

Successful Christian Parenting, Part 2

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Date: 24 March 2024

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[0:00] Lord God, we are so incredibly fortunate to know your name and to be shown through your word the excellency of your character. Lord, we don't have to have, we don't deserve the light we have been given.

Help us to walk in the light, the light that you've provided. Thank you, Lord, for showing us not only your person but also your will and the way that you design this world to work.

God, our aim as a church is to help one another to walk in harmony with their creator and his creation. And so, Lord, we pray that as we open your word today, open our hearts and instruct us in your ways.

In Jesus' precious name we pray, amen. You can be seated, and if you'll open your Bibles to 2 Timothy 3. Kids, we'll dismiss you now. It's a children's ministry.

And if you've got your Bibles with you today, would you open to 2 Timothy 3. Now, I do want to mention a few things happening this week.

[1:10] Firstly, we have a Good Friday service planned. We just feel it's important to be together on Good Friday, and so you'll be receiving news about that. But we typically meet at 7 p.m. for a very brief, short service just to mark and memorialize our Lord's death.

We also have the Easter egg hunt on Saturday, and I think that that will probably be announced in more detail after the service. Now, today we have a potluck scheduled, and it's brunch-themed, brunch-themed potluck.

So who came up with that amazing idea? Love breakfast food. And if you're visiting with us today, we always make it a practice to bring plenty of food to share with anyone who would just happen to drop in on any given Sunday without being told to bring anything.

And we would love it if you were the front of the line and helped yourself to the many delicious treats that will be available to you today. We'll actually, for those of you that did bring food, we'll actually move the food from that room to the chapel after the service.

So if you brought a dish, if you'd be helpful, and go grab that dish and put it in the chapel, we'd appreciate that. Well, today we're going to talk about the role of influence in Christian parenting, the role of influence in Christian parenting.

[2:29] But before we get into that, I kind of want to run an experiment, an experiment this morning. So, hold on. Darn it!

I was really hoping, I guess fake yawns aren't as contagious as real yawns. But if you've ever been in a room with someone who, I don't know how many of you would say you're prone to catching other people's yawns.

I am absolutely prone to catching other people's yawns. I just caught my own yawn. Now I really want to yawn. This notion that we are social creatures taking cues from those around us is at the root of this idea of influence.

And we see it articulated to some degree in our text in chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, and I'm in 1 Timothy, where Paul is actually encouraging Timothy to continue in the ways that he learned from his youth. 2 Timothy chapter 3, beginning in verse 14. But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it.

[3:37] Now, this is part 2 of our parenting conversation. And last week, just to catch you up if you were not here, we talked about the incredible treasure contained in this first section in which we have a clear aim of Christian parenting, and that is to be able to tell our young men and our young women, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.

That's the aim of Christian parenting, to be able to say to our young people, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and what you have sincerely believed.

We also see a little bit of a clause or a little bit of an add-on to Paul's statement here, where he says, that as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it.

Knowing from whom you've learned it. And that's where we get our idea of talking today, of associating influence with the aim of Christian parenting. Now, I thought we probably would want to just do a brief overview of the way that the Bible talks about the negative influence that others can have on our faith.

And this idea is pretty considerable, presented quite densely in 2 Timothy. In chapter 2, we've already covered this text, we see that irreverent conversations lead to more and more ungodliness.

[5 : 01] Paul compared this kind of thing to gangrene, spreading from one member of the body to another. And then in chapter 3, we see this in verse 3, But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, for people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

And then Paul tells Timothy, Avoid such people. The idea of negative influence is really embedded in this little book of 2 Timothy. This is all summarized in something that Paul says to the Corinthians in chapter 15, verse 33 of 1 Corinthians.

He simply says this, Do not be deceived. Good company, or bad company, corrupts good morals. Bad company corrupts good morals.

Now, if we were to go to the Old Testament, which we'll not take the time to do this morning, we would see that often when Israel was at its lowest, it got there because it had, quote unquote, learned the ways of the nations surrounding it.

Jeremiah 10.2 is an example, and I've got about 20 other texts that say about the same thing in the Old Testament. Jared just read this morning from the book of Proverbs, and specifically chapter 22.

