

This message was delivered on Mother's Day by Remy and included a child dedication ceremony. Remy shared nine recommendations to future and young parents based on his 23 years of parenting and the text from Deuteronomy 6:1-9. It also includes the biblical basis for child dedication.

## **The Path to Parenting**

(Note: the child dedication teaching that preceded the sermon is located at the end of this message.)

Last Saturday Lisa and I attended our last Prom Grand March here in Menomonie. Our youngest child, Rebecca, is a senior and about to graduate. As we drove home from the March I was feeling sad and I realized that I was grieving a bit because it marked the beginning of the end of our Phase One parenting, that is, from birth to high school graduation. I've been told by those older than me that parenting never stops, but high school graduation is at least a time of closure for Phase One.

For Lisa and me, parenting has been a great experience. We've loved watching each one of our children grow up. We've enjoyed every soccer and basketball game. We've enjoyed their friends traipsing in and out of our house. But I have to admit, I didn't know anything about parenting.

You see, I didn't think I needed to know anything. I thought parenting was a no-brainer. I thought that all I had to do to be a good parent was to love my kids and not do the stupid things that my parents did and I'd be good-to-go. But as I got knee deep into parenting I realized that it wasn't that simple. I realized that I was impacting the lives of three people for life – that every mistake I made, every bad attitude I projected - had the potential of either scarring my children for life or undermining our relationship for years to come, or both. Plus, I had heard that how I related to them as a father had a significant influence on how they would relate to God for years to come...*all pretty sobering stuff!* I suddenly realized that it might be good if I learned a few things about being a parent.

Well, I have learned a few things over the last 23 years. And so, in the closing moments that I have with you all today, I want to speak to primarily the younger crowd. I want to talk to you about some of the things I wish someone would have told me before I became a parent.

### **1. Love God and obey him.**

The most important thing that you can do for your children is introduce them to God. Sometimes we forget that. We think we need to expose them to the right experiences in life; like, music or sports or travel or education. I love all of those things, but if I never expose my children to God, I've missed the point of being a parent.

But, do you know what?, I can't pass on to my children what I don't have myself, right? So, if I don't have a relationship with God, how am I going to do them justice? I can't just drop them off for Sunday school and go for a cup of coffee hoping that the church will take care of it.

If I want to impact my child spiritually it's important that I have a relationship with God *myself*. And even if I don't have children yet I can start now. That doesn't just mean being a faithful

church attender or volunteering a few hours a week at church. I'm talking about knowing God *personally* – obeying him fully – choosing to follow Jesus at every juncture in my life. So, if you want to be a good parent, prepare yourself by seeking God with all your heart.

## **2. Develop structure** (be responsible, accountable).

Now, I don't want to offend any college students here, but I've noticed that some Twenty Something's tend to pick up a few bad lifestyle habits in college. I'm not talking about drinking or partying or any of that. I'm just talking about a carefree attitude that works well when you are taking classes and working part-time and living on your own but doesn't work so well when you have a mortgage to pay, a spouse to love and a child to raise.

Parenthood requires that you to kick into a whole new gear. So, if you want parenting to be in your future, there needs to be a shift in your lifestyle. You can't be as spontaneous as you once were because you need to create a stable home.

## **3. Seek inner healing.**

Insecure people tend to produce insecure children. Angry people tend to produce angry children. And emotionally healthy people tend to produce emotionally healthy children. It's not a guarantee, but it's a lot more likely. I don't think anything motivated me more to deal with my personal baggage than seeing how my problems negatively impacted my kids. I decided that it was much easier for me to deal with my issues *now* than to have all three of my kids deal with my issues in their lives, *later*, and probably at great expense.

And so, if you want to be a good parent, I encourage you to deal with your "stuff". Don't think that time will heal your wounds. It just covers them up and pushes you deeper into denial.. Bring your problems to God – and maybe a good counselor – as soon as you can. Today might not be too soon.

## **4. Seek a spouse who will parent well.**

The most exciting person you date on a weekend in college may not make the best parent. So if you hope to have children in your future, look for someone who is a good role model for children as well as someone who is willing to engage with children on a daily basis. Don't assume you are on the same page because when kids start coming, it's too late then.

