

# Helping Parents Lead Sons and Daughters to Christ

## Various texts

*Gregory Cook*

**Introduction** As Pastor Russ mentioned this morning, we have traditionally set aside the month of January as our Family Enrichment Conference. This year we are developing the topic of Spiritual Formation in the Home. As is our custom, the morning messages are expositional and the evening are not expositional in the sense that we take a passage and explain it. Tonight is no exception. In fact, Russ has already prepared you for tonight. What I am going to attempt to do is to take Scriptural principles and apply them in what I see as a wise manner given my experience in counseling others as well as the miles that I have on my own odometer of life. What this means is that you should listen to what I offer, but choose those things that you believe you can adapt and how you can adapt them in your home. I've called them Greg's 4 R's.

I would like to begin by reading a couple of passages of Scripture and use them as a place to start my thoughts. I am not springboarding a message, at least in my understanding of that concept, but I am going to use a phrase to make some points that I believe are wise for parents in their responsibility toward leading their sons and daughters to Christ. So let's pray and ask God to help us as we look at this great and glorious topic tonight. <PRAY>

Our first passage is found in

*Exodus 12:21 – 27 (ESV)*

21Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. 22Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. 23For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. 24You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. 25And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 26And **when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'** 27**you shall say,** 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

*Joshua 1:19 – 24 (ESV)*

19The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. 20And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. 21And he said to the people of Israel, "**When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?'** 22**then you shall let your children know,** 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' 23For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, 24so that all the peoples

of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”

## Relax

My first R is to **RELAX**. There are times when we as parents are so uptight, serious, and driven about our parenting, especially in the area of our child’s salvation and relationship to the Lord that we need to remind ourselves to relax. The first area involves our motivations.

### Examine what motivates you

One of the first motivations that I want you to examine is why you want your child to become a Christian. I heard that gasp and see those looks of disbelief. Just suggesting that you look at why you want your child to be a Christian could have you leaving here saying, “Pastor Greg doesn’t think that it’s important that your children are Christians.” That’s not what I’m saying. There isn’t a Christian parent who doesn’t want their children to be saved. When I say examine why you want your child to be a Christian, I’m saying that you need to see if you have some sort of hope that once your child comes to Christ, then your parenting is going to get easier. If you have an idea that getting your child saved is going to make life easier and less stressful, then you are setting yourself up for disappointment. If you will take a moment to remember when you came to Christ, your life didn’t get easier, it got harder. Where there was no war within, now there was a war with sin and righteousness. Your children are no different. Life is not going to get easier or less stressful, you now have a new creation in Christ that needs disciplined. Also, if you have a desire for your child to come to Christ thinking that life will be better, then there is the possibility that you may inadvertently distort the Gospel in order to get a decision to accept Christ as Savior from your child. Notice I said inadvertently. We are people with desires that run amuck. And in order to get our desires we can manipulate and use all kinds of means to get what we want, even when it is a Biblical thing. After all, who would deny that wanting your child to come to Christ is wrong. But please be careful of your desires.

Another motivation that you may be having is that if you have unbelieving children, then that reflects on you as a parent. I am going to deal with this issue a little later in this message; but for now, remember, God calls us as parents to be faithful in what He says we are to do as parents. We are charged with the process. That is the standard for us. Having unbelieving children does not make us bad parents or indicate that we are failures.

### Don’t force every potential opportunity

Having just mentioned that we are to be faithful in our parenting, there can be a tendency to understand this to mean that we are to make sure that we don’t miss any potential opportunities to present the Gospel and bring the Word into play. Making every situation a formal teaching situation is not something that I have found to be a wise way to deal with our children. Preaching and lecturing usually produce the opposite results from what we want.

In the two passages that we read earlier, they had these phrases – when your children ask and when your children say, meaning ask. The Word said that when our children ask we are to tell them. Later on we are going to talk about God’s place in our children’s salva-

tion, but for now, we can be assured that our children are going to ask about God and the Gospel if they are going to be a child of God. We don't have to force an encounter. These times will come quite naturally and at the child's initiative. It is a sure sign that we have imposed our own criteria and timing on the situation when our child rolls their eyes, or looks out the window, or fidgets, or is in a big hurry to get this whole ordeal over. We can make them endure it, or we can examine our understanding of bringing the Gospel to our children. Ask yourself how much you profit and remember from a lecture that you received that was not timely, or was for the 100<sup>th</sup> time. I remember saying to myself, "Here it goes again, lecture number 25. I can quote it myself." It doesn't matter the age of the child – the forcing of these times is not effective. There is a wise saying – less is more. When we hear the same things over and over again, they lose their impact, effectiveness, and are not remembered for the right reason. When they ask, then you answer. Relax. Allow God to work in His time.

