

Helping Your Husband Care Well for Your Kids

You Are Your Husband's "Sous Chef"

A sous chef is the chef's most important helper. A sous chef understands the chef's recipes and cooking style. He (or in this case, she) is the one who manages the execution of them. Caring well for the children is one of your husband's most important jobs. That makes it one of the most important areas within the boundaries God has given you. Your husband and you will come together to make good decisions to flourish your family, but usually, you are the one at home with the kids a higher percentage of the time. In many ways, you're the one who will make the decisions come to fruition. That makes you a sous chef of the home and of incalculable value.

Let's take a look at what God calls our husbands to do for our kids and think about how we, as their wives, help them care well for their families in this way.

How You Help Your Husband Manage Your Family Well

Our husbands are called to be the leaders of our homes. And they need to do this well, not just for the sake of their families, but the sake of their position as pastor. Managing their household well is one of the hallmarks of a man called to pastor a church. As 1 Timothy 3:4 says: "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" Love. Lead. Protect. Provide. That's what it means for our husbands to care well for their families.

Love

Togetherness as husband and wife, involves our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. The same is true of togetherness as a family. We want to love our children in such a way as to reach their hearts, to instruct their minds, and to spend time with them, making cherished memories as well as setting an example for what it means to love God and live for him. This means taking time to understand each child and how to best feed their souls. It is teaching God's truth to them and displaying it to them through how we care for them. Here are some aspects to loving our kids that we learned in part by wisdom and in part by messing up.

Fish and Birds

"A fish and a bird may love each other, but where would they live?" One of my favorite quotes from the movie *Ever After*. We have some fish and bird elements to the relationships in our family. There are times when I understand our son or daughter and my husband doesn't seem to get them at all. There are other times when he understands our son or daughter and I don't seem to get them at all. This is when humility and the willingness to learn from each other can help us better love our kids.

Sometimes it's hard to admit when there's a disconnect. But if we're willing to listen to each other, we can build a stronger family. Here's an example: I am really good at thinking up basic life questions to help me get to know somebody else. My husband freely admits that he is not. He likes to go heavy, deep, and real, real fast. No wonder he is so much better at having fuller conversations about the gospel than I am! But together we make a great pair! I'm the one at the dinner table that can think of ten preliminary questions that draw one of our children out about their day and he's great at adding deeper elements to the conversation. He's learned from me the importance of those first questions and how he needs to practice them. I've learned from him to not just start the conversation but to go even deeper. Together, our children feel understood and loved.

Treasure Planning over Spontaneity, With Kids

Spontaneity is a wonderful thing. Everybody loves something special just out of the blue. I still remember when my mom wrapped this up in blankets and we jumped into the car in our pajamas to drive around and look at Christmas lights when it was way past our bedtime. Or when I brought the kids home from school to find out Mark got opening night tickets for episode one of Star Wars at this swanky theater on the other side of town... And it was a school night! Fun memories; but not enough on their own. Far more important were the regular dinner times together, and the regular times reading the stories at night before bed, and other very regular things that Mark and I did with the kids because he guarded that dinner through bedtime part of the schedule carefully.

Most pastors juggle such a full schedule that depending upon spontaneity often leads to unintentional neglect. Enjoy spontaneity; but do not rely upon it. Planning will help you more consistently have enriching time as a whole family or with each of your kids individually.

Start with your husband's schedule and figure out where his freest times are. Take a look at your kids' schedule and when they have special events or are especially free. This is where you can play coordinator and bring the two together. And by planning these things and putting them on your schedule, it can help your husband not to plan something else ministry related right on top of it. If it's possible, plan regular date nights for your husband and the kids individually. Again, this doesn't have to be going out for a three-course meal. It can even be as simple as going to the hardware store and grabbing ice cream on the way home. The point most of all is the time alone together.

This becomes increasingly important as your kids get older. Perhaps you fear that your kids may leave the church or hate God as fallout from being a pastor's kid. This might happen. But, if you can plan in regular family time and alone time with dad or with mom (but especially with dad) and be seeking to know your child's heart and mind and life in a caring way, this can help protect them from a lot of the things that you fear. And even if they do go through a season of rebellion, you gave them years of caring love that will help to draw them back later. Trust me. I speak from wisdom on this one.

