

Parents in the Image of God

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West Side Church of Christ
Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

(Genesis 1:26-28 KJV)

After 2 years of marriage a husband came home from work. He walked in the front door, and his wife greeted him at the front door with a hug and a kiss. She said "Honey I have some big news." He said "Oh what's that?" She said "Well in a little while there will no longer just be the two of us; there'll be an addition to our family." He said "Are you serious? You have made me the happiest man in the world!" She said, "I'm so glad to hear that because week after next mother moves in."¹

DEDICATION IS A GOOD THING

Today is a beautiful day in the life of West Side. Church is a family, and as a family, we do important things together. If there is a serious ailment in this family, we will gather together and pray together. If there is a something joyful and worth celebrating (like a wedding), we will rejoice with cake and share in that good moment together. That is what families do.

This morning, we will recognize those children God has seen fit to bless us with as a family and celebrate parents of this congregation who have chosen to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is a good thing.

¹ Jeff Schreve, "And God Created Children (6 of 7)." <https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-outlines/75386/and-god-created-children-6-of-7/>

It’s good for at least 3 reasons.

First, it is a recognition that childbirth ought to be a church-welcoming event. Have you ever thought about the fact that we do our weddings at church and our funerals at church, and most of our baptisms take place in church. When we become one flesh with Christ, when we become one flesh with our spouse and when the spirit departs from the flesh to enter the presence of the Lord, we gather as a family to mark those moments as involving something holy. It just makes sense that when we enter into this world to begin our life, we gather as a family to mark this event as something good, something holy, and something to celebrate.

Second, dedicating our children to God is a biblical practice and worthy of emulating. You may recall Hannah wanted a child so bad, that she made a vow: “Lord Almighty, if you will not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life” (1 Sam 1:11). The Lord gave her a son, and he named him Samuel, “because I asked the Lord for him” (1 Sam 1:20). And Hannah told her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always” (1 Sam 1:22). After the boy was weaned, she brought the child to Eli and Hannah said “I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord” (1 Sam 1:27-28).

There was some background for Hannah’s actions. Maybe she was reflecting on Exodus 13, where the Lord said to Moses “consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal” (Ex 13:1-2). Or, it might be that Hannah was reflecting on the Laws of Leviticus, where God said if you have an offering to give to God (like a bull), you are to “present them before the Lord.” Back in Genesis, Abraham did exactly that—offering up his unique promised son in the place of a sacrifice. And for Hannah, there was no greater offering than giving up her only son, giving him over to the Lord. And you and I know that this act was just a foreshadowing of what God himself would do. What Hannah did was not required by the Mosaic Law; it was a beautiful offering from the heart.

When we read the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2, we see that something like a baby dedication had become standard. The text says “When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’)” (Luke 2:22-23). There is no doubt that Mary and Joseph were doing what was required by the Mosaic law. But Luke uses his words very

carefully to paint Jesus as the new Samuel, dedicated to God, raised in the house of the Lord, growing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God.

Third, it is a recognition that my child is not mine—he or she belongs to the Lord. Parenting will not simply be my responsibility; we will join together as a family to raise this child in the way of Christ. There is an old African proverb that says “it takes a village to raise a child.” I’ve always loved how the comedian Sinbad brought this home. He said “when I was growing up, if I tried to run away from mom, there would be 12 neighborhood moms just waiting to trip me.” Yes, Katie and I learn how to be parents from our own parents—of course; but also from other parents we go to church with; with other parents we share life together with. Our children will learn how to be good children when they are in your home as much as when they are in my home. This village is where we will raise our children. And our children belonged to God even before we knew they belonged to us. He formed our children in the womb (Isa 44:24; Psalm 139:13-14), and had plans for them even before forming them (Jer 1:5). My child belongs to the Lord. It is fitting that we take time as a family, as a village, to ask our parents to confess that their children belong to the Lord, and that we, as a family, declare that we will help raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

PARENTING IS HARD...BUT REWARDING

20 years ago, a poll was taken asking people to list things they remember their parents saying to them. The poll identified the six most famous sayings of parents:

6. Someday your face will freeze like that
5. Patience is a virtue
4. If your friend jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?
3. Don’t make me come over there
2. I’ll give you something to cry about
1. Because I said so!

