



A Prayer and a Plan for Parents

John 17:13-24

I got in trouble for eating chocolate donuts. I was getting into the habit of buying a dozen chocolate donuts once a month when they went on sale at Kwik Trip. They're 25 cents a piece, so who could resist, right? I would put them in the freezer and eat them as a desert. A dozen donuts spread over a month isn't so bad. One day Karen came into my office and saw the dozen donuts. It wasn't like I was trying to hide them and I know she had seen them before, but on that day she said, "What are you doing? Why all of these donuts?" She cares about me and didn't want me to be taking in those junk calories. So I gave up my dozen chocolate donuts for my wife.

But the most famous chocolate donut story ever was the one I ate when Ryan was born. We went to the hospital in a not so nice suburb of Chicago early in the morning. Obviously, Karen wasn't planning to eat anything but I hadn't had any breakfast either so I made a quick stop in the bakery just down the road from the hospital. This wasn't a Kwik Trip donut. This was a mom and pop corner bakery who made real donuts. My only mistake was that I should have gotten two. Karen wasn't mad at me for buying the donut but at one point she said something like, "How can you sit there and eat that chocolate donut while I am lying here in labor?" That chocolate donut has turned into a legend in our family because it *started* our family. Ryan was born about nine hours later. Before I ate the chocolate donut we were a couple. After the chocolate donut, we were parents. Actually, you could use this to explain the birds and the bees to your kids. When they ask, "Daddy, where do babies come from?" "Chocolate donuts." ;-)

This morning's topic is stewardship of parenting. Like I said last week during the child dedication, our children do not belong to us. If you fish you certainly practice catch and release, sometime because it's the law of you do it for the enjoyment of fishing. Either way, the fish does not belong to you. Our goal as parents is to raise and release. Our children do not belong to us. This may be one of the most difficult parenting principles to grasp, but if you don't embrace parenting as stewardship, all of your parenting will be skewed.

I have chosen what might at first seem like an unusual section of Scripture for a message on parenting-Jesus' prayer in John 17. Let's read it first and then I think you will see that there are all kinds of applications to the stewardship of parenting.

13 But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

I have titled this message *A Prayer and a Plan for Parents*. each of these principles flow out of a part of Jesus prayer for us. These nine principles are nine prayers but the prayers also require a plan.

1. Know the full joy of Jesus-13

Jesus prayed, *But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves*. One of the reasons this entire prayer is so well suited for parenting is the fact that Jesus left the earth. He caught the disciple and then released them. This is just what parents are to do-raise and release. Had Jesus not been preparing to leave, his prayer would have been different. Obviously, he wasn't abandoning his disciples but he was leaving them and he wanted them to have his joy fulfilled in his disciples. That's a parent's prayer for their children--to the know the full joy of Jesus.

But how do you plan to know the joy of Jesus? One way is to make sure that you have a household of grace. Legalism is the opposite of joy. Many Christian homes seek to follow the Lord and the Bible's teachings but they do it in a spirit of fear and legalism. This family has rules but very little relationships. This family wants to make sure that they children are well behaved so that others will think they are a good Christian family. This family wants their children to behave because they have reduced Christianity to a list of observable behaviors. Do this, don't do this. Now there are rules and commands in Scripture. Lots of them, and I'll get to that next, but rules must be bound up in an atmosphere of grace.

The other way to have a low level of grace in your home is to have a high level of hypocrisy. Are you a hypocrite? of course you are. Only Jesus was not hypocritical. Every Christian is a hypocrite because every Christian sins. But one of the best things you can do for your children is to remind them that you are a sinner. Parents, I want to let you in on a little secret. (Whispering) Your kids already know that you're a sinner. What they need to know is that *you* know that you

are a sinner. This is how you teach them the gospel. You remind your kids as often as possible that you need the gospel every day. You need to be reminded of the perfect holiness of God, of your own sinfulness and of God's continual provision for forgiveness. Homes that lack grace also lack honesty. A related habit you can learn is to learn to apologize to your children. I don't mean every day, but if you mess up, tell them you messed up! Hypocrisy kills joy but the joy of Christ flourishes in grace-filled home.

2. Treasure the Word of God-14

In verse 14 Jesus said, *I have given them your word*. Pray that your children learn to treasure the word of God but they will most likely not learn that without you genuinely modeling it. What is your plan for teaching them to treasure the Word of God? Could you take the blank sermon outline sheet and describe what you do for family devotions? If you can't, how do you expect your kids to learn to treasure the Scriptures?

