



### Parenting with a Purpose

By Barry Banclara, Senior Pastor

Raising healthy, respectful, and responsible children who grow up to love and follow God doesn't just happen. It requires hard work, much prayer, and parenting with a purpose to produce these kinds of results. Leaving it up to chance and luck would be like a farmer hoping for a good crop without doing his part in the process. Many studies show that over half of children growing up in "Christian" homes walk away from the church after their teenage years. Many times their parents are mystified by this and say, *"But I took them to church every week!"* While going to a good church is important, too often parents have outsourced their kids to the church or youth groups for their children's spiritual formation. Parents need to be reminded that God has designed the family to be the primary place where faith and character are nurtured. To help parents, here are five principles to help you parent with purpose.

#### Starting Point Principle

Purposeful parenting begins with Mom and Dad. God tells parents in Deuteronomy 6:5-6 to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. These commands are to be upon your hearts." Spiritual formation and character development of the child begins with the parent's walk with God. How can a parent pour into their child what isn't in them to begin with. After this, we are then commanded to "impress them on your children" (vs. 7). If we do not have a passionate, consistent, and authentic walk with God, how can we impress on them what we do not have ourselves? We will, in effect, be telling them to *"do as I say, not as I do"* which is the least effective form of parenting.

#### Influence Principle

Time and time again, children model and embrace the values of their parents. Although friends can have a huge influence in the lives of our kids, studies show over and over that the #1 influence in the lives of children is still their parents. Kids are, by nature, mimickers. They end up taking on many of their parents' idiosyncrasies, manners, language, humor, political persuasions, sports teams, and favorite sayings. With this in mind, parenting with purpose should make us mindful of how we act, talk, and respond in their presence. If we blow up in anger when we are in a bad mood or when something breaks, goes wrong, and/or we don't get our way...why should it surprise us when they act the same way? Parents should always be alert and aware of the power of our influence. We should ask ourselves, *"Do I want my children to turn out like me?"* If not, we must make the necessary changes in our lives that will end up impacting theirs.

#### Character First Principle

There is a lot of things to focus on in parenting: their grades, improving sport skills, how to make friends, etc. But there is nothing more important than their character development! Why? Because their character will determine how successful they are in any and every avenue of their life. It will effect their future employment, marriage, relationships, parenting, and walk with God. Parenting with purpose will always place the highest emphasis on character: telling the truth, doing your best, being responsible, dependable, kind, trustworthy, forgiving others, etc.

Do my wife and I want our kids to do well in school? Of course. But getting A's is not the goal; learning and doing their best is! My wife and I are very competitive with sports. Do we want our kids to win? Of course. But our purpose with competitive sports is for them to: learn a skill, learn how to win and lose, do their very best, be unselfish, teachable and coachable. Winning the game or championship is the gravy, not the goal. Trophies and ribbons eventually end up in the attic. Their character travels with them for life.

#### Equal But Different Principle

If you have more than one child you have found it amazing how different your kids are from each other. Same parents, same household, completely different kids! One of the most damaging things in any home is favoritism. In Genesis we see Isaac favoring Esau over Jacob. Later, Jacob favors Joseph over the rest of his sons. In each case, there was lasting harm and destruction. Proverbs 22:6 tells us, *"Train up a child in the way he shall go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."* This verse is often taken out of context and people think their kids will never walk away from God because they went to church when they were young. Not true. It actually means, *"Train up a child in the way they are bent..."* Meaning: find the bent of your child and train and encourage them in it. One child may be bent toward sports, another toward ballet, and another toward mechanics. Find their bent and cheer them on. But what if you don't enjoy what they enjoy? Fake it until you learn to enjoy it because our kids can pick it up a mile away if we are not really interested in what they are doing. They interpret this as lack of interest in *them*.

I grew up playing sports all my life. Then I had three girls. My oldest is bent in the direction of music and the arts which is completely foreign to me. I had to learn to become excited about pink tutu's and ballet shoes. I watched more "shows" with feigned excitement until I grew to appreciate her bent. Would I chose musicals over a ball game? No, but I decided to choose her. Now that she is older, I have finally gotten her to love watching the NFL with me and she now knows what a 2 deep zone is! We both won!

Another important way to demonstrate this principle is in the way you tell them you love them. I tell each of my girls that I love them every day. But I often tell them that I love how God made them and how much I love how different they are. This communicates my appreciation for God's design for them in their personality, humor, skills, and uniqueness. The result is confidence. Your children will grow up confident in who they are and how God made them. They will be less likely to become desperate or dependant for the approval of their peers for their acceptance and worth.

