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Parenting & Our Identity



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Parenting & Our Identity

A common first question when getting to know someone might be, “what do you do?” This is a helpful way to determine what stage of life someone is in and what fills a majority of their day. What we do tells a lot about our circumstances and what is important to us. Often our circumstances such as health, stage of life, and so on are outside of our control. On the other hand, what we deem as most important is a choice.

Parenting is one of the many places in life where we can experience the clash between what we want to do and what is most important to us. Even when we know what we should do, it can be difficult to find the strength and energy to follow through. Parents know we are to teach their children of the Lord and His commandments. (*Deuteronomy 6:7-9*) We know we are to care for our children. (*1 Timothy 5:8*) We try not to provoke our children to wrath. (*Ephesians 6:4*) While we know these truths, it is difficult to remember them and live accordingly when we are exhausted, angry, or overwhelmed in the midst of life.

To make things even more challenging, we don't always know what we should do. The scriptures give guiding principles but not many specific “dos” and “don'ts”. We are left to sort through big decisions such as homeschool, public school, or private school. Or how many and what type of chores are appropriate for a child? Most of us struggle to know when we should be lenient and when we need to draw a hard line in the sand. In our best moments, we try to honor the Lord and seek to follow the Spirit's direction. At our worst, we forget we are a child of God and the calling to represent Him to our children.

The parenting journey can feel like a roller coaster. One minute it is exhilarating and the next you wonder if you are going to survive. There are times when you see God work out amazing things in young hearts and times when it is scary. Amid parenting uncertainties, one of the grounding truths to remember is the realization that the Lord has given us the privilege to engage in the role of parenting. It may not always feel like a privilege yet being entrusted with the nurturing of young hearts surely is a privilege. It is also worth remembering we have not been given this privilege because of some ability or skill we possess but because a merciful God faithfully equips us for tasks far beyond our ability.

While we are to take the task of parenting seriously and seek to faithfully engage the task, we must guard against making our role of parenting into our sole identity. Being a parent is a place to live out our identity in Christ, but it is a fatal place to put our identity. Identity is what defines a person. It is the platform from which an individual views themselves and the world around them. It is what gives an individual worth, value and purpose. Most of us quickly agree with the idea that our worth and purpose are found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet this truth is hard to hold onto when challenges, failures and disappointments arise. Our natural tendency is to define ourselves by the roles we engage in and how well those roles seem to be going.

In the case of parenting, this leads to taking too much responsibility for our children's actions. It can lead to being ruled by fear with each decision that arises especially when we see other parents making different decisions. This is not to say we should never evaluate decisions or consider other's opinions. We should pursue wise action and be open to counsel from those we know and trust. Yet we should not be ruled by accomplishments or failures; of our own or our children's. Nor should our identity be defined by the opinions of others. Like Paul, we must try to forget those things which are behind (accomplishments and failures) and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians 3:14*) We are to learn from both success and failure so we can move forward into Christ. We ought to pursue the kind of faith which believes the Lord can bring about fruit and life in our children's hearts in spite of us.

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When children are young, we are to teach them truth and help them learn to walk in righteousness. When they violate God's law, we are to engage these moments as best we can with either mercy, discipline or some combination of the two. As they grow older, we continue to teach, instruct and exhort yet also realizing that they are becoming more and more responsible for their beliefs and behaviors. It is easy to second-guess decisions made, and there will certainly be times you will look back and wish you would have taken different action. Satan wants us to get lost in these mistakes whereas the Lord desires for us to acknowledge mistakes and then live according to who we are in Christ rather than according to past mistakes or accomplishments.

When our view of ourselves lies in our accomplishments, our children's behavior or activities, or what others think about decisions we have made, we find ourselves continually discouraged. The Lord calls us to faithfulness to Him and to bear the fruit of being His child in the different roles we are given. One of the ways we can do this is through modeling what it looks like to live as a Child of God who has embraced their Christ-given identity. As you step back to evaluate your week, be willing to acknowledge both the joys and sorrows experienced while remembering you are not defined by your mistakes or successes. Fight to keep in mind that you are a beloved child of God.

Parenting is a wonderful role to be sanctified, and it is a role that will continually humble us and remind us of our inadequacies. Try to shift away from evaluating your week as either good or bad based on how you performed as a parent. Try to focus on God's continual pursuit of you both in the mercy and correction you experience. Keep turning toward Him and receiving what He has for you. The Lord does not scowl at you when you blow it as a parent nor does He love you more when by His grace you do well. The Lord rejoices with you in the successes and patiently corrects and pours out His grace on you amid failures. Let us live in the light of these truths.