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**PARENTING
& FAMILY**

A MAKING SPACE RESOURCE

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This guide was created to help fathers and mothers think through the implications of the gospel on parenting and family. We're asking the big question: how can we make space to care for and raise our children with great intentionality?

Parenting is one of the greatest tasks we've been given in life; and yet, we rarely process this calling with our partners in parenting. Most of the time we simply survive each day and focus on the logistics. We suggest doing this study with your spouse, and perhaps one section an evening for several days.



INTRODUCTION

Q: Think back to what you thought parenting was like before you had kids. What has surprised you the most about parenting?

ARTICLE: MAKING SPACE FOR PARENTING BY JEFF VANDERSTELT

Psalm 127:3-5 – Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

I want to start here because I want us to see that Scripture speaks of children as a blessing, as an opportunity to pass on a legacy, as arrows that don't stay in the quiver but come out and get placed in the bow and get shot out of our home to bring whatever we put in them to another place, to bring the Good News of Jesus – good news of hope and grace – to people who need it, to places that need to see light break into darkness.

I want to encourage us to think differently than often the culture teaches us to think about children. Many believe children are a nuisance. They get in the way and you're better off prolonging having kids so you can live the life you want before you have them. I want to urge you to heed God's Word. Children are not a nuisance. Children are a blessing. They're a heritage. They're a gift. Cherish these gifts. They're not a curse. They're not a burden. They're a blessing and a reward. And we're called to make space to raise them to follow God. Raise them to be arrow children sent into the world to be world changers.

Train them to be arrows shot into a broken world with the intention of bringing hope and light and life where there is depravity, darkness, and death. Parents, your children are like arrows of hope, light, and love that can change the world! Don't hide them away in a fortress. Don't cower back with them in fear. Prepare them to be a force of change that our world desperately needs! Get them ready to be world changers!

So, how do we prepare our blessed arrows? Train up your child.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

To train them in the way they should go assumes they will go. Train them to go, not stay. I don't mean kick them out. I mean train them knowing they will go, and train them in the way they should go. Train them along the way so they'll know how to go. And train them with the idea that they're going to train others as well. Train them with intentionality. This is true of discipleship as well.

This requires loving discipline. Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

Just to be clear, the concept of discipline here is not a picture of punishment or harsh treatment; rather the rod should remind us of a shepherd who has devoted his life to caring for his sheep. If you know much about the rod that a shepherd would carry, that rod would gently nudge the sheep towards green pastures where they could eat, towards quiet waters where they could drink. If a sheep was running in the wrong direction – like toward a cliff or into a dangerous place – the shepherd would throw his staff, almost like a boomerang, to hit the sheep's legs to keep from going off. And if a predator came in, then that staff was used to beat the predator down so the sheep wouldn't be destroyed. The whole idea of the rod is this gentle staff that we use to make sure we lead our children the way they should go.

This is what love does. Love is diligent to discipline one's children. In Proverbs the father reminds the son that this is what God does to those He loves.

Proverbs 3:11-12 – My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Discipline is a sign of genuine love from God because He cares enough about us not to let us continue going in ways that are full of ignorance and destruction. Parents, your job is to lead your children in the way they should go. The way is the way of wisdom, the way of life. And remember, Jesus is the way. He's not only the way to have a relationship with God and to know all the truths of God because Jesus is the God Man, the God made flesh, One among us, the One through Whom is life. We can see what God is like. We can look at Jesus and know what God looks like. This is how God loves. This is how God talks. This is how God lives amongst people. If we want to know what God is like, we can't know what God is like apart from Jesus.

Not only do we need to know what God is like through Jesus, but God wants us to see that Jesus is also the perfect human, the perfect way to go, and the example of what humanity was meant to be like. When you look at Jesus, you see what perfect love looks like. This is what greatness looks like. This is what the kind of wisdom of God looks like. It's Jesus. We lead our kids to Jesus both so they can know what God's like, but also so they can know what a human is supposed to be like.

