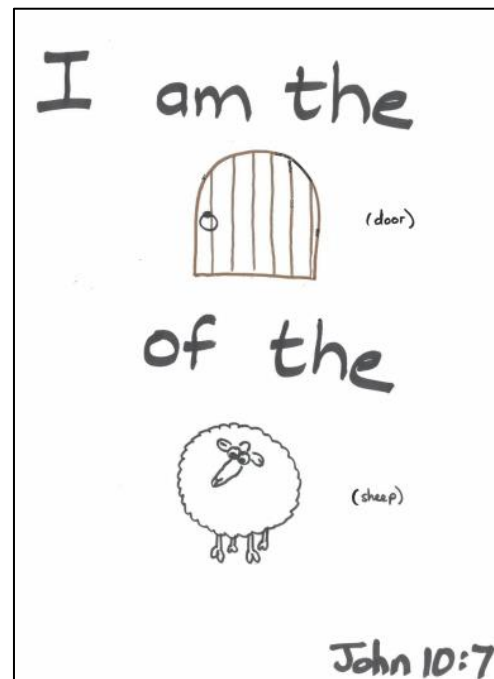


Diagram 1

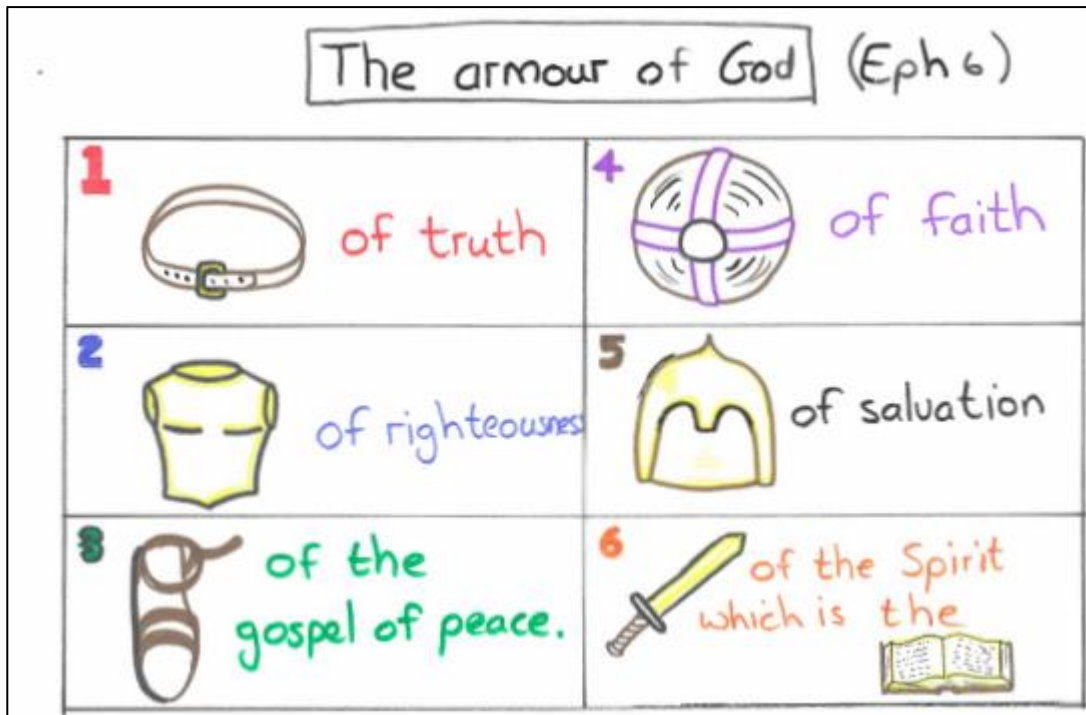


Diagram 2

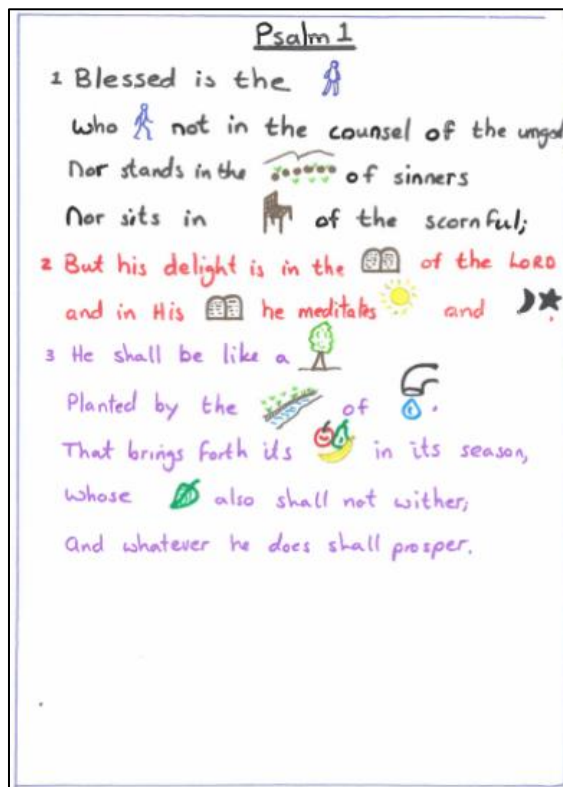


Diagram 3

- (ii) Prayer: we prayed with our children to give them an example of what praying sounded like and the types of things we should be praying about. As soon as they could speak, we also encouraged them to pray about basic issues.
- (iii) Singing: we sang hymns and choruses with our children from a young age. We found that they were able to retain Scripture and doctrine in their minds (again, even though they could not understand it all) very well when set to music.
- (iv) Basic Bible stories: we taught them about the heroes of the faith, such as Noah, Moses and Daniel.
- (v) Christian books: a firm favourite with our children was “Little Pilgrim’s Progress” by Taylor. We read through this a number of times, making age-appropriate application. A free devotional guide to Little Pilgrim’s Progress, especially designed to help parents, is available from the Hillcrest Baptist Church website at <https://www.baptistchurchhillcrest.com/resources/family-devotions/> (available in English and Afrikaans).

It is amazing how much children in this age group can absorb and retain. By the time our children could read and write, they could recite 10-20 Scripture verses, and sing by heart around 10 hymns of quite a few stanzas each.

Throughout this period, the gospel needs to be taught and applied to our children. When they sin and disobey, it is an opportunity to explain to them that they have sinful hearts, that their sin makes them guilty before God and that the Lord Jesus is the only one who can take their guilt away, and give them new hearts that love Him. The selection of Bible verses for memorisation then should include gospel-related verses.

