

***This usually comes in the form of an MP3 but since I forgot to record the sermon I thought I'd at least give you the notes. They're rough but the content is there.

The Aim of Parenting

INTRO:

There may not be a more critical time in our nation's history than now to address the topic of parenting. **We are a country in crisis when it comes to the family.** And while there are many issues facing us – whether they be the economy, government, politics, moral decline, or a list of others, it is my opinion that the **crisis concerning the family** could be the biggest issue we are facing today. In fact, I think there is an argument to be made that serious problems within the family - as defined by the scripture - can be tied to just about every negative issue we see in society today.

I believe one of the major roots of the family crisis today is the approach that many parents in this country are choosing to take when it comes to raising their children...and I don't think I need to convince many of you of this. Just flip on the TV or take a trip to Wal-Mart or the mall and it won't take long before you will witness the absolute unraveling of parent child relationships in this country – which is leading to the unraveling of society in general.

Now, I'm not claiming to be the perfect parent and hopefully I never will. There is no such thing as the perfect parent, humanly speaking. In fact, all you need to do is come to church on Sunday and you will witness the opposite. I'll just confess right now, if you're around me long enough, you're going to see me drop the ball as a parent – and you're going to see my wife fail. **If you have kids you have and will fail at parenting.** None of us who have children are going to parent them perfectly – because **none of us are perfect.**

BUT, we are hopefully here this morning because we know the One who is – and He has the perfect plan for parenting. And the reason why we see so many struggles and failures when it comes to parenting is because many in this country have turned away from the only source of wisdom and guidance that will enable us to parent successfully.

Now, at this point I need to offer a disclaimer: I have not raised teenagers. My kids are still fairly young... (Boice advice) I have 4 kids, ages 9, 7, 5 and 4. I am the oldest pastor at Sojourn with the oldest (and most) kids, which is partly why it was agreed between the pastors that I should preach this topic, but I am sure there is a lot more personal experience and wisdom in this crowd than I have to offer. And in many ways, Jay and Dillon are just as able, if not more able, as I am to preach on this subject. Why? Because, **while personal experience can be a valuable thing, there is nothing as valuable as knowing what God has to say.** He is the wisest and most experienced One we can consult when it comes to any subject and His Word is the best reference we have when it comes to living life, and parenting children, in the best possible way. One of my favorite passages in the bible says this:

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be **complete, equipped** for every good work.

Guys, we are all incomplete. Positionally? ...no. but functionally? ...WE NEED THE WORD TO COMPLETE US, TO EQUIP US, TO PREPARE US FOR LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD, TO PREPARE US TO **PARENT** IN A FALLEN WORLD. PARENTING IS A GOOD WORK AND CAN ONLY BE DONE THE WAY IT WAS INTENDED TO BE DONE BY THE STRENGTH OF GOD ALONE.

So, my goal for the next two weeks is to attempt to expose what the scripture has to say to us regarding parenting. And let me add this challenge: If the knowledge of God's Word does not meet faithful obedience in your personal lives then you are no better off than you were before. In fact, I would argue that if you're knowledge concerning godly parenting increases but it is not met with obedience, you will be worse off than before. **A greater knowledge yields opportunity for a greater obedience OR a greater disobedience.**

With that said, I'd like to start with a passage that is very familiar to all of us. I personally believe that this passage holds the key to successful parenting. **I believe this passage defines what the goal of parenting actually is. Turn with me to Matt. 28:18-20.**

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Let me pose a question: If making disciples is the chief commission to all Christians then, when it comes to people, is there any activity or action in our lives that should not somehow be related to this? Should it not be that the parenting of our children be an outlet of intentional discipleship in our lives? ...but is it?

I have to admit that as a parent, I sometimes find myself settling with an attitude that just says, “Keep'em alive...just keep'em alive”. ...or maybe it's keep'em entertained, or keep'em busy, or keep'em happy, or, for some, just keep'em out of the way (unless it's they're living vicariously through them).

Or maybe it's a more noble cause: Give them the best education...or shelter them from evil...or keep them safe

And while those last few things on this list may be good, any of these things alone, operating outside the desire to glorify God, is not discipleship. Yes, the desire to protect your children can be a component of discipling them but that desire alone, detached from the commission, **can actually keep you from discipling them.**

If the chief end of man is to glorify God...then the chief plan for man is to make disciples. And there are many things that will attempt to derail you in this effort. Especially when it comes to discipling your children.

So, this morning I want to look at how parenting fits in the Great Commssion.