Being Present

One of the things we learned as we went on was that I usually was the one in the best spot to coordinate more intentional times as a family. Since I was typically the one who knew everyone's schedules, I can help Mark make a workable plan for spending time with individual children or all together as a family. He might be the initiator still, but I was frequently the coordinator.

Another issue we face was navigating sermon writing over Fridays and Saturdays – right when our school – age children had more of their free time and extracurricular activities. As much as Mark would've preferred not to be this way, he's always done his sermon prep on Fridays and Saturdays. The trouble with that is it has always been hard for him to pull away from his work, both mind and schedule – wise on those days. But it was important to do so. God gave our kids to parents, but he has made it clear that it's not always enough that I be the parent representative present at that important soccer game or horse show. They wanted their dad to be watching them from the sidelines and cheering them on.

Don't forget: parents are not fully interchangeable. Dads and moms both have a special role in their children's lives. This would be one of the biggest ways we messed up in our parenting years. If we exasperated our children in our parenting anywhere, perhaps it would be here. We have certainly asked our children for forgiveness for not wising up sooner in our parenting and missing some wonderful times all together. Praise God for forgiving children who have now grown up to be adults themselves and see better that his actions weren't coming from a lack of love or full understanding of the impact his absence had upon them for some of those events!

Pray for God to give your husband the ability to spend undistracted time with your children when they are available, even during busy points in ministry. Pray for God to give you wisdom in coordinating family times. Be gracious with your husband as he tries to learn how to do this. It is not easy. Be slow to accuse him of not caring. Instead, help him, pray for him, and encourage him!

Be humble and winsome in speaking to him if you feel like you see unhealthy patterns of neglect that he does not see or that are still continuing, despite your best efforts. Pray for God to give you and your children gracious, forgiving hearts when he doesn't get it right. Pray that God use for the good even those things that your husband may never get right. God certainly has been kind enough to answer these prayers in our family. I'm sure he will in years, too.

This is one reason to consider home schooling. Your family does have more flexibility to spend time together during the week other than the day before the Sunday sermon with this kind of schooling option.

Lead

Nothing like the word "lead" comes to mind when you're talking about your husband at ruling his household well. Before God, it is your husband, more than anyone else, who is for making wise decisions for your family and seeing that they are carried out. But though your husband is most certainly the God – ordained leader over your household, you are absolutely crucial in helping him be a wise leader and helping your family live under his wise leading. Here are some ways you do that.

You Inform His Leadership

I have yet to meet a husband who needs no help from his wife in learning how to lead his family well. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has a family background in which some things were done well and some things were done not so well. Everyone has people they naturally understand better, and others, they can't seem to make any sense of it all.

Our husbands are no different from everyone else. They need us and our strengths to help shore up their weaknesses. They us with our family background to bring in a different perspective on family time. They need us with our ability to connect with different people from them to help them understand any of their children who they don't naturally connect with. And perhaps most of all, they need us because often we are around our children many more hours than they are. So, while our husbands most definitely are the leaders of our families, we are most definitely indispensable informers that God uses to help our husbands be better leaders.

Many times, Mark's response to our children's behavior, especially misbehavior, has been modified by me helping him understand something about them that was clear to me and wasn't so obvious to him. We both desire not to exasperate our children, but it is taken both of us to navigate children's personalities to arrive at the best way to discipline in the all too frequent gray areas of circumstance.

Also, as it turned out, both of our children had learning disabilities. I spent hours reading books about learning disabilities, helping them as they struggled through homework, and meeting with their teachers trying to understand each of their special needs. Mark needed his leadership to be informed by what I learned. He changed what he did based on what I taught him.