[6 : 31] And throughout the book of Proverbs, the kind father is carefully warning his son to avoid certain people. For instance, in verse 24, Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

In chapter 23, the next chapter of Proverbs, in verse 19, The father says, Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Be not drunkards, be not among drunkards, or among gluttonous eaters of meat.

Can't go to Texas, guys. For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. The Old Testament data about influence mostly focuses on who to avoid.

For instance, in Psalm 1.1, the very first Psalm, we see blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

In Psalm 119, we see David saying it this way, Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.

[7 : 43] So that's kind of an overview of the role that negative influence is spoken about in the scriptures. We need to say these things on behalf of our children, of course.

We need to tell the world, the flesh, and the devil, Depart from them, you evildoers, that they may, my child may, obey the commandments of the Lord. Last week, I mentioned that 30% of people who are young people who claim to be Christians leave the Christian faith at a very early age, in their 20s.

30% leave the Christian faith at a very early age, and the number is probably higher in reality.

What's going on there? Why that age?

Influence, right? Influence. Suddenly, competing voices enter into the conversation of that individual's heart, and they are drawn away from the true and living God.

And so, Paul is a kind of spiritual father to Timothy. We've already seen that in 2 Timothy. And Paul was careful to curate the company that Timothy kept.

[8 : 52] That's why he's telling them, telling him to avoid such people. He's making sure that the influences in Timothy's life remain positive. Likewise, mothers and fathers, that's the basic message today.

Understand the role that influence plays in the development of your young people and whether or not they will walk in the ways of the Lord. So that's a little bit about negative influence.

Let's just talk briefly about positive influence. Look back at our text, beginning in verse 13, 2 Timothy 3, 13. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it, and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

There is a phrase going around in theological circles these days, and it comes from Thomas Aquinas, and that phrase is simply, grace perfects nature.

[10:04] Grace perfects nature. What does that mean? Well, we see an example of that idea in what Paul is doing for Timothy. The nature of a human being is to be influenced by others.

Paul is not resisting that fundamental nature. Rather, he is directing it or perfecting it with the word of God. That's what Aquinas means by grace perfects nature.

There are certain things that are just true of nature, and we are part of nature, and one of the things true of us is that we are influenced by others. And so Paul is attempting to direct that natural inclination, already part of Timothy's character because he's a human being, in the right direction. He's saying, don't associate with these folks, rather, associate with these folks. Now, what we can see is that Timothy is in a blessed state.

He is surrounded by a sea of unfaithfulness. But his life has been built up on a godly island of godly influence. And so while so many others are bobbing in the sea, tossed to and fro by every wind and wave, Timothy holds fast.

[11:21] And his security and his stability has a lot to do with whose shoulders he's standing on. His faith is built on the faith of his parents, especially, specifically, his mother.

The phrase, from whom you've learned it, just to get into the Greek for a minute, the phrase, from whom you've learned it, is in the plural. What does that tell us? Well, it tells us that Paul isn't referring to himself alone.

It tells us that Paul is saying, you've learned this faith from multiple people. You've learned this faith from multiple people. And he's saying, as a matter of his own perseverance, or to support his own perseverance, remember these people who taught you the truth.

Remember these people who taught you the truth. Now, we're going to go on a bit of a biographical tour of Timothy's life. We have almost no data on that, so it'll take about three minutes.

But before we conclude, 2 Timothy, it'd probably be nice to share some of this with you. I feel like a little remiss for not having done so previously. If we were to talk about the positive influences in Timothy's life, starting from his childhood up, we'd probably come up with three categories.

[12:34] His household, his church, and godly mentors. His household, his church, and godly mentors. Now, I'm going to do a podcast this week.

It's called The Providence Podcast. Top-Rated Podcast. I feel like you laughed a little too short. I'm hurt. I'm a little hurt right now. I'm going to do a podcast this week on how to find a godly mentor. And so, if you're interested in finding a godly mentor, which you should be, maybe you might listen this time.

Join the wave of people listening to this podcast. So, let's just group for today, let's just group this church and godly mentor category together and discuss this for a brief minute.

Here's the brief biographical sketch of Timothy that may give you some information about the role the church played in his life. First of all, Timothy's name, we didn't cover this, is Timotheos.

