

Note: This is the sermon manuscript that Ben carried into the pulpit. Feel free to use it in any way to advance the kingdom of God.

**The Family:
What the Bible Says About Becoming a Good Dad
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, April 18, 2010**

Please open your Bible with me to 1 Samuel 3.

Several months ago, at the Maximum Man Conference, I attended a session entitled “How To Be a Good Dad.” The speaker was Walt Wiley, who has raised two boys. They are grown and gone and have stayed on the straight and narrow path. For that reason, he could entitle his message, “How To Be A Good Dad.” Unfortunately, even though I teach through his outline this morning, I had to change the title. While I am working at becoming a good dad, I have not reached that place where the proof is in the pudding. I can’t say to you today: “See, I raised 4 great kids. Let me show you how we did it.” So I hope you hear my heart flowing over with humility as I approach this subject of fatherhood. It’s one that is near and dear to my heart, but it is not one that I have mastered.

This morning, I am going to follow Walt’s outline because he presented 7 Principles for Being a Good Dad, or for that matter, a good mom. They’re timeless biblical truths for parenting. But not only that, they are practical in nature, and I’m the kind of person that prefers practical. Tell me what to do.

So let me begin with Walt’s illustration. I found it interesting. Raising kids is a piece of cake. Now, before you walk out in protest, let me explain. To make a good cake, there are a number of ingredients that must go into that cake. There is the mix, and the sugar, and the icing and so forth. In the same way, great kids are normally produced from proper ingredients. Put these things in your home and you can be confident that you are doing all you can to produce a good cake.

Now, let me say this. Sometimes, you can do everything right. You can follow the instructions on the box to a “t” and still have a bad cake. You’re not sure what went wrong, but it doesn’t taste right. In the same way, parents can do everything in their power to produce great kids and still see one of them veer off the path. Free will was the ingredient that God chose to place into the bowl, and when he did, we lost the ability to control our children. They are free to make their own choices. Godly parents can sometimes produce a prodigal son.

But having said that, let’s examine
5 Ingredients For Great Kids

1. Concern

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tim. 5:8

Fathers must be concerned about their families, especially their immediate family. The context of this verse speaks to monetary provision. If we have money in our savings, and our immediate family is in need, we should prayerfully consider our role in helping. We don't turn a blind eye to a brother who is thrown in the street. So, money is part of the provision puzzle. But that's not where it stops for a father. The old saying, "I make the money; she makes the home" is quite unbiblical. In fact, the woman is not called to be the sole homemaker, but there is a partnership between husband and wife in raising the children. They are a team that should not be separated.

Dads, do your kids know that you are very concerned about them? Your greatest responsibility on this earth is not at the office. It's at home. This is hard, isn't it? Personally, I have found that computers, cell phones, and televisions can be a tempting distraction from the children who sit at my feet and say my name over and over again. This isn't good. Those kids need our eyes and our ears.

Do you know what it going to drive me crazy about my kids? It's going to drive me insane when they want to spend every waking moment on the phone with their friends, when they want to send text messages while driving, when they want to avoid the family by hopping on the internet. And right now, why wouldn't they? I model that all the time. I want to change that. I don't have a single memory of my Dad saying, "Hold on, Son, I'm on the phone." My Dad wasn't perfect, but when he was home, he was home. I knew he was concerned about me. Do your kids know that you are concerned about them?

The second ingredient for great kids...

2. Boundaries

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Titus 1:6

That's speaking to the life of a pastor, a person who is called to be a model. If a young man wants to be a pastor, his kids cannot be punks. A man must keep his family on track before he can be expected to keep a greater group on the right path.

As a pastor, I have opportunity to influence people for good so long as I spend time with them. I get an hour a week with most people and that hour can be a powerful time of life transformation. How much more, then, should my potential be for influencing my own family? They are with me hours and hours and hours every week. So it makes sense: if I can't impact THEM with my life, how will I ever expect to influence those who get so much less of me.

I have to labor at building the boundaries for my children...and it's not easy. Let me show you a few passages in Scripture that relate to negligent fathers, who were spineless toward their children.

Turn to 1 Sam.3:11-14.

Eli was a spiritual leader with little spiritual perception. He was slow in recognizing God's voice calling out to Samuel in the night. And, he was slow to react when his sons brought shame to God. They were intentionally and blatantly dishonoring God with their lips and Eli chose to look the other way. Maybe he was in over his head with work in the temple. Maybe he was busy counseling couples in the community. Maybe he just didn't want to deal with it. For whatever reason, Eli did not restrain his boys and God brought judgment upon him. It is the role of the father and also of the mother to put boundaries on kids.