It goes without saying how important it is for parents to be interacting with their children in a variety of day to day activities, and not leaving this to a caregiver.

### 2.3.2 Ages 6 to 12: Expanding the horizons

In our family devotions, very similar activities to the previous age group took place, with the following notable differences:

- (i) The complexity of the Scripture memorization increased.
- (ii) The Bible was used to discuss emerging life situations our children found themselves in, such as choosing friends, age-related questions regarding sex, dealing with fighting and gossip at school etc.
- (iii) Importantly, Scriptures were used to also discuss the “why” of what God expected of them. So, for example, we used Ephesians 6:4 (see diagram 4) to explain that they needed to obey us as parents not because we said so, but because God said so, and God would bless them for doing so. Ephesians 6:4 then became a memory verse. As another example, when our children obeyed us, but with a sulky, angry



Diagram 4

attitude, we corrected it with another memory verse that was applied to specific situations.

- (iv) We introduced basic doctrine and teaching from the Bible. Unfortunately, there is a current trend in certain churches to see doctrine as divisive and “unspiritual.” This is far from the truth! Doctrine is essential in the Christian life for growth (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-6). Doctrine is essential to help children discern error (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12-14). A catechism can be used, or you can select certain key doctrines yourself. Doctrines would include:
  - a. Creation
  - b. Trinity
  - c. Person of Christ
  - d. Gospel: justification through faith in Christ
  - e. Baptism
- (v) Reading biographies-especially of missionaries- to begin introducing a consciousness in our children of the need to evangelise the lost and support missions.

