Title: Successful Christian Parenting

Author: John MacArthur

Age Relevance: Fathers with children through their teen years.

Reviewer’s Recommendation: This is an important book for learning how to be a Christian parent and I would recommend it to all parents, whether their children are toddlers, or if they are middle-schoolers or older. I first read it when my 11 year old son was a baby, and I have used these principles ever since then. Understanding that our children are born sinners, and then focusing on teaching them the truth, disciplining them, and not provoking them to anger, is a solid Biblical model for raising kids who will honor the Lord with their lives. I like how MacArthur supports his points with scripture throughout this book. These are not his opinions. He is just telling us what God has instructed us to do as parents. I also like the importance that MacArthur places on having a Christ-centered marriage. Without it, our children will have no example to follow and parents will “virtually guarantee that their sons and daughters will fail spiritually.”

Synopsis: This book is for parents who are ready to focus on solid Biblical principles in order to raise their children “in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4).

Introduction page x-xi:

Christian families are self-destructing all around. As society has waded deeper into the morass of humanism and secularism, the church has too often failed to stand against the perilous tide. Unfortunately, the impact of widespread worldliness and compromise in the church is taking a toll on Christian families.

More than ever, Christians need to know what the Bible teaches about parenting and begin to put it to practice.

This is not a book on child psychology. It is unlike the pragmatic or formulaic approaches to parenting and family life. I am proposing no new method. Instead, my goal is to present the principles of biblical parenting with as much clarity as possible, and help to make sense of parents’ duties before God. I’m convinced that if Christian parents understand and apply the simple principles Scripture sets forth, they can rise above the trends of secular society and bring up their children in a way that honors Christ, in any culture and under any circumstances.

Chapter One (pages 3-26): Shade for Our Children

Page 3:

There’s no question that society as a whole is in a serious state of moral and spiritual decline. So the question that faces Christian parents today is whether we
can plant some trees that will shade future generations from what may well be the blistering heat of anti-Christian values in an anti-Christian world. Are we planting the right kind of shade trees, or are we leaving our children totally exposed?

The author describes the demise of modern society and of the family and asks the question is it too late to save the family. Statistics are provided highlighting that Christian families are no better off and describing some of the church efforts to build stronger Christian families as off-base. Four basic principles are given as the basis for a Christian parent’s perspective:

- Children should be seen as a blessing, not a hardship
- Parenting is supposed to be a joy, not a burden
- Success in parenting is measured by what the parents do, not by what the child does
- A child’s most important influences come from parents, not peers

Chapter Two (pages 27-46): Understanding your Child’s Greatest Need

Pages 28-29:

There is, however, one gigantic pitfall that is too often overlooked by Christian parents. It is something so basic to what we believe as Christians, so clearly taught in Scripture, that no Christian parent should ever be caught off guard by it. Yet I am constantly amazed at how little is said in most Christian parenting curricula about it. I’m speaking of the child’s inborn inclination toward evil.

The author describes the doctrine of total depravity. Our kids do not come into this world seeking God and righteousness. They come into the world seeking the fulfillment of sinful and selfish desires. Three wrong responses to this issue are described:

- Behaviorism
- Isolationism
- Self-Esteem

The child’s greatest need is regeneration, the new birth.

Chapter Three (pages 47-68): Good News for Your Kids

Pages 47-48:

The gospel is simple and should be presented simply. Parents have the best years of the child’s life to explain, clarify, stress, and reemphasize gospel truths. The key is to be faithful and consistent in both teaching and exemplifying the gospel. One of the
worst things parents can do is be intimidated into thinking someone else would make
a better evangelist for their child, thus abdicating their most crucial responsibility,
missing the best opportunities for reaching their children, and forfeiting the best
blessings of parenthood.

The following strategies for presenting the gospel are explained:

   Take Your Time and be Thorough
   Teach Them the Whole Counsel of God
   Highlight the Doctrines Most Crucial to the Gospel:

   Teach them about God’s holiness
   Show them their sin
   Instruct them about Christ and what He has done
   Tell them what God demands of sinners
   Advise them to count the cost thoughtfully
   Urge them to trust Christ

   Teach Your Children Diligently

Chapter Four (pages 69-106): Teaching Your Children Wisdom

Page 69:

   Teaching children the gospel by no means exhausts the parents’ teaching
   responsibility. Also bound up in the principle of Deuteronomy 6:6-7 is the duty of
teaching our children wisdom for life. The gospel is the necessary starting point,
because “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:3). No one is
truly wise who rejects or disregards the gospel message. But beyond the basic
truths of the gospel are also many vital biblical lessons about character, integrity,
justice, prudence, discernment, and all the practical issues of life. Parents are
charged with the duty of carefully training their children with godly wisdom in all such
matters.

An introduction to the book of Proverbs is provided. From Proverbs the following
lessons are vital for parents to teach their children:

   Fear Their God
   Guard Their Minds
   Obey Their Parents (includes Discipline)
   Select Their Companions
   Control Their Luxts
   Enjoy Their Spouses
   Watch Their Words
   Pursue Their Work
Chapter Five (pages 107-130): The First Commandment with a Promise

Page 107:

Teaching our children to obey their parents is more than a matter of merely pragmatic wisdom. It is also a bedrock moral principle, given a place of prominence among the Ten Commandments, and then emphasized repeatedly throughout Scripture.

