

Raising Children Like Jesus

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Despite what folks often say, the gospel accounts of **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John** are not biographies of Jesus. They do not give us day by day or even year by year portrayals of Jesus' life. Instead, they give snapshots, cross-sections, demonstrating who Jesus is. Therefore, we are not surprised to find little about His childhood. We see His birth (**Matthew 1:18-25**; **Luke 2:1-21**). We see a snapshot of when he was taken to the temple for his purification (**Luke 2:22-40**). We see him as a toddler when the wise men visited him, his flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth (**Matthew 2**). And we see him as a 12 year old being accidentally left in Jerusalem (**Luke 2:41-51**). Other than that, Jesus' childhood is merely described with a broad brush in **Luke 2:52**: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (ESV). As we witness this fourfold maturity in Jesus, we find a great model for the parents among us. This provides a four prong approach to raising our children.

Discussion:

I. Increase in stature

- A. I often joke about my kids and how I can't get them to stop growing. The reality, of course, is, while I am nostalgic about my children's past, if they really stopped growing, I would immediately get them to the doctor to find out what was wrong. Increasing in stature is probably the easiest aspect of parenting. As long as we feed our kids, it happens essentially on its own.
- B. However, consider some consequences of this. If we are going to help our kids grow physically, we must instruct them in mature conduct. In fact, the word translated "stature" did not just refer to height and physical size, but also having attained a suitable age for something (Strong's). We have heard people complain about those who are immature, saying, "Would you please act your age?" But have we ever viewed "acting your age" as a compliment? Of course not. The compliment is if they are "mature beyond their years." We need to raise our children so that at the very least they act their age, behaving with the maturity their age expresses.
- C. Consider some areas in which we need to instruct our kids as they increase in stature.
 1. *Care for the growing body*: In **Ephesians 5:29**, Paul said we nourish and cherish our own bodies. We need to teach our children how to nourish and cherish their growing bodies. This includes issues of hygiene. I know this is not a very spiritual point. But, parents, we must teach our children about the importance of bathing properly. We must teach our children about the mundane things like shaving, hair cuts and yes, even using deodorant. This includes issues of health. Why do we constantly hear about the dramatic increase of obesity among American children? Because we parents are not teaching our children to properly nourish their bodies, often times because we are not nourishing our bodies properly. We allow them instead to over indulge their bodies. We need to teach our children about health and exercise. We need to teach them the dangers of smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs. We must not expect health classes in schools to take care of this for us.
 2. *Accepting adult responsibility*: In **I Corinthians 13:11**, Paul established a growth principle for children. I know his point in the context was about maturing churches and their use of miraculous spiritual gifts. However, his point was only made because of the truth of his illustration. The point was as children grow physically into adulthood, they must learn to put away childish ways and adopt adult ways. Anecdotally, I believe we have all seen that childhood is lasting longer and longer. Young people today get into their 20s and even 30s with no concept of what they will do with their lives because Mom and Dad have always done for them. Fathers, as our boys grow into men, we need to teach them how to be men. We need to teach them how to nourish and cherish their wives (**Ephesians 5:29**). We need to teach them how to provide for their family (**I Timothy 5:8**). We need to teach them to show godliness to their own family (**I Timothy 5:4**). We need to teach them industry and discipline (**Proverbs 6:6-11**). Mothers, as our girls grow into women, we need to teach them how to be women. We need to show them the worthy woman and train them to be her (**Proverbs 31:10-31**), managing their households, doing good to their husbands, working with industry, preparing for emergencies.

3. *Preparing for sexuality*: This overlaps with the other issues already brought up. But in our present society, I think we have to specifically mention this. As our children grow in stature, we know their bodies change. Parents, we need to be the ones that explain those changes to them. We need to be the ones to explain how to respond to those changes. We need to be the ones who teach them how to live once those changes have taken place. We need to be the ones to teach our children about sexuality. We need to teach them its place in our lives and marriage (**I Corinthians 7:1-4**). We need to warn them away from its misuses (**Hebrews 13:4**). If we don't teach them the truth, trust me, someone else will teach them the errors. May I offer some advice? Don't teach your children that sex is the forbidden prize that you just can't wait until your married to finally get to indulge. I don't know how many young people have said things based on the way they have been taught about sexuality like, "Boy, I can't wait until I'm married because then you get to have sex." Many who make that statement demonstrate it was true. They couldn't wait until they were married. Teach your children about the sanctity and beauty of the marriage union spiritually and emotionally. Teach them sex's beautiful place as part of that. Satan wants us to believe that sex is God's great blessing for the married. It is not. Union; emotional, mental and spiritual intimacy; and completeness as two become one in spirit are the great blessings for the married. Sex is merely a physical representation and result of the greater union. Sex, as a direct result of a man and woman being emotionally, spiritually and mentally united is a wonderful thing, providing contentment, happiness and joy in marriage. Sex, as a direct result of merely trying to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, even within marriage, is no prize. It is Satan's mockery of the prize. It is a moment of physical pleasure that will leave you empty, lonely, starved and racing to get your next fix. We must teach our children God's view of sexuality. If we don't, the world will teach them Satan's view.

