

RRR5 – Parenting for eternity

Psalms 127; Deuteronomy 4.4-9, 20-23

Intro

Hey today we are talking about Parenting. Pretty exciting! Couple of related things coming up

- Parent commissioning in a couple of weeks. You'll hear more about that in the message
- Also family worship night is coming up in 2 weeks on Oct 28. Bring your kids, bring your friends and their kids. Don't have kids? That's ok too. Kids team will be leading us and we are going to have _____ (ask John).

Let me take you back a little to your childhood or maybe to mine. Everybody's is different. Did your mom or dad or grandparent or whoever that was that was your primary guardian...did they ever convince you of things you now know were never true? Like my mom for instance...she convinced me she had eyes in the back of her head. For many years I thought that's why her hair is so long...to cover up the eyes that would look really weird. And...she could see everything! It was like a super power. I'll never forget her having a conversation at the table with neighbor Peggy...I'm crawling onto the fireplace to throw newspaper in it...and without breaking eye contact with Peggy, she

calls me out and says "get down from there and don't do that." And go tell your brother to get down from the top bunk I know he's up there again. How! Your parents ever do that?

Now that I'm a parent, while I know she didn't have those eyes I do understand it takes supernatural abilities to be a parent! Few things in life are as intimidating as parenting. A buddy of mine in ministry summed up the prospect of teaching on parenting really well. He has 4 kids just like me and he said:

"It seems like the longer I parent, the less confident I become in my abilities. When I first got in the ministry, I had no kids and 4 great ideas about parenting. Now, I have 4 kids and 0 great ideas on parenting."

That's how I feel too. Parenting books don't prep you for the bizarreness of parenting. Like the sentences you say that you never thought you'd say. "Do not stand on your brother's head." "Yes, you have to wear clothes to chick-fil-a." The parents in the room know that feeling. Like you must have slipped into an alternate universe because human beings in the universe you know would never act like that.

That's how I feel a lot of times. So my job today, again like any weekend here at Mercy, is to offer you what God says about this great calling of parenting.

If you are new with us, we are in the second to last weekend in a series of messages where we are looking at

what the bible says about the major relationships in our lives. It's been a really, really challenging series for me personally. Normally what we do here is we open a book of the bible and for a few weeks just walk through it from beginning to end. We really believe that's the best way to learn what God wants to say to you about himself. But sometimes there is value in zooming out and looking at the big picture of what God is saying about a particular subject across the entire bible. So what we've done with this series is looked at the big relationships we all live in each day and drawn out the bible's teaching on those relationships from beginning to end.

And today, that relationship is Parenting. And we'll anchor ourselves in Psalm 127, the passage you heard Randy & Julie read a minute ago. Hey a couple of great resources on this that have helped me think about parenting and that I used in prep for this message and that I lean on: Paul Tripp's new book called "Parenting." And J.D. Greear's study on Parenting called "Ready to Launch."

I'm going to walk through this short Psalm to help us see God's vision for parenting. First, let's look at this little subtitle.

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

Some of you may be tempted to think this sermon isn't for you. Because you don't have kids. Well, this psalm actually opens with a nod to you.

For one – you may have a family one day and it's never too early to start preparing.

But more importantly – the task of raising the next generation was not just assigned to parents. God assigned it to the entire Christian community. The Psalm is written to the whole community of God's people

The songs of Ascent are 15 Psalms collected together that go from Psalm 120-134 in your bible. The common understanding about these Psalms is that they were used by Jewish pilgrims traveling up to Jerusalem.¹ Everyone together was not just listening to but singing about their responsibility in raising up the children of the community.

And that is a good reminder that as a Christian you are a part of two families. A nuclear family and a spiritual family. By nuclear I mean the family you were either born or adopted into. But the bible is also abundantly clear that when you became a Christian you became a part of another family. The family of Christ. You are united to the church by the blood of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And so when we approach parenting, yes the nuclear parents are the primary people this points to. But in a very real sense the responsibility of raising Christian children falls to the entire church family also. We are going to talk more about how we partner together to do that. So everybody better listen up because in some way or another you are responsible for influencing my kids ok. And I don't know how I feel about that yet.

¹ ESV Study Bible, "Introduction to the Psalms."