This teaching requires diligence because of the corruption all around them, the curse on the inside tending to steer them the wrong way, and the child’s own immaturity. The goal is teach our children to grow in the wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). Intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual needs must be addressed.

Obedience is defined as heeding and it involves the idea of listening intently and conforming to a command. It implies an inward attitude of respect and honor, as well as external acts of obedience. God’s design is that all human relationships are based on what is learned through obedience in childhood. If children learn respect and submission in the family, that will enable them throughout their lives to have proper relationships.

The command for children to honor their parents implies a correct inward attitude. Parents are to look beyond behavior to heart attitudes. Parents are to pour the Word of God into their children so that it informs their conscience and it constantly talks to them. This is how right attitudes are formed.

This command also carries a promise: “That it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth: (Ephesians 6:3). This is not an ironclad promise but in general obedience results in a longer, more harmonious life, and a defiant attitude always causes misery, and often causes people to die before their time. In other words, submission to parents is in the child’s own best interest.

Chapter Six (pages 131-158): The Nurture and Admonition of the Lord

Page 131-132:

Christian parents still struggle with the remnants of fleshly appetites and ungodly habits. Like the apostle Paul, we often find ourselves doing the very things we hate (Romans 7:15-24). We are all prone to fleshly and sinful behavior, and this has its inevitable effect on our parenting.

There are three specific duties Paul outlines in Ephesians 6:4:
Don’t Provoke Your Children to Anger by:

- Overprotection
- Overindulgence
- Favoritism
- Setting Unrealistic Goals
- Discouraging Them
- Neglect
- Condescension
- Withdrawing Love
- Excessive Discipline

Give Them the Right Training – The Greek word for training implies comprehensive training describing all aspects including guidance, instruction, and both positive and negative discipline. Deuteronomy 6 is explained. Parents must first have the commands of God in their hearts and then:

- Teach Their Children About God
- Teach Them to Love God
- Teach Them to Obey God from the Heart
- Teach Them to Follow Your Example
- Teach Them to be Wary of the World Around Them

Admonish Them When Necessary

Chapter Seven (pages 159-182): The Father’s Role

Page 161:

The apostle Paul’s instructions to husbands are simple: Love your wives. Love them as Christ loved the church. Cherish them. Honor them. Protect them. Serve them. Lead them. You are the head of the wife in the same sense that Christ is the head of the church.

The principles of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 are used to describe the meaning of love toward our wives. The following aspects of love are described:

- Sacrificial
- Considerate
- Chivalrous
- Treating our Wives as Spiritual Equals, Joint Heirs with Christ
- Purifying
- Caring
- Enduring

Page 180 contains the following quote on the motive for this kind of love:
“That’s the best motive I know for a husband to love his wife. His love for her honors Christ. How he treats her is a testimony not only to the wife, but also to the world at large about Christ’s love for His people. The husband who understands this sacred mystery will delight to love, purify, protect, and care for his wife. And this sacred union is the foundation from which fathers nourish and encourage their children toward maturity.”

Chapter Eight (pages 183-201): The Mother’s Role

The author provides a brief overview of family problems from Genesis. The curse on woman in Genesis 3:16 (your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you) is described on page 185:

The desire spoken of in Genesis 3:16 is not the woman’s sexual or emotional desire for her husband. It is an illicit desire to usurp his headship.

This goes directly against the command given to wives: She is commanded to submit to the leadership of her husband. It is not optional. Several aspects of submission are provided:

She is required to submit only to her husband, not to men in general. Several paragraphs are devoted to the dilemma this causes for working mothers and the difficulties that result in the home.

She submits because just as Christ is head of the church so the husband is the head of the wife. The order in a marriage therefore is a divine picture of Christ and the church.

She submits in everything with a willing and agreeable heart just as the church submits to Christ.

She submits to unkind, unloving, and/or unbelieving husbands because her obedience might be the thing that turns him to God (1 Peter 3:1-5).

Submission stops when the husband’s commands are contrary to God’s. She is not even permitted to submit to him in these circumstances.

Conclusion (Page 201)

Successful parenting cannot be achieved by following human techniques and child psychology. True success in parenting only results from faithful obedience to God’s instructions for the family.

The family is the one environment where your devotion, faithfulness, and consistency matter most. It’s where the most is at stake. It’s where the greatest blessings can be
realized. There is simply no greater earthly blessing than raising your children in a way that honors God, and then seeing them grow up to honor God with their own lives.

Appendix 1 – Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam by Phil Johnson

This contains the following advice:

- Understand that Children can Grasp the Essence of Almost Any Truth
- Avoid Figurative Language and Unexplained Symbolism when Teaching
- Clearly Separate Reality from Fantasy
- Find Out What Your Children are Thinking
- Don’t Expect Them To Get The Lesson Right The First Time

Appendix 2 – Answering Some Key Questions about the Family

This contains the author’s answers to a number of difficult family questions.

Bio: John MacArthur (born June 19, 1939) is a United States evangelical writer and minister noted for his radio program entitled Grace to You. MacArthur is a popular author and conference speaker and has served as the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California since 1969, and as the president of The Master's College (and the related The Master's Seminary) in Santa Clarita, California.

MacArthur has authored or edited more than 150 books, most notably the MacArthur Study Bible, The Battle for the Beginning, Think Biblically!: Recovering a Christian Worldview, Hard To Believe, and the children's book A Faith to Grow On.

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