Then we call them to follow His example. However, the problem is, none of us can do it perfectly. And the beauty of Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life is that He leads us to Himself so we realize we all desperately need Him. We need Him to forgive us for the ways we don't live the perfect human life and fill us with His Spirit to enable us to live a new life. It's not only that we're forgiven for not living the perfect human life, but we've been given one in Jesus who has perfectly lived the human life we can't.

He is the Son of God who perfectly obeyed the Father so that you and I can have a child-like faith before God and go to Him even when we blow it, knowing that we are perfectly accepted by God the Father. When our kids fail, we can teach them there is a Son who never failed for you. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, lived a perfect life in your place so when you fail, you can go to Him for forgiveness and for acceptance before the Father in Heaven because He lived a life you can't live for you.

Lead your children in the way. Don't lead them to try harder or work more. Lead them to Jesus. One of the ways we do this is by formally rehearsing the truths of the gospel to our kids. When you're at the table, talk about and remember Jesus. Remember He lived for you. He died for you. He can be alive in you by His Spirit to help you live a new life. Remind them that they aren't going to school alone.

Remember, our hope for our families is not us and our efforts. Our hope is in God who builds the house. It's in God who saves our children. It's in God who saves us. Maybe for some of you, you just need to know that you can come to God the Father today and receive His grace. Confess you aren't the perfect parent. Jesus died to forgive you for the ways in which you've fallen short.

Come and receive the grace of God in the forgiveness that Jesus offers through His life given for you. Come receive God as a better parent for your kids. Come receive Jesus for you first. He lived the life that you can't live, died in your place, and brings you into a standing with God where He not only forgives you, but perfectly loves and accepts you in Jesus Christ. If you receive that, then you can lead your children to that as well.



DISCOVER

Take a few moments to discuss the article and read Proverbs 22:6 and Proverbs 3:11-12. Here are a few questions to help facilitate your discussion as you seek to discover the truth about God and what He has said about us in His Word.

Q: What is God like as a Father? How has He trained us, loved us, and led us?

Q: How is parenting children like disciple-making? How does parenting as disciple-making differ from other parenting philosophies?

Q: In light of the wisdom of Proverbs, what does good parenting look like?

Q: Which area of parenting is hardest for you: training up your child, loving discipline, or leading them in the way?

We lead our kids to Jesus so they can know what God's like and so they can know what a human is supposed to be like.



NURTURE

Let's turn inward and explore repentance as we look to our parenting and family environments. Our hope for our families is not us and our efforts; our hope is in God who builds the house. This is good news because we fail our children regularly.

Q: How have you made yourself, others, or systems the hope for your family?

Q: How do you deal with your failures as a parent?

Q: What would it look like to believe God as the hope for our family?

Spend time speaking and receiving the grace of God in the forgiveness that Jesus offers through His life given for you. Speak the truth that God is a better parent for your kids. And that Jesus is a better child for you first before God the Father, a child who lived the life that you can't live, died in your place, and brings you into a place where God not only forgives you, but perfectly loves and accepts you in Jesus Christ. When we lean on this understanding, we walk in wisdom with our kids.



ACT

Spend these final moments exploring the practical implications on your community and city. Essentially we're asking: how will we obey God in our parenting?

Q: How can we encourage and bear one another's burdens as we train up our children together?



PRAYER

Children are trained up by their parents to be sent out to make a difference in a world that desperately needs hope. Get them ready. Equip them. Train them. Take seriously the time God gives you to prepare them because one day they will leave whether you've trained them well or not. Our roles as parents is to prepare them for that day.

Spend time praying for each other and your children.



PERSONAL STUDY

Nothing challenges and humbles us quite like children. We often feel tossed around by new strategies. The world's wisdom is always some form of "make sure you do this and never do that." The list is long and exhausting. During this personal study, we're going to look at three principles from the wisdom of Proverbs. They guide us toward the truth about the role and joy of parenting. We're also going to spend time processing our genuine struggles and fears in prayer to God. Lastly, we're going to make space to draw out the hearts of our children.



PERSONAL DISCOVERY

TRAIN UP A CHILD

Read Proverbs 22:6

The word "train," in this particular text, is the word used for how a mother trains her baby towards the breast when the baby is learning to breastfeed. This can often be a difficult process, especially with a first child, just to get them the nutrition they need. Interestingly, mothers would historically use a little bit of honey on the baby's tongue to make the baby begin to root—to want something more.

