

Lesson Two

The Importance of Parental Influence

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 127:1-5.

Leader: Unless the LORD builds the house,

Group: its builders labor in vain.

L: Unless the LORD watches over the city,

G: the watchmen stand guard in vain.

L: In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—

G: for he grants sleep to those he loves.

L: Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.

G: Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.

L: Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

G: They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we daily experience your love. You bring joy into our lives, and you discipline us in love, never in anger. Help us learn from you. If you have given us the privilege of being parents, enable us to influence our children in the same way you influence us. If we are not physical parents, enable us to be spiritual parents to those whom you bring into our lives. Amen.

Introduction

1. Christian parents often depend on the pastor to lead confirmation class and their Lutheran elementary school teachers to instruct their children. Who should be having the greatest influence on their children, pastors and teachers or parents? What opportunity do parents miss if they give up home devotions, prayers, and discussion about God's Word and defer to pastors and teachers?

Parents are called to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. God can use pastors and teachers to be major and, if need be, even the most important influence on a child's life, but God has given this responsibility to parents. They are to teach his Word to the next generation.

Studying God's Word

Wisdom for parents

2. Use the following passages to reinforce and expand on the point made in the first question.

- Genesis 33:5

Jacob and Esau meet again after a number of years of separation. Jacob acknowledges that the many children with which he has been blessed are a gift from a gracious God.

- Psalm 127:3

These words from Solomon remind us that sons and daughters are a privilege; children are a blessing received from the Lord. When we look at our children in the light of this verse and of what Jacob also said about his children, we are greatly motivated to influence our children for good.

- Proverbs 17:6

How delighted grandparents are by their grandchildren! Children should look upon their parents with pleasure and satisfaction, knowing that the Lord in his love has provided them. When parents and grandparents view their children in this way and when children respect their parents, it is much easier to have a God-fearing influence on them. A God-fearing influence on a child always begins with the child's knowledge of the parents' love.

- Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Parents, and especially heads of households, are to talk about God's commands to their children. God's Word is to be presented to the children in such a way that they see it to be remarkable and memorable. Parents should do everything they can to keep God's commandments always before their children and model obedience to them in their own lives.

- Ephesians 6:4

To exasperate children is to act unreasonably, selfishly, or inconsistently toward them. Instead of being exasperated by their parents, children are to be nurtured (educated, trained, and developed) and instructed (taught and directed) in God's Word.

- Proverbs 19:18

It is important that children receive discipline; the discipline is to be rooted in love. Children who do not receive discipline may die. They may die in their sins, or they may literally die because they have learned no self-control, honesty, or respect for authority. They receive the consequences of that in their lives.

- Proverbs 22:6,15

In training (educating or rearing) children, instruction and discipline are both involved. To encourage parents to be Christian influences on their children, the Lord promises that when they are old, they will not turn from their parents' teaching and influence.

Folly (lack of good sense, foolishness) is tightly bound up in a child's heart. It is so tightly bound up that nothing short of the rod of correction will drive it out.

- Proverbs 23:13,14

In the phrase "punish him with the rod" the term *rod* is a figure of speech for strong discipline. Don't withhold discipline rooted in love from a child. Children may complain and accuse you of cruelty, but loving discipline, including corporal punishment if necessary, will not kill them. Rather, it will be a source of great blessing.

- Colossians 3:21

When disciplining a child, don't make the child bitter. Don't "sour" them in the process.

3. Of what do the above verses remind you about your role as a parent, grandparent, or someone who is in a position to influence children?

This is not a role for the fainthearted. It is a role that parents, grandparents, and others must be willing and ready to take; it is a role that takes a lot of time and energy.

4. What makes parenting and influencing children easy? What makes the process difficult?

It is easy when things are going well and the children respect the efforts of their parents—and when the children are growing in knowledge and faith. This is a great blessing and a gift of God. It becomes harder when children rebel and when their sinful nature gets the upper hand. Then sin needs to be confronted, and parents have to apply the law in all its severity before they can apply the soothing balm of the gospel. It is hard work to be consistent and loving.

5. Agree or disagree. The process of influencing our children for good is a struggle.

The process can be a struggle. Yet, because those who are working to influence their children are doing so out of love for their Savior, a hard process is made much easier.

6. Evaluate: "I am going to raise my children like Sylvia Rimm/Dr. Dobson/Dr. Spock recommends."

Many times these statements are well intentioned, but not very practical. There is no cookbook approach to raising children. Each child and each setting in which the child is found is different. What works in one situation may not work in another.

God-pleasing correction

7. Read the following passages. Each one instructs God's people on how they should correct their fellow believers. Apply this to parents or others when correcting children.

- Matthew 18:15

Our goal in correcting should never be simply to keep order in the home or to alleviate ourselves of stress. Rather, we should be concerned about the spiritual lives of our children. We should strive to nurture in them a spirit of repentance and faith.

- Luke 17:3

When our children repent and confess that what they have done is wrong, we should forgive them as the Lord has forgiven us, not grudgingly or conditionally but with joy.

- 2 Timothy 4:2

Our work of instructing and correcting our children should be done with patience and with careful instruction.

A strategy for correcting our children

8. What follows is a list of things parents might keep in mind when they discipline their children. Share with one another thoughts or experiences that illustrate the truth of each of these points.

Responses will vary. Be prepared to "prime the pump" with your own comments or experiences.

People receive instruction best when

- they know they are loved and cherished.
- they know what is right with them.
- they know that the person correcting them quickly and openly admits and apologizes for any wrongs he or she has done.
- they know the one correcting them has their best interests in mind.

9. Read Hebrews 12:11. This passage speaks about the Lord's goal in disciplining us. How do the writer's words encourage us as we discipline our children?

Our children will find our discipline painful. However, we know what we hope to accomplish, namely, that our children will be enabled to put down their sinful flesh and let the Holy Spirit have his way in their lives.

Summary

Parents have been given the primary responsibility for instructing, encouraging, and disciplining their children and for influencing them in the faith and in God-pleasing living. Christian parents are not without God's help as they work to do this. God's Word gives us direction through clear statements and examples. God also teaches us how to correct our children when they do wrong.

Prayer: Dear Lord, enable us to understand and take to heart your will regarding our responsibility as Christian parents, as grandparents, or as others who care for children. Give us wisdom as we strive to carry out this work. Bless us in Jesus' name, because we can succeed only with your blessing. Help us be models to our own children in view of the day when you may give them children of their own. Amen.