

## “Reactive Parenting”

### The Family of God

Downtown

March 7th, 2021

Welcome back for Parenting week 2. We'll be coming out of Ephesians 6 again:

#### Ephesians 6:1-4

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

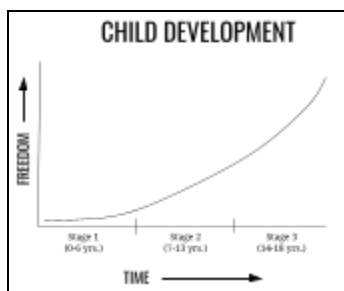
Last week we introduced the Biblical vision for the parent-child relationship:

- **Children** are gifts (Psalm 127:3)
- **Parents** are loving authorities (Ephesians 6:1-3)
- The **purpose of parenting** is to bring them up in the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) telling the next generation of His glorious deeds, His might and the wonders He has done (Psalm 78:4)



We talked about how parenting is full of moments, good or bad, big or small. And parenting happens in two modes - last week we focused on what happens before the X - proactive parenting. Today we're focusing on reactive parenting - what happens at the X.

Before we dive in I want to start us with one more chart we got from an older, wiser church. It really encapsulates the process of bringing our kids up.



Look at that. 18 years old. Launching out. Amen?

Probably my favorite picture of this in the bible is **Psalm 127**. Right after verse 3 that says children are a gift from God, the Psalmist writes *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.*

Anybody take up wooden arrow-making as your quarantine hobby? It's called fletching. Here are the basics:

- For an arrow to fly straight, it has to be straight.
- Tree branches don't grow perfectly straight on their own.
- Which means they have to be straightened.

To straighten a wooden arrow, you apply heat to the bend so the wooden fibers loosen up. Then you add gentle pressure until the bend straightens.

--> It's a good picture for parenting. We are applying heat and pressure to bring our kids up so they are ready to launch and fly straight. Alright keep that chart in the back of your mind. We'll come back to it. Now as we shift to reactive parenting, I want to look at a passage in 2 Timothy:

#### 2 Timothy 3:16-17

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Paul tells us here that all Scripture is breathed out - inspired by God - and useful for four things: 1.)

teaching, 2.) training, 3.) correcting and 4.) rebuking.

And I love that Paul says the end result is: *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* That's the same end goal for us as parents: to see our kids brought up to completion - maturity. And that means teaching, training, correcting and rebuking are required for our goal of raising up mature, complete equipped kids. It's a helpful little framework:

- **Teaching** - give your child information about who God is and how He designed life.
- **Training** - help your child practice so they can apply and live in light of that teaching.
- **Correction** - realign your child when they are getting off the path.
- **Rebuke** - Turn your child completely around when they're going the absolute wrong direction.

You know, the moments you're thinking "have you lost your mind?!"

Here's what I really love about this. This verse helps me realize that **every single X on the line is an opportunity.** Every moment is an opportunity for teaching, training, correcting or rebuke. An opportunity to apply God's truth and bring my child up to maturity.

The moments don't always feel like opportunities do they?

Sometimes they just feel like exhaustion and annoyance.

If you don't know our story, my wife Erica and I didn't build our family in the "traditional" way. We had our firstborn AK about 9 years ago. Then, instead of growing our family 1 or 2 at a time, we're real overachievers so we adopted a sibling group of 4.

This means overnight, we had a 10-year-old... and we didn't know how to parent a 10-year-old... Ditto for our 8-year-old and our new 6-year-old and our 5-year-old... And we didn't know any of their full backstories. And we certainly didn't know how to parent 5 at one time.

And if I'm honest... what we worked hard to prepare for was a lot of big Xs. We were braced up for "I hate you" or "you're not my real dad!"... prepared for some trauma drama.

What we weren't really prepared for was this:



The onslaught of normal, neverending parenting moments. Now I know five kids multiplies this, but a lot of parenting feels like this right? A non-stop barrage of needs and questions.

Most reactive parenting isn't about the big, dramatic moments. It's about 1000 tiny efforts in the same faithful direction. It's how you respond the 25th time your son asks "why?"... Or when your teenage daughter wants to fight you again about wearing *those shorts*.

So in reactive parenting, we have to fight to remember **that every X is an opportunity.** An opportunity to teach, train, correct, and/or rebuke.

