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Sermon Notes

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Parenting: The Early Years

Class 1: Overarching Principles

I. The Overwhelming Drive for Practical Solutions

A. Tyranny of the Urgent

1. From the moment infants come home from the hospital... a dominant theme of practical solutions to physical issues
2. Reminds me of the book *The Tyranny of the Urgent* (Charles Hummel)
 - a. Made a distinction between the urgent things and the important things
 - b. Said the greatest danger was that the urgent things clamor for our attention and crowd out the important things
3. The Tyranny of the Practical is similar
 - a. Tell me how to get my baby on a sleep schedule or an eating schedule that doesn't blow up my world
 - b. Tell me how to do X or Y or Z
4. We can easily forget the overall big picture spiritually, biblically, eternally

B. My Disclaimers Concerning Practical Wisdom

1. I am a Dad... Not a Mom
 - a. I did a much smaller percentage of the day-to-day parenting than my wife
 - b. Women speak a different language to each other that seems much more immediately effective
2. Our kids are (almost) grown... so we've been out of this phase for a while
3. I have a bad memory... or have received the gift of therapeutic forgetfulness!
4. I tend to be much more theoretical/theological than practical

C. Parenting the Early Years is Hard... Physical... Exhausting... Bewildering

1. Little ones are (obviously) very immature
2. Little ones are (like you) fanatically committed to self-interest, but unlike you, they have not been trained yet to control that
3. Little ones are extremely energetic... until they run out of energy
4. Little ones are (occasionally) overpoweringly destructive
5. Little ones are not extremely verbal or logical
6. Little ones (even one of them) expand to take up whatever time/energy resources you have
7. Little ones are not yet converted to Christ

D. It's Easy to Zero in on Practical Issues and Seek Direct Do's and Don'ts

1. Infant: sleep schedules, feeding schedules, well-baby check-ups, teething, crying, diapers... very physical
2. Toddler: speech development, walking, basic issues of obedience, beginning patterns of life—submission to parental authority, cleanliness, manners, work, play, rest, learning, safety, eating. The beginning and deepening of knowledgeable relationships

E. A Sampler of Some Advice on the Internet

1. Googled "Christian parenting toddlers"
2. Found an article by a person I've never heard of before... (not vetted!)
"Parenting Toddlers Without Losing Your Mind"
3. As I read, I was reminded of aspects of that phase of parenting I had long forgotten... (but probably my wife has not!)
4. Here's some of the article

Remnants of lunch smeared across her pants, she totes a toddler on one hip and a diaper bag big enough for a family of 12. She can't remember the last time she slept through the night or went to the bathroom by herself. "No" is her new middle name and an empty coffee cup is a serious emergency. Yep, she's parenting a toddler. Possibly the most physically exhausting job there is. And somewhere in there she's supposed to train that little heart toward Jesus?

I remember those early parenting days well. My first two babies were 13 months apart. And I quickly wondered if I'd ever go to the bathroom without someone dumping a box of cereal on the carpet or if my Bible would grow dust from all those mornings I was just too tired to crack it open. Parenting toddlers was hard. Even though I was so graciously blessed with the privilege of having those sweet little tots, it was plain difficult and many days I thought I might lose my mind.

Mom, just because your friend has 2 or 3 more kids than you do, don't discount how difficult those toddler years are. Don't discount how hard it is to parent even one toddler. This parenting thing is new every day and just when you think you've got the little guy figured out, he changes.

The Don'ts of Parenting Toddlers:

Don't take it personally...defiance is a flesh issue not a reflection of her love for you.

Don't always hover...let her experience minor natural consequences for naughty behavior. Maybe she falls and scrapes her knee after you asked her not to run. Maybe she bumps her head when she keeps running through the house. Obviously you want to make sure she's not in danger, but minor natural consequences are key to learning obedience.

Don't explain everything...he isn't ready for theological or moral reasoning. Parenting toddlers means giving simple instructions without a lot of explanation. You'll have plenty of time to share the moral reason why when he is older.

