

Help! I'm a Parent

Deuteronomy 6:4-25; John 13:1-17

Do you want to drive a car? If you are under 25 to get a drivers licence you get a Road Users Handbook and pass a knowledge test to get L license. You must pass an eyesight test. Then you must have held an L license for 12 months, do 120 hours of log book supervised driving and probably some lessons and pass a driving test to get a red P license. Then to get a green P you have to have had the red P for 12 months and pass a hazard perception test. Finally to get the full license you have to hold a green P for 24 months and pass a Driver Qualification Test. All that to drive a car!!

Do you want to be a parent? There's no official guide book. There are no tests. You don't have to do any lessons. Just go and do it! But bringing up children is much harder than driving a car. How do we know what to do?

The next 3 sermons will look at what the Bible says on parenting. There is a lot of other general wisdom in books and courses but as these are sermons we will look mainly at the Bible and what it says. We will run a Parenting Children course in late July. I encourage all parents to do it. It will run for 5 Sundays so sign up now.

Some of us aren't parents or grandparents but we need to see the importance of supporting and praying for parents and we all need to support the church's ministry to children.

I'm not saying I got it all right in my parenting. I certainly didn't. We all fail. It is a hard job. But we need to think about what we should aim to achieve. It is important to see what the Bible says.

1. The Parent's Role - teaching

In Deuteronomy we read, ⁴*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* ⁵*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* ⁶*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.* ⁷*Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

We see here that it is the responsibility of parents to pass on God's word to their children, to teach them about God himself, what God is like, and about God's will for our lives. To teach how to live God's way. ⁷*Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

One of the interesting things this requires is "all day" instruction or "on the road" instruction. We need to have a set time when we read the Bible and pray with our children, often before bed, but this talks about how we talk to them throughout the day.

Our Richard got this when he was about 3. He found a peach fallen on the ground in our back yard and there was a grub in it. We would have said, "Throw it away. It's rotten." But he said, "Look at this creature God has made." It is about relating to God in everyday life.

One of the places the rubber hits the road in Christian life is in making decisions, as we make choices in life. We can talk to them about their choices, why choose one action rather than another, and perhaps why we choose the things we decide to do. Show them how love for God and love for neighbour works out in daily life.

Some films are rated PG - Parental Guidance. It means you should talk with your children about the film, guide them as to the values, attitudes and action they have seen. We should treat the whole of life with our children as PG. Talk with them about decisions, theirs, yours, other people's, the things in life all around you. Say grace at meals as a start.

Last week we looked at how the world's values are different from God's values. We need to talk about how that works out in life; serving others rather than living for self; the right place of money and material things in life; sharing, forgiving, honesty, being fair and so on. Show how these are God's will for them. Show how Jesus sets an example for us.

Often parents will urge their kid's to work hard, to get good marks to go to Uni, to get a good job, to earn good money. They can make this the focus of life but we need to instruct them in living a godly life, to make choices guided by God's word.

When we come to the New Testament it gives parents the same role, *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4) Again the parents are given the responsibility for training and instruction.

We need to see that it isn't just telling them to be good. It is "*instruction of the Lord*" - it is learning to live God's way.

Church children's ministry plays an important part, Sunday School and later Youth Group but we can't just leave it to Sunday School to teach. It is the parent's responsibility. Sunday School is one hour a week. This sort of "on the road" instruction is 7 day a week teaching as well as daily Bible and prayers.

2. The Parent's Role - The Power of Example

If I was to teach you to make a handkerchief mouse I could describe the process. But I don't think it would help you. No I would need to show you. If I demonstrated how to do it it would be much easier for you to follow. Showing is much more powerful than telling.

Jesus didn't just tell the disciples how to live he showed them. In John 13 we read how he washed their feet. This was the job of the lowest servant but Jesus, the master, washed his disciples' feet. It was something shocking! We can understand why Peter refused to let him do it at first.

Jesus goes on to say, "*Do you understand what I have done for you?*" he asked them. ¹³ "*You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.*" ¹⁴ "*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.*" ¹⁵ "*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*" (John 13:12-15) Jesus had shown them how to live by a startling example. In fact his whole life, especially his death, was an

example of serving. He calls us, not just to do what he said but to follow him, to live as he lived for others. (John 13:34-35)

He goes on to say, ³⁴ *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

The most powerful way we can teach our children is by example.

When my kids approached the age of getting a drivers' license I realised I needed to be careful how I was driving, to keep the speed limit, to stop completely at stop signs and drive carefully. They were watching how I did it. Of course it was too late. They'd been watching for 16 yrs.

It's no good saying don't swear if you swear like a trooper or don't smoke if you puff away all the time. We need to set positive examples for them to follow.

Whether we want to or not we are an example to our kids. That's a scary thing isn't it? The problem is we all fail, life is busy, there is the pressure of work, there is sickness and we get tired, kid's muck up and we get impatient ...

None of us is always a good example. Don't despair! God can compensate for our failures. The important thing is to be the best example we can be. It is important that our children know we regularly pray, read our Bible, worship God, put God first and seek to live his way.

We can see that teaching by example can only come from parents or others that children live with. So much of the Christian life is caught rather than taught.

In the Christian life it is always helpful to feel our weakness. This weakness will drive us to prayer and to depend on God. We need to pray for ourselves as we bring up our children. Pray also for our children that God will be at work in their lives. All of us can pray for all the parents in the church. God our Heavenly father loves our children, will hear.