You may have noticed the 4 categories from 2 Timothy 3:16 line up perfectly with *"instruction and discipline of the Lord"* from Ephesians 6:4. Instruction is teaching and training. Discipline is correction and rebuke. Let's break down those two categories and get practical:

### **Instruction: Teaching & Training**

We teach the brain and train the heart and hands. Teaching is about information and concepts. Training is about helping your child walk in what they know.

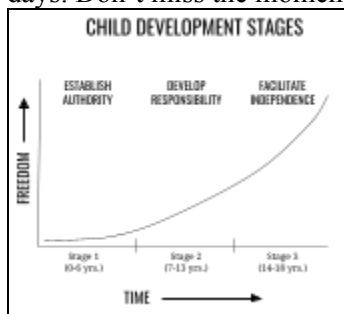
Teaching is about knowledge. Training is about wisdom. Some of you are great at giving your kids information but they also need you to train them how to walk in that.

Just like there is front-end proactive teaching and training we talked about last week, there are tons of opportunities for teaching and reteaching and retraining at the X reactively as well.

## Examples:

- 1.) Freebie - anytime your kid likes anything. A flower. A lizard. A rainbow. The color pink. A ball. A game. A person. Literally anything. It's an opportunity. "Hey honey, you like Paw Patrol? You like puppies don't you? You know who made puppies? God did. God made puppies." Boom. Tie a Bible verse to it. James 1:17. Every good gift comes from above. Everything good in life, God made it. God gives it. How awesome is God? Have 'em memorize it. Killin' it.
- 2.) My friend Ant sees one of his sons hit his brother. Dad steps in and says "Whoa. That's not ok" and as he engages him, he asks, "Why does God give us our strength? To love and protect people. Not to hit". Beautiful. He saw the moment of misbehavior as an opportunity to teach. That doesn't mean he didn't correct. He still did. But he's reactively teaching as he's correcting.
- 3.) I'll give you one more for the older kids. I'm driving around with my teenage daughter and she's got a Taylor Swift song on... so it's sad... and about a boy. It's a Taylor Swift song. So I reach over and turn the radio down and I say, "Hey honey, what's she singing about? That's right... her heart is broken because of this boy. Remember when we were talking about idolatry last week? This is it. Put all your hope in boys and you end up heartbroken because boys make for bad gods." Sometimes she rolls her eyes, "can we listen to the radio again?" but over time she's getting it.

Ok, reactive instruction is about seeing the opportunities for teaching and training all throughout the busy days. Don't miss the moments. Now I want to go back to our chart:



Three stages for how our teaching and training needs to shift focus over time.

### Stage 1: Establishing Authority - Age 0-6.

In the first 6 years of life, you're focusing a lot on teaching and training authority. God is in charge of the universe and He put me in charge of you. This is foundational because learning to listen to you prepares them to listen to God. Your child needs to know that they are not in charge and also that the ones who are in charge love them and are trustworthy. Every temper tantrum is an opportunity.

### Stage 2: Develop Responsibility. Age 7-13.

Our focus shifts from teaching them how to trust, obey and live joyfully under authority to grow their ability to carry weight and responsibility. We start giving our kids real weight for them to carry in a safe environment with minimal risk if they drop the ball. This develops healthy confidence and trustworthiness.

### Stage 3: Facilitate Independence - Age 14-18

And in the last stage, we start handing them more and more freedom so by the time they launch out of our house it isn't the first time they've had to make serious life decisions. We start letting them make more and more decisions, with some coaching and we celebrate their successes and help them learn from their mistakes in a safe environment.

## Training Examples:

**Stage 1** - Before Erica and I had kids we visited one of her best friends who had a 6-month-old. And we watched her put her daughter in a bumby chair. Put her favorite toy in front of her. And mom would say "ok honey. No touch." and the baby would look at her like she was crazy. Start to reach to touch it. Mom "no honey. no touch." and eventually her baby would sit and wait. 30 secs. A minute. Then mom would say "ok you can have it!", give it to her and cheer! We were awestruck - "Your six-year-old can listen like that?" And she said, "well yeah it takes training, but I'm trying to help her have self-control." Beautiful.