[13:43] It's God-honorer. All right, so we know something about his childhood right away, right? He is named God-honorer from his birth.

Now, his name appears 25 times in the New Testament. I did not do a comparative analysis of all the other prominent names, but I would be willing to bet that his name is featured more than any other name if we're counting the non-apostles.

In other words, Timothy was a very prominent figure in the early church. Have we talked about how Timothy died? He's 80 years old. This is church history.

We're not conclusively sure about this, but the witness of church history says he's 80 years old, still living in Ephesus, and for this whole time Timothy's lived in Ephesus, he's done hand-to-hand combat with the idol worship in the city, right?

There's a temple there, a major temple dedicated to the worship of an idol, and for his whole life, he's watched this and fought against this and led people to Christ out of that cult and so on and so

forth, and I think this is the best retirement plan ever.

[15:00] At 80, he just decides to physically intervene, and the crowd beats him to death. So as you guys get older, something to think about. Like that might be a beautiful way to go out. You know?

He held fast to the end is my point, and lived a life of courage and bravery and competency and faith. He was a prominent figure in the New Testament, and the point about that is just that look at what your parenting could do.

Don't be a low-hope person. expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.

You know, there's this moment where Timothy's freshly hatched, and they're holding him, and they say, let's call him God-honorer. Almost as if, as a charter for their own parenting purposes.

What's the most important thing we can wish for this child? child? That he would honor God? It's as if when you give your child to the king, the king makes great use of him in his kingdom.

[16:18] And so let's not set our sights too low on what the outcome of Christian parenting can be. This reminds me, by the way, this idea of being used by the kingdom, this reminds me of a cute little quip between Spurgeon and his mother.

Spurgeon was converted as a young adult. He had escaped his Christian home without coming to faith in Jesus. So Spurgeon's mother was praying for him routinely. I believe she was Anglican.

And Spurgeon's mom wrote to her son when it turned out that he was saved and he had joined a Baptist church. Spurgeon's mom wrote, Oh, Charles, I've often prayed that the Lord would make you a Christian, but I never asked, I never asked that he might make you a Baptist.

And Spurgeon wrote back, Oh, mother, the Lord has answered your prayer with his usual bounty, giving you exceedingly above what you had asked or thought.

It's a sweet moment because look at what a difference that man made in the kingdom. And consider the fact that that all started with a mom praying over a little baby.

[17:42] When you're struggling, struggling to believe prayer matters, talk to some of us prodigals who were prayed out of the pit by their parents.

Prayer matters. Now, the thing they noticed though is that Spurgeon's mom was influential in his life, but not the only influence. After all, he didn't stick with her denominational preference.

he became a Baptist. By the way, you guys heard what the difference between a Methodist and a Baptist is? A Methodist is a Baptist that can read. Hey, I get to tell that joke.

the connection is that she got him to a certain point, but then there had to be more Christians at the end of his journey to help him into the next chapter of his story.

Spurgeon was not Spurgeon because of his mother alone, and neither was Timothy. Now, the first time, I said his name appears 25 times, the first time it appears is in Acts 16.

[18:59] Paul was in his hometown, a town called Lystra, and he meets a young Timothy who is described already by the time Paul meets him as a disciple.

And we're told that he is the son of a Jewish man who was a believer, but his father was a Greek and presumably not a believer. Well, let me just hit pause because we want to unambiguously emphasize the importance of a father's role in raising his children in the Lord, but not all of you have that father, and some of you moms don't have a believing husband.

And without compromising on the ideal, I do want to pause and say, look what God can do. At the end of the day, we don't trust in recipes for raising our kids, we trust on the one who reigns most high.

And look what God can do. So if you're a mom without a believing partner, without a believing husband, to help you raise your kids in the Lord, well, I would say, Timothy appears to have been raised in a similar environment, and the Lord made up for that lack.

Now the thing we see in Acts 16 that's really interesting to me, is in verse 2, it says that he was, now he's a young guy, that he was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

[20:35] This little sentence reveals the role the local church played in the development of his character. You see, this tells us that Timothy was so enmeshed in the life of that local church, that the brothers, the men, in both his own home church and even a neighboring church, knew him, they had their eyes on him, and they were able to say to Paul, you know this young man Timothy, we want to speak well of him, he really loves the Lord.

