

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Biblical Goals in Parenting

One of the most important places to begin an examination of how to become an effective parent is to first determine what your goals are for your children. Do you have biblical or more humanistic goals? All parents have goals for their children, but are these goals biblically correct? Your parental goals are what you are trying to accomplish and achieve in your children's lives.

Now you may be wondering if setting a goal is in itself biblical. Absolutely! Paul commanded us as believers to pursue the highest goal. What is this highest and most important goal? He declared, *"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14). In the context of this passage, Paul reveals what his goals are and then what our goals should be. He wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and to become conformed into Christ's likeness so that he might attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10-11). These are truly worthy goals for every believer to pursue! Therefore, if you set personal goals for your Christian life, then you must also determine biblical goals for your parenting.

In setting these goals, it is very important that both husbands and wives agree. Mutual goals will produce success and help you to

avoid working at cross purposes. There may be goals that are good, but these may not necessarily be primary goals. What do I mean by this? Is your goal to have happy and financially successful children when they grow up, or is your goal that they have a specific occupation? These goals in themselves are not wrong, but they are not the highest biblical goals that God reveals in His Word. Therefore, consider what your highest biblical goals should be.

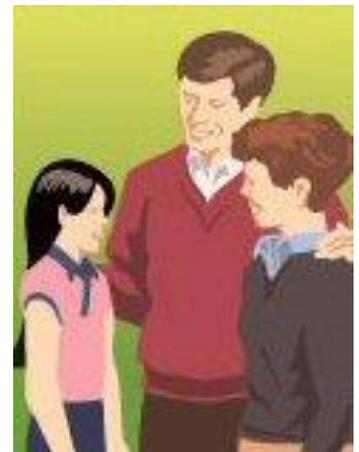
What are the biblical goals for parenting?

1. Your primary goal should be to lead your children to Christ. The most fundamental goal of parenting is that your child should come into a personal relationship with Christ. God's desire is that everyone would be saved. The Apostle Peter explained that this was and is God's highest goal. Peter explained that, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, leading your child to repentance is the primary parenting goal, which enables all the other goals to be accomplished.

Consequently, when your children are old enough to understand the truth of the gospel, will you lead them in a prayer of repentance? Or will you leave this responsibility to the church Sunday school ministry, or some other family member? Personally leading my children to Christ was more important to me than all the rest of my ministry. I remember praying as a young parent and told the Lord I considered the

greatest success of my life and ministry to see my children in heaven one day. Do you see your life and ministry to your children this way?

2. Your goal must be to disciple them. The Bible teaches that as His disciples we are all called to make disciples. Jesus said to His disciples just before His ascension, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, the first disciples you want to make should be your children.



Take time to teach your children!

In our church when children come of age and the fathers are believers, we ask these dads to publically baptize their own children at our local beach. This enables these fathers to take their place as the spiritual leader in their home. This is also an important spiritual example to the children that their father believes the commands of Christ and is willing to demonstrate his faith in public.

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

3. Disciple your children in such a way as to encourage them to put their hope in the Lord.

Hope in God is what draws your children to Him, and what enables them to obey and follow Him all of the days of their lives. Note what the divine author stated as the responsibility of fathers in Psalm 78. He declares, *“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God”* (Ps. 78:5-8). Notice that the ultimate end of the father’s instruction to his children is that they might set their hope in God, so they would not be a stubborn and rebellious individual. But, you will naturally ask how does a father achieve this outcome? That brings me to your next goal.

4. Train your children in the faith.

Teaching and training your children is one of your primary jobs as a parent. This is also clearly indicated in Psalm 78:5, which I quoted above. The New Testament makes this responsibility equally clear. Paul said, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4). The word *training* in this verse means to educate or instruct. The word *admonition* means to discipline, warn or reprove.

Therefore, what is your plan to educate and train your children? When and how will you train them in the ways of the Lord? Will you fulfill your responsibility or will you relinquish your calling to the church Sunday school? If training your children is truly your goal, then you must have a plan.

5. Teach them discipline. True discipline begins with a respect for your authority as you teach, warn, and reprove your children. This submission to authority is clearly taught by Paul the apostle when He declared, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right”* (Eph. 6:1). The word *obey* in this verse means to heed authority. If your children do not learn to respect authority, they will struggle with submitting to all authority and especially to the authority of God. Note that Jesus was both submitted to the Father and to His parents (Luke 2:51).

