

## GROWING A HEALTHY FAMILY - Part 2

Proverbs 24:3; Ephesians 5:30-6:4

September 20, 2009

Over the years I have met all sorts of parents. They have come from a variety of backgrounds - socially, financially, ethnically, and spiritually. But virtually all of them have shared a common goal: They want to raise their children well. They want to build a healthy family. Well, healthy families do not come by accident. Proverbs 24:3: *"It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong."* We need wisdom and understanding to build that healthy family. Now for some time I have known that wisdom is the ability to make good choices. Experience teaches us how to make good choices. But experience comes from a history of making bad choices. So, it is possible that by the time we gain the wisdom we need to raise our children, we no longer have children to raise. So instead of relying on ourselves, it is best to turn to God's wisdom that is found in the Bible.

Scripture gives us four points to follow in order to raise healthy families. We looked at the first two last week.

**1. PREPARE YOUR KIDS FOR LIFE.** We follow the example of Jesus found in Luke 2:52: *"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man."* Our kids need to have balanced growth intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. The family is the primary teaching center for how to handle relationships, to model character, and to instill values. And the teaching of those things is more about showing them rather than telling them. In that way we begin to prepare our kids for life.

**2. PROTECT YOUR KIDS IN STORMS.** We will never be able to protect them from the storms life throws at them, but we can protect them in the storms; storms like change, failure, and rejection. We need to establish a safe, secure sanctuary in our homes by hearing our kids, hugging them, hoping in and through them, and by helping them. If we establish such a home, our children will not only be protected, but we will teach them to establish that sort of environment for their kids. So those are the first two lessons. There are two more.

### **3. PLAY WITH YOUR KIDS FOR FUN.**

In John 10:10, Jesus said, *"I have come that you might have life, and have it in abundance."* Abundance in life is not to be a chore. In life we are suppose to have fun. And fun is to be found in our homes with our families. But somehow people lose sight of that. I knew a man, a father who believed it was his Christian duty to break the spirit of his children so they would obey him without question; so he could control them. In doing that we take away their hope and joy. That is not within the desires of God. God wants us to have fun. Jesus got in trouble because he was having fun. Luke 7:34: *"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"* God expects us to have fun. To enjoy life. But some Christians forget that. They get so focused on establishing the right values, character, and relationships that they turn their home into a boot camp with themselves as the drill sergeant. Home life is not to be comparable to training for military service. In that atmosphere, kids are often afraid to make any mistakes, and so they tend to withdraw, afraid to risk anything in life. We are to prepare our kids for life, not to make them afraid of life. We have to allow them to take the risk to enjoy life and have fun. So don't be afraid to lighten up a little so your kids will know how to live. We say that a family that prays together, stays together. But it is also true that a family that plays together, stays together.

*"Children are a gift from God."* (Psalm 127:3b) Gifts are meant to be enjoyed not endured. Some parents endure their kids; they don't enjoy them. But gifts are meant to be enjoyed, not just endured. Deuteronomy 16:11 says *"Celebrate with your whole family."* Have fun. Get silly now and then. Ecclesiastes 11:8 *"People ought to enjoy every day of their lives, no matter how long they live."* If we wait until all our problems are gone

to start enjoying life, we'll never enjoy life. We've got to enjoy it even in the midst of the problems. After all, kids are inherently funny.

A couple of years ago my son Joe decided that he ought to go to Punxsutawney for Ground Hog's Day. So he talked the school's weatherman into going, with Joe making the trip as driver and cameraman. I don't think he ever operated a camera before that. But after he had that set up, he actually talked the school into sanctioning the whole thing. They created their own press credentials which the principal signed. So bright and early on February 2, they were on their way to Punxsutawney. I expected that at worst I would get a call that the car had broken down, and at best that Joe would have a good story about the event. Instead, as I am watching NBC news, the camera spans the crowd at Knobler's Hill. Right there in the middle of the crowd, 20 feet from the stage, is this young Asian man in a bright yellow hoodie. Between the major networks of NBC and CBS stands Joe Sprenkle of Lewistown High School. Later he told me that he had actually been on stage, which is unheard of. But he was caught by the authorities because their press credentials looked too good as compared to what the official ground hog people were handing out. And in amazement, all I could do was laugh. Kids inherently do funny things.

But our kids aren't going to be with us forever. Parenting is just a season of life. Sometimes that season will be frustrating. But overall, it needs to be a season that we enjoy. Because someday the kids are going to grow up and move on with their life. Then the kitchen can be neat again. Then you won't have to look for dishes, glasses, and cups under beds and chairs. Then dirty clothes will find their way to the hamper, and clean clothes will be folded and placed in drawers, or secured on hangers in the closet. Oh happy day! Someday the telephone, computer, and TV will be available for our use once again. Someday our kids will actually speak a language that we can understand. And the time might even come when our kids will be open to really communicate with us. Someday, when the kids are grown, they will leave one by one, and the place will begin to conform to our desires rather than their disaster. The clink of china and silver will be heard on occasion, and the muffled crackling of a fireplace will echo through the hallways, and the phone will be strangely silent. In fact, the entire house will be quiet and calm and filled with memories. And maybe a little loneliness. We won't like that. And we'll spend time not looking forward to someday but looking back to yesterday and thinking "Maybe we can baby sit the grandkids and get some life back in this old place for a change."