As noted previously, if parents are not spending time cultivating a close relationship with their children, their children will not feel free to communicate their personal issues with them. It is vitally important to gain trust and lay the foundation of open channels of communication from a young age, as the issues and situations children are exposed to as they get older, become more complex. It is essential to help children learn to cope in a godly manner in this world, and they will come to respect our experience as we draw alongside and care for them in this way.

### 2.3.3 Teenagers: The age of opportunity

Many parents dread the teenage years! However, these years are vital, and have been well described as the age of opportunity. At this age, children are beginning to transition into adults, and need much guidance, direction and prayer. If the correct foundations have been laid in the earlier years, then the teenage years can be very meaningful and a wonderful time in parenting. Of course, there will be challenges and frustrations, but generally speaking, these can be navigated by God’s grace.

This stage is the stage of transition. The following are essential keys to navigate this time:

- (i) The essential outcome is that by the late teens, our children must have developed a spiritual life that is relatively independent of their parents. They must learn to have their own quiet times and prayer lives. As parents, we started to reduce the number of family devotions, and encouraged our children to have their own times of prayer and Bible reading.
- (ii) We had more in-depth discussions about doctrine. When our children leave the home, their spiritual safety will depend on how well they know and understand the foundational doctrines of Scripture. Our children will most likely also be parents one day who will need to instruct their children. The more grounded they are in solid doctrine and Bible truth, the better equipped they will be for life.
- (iii) Family times of prayer should reflect the broader priorities of the kingdom, including the state of the church, revival, mission work, outreach, and salvation of the lost. This helps orientate the minds of teenagers towards others and also emphasises those things that are most important to God.

- (iv) We discussed in greater depth how the Bible applies to real life situations and encouraged our children to trust the wisdom of Scripture and follow it.
- (v) We started getting our children to think about what type of Christian adults they wanted to be. For example:
  - a. What type of a spouse should they look for? What are the godly characteristics they should look for?
  - b. How did they want to raise their children?
  - c. What type of a church should they join when they leave home?
  - d. How would they spend their money? How would they prioritise giving to the church?
  - e. How would they support missions?
- (vi) We introduced a “family conference” time from the early teens: A family conference is a time around a table where everyone can have their say. Our children could express what they liked and disliked about us as parents, our home, and our standards. The rules of the conference table were:
  - a. Must be honest, but speak in love, and be gracious and respectful.
  - b. When one member is speaking, the others listen carefully.
  - c. When sin / failure was brought into the open, it was discussed, and there was an opportunity to ask for forgiveness. Importantly, this is a time for parents to also confess if they have done things incorrectly or frustrated their children.
  - d. At the end, forgiveness and love needs to be expressed.

[These sessions did not always go perfectly smoothly, but they were generally effective and a blessing to our family. They tended to knit the family together, and practically expressed what it meant to have Christ at the centre of family life.]

## 2.4 Prayer-saturated parenting

All the above efforts are meaningless unless God blesses our endeavours in the lives of our children. As parents, one of our main tasks is to pray for our children. Only God can save them and open their eyes to His glory, and only God can give them faith and a deep confidence in His word. As parents, we need to show our entire dependence on God by saturating all of our parenting with prayer.

## Session 3: Common parenting mistakes

Passages such as Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 warn of the danger of provoking our children to anger and discouraging them. Parents can do spiritual harm to their children. This session deals with four common parenting mistakes, although there are many more.

### 3.1 Hypocrisy in the home

The sin of hypocrisy is essentially not practicing what we preach. It can take various forms, as can be seen from the various types that the Lord mentions in Matthew 23, and it is incredibly damaging to others and ourselves. God hates hypocrisy. Some of the most scathing words that came out of the mouth of Christ were against hypocrites (Matt. 23).

In the home, parents need to live authentic Christian lives before their children. This is not a call to be perfect parents, but parents who are genuine and who live out their faith.

Types of hypocrisy in the home that can damage our children include:

- Setting standards for children when parents don't keep them themselves.
- Teaching children about the importance of Bible reading and prayer when the children never see their parents reading and praying.
- Teaching children about a loving and gracious God, when they are consistently angry and grumpy.
- Sending the children to church or Sunday school, but the parents avoid church whenever possible.

The proverb that our actions speak louder than our words is certainly true in this regard.