The other obvious way to teach them to treasure the word is to do it yourself. In my personal Bible reading this week I came upon King Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was one of the rare good guys. He was a good king in Judah. Listen how he trusted in the Lord when they faced an overwhelming army waiting to destroy them. "O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chron. 20:12) That is one of my favorite verses. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*. Actually, that should be a rallying cry for every parent. God, I don't have a clue, but my eyes are on you. I have been in elder meeting when we have done this with all sincerity and desperation. So Jehoshaphat was a good guy, except for this one thing.

Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab (2 Chron. 18:1). Ahab was one of the most evil and despicable kings in Israelite history. Jehoshaphat did not marry into the family of Ahab, but his son did, and look at the tragic result. *And Jehoram walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife* (2 Chron 21.6). However, it happened, Jehoshaphat gave his blessing to allow his son to marry a daughter of Ahab and that became his son's downfall. Jehoshaphat did great things for the kingdom of Judah but he failed to treasure God's word in his own family. The result was disastrous. If you treasure the word of God your children are likely to catch it but if you don't they will just as easily catch that also.

3. Be kept from the evil one-15

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

Jesus knew that the disciples would do their ministry in a world run by Satan. The devil is the prince of the power of the air. He does not have ultimate authority but he is a worldwide ruler with countless evil foot soldiers all of them bent on destruction. If Jesus prayed this way, then parents should pray this way: keep them from the evil one.

We can't take our children out of the world but while they are young and under our authority, we can keep the world from them as much as possible. This is a primary responsibility of all parents. Now we don't publish a list. Some churches will basically do that. They may not have a written

list of acceptable and unacceptable worldly things, but there is an unwritten code. We don't do that. Obviously, the Bible itself is a written code but beyond that you need to learn discernment and teach your children to learn discernment for themselves. If you only tell your kids what to do or not to do but never teach them your reasons, it's almost as bad as not teaching them right from wrong. They may grow up and reject your standards without even knowing their foundation. So pray that they be kept from the world and teach them how and why not to be worldly.

4. Belong to another world-16

And they should not be in the world because they are not of this world, as Jesus said in verse 16. *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.* So how do you train your children to grasp this idea that this world is not their home? It's not an easy task to get them to have an eternal perspective. But one of the most powerful tools you can use to teach this principle is to teach them to give, to be generous.

But before you can be generous, you must understand the Biblical principle of hoarding heavenly treasure. Jesus explained this in Matthew chapter six.

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So how do you lay up treasures in heaven? And by the way, this is a command. It's a way of orienting your life with an overriding eternal perspective. It's not limited to but certainly includes giving and generosity. Here's how Randy Alcorn explains it.

"Where we choose to store our treasures depends largely on where we think our home is. Suppose your home is in France and you're visiting America for three months, living in a hotel. You're told that you can't bring anything back to France on your flight home. But you can earn money and mail deposits to your bank in France. Would you fill your hotel room with expensive furniture and wall hangings? Of course not. You'd send your money where your home is. You would spend only what you needed on the temporary residence, sending your treasures ahead so they'd be waiting for you when you got home."¹

So start with the little piggy banks and train your kids to pull out 10% of whatever money they get for the Lord's work. If they get an allowance, 10% goes to the Lord. It doesn't have to go to Grace Church. We will survive just fine without your children's tithe money. Maybe they want to give it to a missionary. Find something they are interested in and get them excited about being generous. Ethan started working at Dairy Queen a few weeks ago. We were riding in the car this week and he suddenly announced to us, "Hey, I need to start tithing my Dairy Queen checks." I didn't have to tell him to do that. He came up with it on his own. But we have trained him to think this way.

5. Be sanctified by the truth-17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

There's that fancy word sanctification again. By now you should know what justification is. It is the moment of your salvation. It is Christ becoming what we were so that he might become what

he is. We are made righteous. Sanctification happens between the moment of your justification and your death. It is simple growth in spiritual maturity.

To lead your children to Christ is more than just making sure they are saved. They must know that there is a process, that salvation only begins their walk with the Lord; that there is a continual, lifelong process of greater dependence upon the Lord.

But here is where you see how all of these principles work together. If your children are not learning to treasure the Word of God they will never be sanctified by the truth. You have to love the truth before you will be affected by it.

6. Be Sent into the world-18

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

I find this to be a very interesting progression. First, Jesus prays not to remove them from the world, but to be kept from the evil one. Next Jesus said that we are not of this world, that we belong to a different, exceedingly better world. Now he says that we are sent into the world.