## The Life Stage Principle

Our children go through different stages that require parents to adjust their plan in parenting. When parents fail to adjust they risk losing their credibility with their kids as they grow up. Here are some Life Stage periods and suggestions for purposeful parenting:

### **Wet Cement Period:** (Toddler to about age 5)

The impressions at this life stage last a lifetime. Children at this age need hugs, kisses, cuddling, and yes, loving and firm discipline. All of these are foundational and the impression left will be one of security. This is why child abuse at this stage is so deeply damaging. The proper and healthy impression will leave them with a foundation of love and clear sense of right and wrong. Most parents can easily grasp the hugs and kisses but often struggle with discipline at this stage. I know this is not popular, but spanking is both biblical and effective. (Read Proverbs 22:15) Allowing a child to do behave however they want without boundaries or consequences is not properly loving them. Some say, "but it hurts my heart to do this." While this may be true, failure to discipline at an early age will be a sure guarantee for your heart to be hurt beyond your comprehension when they become a teenager! Spiritual foundations begin at this stage as well. Teaching them basic bible stories and learning how to pray are foundational for their future. They may not know all the significance and meaning of prayer but they can at least begin to learn how to communicate all the things they are thankful for.

### **Teacher/Coach Period:** (Age 6 through preteen)

Children at this stage need to learn with both instruction and demonstration. They need to know what you believe and why you believe it. They also need to know how to respond to different kind of people. Parents must teach and model values because our children both hear and watch us like a hawk. Don't worry or panic when they ask questions or push back. They are trying to understand how things work and function in life. They are in the early stages of figuring out what they believe. This stage is a lot of work because you are moving them from blind acceptance to a deeper understanding of how to live. Shooting down their questions hinders their growth and development both socially and spiritually. Teaching them responsibility is also vital in this stage. Having them contribute around the house and yard with chores is important. This actually gives them self confidence that is critical in their next stages in life. Failure to teach, expect, and have them follow through with responsibility will give them a warped view of life. You will fail them if you do everything for them or do not hold them accountable. This stage of life is the brick and mortar time of their life. (See *"Preparing Your Child for Adolescence"* for more in depth insight.)

### **Coach/Counselor Period:** (Teenage years to young adult)

(See *"Help! I have a Teenager!"* for more in depth insight.) This transition is very difficult for both child and parent. We still need to coach them (how, what, when, why) but they need to begin making their own decisions or they will never fly on their own. This, of course, is done in incremental steps. Parents need to transition from coach to counselor in the later teen years and beyond. We need to motivate, challenge, encourage, and advise them. We need to ask them more questions to learn how they are processing life and circumstances. We offer counseling more and more and are there when they fail. Don't expect them to make the best decisions all the time. They are still young in life and will learn from their failures and hurts. We need to provide a safe environment where they can ask questions and even debate issues they are wrestling with. Maintaining strong relationships and not burning any bridges are critical for parents at this time. Expect for them to think they are smarter than you during this stage. This is normal. In their mid 20's and beyond they will begin to realize just how smart and wise you were and how foolish they sometimes were during this life stage.

## Warning!

The truth of the matter is this: parents can do everything right (model, teach, coach, and counsel) and still have their child go down a rebellious and destructive path. The bottom line is this: every child is a moral free agent! They ultimately will choose for themselves whether or not to adopt the values and Christian beliefs of their parents. While this will cause the parents grief, pain, and many tears, parents are only responsible to God for obeying Deuteronomy 6 and doing their very best with each of their children.

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## Going Further - Resources

### Recommended Books:

- *The Family Compass* (by Kurt and Olivia Bruner) offers key principles and practical ideas on how to become intentional about instilling a strong faith in your children.
- *Your Heritage* (by J. Otis Ledbetter and Kurt Bruner) provides parents with a framework for giving their children a strong social, emotional and spiritual legacy.
- *The Blessing* (by Dr. John Trent) explains the life-changing gift the Bible calls "the blessing" – a vital element of creating a strong relationship with our children.
- *Building the Christian Family You Never Had* (by Mary Demuth) offers encouragement and insights to "pioneer parents" who are first generation believers.
- *Movie Nights* (by Bob Smithouser) offers discussion on 25 broadly varied films including Groundhog Day, Life is Beautiful and Unbreakable. It includes practical ideas, story points, and follow-up activities that will enable parents to have fun talking with their teens about spiritual truths using movies.

### Recommended Websites:

- [www.familylife.com](http://www.familylife.com)
- [www.focusonthefamily.com](http://www.focusonthefamily.com)