### 3.2 Legalism

Parents must not manage their home and children on a legalistic basis. Christianity is not just external obedience to a set of rules. Christianity is never just dry duty.

When people are saved, they are born again (Jn.3:1-8), become new creatures with spiritual life (2 Cor. 5:17), and enjoy a real relationship with the living God. They walk in the Spirit, and not merely in the external letter of the law (Rom. 7:6; 8:1-2).

Parents need to teach their children that Christianity is a relationship with God, not just outward conformity to a set of rules. This has the following implications:

- The emphasis here is to get our children to obey from the heart. We must shepherd their hearts, not just their outward duties. Their attitudes and motivation are critical and need to be addressed.
- When children sin, mercy and grace must be part of the restoration process.

- Our children must never develop the mindset that when they fail God, they somehow have to make it up to God by doing good works. This is a “works mentality” which opposes the gospel of grace.

As parents, we made sure to emphasise the joy and privilege of being a Christian and having God as our Father. We spoke of the Lord’s day (and attending church) as our favourite day of the week.

### 3.3 Parents speak, but don’t expect children to obey

This parenting mistake is extremely pervasive, and extremely dangerous. Any casual observer of the majority of parents in society will see daily examples of parents asking their children to do something, the child essentially ignoring or disobeying the request and the parent then dropping the matter, or even worse, starting to beg the child to obey. Examples of unsubmitive behaviour include:

- Asking children to sit quietly for a while, but they run off.
- Asking children to walk quietly next to the shopping trolley while Mom does the shopping, but the child does not comply.
- Asking the child to be quiet for a short while and hold in their question until Dad has finished talking to another adult, but the child keeps interrupting and badgering the parent.

This failure in parenting is extremely dangerous, as it has many consequences. It teaches the child that instructions from an authority figure don’t need to be obeyed and that there won’t be any consequences for non-compliance. The end result is an unsubmitive child. It is important to note that 1 Timothy 3:4 requires church elders’ children to be submissive with reverence. This submission means that when the parent speaks, the child listens and obeys. This does not happen automatically, as the child has a sinful heart that tends towards disobedience. So the child has to be trained by the parent to be submissive. Another way of viewing submission is that of control. Children need to be under the control of their parents.

As mentioned above, unsubmitive children have been taught by the parents that they don’t have to listen to the instructions of an authority figure, and that there are no consequences for disobeying the instructions. Such children will tend to do the following:

- Be careless, disobedient and unsubmitive at school
- Be more likely to disobey the law
- Most importantly, **disregard and ignore the instructions given by God in His word**. After all, the parents have taught the child that there are no consequences to disregarding the instructions of an authority figure.

The following guidelines are strongly suggested:

- (i) Training a child to be submissive must happen in a home environment of love and goodwill. This will include plenty of hugs and words of encouragement.
- (ii) Don’t give an instruction if you are not prepared to follow through with it, or don’t really mean it.
- (iii) Don’t “count to three”, as this just teaches the child delayed obedience. The standard in the home should be first-time obedience.



- (iv) As our children got older, we did allow them to appeal our instruction by giving further information. However, after we considered the appeal, there was no further appeal, and if we decided they still needed to obey, then that was final.

It should always be remembered that this training in submission is a process and does not happen overnight. Also, it is not possible, in my view, for parents to be perfectly consistent all the time. However, there must be a general consistency and insistence by the parent to achieve first-time obedience. This expectation must pervade the home and the task of parenting.

Children usually realise very quickly that they can get away with a lot more in public than at home. As such, they may tend to throw tantrums at the shopping centre in full view of everyone, or do gymnastics on the chairs at church during the service! Training in submission should be done in the privacy of the home. The result will be submissive children in public.

### 3.4 Spanking

#### 3.4.1 New legal situation in South Africa regarding spanking

On 18 September 2019 the Constitutional Court handed down a decision that effectively means that all forms of spanking of children are unconstitutional.

