

HOW GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH PARENTS

Proverbs 6:20-23

"My son, keep your father's command, and don't reject your mother's teaching. ²¹ Always bind them to your heart; tie them around your neck. ²² When you walk here and there, they will guide you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you wake up, they will talk to you. ²³ For a command is a lamp, teaching is a light, and corrective discipline is the way to life."

INTRODUCTION

In honor of today being Mother's Day consider this—You Know Motherhood Has Set in When: 1) You actually volunteer to cut up other people's food; 2) You hide in the bathroom just to be alone; 3) You hope ketchup is a vegetable because it's often the only one your kids will eat; 4) You read the average 5-year-old asks 492 questions a day and you're certain your child is above average; 5) You count the sprinkles on each kid's cupcake to make sure they're all equal; 6) You hear your mother's voice coming out of your mouth; 7) You stop criticizing the way your mother raised you; 8) You hire a sitter because you can't remember the last time you went out alone with your husband, but then you spend half the night checking on the kids; and 9) You say at least once a day, "I'm not cut out for this job," but you wouldn't trade it for the world.

Would you agree no one on earth is in a better position to make God's presence and character known to a child than a parent? Until a child is old enough to truly understand who God is, a parent in many ways is what to a child? God! This is particularly true of fathers in two-parent homes, but it is also true of mothers. **Colossians 3:20** gives us this clear command: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." What is God's primary purpose in giving parents such awesome authority over their children? Is it just to keep them from becoming too much of a pest so there will be more peace and cooperation in your home? Is it to help turn out good, productive citizens in society? These are both good answers, but the main reason God assigns parents such all-encompassing authority over their children is that if they are trained to respond well to parental authority, this prepares them to respond well to whose authority? God's!

There are two extremes or traps parents may fall into, both of which are lethal in terms of sowing seeds of rebellion in children toward their own authority and to God's. One extreme is to emphasize rules but to neglect relationship with your children. The other extreme is to emphasize relationship but to neglect rules. A remarkable mother named Susanna, who gave birth to 19 children (including two sets of twins), avoided both traps. Her father was a scholar, beloved pastor, and a respected preacher with a genuine love for the Lord. In a day when books and universal education were rare, Susanna's father gave her opportunities to improve her mind, which she put to good use in writing a series of meditations and commentaries on the Bible to nurture her faith and her children's. She also embraced a personal relationship with **Jesus Christ**, instead of thinking she was a Christian merely because she followed the rules of the Church of England.

At age 19, Susanna married a young minister named Samuel Wesley. Despite their struggles with poverty, the grief of losing 9 children in infancy, and their home burning to the ground twice, she produced some extraordinary children. Two of them, John and Charles Wesley, founded Methodism and became priceless blessings to God's world. Such children did not arise by chance but by choices Susanna made in raising them. She set aside an hour each week for time alone with a particular child, when she spoke with them not only of their activities and interests but also of their own journey in walking with **Jesus**. She prepared them to respond well to God's authority in life by the way she trained them to respond well to parental authority. In his journal, John Wesley recorded these lessons on child rearing learned from his mother.

In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer the will, and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding [to develop their minds and conscience] is a work of time, and must with children proceed by slow degrees as they are able to bear it; but subjecting the will is

a thing that must be done at once; and the sooner the better. For by neglecting timely correction they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which is hardly ever after conquered. Self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after-wretchedness; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness.

Someone who spent years studying the criminal records of the Houston Police Department published *How to Raise a Juvenile Delinquent* in 1991. It identifies 12 leading reasons why parents with far different ideas of raising children than Susanna Wesley contribute to their children becoming unfit for decent society. **1.** From infancy, give the child everything he wants. He'll grow up to believe the world owes him a living. **2.** When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. It will make him think he's cute and encourage him to pick up phrases that will blow off the top of your head later. **3.** Never give him any spiritual training. Wait till he's 21 to decide for himself. **4.** Avoid using the word "wrong" so he won't develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, if arrested for stealing a car, society is against him and he's being persecuted. **5.** Pick up everything he leaves lying around: books, shoes, clothing. Do everything for him so he'll be adept at throwing all responsibility onto others. **6.** Don't monitor what he reads [or his music, movies, TV, or PC]. Sterilize the silverware but let his mind feast on garbage. **7.** Quarrel frequently in your children's presence. Then they will not be too shocked if the home is broken up later. **8.** Give a child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them? **9.** Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. Don't deny such desires being gratified or this may lead to harmful frustration. **10.** Take his part against neighbors, teachers, and policemen [so he'll believe] they're all prejudiced against him. **11.** When he gets into real trouble, excuse yourself saying, "I never could do anything with him." **12.** Prepare for a life of grief. You will be apt to have it.

