

Season of
Parenting

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Ps. 127:3, NKJV).



This picture of a father carrying his son represents spending quality time with children. A relationship can only grow on time spent. This week's lesson teaches the essentials of parenting.

Introduction

I'm Watching You!

| 1 Cor. 11:1

I'm a parent of two lovely girls; Isla, 11, and Amity, 8. Most of the time I'm a sane, rational, normal person who gets on with life and does what I need to do without too much fuss. Occasionally, though, I have brief moments when I realize the awesome, sacred responsibility of parenting. I stop and think about this amazing, humbling position I'm in. If I dwell on it too much, it's overwhelming! Contemplating the enormity of my assignment is sobering and reminds me how vital it is to parent with love and intention.

We start off as children who mimic our parents, then we may become parents who are mimicked by our children.

Recently, I lost my temper with Isla because her room was total chaos. As I berated her for being so messy and disorganized, God spoke to my heart and reminded me of the mess in my own room and in another room where I'd allowed books and papers to pile up. He challenged me not to expect more from my children than from myself. As I apologized to Isla and we talked things through, I had a realization. We start off as children who mimic our parents, then we may become parents who are mimicked by our children. Finally, we may become grandparents mimicked by both our children and grandchildren. In each stage of life, God gives us little mirrors to show us areas where we need to grow, change, and better reflect His love.

How did Jesus teach His disciples? What approach did He take? How can I translate that into my parenting and family relationships?

Jesus didn't berate the disciples, condemn them, shout at them, or disown them. He gently taught them truths. He modeled grace in action and told stories to help them understand the depth of God's love. Most of all, He just "does" life with them. I feel God prompting me to have more patience, more time, more stories, more instruction, and more love for my children. My children are watching me and learning what I value, where I place importance, and what my heart truly treasures. I pray that they feel valued and loved as I try to give them a glimpse of the amazing, immeasurable love God has for them. I pray that they find their God-given purpose as I train them to be all they were to be. I pray that they see Jesus reflected in me.

Who is watching you? Even if you don't have children of your own, people are watching. You can encourage, uplift, and draw people to Jesus. What is your life saying to others about God, and how can you live more intentionally so that you can show them how patient, loving, and kind God really is?

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Gen. 18:11; 30:1;
1 Sam. 1:1-8;
Luke 1:7

Evidence

To Parent or Not to Parent

From birth to toddler, to middle school, to graduation, to marriage, to parenthood—this feels like the natural flow of things, how it's supposed to be. God said, "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). But what about the in-between time? For many, the question "To parent or not to parent?" is answered with a resounding, "Yes!" But then the child does not come.

As you read the verses for today's lesson, jot down words in the margins that describe the emotional state they reference. While the tone is dark, there is also a glint of hope. Read the context around each verse. The personalities turn to God with their questions. It doesn't mean that the tension lifts or that a longed-for birth is satisfied with pleasure. Each heart finds a glint of faith that motivates a turn to God even before answers are given.

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The temptation becomes too great, so we turn the page. In the stories of Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth we need the next chapter. Just as Sarah named her son Isaac (Gen. 21:6), a name that means laughter, she laughs as only one who is old can, one who is old and receives a ridiculous miracle that gives her the desire of her heart.

Read far enough, each of the women has a similar story to tell. Yet don't gloss over it. Again there are the between times, the life with tension that must be lived. Sarah must wait until she is old and grey. Rachel prays long and hard and finally births not one but two sons, neither of whom she will see grow up. Hannah gives up her prayed-for child to God's service in the temple. Elizabeth's son goes to preach in the desert. The prayed-for child who changes child-free living to child-full living changes their lives forever. (Yet, as a mother, I suspect that these women would not have had it any other way.) Living in the tension, in full knowledge that God is there, reignites the flame of hope.

REACT

1. How can someone live in the tension of parenting without having a child of their own? How can someone in this phase of life choose to invest and mentor other children not their own?
2. Draw a picture that illustrates an as-yet-unrealized hope in your life. What can you learn from these women and their childless living?

Logos
*Nature, Nurture,
 and the Spirit*

Gen. 18:18, 19;
 1 Sam. 3:10–14;
 Psalm 127;
 Prov. 22:6

Becoming a Parent Can Bring Great Joy—and Sheer Terror

The weight of responsibility for an otherwise defenseless young life can haunt anyone. A child’s fragility, naivety, and trust can feel baffling and overwhelming. What if I drop the child? What if my impatience today leads to dysfunction ten years from now? What if I look away at the wrong time?

Parents in the animal kingdom don’t seem to suffer from such concern or hesitation. Animal parents act by instinct, sometimes making brutal choices to ensure survival. They often act dispassionately in order to ensure their offspring live on and thrive to raise the next generation.

Natural Parenting? (Gen. 18:18, 19; 1 Sam. 3:10–14)

The prophet Jeremiah observed, “Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD” (Jer. 8:7, NIV). While Jeremiah was addressing people’s disconnectedness from God, his words remind us that sin has stolen what should come naturally, our aptitude for raising children. God created us in His image, but we tend to raise children in our own.

