

Parenting that reflects  
the image of god



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## Abstract

The inceptive understanding of God by children is deeply shaped by their relationships with their parents. Premium Christian parenting will endeavor to reflect the character of God as a foundation for developing the child's emerging relationship with God. A solid foundation for children to experience the love of God laid by providing genuine love with clear boundaries.

## I. Introduction

The most influential environment in the lives of the majority of children is the home. The first experience of the world by a child is the family and continues to occupy a dominant portion in their lives until adulthood. Though the school also plays an important role for most children and youth, the family remains the nucleus of their life experience. The family has played a crucial role in the outworking of the purposes of God on earth from the beginning.

The family has been designed to provide the platform for the nurture and training of each subsequent generation. God designed the family to reflect and bring forth the spiritual truth. The Scripture makes use of images of the family to speak of our relationship with God in Christ. Believers are adopted children in the family of God (Romans 8: 15-17). God is our Father (Hebrews 12: 5-11), and we are his children and joint heirs with Christ (1 John 3: 1; Romans 8: 17). These relationships illustrate the high calling and task which accompanies Christian parenthood. The primary focus of this paper is to develop some strategies for parents who want to raise their children in a way that will reflect the image of God. To carry out this assignment,

some research findings and biblical principles on loving, disciplining and developing children of spiritual and moral character will be examined.

## II. The Research on Parenting and Children God's Concepts.

The huge influence of home and family is much greater than what happens the few hours that children spend Church or other Christian programs. It is the home that provides the primary shape for the spiritual understanding of children (Smith, 2005). Though the formal spiritual upbringing in the home is valuable, there is proof to suggest that more noteworthy for spiritual development is the nature of connection that is raised in the family. Variety of studies have pointed to substantial correlation that exists between parental childrearing practices and children concepts of God (Choua & Uata, 2012; de Roos, 2006; Lee & Earia, 2000; Limke & Mayfield, 2011; Moriaxy & Hoffman, 2007)

The recent research of 'neurotheologian' (Albright & Ashbrook, 2001; Newberg, d'Aquili & Rause, 2001) suggests that there may be some form of 'God's Spot' in every human (Beauregard & O'Leary, 2007; Hay & Nye, 2006; Seybold, 2007). Whether 'God's Spot' exist or not, the agreement is that children natural spiritual curiosity appears to be inborn. Possibly, the best interpretation of the research starts with the identification of the fact that the search of a child for God is tinted by human relationships. One interesting study has pointed to the value of "bidirectional" religious communication in the home in which parents and children are active, and both are active, and both behave in ways that may ultimately influence the other (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). The situation in which parents both listen

and guide the children's expression of faith will likely lead to long-term faith and commitment on the part of the children.

Parent-child affinity is the most instant and persistent relationship that go through in children's early developmental years of life, and this is probably the reason why this relationship deeply impact children perception of God. Concerned parents who recognize this pattern always look for ways and means to direct their children to a healthy relationship with God. Studies have also shown that father's relationship with the children may be more influential. Longitudinal Study of Generation LSOG) has shown a substantially greater impact on religious transference in close father-child interaction than close mother-child interaction (Bengtson, Putney, & Harris, 2013).

### III. Biblical Principles for Parenting that reflects the Image of God.

#### 1. The atmosphere Of the Christian Home.

A home that is represented by the presence of God should be filled with an atmosphere of love, forgiveness, openness, acceptance and honesty. The ideal Christian home should be a place of fun, creative activities, enjoyment, encouragement and relaxed attitudes. This can only be possible if Christ is the unified factor in the life of the family and parents set a good example of what it means to be a believer in Christ.

There is the need for Christ-like attitude to prevail in parents so that every member of the household is made to feel very important in the family.

Parents should model before their children the quality of mutual respect for one and other. The individuality and dignity of each member of the family

must be recognized in a positive and encouraging manner. Parents should avoid favoritism, and there should be no comparison of one child with another. The great mistake that Rebeca made by loving Jacob more than Esau his senior brother should be avoided in the home. It is also very important for parents to ask for forgiveness from their children when they embarrass, mistreat or break a promise. This good attitude will make honesty and esteem for each member of the household to be implanted in the mind of the children.