In *How God Reveals Himself through Parents*, we look at Guided Decisions, Guarded Decisions, and God's Decisions.

I. GUIDED DECISIONS

We all make guided decisions. When we first come into this world, we know nothing about anything. As soon as we gain the ability to crawl, we then have two main options to learn about the world around us: exploration or education. We can put our hands upon, put into our mouths, or move off in any direction that seems right to us at the time, or we can rely upon the guidance of others for help. Is it extreme to claim God can reveal Himself to us through parents in many of the same ways the Bible reveals God to us? **Proverbs 6:22 & 23** attribute the same guidance power to "your father's command" and "your mother's teaching" that is assigned to God's Word. **Proverbs 6:20-23** (GNT) urges, "Keep their words with you always, locked in your heart."²² Their teaching will lead you when you travel, protect you at night, and advise you during the day.²³ Their instructions are a shining light; their correction can teach you how to live." Is this closely similar to **Psalms 119:105**, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path"?

Light is often used as a metaphor for guidance and direction. If we need help to solve a problem or explain a mystery, we often say, "We need more [what?] light on the subject." We admit we don't have enough information or guidance to make an informed decision or reach an accurate conclusion. Have you been in a poorly lit room in an unfamiliar home? Dim light may fool us a fabric is a certain color; when the curtain is drawn or a light is turned on we see the color is quite different. Or, we may be in our own home in a dimly lit room and see a dark speck on the floor we think is a piece of lint or food crumb. If we pick it up and it starts to wiggle, we suddenly realize we're holding an unknown creepy crawler. If you're like me, you quickly toss it to the ground and then get more light to see if it's a spider or scorpion. Or, we may have ample light but it causes confusion by being colored. The lights in the main dining hall at the Southern Pines Camp near Mt. Lemmon used to be all yellow bug lights. We discovered when we played UNO at night, the blue and green cards looked alike under the yellow lights (blue and yellow make green). We had to use flashlights to shine on our cards when it was our turn to make sure we didn't play the wrong color.

Sin's darkness can have this same dimming or distorting effect upon us. Something appeals to us as something that looks like our favorite color appeals to us, yet once we see what this object or person is really like in true light, we are not satisfied with it at all. Or, we find out too late sin colored how we perceived things (as yellow lights color how we see things) and led us to make moves that made us losers, not winners. Or, we take hold of some-thing that we think is harmless and it may be quite dangerous. One of the chief ways God shines His light on us to protect us from foolish choices is the guidance He offers us through parents and close relatives. God's wisdom conveyed through my parents still guides me to this day. The absolutely worse thing we can do is to rely upon the guidance of those who dismiss God's wisdom through parents and the Bible. **Proverbs 13:20** (The Message) exhorts us, "Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools [those morally opposed to God] and watch your life fall to pieces." A little boy forgot his lines in a Sunday school presentation. His mom was in the front row to prompt him. She gestured and formed the words silently with her lips, but it did not help. Her son's memory went blank. Finally, she leaned forward and whispered the cue, "I am the light of the world." The child beamed and with great feeling and a loud, clear voice said, "My mother is the light of the world."

II. GUARDED DECISIONS

The parental authorities God has placed in our lives (not necessarily birth parents) can benefit us with wisely guided decisions. God promises they can also benefit us with guarded decisions. This world's a dangerous place. The more we're unaware of potential dangers in our circumstances and the less capable we are to ward off danger should it strike, the more desperately we need to rely upon others to ensure our safety. Predators have always been ready to subdue and take from others by force, whether they are armies, animals, or other force of arms. One of the largest freshwater turtles is the alligator snapping turtle. Found primarily in the southeastern United States, these massive turtles average about 70 lbs. and can weigh up to 250 lbs! They are carnivorous. This turtle will often lie completely still on the floor of a lake or river with its mouth wide open. At the end of the turtle's tongue is a small, pink, worm-shaped appendage. This turtle wiggles the end of its tongue so that it looks like a worm moving through the water. When a fish comes to eat the worm, the turtle's jaws snap rapidly closed, trapping the fish to its doom! Would the arch enemy of God's people be as fiendishly clever in his traps to destroy us? **Revelation 12:9** (NKJV) describes him as, "the great dragon . . . , that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world."

