

# Father's Day

Anne Lamott (pg. 33)

Clips

Parenting is a topic that affects us all.

Parenting—is not for those doing the parenting—but those who are being parented.

I've learned over the years that there are three things you don't mess with... a person's politics, religion and parenting. We are already pretty sensitive about this parenting subject. We know how insecure we can be about the mistakes we've made and the regrets we have regards our own parenting.

I want you to know that this is not a how-to on parenting. You can buy the parenting books or listen to Dr. Phil. Instead, this morning is designed around some general biblical principles about parenting.

Little boys and girls do grow up. They will see where our inconsistencies are—and some may even surpass what we have accomplished in life—regardless of how we parented.

There will come a day when our children will no longer see us idealistically.

I've come to understand that the family is the training ground for forgiveness. It seems to me that if we can forgive people in our own families for all their weirdness and inconsistencies we can learn to forgive anyone. We can even learn to forgive ourselves.

Anybody here have a perfect family? My daughter worships at a wonderful community church "Grace Pointe" in Nashville. Several weeks ago when we were visiting her we worshipped at Grace Pointe and the preacher asked the same question I'm asking about perfect families. The question was asked almost rhetorically. But then one hand went up... it was the preacher's 7 year old son. The place filled with laughter. The son then said I love everyone in my family. Dad said you love them, that doesn't mean they're perfect. And he told his son that he'd explain it when they got home.

So I've been wrestling how to talk with you about parenting. First, I am not an expert on parenting. However, I have had the privilege of parenting my daughter from being a little girl (when she thought we had a perfect family... or at least thought dad could do anything), to an adolescent girl (who then realized that we didn't quite have it) to a 27 year old who treats us like we're valuable and that we are much brighter than she once thought). And what a trip it has been. Now with a little more knowledge today it would be different if we went back to April 27, 1979.

There's an old saying that goes something like this: I used to have two theories about parenting—now I have two kids.

I'm convinced that this is a subject you can't read enough about, learn enough about, pray enough about and fast enough about in order to figure it out. I've come to better understand that if we are people of faith, we will need to have a dynamic faith that will trust the Holy Spirit to guide us as we try to parent our children the best we can.

## Principle 1

Parenting is a gift from God. Now I know that it doesn't always feel that way. Sometimes parenting feels like a task or a duty. But don't forget the simple things.

Paul said ...Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. (Gal. 3:1)

Don't forget the simple things. Remember that our children are a gift.

I mean think about it. God has given us the ability to take part with him in bringing another soul into this world. We're not creating material blobs of flesh... but we are creating living, breathing beings who will spend eternity somewhere.

CS Lewis said that they will either be eternal horrors or eternal splendors. And God has allowed me into this process and allowed me to be a part of this creation of another human being. A human being with life and emotion and intellect that will either praise God or not.

It has happened billions of times and yet the birth of every new baby reminds us of the miracle of life. And here we are, humans who are allowed to create other human beings and allowed to mold and shape these living souls—at least for a while.

God is allowing us to be foster parents because God is their first parent. My daughter Jessika has a father that precedes this father and Jessika has a mother that precedes Helen. Almighty God is the first parent and he's asked us to care for and to shape these children who are created in God's image to be God loving people. God gives us these human beings while they are so vulnerable and malleable.

God has given us these children who are like clay in our hands. Waiting to be shaped and molded. These lives are not even yet their own to shape—and we get to be a huge part of it. And we do so by using words of affirmation and love to help shape and to point them into the direction of God.

To be a parent is one of the most precious gifts God has given to humankind. If you have not been given that gift, then you have been given to another person as that gift. You too are a part of the process.

God has decided to send his son or daughter into your home and mine so that we can care for and nurture and shape them.

## **Principle 2**

Parenting is a sacred trust.

Parenting is not something that we should take lightly. Parenting is not a casual occupation.

Think about it. That God would give me one of these little ones knowing that I will not be able to make all the difference in their lives—but my effort will make a big difference. This is so because there is such a thing as free will. And trust me, our children will practice their free will. But, I can make a lot of difference in this one's life.

The problem is we also make a lot of mistakes. I really hate to make mistakes, especially in parenting. I can remember one time when Jessika was real small, and Helen and I were arguing. I got so mad that I hit something off the kitchen table and there in the doorway was my sweet little girl. This is no way to act. As I recall, Jessika went on to tell people at church how daddy got real made when it was the world's birthday. She let me remember this one for a long time.

Listen, we can make a difference in the lives of our children. One day, God will come whispering in the heart of our children... "I love you." He may even say, let me help you understand how much I love you... do you know how your mom and dad love you?" I sure hope that God has used that simile with Jessika.