#### IV. Spiritual Development Principles

The Scripture states in Deuteronomy 6: 4-5, “ Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God; the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your might.” Parents cannot impact what they do not have to their children. It follows therefore that parents should have a growing relationship that their children can emulate with God. The first necessary condition for a godly parent is to love God with all his strength and might. And this can be achieved through an unfailing relationship of dependence, trust, and communion with the Lord. Before love can radiate in our home, it must first be in our hearts as we respond to God’s love and walk in it.

Another condition can be found in Deuteronomy 6: 6 which states, “ And those words which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.” Parents need to respond to God’s love and also to His Word. The Word of God speaks to every area of life, and the success of parents in any area depends so much on the degree to which they know and make a claim on

relevant biblical principles. Children cannot be raised in the image of God by doing just what comes to mind naturally.

Deuteronomy 6: 20-24 admonishes parents to tell their children when they ask questions about what the requirements and regulations that commanded mean. In other words, parents should be ready to share their testimonies of the goodness of the Lord in their lives. This will make parents a living model for their children. What parents communicate through their actions are far more than what they say verbally. In other words, parents must demonstrate practically the reality of their faith for their children to emulate.

Children will copy and do exactly what they see in their parents. If parents are dedicated to positive spiritual change and growth, their children will follow suit. They will not walk in the way of the Lord just because they are told to do so. This is because children respond to reality, not pretense or lip service. For instance, if a father who wants his children to grow in the image of God is unkind to his wife and treats others with disrespect, the children will be confused with the distorted image of God. A healthy view is best transmitted by the parent who will allow the Spirit of God to make them loving and Christ-like.

Another principle that will help parents to raise children in the image of God is that of love and boundaries. Though the language of fatherhood is not directly given in the story of creation, one can see the balance between love and boundaries displayed in Genesis chapter one. Here God provided an environment of space for Adam and Eve and all the creatures. The

separation of light from darkness in Genesis 1: 4-5 and the waters below (Genesis 1: 6-7) show God's value for order and space.

When God created Adam, He provided a space He provided a space for him to carry out the first assignment of naming all the animals (Genesis 2: 19-20). In like manner parents need to create order and space in which children will be able to express their voices, we reflect God's character in our relationship with them (Shaw & Constatineanu, 2003).

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus completely redefined the fatherhood of God. The image of God in this parable is that of a father whose love, care, forgiveness, goodness and compassion has no limits. The central theme in the Gospel narratives is Immanuel, incarnation, and paralysis. God in Christ enters the world of his children to direct them to God. In the same manner, Christian parents must reflect God's character by entering into the world of their children in order to show them the way to God. In Jesus' teaching, he made mention of how God cares for the birds of the air in Mathew 6: 26, makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and allows rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mathew 5: 45), and looks after little ones (Mathew 18: 14).

Paul also extends the same message to all believers were formerly slaves to the devil, but now they are now the beloved children of God (Galatians 4: 6). This invitation is now for parents whose lives can become a good example of what it means to made in the image of God and live a life full of love and holiness. A good reflection of the character of God as an example for family life is a challenge to many of our traditional stereotypes of the roles of

gender in parenting. God is not only referred to as a father, but many images suggest His motherly fatherhood. In Psalms 17: 8, God is described as a mother eagle who hovers over its young, and then pushes the eaglet out of the nest (Deuteronomy 32: 11), while underneath is the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33: 27). Jesus also made use of imagery to express his emotions towards Jerusalem in Mathew 23: 37.

When parents understand the richness of God's love and His holiness, their lives become a clear witness to others. In the same manner, homes are represented by boundaries and love are likely to show God's holiness and love under which children can embrace the gospel and live to display the character of God.

The placing of a child in the midst by Jesus in Mathew 18: 2 points to the mutual nature of parenting that reflect the image of God; children learn about God through the nature of their relationship with their parents and the character and behavior of children can alert adults to the challenges of living with integrity in their covenant relationship with God (Shaw & Constantineanu, 2013). Children should be encouraged and sanctioned within the family, both parents and children experience the mutual joy of learning and growth that is one of the features of hospitable space.