Now in compliance with full disclosure, I must confess that my kids do not come home as much as I would like. There are some circumstances that make that a little easier to accept, or at least understand. But when I think about that, I wonder what I have done wrong. Or what could I have done better. I know that sometimes my kids have thought that I was judging them, or condemning them. Often that was not what I said or did, but it is what they heard. Over time they have sought conversations with us more than they used to, and that is good. Hopefully they are coming to realize that there really was more grace than judgment. But it all makes me think about the Beatles' song, "She's Leaving Home" where the parents sing, "We never thought of ourselves. We struggled hard all our lives to get by. What did we do that was wrong? We never knew it was wrong." Meanwhile the one who left home is now having fun. Again I quote, "Fun is the one thing that money can't buy." We need to have fun with our kids.

That's part of my story, but how about yours? How do you evaluate yourself on this? How often do you have fun at your house? Do you enjoy your kids or just endure them? Do you actually plan fun times or are you so busy that you don't have time for any fun? Just remember that we need to prepare our kids for life. We need to protect them in the storms of life, and we need to play with our kids for fun.

#### **4. POINT YOUR KIDS TO GOD.**

Ephesians 6:4 *“Fathers, bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* That’s not just for fathers. That’s for all parents. Last week I said that God has given us the responsibility to spiritually train our children. It’s not optional, it’s a commandment. The most important lesson that we teach our kids is about knowing and loving God. The bottom line of parenting is to point our kids to God.

Now we don’t have all the answers. If you think you do, you’re wrong. My kids take great pleasure in saying or asking something to which I cannot respond. That’s because they think that I think that I’ve got all the answers. But I know better. And I’m not talking about questions like, “Why is the sky blue?” That’s easy. Because it’s not green. Those answers we can just make up as we go. But the tougher ones are, “Why did God make me this way? If God is loving and in control of everything, why did He allow Grandma to die?” Those questions are tough and we don’t have all the answers. But we have a God, a Heavenly Father, who does have answers. As a parent, it is my task to point my kids to Him.

Proverbs 22:6: *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”* How do we do that? We could do it in a most formal way, but our kids don’t always listen to what we have to say. But they do learn from what we do. We need to model the faith and the lifestyle that we want them to live. We model the truths we want them to understand. We are to live our lives in such a way that our kids want to emulate us.

Sometimes we try to protect our kids by hiding the problems and struggles that are going on in our life. Now there is a place for that sort of protection. But if our children are to learn how to handle the tough times, we need to show them how we handle them. To do that, we need to share with them the things that are going on in our lives because it helps them see how to get through them. When we’re going through grief or pain or struggles, then we can say to our kids, “Yes, this hurts, this is hard. But God will comfort us and sustain us. The Lord will be with us and we will get through this.” We show our kids how we can get strength and help from God. If they don’t see us going to God, trusting God, they won’t know how to do it themselves. If they don’t see us pointing to God all the time, why should they trust Him, or rely on Him? We need to teach them to go to God.

Proverbs 9:10 *“Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding.”* Philippians 3:8 *“Everything else is worthless compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.”* Knowledge, learning, wisdom begin with our relationship with God. And it’s not enough just to talk about God. It is a matter of knowing God, and living in a relationship with God. And that is the knowledge, the wisdom that we need to teach to our children. We point our kids to God.

My grandparents took this seriously. I remember that when I was about five, my grandfather said that his great hope was that I would become a preacher. My mother made sure that church and Sunday School were always a part of my life. She modeled the involvement and activity of a Christian parent. We lived with the great theological statement that “Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so.” But not all of you have had that advantage. Some did not come to Christ, or did not come to know Christ until adulthood. Maybe there was a time when you did not have the relationship with the Lord that you could model before your children. But it’s never too late to point your kids to God. Go to your kids and say, “As a parent and as a person, I made mistakes. I didn’t point you to God. Now I know that Jesus is my Savior, and I’ve made Him the Lord of my life. Go to Him that you might have life.” Point your kids to God.

Time for a personal evaluation. How well do you point your kids to God? Are you, by your life, showing them what it means to be a person who is 100% sold on Jesus? Or by your actions are you teaching them that a job or

money or a hobby or pleasure are the things that really matter in life? Is Jesus a name that they're familiar with in your house? Is that a name they hear on a daily basis in a good way? Or do they think that Jesus is the god of hammered fingers. Evaluate yourself. If this is a weak area in your life, work on it and make your own relationship with Christ stronger so that you can point your kids to God.

Healthy families are not an accident. They are intentionally built by wise parents who do wise things. It starts with a commitment. And it starts with a choice. Several thousand years ago, Joshua stood in front of an entire nation and said, "*Choose this day what you're going to do. But as for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord.*" Moms, Dads, Grandma's and Grandpa's, have you said that about your family? As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. Joshua wasn't out to win a popularity contest. He wasn't trying to be Mr. Cool Dad. He just said, "We're going to do the right thing. For me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord."

If you want a healthy family, you need to make that kind of commitment. You commit your own life to Christ and say, "Jesus, I need Your help in all my life, including parenting. Today I commit and dedicate my family to You. They are gifts from You. I dedicate them back to You." Dedicate yourself to seek the wisdom you need to build a healthy family, and you'll get that wisdom by getting close to God. Armed with the Word of God, go forth to build His kingdom, to enrich His family and your family. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.