

Desperate Parents Make the Best Parents

Pastor Brad Bigney / Grace Fellowship Church

Author and counselor, Dan Allender, tells how as a young pastor and parent he had the opportunity to meet with the great theologian, William Hendrickson. By the way, Dr. Hendrickson is the author of my very favorite set of commentaries I own. Dr. Hendrickson was in his 80's when Dan Allender met with him for lunch with a bunch of other young pastors.

He says at one point all the young pastors around the table started talking about how hard it was being a father... and the demands they felt as fathers... and when they started talking that way Dr. Hendrickson SMILED and said, "Remember parenting is not difficult; it is impossible." His laugh conveyed both agony and hope. Allender says he answered a few more theological questions for us, but then before our time was over, Dr. Hendrickson turned the conversation back to the subject of parenting. **He looked at us and said**, "Nothing you do will be more important than being fathers; and in nothing will you fail more miserably. Parenting is impossible, so you will need God more than you will need to be a good parent." *How Children Raise Parents*, Dan Allender, p. 111 & 112

- You need **God** more than you need to be a **good** parent! Because without God you can't BE a good parent for long.
- There are two categories of parents - you're either **desperate** or you're **deluded**.
- It's our human and sinful nature to try to boil everything down to just a few **principles**. We want some kind of **system** or check-list that will put us in control and allow us to operate without God.
- **But mark it Down!** Biblical principles **divorced** from the God of THOSE PRINCIPLES will not produce the **results** we're looking for. And you can knock yourself out in the flesh... and it won't make up for the absence of God.

Paul Tripp says this is a parenting principle that we need to come to grips with. God says, "'His grace is made perfect' Where? In our Weakness! (That's what 2 Cor. 12:10 teaches) **Paul Tripp says here's a principle:** In parenting, your weakness will not keep you from effectiveness if you believe the Gospel. Your delusion of strength will! Because it will keep you from seeking the Lord... keep you from seeking His help... keep you from humbly saying, 'It's not only my child God is working on in this moment... He's also working on me...'" Taken from **Case for Kids** tapes series, tape #3 "What Are Teenagers?"

4 Ways Biblical Desperation Shows Up in a Life

I. Show Your Counselees that Desperate Parents are Driven to Cry Out to God in Prayer

Colossians 4:2, 12 “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving... v. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

A. Get your counselees to be praying for specific traits or characteristics that they want to see developed in their children

That they'd stand alone
 That they'd be found out quickly when they sin
 That they'd make the Bible their authority for life
 That they'd be humble and teachable
 That they'd hunger and thirst for righteousness and holiness
 That they'd go hard after the things of God
 That they'd always tell the truth – even if it costs them

Use Desiring God Ministries booklet *Praying for the Next Generation* (Sally Michael) – it's just full of Scripture prayers.

B. Get your counselees to pray about Specific Sins And Weaknesses that you see in your children

Pride –being 'wise in their own eyes'
 Stubbornness
 Unteachable spirit
 Deceitfulness / Exaggeration
 Idolatry of living for external beauty vs. cultivating inner beauty
 Laziness – put on diligence
 Living for pleasure

C. Get your counselees to pray for 'breakthroughs' and insights into what's going on in their home, their own heart, and their child's heart.

For more help on this – check out my book, *Gospel Treason – Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols*. Also check out the website www.bradbigney.com for a free study guide, as well as sermon video and audio about idolatry.

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James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

Prov. 2:7 “He stores up sound wisdom for the upright...”

Example of “Breakthrough Insights from God”

1. Slow down – you can’t parent in a hurry / or on the fly
2. Train them! Don’t just correct wrong behavior – show them the correct / role play the righteous behavior
3. Use Scripture again! Open the Bible – read a verse
4. Go on a ‘Love Crusade’ again!
5. Expect to be doing these things – don’t act like it’s inconvenient or that don’t have time
6. You can’t control your children or get a hold of their hearts... only God can do that!

- **Jim Elliff** “Comfort for Christian Parents of Unconverted Children” (www.ccwtoday.org)

- **Howard Eames** personal testimony / commentary on this article

7. Your joy cannot be tied to how well or poorly your children are doing.

In his book ***Lost in the Middle*** Paul Tripp gives the example of how our own idolatry creeps into our parenting when he says, “Joanna thought she had grown in her faith. The problem was that she had forgotten who she was, and it was not long before her identity in Christ was replaced by another identity. Joanna’s children became her new identity. They gave her meaning and purpose, and they really did give her hope and joy. The problem was that they were not sent by God to do any of that. Joanna lived vicariously through them, and the more she did, the more she became obsessed with their success. Although Joanna was just as faithful in her personal devotions and public worship, God was no longer at the center of who she was. All it took was Jimmy to mess it all up. With all his inner turmoil, Jimmy didn’t make a very good trophy. Being with him often meant unexpected confrontations and public embarrassment. The girls were forced to live in the wings of Jimmy’s drama and they didn’t turn out to be trophy children either. Now that they were adults, Joanna was lost... She was paralyzed by what had happened to them, not just because she loved them so much, but more importantly because of what their struggle took away from her. In their tumultuous launch into adulthood, the kids not only broke Joanna’s heart, but they also robbed her of her identity. She felt like it had all been for naught. When she looked in the mirror, she felt like she didn’t know the person she saw there.” *Lost in the Middle*, Paul David Tripp, p. 275-276

8. Be careful what you pray for! My wife, Vicki, read where an African Christian made the comment, “You Americans are always praying that God would remove the trials. We pray that God would strengthen our backs to bear the trials for His glory.” 10 years ago I wrote it in my prayer journal and started praying “Lord, don’t remove the trials but strengthen my back to bear them for your glory.”

