

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Parenting Realities

After the birth of your first child there is such joy and excitement that you have a child. However, it doesn't take long before you start asking yourself at two o'clock in the morning, *What have I got myself into?* As things calm down and your child begins to sleep through the night, a succession of new challenges presents themselves. How do I potty-train them? How can I help them do better in school? How do I parent my teenager? How can I guide them to choose a good mate? How can I keep from being an overbearing in-law? The reality of parenting is this fact - that it is never done.

As you consider this topic, I want you to think through some of these realities and consider what Scripture teaches. If you do not think these realities through biblically, you can condemn yourself when things do not turn out as you believe they should. Some of the things I am about to say will challenge what you may assume, but come with an open heart.

What are some of these parenting realities?

1. Every child is different. No two children are exactly alike in their personalities or behavior. This means you must be sensitive to use different means and methods in your parenting for each child.

Many times you can see these differences from birth. Some children are compliant and loving, and others are wild and independent. Some children are spiritually receptive, while others could care less about spiritual things. Jacob and Esau are good examples of this principle. They were twins, yet they responded to God very differently. In addition, Scripture

declares that Abraham's son, Ishmael, would be a "wild man" from his birth (Gen. 16:12). The words "wild man" means wild donkey, so different from his brother Isaac. Consider also the difference between King David's heart for the Lord and that of his brothers. They all came from the same parents and the same family, but they were very different. Some children are rebellious from their youth. God declared this fact about King Jehoiakim in the Old Testament. God said to this king, *"I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not hear.' This has been your manner from your youth, that you did not obey My voice"* (Jer. 22:21). The opposite can also be true of some children. They can be receptive from their youth and obedient to God, such as the Prophet Jeremiah or Paul's protégé Timothy (Jer. 1:5-10; 2 Tim. 3:15).

My point is this; you must deal with each child on the basis of his or her personal behavior. The principles of God's Word are the same for all children, but the application of those principles may be different. One may require you to be very strict and another child may yield very quickly. One will respond to little discipline and another will fail to respond with even vigorous correction.

2. All respond differently. In fact, you can teach and discipline exactly the same, and do everything correctly, and children will respond differently because they are different. The children of Israel were loved, nurtured, and disciplined correctly by God and yet they still rebelled. God said of them, *"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me"* (Is. 1:2). Their rebellion was the result of their self-

will and sin nature. No one could blame the parenting skill of God the Father! This is a key principle that parents forget when they have rebellious teens or adult children who walk away from the Lord. Remember, God declares that people must, *"receive correction"* for change to occur (Jer. 2:30). Likewise, your parenting will not be effective unless your child receives both your correction and God's. Why? Your children have a free will just as you do.



Look to your Bible for answers!

Now, I know what you are thinking, doesn't God guarantee in His word that if I *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Prov. 22:6)? This verse is misunderstood and misapplied so often. The word *"train"* means to dedicate as Solomon did with the Temple (1 Kings 8:63). You are to dedicate your time and effort to helping your child find and fulfill their future responsibilities. Some scholars believe the *"way"* he should go refers to their vocation. But, note that it says in the way your child *should go*. The word *"should"* does not mean it is a guarantee. *Should* implies it is the way they ought to go.

Why is the word *"should"* not a guarantee? Your children are not robots. God will not force them to

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

obey His will. They must individually choose to follow Christ for themselves. They must also continue to choose to deny themselves and pick up their cross and follow Him throughout their lives (Matt. 16:24).

In addition, Proverbs also acknowledges that some children will refuse to obey their parents (Prov. 10:1; 8; 17; Prov. 13:1; Prov.17:21). Note that the responsibility is placed on the children in these Proverbs, not the parents. God holds both parents and children responsible for the outcome.

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Remember that proverbs are general truisms, not absolute guarantees. Consider the two verses prior to Proverbs 22:6. Solomon also taught, “*By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life*” (Prov. 22:4). Does this mean that just because you have humility and obey the Lord that you will be rich? No, you must also be judicious with your money and use wise business principles. These are just a few factors that would enable you to honor God and become prosperous.

Solomon also declared, “*Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them*” (Prov. 22:5). Does this mean that if you are careful and watchful over your heart that you will have no trials or hardships in life? Not at all. But, you will have many more hardships and trials if you do not guard your soul. Again, these are basic truisms, not guarantees. See also Proverbs 26:4-5.