Now that's a crucial piece of the parenting puzzle, and if you want to be able to say to your young men and women one day, continue in the faith you have received and have firmly believed, your

role as a parent matters.

We're going to end the sermon talking about this, that, but also your connection to a healthy local body can be your best ally in helping you to see the main dream you have for your child come true. I had a vision or a daydream the other day. I don't know what I was doing, but it's not unusual for me to daydream. I imagined a prominent visitor coming into a beautiful and well-run medieval city. When he arrives, the city's mayor, who was very industrious and kind and a good-hearted leader, met this prominent visitor and said, hey, can I show you around this city that we've built?

[22 : 13] We're quite proud of all that has been accomplished here. And the town was beautiful, and it was bustling with life and full of productivity, and the wise mayor, in order to protect this city, built a very substantial wall around the entire place, and that would protect this city from a myriad of invaders.

The mayor said something to the effect of, we have this huge wall, and we have several dozen gates that have been built into the walls, into the wall in different places over time so that goods can efficiently be brought in and out of nearly every part of the city.

The guest was duly impressed, and he said, Mr. Mayor, this is a beautiful town. Your diligence and love for this place is very obvious. But then he asked a rather penetrating question.

He said, you have several gates in this city, in the wall, and the mayor said, several dozen. And the man asked, how many gatekeepers do you have?

And the mayor looked down, slightly embarrassed, and rather sheepishly replied, you've touched on a real problem we're facing. We've built all these gates, but we have had trouble finding gatekeepers.

[23 : 30] gatekeepers. We have dozens of gates, and we only have two full-time gatekeepers, and they're getting old. So these gates, which were really designed to benefit the city, have become somewhat of a liability.

We don't have enough people willing to guard all these gates. What does that have to do with this conversation? Friends, when your children are young, they only have a few gates, and you and your partner can man those gates.

But as children grow older by necessity of their age, necessity of their educational needs, necessity of their own interests, and just living a well-rounded life for the glory of the Lord, they have to have additional gates in the wall.

You've probably seen some 20-year-olds who were raised in a very restrictive environment that only had two gates. That doesn't go so well either. And so you want your child to be this bustling, you want your child's soul to be this bustling, beautiful place of activity, but in doing so, you open that child up to a multiplicity of threats from a multiplicity of errors or sources, and you aren't enough.

What are you going to do? Who will help you guard all these gates? The answer is the church, the living body of Christ, the people of God.

[25 : 02] And so I'm speaking to you parents mostly, but also to you older folks as well, to understand what role you play in the raising up of this now second generation of providence. That would be this.

Parents, you have a ton of immediate demands in raising children. children. I want to encourage you as soberly as I can not to neglect the long game.

And you say, what's the long game? The long game is this. While you are raising your children, you also need to raise up allies. Trust me, the day will come when you need a whole community of faith to help stand guard over your child's life and doctrine.

The friendships you build in the church today will become gatekeepers for your child's heart tomorrow. So here's what I would say. Pick a church, stick with it, if possible, put down roots, plant relational seeds, become known, and get to know others.

So that when your children get older, they will be surrounded by people who know them, who love them, and who can do their little part in helping launch your child into the next chapter of their Christian journey.

[26 : 24] So we would say that, yes, Timothy grew up in a Christian home. We'll talk about that more in a moment. But Timothy also grew up in a Christian church. You see, no person lives the perfect Christian life.

No parent here is capable of adequately representing the glory of God. God. We all have blind spots and inconsistencies, and in spite of just besides the sin issue, we also just live in very particular contexts.

Our lives start to take on rather sort of restricted conditions over time. We live very kind of lives particular to us, I guess is the point I'm making.

When we isolate our children from church, we deprive them of the opportunity to see the Christian life lived out in a variety of contexts. We deprive them specifically of the opportunity to see Jesus reign in a bunch of different circumstances.

So that your child, if not surrounded by the saints, will grow up and think, well, I know Jesus kind of works for this situation, but they'll have no clear evidence that Jesus works in all situations.