Nothing lays us quite as low – or strikes as close to my heart – as parenting trials. They seem to hurt the most... and drag on the longest... and bring the most confusion and heartache. But God knows! He’s been a parent long before you and I ever started this journey.

Isa. 1:2 “I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me.”

Parenting is More than a Formula – Jim Newheiser
When Good Kids Make Bad Choices – Jim Newheiser
Come Back, Barbara – Jack and Rosemarie Miller

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Prodigals, and Those Who Love Them – Ruth Bell Graham

James 1:2-4 “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Convicting question: How much time do you or your counselees spend praying about the struggles with their children compared to talking or complaining about them to other people?

II. Show Your Counselees that Desperate Parents are Driven to Cling to God’s Word for Grace

As **Eugene Peterson** says about discipleship, “It’s a long obedience in the same direction.” That’s what parenting has to be.

2 Timothy 2:1-3 “... be strong in the **grace** that is in Christ Jesus, and the things that you have heard from me... commit these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also. Therefore, you must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...”

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

That verse is almost always taught as a promise for parents who do right, and at the same time an indictment against parents whose children are not following the Lord. And it’s unfortunate that most of our English translations make it sound like a ‘money-back’ guarantee regarding parenting.

But a stronger and more correct translation and interpretation of this verse would be: “If you bring up a child in his way [i.e. the way he is bent (as a sinner)] when he is old he will not depart from it.”

In other words, this verse is a warning for parents more than it is a promise.

- This interpretation is also consistent with the whole book of Proverbs, which teaches that *generally* speaking, good parents turn out good children and bad parents turn out bad children.
- But it’s also consistent with the message so often found in Proverbs telling children to choose wisdom.

“In its proper context Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise so much as it is a warning to Christian parents. In the Hebrew text of Proverbs 22:6, the phrase ‘in the way he should go’ is entirely lacking. Rather, the Hebrew says, ‘Train up a child in his way and when he is old he will not depart from it.’... Allow a child to have self-expression, allow him to pick and to choose what he will and will not do, and as that habit is formed in his youth he will not change when he is older... This verse is a stern warning.” Bruce Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, p. 33

So we look to God and trust God to do what only He can do!

2 Corinthians 3:4-5 “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.”

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Acts 20:32 “And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up...”

The Bible will build your counselees up as a parent! It will FEED and FILL their hearts for moments they don't even know are going to happen this week... but God knows.

Dan Allender says, “Our reliance on everything but grace HAS US exhausted, worried, and secretly counting the days until our little cherubs are out of their diapers, or in school, or out of adolescence, or out of the house. The desire to rush through one stage to get to the next is the idiocy of believing that the grass really is greener on the other side. It isn't, of course. Don't rush the future; generally parenting only gets harder.” *How Children Raise Parents*, Dan Allender, p. 131

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another...”

III. Show Your Counselees that Desperate Parents are Willing to Confess Their Own Sins Quickly

James 5:16 “Confess your sins to one another”

And the Lord helps those who – not help themselves... but humble themselves! – who are humble enough to acknowledge that my sin – and your sin is part of the equation – not just my child's sin but my sin.

“The fact is that none of our children, no matter how spiritually inclined, turns out like we would have imagined or dreamed. They make choices that you and I wouldn't make. They go through the bumps and bruises of young adulthood, sometimes bloodying their noses in unnecessary ways. They may share your faith, but they don't share every one of your values. And along the way they can be quite candid about your weaknesses and failures and how they have determined to avoid them...”

We weren't the parent that we wanted to be. Yes, we were very dedicated to do it God's way, and we were always looking to learn. We sought to make God's presence obvious to our children, and we talked much about the Gospel. We endeavored to be faithful in correction, instruction, and discipline. But in all of this there was one huge and glaring problem: we did it all as sinners. There were so many times when our sin got in the way.” *Lost in the Middle*, Paul David Tripp, p. 104-105

Matthew 7:3-5 “And why do you look at the speck in your [son or daughter's] eye, but do not consider the plank that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your [son or daughter], ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see more clearly to remove the speck out of your [son or daughter's] eye.”

As hard as it is, you need to encourage your counselee to be willing to confess their own sins to their son or daughter, even before they repent, before they change.

“Let us challenge you to do something that we've tried to do as we've faced our family difficulties: strive to win the gospel race! Think to yourself: If I'm the first to confess, the first to repent and humble myself, the first to the cross, I'll experience renewed grace from Him! I won't have to worry about trying to defend my own reputation or the ‘moral high ground.’ Instead, I'll be flooded with God's

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mercy. Remembering that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5) should motivate you to resist the temptations to blame, to hide, and to win.” ***When Good Kids Make Bad Choices***, Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jim Newheiser

IV. Show Your Counselee that Desperate Parents are Humble Enough to Allow Others to Speak to Them about Parenting

Prov. 12:1 “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates **correction** is stupid.

Prov. 15:12 “A scoffer does not love one who **corrects** him, Nor will he go to the wise.

Prov. 13:18 “Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, But he who regards a **rebuke** will be honored.

Recommended Reading

Wayward Children: Finding Peace, Keeping Hope (31-Day Devotion), Stuart Scott, P&R Pub., 2023
When Good Kids Make Bad Choices, Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jim Newheiser, Harvest House Pub., 2005
Prayers for Prodigals – 90 Days of Prayers for Your Child, James Banks, Discovery House, 2011
Come Back, Barbara, C. John Miller and Barbara Miller Juliani, P&R Publishing, 1997
You Never Stop Being a Parent – Thriving in Relationship with Your Adult Children, P&R Pub., 2010
Parenting is More than a Formula, Jim Newheiser, P&R Pub., 2015
Dealing with Your Rebellious Teens: Help for Worried Parents, Barbara Juliani, New Growth Press, 2018