In setting these goals, it is very important that both husbands and wives agree.

As you teach and discipline your children, they ultimately will become self-controlled and self-disciplined. This is one of the fundamental goals for all discipleship. The Apostle Peter said, *“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness”* (2 Peter 1:5-6).

The final goal of discipline is that your children learn to make independent decisions without direction from you. This was the reason that Solomon wrote the proverbs to his son (Prov. 1:1-10). Solomon wanted to instruct his son that he might learn the fear of the Lord and not be enticed by sinners.

6. Lead your children into the fear of God.

How do you lead your children into the fear of the Lord? The fear of the God is primarily accomplished by teaching your children the word of God. Moses explained to the people of God exactly how this should be done. He said, *“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen,*

and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’ ” (Deut. 4:9-10).

There are two very important principles in this passage. First, teaching the Scriptures is what allows your children to hear God’s Word directly from Him, just as the children of Israel heard. The second principle is that you must share your personal experience with your children, just as the Jews explained the moment that they stood before God at Mount Horeb and saw His great power manifested before them. Have you ever shared your personal conversion experience with your children? Explain to them how you were saved from your sin and how He has changed your life.

7. Your ultimate goal must be to see your children’s hearts changed.

If you follow all of the above principles, this will give you the best opportunity to see their hearts changed. What do you want for your children - behavior modification, or a changed heart? You can pressure, manipulate, and force your children to do what you want, but this will not bring a changed heart. Notice the goal that is clearly stated in Psalm 78:8. God wants your children to set *their hearts* aright, not just have behavior modification or external change. Jesus clearly recognized that the Pharisees had behavior modification, but their hearts were far from Him (Mark 7:6). He understood that the heart of man must be changed if God was ever to be enthroned in their hearts. The heart is the source of all that is good or evil (Matt. 15:19). This is why you are commanded in Scripture: *“Keep your heart with all diligence*

for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

How can you reach these biblical goals?

It is one thing to have the correct biblical goals, but how are you going to reach these goals? What steps do you need to take so you can implement your plan to reach these goals? Application of the truth is just as important as the truth itself.

1. Pray with and for your children continually. Prayer is the first step to take to introduce your child to fellowship with God. When your children see and hear you pray, you are displaying an understanding that God exists, that there is someone higher than you as the parent, and that you are accountable to God. Prayer with your children is usually the first way they recognize that there is an unseen and mighty God. You are a powerful example in this regard. Note what the psalmist declared concerning his son: *“Prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised”* (Ps. 72:15). As you pray for your children, God will give you wisdom and insight into their heart, and how to best minister to them. Remember, *“The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16).

2. Disciple your children in the Word. Teaching your children the Word of God is another way that you introduce them to your heavenly Father. As you teach them the Scriptures, you are planting the seed of the Word of God in their hearts. Therefore, you need a plan for *when* you are going to teach your children and *what* you will teach them. God had a plan for disciplining the kings of Israel and the people. God determined that He wanted all the Kings of Israel to have a copy of the Law so that, *“It shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes”* (Deut. 17:19).

The Lord had a similar plan to disciple the people of the land. God commanded Moses to gather the people at the Feast of Tabernacles, and every seven years the Law would be read in the hearing of all of the men, women, and children. God's purpose in taking this action was to firmly plant in the people an understanding of who God is and what He requires (Deut. 31:9-13).

Teaching and training your children is one of your primary jobs as a parent.

One of the most effective ways to do formal teaching with children is to open the Scriptures at the breakfast or dinner table. I found this was the only time we were all together and had gathered for one purpose - to eat together. I realized that when I had to stop my children from whatever they were doing in order to come to devotions, it seemed I was always getting someone irritated with me. However, at breakfast or dinner, I had a captive audience. They didn't want to be any other place and they were eager to listen. I would simply share what God was speaking to me from my personal devotional time. Many times this would open a discussion with the entire family about spiritual things. Try it, it works!

3. Give consistent discipline. Disciplining your children in a consistent manner communicates several things: (1) there is an authority that is over them (Luke 7:8), (2) there is a right and wrong way of living that you believe is true (Prov. 4:11), (3) there is a consequence for sinful disobedience (Col. 3:25). Remember that you are to, *“bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4). The Bible is also clear that both mom and dad are to participate equally in this task (Prov. 1:8).