**Stage 2** - A friend of mine around the end of stage 2 moves to a new house. It has this pond but there are thick trees and brush all between the house and the pond. Dad sits my friend and his brother down and says, “Boys. I have great news. We have a pond. I also have bad news. We can’t see it. More great news. I just bought these two axes. You’re done when we can see the pond.” And for the next two summers, these two boys got to chopping. My friend is now a dad and he looks back on that and says, “You know he could have bought us a chainsaw. But He wanted us to get some callouses. He wanted us to grow strong and learn how to carry weight.”

Now you may not have a pond or trees or a comfort level with your 10-year-old slinging an axe. But all of our kids in this stage can learn how to do their laundry, make their beds, learn how to cook. It’s not because we don’t want to do the work. That would be an abuse of power. It’s because we see the opportunity to help train our kids to be skilled, responsible, and trustworthy over time.

**Stage 3** - I’ll give you a small example I’ve always found profound. When one of my friends got to high school, his parents looked at him and said “Instead of paying for your haircuts, we’re going to give you the money we would spend on haircuts, and you can decide what you want to do.” My friend learned how to cut his own hair and has been saving money ever since.

It’s a simple but great example of handing off freedom in decision making so they start to make their own decisions with you guiding and coaching them. You’re going to be trusting them with keys to a car and eventually sending them out to college or work. I would argue it’s wise to let them make some decisions, see how they do, and train them up before they leave.

Ok, that’s Instruction: Teaching + training. Let’s shift to **Discipline - Correction + Rebuke:**

What’s the difference? **Correction** is more normal every day, you’ve taught and trained them how to walk on the path... but they’re a bit off. Correction is bringing them back in line with the target. Can be as small as a look. “You sure about that?” Or a full discipline conversation/consequence.

**Rebuke** - Teaching and training are in place. A moment comes and it’s not just a little off base... they’re going the opposite direction of what you’ve taught and trained them in.

Rebuke is needed when your child is off the rails and you need the nuclear option.

Now all discipline, correction, and rebuke thrive on consistency just like kids.

Which means **you need a plan**. For your sanity (and theirs) you need to develop a routine plan for how you respond when your child needs correction. If you’re married, this needs to be a unified plan. Because kids are *incredible* at figuring out what mom is more strict on and what dad is more strict on and they will play you like a fiddle if you aren’t united. “Well, Mom said...”

**You need a plan... And your plan needs a script:**

Starting around 12 months, we started a regular routine script with AK... she’s crawling toward an outlet... “AK Stop. Look at Daddy. Danger. Ok, Daddy?” And then we’d go pick her up and physically move her. Before she could talk, she’d learned “AK Stop” meant stop.

And then this basic script goes with your kid as they get older. So they’re in preschool elementary school and now you’re having them stand at attention as you look them in the eyes and say “Stealing that toy and hitting your sister *with it* was not ok.” here’s why... And then you have them repeat back to you what they did and why it was wrong. And then it’s big hugs and kisses. Jesus forgives our sins and loves us.

Mommy loves you. You’re forgiven. Let’s go try it again! Because even the discipline moments are opportunities to teach and train, right?

And then as teenagers, these are full-blown conversations. Doing whatever you can to help them understand why and how you think and telling them stories of mistakes you made when you were their age and why God and His way of life are better.

**And along with the script, your plan needs some consequences:**

These are your primary tools for reinforcing and applying pressure on the bent areas in your kid arrows that you're putting heat.

Ant's dad - the goal in discipline is to help your child realize sin is not worth it.

Punishment is one tool within the larger scope of discipline. It's saying, "Listen I don't like this. And you don't like this. But I'd rather you experience this small amount of pain now than continue to walk down this path that leads to much greater pain later."

I wish I had more time to go into detail - natural consequences, creative punishments, what you do if you experienced really unhealthy discipline... I'll get into it more on the Midweek podcast, and we'll link to a Milestones resource on Authority and Discipline on the sermon page.

But I do want to get this specific since I think it will apply to all of us:

**Your plan needs to address disobedience, disrespect, and destruction.**

**Disobedience:** Ephesians 6:1 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

Ignoring or downplaying your children's disobedience is not loving. It's neglecting your role as their loving authority and it trains them to be proud.

- Practical. I know different families who handle this in different ways, but for our family, we practice first time listening. We do not count down from 10 or 5 or 3. I'm not interested in empowering my children to enjoy their role as a terrorist that needs to be negotiated with. The expectation in our home is that our kids obey the first time with a good attitude.