Oh, the frustrations of being a parent! Several years ago I came across these examples:

1. Trying to dress an active little child is like trying to thread a sewing machine needle while it’s running.
2. Cleaning your house while kids are at home is like trying to shovel the driveway during a snow storm.
3. There are only two things a child will share willingly: their mother’s age and communicable diseases.
4. Kid’s certainly do brighten up a household; after all, they never turn off any lights!
5. And any child can tell you that the sole purpose of a middle name is so he can tell when he’s really in trouble.

Becoming a parent is usually much easier than *being* a parent.

A cartoon showed a psychologist talking to his patient: "Let's see," he said, "You spend 50 percent of your energy on your job, 50 percent on your husband and 50 percent on your children. I think I see your problem."

A four-year-old and a six-year-old presented their Mom with a house plant. They had used their own money and she was thrilled. The older of them said with a sad face, "There was a bouquet that we wanted to give you at the flower shop. It was real pretty, but it was too expensive. It had a ribbon on it that said, 'Rest In Peace,' and we thought it would be perfect for you!

But then again, our children recognize far more than we think, and they know what parents do for them.

A teacher asked a boy this question: "Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you--your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?" "A sixth," replied the boy. "I'm afraid you don't know your fractions," said the teacher. "Remember, there are seven of you." "Yes, teacher," said the boy, "but you don't know my mother. Mother would say she didn't want any pie."

A teacher gave her class of second graders a lesson on the magnet and what it does. The next day in a written test, she included this question: " My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I pick up things. What am I?" When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word Mother.

Yes, parenting is hard but rewarding. It's easy for a parent to feel inadequate; to wonder where to look for help and guidance.

Praise God that we have some guidance, as we look to God as our parent.

GOD IS FATHER AND MOTHER: THE PERFECT PARENT

Yes, He is our Father. 13 times in the Old Testament, God is called Father; but most of these references are in the sense of originator (much as man may be called a Father even if he never provides for his children). It's been said anyone can become a father, but it takes a special person to become a Dad. Well God is our originator—our Father. But over 70 times in the New Testament, he is described as our Dad. Jesus called him “my” father (not just “our” father), and he even said “Abba, Father” (which is that term

of endearment children would learn when first forming a name for their Dad). God is our Father.

But don't let that name fool you. God made males *and* females in the “likeness” of God. It's easy to assume that we each individual is an “image” of God. And that's true. But the point being made in Genesis 1 is that when male and female join together to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, they “image” God on the earth. And God loves single parents. If you are a single parent, God loves you and is with you as you offer your child all the traits that come naturally to you, and try your best to offer the ones that don't. But I want you to know that God is *not* a single parent in the sense that he doesn't lack any traits that a child needs from a parent. Both fathers and mothers can find what it means to be a parent from the face of God, and we will find traits that we usually see in our fathers and traits that we usually see in our mothers when we look at God. That is because mothers and fathers, working together, image God on the earth.

THREE WAYS TO PARENT IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Today, we parents pledge to image God on the earth as we dedicate our children to the Lord.

This means that *we will raise them with tenderness and compassion*. Isaiah tells us that “tenderness” and “compassion” can be found in the Lord (Isa 63:15). “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,” declares the Lord (Isa 66:13). Jonah knew this side of the Lord. He said “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2). And He meant it as a criticism! Jonah meant “God, you are just not strong enough!” Because you are a God of tenderness and compassion. But we know that tenderness is not a weakness; tenderness is a strength. The God who brings both the power to destroy and a willingness to save. There is tenderness in God.

In Isaiah 42, God describes his servant, the one who bears His spirit. “He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isa 42:2-3). Have you ever seen a stick bent back and forth so much it is now hanging by a thread? He won't let it break. Have you ever seen a candle that is down to just smoke? He won't let it go out.