Carrying out His Good Leadership

Our household has been a fairly stereotypical one, with Mark at work most days, and me at home with the kids most days. That put me in the role of chief carrier out of his leadership with the kids. I can recall many times when the kids misbehaved or wanted to do something that we all knew exactly how their father would react. They would give me those puppy dog eyes and plead with me, “Oh, come on. Daddy’s not here. If you don’t tell them he’ll never know...” That we let the dog come upstairs or up on the living room couch.” And even more seriously rebellious against his desires: “Don’t make us go to Bible study tonight. It’s so boring. Daddy is out of town. He won’t know,” in hopes that I would choose not to carry out what Mark would want them to do if. But so much more was at stake than whatever was the issue at hand. I was deciding whether there would be mutiny in the ranks or not, and whether I would honor my husband even at times when he never needed to know otherwise.

These are very hard, but very powerful opportunities to uphold respect for our husband’s leadership. And even more, they show upholding respect for God’s choice of our husbands as the leaders of our home. Pray for grace to not give in! Don’t miss out on the great gift these times can be to your children. How you handle carrying out your husband’s leadership when he’s not actually at home can help raise esteem for him in your children’s eyes or lower it. And a lot of it comes down to your attitude. It amazed me how our kids could seem to sniff out even the slightest discrepancy between a rule that Mark put in place and my personal feelings about that rule. If they felt my personal feelings leaned in the direction of what they wanted as opposed to what Mark said up as best, they would press in even harder, hoping to get me go along with what they wanted. I found it was so important for me to show trust in Mark’s judgment even if it was different from my own personal preference. It was a great model for what we were asking the kids to do under his leadership.

Hardest of all, was when the children would ask for a decision about something that I was unsure what Mark would counsel. I tend to be the more lenient of the two of us. Sometimes the situation was such that I went ahead and made a decision before consulting Mark. Many times, this was ok. But more than once, I accidentally put Mark in the “bad guy” position, who in the end said “no” to something I had already said “yes” to. Ugh! Over the years, I realized two things: there would be situations in which I would have to make these decisions. I would never get them all right, but I would be faithful to try and faithful to pray. And, if at all possible, I would postpone a decision, telling the kids, “That sounds like an amazing opportunity. I’m not sure. But when your father comes home, will talk about it and let you know.” This was not only good for the kids, but it was good for our marriage. I was showing the kids that I respected Mark’s leadership and was encouraging them to respect it, too. And, was modelling a good marriage that would hopefully be something they would emulate as they grew up and got married, themselves.

A very particular way pastors’ wives carry out their husband’s leadership is on Sundays, at church. Most families come to church with father as well as mother joining the children in the pew during worship service. But if you’re the wife of the pastor, and he’s preaching, then it’s just you with those kids. Parenting in the pew can be difficult for any family, especially those blessed with wiggly little kids. It gets even more difficult if you feel that the eyes of other members are watching you and potentially even scoring your ability to train your children in good churchmanship etiquette. It may be classic to sit down front with your kids if you’re the pastor’s family. But seek out your husband’s leadership on this. If yours is a family that will do better worshiping the Lord or training your children without the easy observation of others, give up that front row for a less conspicuous spot. And if anybody asks why you moved, be honest. It gives you an opportunity to explain that you care most of all that your family can worship the Lord well and that you want to sit wherever you can make the most of your children’s time in church for their spiritual well-being.

Helping Fathers Lead When They Are at Home

Let's face it. The ministry can leave our husbands exhausted at the end of the day. Passive just sounds so good! I think we need to be sensitive to how tired they are at the end of the day. But I think we need to help them help us and connect with the kids when they get home even if they'd rather check out. Usually, it works best to try to do both. Figure out a way for them to have a few minutes to unwind. Figure out a time for them to engage if they need help doing that on a regular basis. And don't depend upon your husband having the same eyes as you for where and when you need help. If he needs you to spell it out to help him care well for his family, then spell it out.