#### 3.4.2 The statement of the elders

In response to the above ruling, the Elders of Hillcrest Baptist Church put out the following statement to their congregation:

*“The responsibility for disciplining children is given to you as parents, not to the church. Various texts always address parents (and mainly fathers) with regard to the discipline of children. So as parents, you have the God-given responsibility to decide how you are going to discipline your children.*

*If you want to ask us what we believe the Bible (and God) teach about spanking, we believe the Bible teaches that spanking (done appropriately and in love) is a legitimate and necessary form of discipline of children, along with other forms of discipline, depending on the age, temperament and nature of the disobedience.” (February 2020)*

This statement essentially says two things:

- (i) Parents need to understand the issues, and decide for themselves how they will discipline their children.
- (ii) The Bible teaches that spanking, done appropriately and in love, is a legitimate form of disciplining children.

#### 3.4.3 The historical view on spanking held by the vast majority of the Christian church

This section sets out the historical teaching of the Christian church on spanking for your own information. This information is given to help parents assess the Bible’s teaching on the matter.

God's dealings with us are given as a pattern for discipline (Heb. 12:5-11). Note that God disciplining us is painful at the time, but afterwards it yields a fruit of righteousness (vs 11). It is important to note that the whole endeavour of God's discipline is called training (vs 11). This indicates that the discipline imposed by God is for the good of His children, and should not be seen as:

- pure punishment: it's aim is remedial
- a once-off act: it is ongoing
- causing lasting damage: the lasting fruit intended, is that of righteousness

The book of Proverbs speaks of using a rod. It is evident that the rod speaks of some form of corporal punishment that does inflict physical pain (Prov. 23:13-14). The testimony of the book of Proverbs to the discipline of children and the use of the rod is as follows:

- The discipline of children includes the use of a rod (Prov. 13:24).
- To neglect the use of a rod is to hate one's child (Prov. 13:24).
- The rod is an instrument of correction to drive foolishness from the heart of a child (Prov. 22:15).
- The rod can deliver a soul from hell (Prov. 23:14).
- The rod gives wisdom (Prov. 29:15).

An important question would be how the use of the rod imparts wisdom and delivers a child from hell. The historic understanding of the church is that spanking teaches a child that there are consequences to sin and disobedience, which is one of the most important lessons a child can learn in life.

In terms of the use of the rod, the church has believed the following:

- (i) Spanking must never be done in anger, but in love.
- (ii) Spanking must never cause extensive or permanent physical damage – that is abuse.
- (iii) Spanking is reserved for acts of deliberate disobedience, never for accidents.
- (iv) Spanking should be done in private so as not to embarrass the child.
- (v) Spanking must be accompanied by teaching and instruction, which includes:
  - a. Explaining the reason for the spanking and what the child has done wrong,
  - b. Explaining that God teaches the use of spanking for acts of deliberate disobedience,
  - c. Explaining that children disobey because their hearts, like all our hearts, are sinful,
  - d. Explaining that we need the Lord Jesus to forgive our sinful hearts and actions.
- (vi) There must be restoration after spanking: the child needs to be comforted and reassured of the love of the parent.

### 3.5 Preventing teenage rebellion: Building on foundations

In a previous section, it was mentioned that the teenage years can be very rewarding and exciting for parents. It is indeed the age of opportunity. But this is only if the training in submission and discipline has happened consistently from an early age.

Parenting happens in stages, with one stage being foundational to the next stage. A later stage often builds on a previous stage. Generally speaking, teenage rebellion happens when loving, but firm, discipline has not been applied from an early age.

It is also important to understand that very often, consistent discipline in the foundational years of a child (before the age of five) sets a tone for the child-parent relationship that requires much less discipline in later years.

That stated, it must also be said that with God, it is never too late. If problems arise during the teenage years, godly discipline and correction can still be applied to the situation. It may be more difficult and may require more effort on the parents' part, and discussion regarding laying out the foundations for the first time may be necessary. As a parent, you may even need to carefully consider the situation and ask the behaviour and characters of your children reveal for forgiveness for not addressing the problems earlier.

## Session 4: I am glad you asked...

### Question 1: How to regulate internet and cell phones?

There are no hard and fast rules with regulating internet and cell phone use. Our children were not the first or youngest to get cell phones, but also not the last. When they got laptops for school work, we loaded web-protection software on them.

