

Sermon Series: Family Matters 2016 (AFBC)
Family Matters 1: PARENTING MATTERS
I Thessalonians 2:6b-12 (5/8/16--Mothers' Day)

Last Sunday was Children's Day at First Baptist, and Amy and our children launched our new emphasis in worship on "Family Matters."

Parenting is a vitally important family matter, and this is our focus today: "Parenting Matters!" I think we'll all agree that if we have children, raising them well is one of the most important responsibilities we have in life.

And parents, we're not alone in this. Churches, schools, extended families and communities all share in this God-given responsibility to train, educate, grow and protect our children.

Since today is Mother's Day, and we've already shared together in a time of parent/child dedication, it seems to be the right time for us to take a look at parenting.

I count fatherhood and the opportunity I've had to share with Pam in the parenting of our three children to be among the greatest privileges of my life. In parenting, the challenges are many, and moments of bewilderment and exasperation come with the territory; but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he's reminding them of how he cared for them while there among them. Interestingly, the Apostle Paul uses the language of parenting to do this.

I say this because, as far as we know, Paul was not a parent...in the sense of having personally fathered a child. But God worked through Paul to bring many people to Christ; and Paul took on a kind of parenting role in the lives of these new believers.

Now, most of us probably see Paul as being rather tough—and he certainly could be—but here, we find Paul in a very tender mood as he compares his care for the people of Thessalonica to the ways good parents care for their children. Listen:

**"As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,
7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for
her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were
delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but**

our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” (I Thes. 2:6b-12)

In this remarkable passage, Paul shares some insight into what Christian parents should be and do in relation to their children. Let’s take a look.

I. We’ll start with this: Paul seems to understand that **RAISING CHILDREN REQUIRES COMPASSION**. Listen for it: “...we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you...”

Do you hear a gentleness and tenderness in those words that communicate a loving, sensitive compassion? Later, Paul speaks of Fathers; but it should come as no surprise that he relates these particular qualities to mothers. In most families, moms are just a little better at this than dads—not always, of course, but usually.

Compassion is a combination of love and understanding, and there’s nothing that can adequately substitute for these in the life of a child. Compassion is when I know everything about you and still care for you. We call this “unconditional love.” We all need places where we feel loved and accepted...no matter what.

With this in mind, I invite you to hear this poem that one of you gave me on Mother’s Day a few years back. Listen closely, and prepare to be inspired! The poem is called...

.....**THINKING’ BOUT MOMMA:**

**I was a-sittin’ on my rear, Just a-swiggin’ on a beer,
When I shed a little tear, ...Thinkin’ `bout Momma.**

**When I was jest a little squirt, She’d scrub away the dirt,
And kiss me when I hurt, ...My dear, sweet Momma.**

She washed and ironed my clothes, And she wiped my snotty nose; Yes, she's sweeter than a rose, ...I love my momma!

Surely this was a mother whose love was unconditional. She loved and accepted this kid—no matter what!

So, how do we show compassion toward our children? How can we love them with understanding?

Well...a good place to start is by spending time with them, and listening. I will often mention listening in this series, because it's vital to healthy families, churches, and communities.

I John 4:7 begins "Let us love one another." Bible scholars tell us this carries the meaning of loving one another continually. It can be translated, "Practice loving each other..."

PRACTICE loving each other! Think about it: you have to be with someone to do that.

You cannot practice playing the piano unless you and the piano are in close proximity. You can't practice football without being out on the field with your team. To practice loving our children, we must be with them!

Children spell love "T-I-M-E." When they're young, anyway—later, they spell it "M-O-N-E-Y." Just kidding—sort of. Anyway, we cannot communicate love to our children without investing time in their lives. The gift of our time makes them feel loved.

Children want and need attention. There may well be no better way to show love to a child than to give him your full, undivided attention. This will communicate how important they are to you.

It will enable you to hear what's really going on in their minds and hearts. And it will also earn you the right to BE heard when you come to those teachable moments in their lives.

In any relationship, listening is indispensable to loving. Compassion begins with our presence and our attentiveness to others. Healthy, loving families spend time together, and...they listen to each other.

Get down on your child's level, look them in the eye, and listen to what they have to say. Without you ever saying a word, what they'll hear is, "You really matter to me. I want to listen to what you have to say because I love you." This is one of the greatest needs in every child's life—it matters.

II. Next, RAISING CHILDREN REQUIRES WISDOM. Now, I see this communicated in what Paul says about Fathers—but again, this can certainly be true of Mothers as well.

Listen again to a portion of verses 11 and 12: **"...we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God..." (I Thessalonians 2:11-12a)**

Paul is speaking specifically here about sharing the Gospel with them—and there's no greater responsibility that we have as Christian parents than this. Parents who stand before us for parent/child dedication acknowledge this and commit to it.

James Keller wrote, "Every mother has the breath-taking privilege of sharing with God in the creation of a new life. She helps bring into existence a soul that will last for all eternity."