Perhaps an example will help. Several years ago, Becky, Laurie, and I were at DisneyWorld and were waiting in line for a ride. There was a young family of three behind us – dad, mom, and a girl probably between 10 and 12 years old. In typical Disney fashion, there was a distraction along the way to help with the wait in line. The wall was lined with multiple screens that flashed facts about planet earth. This mother thought this was a great time to have her daughter learn about planet earth. So every time the screen flashed a new fact, she proceeded to have a discussion with her daughter about the factoid. The girl played along with her mom for about 5 minutes, but it became very obvious this daughter was not in DisneyWorld to learn about planet earth, she was in DisneyWorld to have fun. But mom was determined that this was going to be time well spent. So not only did the daughter have to endure mom's chastening about not paying attention and not using her time wisely, but each of us within ear shot had to endure it as well. How much do you suppose that young lady remembers about planet earth from her day at DisneyWorld. How much do you think your children remember about your lectures or sermons? What effect do they have on them? What is remembered from them? Don't force the Gospel on your children. They will ask and you will answer.

## Reflect

The second R is **REFLECT**. This is about we as parents reflecting the glory of God in every area of our lives.

## Walk the Talk

When we talk about reflecting God's glory, we need to be looking at our lives to make sure that we are not giving the message "Do as I say, not as I do". Do our children observe us living as godly husbands and wives or do our children live in a war zone? Do our children see us living as parents who desire to obey God no matter what the cost or as complaining whenever we are put out? Do our children observe us seeking forgiveness from those we have sinned against or is home a place where grudges and harsh words are spoken behind backs? Have our children experienced us seeking their forgiveness when we have sinned against them or can they honestly say that they have never had dad or mom seek forgiveness for anything, even when they know they are wrong? Do our children observe us reading the Word, praying, being faithful to the community of believers, making our public gatherings a priority or have they seen the example of

convenient Christianity? It's difficult to lead our children to Christ when it is something that is a take-it-or-leave-it thing for us.

### **Make the Gospel Attractive**

Another way to talk about reflecting the glory of God is by a phrase that Pastor Dan used that has stuck with me and has been a great help whenever there is a discussion about presenting the Gospel. That phrase is, "Make the Gospel attractive." I don't remember where I heard him say it, or if it is original with him, but I have found it so helpful. Is what I am saying and doing making the Gospel of Christ attractive or is it making it easy for someone to turn away from Christ? Don't hear me saying that we are to water down the Gospel to make it an easy-believism. That is not what I'm saying. There is a time for the wrath of God. But there is also a time for the great love, and joy, and peace, and mercy, and grace, and on and on of God, as well. I can remember, to my shame, so many times in the past that I presented the Gospel in such a way that it was not attractive. It was the truth to be sure, but it was so harsh and judgmental. What are your children hearing and seeing? Is the Gospel attractive? Is the majority of what they hear God's wrath and judgment?

One of my observations during my time of counseling is what people believe about God. I am constantly amazed at how many people see God as a cosmic kill-joy and judge who derives great pleasure in making life hard and joyless. He is waiting in heaven for us to make a mistake so He can punish us with great delight. I have found that people find it very difficult to believe that God is a good God. That His great joy is in our finding our joy in Him. I wonder if this didn't start at home by well-meaning parents whose very great desire was for their children to come to Christ and preached the judgment of God and the fire of hell as their most common presentation of the Gospel.

### **Live in God's Presence**

There is a very familiar portion of Scripture that I think fits in with this subject of reflecting the glory of God. It is found in *Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (ESV)*:

1"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

4"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

What I think is being pictured is consciously living before the face of God every moment of every day. Our lives are so Godward focused that every moment is a reminder of God and Who He is and who we are. There is so much that our children will learn about God from us everyday without a formal sermon or lecture. And this can be good or bad. Hopefully we will be increasing daily in our awareness of God and we will verbally acknowledge God's care of us over the mundane of life. We thank Him for the cool water, the delicious food, the warm house, the soft bed and cozy covers, for the car that starts in the cold, for the Learning Lambs teacher who helps with the memory verse, and on it goes. As we worship the God who created this blade of grass and made it green, for the flower that smells, for the bee that stings, for the bird that sings, for the tree that drops its leaves so we can rake them into a pile and jump into them. For God's protection as another car runs a red light and we have time to stop so their isn't a wreck, instead of yelling words over the blast of our car horn that we get upset at our kids when they say them. Our prayer should be, Lord, help us to be more reflecting of your glory every moment of every day.

