

February 3 10:00am [This is part 2 of 2 sermons.]

If you've been a parent for any length of time; one thing you've learned is that just when you think you've figured out your child; he or she is upgraded to a newer version that you have to figure out all over again.

One thing I've learned as a parent is that parenting is the hardest thing you will ever do in life. You will have days when you think you are the world's best parent; and within moments believe that you are the most horrible parent in the world (and you child will let you know which one they think you are)!

I've been a parent for 26 years. What I can tell you from my own experience is that the most important thing you can do for your child each day is make certain that you carry them to Lord in prayer. You will not get everything right, neither will you get everything wrong; but what I want you to learn today is that while you and I will not be *perfect* parents the one thing we can be is *praying* parents.

So today I want to share with you some things that I've learned, some things I wish I had done, and some things that I believe will help you to not only be a *praying* parent; but become a model for your children of how prayer can be a vital part of everyone's day.

One thing that every family needs to discover about prayer is that it will be unique to your family and it will change as your children change. People will tell you wonderful stories about what works for them; and what you need to understand is that every family is going to be unique when it comes to developing habits of family prayer.

Personally, we tried just about everything imaginable when it came to family prayer time. Some of it worked, some of it appeared to fail; and sometime we just abandoned the whole idea!

Now I say all that to make a very simple point about developing a family prayer time. You need to find a rhythm that works for your family. When your child is small you may be tucking them in to bed at night and that can become a great time to say a prayer and read a Bible story.

But as your child grows and you and your child fill your schedule with entirely too many activities; then you need to find the time that works with your family schedule.

Maybe it means setting aside time in the morning at breakfast. Maybe it means that you get to rehearsal/practice ten minutes early so that you can take time to pray. Again, the key is to find the rhythm that works for your family; because while you will not be the *perfect* parent; you should always be a *praying* parent.

One of the reasons that this church exists is due to a praying parent, Suzanna Wesley. Suzanna Wesley gave birth to 19 children, including John and Charles Wesley, who envisioned the Methodist movement. With 19 kids in a small house she never had a moment to herself; but Suzanna prayed fervently for her children.

If Suzanna Wesley could find time to pray, and specifically for her 19 children; I don't think any of us can claim to have an excuse. Our children need to see us pray and we need to model prayer for our children.

As Mark Batterson says in his book, *Praying Circles Around Your Children*,

You don't become a praying parent by default. You do it by design, by desire, by discipline. Whatever you decide to do as a result of today's message; the truth is that it will take sheer determination. But if you determine to circle your children in prayer, you will shape their destinies, just like Susanna Wesley shaped the destiny of her children. And your prayers will live on in their lives long after you die.

Now I've sort of touched on one important aspect of developing a family prayer rhythm; but just in case you didn't pick up on it let me say it loud and clear: developing a family prayer time grows out of your own personal prayer experience.

As adults, we will model for our children the importance of prayer. Just as your children will learn other traits and characteristics by watching you; they will learn the value and importance of prayer and Bible reading by watching you. If you model reading the Bible and praying, your child will understand that it is important for them to develop this area of their life as well.

Now I realize that not everyone here may believe in prayer and the importance of Bible reading; why you're not even sure about whether or not God exists or if this church stuff is right for you; but I bet that as a parent there are some characteristics, attitudes, and actions you would like your child to develop.

We all want children to grow up understanding the principles of sharing, loving, giving, and encouraging. We want our children to understand that it is wrong to steal and lie and a host of other things. Well the Bible is full of stories that demonstrate all of these characteristics. They are stories that have become a part of nearly every culture. Stories like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 and the principle of the Golden Rule in Luke 6:31.

And what parent doesn't want their child to make good choices when it comes to choosing friends? The Bible has a whole book full of Proverbs that can serve as reminders when it comes to choosing friends and other wise choices. One of my favorite proverbs is Proverbs 13:20, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

Now there is a lesson from which anyone can benefit! Choose your friends wisely, because if you choose to spend time with a fool, well eventually they will be like a time bomb just waiting to explode- and you don't want to be there to take the shrapnel when they explode!

So even if you are a parent who isn't sure about this God stuff; there are certainly advantages to using a time each day to teach and train your child how to make good choices and how to interact with other people.

So before we go any further this morning let me ask you a question: ‘Are there any perfect parents here?’ Now let me ask this: ‘Are there any parents here who want to become praying parents?’

Ok, then let me give you some simple suggestions for developing a rhythm to your family prayer/devotional time.

1. Create a place and time for your family to be together for prayer and Bible reading. I heard a pastor say that at one point in their life they just met on the steps as everyone was headed to bed. Whatever works!
2. Get everyone involved. Children and parents can both be active participants in reading and praying. Parents, remember this, don’t just pray *for* your child, pray *with* your child. Children can pray simple, yet powerful, prayers
3. Make a Prayer List. One simple way to guide your prayer time is to develop a list of people and needs. Not only does it help you to keep track of who/what you are praying for; it provides you a place to track the answers.
4. Mark Batterson, in his book, *Praying Circles Around Your Children*, offers the idea of creating prayer mantras. This is simply taking a passage of scripture and repeating it/praying it over and over again.

As Mark says the repetition and consistency helps to get it from the head to the heart. A simple example is the verse from Luke 2:52 that describes the transition from Jesus’ birth to adulthood: ‘And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.’

You can take that verse and turn it into the simple pray: ‘May you grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.’ Wouldn’t that be a beautiful prayer for your children to hear every day?

As you read the Bible and find God’s promises for your family or an individual child just make the verse a prayer. As you consistently pray the prayer not only will it be a blessing to your child; but an added benefit will be that your child will memorize the verse!

There are a lot more ideas that we could share this morning; and maybe even some that you have developed as a family. Share them with one another as a way of encouraging one another. (Also, I have several copies of Mark’s book to distribute. Maybe several families can take a copy and pass it around or just download it onto your Kindle for \$1.99.) Just remember that you and your family need to find the rhythm that is right for you. Remember that you are not going to be a *perfect* parent and get this right every time; but you can be a *praying* parent!

One thing I can assure about being a praying parent; 100% of the prayers you *don’t* pray won’t get answered. But by your sheer determination; by design, desire and discipline you can become a *praying* parent. And this is most assuredly true; while you never know *how* or *when* God will answer your prayers; you can be sure of this: Your prayers will shape the destiny of your family for generations to come.

Before we come together for communion I want to take the opportunity to pray for you and your family today. So what I would like you to do is join hands together as family, and if someone here today doesn't have a family to join hands with would you reach out and adopt them into your family this morning.