Isn't that fascinating? Really, I think the order and progression are important. Here's my point. Don't send your children into the world unless they first know that they belong to another world. Do you see what I am saying? As Jesus sent his disciples into the world--for a purpose, on a mission; to reach the dying world. As Jesus sent his disciples into the world and as he sends us into the world, so we raise our children to be sent into the world for the same purpose.

However, if they are not grounded in the reality that they are not of this world and literally belong to another world, they are not ready to be sent into the world. The world is too powerful to be sent into unprepared. Godliness and worldliness are in continual battle for every believer and the believer who s a child is not ready to do this battle--at least not a full frontal assault.

Being sent into the world is also a result of the other principles. If your children learn to treasure the word of God and are sanctified by the truth, they will be better prepared to be sent into the world. Here's a question for you. Can you send a ten year old into the world? Sometimes little ones can be great witnesses. We visited Karen's mom in Florida when Kellyn was about five years old. One day out of the blue Kellyn asked her grandma an innocent question. "Why don't you want to become a Christian?" Whoops. That didn't go over so well, but her heart was in the right place. A n eight or ten year old can testify about Jesus but you don't send a five year old into the world. But you can go with them. You could take them with you when we go street witnessing this summer. Your kids would probably just watch and not say anything but I believe that it would be a great experience for them, to say nothing of what it could do for you.

7. Have success in evangelism-20

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word

Here we have the result of being sent into the world--that others "will believe in me through their word." I love that the Savior of the world prayed this prayer. He would soon be done with his ministry and gone. He would return to the Father and leave the world to his disciples. Now that's stewardship, wouldn't you agree? I've said this on many occasions, but I am just blown away the fact that Jesus left this to us. Like all stewardship, it almost seems irresponsible. It's one thing to

turn the planet over to us to manage but it's another to turn the souls of every man and woman over to our responsibility. Knowing what I know, I would not have made that decision. That's simply not what I would have done.

But whether your children are ready to share their faith or not, they need to understand this verse-- *those who will believe in me through their word*. Who's word? Not Jesus' word, but the disciple's word. Don't get me wrong. This task is 100% beyond our ability. We do not save people but we do speak words which the Lord then uses to bring them to salvation. Just as this was Christ's purpose for his disciples, so this is the purpose for your children.

8. Experience oneness with the Father & Son-21-23

that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one,

Do we already have oneness with the Father and Son or do we have to work to achieve it? You're going to be tempted to say "both" but that's the wrong answer. We already have oneness with the Father and Son. Remember that Jesus is referring to "all those who will believe in me." So if they believe in Christ, they are one with Christ. Now we can be in and out of fellowship with Christ but we cannot cease to be one with him.

Notice also the staggering truth in verse 22. *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one*. How is it that Jesus has given all believers his glory? We don't have his glory in the sense that we are now God. But his glory is his own revelation. To be a Christian is to have Jesus, right? This is where John Piper's famous quote really makes sense. "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." As principle #2 says, we are to treasure the word of God but we only do that so that we can treasure Christ.

It's the highest of parenting duties, but your ultimate goal is to have your children find satisfaction in Christ alone. This is why you discipline your children--so that their selfish desires can be tamed which can then lead them to Christ. If their selfish desires are permitted to run wild, they will always be looking for new ways to satisfy their sinful desires.

9. Be brought safely home in glory-25

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Everyone has a picture of Heaven but a lot of them are wrong. Too many visions of Heaven fail to put Jesus at the blazing center. There will be no more sin. True, but the reason sin will be vanquished is because Jesus is there. We will be healed of all illness and disease. True, but ultimate healing comes from Christ. We will live forever and never die. True, but living forever without Christ at the center is what the Bible calls Hell. So if you can picture all of the benefits of heaven but Jesus is not at the center of it all, then you are actually picturing Hell.

We don't like to think of our own children going to Heaven, at least any time soon. We pray that it will be another forty to fifty years after we are gone. But isn't that the end goal of parenting? Raise and release. You raise them and then release them into God's hands.

These parenting principles go well beyond what we normally think about in our parenting responsibilities. Sometimes survival is our only goal, and once in a while, that's OK. We are all sinful people raising and releasing more sinners into the world, so there is no parenting perfection. But how might your parenting change if you had Jesus' prayer in mind at all times? What if you yourself prayed these prayers and then had a plan in place for raising your children to these standards and truths. Would you consider praying these every day for the next week?

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¹ Alcorn, Randy (2012-04-11). *The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving* (LifeChange Books) (Kindle Locations 499-503). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.