## **5. Marry and develop a God-honoring home.**

I say "marry" in contrast to "living together". Five years ago I probably would have never had this on my list. But living together has become a socially acceptable first step to marriage. So I need to say explicitly what used to be assumed.

Too often today couples are living together as an experiment- testing the waters of marriage. Now, I understand the temptation. There are so many bad marriages that young people think living together will eliminate a bad decision. Or maybe they think it is a wise choice financially. But God called us to one life-long relationship for good reason. So we need to abide by that.

There are many problems with living together but one of the problems is that, to the couples surprise, they might get pregnant, and instead of the child coming into a loving marriage and an

established home, the child comes into an experiment – an experiment that wasn't built for children, and an experiment that is not approved by God.

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for the man to leave at that point because, in his mind, fatherhood wasn't part of the bargain. And once there is a child he knows that the pressure for marriage is going to increase tenfold. So he solves the problem by packing up and leaving. And that's not really fair to the child, is it? That can all be avoided by simply obeying God's call to marriage.

I like what it says in Deuteronomy.

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe ..., so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you...*

It doesn't say that God wants us to obey his commands to spoil our fun. It says that we are to obey God's commands *so that* we might enjoy a long life and *so that* life will go well for us. Do yourself and your children a favor, and skip the living in phase and get married.

#### **6. Become a student of marriage.** (love your spouse).

Maybe you've heard it said that the best thing a father can do for his child is to love the child's mother. And the same is true for mother loving the father. If you are a single parent, that's not possible. But if your marriage is still intact, that's great advice.

Working on your marriage is going to create a strong home life for your children. If your children are constantly watching you bicker and fight, or experiencing an icy silence, they'll live in a state of tension and insecurity and confusion wondering how long the family is going to last. But when they see you working at loving each other, and preferring one another, then you release them to just be kids and enjoy life in peace.

#### **7. Become a student of children.** (they're not little adults!)

It's interesting how we'll go to college for four years to learn about computers or some other career but we won't read one book about how to raise our children. Why is that? I think it's because we are under the illusion that good parenting is obvious and it comes easy. But it's neither obvious nor easy

To be a parent is to be a leader and leadership takes a lot of wisdom and self-sacrifice – two things that most of us are pretty short on. The minute you know that you are going to be a parent, and every year that you are a parent, I encourage you to be reading about children and taking classes about children and asking God to show you what it means to be a good parent. The Bible is a great place to learn how God “parent's” us and so we can learn from him.

#### **8. Seize every moment to bless your children.**

In our busy culture there will always be something competing with your taking time to be with your child. And even when you are with them, it will be tempting to be somewhere else mentally –only partially engaged with them. But don't let that happen. Once your children leave the house you'll be so glad that you spent every second with your children that you did and went out of your way to bless them.

Don't reduce your parenting to telling your kids what to do and punishing them when they fail. Speak into their lives. Find the good and champion it. Call out of them the gifts that you see and release them into God's calling on their lives. Trust me, as you invest in their lives, you will reap the rewards as they turn around and bless you back.

## **9. Seize every moment to teach them about God.**

I want you to notice something about the passage in Deuteronomy that I quoted earlier.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

It assumes that if you love the LORD with all your heart, soul and strength, that you'll teach your children about God.

Parents are to do three things. First, *impress* God's commands on their children. The word for "impress" means to carve or tattoo with a sharp knife. We can be thankful that they didn't take this literally! But the word gives you the idea that we aren't supposed to take this lightly. God's word is supposed to have a lasting effect on our children.

Moses gives practical examples of how to do that. He says...

*Talk about them [God's commands] when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

That doesn't mean you need to be obnoxious and cram God down their throats. It means that God is supposed to be so much a part of your life that it naturally oozes out of you through out your whole day instead of a forced, preachy way. Your relationship with God shouldn't be something that embarrasses your child but makes them feel secure and gives them pride in you.

The second thing it says is to

*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

Now, this command the religious Jews *did* take literally. They would take pieces of the scripture and tie them on their hands and forehead. But I think they missed the point. The point was that when your children see you they should see someone who knows God and is careful to obey God's word. Nothing will turn a child away from God quicker than a parent who quotes the Bible and acts religious but doesn't obey God themselves.

