

Burdened by Parenting: Wait till your Father Gets Home

Prov 13:24, 22:6, Eph 6:1-4

Brothers and sisters, I'm stating the obvious and preaching to the choir when I say that parenting is a difficult job and it's not for the faint of heart.

Even those of us who are not parents agree with this if we've ever babysat someone else's kids, or served in the nursery, or helped teach a Sunday school class or volunteered for youth group. While it's a blessing to serve, the truth is we're thankful we can send those kids home to THEIR parents...

But when you're the parent, and it's your kid – they are your responsibility to care for and raise and it's a 24-7 day in day out job that can leave the best of us run down and worn out and burdened.

And what else can you do about it but just grin and bear it and try to find some humor in the parenting situations that you encounter... because if you don't try to laugh about it – it's enough to make you cry.

So, there is much humor to be found at the expense of weary and exasperated parents burdened by the work of caring, clothing, feeding, cleaning, feeding, cleaning, feeding, cleaning, and training and disciplining their children.

One of my favorite sources of such humor is the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes.... (show slides)

Or maybe you remember that TV show from the 1950's where the mischievous kids would misbehave and get into trouble and their mother would always warn them by saying *"just wait til your father gets home!"* Implying that they were really going to be in trouble when their father found out what they were up to and likely get "the belt" or a good spanking!

Maybe your parents said that line to you when you were a child with the same implication, or perhaps you've said that to your kids?

Or maybe you wouldn't say something like that to your kids, or you've come to realize that you can't say things like that to

your kids these day - because things are a bit different today when it comes to dealing with discipline than they were in the 1950's, or things are different here in Canada than where you have come from.

Maybe that's a part of what makes parenting feel burdensome for you? It's hard to know how to administer discipline in a way that's acceptable to the Canadian culture.

There's an East Indian immigrant comedian, a lady by the name of Sindhu Vee who finds some humor in this challenging situation. She says *"I actually find this situation quite stressful, because I was born and raised in India, so what I find to be healthy, robust, high-quality parental discipline.... Is frowned upon in this part of the world, actually – that's not quite true... It's illegal... I've checked. Because I really want to have well behaved kids – but that's no use to me if I'm in, jail!"*

And another East Indian comedian who grew up in Canada, Russel Peters, finds a lot of humor in the contrast between how he was strictly and physically disciplined by his traditional

Indian parents who didn't put up with any lip or backtalk and his white friends would curse and swear at their parents and get away with it and do whatever they wanted - and they would threaten to call children's services and report their parents for abuse if they tried to discipline them.

And the punchline in Russel's story comes when he shares about how he tried to pull this on dad to get out of doing the dishes... but his dad called his bluff and handed him the phone and said *"Ok mr big shot, you go ahead and call them... but I know... and you know... that its going to take them twenty minutes to get here – and in that time... someone gonna get a hurt real bad!"* Needless to say, the dishes got done.

But brothers and sisters, there's only so much laughing you can do in the face of the challenges of parenting. Whether its trying to figure out how to discipline your children effectively and legally.... Or whether its dealing with driving them around to all their sports and activities, or motivating them to study harder and get better grades, or making good choices and choosing good friends, or dealing with the insecurities and

drama and eyerolls of the teen years... whatever it is brothers and sisters, there's only so much laughing you can do.

So, if you are feeling burdened this morning by the demands and responsibilities and challenges of parenting... then Jesus' words in Matt 11:28 are for you. *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest!"*

Brothers and sisters, bring your parenting challenges to Jesus, whatever they may be – bring them to Him in prayer. Be intentional, specific and articulate about what you are facing and struggling with and pray to Jesus about it, He can help us.

But – remember, we are to present our prayers and petitions to Jesus, with thanksgiving, in order to have the peace of God guard our hearts and minds in Christ.

So, coming to Jesus to find rest with our parenting burdens doesn't mean that Jesus is going to babysit our kids for us to give us a break, or that He will zap our kids into well behaved little angels.

Remember, the rest Jesus gives us is from switching to a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, not from removing our duties and responsibilities from us – especially in taking care of and disciplining the children that He has blessed us with.

So, we bring our parenting burdens to Jesus and He helps us by filling us, refilling us with His Holy Spirit to give us more wisdom, patience, endurance, strength, insight and changing our character to have more love, peace, kindness, gentleness and self-control so that we are better equipped for the most important and holy task that we will ever do. Raising HIS kids...

Because the truth is brothers and sisters, as Ps 127:3 says *"children are a heritage FROM the Lord"* They are his first... they are ours second.

So what does the Lord Jesus have to say to us about parenting and discipline that can help us take this responsibility seriously but yet also relieve us of the weariness and burden that we so often feel from it?