Don't offer choices...choices complicate things at this stage in parenting toddlers. So don't offer him choices. This includes clothes, colors, foods, etc. Save the battles for later.

Don't let media dictate your child's behavior...just because a tv show or media game is labeled "for kids" doesn't always mean it's best. As you parent your toddler, remember to pay attention to what you let her watch or games you let her play. She will imitate what she watches.

Don't compare your child to others...each child learns to obey at his own pace. Some learn quickly while others have a more challenging temperament. Be patient and consistent. Obedience and development will come

The Do's of Parenting Toddlers:

Make time in God's Word your priority

Parenting toddlers is hard. And I know that finding alone time to be with God can seem impossible many days. But I promise, making time to be in God's Word each day is a worthwhile investment for your children.

Find a Titus 2 woman

If at all possible, find yourself a mentor – a Titus 2 woman – who can walk with you as you parent toddlers. I would encourage you to make broad your definition of “older woman.” While those women who have graduated multiple children are a wealth of knowledge, they have forgotten a LOT of what happens in the trenches of toddlerhood. Instead, find a mom with multiple children who are late elementary or middle school. These moms have toddlerhood fresh on their minds. Trust me!

Find grace

When I first had children, there was one thing I was SURE of. My children would obey. The first time. Period. Over the years, I have learned that this is a ridiculous expectation. Do I obey the first time every time? If I can't meet that expectation as an adult, then I can't place that expectation as I parent toddlers. I'm not saying to throw it all out the window and just let them do whatever they want. Be firm and consistent, but know that you must find grace for that sweet little defiant face.

Make a schedule

Toddlers thrive on structure. They should get up roughly the same time, take a nap at roughly the same time, and have meals at roughly the same time. This type of consistency helps them feel secure.

Give instructions not options

Remember, you are mom. Don't ask your child what she wants to do. Give instruction for what you want her to do. If you ask her if she wants to go to bed, do you honestly think she will ever say yes? Your question indicates to her that it's an option and it isn't. The same thing goes for “ok.” Don't put that on the end of your instructions. “Get in the car, ok?” is a choice. But you aren't offering a choice. You want her in the car. So state that.

Expect obedience

When you ask your child to do something or to stop doing something, ask only once. Don't count to three. Don't threaten, “If you do that one more time, I'm going to...” Simply state your command one time. IF the child is disobedient, move directly to corrective discipline. Otherwise, you make yourself a liar and that reputation will stick.

F. Practical Wisdom is Very Helpful

1. Young parents can truly feel like they are navigating in uncharted waters in a fog with no compass and no nautical training... sometimes it even seems like the boat is leaking and a storm is starting to whip up
2. Specific answers to practical questions can be like tonic... it can give you a pathway
3. This is especially helpful in the infant and toddler years, when so much of the parenting seems pure physical, and not very relational or spiritual at all
4. When Christi and I first began years ago, we followed a curriculum called "Growing Kids God's Way" by Gary and Anne-Marie Ezzo
5. They wrote a book called *On Becoming Babywise*
 - a. The strong emphasis was parental control of feeding and sleeping schedules
 - b. Claimed to be able to cause the baby to sleep through the night by 7-9 weeks
6. It gave us (as we believed) biblical guidelines and intensely practical advice on tons of details along the way
7. It alleviated the feeling of navigating in a fog with no compass, no idea where to go or what to do
8. Since that time, the Ezzo's parenting philosophies have come strongly under fire... I do not want to get into all that

G. The Big Picture is Vital as Well... Without Neglecting the Practical and Day to Day

H. How Does Christian Parenting in the Early Years Fit into God's Eternal Plan?

II. The Centrality of the Glory of God

A. The Centrality of God's Glory

Jonathan Edwards: *The End for Which God Created the World*

Simple, profound question: Why did God create the world and us in it?