Here's an example from our lives back when our kids were little when Mark literally started doing that: When our kids were little and my husband was working on his PhD in his little study upstairs, 5 o'clock would roll around and I would have kids underfoot while trying to make dinner and having a tough time of it all. For while I would get upset with him for not noticing what time it was; or, noticing what time it was and not thinking about coming down and helping me with the kids so I could get dinner finished. It didn't seem to matter how many times we talked about it, the issue just kept occurring. So what did my husband do? He added one phrase to his daily schedule on his computer: 5 PM "Ask Connie what I can do to help." That may seem very unromantic but let me tell you: it has been a wonderful gesture of love for years and years now that he still keeps up even though the kids have flown the nest.

Perhaps you do just great getting dinner on the table while managing the kids, but you are dying on the vine come bedtime. You're happy for your husband to come home and charges batteries for a while, so that when it's bedtime, he is able to take the lead. You're going to need to make your own set of cue cards. Take time to sit down together and talk about what's most helpful for your whole family.

Other times, your husband's great at pitching in with meeting the kids' needs, but there's other areas where it's harder for him to lead. It's great for you to step in when he's not there. That's you helping fulfill his leadership, even when he's not home. But when he's home, leave room for him to lead. This does not have to entail nagging, but it may require a conversation if there is a regular area where he's failing to see the need for his leadership that you see. If this is the case, do this winsomely. Encourage him by telling him what a blessing his leadership is in your family both for you and the kids. Let him know how much you want to help him be that leader and humbly point out the situations you have in mind where you would love to see him expand his leadership. And later, when you see him striving to lead in those new ways, don't forget to show your appreciation. Your encouragement will only help him grow and become an even better leader within your family.

Protect

This is the job every Christian father has, not just pastors. But here are some special types of protect that can be especially important for pastors to think about with their children.

1. Protect Them from False Conversion

Your children's conversion: sign of a pastor's job at home well done? Unfortunately, some people think so. It's is a litmus test for how well he's doing his job, they think. It's easy to forget that your children's conversion is of the Lord, not of the perfection of your spiritual training. Sometimes it feels like we failed our quality control rating as the pastor's family if our kids don't become Christians. Or, even if they do show signs of trusting in Christ, the temptation can be to baptize them early as a sign to the church that their pastor and family must be doing Christian parenting right because their kids are Christians. Do not buy into this lie!

If someone subtly tries to take issue with your spiritual rearing of your kids (for no good reason), use it as

an opportunity to remind them that salvation is of the Lord. Listen humbly to them. Take away any good advice they might offer. Encourage them to pray for your kids. But confess your trust in the Lord, the one who alone brings dead souls to life!

And if the problem isn't whether others think your kids are saved, but are wondering why your kids are baptized, use it as an opportunity to remind them that you are waiting for the children to get older and bear the good fruit of salvation that backs up their profession of faith. It's not a fun way to give guidance to someone else in your church, over the seeming reputation of your family spiritual life, but it's a very powerful one. Don't give in to pressure for your kids to look a certain way and inadvertently making them into hypocrites and blurring what true gospel centered living looks like.

2. Protect Them from (Some) Others at Church

Our kids had some very good friends and positive role models here at our church. But they also faced some very hurtful ridicule and judgment from others at our church. "Oh, you're the pastor's kid we can't invite you to do..." "You're the pastor's kid, you should know the answer to all the Bible questions," are examples of the ridiculous sort of comments that peers made. "What are you going to do with your life since you are Mark Dever's son/daughter," jabbed many others. Then there was the time during his school's Spirit Week when our son Nathan thought he used temporary pink hair dye on his hair... but it turned out to be permanent. Someone noticed his bright pink hair at church and chided us for letting our son live clearly in rebellion. Did they ask why Nathan's hair was pink? No. They just assumed. (And even if it had been pink on purpose, that wouldn't even mean, necessarily, that Nathan did it out of rebellion.)

I'm not saying these are the worst comments ever, certainly not persecution, or anything like that. And I know that many kids just let these comments roll right off of them. They certainly can be a great opportunity to empathize with our kids and point them to caring about what God thinks more than others think. I would still say that it's important to remember that some kids are more sensitive than others. More sensitive kids will need more protecting and more encouraging, especially if the comments are more than just the one-off wisecrack.