Over and over again in the Bible, we are told of God's “tender mercies” (see Psalm 145:9). John the Baptist's father Zechariah sings a song of praise in the first chapter of Luke, speaking of “the tender mercy of our God” (Luke 1:78). James writes “the Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:11).

God, our warrior king, is full of compassion. The Israelites saw only the fire and smoke, and stayed away, failing to move close enough to find the tender heart of God. So God sent that tender heart to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Over and over again in the gospels, Jesus is moved with compassion (Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). He tells the story of an unmerciful servant, unwilling to show compassion on his fellow man, even though he himself was shown enormous mercy when his master was moved with compassion for him. And that is a story about God (Matt 18).

It was the way of Jesus. So it becomes the way of Jesus’ people. “Be kind to one another,” writes Paul, “tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). (see also 1 Pet 3:8; 1 Jn 3:17)

Paul was a man’s man. But before he was a man’s man, he was God’s man. And seeing this trait in God means it is worth having in all of us. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul says “We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” We acted like God toward you, says Paul. In a way you saw reflected in your mother. You saw the face of God.

Second, *we pledge to truly raise our children* what the King James calls “nurturing” them. You probably remember this verse from Ephesians 6: “Father’s, don’t provoke your children to make them angry, but bring them up in the training (or nurture) and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). The Bible says God has children. He raised them. He nurtured them. And he loves them.

In Ezekiel 16, God’s people, Israel, are described as an orphaned child. God was walking beside the road and saw someone had left their discarded baby. Left her for dead. That baby is Israel. God picks up the baby; feeds it; nurtures it; gives it clothes; weens it; and helps it to grow. That’s my God toward the people he loves.

In Hosea 11, God cries out in language that surely remind you of a loving parent: “When Israel was a child, I loved him; and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.” God pauses to reflect on what has happened to his adult children. He remembers them playing on the tire swing; but now they offer worship to Baal. He remembers them gently rocking their baby dolls to sleep; now they offer up sacrifices to false Gods. And as he reflects, God says this: “It was I who taught Ephraim how to walk; I took them by the arms as I taught them how to walk. But they didn’t realize It was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek; and I bent down to feed them.” (Hosea 11:1-4).

Which parent was it that had the spoon full of oatmeal and said “here comes the airplane?” Who picked you up after you fell off your bike for the first time? God is the perfect parent. Spiritually speaking, he does all those things for us.

It was Jesus who said “O Jerusalem; how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” It’s in the heart of God to protect and provide for his children.

Jesus said the birds of the air are taken care of; the grass of the field are all taken care of. How much more will God *clothe* you?

We will provide for our children. We will give them what they need and be there to help them when they fall. We will nurture them, as God nurtures us.

Finally, *we will instruct our children in the way of the Lord.* The book of Proverbs is both clear and repetitive that parents are to teach their children well. Free will is a real thing. I don’t believe a parent is entirely responsible for what their 40 year old son does; free will means a person can reject their teaching, reject their instruction. But if your goal is to do all you can to help your child follow Jesus, there are two most important things you can do: (1) follow Jesus yourself in word and deed, and (2) teach your children how to do so. Do we make church sound like a bore? David said “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord!” Do we act as if knowing sports stats is more impressive and meaningful to us than knowing the names of the sweet ladies who sacrifice their time to teach our children? Do we abdicate our responsibility, letting the TV raise our children, or the school system to raise our children, or the Bible class teacher to raise our children? We are part of a village, to be sure. But we commit this day to do our part. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, starting with me. Paul said one of the boldest statements I’ve ever seen in print. He wrote a letter to a church and then said: “Follow me, as I follow Christ.” Can we say that to our kids? “Follow me, as I follow Christ.” We do this, because Jesus came to earth, and we said to him “I don’t have what it takes. I want God in my life but my sins are too big. The wall is too high? I can’t do it!” And Jesus said “Follow me—and he went to the cross. Here is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us, and gave himself to die for us. We, parents, we act first: we only ask our children to do what they have heard and seen in you and me.

And the God of peace, the God of all glory, our Ideal Mother and Father, will be proud that we raise his children—his children—that he has allowed us to steward for a short while—since our children, like ourselves—all belong to God.