BODY:

Jesus begins in v 18 with:

1. **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** Guys, all authority belongs to Him – we must first recognize and submit to His authority if we’re going to pull this off. We are His servants, not vice versa. He calls the shots, not us and we have to recognize that truth and LIVE by it.

“Jesus is Lord” should be the first sentence we teach our kids. The second is “I am a sinner”. But that’s not usually how it works, is it?

Our parenting isn’t prone to start with the Kingdom of God. It’s just natural not to, right? In fact, it usually starts with the kingdom of self. I think of:

- the competition between mom and dad to see if they will say “mommy” or “daddy” first
- unhealthy preoccupation with which side of the family they resemble the most

And I understand that these things can be light-hearted and aren't necessarily wrong when not taken too seriously but I also think they can point to a very dangerous problem...a self centered heart.

Guys, the goal as Christian parents is to raise children who live under the Lordship of Christ but let me assure you parents **the chances of you raising children who fear God are little to none if YOU don’t fear God** as the Ultimate authority in your life.

If being a Christian to you is simply going to a church gathering once or twice a week while the rest of your time is spent immersing yourself in the world and your own kingdom your kids are going to see it. Believe me guys, my kids are still fairly young but they’re not too young to know what’s important to me.

It doesn't take much for them to learn how to worship themselves...they come pre-programmed.

And if you really believe that **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to (Christ)”** then your life will conform to that belief and your kids will see it, they NEED to see it.

You see, our lives conform to our beliefs, right? I believe that if I fall off a tall building then I will die therefore I try to stay away from the tops of tall buildings...and if I find myself on the top of a tall building I do my best to avoid the edge. Why? Because I know it could cost me my life.

Parents, your actions are driven by your beliefs! Your life is an active demonstration of what you believe and hold to be valuable! What are you up to these days?

Are you jumping off buildings while telling your kids it's not good to do so? ...or maybe you're just getting as close to the edge as possible. Live this way and there's a good chance they'll go ahead and jump.

Parents, do you live your life for Christ? Your kids are living witnesses and do not be deceived, they will more than likely follow your pattern.

Are you following Him? Are you recognizing Him as the authority in your life? Because he is whether you recognize it or not.

And if we live our lives playing church and paying lip service to God while we serve ourselves and build our own kingdoms, our kids will see it and they will more than likely reject the so called faith we say we have. It's happening all around us!

Young people are leaving the church in droves and the biggest reason is because they were raised in homes where Christ may have been spoken of as Lord but He wasn't treated as Lord. It was declared but it wasn't demonstrated. Guys, it has to be both. It will be both if its real.

A very popular parenting passage, and for good reason, is:

Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

This passage, while not a promise, is generally true**. But let me ask you this: Do you know the way? Do you know the "way he should go"? You see **this passage assumes that you do** .

Jesus is the "way he should go." Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and if that's really true for you personally, that's a great place to start in parenting your kids. That's the only place to start if you're going to do it the way it was intended.

So, discipleship starts with submission to the authority of Christ in your life, and so successful parenting does as well. It's the profession with the mouth leading to the progression of the life under the lordship and authority of Christ. If you have submitted your life to Christ then you are ready and able to disciple your children.

Well, what does Jesus say next?

2. In verse 19 Jesus says "Go" therefore and make disciples – whether it's "as we go" or pro-actively going we have to be intentional about parenting.

Guys, this is where the rubber meets the road...and it is not easy. **You will meet resistance** and if you are anything like me, your greatest and most subtle enemy is yourself.

Just think about life in general. As believers, we all have good intentions concerning God's Kingdom, right? And as Christian parents, we all have good intentions concerning discipling our children, right?

We all have good intentions when it comes to exercising and eating right too. How's that working out for you? It's easy to get drive thru – it's hard to cook and eat healthy and clean up, it's easy to sit in the chair – it's hard to exercise consistently.

And guys, take it from me, it's hard to be Christ centered in your parenting. It's easy to let the TV raise them. It's easy to give in to their stubborn tantrums – or their cute little grins. It's easy to let them play

video games all day. **IT'S HARD TO DISCIPLE YOUR KIDS. It's work. It requires your involvement.** And our lazy flesh doesn't want to work, it doesn't want to be involved with anyone but itself.

I heard a stat from a sermon that was preached probably 15-20 years ago. There was a group of parents polled and out of that group 70% of parents said they wished they'd never had kids. 70%!!! You know, what's interesting is that around that same time or a little after the percentage of young adults walking away from their faith was around 70%. Do you think their might be a correlation? Disturbing.

We took a family vacation a few weeks ago...Pirate ship illustration...

- Big, impressive Pirate ship, Guys and girls in pirate uniform, lots of flash
- Water guns and candy, lots of surface appeal

Parents were encouraged to just sit back and let the pirates take care of their kids.