Probably even harder than comments like these, were the opinions that our kids should be involved in this or that activity to encourage other kids to be a part of that activity or to show the pastor's endorsement on certain activities. "If your son/daughter doesn't come to youth group, why do we think anybody else is kids will come to youth group? If you want the youth group to grow, your daughter needs to come," was the pressure some well-meaning volunteers would put upon us when she didn't want to take part in youth group. We stood behind our daughter's desire to not attend because it was the kids in youth group who were the very ones giving her such a hard time. Youth group was not necessary for our daughter to learn about God. The volunteers would have to encourage youth group attendance off of something more than our daughter's seal of approval.

How do you protect your kids from the comments? Many times, you can't. Sometimes we would talk to teachers or parents of kids. Often, we would just talk to our kids. And if there was a pattern of teasing that showed obvious signs of hurting one of our children, we would not put pressure on them to go to that activity. They could just stay with us. But it is a balancing act between helping them not care so much about what others think and exposing them to more than they can handle. It takes so much wisdom and not a little trial and error.

Protect where you can, but sometimes the better way is reminding them that the people who say these things and do these things are sinners and fools just like they are. They can spend every hour of the day

pointing out to the hurtful things someone else did but remind them that God can point to their hearts and do the exact same thing. You can't always make the circle of life small enough to keep her away, but you can help your kids expand their hearts to love even those who hurt them.

You can also dilute the hurt by surrounding them with other people from the church who love them well without these foolish actions and comments. Usually, there's far more kind and encouraging people than there are critics in a church. Lots of interaction with this kind of people can help give your children give them a more realistic and favorable opinion of the people at church. It doesn't take away the sting of the hurts, but it makes them much easier to overlook.

3. Protect Them from T.M.I (too much information)

Derogatory comments or vengeful actions of church members can be hard enough for us to receive, process, and forgive. For kids, it's so much harder. Not only do they frequently not yet have the developmental maturity to process these actions or comments well, but they often don't have the spiritual maturity to understand that godly people are sinners, too. Add to that, while you may have an opportunity to reconcile your differences and restore unity with these church members, often there's no platform for the kids to come to a resolution with these members who have mistreated their father or mother.

As much as possible, when you share church difficulties with each other, do it out of the earshot of your kids. And if they do overhear you or even observe this behavior going on, don't dismiss it. Make sure they know when reconciliation has occurred. And if you see a bitterness of spirit toward someone you have reconciled with, you may need to ask for that person to join you in sharing with your child how God has restored your friendship. This can turn a potentially harmful consequence into a potentially God glorifying testimony about how God helps his people to live.

4. Protect Them from a Home Over-run with Ministry

Hospitality is a hallmark of pastors. This doesn't have to include inviting others into your home, but it usually does. There is nothing like welcoming someone into your home for getting to know them and them getting to know you. However, do not let your home be overrun with ministry. Keep track of your kids' response to hospitality. We found that there were seasons in our family's life when our kids were happy for us to have lots of people in-- both strangers or couples/singles who became like family to us. Then, there were other seasons where our kids wanted our home to be our home. Or at least if we had people over, they were more of the adopted family type.

Let your in-home hospitality reflect that first and foremost your home is a place of hospitality for your family. You will only have your kids at home for so long. You know God has called you to love them and spiritually nurture them. Don't throw this away as less important than having adult visitors or members over.

This doesn't mean you don't ever have strangers over, even in seasons when the kids are looking more for alone, just close friends/family time. It does mean that you think carefully about how often they come over. Or you can always take someone out to dinner and get a sitter for your kids. And remember, someone might at first be offended by you not having them over to dinner, but you can use it as an opportunity to teach them about the importance of being hospitable to your children at home, first of all. This can be a very powerful and useful teaching opportunity as well as good protection for your kids within the home.

Another way to continue to be hospitable yet protect your kids is by inviting people over to your house after your kids are in bed. You can still enjoy great conversation over dessert and coffee. And if you have little kids, chances are your conversation will be far less interrupted this way. This is especially good idea if you have difficult issues to discuss. You protect your kids since of home and at the same time, you protect them from being partner to information that is better they don't process.