## 1. Love and Discipline

### (i) Love

Rules and regulations are important in the home, but they cannot have meaning unless they are within the context of a relationship. Some parents



do not discipline their children because they don't want to hurt their feelings. This is a wrong approach because a child that is not disciplined will eventually become unruly. The Scripture in Hebrews 12: 6 states that the Lord chastens those whom He loves and scourges every son whom He receives. Whenever it becomes necessary to punish a child, it is important to give to give reasons and at the same time reaffirm your love so that the child will know that you hate his behavior, not him.

Philippians 4: 8 admonishes us to allow our minds to dwell on what is honorable, true, pure, of good report and worthy of praise. Love lays emphasis on the positive, not the negative. Parents who use loving affirmation accomplish more than those who make negative comments. Parents can teach their children to love by displaying love. It is very disheartening to children to see their parents fighting or yelling at each other. Love should be the lifestyle of everyone in the home.

(ii). Discipline.

The Scripture admonishes parents in 1 Timothy 3: 4 to maintain discipline at home. But this discipline as discussed earlier must be balanced with love. Discipline without love will lead to hostility and resentment. Love without discipline will spoil a child. Ephesians 6: 1-4 will help in maintaining a balance. The words instruction and discipline refer to preventive and corrective discipline. Biblical discipline involves both the negative activity of punishment for disobedience and the positive aspect of teaching children the way they should go. Protective teaching should be supported with corrective action and correction should be reinforced by teaching.

The book of Proverbs teaches that children are not good naturally.

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” Proverbs 23: 13-14; Proverbs 22: 15. Children tend to be selfish; they do not understand love regarding giving themselves to others but regarding receiving. A prudent parent recognizes these facts and also understand that children can be taught. Proverbs 9: 18 admonishes parents to discipline their children while there is hope. The rod and correction give wisdom, but a child who is always having his own way will bring shame to his mother Proverbs 29: 15.

To bring up a child in the image of God, parents must be consistent in their discipline because inconsistent discipline results in frustration, insecurity, and anger. Christian parents must have biblical philosophy of child discipline so that there will be consistent and agreement between husband and wife in they respond to disobedience. Children receive mixed signals when parents are divided or disagree about discipline. If you must use threats to correct your child, then make sure you follow the threat through or else your children will not take you seriously.

### (iii). Forgiveness

Parents should always remember that regardless of what method they use to discipline their children, the goal of discipline is forgiveness and reconciliation. Children must be taught that disobedience to parents is sin and thus, teach your child to confess his sin of disobedience to God and thank Him for forgiving him. Forgiveness should result in restoration of fellowship and forgetting of the offense. If a parent makes forgiveness a

lifestyle, he will be modeling the love and forgiveness of God (1 Timothy 1: 9). Forgiveness impacts the inner life while discipline focuses on the outward behavior.

## V. Conclusion

The Christian home has been referred to as a laboratory for the appliance of biblical truth in a rational situation. It is the child's training ground for the impression of values, the development of relationship, for teaching and learning to obtain and give love. Parents have been assigned the responsibility of determining their children character and directing their spiritual, intellectual, psychological, emotional and physical growth. This responsibility should not be left to outside institutions.

Many studies carried out on this issue support the fact that there is a substantial correlation between parental childrearing practices and children's concepts of God. The home that is filled with the atmosphere of love, openness, forgiveness, acceptance and honesty is the ideal place to raise a child in the image of God. There are biblical principles that can be applied to bring up children in fear of the Lord. A good reflection of the image of God as an example for family life is a challenge to many of our traditional standards of the roles of gender in parenting. God is not only referred to as a father, but many images suggest His motherly fatherhood

There should be love and boundaries which will be applied in the home. Punishment must be applied when necessary to check indiscipline and disobedience as instructed in Hebrews 12: 6. If parents make forgiveness a lifestyle, they will be modeling the love and forgiveness of God (1 Timothy 1: <https://assignbuster.com/parenting-that-reflects-the-image-of-god/>

9). Forgiveness impacts the inner life while discipline focuses on the outward behavior. Proverbs 23: 13-14 tells us that children are not good by nature and the parents have the responsibility to use the rod of correction.

Notwithstanding the method of punishment used, the goal of discipline is forgiveness and reconciliation.

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