II. Increase in favor with men

- A. This is perhaps the surprising goal of parenting. We know all the sermons and all the points about pleasing God instead of pleasing men. We know we are wrong if all men are happy with us according to **Luke 6:26**. Yet Jesus grew in favor with men. Further, we find **Acts 2:47** in which the church followed Jesus' footsteps in having favor with all the people. What we learn from this is that in many ways, folks who are serving the Lord properly will indeed be in the favor of many people. We must certainly teach our children the limits of that. When being in man's good favor contradicts God's good favor, we must always choose God's favor over man's (**cf. John 12:42-43; Acts 5:29**). Further, we must not view man's favor as an indication of God's pleasure with us (see above, **Luke 6:26**).
- B. Having made those caveats, we see from Jesus that raising up children who are pleasing to the people around us is part of raising mature children. We want to raise children that people actually want to be around. Let me explain this. If people don't want to be around your kids, they won't want to be around you. It is in your best interest to raise up kids that people enjoy. This is really not that hard to figure out. Just think about the children you have enjoyed being around and raise your kids up to be like that. I can share with you some biblically based principles that allow me to enjoy children. You consider these and see if you don't agree.
- C. Consider a few principles:
 1. *People enjoy children who are mannerly and polite*: **I Corinthians 13:4-5** says love is not rude. We teach our children to love, but do we get down to the brass tacks of that love, teaching them basic manners and politeness. Teach your children to say please and thank you. Teach them to open doors for others. Teach them to give their seats to others. Teach them common courtesies of looking people in the eye and speaking to them, responding to questions with appropriate, clear answers.
 2. *People enjoy children who are respectful*: **Leviticus 19:32** provides God's view of older people and demonstrates how God expects us and our children to treat those who are older, with respect and honor. We must teach our children to demonstrate respect in their speech and their actions. I know that some issues of respect in speech are somewhat cultural. For instance, just this week I watched a parenting video in which the standard for respectful speech was using Mr. and Mrs. with the person's last name. In our culture, the respect is

most often demonstrated by using Mr. and Mrs. with the first name. But whatever you teach your children, teach them to address their elders with respect. Frankly, I don't know of any culture in which answering an adult with "Yeah" and "Nah" is respectful. That may be the norm in some cultures, but nowhere is it respectful. Teach your kids to say "Yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, no ma'am." Let me share with you another example that Marita and I have come to recognize over the past few years and was even mentioned in the parenting video I watched earlier this week. Consider potlucks and get-togethers—when you were children, who got to eat first at potlucks? The elderly. Why? Because we were showing honor to them. Who gets to go now? Children. Of course, it is not the children's fault. This is happening because people who are my age are more concerned with our convenience than we are with honoring our elders. No wonder our children don't honor their elders. They are following our lead. To be clear, is it sinful to say "Yeah" to an elder? Is it sinful to get in line before our elders at a potluck? Perhaps not. But it is wrong to dishonor and disrespect them. Teach your children to respect their elders.