This is a beautiful picture of what God does with all of us when we hear these words from Scripture: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." He wants us to get a taste of Jesus so we'll want a lot more of Jesus. That's the background behind this word: train. Parents, train up your children like that, with a gentle application of the goodness, beauty, and joy of Jesus Christ. Help them to see how good the Lord is. Help them taste and want more. This is the best way to prepare them for adulthood. "Train them in the way they should go" means nurture them with the good grace and satisfying substance that Jesus is to our souls. That's what we're doing when we're parenting.

Q: How can you intentionally train your children to walk in repentance and faith? How do you take time for conversations, spontaneous lessons, and explanations of the gospel?

LOVING DISCIPLINE

Read Proverbs 19:18 and Proverbs 13:24

The concept of discipline here is not a picture of punishment or harsh treatment. Rather the rod should remind us of a shepherd who has devoted his life to caring for his sheep. The shepherd uses a rod to gently nudge the sheep towards green pastures where they can eat or quiet waters where they can drink. If a sheep runs in the wrong direction, the shepherd can throw the rod like a boomerang to hit the sheep's legs to keep it from going off a cliff or into a dangerous place. If a predator came near, the shepherd could use the staff to beat down the predator so the sheep wouldn't be harmed. This is the idea of discipline in these proverbs: that we would, out of love, correct, rebuke, and protect our children. This is how God disciplines us.

Q: How have you experienced God's loving discipline in your own life?

Q: How can you walk with your children like a shepherd guarding and caring for the sheep?

LEAD THEM IN THE WAY

Lastly, we're called to lead them in following Jesus. We're an example of what it means to be a man or a woman for them. We don't simply talk to them about God; we emulate a life lived close to God in repentance and faith. As we fail, we point to Jesus as the perfect Son, the true humanity.

Q: Jesus, as we've discovered through this entire study, is the perfect example of a human. How can your children encounter His life in your life?

Q: How can you demonstrate repentance and faith with your children? Do you seek their forgiveness or share what you're learning and how you are growing?

Every time we share how God is meeting us in our struggles or redeeming us in our brokenness, we're pointing them toward the way. Every moment we share God's grace to grow our faith, we're leading them toward the way of abundant life. Our children need to know and see our need for Jesus.



NURTURE

In this section, focus on repentance, faith, and renewal that needs to happen in your own heart. This week, take time to reflect on the blessing and treasure children are and the privilege of being called their parents. But most importantly, reflect and pray about God's faithfulness to build the house and do the work of building your family.

Read Psalm 127 and use it as a guide for this time.

First, offer God things you're thankful for in your family and your children. Thank God for the jokes, the laughs, the tears, and anything specific about your children that bring you joy.

Second, confess your doubts, worries, and concerns. Think of areas where you're struggling with your children. Spend time speaking them to God

Third, ask God to transform your heart and bring you closer to Him through the role of parenting. Ask the Spirit to strengthen you and guide you and your spouse toward faithfulness.



ACT

This section is dedicated to applying and obeying the truths we've learned and grown towards in belief. This week we're going to make space for our kids. Engage your kids in an intentional way and draw out their hearts.

Have Quality Time With Your Kids

- Go on a walk or a bike ride
- Play outside
- Watch a movie
- Play a game at the house
- Have ice-cream or make a special dessert together
- Watch a sporting event or concert
- Make routines quality time (breakfast, going to school, coming home after practice)

HOW TO DRAW OUT THEIR HEARTS AS YOU SPEND TIME TOGETHER

Ask them about their day at school: What did you learn today? What are you understanding?

Ask them about their life as a whole: What's coming into your heart and your mind these days? What are you most excited about today? What are you most sad about?

Pause and reflect on what you are doing together: If you watched a movie, ask about the story and what part they resonated with. Ask them what parts reminded you of God's Story and which parts seemed different. If you had a special dessert, ask them why they liked it and how it made them feel. Talk to them about satisfaction, joy, and God's provision.