We did apply the following rules, which gradually relaxed as they got older:

- Before they got cell phones, we spoke openly to them about the dangers of internet pornography, stalkers, chat rooms etc.
- As parents, we could view their cell phone whenever we wanted to. This was one of the conditions of them getting cell phones.
- We did restrict time on internet and cell phones. As early teens, our children had to hand in their cell phones at a stipulated hour at night, and they could get them back the next morning (to prevent texting of friends at inappropriate hours).

### Question 2: When and how to raise issues about sex?

Unfortunately, children are exposed to sex at increasingly earlier ages. Generally, many children have had their first sexual encounter by the age of eleven. This means that parents need to be aware and available to speak to their children about sex from a young age.

There are two errors to avoid when speaking about sex:

- (i) Exposing your child to details too early for them to handle
- (ii) Avoiding the topic, and letting them find out for themselves

As a general rule, any questions the child asks must be answered honestly and with the correct terminology for the relevant body parts. The child must always know that they will get the truth from their parents. However, the information and truth told to children can first be general and a little vague in order to gauge how much the child has already been exposed to. If the child is satisfied with the answer, then the matter can be left. If the child is curious and is not satisfied with the answer, then more explicit details can be given at the discretion of the parent.

What is very important however, it to have a conversation with your children at a very early age about people trying to touch their breasts or genitalia. They need to know to never go with anyone to private areas alone, and that they are never to keep secrets from their parents. This is to help prevent any forms of sexual abuse.

Parents also need to be extremely cautious about who they leave their children with, even if it is close family or friends. Sleepovers are especially a high-risk activity, and should be regulated:

- Only from an appropriate age
- Only with friends where the entire family is very well known to the parents

- Only if it is known who else will be staying over at the home

A good motto is: Rather be safe than sorry!

In terms of proactively raising issues about sex with children, the following general approach is recommended:

- When they are very young, make them aware that certain behaviours, such as others touching certain parts of their bodies, must be reported to their parents or teacher straight away.
- While the child is young, use general questions to gauge their awareness of sexual issues and what their friends are talking about. This will help know how much detail to give them if they ask questions.
- The issue of sex should be specifically addressed by the parents with the children before the teen years. Due to heightened awareness of sexual issues from social media and the internet, by the time the children are teenagers it will be too late.

Once again, encouraging open channels of communication will make these conversations easier and more natural. Parents, make every effort not to overreact to what your children may confide in you! It may be that your child will need special godly guidance in certain circumstances, and this can only foster a closer relationship when they listen to your godly advice. Also, do not hesitate to ask for advice from trusted Christian friends or elders. If you don't have the answers straight away, there is wisdom in putting the conversation on hold while you seek them. Your child should appreciate that you are being honest and caring enough to take the time and effort to help them.

### Question 3: How to cope as a single parent or two working parents?

Single parenting is tough: one parent has to do the job of two. However, God does give much grace. It is important to be involved in a solid local church, where advice can be sought from others, and other families can be involved and used as role models for your children.

There are two issues that are extremely important:

- (i) Select the person (or people) your children will be left with during the day carefully. They will have a major impact on shaping your child and as such, they should be Christians, and share the same values and standards of raising children as you do.
- (ii) For the working parent, there will be a temptation to avoid or neglect discipline in the evenings when spending time with the children. After all, parents don't want to "spoil" this quality time with anything negative. One needs to bear in mind that firstly, discipline is positive and necessary and secondly, consistent, loving discipline done in the formative years sets a tone for the parent-child relationship that requires less and less discipline as the child gets older.

### Question 4: How young to start discipline?

In short, gentle discipline can start as soon as the child can understand the word "no," and starts to disobey clear instructions. This is generally well under the age of a year old.

## Question 5: What to do if the pre-teen or teen does not want to attend youth group or church?

This issue can be extremely worrying for Christian parents. Two extremes need to be avoided:

- (i) Insisting that the child attend every church activity if they are not interested. After all, Christianity is about a joyous relationship with God, not a reluctant servitude to religious duties and ceremonies.
- (ii) Allow the child to just do as they please and avoid all services. After all, there is an aspect of discipline in the Christian life which includes doing things that please God even when we don't feel like doing it.