Well for that we shift from prayer to looking at the scripture because the scripture is God's Word that points us Jesus, so whatever useful teaching we can receive from the scripture on this matter is another way that we come to Jesus to find rest.

So it's really a question of how we experience God's grace and how that grace enables us to be disciplined, and as we experience and understand this brothers and sisters, I think we will switch out the heavy and burdensome yoke of consequential parenting for our own expectations or societies expectations and switch it to the light yoke of parenting with grace and discipline.

So let's look at the scripture passages we read this morning.

Now when the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the early Christians in the ancient city of Ephesus, Roman society was of the opinion, as was most of the ancient world; that strict discipline and corporal punishment administered by the head of the household was the only way to keep order and decency

in society and to prevent their civilization from falling into disarray and crumbling.

And while we might think that is a bit dramatic brothers and sisters, those of us who have seen the changes that have taken place in Canadian society in regards to discipline over the past 60 years are likely to agree, it has had a detrimental and negative effect on our society in terms of self-control, respect, decency, and character development.

Certainly when I was growing up I had friends like ones Russell Peters describes in his comedy skit, bratty little Canadian suburban kids who would lip off to their parents with no consequences. Ironically their parents were well educated, up to date on the latest psychology – and yet they couldn't... or wouldn't control or discipline their children and I saw the results.

Their kids, my friends... were angry and undisciplined and they were at the root of the social problems in my middle-class

suburban neighborhood: vandalism, graffiti, drug use, theft, violence...

So, the ancient Romans were maybe not as backward thinking in terms of parental discipline and social breakdown as we might think they were...

And the ancient Romans and also believed it was important to appease the gods by performing rituals and offering sacrifices to secure the gods favor and avoid their anger. Because you needed the favor of the gods along with good discipline to prevent the downfall of your family, your city, or the Empire.

So, Brothers and sisters, imagine how radically different the message of the gospel was in this culture. A message which said – there is only one God, and He loves us and offers us forgiveness and grace and mercy for our sins instead of anger and punishment, and He does that through the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And if you took that message seriously and believed it... and were changed by it – then what did that mean for your day-to-day responsibilities as a parent – especially if you were the head of the house entrusted with keeping social order in your small corner of the society?

When your child did something wrong – instead of beating him, instead of shaming her, perhaps you would begin to see this as a chance to reflect the way God had treated you in Jesus Christ- and offer your child grace and mercy and forgiveness instead of strict punishment.

Because the truth is brothers and sisters, when we truly understand the gospel, when grasp it in faith with our heart, mind and soul, it works its way into every area of our life - into our parenting as well.

However, this presented a problem within Roman society – Grace and mercy could be used as opportunities to get away with bad behavior, or to abdicate the often difficult responsibility to discipline your children and your household.

Parents who showed grace and mercy to their children risked being seen as subversive to society, as contributing to its breakdown, because if their children were getting away with bad behavior, it was only a few steps away from the collapse of civilization.

And this assumption is partially true – so we’re back to the example of bratty little Canadian friends whose parents couldn’t control them, who simply let them get away with bad behavior and the whole community suffered because of it.

So Brothers and sisters - it’s pretty easy to see that we’re caught on the horns of a dilemma here, especially as Christian parents.

Because on the one hand we know that the way God deals with us in Christ is characterized by mercy and grace and forgiveness....but on the other hand letting kids get away with bad behavior, letting them do what they want without consequences and punishment, spoils them and hurts others.

Prov 13:24 specifically says that neglecting to discipline children is tantamount to hating them.

So grace and discipline seem like opposite ends of the spectrum and I would guess most of us are not sure how to be a gracious Christian parent who models a loving gracious God to our kids... and at the same time discipline them and enforce the rules to ensure that they don’t turn out to be lawless hooligans.

But brothers and sisters the good news is that the scriptures don’t see grace and discipline as contradictory opposites. Instead of focusing on a false dilemma like this, the scriptures are more concerned about the issue of us getting what we deserve.

Proverbs 10:16 says *“The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.”* And Paul picks this up again in Romans 6:23 where he writes *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

What this teaches us as parents brothers and sisters, is that we shouldn't be asking the question *"should I be strict with my kids, or should I be lenient with my kids?"*

Instead, we need to ask *"How does God step into our lives – into my life... to prevent me from getting what I deserve, and how can I do that for my children?"*

Now this doesn't necessarily mean that you are sparing them the consequences of their actions, but it gets to the heart of why you discipline your children – and it is what will help us to bring grace and discipline together as partners instead of opposites.

And right here is where we switch from the heavy yoke of consequential parenting to Jesus' easy yoke for parenting...

That heavy yoke of consequential parenting can take many forms, have many reasons for why we discipline – or don't discipline our kids.