[27 : 37] But if you raise your kid in a healthy Christian church, your kid will grow up and have answers to questions that actually matter. Basic life questions like, how does a single mother trust Jesus?

How does a chronically ill person fight discouragement? How does the person struggling with substance abuse find deliverance? How does a marriage rocked by an affair get put back together again?

How does the man who unexpectedly loses his job get back on his feet? How does the couple struggling with infertility walk in faith? You see, what you want is you want your kids to see King Jesus ruling and reigning over a multitude of environments and circumstances and contexts and people and personality types and sin problems.

And the way you do that is by joining a church, putting down roots, knowing and becoming known. We want our kids to see that Christ applies to all of life.

We have to show them Christ working in all kinds of lives. So that's a bit about the importance of the church. Now let's talk about the importance of the parents.

[28 : 57] We need the church to complement the role that parents play. The church plays a supporting role. The parents play the primary role.

So look back at our text, verse 14, but as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it. We think that Paul is probably mostly referring here to Timothy's mother and grandmother.

It's sort of evidenced in the text itself where he refers back to Timothy's childhood, but it's also clearly evidenced at the beginning of the book. Paul has a way of revisiting things he said earlier. In 2 Timothy chapter 1, Paul writes this, I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you that I might be filled with joy. In verse 5, I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure dwells in you as well.

[30 : 09] So let's do something here. If you have children in the home that are under the age of 18, would you raise your hand? Okay. Keep them up. If any of you would like your child not to be a Timothy, could you put your hand down?

Trick your hand. Right. This, we, we, we're fine. Thank you. Put your hands down. We would all be happy to raise a Timothy. So we know what God did and what God used to make that so.

Last week, we talked about the role of the word in the Christian home. And we said that the word, in addition to making a man capable of living a godly life, can also make us wise for salvation.

And we talked about the importance of teaching both the law and the gospel in our home. And now we have this second thing that we're seeing, and that's the role of godly influence.

And friends, we know the church is important, and now we see that parenting is important, but what specifically should you be most aimed at as you think about raising these kids?

[31 : 18] What about you needs to change? Who do you need to be in order for your kids to be who you want them to be? And the answer is this word in 2 Timothy 1.5, the answer is this phrase, sincere faith.

This is what we know about Timothy's home life. He was surrounded by a mother and a grandmother who had sincere faith. That's it.

This is not super hard. If you can have sincere faith and magnify the word of God in your home, surround yourself by other Christians in a good church, you got more than a good shot at this.

Okay? Sincere faith, scriptures. So what does it mean to have a sincere faith? The word sincere simply means non-hypocritical.

Non-hypocritical. The word's actually just associated in ancient Greek with actors. Actors were hypocrites. They were playing a part. And the word sincere is just a non-actor.

[32 : 32] Someone who isn't playing a part. So what do you need to be in order to raise your child the way you want your child to be? And the answer is you need to have a sincere faith. What does that mean?

Well, here's some stuff. There should be no huge disparity between the way you are in home and the way you present yourself in church. Because if there is, you're essentially teaching your kid that Christianity is a LARP.

You're teaching your kid that Christianity is a part they play. So there should be no significant gap. We all sin. There should be no significant gap between who you are at home and who you present yourself to be in the church.

This, in my opinion, is the key source of children stumbling. So much as it involves the parents at all, it is this. This gap between who a person is at home and who they are in public.

Dad is angry at home but pleasant at church. Mom is sassy at home but abounding in faith at church. Have any of you ever been in mid-punishment by your parents?

[33 : 48] Now, this is cute. I don't know what else you could do about this. But I have this distinct memory of my mom literally about to apply the paddle. You know, it's incoming.

Phone rings. She says, stay right there. You know what happens next, right? The most charming and polite Midwestern voice one had ever heard.

I, frankly, was impressed she could do it because I was pretty sure her vocal cords were bleeding seconds earlier. Friends, it's actually really easy to fall into a public and private persona.

You know, friends, all of the shipwrecks we're seeing amongst Christian leaders today has so much to do with the ability to develop both a public and private persona.