In terms of our experience, we let our children decide about whether to attend youth group and social activities at church, but more strongly insisted that they attend Sunday worship with the family as a general rule.

It is extremely important to consistently emphasise the joy and privilege of being a Christian and attending church to your children from a young age. We made sure we did two things:

- (i) When we prayed or talked with our children, we emphasised the joy and privilege of being Christians, and how sad and difficult it must be for those who don't have God as a Father in this world. When prayers were answered by God, we would highlight God's goodness and kindness to our children.
- (ii) We made sure that, as parents, our children could see our joy and commitment to attending church and being involved in church life. This meant for me, as a dad who loves sport, that I gave up Sunday sport activities and races so that I could show my children the importance and joy of church involvement (without judging those who did participate in sports on some Sundays).

## Question 6: How do we handle the grandparents?

Most grandparents are thrilled when the grandchildren arrive! However, there can be stresses and strains in the relationship when you, as parents, have different standards or ways of doing things when compared to your parents. This is especially true if your parents are not Christians.

There are a few principles that you will need to think through:

- (i) Grandparents are not parents to your children, so do not expect them to be. Generally, grandparents tend to spoil their grandchildren more than they spoiled their own children, and they will not be as strict with their discipline as you may be with your children.
- (ii) You will have to differentiate between things you can tolerate the grandparents doing, and things you cannot. For those things you can tolerate, you can simply overlook them. For more serious differences, you will have to sit down with your parents and explain your standards and respectfully request that they uphold these.

- (iii) If, after speaking to the grandparents, they continually undermine some of your standards that you consider important, then you may have to limit the time spent with them, or make sure you are present most of the time.

## Question 7: Ho Ho Ho. What do we tell our children about Santa?

Christians celebrate Christmas in different ways. Some steer completely clear of all the materialism and festivities, and just focus on the spiritual truths of the incarnation. Others enjoy all the traditions of gifts, Santa, reindeers, trees, decorations, and the like. There are even some Christians who do not celebrate Christmas on 25 December (and we are not talking about Jehovah's Witnesses)!

Each Christian family should decide how they want to celebrate 25 December. However, there are a few principles to think through. You should never lie to your children, as this breaks trust. You should also never mix biblical truth and fiction as this creates confusion in the child's mind. When they find out that some parts of the stories you told them are not true, they may think the biblical truth mixed into the story could also be untrue.

It is therefore our firm conviction that you should never let your children believe that Santa is real. When they eventually find out that Santa is fiction, they could think that the truth of the incarnation could also just be a story for children that needs to be outgrown. This can do great spiritual harm. [It would be wise, however, to caution your children not to spoil it for others by broadcasting the truth about Santa in class! This can offend other families.]

Children are still able to enter into the fun of a fictional story even though they know it is not "real." There is therefore no harm in being truthful about Santa if you decide you still want to engage in all the traditions of Christmas time.

## A final word

There is no infallible "spiritual formula" when trying to raise godly, submissive children. As parents, we humbly present our efforts at raising our children to God in prayer, asking Him to bless the outcome. The guidelines presented in this book are just that: guidelines. However, as far as these guidelines reflect biblical truth, they can be trusted to represent wise parenting that honours God.

*Train up a child in the way he should go,  
Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Prov. 22:6)*

## Recommended Books

### Raising children:

*Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Ted Tripp, Shepherd Press

*Age of Opportunity* by Paul Trip, P&R

*Childwise* by Ezzo and Bucknam, Parent-wise Solutions

*Pre-teen wise* by Ezzo and Bucknam, Parent-wise Solutions

*Teenwise* by Ezzo and Bucknam, Parent-wise Solutions

*Don't Make Me Count to Three* by Hubbard, Shepherd Press

*Leading Little Ones to God* by Marian Schoolland, Eerdmans

### Devotions to use with children:

*Little Pilgrim's Progress* by Helen Taylor, Moody (also available in Afrikaans)

*Building on the Rock* series by Beeke and Kleyn, Reformation Heritage

*Devotional Guide to Little Pilgrim's Progress* by Andrew Aucamp, available from <https://www.baptistchurchhillcrest.com/resources/> (available in English and Afrikaans).