Ok as we move into the psalm, I want you to recall that super power I told you about my mom. How she, and really how every parent...has to keep their eyes on multiple zones at once. I think that is a great picture of the spiritual vision you must have as a parent. Today I'm going to challenge you to pay attention to multiple spiritual relationships that are all developing at the same time. You gotta pay close attention to your relationship to God, your relationship with your kids, and your kid's relationship to their world around them. And we'll talk about each of them as the Psalm develops.

[1] Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. [2] It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Ok these first two verses launch into our first relationship every parent has to pay attention to: **The Parent's Relationship to God.**

The author uses a bunch of examples to create a theme. There are two characters really. The Lord and the person with the task. The builder builds, the watchman watches, there is the guy or girl who works overtime and can't get sleep because they are so anxious about their task. And look at the repetition.

[1] **Unless the LORD** builds the house, those who build it labor in **vain**. **Unless the LORD** watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in **vain**. [2] It is **in vain** that you

rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for **he gives** to his beloved sleep.

Unless the Lord. Unless the Lord builds the house, Unless the Lord watches over the city...it is in vain. What does that mean? Well what he is saying is that for the house to endure, for the city to thrive...The Lord has to be the one that builds it. You have to understand these verses as setting you up for the very important commentary on children and parenting that are coming in verses 3-5.

Remember that old Beatles song "All you need is love?" Yeah that is a great sentiment but a pretty poor parenting philosophy. Yet some parents think aww just love them and they'll find their way. They'll find a way. But unless the Lord builds your house, you are opening your kids to all kinds of paths of destruction.

I'm not saying you shouldn't love your kids ok. But I'm saying you gotta put a lot more than that into your parenting. Listen guys how much thought have you put into your parenting? What is your parenting strategy? What is your plan for their development and how is that plan different from age 3 and age 13? Or are you just riding on old sayings about kids that your grandpa told you at a Christmas dinner 5 years ago? "Well son, kids are like footballs. For the most part you gotta hold on to them real close, but sometimes you gotta kick em away." MMMM...wait what?

Many parents know so much about their work, but so little about perhaps the most important job they will ever have. I know many dads can be incredible leaders in their workplace but are mostly disengaged clueless as dads. Like “Well I provide food and shelter” that’s my role. Pastor John Bryson said about this perspective “That’s the standard? Possums give their offspring food and shelter. Is that really the bar we want to set for manhood?”²

Men and women where I hope this starts is you thinking...What am I putting into my house? Am I allowing the Lord to build my own life? That’s where this all begins. Because your kids are going to follow your lead. Whatever house is being built, that is what they are growing up in. And when they get older, what will they look back on and say about that house? They will follow your obsession with work. They will follow your apathy towards the things of God. They will follow your anger. They will follow your laziness.

Guys I hope what you are seeing is that having kids may be one of the most sobering things to ever happen to your spiritual life. “To be an effective parent you have to let the Lord build the house. Growing closer to God yourself will allow you to be a more effective parent to your kids.”³

² This quote, along with core of the extended thought on “thoughtful parenting” comes from session one of Ready to Launch by J.D. & Veronica Greear.

³ Ibid.

[128:1] Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

[2] You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with
you.

[3] Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

[4] Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:1-4 ESV)

The best thing I can do to raise my kids well is practice a deep devotion to the Lord. I told you, this series isn’t about quick tips to help your relationships. Are you seeing a pattern? The way to experience fullness in every relationship goes back to a deep abiding relationship with the Lord. Which is why whether we are talking about your marriage, your friendships, or your parenting you MUST build from the same foundation. And that means you need to get serious about your faith. Throughout this series we keep coming back to the idea that the gospel is not just the front door to the Christian house, it’s the house itself. And you need to make your home in it. Because every relationship you are in will be healthier and stronger when you are living out of a deep relationship with God himself.

*Hey I’m about to go to verse 3 here but before I do I need to say something to the single parents in here. When you hear me talk about moms & dads...I know there is a part of you that stings or aches because its just you. I want you to

know you are a warrior. And I want you to know you bring great honor to God when you seek to raise your children to the Lord. God doesn't see you as less of a person and he will give you the supernatural strength you need to raise your children. He has also provided you the church as a spiritual family to step in and provide, in a different way, the love and support the other parent would have provided to your kids. We love you.