And this is how Walt Wiley says he did it. With statements like this: "We don't do that." I like the way Lynley says it: "Do that again, and you will be sorry." And she means it. She means it more than I mean it! I thank God for my wife. She's a no-nonsense woman and she is much better at setting boundaries than I am. And let me say this: Sometimes my wife sets boundaries that are closer than I would set them, but I need to respect those boundaries with children. And vice versa. I might be more strict about something, but it's destructive for her to ridicule my rule in front of the kids.

The third ingredient in great kids...

3. Consistency

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Luke 12:1

My kids can spot hypocrisy in a second. In February, my wife put a bowl of Valentine M & M's on the counter, and when the kids weren't looking, I was working my way to the bottom of that bowl. And my son Max caught me. He said, "Daddy, can I have one?" And I said, "No." And he asked the question that kids love to ask. "Why do you get one and I don't get one?" What he was asking was this, "Why do teach me that it's bad to eat junk food all day long when you eat junk food all day long?" And I gave Max the answer that never works: "Because I'm the Daddy and you're the son. Walk away boy."

Now take peanut M & M's to another level. We say,

- "Son, you need to read your Bible." And he says, "Dad, I've never seen you reading your Bible?"
- "Son, you shouldn't talk about your teacher that way." And he says, "But Dad, you talk about Grandpa that way."
- "Son, don't be lazy. Pick up your room." "Dad, why is Mom always mad at you for letting the grass get so long?"

Kids can spot hypocrisy. What they need is consistency. Whatever we expect of them, we seek to live it out. What I should have said to my son that day was, "Max, you're right. You called me out. I shouldn't be eating this candy right now. We don't do that around here, do we? Be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

4. Hands-on training

When he had finished washing their feet, Jesus put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. John 13:12

Jesus didn't meet with his disciples once a week at Perkins and give them an outline to fill in blanks. He didn't teach that way. The most effective way to teach is by modeling. Parents have to model Christian living for their children.

- Your little children will love to sing in church if they see your lips moving and your eyes awake.
- Your kids will be generous toward the poor if they go on mission trips with you and watch you serve poverty-stricken people.
- Your kids will pray great prayers as they hear you praying heartfelt prayers over them.
- Your kids will be respectful of authority if they see you speaking kindly of your supervisor.

Jesus taught us how to teach. He taught us that deep spiritual living comes through modeling and through hands-on training. This is where I think youth groups and Christian schools can kill us. So many parents believe that they can pass off their children to a charismatic youth leader? These kind of parents try to do “drop off discipleship” and they kick their kids out of the car and say, “Have a good time. Learn something.” They're shocked when they have invested \$100,000 in a private school and their child is rebellious.

Dads are so good about showing boys how to change oil in a car or how to put a worm on a hook. They understand the importance of training when it comes to auto maintenance or fishing. But how many of us are teaching our kids how to share the gospel with a stranger, or how to study the Bible verse by verse, or how to get down on your knees and beg for Holy Spirit help in solving problems? We have to show them, like Jesus showed his disciples. He washed their feet and then he said, “Do you understand what I just modeled?” That's discipleship.

Number 5, the fifth ingredient for producing great kids...

5. Values

You cannot serve both God and money. Matt. 6:24

Your children will know what is valuable to you as they spend time with you. If driving a nice car is something that makes your heart race, then they will grow up believing that they should seek out a nice car. If climbing the corporate ladder is the thing that gets you out of bed in the morning, then your children will value that same type of success. God has wired kids in such a way that they want to please their parents. They want their parents to say, “Wow, we are so proud of you.” And they will do whatever it takes to make you proud.

I'll never forget playing basketball in high school. We had to travel 45 minutes to an hour to play our opponents and my parents weren't always able to make my games. Most times, it didn't bother me. I knew my dad wanted to be there, but the swing shift called him to work 3-11. I can remember, however, certain times when I would have a spectacular game, when I had played at

the top of my potential, and my parents weren't there to see it. I can remember coming home and feeling disappointed that they had missed a moment where I would have made them proud.

God turns a kid's heart toward his parents and deep inside, a child wants to please mom and dad. So what does this mean? This means that whatever is important to you, whatever you consider worthy of your pursuit, those things will also be of great value to your children. And this is what I see in some men:

- Hunting is more important than date night.
- Golfing is more important than church.
- Money is more important than ministry.
- Television is more valuable than Bible Study.
- Time with the friends is more important than time with their wives.

All these scenarios are ungodly and improper. Parents have to be aware that our values are constantly being observed by our children. And they will grow up wanting to please us, by modeling those same values.

Values. We have to help our children see what's most important.