Parenting can be one of the greatest catalysts in life for spiritual and emotional growth.

Children can bring out the worst in us. That is to say, without the Holy Spirit, raising children may just reveal more fully how broken we really are. Yet parenting can be one of the greatest catalysts in life for spiritual and emotional growth. Children can stir our most tender and selfless feelings. They can teach us how God sees us, loving us despite our frailty, weaknesses, and self-centeredness. When we seek to partner with God in parenting our children, it may shape our characters to become more like Him. With God working in us, parenting can make us more patient, more loving, and more self-sacrificing.

The Bible is a handbook for parenting with scattered counsel, providing broad principles applicable to various situations. It also tells stories of how parenting and personal choices impacted generation after generation.

Abraham had a favorite son, Isaac. Isaac had a favorite son, Esau, and his wife, Rebekah, had a favorite son, Jacob. Jacob had a favorite son, Joseph. Abraham lied about his wife. Isaac lied about his wife. Jacob lied to Isaac about his identity. Jacob’s father-in-law, Laban, lied to him about his wife’s identity. Jacob’s sons lied to Jacob about what happened to their brother Joseph. In each generation, each parent’s poor choices caused

conflict and grief. Only through confession and reconciliation could these life-shaping choices begin to be altered.

Life Lessons (Prov. 22:6)

One of the biggest rules of writing is “show, don’t tell.” What makes for effective storytelling also makes for effective parenting. As a popular saying declares, “Don’t tell me what you believe; let me see what you do and I’ll tell what you believe.” Children learn more from how we live than what we say. Put another way, our values are better “caught” than “taught.” We can tell our children whatever we want, but they’ll pick up far more from our actions than our rhetoric.

King David had a man killed to cover up his sin of adultery. Thereafter, David’s sons committed rape and murder, and they tried to steal his throne. And while David’s son Solomon stepped clear of the vengeance and violence that had defined David’s life and reign, he carried on David’s legacy of plural marriages, which led him away from God. Over the next four hundred years, the kings of Judah wavered between faithfulness and idolatry.

Parenting is daunting. Even people who walked with God, such as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, and Hannah and Elkanah, struggled to honor God as parents. There is no magic formula for raising children.

Love, patience, time, involvement, praise, correction, faith—today we argue over the balance between such elements, but we all recognize that they are essential. We should also recognize that what we pass on to our children may not necessarily be what we hoped or intended.

A Quiet Turmoil (Prov. 3:5, 6; Isa. 43:1, 2; Jer. 29:11; 31:25; 32:27; Matt. 11:28)

Parenting offers no guarantees. We may never have the opportunity to have children. We may endure multiple miscarriages, or even lose a child to accident or disease. Our children may break our hearts with their choices and actions.

In such circumstances, our heavenly Father may be our only comfort and support. He who is our “refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1, NIV), will not abandon us in our time of greatest need. The God who is love (1 John 4:8) is ever present. He will “never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6, NIV).

REACT

1. How much of parenting do you feel is instinctive? What’s the hardest part of parenting? Why do people value parenting so much despite the stress it adds to our lives?
2. How can we counter the lingering impact of our unconscious programming, of generations of poor choices?
3. What would you change about your childhood if you could?
4. Why did God entrust parenting to broken human beings?

Testimony
*Mighty Oaks From
 Little Acorns Grow*

Ps. 1:1-3

“The importance and opportunities of the home life are illustrated in the life of Jesus. He who came from heaven to be our example and teacher spent thirty years as a member of the household at Nazareth. . . . He lived as one of us, sharing the home life, submitting to its discipline, performing its duties, bearing its burdens. In the sheltering care of a humble home, participating in the experiences of our common lot, He ‘increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.’ Luke 2:52.

“The Saviour’s early years are more than an example to the youth.”

“During all these secluded years His life flowed out in currents of sympathy and helpfulness. His unselfishness and patient endurance, His courage and faithfulness, His resistance of temptation, His unfailing peace and quiet joyfulness, were a constant inspiration. . . . In an unobtrusive way, from His very childhood, He ministered to others, and because of this, when He began His public ministry, many heard Him gladly.

“The Saviour’s early years are more than an example to the youth. They are a lesson, and should be an encouragement, to every parent. The circle of family and neighborhood duties is the very first field of effort for those who would work for the uplifting of their fellow men. There is no more important field of effort than that committed to the founders and guardians of the home. No work entrusted to human beings involves greater or more far-reaching results than does the work of fathers and mothers.”¹

“Our homes should be a place of refuge for the tempted youth. Many there are who stand at the parting of the ways. Every influence, every impression, is determining the choice that shapes their destiny both here and hereafter. . . .

“These youth need a hand stretched out to them in sympathy. Kind words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation which gather over the soul. . . . If we would show an interest in the youth, invite them to our homes, and surround them with cheering, helpful influences, there are many who would gladly turn their steps into the upward path.”²

REACT

Who, besides your parents, most influenced your spiritual development and how?