Proverbs 22:6 has been greatly misinterpreted. In the same way a passage in the New Testament has been misconstrued. Many read Acts 16:31 and think that Scripture promises that if the jailer believed in Jesus then his whole family would automatically be saved. However, the

promise was that his whole family could be saved in the same manner as he was, through faith. Peter taught the same: “*The promise is to you and your children and to all who are afar off*” (Acts 2:38-39). This promise is equally given to all, if they receive the grace of God through faith just like the parent.

3. All will not follow the Lord. Just because you are a believer does not guarantee that your child will also become a believer and follow your godly example. Why do I say this? There are several reasons.

Adam and Eve had the best parent, God the Father, the best environment, the best opportunities, and yet they still disobeyed God and brought us all into the ungodly world that we live in today.

The kings of Israel also reveal a number of examples of godly fathers, who had some of the most ungodly children. Consider King Jotham who fathered King Ahaz (2 Chron. 27:1-28:4), or King Hezekiah who brought forth King Manasseh (2 Chron. 29-33).

However, some godly kings also raised godly sons such as King Uzziah and King Jotham (2 Chron. 26-27).

In addition some ungodly kings raised ungodly sons such as King Jehoram and King Ahaziah (2 Chron. 21-22). And some ungodly kings had godly offspring, such as King Amon who fathered a godly son, King Josiah (2 Chron. 33:21-34:2), or the ungodly King Ahaz who brought forth godly King Hezekiah (2 Chron. 28:1-4; 29:1-2).

What do all these examples teach you? They reveal that the example, training, and influence of the parent are important, but in the end, the children must choose for themselves whether or not they will follow the Lord. Each child has a personal responsibility before God.

The Scripture also acknowledges this concept of personal decision-making on the part of children in Ezekiel

18:4-14. There God reveals that He assumes that sometimes the godly will bear ungodly children and some that are ungodly will turn from their sin and follow after righteousness. This should motivate you to do your best to train and discipline each child. Pray for them continually and trust God to work in their lives just as He has in yours. But, in the end, you must commit them to God and to the work of His grace, and acknowledge that each must make their own decision.

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If this fact I have just explained is not a fundamental parenting reality, then why does Jesus teach the story of the Prodigal Son? If a prodigal child is not a possibility, then what is the point of the story? This story revealed that a rebellious child was a real potential occurrence in the time of Jesus. Remember, this rebellious son grew up in a home with a loving, caring and giving father. Jesus only used stories that all could relate to and understand.

Therefore, I explain this reality so you will be ready for all possible outcomes, and so that you might relate to a rebellious child with the same love that this father gave to His prodigal son. All God requires of you is that you do your best and commit your child to God.

4. You don't have the final decision.

This is another fundamental parenting reality. Each child must make his or her own decisions in life. The sooner you learn this lesson the sooner you will start helping them to choose wisely. In life they will have many choices to make, so instruct your children how to make good ones!

Samson is one of the best examples of a man having all the benefits in life, yet making bad choices that clearly impacted his life (Judges 13-16). Remember, Samson had an angel

announce his birth. He had a prophecy given of the deliverance he would bring to the nation. He was separated unto God by his parents to be a Nazirite from his birth. He had prayerful and reverent parents who only wanted the best for him (Judges 13:8). God even personally blessed Samson (Judges 13:24). But, Samson failed miserably to experience God's best in his life because of his foolish choices.

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Your children have the final decision on the direction of their lives. You can't make those choices for them. Just be sure to explain to them that the consequences are real.

5. You will experience everything that your heavenly Father does.

Another parenting reality is that you experience the same joy of creating children and seeing them grow into adults. You will also experience the heartache of seeing them make bad choices and then experience the consequences of those choices. Isaiah tells us that when God's people were afflicted, *"He was afflicted"* (Is. 63:9). He truly feels our pain! In addition, you will have to learn how to love them in spite of their failings. This is part of parenting. You must learn how to respond in the good times and the difficult ones.

How can you do that?

1. Stay calm and do not overreact. Don't yell or berate them. Do not disown them and tell them you don't want to have anything to do with them. Solomon declared, *"He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit"* (Prov. 17:27). Remember, God is always ready and waiting for the prodigal to come back into a right relationship with Him. Are you ready?