Wow, what a great picture of the world and the current approach so many are taking to parenting! The world is that pirate ship - except it's not a harmless ride the whole family can enjoy. It's a path to destruction and it will encourage you to sit back, enjoy yourself and just have fun. It's more fun for your children if you're not involved too much.

Guys, we can all sit here and say, "Oh no, that's not how I parent or that's not how I'm going to parent. But be careful. It's subtle. Before you know it something other than yourself will be teaching your kids about life and if it's not word centered, chances are it's not good. **Your flesh does not want to be a good parent. It's hard!**

You have to be intentional as a parent or you will be conventional as a parent and what is generally held to be acceptable by this world and, specifically, this culture is not God's plan for parenting.

SO, what is it that we are to be about? If we are to "Go" where exactly is it that we go as Christian parents? We agree that Jesus is Lord, that He has all authority and that that authority extends to us personally and as parents. We also hopefully agree that godly parenting requires personal holiness and intentional living. But what exactly are we to be intentional in? What does it look like to disciple your children?

That brings us to the next point which we will get into a little more specifically next week:

3. Jesus tells us to go and **make disciples, baptize, teach** – What does this look like in parenting? It's pretty straight forward, right? Disciple your kids, baptize your kids (or let a pastor do it), teach your kids.

Now, some of you, when you hear Jesus' command to disciple people, whether you think of your kids or your co-worker, **you immediately feel somewhat intimidated.** You may think that you just don't know enough about the Word or you just haven't lived long enough or you don't have the gift of teaching and so on.

Don't fall for that, guys. God knows who you are and how He's gifted you. And He's told you to make disciples. **If God told you to do it, what does that imply?** ...that He's going to supply what we need to get it done, right? And He has! All the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places are at our disposal (Eph. 1)

Guys, **to feel inadequate can be a good thing**. I feel inadequate every time I think about standing here in front of you teaching the Word...and that drives me to my knees and reminds me that apart from Him I am inadequate.

But to feel intimidated is a different thing. We have not been given a spirit of fear...**Intimidation is rooted in fear**. Inadequacy, at least when it comes to doing anything spiritually good, is rooted in truth.

Go ahead! Feel inadequate when it comes to discipling your kids! You are! Welcome to the crowd! **And run to God for strength!** He will provide it! He has provided it in His Holy Spirit that lives in you.

But do not fear.

In John 14:27 (ESV) Jesus says

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

And remember, Jesus did not call us to make saints. That's His job. He called us to make disciples. The word "disciple" simply means "pupil or learner" (this helps us to understand John 6:66 a little better). Guys, please understand something. You cannot save your kids. Only God can save your kids.

It is your responsibility to teach your kids about the God who saves them. Romans 10:14 says

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? **Guys, YOU'VE been sent into this world for the purpose of making disciples...**and God has hand delivered some people to us. They're our children.

Did you know that all parents in this world are disciple makers? It may not be in a Christian sense but concerning the plain meaning of the word "disciple" all parents are disciple makers. When we bring kids into this world we instantly become disciple makers. They are living, breathing, fallen human beings who rely on us for everything, including the information and knowledge they receive. **They are the pupils and we are the teachers, like it or not.**

It is on us as parents to teach them about the sovereignty of God over all creation and His perfect holiness, the sinfulness of man, the provision in Christ and the absolute fact of His return – and if you are a believer, by the grace of God you know this much!

We have to be faithful to pound the gospel into their little minds constantly because this worldly system is in auto-pilot and it is constantly seeking to distract from any spiritual reality

We have to be faithful to talk about the hard things. We have to talk about sin and death and judgment and hell. We have to be willing to confess our own mistakes. I've apologized to my kids before - and

probably not enough. I've confessed to them when I've spoken harshly or out of anger to Renee or to them.

They need to see that daddy's not their savior but that he's trying to follow the one who is...and that he can't do it perfectly either - but God's grace is sufficient! This is discipling your children!

Guys, your life is your teaching opportunity for your kids...and the gospel has to be central because **your kids are not born saved**. They're born with the seeds of every sin, known and unknown to man, planted deep in their hearts. And the gospel of Jesus Christ is the **ONLY THING THAT WILL DELIVER THEM**.

And don't lose heart! You will spend some time mowing weeds but by God's grace it will hopefully lead to salvation...By God's grace they will one day follow the one who can kill the weeds.

Do you love your kids? HOW are you discipling them...because you are discipling them whether you like it or not. **What are you teaching them? Is it pointing them to Christ?** Because if it is then the chances are good that they will come to faith and be baptized and continue being taught by you and other gifted men and women in Christ...and they will become disciple makers themselves.