Edwards zeroes in on "ultimate" ends and "chief" ends above lesser ends... that which is MOST VALUED

The ultimate answer is “for his own glory”

{It’s like a chain of purpose or cause: this happens so that this happens so that this happens... etc. Like the child’s incessant “But why??” “The pretty bird has many feathers.” “Why?” “So that it can fly?” “Why?” “So that it can be happy and live and feed and mate and make nests and migrate?” “Why?” “So that God can be glorified” That last answer is always the ultimate answer to ALL chains of questions}

B. All Things Made for God’s Own Pleasure... His Own Glory

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists...

KJV Proverbs 16:4 The LORD hath made all things for himself

C. Humanity Created to Display God’s Glory

***Isaiah 43:6-7 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--
7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."***

D. Humanity Created to Know God’s Glory

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

E. Humanity Redeemed for the Praise of God’s Glory

Ephesians 1:11-12 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

III. God’s Vision for Parenting

A. Procreation

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

B. Covenant Vision

Genesis 18:17-19 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Godly parenting is essential to the fulfillment of God's covenant plans

C. Multigenerational Vision

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders-- great and terrible-- upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. ²⁴ The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. ²⁵ And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

Psalm 78:3-7 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. ⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, ⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. ⁷ Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

As opposed to Hezekiah's lamentable short-sightedness

Isaiah 39:6-8 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." ⁸ "The word of the

LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

D. Christian Vision

Ephesians 6:4 And fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

IV. The Primary Goal of Christian Parenting: Salvation

A. What Would It Profit...?

Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Parents often want to “give the world” to their kids... but this stands as a timeless warning to us all; if you give the world to your kids, and they end up forfeiting their souls, what good would it be?

B. Scripture’s Purpose is Parenting’s Purpose

2 Timothy 3:14-17 ... how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

C. Not Just Their Salvation... Yours Too

1. Parenting, like marriage, is a “workshop of sanctification”!!
2. We are not done being saved!!

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Philippians 2:12-13 work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

3. God is going to use the pressures of parenting to drive you away from selfishness, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency!!
4. Parenting will drive you to your knees in prayer!
5. Parenting will show you your own sin patterns... even from the very beginning of your time with a newborn; you will realize how not only is the child “fanatically committed to self”, but so are you!!

V. The Second Goal of Christian Parenting: Maturity

A. Practical Maturity: Independence, Taking Responsibility

“Maturity is taking responsibility”

In a simple sense, parenting is preparing the child to not need you at all... to be fruitfully independent from you in every respect. That is maturity... it's also a painful process for us!

When they come home from the hospital, they are totally helpless and dependent on you for everything; by the time you are empty-nesters, they don't really need you for anything.

B. Comprehensive Maturity

Luke 2:52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Wisdom: mental and moral development

Stature: physical development

In favor with God: religious development

In favor with people: social development

C. Especially Spiritual Maturity

The goal of salvation is total CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

VI. The Third Goal of Christian Parenting: Fruitfulness

A. Prepared for Every Good Work

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

All Christian parenting beyond salvation points to shaping and molding their hearts and minds and bodies for usefulness to Christ, fruitfulness in his Kingdom.

B. Prepared for Kingdom Fruitfulness

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

VII. Some Overarching Themes for the Early Years

Establishing convictions, themes, patterns that will last all the years you have together

- A. Husbands and wives must work together in their God-given roles
- B. Parents must lead, children must follow; parents must command, children must obey
- C. Children are a blessed gift from the Lord... so enjoy these years!
- D. Children are a stewardship from the Lord... they are infinitely more His than yours!
- E. Parenting is the most effective evangelism in the world
- F. Children have tender hearts without a history of sin
- G. Children grow quickly like a dimmer switch
- H. Time is very short... but don't panic!
- I. Establish spiritual patterns in the family
- J. Teach them to obey you all the way, right away, with a happy spirit
- K. Establish discipline patterns that develop as they grow