If you live next to the church like we do, protecting our kids from being overrun by ministry occurs as soon as church lets out. Because our very little back garden opened onto the church parking lot, people would just naturally come over and even come in our house, since the door is usually open. We have even had people come in unannounced and walk all the way up to the top floor of our house where our bedrooms are... That's three flights up. And that's pretty in your face.

If we decided to grill out, we have people walk over and say "Just wanted to find out what Mark Dever was having for lunch." I didn't really care if somebody knew if we were having hamburgers instead of sirloin steak, but it felt far more like the paparazzi at our back door looking for some juicy, news-worthy tidbit, than a social call.

Then there was the night when we realized that if people were over the second for the church they could look right into our kitchen and see whatever we were up to. One evening, I was dancing with my granddaughter, and somebody who was watching us from over the church building texted and said, "Nice moves you've got there!"

This woman was actually a good friend of mine and we laughed about it. But it did remind me how very public even the inside of our house could be to people at church. We've learned the value of the fence around our little backyard, of closing the window blinds and locking the door when we want to ensure a bit more privacy. This let our family have a greater sense that our home is our home and even we, the pastor's family, do well to protect are together time in our privacy.

When Is Enough Enough?

In an earlier section we thought about our husband - pastors sometimes needing to care for us by pulling out of a ministry (or the ministry) because it was more than we could handle. Sometimes father-pastors need to protect their children by doing this, too. And sometimes father – pastors need to protect the church by stepping down to a different job in which they could better manage their family.

Here are some questions that could help you and your husband consider:

1. Are there ministry pressures that your kids regularly feel as too much? (especially the pressure of expectations at church, difficulties with friends, or difficult ministry situations your kids know about and are trying to cope with or are watching you try to cope with).
2. Is the ministry schedule regularly causing your husband to be absent in their lives, and despite many attempts at changes, it consistently stays that way?
3. Is your child in a regular pattern of rebelliousness that consistently needs more time than ministry can provide? Does the rebelliousness seem to be made worse by the fact that your husband is in the ministry?
4. Do you feel like you are truly unable to manage the kids God is giving you in your current ministry situation? Would there be a different ministry situation that would be a better fit for your family? Or does it seem like the ministry in general is not a good fit for you managing your children well?

Provide

Provide Them with Spiritual Leadership (Even Though You Can't Provide Them with Conversion)

Another very important area of our husband's leadership in our families is in nurturing their spiritual growth. Most Christian parents start praying for the conversion of their children even while they're still in the womb. Oh, how we want them to know the Lord and be saved from their sins! By the age of two, Bible board books and prayers have become part of the bedtime ritual. By three, we are wondering if we should start a catechism with them. What can we do to bring our children to the Lord? If we can just figure that out, will do it. Just give us a list. We will carry it out.

But the conversion of our kids is not a cake recipe either. We can't make just the right mix and out pops a new creation. Spiritual birth is of the Lord. He calls us to be good stewards. Here are four fundamentals of good spiritual leadership of our children from Psalm 66:

1. Live joyful lives.

"Shout for joy to God, all the earth." Psalm 66:1, ESV

We can live joyful lives in light of what God has done. True joy is a gift of the Spirit. It is remarkable. It cannot be reproduced by any other religion. It reflects the Spirit of God working within us, giving life where there was death. It is living in faith, despite trials and despite having to let go of what the world holds to be true and dear. And so, as we parent, we ask God to make our joy in Him evident. It is a very potent witness of the truth and power of the gospel to our children as they watch us.

2. Live to glorify God in all things...regardless of the outcome!

"Sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! ... All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name." Psalm 66:2,3,4, ESV

We live to glorify God in all that we do. We do not have control over the conversion of our children. Their conversion is a work of God's Holy Spirit that we pray for and yearn for, but we cannot use it as the measure of success. On the other hand, seeking to glorify God in how we teach, raise and live among the children is a "success" we can strive for. This is freeing! We can strive to please God as we declare the greatness of His name to these children. We can strive to please God as we do, to the best of our ability, all He calls us to do, including raising these children. It makes parenting yet another venue for glorifying God, regardless of who is converted. And, it makes conversion a matter of trust in God...just where it should be.