I hope that when God is looking for some kind of a word to touch Jessika with his love that he can use the word “dad.”

This is such a powerful image that it could easily overwhelm us. This is certainly not what I want to do. But I do want to say to those of us who are parents—our parenting is a humbling sobering task. Parenting is a **sacred trust**.

No doubt this is what the Proverb reflects in 22:6 **Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.**

What a humbling verse.

### **1. There is a way my daughter should go.**

- We live in such a pluralistic world where everyone is right in his or her own eyes, but God tells us that there is a way we should go.
- God has a plan for our children’s lives... and I get to have a part in that plan. I get to be an encourager, a nurturer. I get to point in the direction my daughter should go... but I can’t take the journey for her.

**How many of us want to take the journey for our kids. I remember Jessika’s first day of school. I drove up to the school and my heart sank when she left the car. I remember crying. I was crying because this was one of the first steps out into the world alone. I was thinking about what she might encounter. The cruelty she might face, the teasing and hardship that can happen in the world. I knew that the pecking order would be established quickly and how easy it would be to be stuck in some kind of category that might affect her for life. My fear was that I did not want her to be on the bottom of the pecking order. What I really wanted to do was go to school with her for the first week to help her get established and let the world know how great a kid she was and that she deserved to be treated well. But I had to let her go. To go into the world where others may not treat her well. Where others would have different values than I. This vulnerable child who would come home after school sometimes learning words that she never heard at home or sometimes hearing stories about broken families that were foreign to her own. I don’t mean to sound cute with this one, but I remember one year Jessika had a show-and-tell in her class. All parents were invited to attend. I went. It was interesting. Each child makes something that they put on display and the parents could walk through and hear the child explain their project. One boy looked at me and said “you know what?” What I said... My mommy is real mad at my dad. I said something like I’m sorry about that. He said, “My mommy came home last night and yelled at my day because he was looking at bad magazines. This is the world my vulnerable girl was walking into. Oh how I wanted to take that journey for her.**

**There is a way that he or she should go!**

### **2. I should train my child**

Listen, this is a hard saying for the control freaks among us. The bible doesn’t say, train a child in the way he or she should be... oh no, it says, train a child in the way he or she should go (Goddard).

This is a hard saying: we are not called to control their doctrine and we are not called to control their experience.

- I have an experience with God and I cannot translate that experience to my daughter.
- Here’s a common problem among religious cultures.
  - the first generations experiences God, the second inherit the story of that experience and the third generation embrace a convenient religion and that religion to the fourth generation can’t be bothered.

(Experience, inheritance, convenience and nuisance)

I can't give my child a walk with God! I can't take her back to when I was 19 years old and felt the conviction of God call me to live a different life. The conviction that called me to repent and to make right the wrongs in my life and to give my life to Christ. I can't take her back to my baptism where I died to self and was brought up out of the water into a new life. Oh, I can tell her about it but I can't give it to her.

I can't give her my experience of how my life was rooted in drugs and alcohol and all about fun... only to wake up one day, seeing my little girl and my lovely wife, knowing that I was ruining our lives. I can't show her the heartache of my... for the first time facing my sin and coming to God for grace and mercy. I can't give her that experience. And I certainly can't put together 4 or 5 doctrines that somehow will give her what I have or to make her the kind of Christian I am. I can't do it!

The bible doesn't say train them in the place they should be or train them in how they should be... It doesn't say replicate them in the way you are... it says train them in the way they should go!!!

Be courageous enough to trust them and to trust that God loves them more than you do and that he'll guide them down that path and he'll find them on that path just like he found you. Let them have their journey! Let them dig out their experiences! Don't put them in a position where they're simply telling stories of previous generations—but train them up with a fluid faith.

When our kids step in that world for the first time (mostly after high school) their worlds are going to be rocked! They'll experience some of the same junk we have. Do not be insecure in their walk. They have to ask the same questions we did. And we can tell them what we think but they have to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling before God. You can't do it for them.

Here's where we can take comfort... we can train our child by showing them the path they should go.

Here's the path I've tried to put Jessika on. It is a path where there is a loving God. A path where God gave his son Jesus to take away our sins and to give us grace for eternal life. A path where God has gives us the Holy Spirit. These are the primary issues. I've always encouraged Jessika not to get off this path. Sure there are some secondary issues worth talking about, but these are the primary ones. This is a path where God will be with you in all things.

Train a child in the way he should go...

**Eph. 6:1-4** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2**"Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – **3**"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."<sup>[a]</sup> **4**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

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