This should mean—for moms and dads—that we understand that in choosing to have a child, we're also assuming responsibility for providing direction and wisdom that comes from our years of experience--years that our children do not yet possess.

To grow up and become successful adults, children need to receive a stable value system. They need to be taught what is right, what is wrong, and just as importantly, what is best. They need to know the difference and have the desire to live accordingly.

Many parents fail to connect with their children on the most important issues of life. They make no effort to instill values, nor do they censor the kinds of media to which their children are being exposed. This is an incredibly difficult task today, but we must try to protect our little ones from harm.

Some parents mistakenly think the church, the school, or maybe the scouts can do this for them—assigning blame to those

organizations if they're not successful! But please hear this--if what we try to accomplish here or what's attempted in those other places is not consistent with what children see and hear in their homes, our efforts won't work. Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. Nobody can ever take their place!

When we dedicate a child to the Lord, we as parents, along with ministers, Sunday School teachers, and the church family, are also dedicating ourselves to the Lord and to task He's given us to teach this child, with the hope that one day we will experience the joy of knowing that they have also made the commitment to follow Christ as their Savior and Lord.

I like this analogy: the lives of young children are like "wet concrete." It's fairly easy to make an impression on them; but once you do, they're set for life. No pressure, folks, but our opportunities to make these lasting impressions...are short-lived.

In **Deuteronomy 6:7**, God is trying to impress this on parents when He says concerning His commandments, **"You must teach them to your children, and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning."**

YOU must teach them—not the schools, not the government—you, moms and dads. The church is here to help, but what you do and say and demonstrate before them makes the greatest impact on their lives. Teach them in the wisdom of the Lord.

III. Now this: **RASISING CHILDREN REQUIRES DISCIPLINE.** There are no perfect children—and no perfect parents either; but this takes nothing away from our responsibility to discipline our children—to correct them when they make mistakes.

Even better, we are to point our children in the right direction before those mistakes are made. We don't have to make perfect decisions as moms and dads—we won't. But we should at least be able to make better decisions than our children would if everything was left up to them!

In 30 B.C., the Roman poet **Virgil** shared this insight into raising children: **"As the twig is bent, so the tree inclines."**

I got to thinking about this—I'm convinced my father misunderstood the poet. He thought Virgil said, **"The twig should be bent on the children's behinds."**

Some of you had to go out and get your own switch too. I know—we've shared these experiences and commiserated together about this cruel and unusual punishment! But it was effective.

Listen to this verse from the book of Hebrews: **"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)**

Responsible parents set responsible limits for their children...and stick to them. Beginning very early, children must know the rules and understand there are consequences for breaking them. If we fail to correct our children, we are setting *them* up...for failure.

Now, the key word here is discipline, not punishment. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty—and, yes, sometimes that's called for. The purpose of discipline, though, is growth.

Punishment focuses on the wrong thing that was done in the past. Discipline focuses on the right things that can and should be done in the future. You see the difference.

Punishment is often carried out in anger or disappointment. Discipline, on the other hand, is done in love.

If we discipline our children early enough and consistently enough, most of them will not require much punishment. But to keep our children moving toward maturity and success in life, they will likely need both.

IV. Let's consider now one other factor: **RASISING CHILDREN REQUIRES CONFIDENCE.** In our text, I hear the Apostle Paul saying to his fellow believers: "You can do this. Be faithful to Christ, stay true to your convictions, persevere—I know you can!"

That's another good lesson for us. Believe in your children, moms and dads, and let them know that you believe in them. Often you will need to have more confidence in them than they have in themselves...if they are ever to be able to be and do their best.

Everybody needs someone who believes in them. This world can be tough. My hunch is that it's getting harder every day for our children. In some areas of life, say...physical appearance, society is setting impossible standards.

Our children encounter pressures that can shake their confidence and cause them to just give up. Our confidence in them, and our encouragement of them, may be what keeps them motivated to use the gifts God has given them to their full potential.

Not all kids have the same strengths. I encourage you to set high standards for your children; but at the same time, be realistic. Make sure your confidence is not misplaced, that it's not causing you to push your children in directions they should never go.

Help them to discover what their passion is, not just what you want it to be. Art or music or drama may not be your thing—but if it's theirs—encourage them.

Don't encourage those pursuits, though, if they don't have any talent. Maybe they love sports instead—cheer them on. Parenting is about finding what your child is good at and then helping them to become their best...at that!

Children need to be challenged. They need to be counseled and corrected, too. But if we want them to be confident, we have to build them up a lot more than we tear them down.

Be their head cheerleader and let them know that you're proud of them. This will give them the confidence they need to succeed.

If God has seen fit to entrust a child to your care, thank Him for the privilege. Be humbled by the confidence He has in you—humbled enough to always acknowledge your need of God's wisdom and guidance and strength for the task of parenting.

Love your children. Enjoy them. And seek to raise children who will grow to bring glory to God and be blessings to whatever family, church, and community that they're part of in the future—for the rest of their lives—those years when your job as a parent is done!