Ok, I want to turn our attention to *HOW* we let the Lord build the house.

[3] Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Children, Solomon says, are a “**heritage**” or “**inheritance**” from the Lord. “**Inheritance**” is a big word in Hebrew—it pointed to the eternal kingdom God was giving to them. Our children (whether of our families or of our churches) are the first ones we are going to win that will make up this eternal inheritance.

Think about it: an inheritance is what you leave behind for future generations. Our children at this church are what God has given us to leave behind to win future generations.

What we are looking at now is the second relationship you have to monitor as a parent. **The parent's relationship to their child.** At the same time you are giving attention to your relationship with God, you must understand two very important things about your relationship to your kids.

Verse 3 is going to help us see two very important things.

1. Your children are not yours, they are God's. Take a minute and let this sink in. “Good parenting, which does what God intends it to do, begins with this radical and humbling recognition that our children don't actually belong to us.”⁴ Paul Tripp explains this understanding in his book as the difference between seeing yourself as an Owner of your kids vs. an Ambassador to your kids. The “owner” view of parenting says “these are my kids, so I will parent them as I see fit.” We focus on what *we* want *for and from* our kids.

We'd never say that of course, but left to ourselves we can lose sight of God's calling on our lives and just *react* with whatever seems best to us. But an Ambassador's job is to convey the message of the one who sent him right? Parenting is not first about what we want *for* our children or *from* our children, but about what God in his grace has planned to do through us *in* our children.⁵

Most Christians want to nod their heads to this. Yeah I know, they are God's children and I'm here for them. But then sin creeps in so subtly and starts to change our perspective. One way, Tripp says, to tell whether you are parenting as an owner or an ambassador is how you measure success as a parent.⁶

⁴ Tripp, 14.

⁵ Tripp, 15

⁶ Tripp, 19.

- An owner measures success by things like academic performance, athletic achievement, social likeability...these serve as indicators that you as the parent must have done a good job. These things are not bad things, but they do not measure successful parenting because good parents don't always produce "good" kids as measured by these indicators.
- Ambassador parents realize they have no power at all to produce any real change in their children. So they don't look at those same indicators. Successful parenting for an ambassador isn't about achieving goals (that you have no power to produce) it's about being a faithful tool in the hands of the one who is able to produce truly good things in your children.

Am I God's instrument to achieve his agenda for my kids or am I my only going to be about my agenda for my kids?

Which leads me right to the second thing we must watch for in our relationship to our kids:

Our primary responsibility to our children is to teach them the gospel and equip them to teach it to others.

I want to take you to another place in the bible that is such a clear call to parents for how to think about their relationship to their children. Deuteronomy 6.4-9

[4] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and

with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

That's our outline so far today right? It starts with you. The commands of God must be on your heart. You cannot give away to someone else, even your kids, something that is not first in you. So Moses says first you must Love the Lord your God. Then the very next thing he says to do with it...you ready...

[7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The "them" is the words Moses just said to the parents. That you love God with everything you have. Moses says you then teach your children about who God is and how he has called them to live. Because the single most important thing your children will ever learn from you is about the existence, character, and plan of God. That is weighty but true. Every parent, especially dads, want to leave a legacy of some kind right? I used to joke with Zeke when he was 6 months old and couldn't understand me. He's my firstborn son. I would call him heir to the Shelton kingdom. All .10 acres of it. From fencepost to gleaming fencepost. I do want my kids to be proud to be from our family. And the older

they get the more I realize I am leaving a legacy on them. They are watching me. Impersonating me.

The other day my sweet little 3 year old...Haddie would you like breakfast? "tootally." Put a pop tart in front of her "That's Fantastic daddy!" Where did that come from? Ummm that'd be mom & dad. When one boy messes up a game they were playing I hear "are you serious?" Courtney looks at me and I'm like...probably something they picked up in Mercy Kids. Those teachers...