**Disrespect:** In your own time, go check out Proverbs 30:17 for a grisly warning about what happens to arrogant kids who mock and scorn their parents.

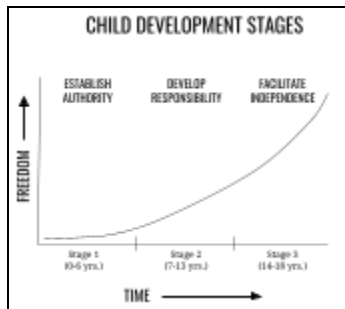
My rough translation - Kids who roll their eyes... die a terribly painful death. So we gotta train that out of them.

- So in our family, the expectation is you listen the first time with a good attitude. I am not afraid to ask my kids to do something over until they can do it with a good attitude.

Last one - **Destruction:** This includes intentionally, you throw a temper tantrum and break a toy and it also includes, carelessly or recklessly you break a vase or hurt your sister.

Practical - this means for us, if you break it you buy it.

Ok as we come to a close and wrap up this discipline section, I want to look back at our chart and point out a dangerous pattern:



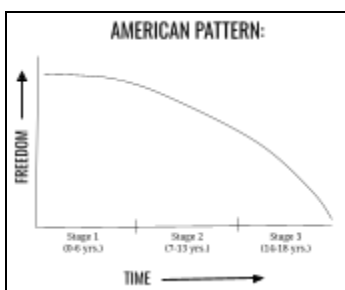
The Biblical vision is we work and labor to train and prepare and shape our kids to launch out.

The American happiness-based vision of parenting does almost the exact opposite on accident.

We give our babies and toddlers maximum freedom and choices at 2, 3, 4 years old. Tons of choices about what they eat, what they wear... you know so they can express and find themselves!! Of course!

But this inadvertently trains them to be wise in their own eyes and arrogant at a young age when the stakes are low.

Somewhere in stage 2 parents start getting a little worried. Wait a second. My kid keeps pushing back all the time. Maybe we need to reign this in a little bit.



And then by stage 3, they're in full-on panic mode. While their 3-year-old saying "No!", giggling and proceeding to do whatever they want was kinda cute... Their 16-year-old doing the same is not cute at all. The stakes go up as the kid grows up. So the parent tries to clamp down. And they show up at church, "Here, you fix them."

But the problem is this is when the child should be growing in the maximum amount of freedom and they know it. You're pulling the reigns when you should be helping them fly.

But you can't because they aren't trustworthy and they aren't responsible and you know it. You accidentally trained them in it.

**So if your kids are little** - don't lose the vision of who you're training them up to be. Yes, it's hard and constant and exhausting now as they're climbing all over you and always at your feet, but there will be a day when you wish they would stay a little closer. Train them in such a way that you can trust them when they aren't as content to stay by your feet.

**And if you've got older kids or** - and you're starting to get a little worried like "what have I done wrong? ... It's too late. I've already messed this up," listen. I can't wave a magic prayer wand and fix them for you. I wish I could. I'd make billions... But here's what I do have. We believe in a God of redemption who doesn't believe in "too late". The grave wasn't too late for Jesus. If He can handle the grave, He can handle your teen and your parenting failures. It's likely going to take a lot of work and a lot of prayer and support from LG and maybe others. It might be awkward, to own your mistakes and say, "Hey, we're not going to do it that way anymore..." AND they're going to hate it... at least at first... but it's worth it.

Last week we landed in **Hebrews 12:11** - *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness ...*

Hebrews 12 also tells us that God disciplines the son he loves. This is what He's doing in us. And He's so good at it. He's an expert at teaching, training, correcting, and rebuking. He is an incredible ally as you go about the hard, beautiful work of bringing up your kids.

I love how Paul in Colossians 1:28-29 says that his goal in preaching the gospel is essentially the same goal we have as parents - he wants to present everyone mature in Christ. He's working to bring them up. Listen to how he describes his work:

**Colossians 1:29** *For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.*

However it's going, whether you feel like you're crushing it or failing miserably... God is with You. He gives his Spirit gladly to those who ask. He wants to teach and train and help you learn how to walk in all of this. He will give you His energy and His Spirit powerfully.

He will not quit working to fill the world with a family of people who love and worship Him. And He's doing it through little biological families and His big spiritual family humbly working together and coming to Him for help.

**Let's pray.**