Is America becoming a more dangerous place to live than it was a generation two ago, or less dangerous? One way to answer that question would be to compare the top disciplinary problems reported by educators in 1940 with today. In 1940, these were the chief disruptions in our nation's schools: talking in class, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, wearing improper clothing, and not putting waste paper in the waste paper basket. A survey in the late 1980s revealed these had become the top disciplinary problems in our schools: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, arson, bombing, and murder. It has to be most frustrating to parents that children who have the least awareness of how dangerously violent our world is today and how full of temptingly destructive habits (as the suicidal and chaotic impact of sexual intimacy and adultery described in **Proverbs 5 & 6**) are often the children least interested in the helpful and often necessary protective guidance of their parents! God the Father often feels this same frustration about us because of how little interest we have in His helpful and often even necessary protective guidance.

Proverbs 6:20-23 (GNT) assures us parents can be vehicles of God's protective wisdom. "Son, do what your father tells you and never forget what your mother taught you.²¹ Keep their words with you always, locked in your heart.²² Their teaching will lead you when you travel, protect you at night, and advise you during the day.²³ Their instructions are a shining light; their correction can teach you how to live." The experiences of a wise parent, aided by an even wiser God, can watch out for us in ways we don't even know we need help! A sentiment falsely attributed to Mark Twain (whose Dad died when Twain was 11) is often the real experience of many as they mature from a young adult into full adulthood: "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I

was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." When youth are straying into harmful moral behavior, God can set them straight and shape their character by the lessons He's taught parents. I can still recall my own Dad saying to me as though it were yesterday, to discourage me from actions he knew were dishonorable, "Son, you'll want to be able to live with yourself. When you lay your head on your pillow at night and it's just you and God, you want to be able to like the person that you are."

III. GOD'S DECISIONS

How many of you think most parents want their children to remain immature so they can continue to fuss over them and make most of their decisions for them to try to keep their kids from ever making foolish choices? Some unknown sage once said, "The most important thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along without them." Through the ages, children have demanded of parents, "When are you going to start treating me like an adult and stop thinking you must hover over me and tell me what to do all the time?" The age-old answer has been, "When you start acting like an adult." For example, Advice columnist Dear Abby defined "maturity" as: "The ability to stick with a job until it's finished; the ability to do a job without being supervised; the ability to carry money without spending it; and the ability to bear an injustice without wanting to get even." God longs for us to demonstrate we are spiritual adults by applying His teachings to our lives ourselves, as good parents long for the day children can stand on their own two feet and make godly decisions without needing to be told what to do.

CONCLUSION

A profoundly written article allows us to glimpse the heart of the best of parents. To the extent we find the last part of each of these statements already a reality in our lives, we've progressed from making merely guided decisions and guarded decisions to making God's decisions. This rejoices God's heart!

I gave you life, but I cannot live it for you.
 I can teach you things but I cannot make you learn.
 I can give you directions but I cannot always be there to lead you.
 I can allow you freedom but I cannot account for it.
 I can take you to church but I cannot make you believe.
 I can teach you right from wrong but I can't always decide for you.
 I can buy you beautiful clothes but I cannot make you lovely inside.
 I can offer you advice but I cannot accept it for you.
 I can give you love but I cannot force it upon you.
 I can teach you to be a friend but I cannot make you one.
 I can teach you to share but I cannot make you unselfish.
 I can teach you respect but I can't force you to show honor.
 I can grieve about your report card but I cannot doubt your teachers.
 I can advise you about friends but I cannot choose them for you.
 I can teach you about sex but I cannot keep you pure.
 I can tell you the facts of life but I can't build your reputation.
 I can tell you about drink but I can't say NO for you.
 I can warn you about drugs but I can't prevent you from using them.
 I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.
 I can teach you kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.
 I can warn you about sins but I cannot make your morals
 I can love you as a daughter or son but I cannot place you in God's Family.
 I can pray for you but I cannot make you walk with God.
 I can teach you about Jesus but I cannot make HIM your Saviour.
 I can teach you to OBEY but I cannot make Jesus Your Lord.
 I can tell you how to live but I cannot give you Eternal Life.