3. Teach the children God's awesome works, as revealed in the Bible.

"Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man."

Psalm 66:5, ESV

From before the creation of the world, God has had one, big plan to redeem His people as a magnificent display of His glory. We read of it in the Bible—the record of "His awesome works on man's behalf." And so, the Bible is our primary "textbook" for teaching our children about God, and for how we parent. The Bible is central to all we do and long to teach the children.

4. Tell the children the gospel that has saved us and can save them.

"Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip... Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my

heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" Psalm 66:8-9,16-20, ESV

As Christians, God has given us grace to hear and believe the gospel. We have repented of our sins and trusted in Him as our Savior. We have the testimony of His good work in our lives...and so, as we parent, we want to testify to our children of God's work in our own lives. This is not a God only of history and past acts. This is the living God who is at work today...and in us! What a story we have to tell our children every day, of the God whose mercies to us are new every morning! Let your life and your care for them be a fruitful soil for a good taste of the gospel. Godly; available. Humble, when wrong. Dependent upon the Lord to be your wisdom, your strength, your guide for shepherding your kids.

Do Not Exasperate

The funny thing about those fundamentals is that they are all lacking a prescriptive list of none of techniques every godly parent should use with their child. Carrying them out will look different from family to family. I feel like this is part of what Paul is getting at in Ephesians 6:1 – 4 says: "Fathers, do not exasperate/provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training/discipline and instructions of the Lord."

This verse is about fathers (with the help of their wives) shepherding their kids in ways that nurture them and help them to flourish. They seek for the discipline of their children to reflect the Lord treatment of His children: with both holiness and loving compassion. Full of grace and mercy. Willing to give them what's best for them, even if it's not what's easiest. And, by trying to be consistent and fair in their discipline, they hope to not provoke them to anger.

Perhaps it's easier for pastors and their wives to exasperate their children than other families when it comes to discipline, at least at church. Why? Because you are aware of other people looking at your children's behavior and are concerned that they will think any misbehavior as a reflection of you or your husband's inability to raise your children in a godly manner. Oh, how hungry our hearts are for people to think our children somehow bypassed the Fall!

It's so important to realize managing your household well is a different standard than producing perfect children. It certainly would silence critical times and turn away judging eyes, but it can be a heavy burden that you put on your kids to act perfectly, especially at church. While it can be very hard, one of the best things you can do when someone wrongly misjudges training of your children is to humbly receive their comments but also remind them that your children are no different from anyone else's children: they are sinners in need of a Savior. By God's grace, you spend your life teaching them God's truth and pointing them to that Savior, by living out and teaching them God's truth, by loving them and disciplining them, and by praying for them. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convert.

It's never fun when someone unfairly judges you but try to see these comments as a chance to talk about what good and godly parenting is. You never know what their background is. You may feel like a loser by their comments, but remember that it really may be far more an indicator that they are a learner when it comes to families. And if their remarks rattle your confidence in how your husband or raising your children, go back to your husband and talk it through.

But Paul isn't only telling fathers to not provoke their children to anger in the way they discipline them. He's also telling them not to provoke them in how they instruct them about the Lord. I'm afraid we learned this the hard way. Those poor firstborn children!

In our case, it was our daughter. We were two eager parents hoping to fill our little daughter with lots of Bible truth not quite before she could eat solids though we would've even done at that early if we thought it would have been possible. We pulled out our shiny little copy of the children's catechism and basically forced it down our poor little active, bouncy little girl's throat. Yes, she learned the answers. But for reasons we didn't find out until later, it was only with great difficulty. It turned out she had ADHD and her difficulty focusing and holding still long enough to spit out all the correct words in the right order put quite a strain on her. Ugh!