3. *People enjoy children who respect other people's property:* The 10 commandments condemned stealing (**Exodus 20:15**). The greater principle behind this command was a respect for what belongs to others. This was demonstrated further in **Exodus 22:7-8**. We need to teach our children to respect other people's property. They need to respect the toys and ownership of other children. They need to respect the homes of adults. Leave alone that with which they have not been given permission to play. They need to learn to put away what they got out. They need to learn to play properly with and use properly what they are using. If they break something, they must be taught to make restitution in some way. Further, while our children are young, we as parents must take responsibility for that. If our kids tear something up, we need to make restitution. Here is one of the interesting issues. Many parents are afraid to take their kids anywhere. When they do take their kids, they follow them all over the place to make sure they don't mess with anything. We live in a society that says "child proof your house." Instead, we must learn to house proof our children so that they know what to touch, what not to touch and how to use what they are given. We need to teach them to respect other people's property.
4. *People enjoy children who put others first:* **Philippians 2:3-4** demonstrates the principle we must pass on to our kids. This is definitely a tough training point. But we need to work at it. Children are naturally selfish. We have to train that out of them and train selflessness into them. We must not promote a child centered world. Rather, we must promote a very healthy others oriented world. We must not give our children preeminence in everything in our homes. They will never understand when no one else does. I will share this with you, nobody likes whining, the ultimate expression of selfishness. It is the visible tantrum and expression that things are not going my way. If you want your children to grow in favor with other people, teach them to suck it up when things don't go their way and move on, finding a way to adapt and move along. Whatever you do, do not reward whining by giving your children that for which they whine, coddling them or figuring out some way to make it all better.
5. *People enjoy children who treat others the way they want to be treated:* We all know the golden rule. "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (**Matthew 7:12**, ESV). I'm just going to be honest with you. This is hard and often seems like a double standard. But it is a principle we have to pass on to our children. Let me explain by giving you a real world example. I have three children. Sharing is always an issue. In every scenario where sharing is the problem, we almost always have to get on to both children involved in the altercation and the rebuke is almost always exactly the same. "How do you want others to treat you in this situation?" For instance, the child who won't share. We ask, "If you wanted to play with someone else's toy, how would you want them to treat you when you asked for it?" Of course, they would want the other child to share. But then with the child is the owner, we ask, "If someone kept badgering you about one of your toys that you didn't want them to play with, what would you want them to do?" The answer is always, "Leave it alone and quit bugging me about it." This principle means that when it is their toy, they are being pushed to share. When it is not their toy, they are being trained in ownership and how it is not theirs to demand. As children get older, they will

inevitably see this as double-standard. "When it is my toy you teach me to share. When it is their toy, you teach me to leave it alone. That is not fair." The Golden Rule principle is not about what is fair. It is about empathizing with others and putting yourself in their shoes. What would you want if you were like them? Give that to them. Children who grasp this concept will certainly grow in favor with men.

III. Increase in wisdom

- A. Solomon took teaching children wisdom so importantly he wrote an entire book about it. **Proverbs** begins: "To know wisdom and instruction..." (**Proverbs 1:2**, ESV). The rest of the book is a treatise on wisdom. Notice specifically passages like **Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36**. Wisdom is personified. She is calling us and our children. We must direct our children to her. Perhaps a good way to do that is to teach them the **Proverbs**.
- B. This corresponds with some of the issues we learned under increasing in stature. As our children grow up, we need to teach them to conduct their affairs in wisdom. Within **Proverbs** this addressed friendship, discipline, industry, laziness, interpersonal relationships, self-control, temper, communication, finances, sexuality, worship, and on the list goes. We must not leave this teaching up to our schools and congregations. We need to be teaching this.
- C. No doubt we could spend multiple lessons walking through **Proverbs** and the lessons of wisdom we should teach. I will encourage you to take to pursue that study on your own. Instead, allow me to share three principles to help us understand wisdom and how to teach it.
 1. *Do not be afraid to discipline your child:* **Proverbs 22:15** explains that folly is bound up in the heart of a child but discipline will drive it from them. Remember **Proverbs 13:24**, if you spare the rod, you do not love your children, you hate them. But remember that discipline is to be used not to vent your anger, frustration or embarrassment. Discipline is to be used to increase wisdom.
 2. *Focus on true spiritual wisdom:* In **I Corinthians 1:20-2:16** demonstrates two kinds of wisdom. There is worldly wisdom and there is godly wisdom. These are opposed to each other. Sadly, we are all too often satisfied with the pop-psychology wisdom of cultural icons and societal movements. We are all too often pleased when our children make good grades and impress humanistic teachers and blossom with psychological and sociological curriculum. Certainly, there is some wisdom in all these fields. But if we are simply satisfied with providing our children the wisdom they will get from school, our children will be miserable failures in what matters most. Provide them with spiritual wisdom from God's word. Make that your chief goal.
 3. *Teach your children to live by wisdom:* **James 3:13-18** says wisdom is not just about learning what is right. Wisdom is living, acting, behaving by what is right. Do not be satisfied when your children can make good grades in school and provide all the correct Bible class answers. Wisdom is only wisdom when it is being lived. True spiritual wisdom demonstrates itself through purity, peacableness, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy and good fruits. It is impartial and sincere, without hypocrisy. Righteousness comes from true wisdom. Help your children learn these attributes and all other issues of wisdom will fall into place.