We can discipline them because we are selfish... because we want their behavior to reflect well on us, to reflect that we're good parents, to reflect our ability to exercise our authority – our power.

We can discipline them because we are full of regret...because we messed up and made bad decisions and we'll be damned if our kids are going to make the same mistakes as us.

We may discipline them because we regret having them, maybe we may resent them and if we have to be miserable, they're going to be miserable as well – misery loves company.

Or maybe we discipline them because we are idealistic...we've read all the parenting theory books, we've figured that the way to solve our social problems is through better parenting and we can't wait to show how we're going to get it right with our kids...

Or we discipline them because we are perfectionistic and we are pushing them to realize what they are fully capable of and

will never let them settle for anything less than the very best of what they can do.

The yoke of consequential parenting has many reasons for disciplining our children – and it is a heavy yoke to bear, it will make us weary and burdened.

But Jesus' yoke for parenting from the scripture switch out reason for disciplining our children to the gospel truth of preventing them from getting what they deserve – which is the wages of sin...death – and we do this for them from the reality that God has intervened in our lives and done this for us.

In God's actions in the gospel brothers and sisters we see a demonstration of how grace and discipline are not opposites – Grace is God stepping in when we've done nothing to deserve being rescued from ourselves and saving us.

And Discipline is God stepping in when we've done nothing to deserve being shown how to best display our gratitude and being shown how live in obedience to Him.

Additionally, God's discipline protects us from making further mistakes and hurting ourselves – and that's a form of grace.

So how can we parent with Jesus' light yoke in a manner that best reflects how God interacts with us?

Well, the scriptures give us some advice in that manner – the verses in Proverbs this morning remind us of that it is wise not to abdicate our role in applying discipline to our children – remember the friend's I grew up with, they were angry kids!

And they also point out the wisdom of making sure that the kind discipline we apply is appropriate to who our children are. Proverbs 22:6 says *“Train a child up in the way they should go...”*

Brothers and sisters, there is no one size fits all approach to the ways and means of correcting, guiding, motivating and rebuking a child.

I don't think I've ever needed to spank my daughter, she knew she had crossed the line if I had to raise my voice to her – that was enough.

However, when I was a young boy – if I got wound up and out of control, I wouldn't stop until my behind met the end of my mother's Tupperware soup ladle (*it had a flexibility that made it more whip-like when it was used as opposed to the stiffer traditional wooden spoon- made it very effective!*)

So brothers and sister, take Christ's light yoke of parenting upon you through reading these Proverbs. The book of Proverbs in the bible is full of wisdom like this with regards to parenting, and I encourage you to read it and share it.

But wisdom can also come from observing God's creation as well. After all He's the one who made it and when we observe it through a Christian worldview we can pick up on His designs and norms and we can learn good discipline and parenting skill in this way too. We call this creational wisdom.

So - interestingly enough it was a Jewish development psychologist, Diana Baumrind, who pioneered a creational wisdom description about grace and discipline for parenting that I find very helpful. She says parenting is being responsive to your children (grace) while placing demands or stipulations on them (discipline).

So according to this definition we see the follow kinds of parenting styles.

The parent who places no stipulations on their child, and is not responsive to them is a negligent parent. A parent who places no stipulations on their child, and is highly responsive to them is an indulgent parent.

A parent who places stipulations on their child, and is not responsive to them is an authoritarian parent. And a parent who places stipulations on their child and is highly responsive to them is an authoritative parent.

Brothers and sisters, if we think about parenting in this way then the God revealed to us in the scriptures is the inspiration behind an authoritative parent.

Because God has always been very clear with us about who we are, and where our loyalty should lie and how we need to live to show that loyalty.

But He has also shown himself to be highly responsive to us – He became one of us in Jesus Christ so that He might change our sinful nature in order that we might become people who are enabled to be highly responsive to Him. And He did this so we will not get what we deserve – the wages of sin...death. So, let this be our motivation for how we discipline our children. This parenting yoke is easy and its burden is light.

Its not about punishing them because we're angry, (though we may be) its not about shaming them because they've let us down, or embarrassed us (thought they might have) its not about leaving them to deal with their own consequences

because we're so tired of dealing with the same issue time after time...

It's about wisely intervening – being involved in their lives – responsive, to apply unique, appropriate and effective stipulations upon them to help them how grace and discipline come together – for the purpose of leading them to salvation.

Brothers and sisters, if you are burdened and weary of consequential parenting – come to Jesus instead, take up His yoke for it is easy and His burden is light.

May the Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father fill you with the Holy Spirit with all that we need to discipline HIS children so they may know the reality of His grace and discipline in their lives as He has made that a reality in our lives as parents.

Amen.