1 . Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 349–351.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 354, 355.

1 Sam. 17:4;
1 Cor. 16:13

How-to *Facing Giants*

Two children were born centuries apart. Irena Krzyzanowska (Sendler) on February 15, 1910, and David, born about 1040 B.C. Both would impact their worlds.

In 1943 the Warsaw Ghetto refused to fall to the Nazis, and SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop ordered the slaughter and burning of those left behind. Thirteen thousand Jews died. A year earlier, Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker, gained access to the Nazi-controlled Warsaw Ghetto. Irena's main goal was to provide assistance to the segregated Jews. Unknown to the Nazis, Irena was an active member of Żegota, a Polish government-organized secret organization created to smuggle out children under the guise of the Warsaw Health Department. Irena faced the foreboding giant of the Nazi party and their quest to exterminate the Jews.

How are we preparing our children to face the “giants” of their world?

Nearly three thousand years before, a shepherd boy who was delivering food to his brothers went out to face “Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span” (1 Sam. 17:4, NKJV). A giant of a man, Goliath had been mocking and taunting the Israelite army. A shepherd boy was surely no threat to his knowledge of warfare and carnage.

How are we preparing our children to face the “giants” of their world? Irena faced the Nazi party, a giant of death and destruction, while David faced a fearsome Philistine warrior. Both Irena and David thought beyond themselves. Irena was arrested and nearly executed. David could have been slaughtered by Goliath's sword in front of his family, Saul, and the Israelite forces. “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13, NIV).

Our children's impact on this world does not have to be great. Sometimes a simple task is all that is needed. Irena helped smuggle 2,500 babies and children to safety outside the Warsaw Ghetto. David brought down a huge adversary with one little stone. While Irena's smuggling out children seems like a great feat now, it was a small daily happening. One small stone brought down Goliath. One at a time, a small child hidden in a suitcase or under a stretcher in an ambulance escaped the ghetto.

REACT

How are we raising our children to think beyond their small world, to seek out ways to make this earth a better place and to face the giants of their future until Christ's return?

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Opinion

No Good Parents

Psalm 127

Have you ever complained about your parents? Of course you have. Everyone does. That's because parents give us reasons to complain. Every mother or father makes mistakes.

No one checks a man and woman's qualifications before they become parents. No training is required. That teenager texting behind the wheel of the car ahead of you had infinitely more testing before he could drive than your parents did before they gave birth to you. The government requires a license before you can even go fishing, but when it comes to bringing a living soul into existence, the State shrugs and steps out of the way.

No one checks a man and woman's qualifications before they become parents.

Parents are not only clueless—they are broken by sin. Even if they know better, they may damage their kids with their anger, their addictions, and their warped ambitions.

You may wonder why God allows a bunch of ignorant and crooked creatures to reproduce. Why doesn't He limit fertility to head elders and Sabbath School superintendents? The answer is probably the same as the answer to the old question of why He allowed sin in the first place. He wants us to be free. We are free to create little humans and raise them however we want. This creative act looms as a staggering responsibility, but it wouldn't be a real responsibility if we weren't free to flub it.

Thankfully, not every parent makes a total wreck of their job. Through grace, God has put enough love in their hearts to compensate for their ignorance and impatience. Making use of those gifts, many men and women become decent parents. They aren't perfect, but their good intentions overwhelm their bad moments.

In the end, we are all bad parents. As Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "No one is good but One" (Matt. 19:17, NKJV). Some will know judgment and regrets. And others—through some combination of repentance and grace—will see parenting as a great and shining joy.

REACT

1. What mistakes that your parents made are easiest to forgive? What mistakes are hard to forgive?

2. What mistakes are parents most likely to make in this day and age? What mistakes are they less likely to make than in earlier generations?

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Exploration *Delight*

CONCLUDE

The wait had been so long. It wasn't until I held him in my arms that I understood the meaning of God's saying He delights in us (Ps. 147:11, NIV). Ever since my son entered our family through adoption, I have called him "Mama's delight." One day my son asked me, "What does 'delight' mean?" I replied, "To have immense joy." It wasn't until I became a parent that I understood God's love, joy, frustration, and angst and understood the true gift of free will—and how painful that gift is. Parenting my biological and adopted children has stretched me, and I have gained more insights into myself, my marriage, and my family than I ever knew possible.

CONSIDER

- Meditating on Psalm 127 and its meaning three thousand years ago, and today.
- Writing a letter to those who raised you, reflecting on how they shaped you, making you who you are today.
- Sketching an illustration of how God has taken care of you.
- Creating a board game about the challenges of family life.
- Interviewing a parent or grandparent about what they learned through experience.
- Contrasting different parenting styles you've witnessed or experienced and how they shape someone's character.
- Role-playing how you might respond to a challenge in your family.
- Reflecting on the memories that built bonds between yourself and your family.

CONNECT

Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Joshua 4:20–24; Proverbs 3; Lamentations 3:22, 23; Matthew 6:28–34.

Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 159–162.

Donna Habenicht, *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus* (Review and Herald®, 1994).