IV. Increase in favor with God

- A. This is, of course, the most important of our goals as parents. We want our children to grow in favor with God. We want our children to be pleasing to God. In **Ephesians 5:10**, we are directed to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. We must teach our children to do the same.
- B. I would like to share with you a very subtle aspect of this. We are to teach our children to be pleasing to God. We are not to try to make God pleasing to our children. Did you catch that? The religious mainstream world is filled with children's churches, youth ministries and other entertainment oriented venues in an attempt to make God and serving Him pleasing to the children. Sadly, many Christians are buying in to this same distorted philosophy. We fill Bible classes with arts and crafts in an attempt to get our kids to want to come back. We want our assemblies to be more emotional in an attempt to get our kids to enjoy it and be interested. Just think for a moment. Was there anything the least bit fun for a 12 year old boy being taken to Jerusalem to watch animals get slaughtered and then to sit in a temple and talk Bible with older

men as Jesus did in **Luke 2:41-49**? Did Joseph and Mary try to spice it up so Jesus would enjoy it more? Was the trip to Jerusalem about having fun or worshipping God? Don't get me wrong. I am not saying it is wrong to enjoy or even teach the Bible in enjoyable ways. I am just pointing it out that we are getting things backwards when we are trying to make God and serving Him pleasing to our children. We need to work to make our children pleasing to God.

- C. *Train our children in obedience:* As the children are little, parents, we have to understand it is our responsibility to train our children to be obedient. Their obedience is pleasing to the Lord (**Colossians 3:20**). Don't train them that they can disobey you until you count to three. Don't train them that they can disobey you until you have screamed at them in that certain tone of yell. Train them to obey you the first time. Yes, first time obedience. Anything else is not obedience.
- D. *Train up our children in faith:* If we are going to teach our children to be pleasing to God, we have to teach them to be people of faith (**Hebrews 11:6**). **Romans 10:17** says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. If we are going to teach our children to be in God's favor, we have to get them into God's word. Brothers and sisters, fellow parents, this is so much more than "bringing them to church". This is more than making them get their Bible class lesson. This is more than watching VeggieTales' skewed and distorted Bible stories or reading from bedtime Bible story books. This means get them in the Word. This means teaching them to study daily (**Acts 17:11**). This means getting them to hide God's word in their heart (**Psalms 119:11**). This means getting them to make their decisions and live based on what the Bible says (**Matthew 7:24-27**).
- E. *Train them to bear fruit, walking in a worthy manner:* **Colossians 1:10** says we please the Lord when we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work. We must train our children in this. We must teach them to bear fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). Further, **I Thessalonians 4:1-3** demonstrates God is pleased as we are sanctified, that is, as we are set apart for holy service. We must train up our children to be set apart from the world that they may be committed to the holy work of God. Within the context of **I Thessalonians 4**, Paul talked about sexual morality, modesty and mental purity. We have to teach our children not only to refrain from fornication but to present their body in dress, speech and conduct in a manner that demonstrates they are a holy vessel of the Lord. Can we do that if we allow them to wear midriff showing, form fitting, low cut shirts? Can we do that if we allow them to rub their bodies with other young people on the dance floor at school? Can we do that if we allow them to dress in skimpy outfits and show off their underwear in the name of cheerleading? You tell me, does any of that tell anyone, "I am set apart for God's holy use?"
- F. May we never lose sight of how important this one goal is. May we please God in our parenting and may we train our children to find favor in God's sight.

Conclusion:

I certainly hope nothing in this lesson came off sounding like I meant you need to train your children to be like mine. Half of the things I included in this lesson reminded me that I have some real work to do at home. In fact, I just learned this week a great way to deal with those embarrassing moments when your children don't measure up to these standards in front of other people. Instead of offering excuses to the people who have witnessed your children's misbehavior about how tired they, how stressed they are or what kind of teenage emotional angst they are dealing with, just say, "I'm sorry, we are really working on this. When we get home, I will be having a talk with Jr. about this." So, for the many here who can pinpoint issues in the lesson and say, "Well we have seen your kids violate that point, Edwin," let me say, "I'm sorry. We are working on these things. We are having many talks at home about them." We are still growing as parents. Our children are still growing. But let us all strive to raise up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (**Ephesians 6:4**) that they might continue to increase in stature, wisdom and in favor with both God and men.