## Respond

Let's go to the third R. Remember the verses in Exodus and Joshua that we began with – and when your children ask, you shall say. So the third R is **RESPOND**. When they ask, respond.

### When You are Asked

This first point follows along with something I said at the beginning. We should be careful to wait for those times when our children ask, not make them endure our times and our agendas. But when they do ask, we need to respond.

Pastor Russ taught this morning that we need to make sure that we know what the Gospel is and that we present the Gospel with integrity and without coercion. Do you know what the Gospel is? I think a quick review from this morning is appropriate. "The Gospel should be given with simplicity and clarity so that your sons and daughters understand their position as a sinner before God, the saving work that Christ has done and their responsibility to believe the Bible and submit to God as their King." We need to be careful that we don't give the impression that this is what is going to make mommy and daddy happy, nor are we to tell them to ask Jesus into their hearts, or ask them if they want to go to heaven. That is not the Gospel.

### To What Has Been Asked

But we need to be careful to respond to only what has been asked. Just because there has been a question doesn't mean that this is the time to give a full Gospel presentation. We should only answer the question that is asked. If your child wants to know more, then they will follow up that question with another question. Let your child determine the direction of the conversation and the place where it ends.

Again, an illustration may help. One day a fifth grade boy came home from school and asked his mother where she came from. Immediately her mind raced. She knew this day was coming, but she was planning on her husband being the one to explain sex to her son. But dad was at work and wouldn't be home for at least 3 hours and she didn't want to lose this teaching moment. So she sat her son down and began to explain the differ-

ences between boys and girls and how babies are made and born. After this full explanation, mom took a breath and looked at her son and said, “That’s where mommy came from.” He had a startled look in his eyes and he didn’t speak for a few moments, but finally he did say something. “Wow mom, Tommy’s mom came from California.”

Many times our children have questions about something in particular, but that doesn’t indicate that they are asking for a full explanation of the Gospel or even that it is on their minds. Be sensitive and answer the question asked. If they want more, they will continue to ask. When the questions stop, you stop.

There are going to be certain times when our children will be more prone to ask questions about salvation. Just like our verses in Exodus and Joshua indicated, there are times and events that are designed to be question initiators. Times like baptism and communion are excellent times for questions. And we should be prepared with answers for those questions.

### **In an Age-Appropriate Way**

Obviously, we are not going to respond to a four year old and a fourteen year old the same way. And we are not going to pray the same way, or read the same things, or sing the same songs, or talk about the same issues. This is so obvious that you’re wondering why I’m bringing it up.

The reason has to do with young children wanting to make a decision to be saved. You heard Pastor Russ talk about that this morning. It’s not that young children can’t understand the Gospel, it’s a matter of do they. God saved me at the age of seven. I understood the Gospel. There was no question about my understanding my sin, Christ’s sacrifice, and my inability without Christ’s sinless life, atoning sacrifice, and resurrection on my behalf. The question is in regards to the four or five year old? Do they understand? In our response to these children are we having to use a vocabulary that is foreign to the Scriptures? Do they comprehend the concepts that are the Gospel?

This doesn’t mean that we don’t answer their questions, it’s just that our answers will not be as involved as they will be for those who are older and can comprehend the Gospel. But we must still teach the truths of the Bible. That’s the point of Pastor Russ this morning and my point here. We cannot change the Gospel. We cannot use the Scriptures in ways that they were not meant to be used. We must not use the Old Testament stories as moralistic standards for living, but as pointing to Christ. The message we teach is the same message not matter the age. What changes is the way it is presented. We will be conscious of the age of our children and their ability when we teach them the truths of God’s Word. We will be constant in our telling of the Gospel and seeking acceptance of those truths.

### **In Creative Ways**

And our response doesn’t always take the I tell/you listen format. We need to be creative, especially as the child gets older. We need to use the interests and ways that our children learn to help them answer their questions, realizing that God is also at work in our lives as parents helping us answer questions that we thought we knew the answers to.