But parents, it starts with you! Don't outsource your God-given role as the primary discipler of your children to programs in the church. It may produce some good results with some kids but it's not the best way! You teach them about God! You are their primary teacher whether you like it or not! It's okay to supplement....

Teach them what you know, even if it's not very much...and accept the challenge to learn more. A man once told me that if I knew just a little bit more than the guy next to me that I could disciple that guy. Guys, most of us can safely say that we know more about the things of God than our kids. That may change over time, and praise God if it does, but we really have no excuse.

BUT YOU HAVE TO BE INTENTIONAL AND AVAILABLE FOR THIS TO HAPPEN.

Os Guinness said (paraphrased), "There's no question that a key factor in whether young people remain resolute in their Christian faith or walk away from it is the influence of their parents. It's as the Proverb says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). One particular study found that when both parents were faithful and active in their *faith*, 93 percent of their children remained faithful. When just one parent was faithful, 73 percent of their children remained faithful."

Be a faithful follower of Christ and discipleship will happen. Being intentional with Christ in your personal lives will cause you to be intentional with your children...it will flow through you...they will be affected by the springs of living water and they will learn about God!

Take time to get in the Word together before bed time. Take time to pray with them and teach them how to praise God and worship Him for who He is...don't just teach them to go down their list of requests.

Remember, the goal of parenting is to make disciples, not well behaved kids. If your kids commit their lives to Christ, their behavior will follow.

Teach them the gospel and do not fear. God is with you, which brings us to our last point

4. What does He say in verse 20? And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹

Remember guys, He is with you. Making disciples is no small task and take it from me, discipling your kids is hard. You will sacrifice rest, it's costly, you will suffer the loss of things and activities and personal time and your heart will break at times – but it is worth it. When you see the light begin to come on in their little minds there is nothing in the world like it – because it's not of this world! **It's God working through you to fulfill the commission He's given you! He's with you in this!**

And it's not always hard. Sometimes it's just fun and it should be because we love God. But whenever you're dealing with the kingdom of self, which is the kingdom your child is born in, there will be difficult times in your efforts to teach them about the kingdom of God. Those two kingdoms are in conflict.

Take heart! He has given you His helper, His Holy Spirit, to provide what you need to do this – and He is with you always. I don't know how to say it any better than that. He is with you in your effort to raise godly children.

As we come to a close, I'd like to look at a passage in Genesis that really got my attention a few weeks ago when I began to look at this topic. Turn with me to Genesis 18 if you will.

⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, **that he may command his children and his household after him** to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, **so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him .**”²

Wow, what a significant passage in light of our topic. **In vs. 19, the Lord connects the raising of children directly to the fulfillment of the promise to bless all the nations through Abraham.** Did you get that guys? What an awesome opportunity we have today! And for those of you who don't have kids, take heart! Take heart because in Christ, you are a child of Abraham - and while you may or may not have children in your immediate earthly family, there are opportunities that abound to have children in your heavenly family!

And another interesting thing to note is that this conversation happens in the midst of judgment. God is about to judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness and this takes place right before that happens.

In the midst of one of the most intense accounts of judgment we see in the Bible God reminds us of the hope we have in Christ – and His plan to BLESS the nations. And there's no denying, godly families are a central part of it. Raising children in the fear of the Lord is a primary way the Lord has chosen to use us to fulfill that great commission, to fulfill the promise to Abraham to bless ALL nations, to see disciples made in ALL nations.

And guys, there are some that might think that the time it takes to raise kids just gets in the way of ministry. I'm sorry but they are tragically wrong. **Raising kids in the fear of the Lord IS ministry!** It is the most important ministry other than loving your spouse!

At the beginning, I mentioned the problems we see in our society. You know, I see a lot of the same problems in our society that we see in Sodom and Gomorrah. Many believe that we are a country in decline and that we too are on the verge of destruction. That may or may not be true. Time will tell.

But if you want to turn the tide in this nation and in this world, as a parent, you can have an impact. Disciple your kids. Love God and love men and you will do it! Today is the day. Don't beat yourself up about past failures. Those are covered by the blood. Take up the cross of godly parenting and bring the blessing of Abraham to the world!

Before we pray I'd like to read a passage of scripture that I feel captures the heart of most of what I've tried to communicate today. It's found in Deuteronomy 6

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. 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.

...picking up at 13

It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.³

Amen. Let's pray.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Mt 28:20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* . 2001 (Ge 18:16–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* . 2001 (Dt 6:4–9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.