And friends, don't lose the lesson that's being taught to you by the Lord's providence and these revelations. It's not, oh, those leaders, we can't trust leaders. No, that's a human being.

[34 : 51] And if they can do it, you can do it too. It's actually quite easy to develop two faces. It's actually quite easy to become a Christian actor.

We don't want to teach our kids that Christianity is an act that we put on in a certain company. We want them to see that by and large, we are the same person in every context.

So that's really it, guys. What you need to be is just a real Christian all the way through. Not a double-faced. See, the truth is, is that if you've got an anger problem, it would be better for you if you just got angry in front of your Christian brothers.

So that your children weren't the only ones to see it. Because, you know, your children won't, the children aren't the ones who are supposed to correct you. But I will. Well, so let's just be who we are and trust the Lord to refine us through the work of the gospel.

Now, I have this last bit that doesn't really fit, I don't think, but I feel like it's from the Lord, and I just want to tell you the story of the prodigal son in conclusion. The basic details of the prodigal son, in case you're not familiar, is this.

[36 : 10] You've got a prideful rich kid, young, who is a bit of a punk, second child, so you know. And he has this inheritance coming to him, and so he goes to his father and says, I want my inheritance now.

It's sort of a death wish kind of thing in that culture, essentially saying, I want to pretend as if you are dead, father. Father, give me my money. And so he goes out and lives this wild life, and he only comes to his senses when he runs out of all other possible options.

We missed that part of the story. It's not like he runs out of money and then jumps back. No, he still doesn't want to go back after he runs out of money. He keeps working his way down the ladder of sin, right, of the judgment on sin.

He's a stubborn kid. Well, he finally comes to his senses, and he develops this speech, which I think is so cute because he has this sense that he needs to justify his return.

Not in a sense of blaming anyone else, but also in a sense of sort of coming up with a plan. He's essentially trying to earn his salvation. And so he's walking back home, and the father sees him from a long way off, and the father, it says, runs to him and embraces him and throws a party for him celebrating the restoration of his son.

[37 : 46] The rebellious punk kid thought that maybe he'd come back and be a servant. He had no category for coming back after all of that wickedness and being welcomed as a son.

But that's what happened. And that celebration really provoked the older brother. The older brother is actually a big point that Jesus is trying to get to in that story, if you read the context. The older brother, who never left, who was always faithful, was really provoked by his father's display of grace. In fact, I would say this. The older brother is a stranger to grace. It looks wrong to him. It looks objectionable to him. He is bothered by it. He's provoked by grace. He doesn't like grace. He's never experienced it, as far as he can see.

So how do we normally process this story of the prodigal son, especially when it relates to parenting? I have a friend that I see a couple times a year. He's a little older than me. And we usually go get lunch or something together.

[38 : 52] And he has five adult sons. And so we check in on all of our kids. And we always leave one kid to talk about last, because he has one son out of his five adult sons who's completely abandoned the faith and is living just a completely licentious lifestyle.

So we're usually sitting at some restaurant. And we get through all the other kids. And then there's this one. And I say, so how's the prodigal? And he usually says, still prodigal. And so I just reconfirm my commitment to pray and encourage him to not give up hope and to stay involved in his son's life and so on and so forth.

I think that most of the time when we talk about the prodigal son story in the context of parenting, we tend to, parents, we tend to grab the father role and start thinking through, like, how do I be that guy?

Which is great. But that's really probably not where we need to begin. The prodigal story is really just a message, not so much about the nature of prodigals, but of the nature of God.

A God who, in spite of being seriously wronged, is easy to forgive and embrace his ruined son and nurse him back to recovery with a fatted calf and, I'm sure, a brunch-themed potluck.

[40 : 17] So I think it's very important when you listen to the prodigal son's story, moms and dads, because I want you to have a sincere faith. I think it's important for you to understand, or just to understand this, ask this question, when was the last time you felt the father's embrace?

Qualify that. When was the last time you felt the father's undeserved embrace? I think this is the key to sincere faith Christian parenting.

A familiarity with grace. Not being a stranger to grace, but being all too familiar. With the grace of God.

The Bible talks about this one story where Moses comes off the mountaintop after being in the presence of God, and he's, like, glowing. You know, he's illuminous. Parents, what a sincere faith is, is a heart glowing with joy over one's salvation.