I know that some of you have heard me tell of my experience with our oldest daughter, Jen. This incident happened during the time I was evaluating my understanding of the Scriptures that I mentioned earlier. She and our second daughter Laurie were in high school at one of the Christian schools in the area. She asked me one evening if she could go dancing. Being raised and taught the way I had been, my immediate answer was, "NO!". She asked why not. And my response to her was the response I had been given, "Because Christians don't dance." She again asked why. I asked her who she was going to go with and she told me her friends from school. I quickly remarked how disappointed I was with the school and wondered if I had wasted my money. So I had an idea. I told her that I would consider her request if she could show me from the Scriptures that it was OK to dance. She had free access to my library and any other help she needed. She gladly accepted the assignment. A due date was set and off she went. I also knew that I was going to have to be prepared to combat her bogus Scriptural support, so I went to work as well, seeing I had never had to support my position from Scripture before. It was just one of those fundamental givens for Christians that you didn't question. Needless to say, Jen went dancing and God used that in my life to help me see that it was time for me to question the things I took for granted.

This illustrates that God is at work in all of our lives as our children ask questions.

## Rest

The final R of Greg's 4 R's is **REST**. We rest in the sovereignty of God in salvation.

### **There is no Hurry**

Because of God's sovereignty, there is nothing to be in a hurry about when it comes to our children's salvation. We can rest in the fact that it will be in God's time and in His way. I don't have to fret that I have missed the golden opportunity and my child's heart is never going to be as tender to Christ and the Gospel as it was at that time. God is at work and He will bring my child to Himself when it pleases Him. I can rest in that truth.

### **God Calls Us to Faithfulness, But He Does the Saving**

As I mentioned earlier, God calls us as parents to be faithful in the parenting that God requires of us, but He is the One Who is ultimately responsible for the outcome. Saving faith is all of the Lord. We can do nothing to save our children, nor can we do anything that will keep them from being saved. Please don't read into that statement that we don't have any responsibility. I just said that God holds us accountable for being faithful in the process. But what rest we can have in knowing that God will save those who are His.

### **When Your Child Does Not Come to Christ**

In case it hasn't crossed your mind yet, there is no guarantee that your children will come to Christ for salvation. Remember, salvation is of the Lord. Children who are outright disobedient and rebellious to the Gospel are one thing. But those who know all the right answers, know how to live a life that has the appearance of a believer, and yet have no fruit appropriate for repentance are the hardest. Are they believers? Are they outside the fold? We do not know the heart; only God does. And we can rest in God's providential care of us and our children when our children do not come to Christ. Am I saying that we as parents are cold-hearted and unconcerned about children who are not believ-

ers. Not on your life! Our prayer is no different than the Apostle Paul's was for his people, the Jews, recorded for us in Romans 9: 2 - 3 "that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." We pray, we intercede, we cry, and at times we ask why; and yet, we rest in the providential care of a loving, merciful, wise, and just God Who brings glory to Himself through all things, even the unbelief of a child.

## Conclusion

Let me close with a final thought that is not an R, but an E – ENJOY.

## Enjoy

We have spent today looking at helping parents lead their sons and daughters to Christ. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have more miles on the odometer than most of you. And my encouragement to every one of you is to enjoy every stage of the lives of your children.

Enjoy that first smile of your infant and realize that your Savior smiled at his parents. Determine that you are going to, with God's help, enjoy this child through all the difficult and joyous times of life.

Enjoy those toddler years and relish those first words, those giggles, those first steps, the first sentences, the infatuation with the box and paper instead of the gift, the potty training, the constant asking why, and the thousand other things that go into learning about God's world. Those years of learning multiplication tables, and their first crush and their first heart break, their first disappointment and your first disappointment with them, the realization that you are no longer the only influence in the life of your child, the thrill of making the sports team and the disappointment of not making the sports team, the wanting to drive, and the getting of the driver's license, and the wanting to go on the first date, and the multitude of events that all the days bring. Each child brings their own special joys and will bring times and ways for you to enjoy them that are uniquely theirs.

RELAX during all of these times and enjoy them. REFLECT God's glory by living a life that is constantly aware of our glorious God. And of course, RESPOND to their questions as you diligently teach the Scriptures about the God Who loves them so much that He gave His Son to die for them, and REST in His providential care of those sons and daughters that you have committed to Him for their salvation. And to us grandparents, we have the special joy of being able to go through it all over again. But this time, we have years of experience.

ENJOY that child whom you tuck into bed one evening and they say, "Nigh night mommy; nigh night daddy," and they wake up the next morning in their senior year of high school saying, "Mom, did you wash my skirt" or "Dad, I need money for gas for the car".

My God grant us His enabling grace as we lead our sons and daughters to Christ for His glory.