The discipline you give out to your children must be in accordance with

biblical methods and with true love. Have you ever made a study of Scripture as to how God disciplines you? This would be very worthwhile to do. Remembering always, that *“whom the Lord loves He chastens”* (Heb. 12:6).

4. Seek a change of heart through honest repentance, confession, and forgiveness. If you truly desire to reach your children's heart and see their attitude change, then you must teach them a biblical method of reconciliation with both God and others. You must consistently train them in this regard if you desire your children to have a successful relationship with God and other people.

What are some of these biblical principles that enable reconciliation? (1) You must teach them honest self-evaluation (Matt. 7:5). (2) They must learn to be specific in their confession of fault (James 5:16). (3) They must learn to forgive anyone for anything (Mark 11:25). (4) You must train them to control their anger (Prov. 16:32). (5) They must learn to communicate truthfully and lovingly (Eph. 4:15). (6) You must teach them to find agreement through compromise (Matt. 5:25). (7) They must learn how to take the correct biblical action even if others will not (Rom. 5:8).

5. Consistent praise. I have found throughout my counseling ministry that there is a lack of verbal praise and approval in most homes. It is so easy to only focus on what your children are doing wrong, and forget to give them a *“well done.”* But, without a *“well done”* from you, your children will begin to think that everything they do is wrong. There is a critical balance between correction and praise. If you want to reach your biblical goals in parenting, you must find this balance. The Psalmist encouraged this balance when he said, *“Prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised”* (Ps. 72:15).

6. Be a Godly example. Are you an example to your children of all you are teaching them? Paul remarked to Timothy that he saw a "genuine faith" in him that was first exemplified in his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Do your children see the genuine reflection of Christ in you? To be this example, you must avoid any double standard in your life. You cannot say "do as I say, not as I do." Remember, your children are watching what you do more than what you say. They will only consider your lifestyle as hypocrisy. Paul said, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9).

7. Spend time with them. The Bible teaches nothing about "quality" vs. "quantity" of time. It is impossible to fulfill these goals without spending considerable time with your children. Time together is where your informal teaching and example will rub off on them. Note the instruction by Moses to the parents of his day. "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Notice that God declares when you are to communicate your goals and values. God says when you sit together in your home, or when you walk together, or at bed time, or when you rise in the morning, communicate God's truth and encourage one another. This requires time together. Are you truly spending the necessary time together to accomplish your biblical goals for your children?

8. You must be growing and maturing just as your children. True biblical parenting requires mature and loving decisions from a parent that is listening to the Holy Spirit. However, you cannot give something to your children that you

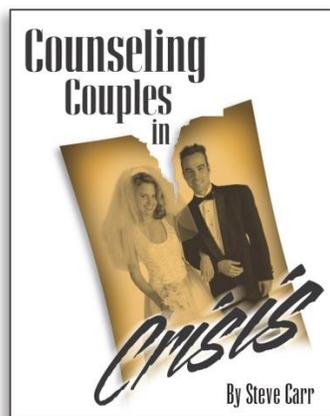
do not personally possess. Paul declared, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received" (1 Cor. 15:3). Each child brings new and different questions and challenges that will push you to the limit of your patience and understanding. Therefore, you must be willing to allow God to transform you into the person He wants you to be. Only as you grow in your personal relationship with Christ will He enable you to become an effective parent. If you will seek the Lord with all your heart, He will be found by you. Christ will empower you to fulfill this important task of biblical parenting. Jesus said, "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8).

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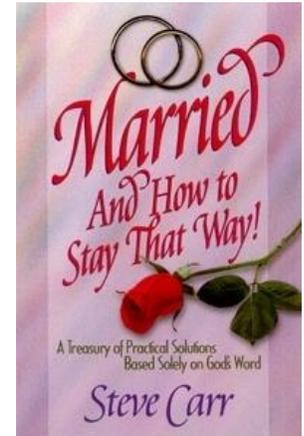
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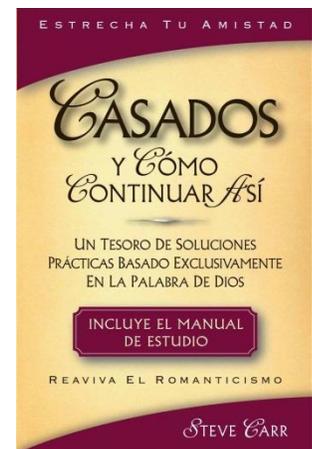


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