A heart genuinely glad. Not for just the mere category of salvation, the mere category of justification by faith alone, the mere understanding that Jesus died for my sins, but a personal familiarity with a forgiving father who forgave you yesterday.

[41 : 45] Right? Not 20 years ago. I added up all the years I've done pastoral ministry. It's 27 years. And in that time, I found all Christian parents divided in two basic categories.

Prodigal parents who know the grace of God. And older brother parents who are strangers to grace. We could track the story of these two men into their next chapter of life, and we could see them both get married and have kids.

And I'll just tell you right now who's going to do the crummiest job ever. And it's not the dude who almost starved to death after spending all of his money on prostitutes. It's the dude who is a stranger to grace.

It's the older brother who has never felt joy in his salvation and doesn't feel joy in his salvation on a regular basis.

So parents, if you want to know, and I know you do, what is it that you can do to have a sincere faith, a contagious faith, a faith that encourages and makes your children wise for salvation?

[43 : 01] It's got to be a faith that genuinely believes, man, God has been really good to me. A grateful, joyful heart is the key to a sincere faith.

It's the expression of a sincere faith. Now, some of us have a problem. I don't, but some of you have this problem. You weren't bad enough when you had the chance, you know? So some of you haven't had the most dramatic prodigal experience.

Let me tell you something, man. Like, if you take all the prodigal mass of that young man's rebellion and you put it on a scale and then you take your sin, here's the deal. You're just spreading your prodigaling out over 50 years.

It's at least the same amount. You need this unconditional fatherly love from the God of the universe as much as anyone else.

And strangers to grace, whether it's strangers to grace this week or strangers to grace this year or strangers to grace ever, they just don't make good parents.

[44 : 14] I don't know how else to tell you that. They just don't. They will not successfully raise Timothys. The prodigal knew the grace of God intimately, personally, practically.

Do you? Friends, we all, like sheep, have gone astray. We're all prodigals. Each have turned to his own way.

I can't help it if the way you chose was more boring than mine. You did it because you wanted to. You just don't have interesting taste. Friends, we all, like sheep, have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to his own way. And some of us have had very significant seasons of prodigaling and some of us not. But all of us must routinely turn to the father and say, I'm not even worthy to be your servant, let alone your son or your daughter.

And then we need to feel the father's finger go. Smash our lips. Silence us and say, I don't want to hear your theology right now, man. I don't want to hear your perspective.

[45 : 28] I'm just glad that you were dead and now you're alive. And just like Moses is glowing after he comes off the mountaintop, a parent who routinely experiences the grace of God, something's happening, something's coming off of them.

And a parent who doesn't, doesn't. So we all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. What does Isaiah say comes next?

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. We read this morning the story of Jesus descending from the Mount of Olives into the city. And we tend to think of, you know, that as an isolated incident.

Friends, he was going there to die for you. He was going there to make it possible for every single day of your life for you to go to the Father and say, I sinned today.

And I need the forgiveness offered to me through Christ. He was going there to die. In the end, parents, those who are forgiven much love much.

[46 : 50] For communion, we'll just read from 1 Corinthians 11, very much tied into the cross of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 11, 23. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, also, he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let me pray for us. Oh, gracious God, we need your work to even stir our hearts to see our sin, to see your grace.

The whole transaction we're looking for to give us a sincere faith is all in your hands. We are dependent on you to do it. But, Lord, you have said very clearly in your scripture that all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[47 : 56] And that if we draw near to God, you will draw near to us. And so, Lord, I just pray on behalf of everybody in this room, let us not be strangers to grace. Let us see that we all, like sheep, have gone astray, that each one of us has turned to our own way, but the Lord has laid our iniquity on Jesus Christ.

And, Lord, as we come to this table, let us simply come with grateful hearts for the provision you've made, not just to save us once so that we could go to heaven, but to forgive us day in and day out as we come to you.

Lord, this table represents a high price you are willing to pay to be able to embrace every single person in this room with redeeming grace.

So, Lord, would you please show us, through your spirit, this incredible, incredible gift you've given. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Come and partake. Amen. Amen. Amen.