Children are sponges soaking up everything they see and hear. Which is why Moses says you have to saturate them in the knowledge of God. And it cannot wait. So here's the thing church family...God talk must be commonplace. Not weird. Does that make sense? Because the opportunities are going to come everywhere in little unexpected moments. Courtney told me yesterday about how backwards but true this is in our family. We try to have a little bible study, like 3 minutes, before dinner each night. We use a book (I've put these resources on our blog) and it's a designated time to do this whole saturate the kids with God's commands thing and then...they say "hey dad watch me balance my chicken nugget on my nose." But then, they get in the van to drive somewhere with Courtney during the day and all of the sudden the Mini-van becomes a theology Q&A forum. "Hey mom, where is heaven?" "Hey mom, why couldn't God just save us without Jesus dying?" "Hey mom how does God live in me?" And Courtney is thinking...the parent with the theology degree is hanging out at work and here I am trying to navigate Independence

traffic with Socrates and Plato dropping philosophical bombshells on me!

And "ask your dad" doesn't work there because that's the little fleeting window to draw them back to the hope we have in Christ. And responding in those moments will build confidence in us for the moments when they are 13, 15, and 17 and have genuine crises. Dad, how could God allow suffering? Dad why doesn't God ever answer my prayers? Is he listening? Mom what does God want me to do with my life?

BTW – I hope this helps you understand your relationship as a parent to Mercy Church. *Did you know that we, as a church, have about **104 hours a year** with your kids; you (as parents) have **8,440 hours** each year?*

We partner with you in doing the work of teaching your kids the gospel. The church was not designed to replace you, but to assist and equip you for this essential work.⁷ You gotta think of our relationship like air war & ground war. On Sunday we'll drop some gospel bombs, but it will be the day-to-day grinding it out in the trenches where real progress will be made.

Our job is to equip you for that fight. But I will say parents, they will see how you value church too. And this is hard because it will sound like the pastor is just trying to get you to come to church. So you will just have to trust my heart.

⁷ Tripp. 30

Parents who have a casual approach to church commitment and involvement will raise children who have the same value. And when they get to high school or college and wander away from their faith and you are like “we raised you differently!” They will say no, you raised me to worship sports and practice hours a week and to show up at church every now and then. So I’m leaving church but don’t worry mom & dad I still love the panthers. That’s what matters right?

Again, I love you and I don’t want you to hear condemnation. I want you to hear your kids will value what you value. That’s why we need a few of you to step up and help us launch student community groups for middle and high schoolers. Because I want our students to have friends here in their church who can push one another towards the gospel.

And Moses says that time will come when your kids ask, “What the meaning of all this God stuff is...”

[20] “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ [21] then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. [22] And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. [23] And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. [24] And the LORD

commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.

When they ask, you do your best to answer, but you point them to answer to the underlying question about God. You point them to the Gospel. I was once a sinner, but God in his grace saved me. He freed me and he says if you will trust me, it will be for your good. And I don’t always understand him but he’s set me free from sin and any God who loves me so much he’d sacrifice his son for me, is a God I can trust even when I don’t understand him. Because he promises he is working for my good. And you can trust him too. So seize the day, every day, to point your kids to God’s love for them. That isn’t weird. “He is so pictured by his creation that it is positively weird not to be reminded of him and talk about him all the time. And remember, the teenager needs this as much as the toddler does.”

And let’s remember this as we do: No one gives grace better than a parent who humbly admits that he desperately needs it himself. Don’t try to be a perfect parent, try to live as a redeemed parent. When your child questions the rules, don’t puff up your chest and tell him he better obey or else; talk to him about a loving redeemer who not only created him but shed his blood for him so that he could know and do what is right!⁸

⁸ Tripp, 31.

You gotta discipline them for sure. One of the most loving things you can do is discipline them. But here's the deal...when they disobey you the reason that is such a bad thing is because it reveals a spirit of disobedience to authority. And that spirit, left unshaped by you will grow fully into a rejection of all authority, including God's. So right now you are standing in the place of God in their life. And so you need to discipline them in a way that shows them the pain of their disobedience and seeks to draw their heart back to you. Because ultimately you are teaching them about repentance...at the core discipline is not a behavior issue, but a heart issue. So go after the heart and point them to the God who loves them. I wish I could talk more about this.

Tony Ferguson, one of our members we are about to present to you for elder confirmation, has taught me so much about parenting. He did a seminar for some families on a trip we were on in Romania together. But one thing he's said that has stuck with me
"We love our kids by exposing our weaknesses and the need for God's forgiveness. We cannot be afraid to apologize." – Tony The Tiger Ferguson We must love them enough to show them their need for Christ by showing them our own.