She's a completely grown-up adult now and will laugh about it with us, but she said she still gets the panicky feeling if she thinks about that catechism. She knows we didn't know she had ADHD at the time. She knows we weren't trying to exasperate her. We were trying to give her a library of God's truth. I'm grateful for her understanding of our good intentions. But there's something to be said for looking at what your kids are like in using the way they are as more effective conduits for the truth you want to place in their minds for the Lord to hopefully use in their hearts.

THINK BOTH END AND MEANS! Our daughter loves music. If we had used music to help her learn those Bible truths, I think she could've learned them so much more easily and without us exasperating her. I'm not saying that you don't ever do things that are difficult for your children. But I am encouraging you to understand your children and remember the point is getting the truth into them, using a particular format you like.

I would also be careful to not always be using a Bible verse as a proof text for your children's discipline issues. Yes of course, you want them to know you're not coming up with these ideas yourself. But there's a number of popular authors who encourage you to quote at appropriate Bible verse each time you discipline them. Or, quote the whole gospel to them every time you discipline them. Not only is this impractical many times, but it can accidentally feel like hitting them over the head with a Bible rather than softening their hearts to God's good news for sinners.

It is great to be deliberate in teaching Bible truths to your children through your family devotion times, through their Bible classes, and the preaching of God's word at church. But the gospel is more than just "God – Man – Christ – Response" four word summary you might teach them. The same is true of the Bible stories they hear you read and the Bible verses you help them memorize.

I would encourage you to think of the gospel, the truths of the Bible, and seeking to know God as water your family swims in. It comes out in your tone to your spouse to your kids. It shines out in your reaction when you get bad news or mistreated. It is reflected in how you care for your kids, and how you discipline them. And in your humility when you ask your kids or your spouse to forgive when you've sinned against them. Gospel-centered parents are teaching their children Bible truths in so many ways, every day. Pray that God's Holy Spirit would give them spiritual eyes to see and hearts to believe.

I love Deuteronomy 11:18 – 21: “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; Titus symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you live down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be as many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.”

Deliberate; continuous; making the most of opportunities your life story; flexible. This is how God is calling His people to teach their children each day. There’s nothing like life to be a powerful display of the living God and of your living faith in Him. Sometimes, we reflect God’s character... hopefully a lot of time. But other times, we need to confess our sinfulness. We can always thank God for sending Jesus to be that Savior we need, and we can ask Him to provide for us and work in us all of His good will. That’s what a faithful parent be a display of to their children.

There is so much we can learn from others as they parent their kids. I’ve found it especially helpful to talk to other pastors and their wives about navigating raising PK’s. But also remember, that there will always be customizing going on as you learn from others and apply their wisdom to your family. It’s going to take your knowledge of your kids to know best how to reach them.

Children are our very own, home-grown mission field. It starts in our hearts and our heads, and by the grace of God, and a lot of prayer, we take a lifetime to present it to our kids in their language, so that it can reach their heads and with the work of the Holy Spirit into their hearts. We cannot convert our children, but we can display the faithful witness to the one, true God. We cannot make our children have spiritual eyes, but we can glorify God... to please him.

Back to That Sous Chef Position

Do you see how much of good spiritual stewardship is a day-to-day, event-by-event task? This is why you are so important as your husband’s helper with the kids. HE may be God’s gift to your family to bless them by loving, leading, protecting and providing for your children. But often it is YOU who carry out so much of his good leadership with the kids each day. It is YOU who can help inform his leadership by what you observe and by helping the kids and him connect with good time together. And know that by doing these things, God is using you to help your husband to flourish your family and continue to be qualified to be a pastor.

Further Reading

- The Pastor’s Kid Barnabas Piper
- How to Help Your Anxious Teen: Surprising Sources of Their Worries and Fears
- Jessica Thompson
- Parenting with Love and Logic (Children, Teens) 2 volumes
- Parenting with Loving Correction: Practical Help for Raising Young Kids Sam Crabtree
- Prayers of a Parent series by Kathleen Nielsen
- I Need to Trust in God, Hope in God, Love Others, Love God (4 book series) Joel Beeke