2. You need to pray. *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16). Do you believe that your prayer can help your prodigal child? Paul asked for people's prayers for him. Why? Because he believed prayer would help. Paul believed in the *"God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us"* (2 Cor. 1:9-11). If you want to be an effective parent, offer up your effective fervent prayer to the Lord for your children. Pray for them continually!

3. A 30 second lecture. (See Parenting Teenagers article in this series for more information on how to give a 30 second lecture). My point is that the less you say the better it is. Usually, the more you talk the less your teens and young adults will listen. Why? Because they simply think you are trying to control them. Encourage them that they must consider the consequences of their actions. Tell them that they have to live with the consequences of their decisions.

Why is explaining consequences so important? Because it is what God does with His people throughout the Scripture. God explains the blessings that follow obedience and the curses that follow rebellion (Deut. 28; Lev. 26). Jesus did the same thing. *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall"* (Matt. 7:24-27).

4. Use tough love. The definition of love is different to each person. That is why we need one standard of love

for all men. That standard is God's love as revealed through Jesus. He said, *"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love"* (John 15:9). *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). Jesus also said, *"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you"* (John 13:15).

If you want to be an effective parent, offer up your effective fervent prayer to the Lord for your children. Pray for them continually!

How does God use tough love with us? For an in-depth look at this subject please read my article entitled *"Implementing Tough Love with Your Spouse"* at covenantkeepers.org. The simple answer to this question is that God speaks a reproof to begin tough love (2 Chron. 33:10). He then requires a response and holds people accountable for their actions (1 Kings 18:21). If there is no favorable response then God takes corrective action (Heb. 12:6). If there is still no response He then steps back and allows a person or nation to experience the natural consequences of their actions (Jer. 2:30; Ps. 81:11-12).

Therefore, love your adult children, but do not enable or support irresponsible behavior. If you do, this only hinders them from experiencing God's correction through the natural consequences of their choices. There are many examples of God and men not supporting evil or the irresponsible behavior of others (Is. 1:5; 1 Sam. 15:26).

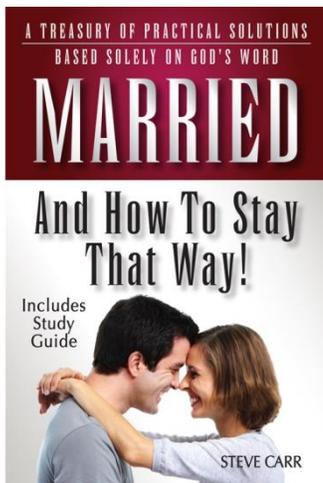
5. Trust that God will work. The bottom line to all these parenting realities is that you must trust God. Trust Him that He will work in your children's lives just as He has in yours. Solomon encouraged his son, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own*

understanding. In all your way acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path” (Prov. 3:5-6). This is equally good advice for any parent or child. Commit your children into God’s wise and capable hands. The Father saved you, and He is just as able to save them. Trust Him to do it!

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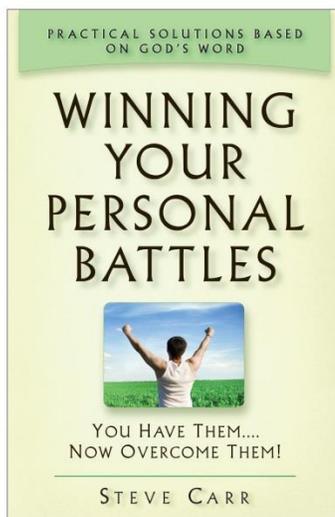
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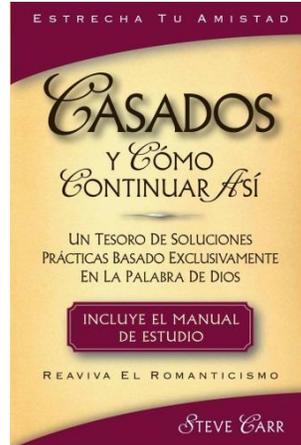


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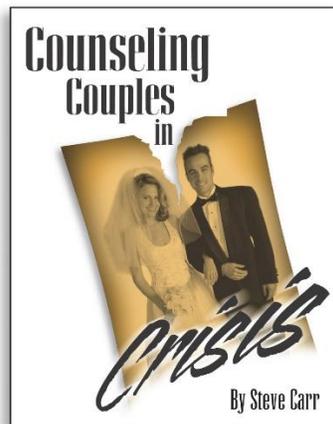
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