Ok we gotta keep moving. You realize there are huge giant subjects I'm not covering. But I'm just trying to follow along with the bible, speaking of let's hit the last two verses

[4] Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. [5] Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Here's another zone, the last one we'll talk about today, you have to keep your eyes on at all times. The child's relationship to the world.

Look at the image. There is a mighty warrior standing there...that's me. That's you. Hey wives, guys like being called warriors. So if you want to talk to him about his parenting, start by saying "hey warrior" hunk man. Let's talk. He will listen. Then this warrior has a quiver, that's the sleeve on his back where the arrows go for his weapon. And the song goes, remember the song people are singing as they ascend this hill, is that the arrows....they are children. And the man who has many arrows is blessed.

What is the purpose of an arrow? It's to be shot out...shot out at the enemy. And this, God says is what your kids are.

Parents, you must ask: "Why did God give me these kids?" Remember they are not yours. You are not an owner, you are an ambassador. So what is your role? God gave them to you to prepare them for the mission. "To prepare them and launch them out. To accomplish that you have to take your hands off of them."⁹

⁹ Greears, "Ready to Launch" Session 4.

This is scary for parents. That you are raising up your children for God's mission. Not to accomplish the American dream of a happy, safe 2 car garage picket fence life. You are raising them for a mission. Totally different mindset. Which means you have to hold them with open hands. It sounds nice to me because it's still a long way off...but what about you parents of teenagers? This is going to be the driving vision of our student ministry. To prepare arrows to be sent out. Parents are you ready for that? And are you facilitating that?

Listen I know we live in a culture that is safety obsessed. You can't get out of a car seat now until you can drive the car. And a bunch of that is good. But it can also creep into the way you train your children for God's mission.

A guy named Reggie Joyner, who is an excellent teacher on parenting, talked about this problem saying "When God designed a kid to be an arrow, and instead you treat him like a piece of furniture (or art) that you plan to keep in your house, you are not only stunting their development but discouraging them from finding God's plan altogether.

*The ultimate mission of the family is not to protect your children from all harm but to mobilize them for the mission of God.*¹⁰

One way to do that is to begin to introduce them to God's mission now. Which means you will lead out in this. One of my favorite parents in this regard here at Mercy is Taylor &

¹⁰ Reggie Joyner, Parenting Beyond your Capacity, 180-182.

Ashley Knock. They love and care for others more than almost anyone I know. And they take their little son Gabriel along with them for all of it. In fact, they aren't here this weekend because they are in Myrtle Beach organizing and leading a giant food drive. And they posted a picture of Gabriel asleep on a chair wearing a hair net right there where they were serving. One thing I promise you is that Gabriel will grow up learning how to operate in the mission of God. Because he will just have to look at his parents. I often think of my kids as limitations to my ability to be on God's mission. Like, well I'd be involved there but I have kids. What if instead we saw it as our responsibility to engage in the mission of God with our kids? That's why we try and partner in Serve Charlotte with some organizations that make that easy. Another one I love is Compassion International. Where they make it so easy to involve your kids in the mission of God by supporting a child in need overseas.

Listen, my point is: Your kids are to be gospel arrows sent out to the heart of the enemy. Are you preparing them for that? Are WE preparing them for that?

Listen parenting isn't easy. We didn't even deal in discipline today and that is something I know you need and I recommend those resources to you that will delve into that. Somebody come tell me they'll lead a study for parents and I'll buy the materials for you!

Parenting is hard. Do you have a vision for where your children are going? Are you ready to accept God's vision for

your children? Will you trust him with them? And lead them as he calls you to? Will you give them the gospel at every turn you can?

'At the end of the day, God gave only one heart-changing remedy: The gospel.'¹¹

That God our Father would enter into our confused world and give us purpose and hope and life. And when we rebelled, when we disobeyed, he responded in patience and love. Sin still had consequences...It demanded payment. And so he punished his son instead of you so that you could be reconciled to him. And he defeated death so that you can have hope that sin can in fact be defeated. You can have hope in your parenting that the same hope that is overcoming your sin...that is giving you life...will be FOR you as you raise God's children he has entrusted to you.

¹¹ Greears, "ready to launch" session 5.