And finally, it says that we should write God's commands on our doorframes and our gates. The word for "write" here literally means to engrave, so it's something permanent. And that speaks to me of a legacy, something that is passed down. In other words, your faith isn't something that comes and goes based on circumstances but it's something permanent and it's something that you are known for by others. When your children look at your life they see a godly heritage. Something that's solid. Something that they can turn to as a model for their own life.

The Bible says that...

*Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him. Psalm 127:3*

Because of this, I hope you'll do all you can to prepare yourself to be the best parent possible.

**Prayer:** *Father, children are a gift from you. Thank you for the children that you have given us. And help us, not only as parents, but as a community, to resolve to faithfully raise them up in the knowledge of you. Amen.*

### **Child Dedication.**

At Cedarbrook, we choose to dedicate children to God without baptizing them. We believe that baptism should be done after someone has made a conscious choice to follow Jesus. But we respect the fact that some churches do dedicate children with baptism. It doesn't make us better. It doesn't make them wrong. We are just different in our approach.

Dedicating children to God has a long tradition in the Bible. We first see it in the book of Genesis with Abraham. God told Abraham to set his children apart by circumcising the male children.

*"Your part of the agreement," God told Abraham, "is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised; the flesh of his foreskin must be cut off. This will be a sign that you and they have accepted this covenant. Genesis 17:9-11*

The act of circumcision was very symbolic because in cutting away the flesh, it implied that God followers are willing to die to their own desires and to wholly dedicate themselves to God's desires. It set them apart for God both physically and spiritually. (The word "holy" means "set apart for God").

There's another Bible story that points to the idea of dedication. There was a woman by the name of Hannah who longed to have a child. She was so desperate that she made a deal with God. This is what the Bible says...

*In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, ...1 Samuel 1:10, 11*

That is, she was offering to turn her son over to the priest to raise her son in the Temple. Well, God answered her prayer and gave her a son, by the name of Samuel. And so, as promised, Hannah dedicated her son to serve God in the temple.

*When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and half a bushel of flour and some wine. ...I asked the LORD to give me this child, and he has given me my request. Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life." And they worshiped the LORD there. 1 Samuel 1:24-28*

Now, there are a couple things here that we can be thankful for today as these families dedicate their children. First, we can be thankful that they don't have to bring a bull & ½ bushel of flour

& wine. Second, we can be thankful that they don't have to leave their child with me. There aren't many things in the Bible that we can improve on but this is one of them! And to be quite honest, Lisa and I are thankful that we don't have to go home with a herd of bulls and a bunch of babies!

We can see throughout the Bible that God calls us, not only to *follow him* but for us to raise our children in the knowledge of the LORD as well. And so, this morning, these families are following a long line of God followers in dedicating their children to serve the LORD. People have been dedicating their children for over 4000 years. Isn't that amazing?

Let me introduce each family to you briefly.

First Service:

**Adeline Constance Ruth** (11/26/2004)

Parents: Greg & Christine Ruth

Brother: Kellen Ruth

**Rhylee Ann Smith** (1/15/2006)

Parents: Karen Meindel & Gordon Smith

**Greysen Lee Amundson** (3/25/2006)

Parents: Cory and Tammie Amundson

Siblings: Kaylyn Amundson – 11, Colton Amundson – 9, Calvin Amundson - 6

Second Service:

**Grace Evelyn Kehn** (3/24/2006)

Parents: Brad & Cheryl Kehn,

Sister - Autumn 4 1/2 years, Brother - Hunter 2 years old.

**Ezekiel Lawrence Moret** (4/21/2006)

Parents: Jessica & Leonard Moret

Siblings: Tiffany, Sonja and Zachary

**Kylie Rae Mogen** 12/20/00

**Alyssa Jane Mogen** 1/29/03

**MyKenna Lynn Mogen** 6/1/05

Parents: Chad and Kari Mogen

Moses charge to the Israelites (and us):

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe ..., so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you ..., just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.*

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

(Remy prayed for each child and their family).