

2 Peter 1:4-9

August 27, 2023

We have been taking this in segments, and studying the Bible componently is a great way to do it. You break it down into sections, then put the sections one at a time, look at them, and understand them. Then you put it all back together. That is the way we have been doing this.

For the last couple of weeks, we have been coming through the six absolute principles of parenting. That really is a section in itself, and each one of those things is something that you need to really get into your own life and understand. We are going to tie it all together here as we go through the other areas. You will see at the end, we will put it in one big package with a pretty bow on it, and then we will send you on your way to be what you need to be to your children, and we will help you along the way.

I. The Principle of Availability

We are going to look at the last principle today in training and teaching your child: availability. Somebody said one time, and I do not remember where I heard this, but it is a common thing; it is pretty common sense. I heard it years ago, and I remembered it this week as I was putting this together. Somebody said one time that love is spelled T-I-M-E. When you start to think about that, that is so true. I know it is true in marriages, and I also know it is true in any relationship with your children.

As I was preparing this lesson this week and thinking about what I wanted to say, and more importantly, how I wanted to structure and say it, a very simple yet profound truth came to my mind. It was something that I knew all my life, and it was so obvious that I had forgotten it. It is like so many great things in the Bible; we take it for granted, then we forget it, and then suddenly it gets reawakened in our life, and it is like we discovered it all over again.

The great truth, as I was getting ready to lay this out about availability and being available to your children, is a great principle. God is my Father, and we know the Bible lays it out that I am His child, and you are too if you know Him as your own personal Savior. The great concept is that there is never a time, as God is my Father and I am His child, that I do not have total access to Him 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He always makes Himself totally available to me.

I got thinking about that, and I knew that. That is such a common, basic thing in its simplicity, but it is so profound when you put it into perspective. I guess that is probably the real major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most people do not understand that in the Old Testament, you could not have a personal relationship with Christ like you and I have. God was working a totally different system back then. The Holy Spirit of God was not indwelling anybody. It is a situation where it is really the real big difference, and there are a number of differences, the fact that in the Old Testament, you could not have what we have with Christ today.

You will find that God picks particular people out, and He has a relationship with them, but not through His Son in the sense of a glorified Christ. Not in the sense of God living in them, never

to leave. Not in the sense of them being sealed by the Holy Spirit of God on the day of redemption. It was a totally different situation. When it comes to worship in the Old Testament, that is why God set up the system that He set up where you had to have an order of priests. Then you had to have a literal physical man who was called the high priest. When you did something wrong, or in a national sense, once a year when Israel had to make the Feast of Atonement for their national sin, you had to bring that sacrifice to a human man. That human man was the high priest. The priest may have prepared the sacrifice and got it ready, but there was one man that was designated as the high priest. That high priest took that offering, went in behind the veil, which we know the Bible talks about in the Book of Leviticus and Exodus, and laid on that mercy seat the blood that cleansed Israel's sin as a nation. That is the way that they had to get to God back in the Old Testament.

You and I, the Bible says, do not have to go through that procedure. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:16 that you and I have access to the throne of God 24/7. In fact, it even says you can boldly go into the throne of God and meet with God. You see, the High Priest in the New Testament, where we live, is the Lord Jesus Christ, and He lives inside me. The tabernacle that He dwells in is my body, your body, if you are a Christian. So we do not have to have a human man that we confess our sins to. We do not have to have a human man who makes sacrifices for you.

I do not think anybody here is under this illusion, but certainly you do not think me as a pastor that I can do anything for your sin. You can come and confess your sins to me all day long, and I may get some good internet detail, but I cannot do anything about it. I cannot solve your problems. You can bring your sin to me by the bushel load, and all I can do is point you to the One who can deal with your sin. I am not a high priest. I am a priest, but the High Priest that is for you and for me, as far as our sin, is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why when you accept Him as your own personal Savior, He comes inside you. He takes up residency inside your body, and from that day forth, He lives within you. You are now sealed, the Bible says, unto the day of redemption, and the rest of your life, you now have total, complete access.

I thought about that, and I just started to briefly run through the Bible in my mind, and every place I went in the Bible, I found the same thing.

Romans 10

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Psalms 4

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

Psalms 18

I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

Psalms 50

Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

1 Peter 5:7

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Matthew 11

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Psalms 80

Wherever I went, wherever I would go in the Bible, I found that there were no restrictions on my time with God, that God wanted to spend as much time with me, and I could spend as much time with Him. There will never be a time in my life when God says, "I am too busy today, Bob. I have the war in Iraq to deal with. I am too busy today. I have the salvation of Africa. I am too busy today. I have the salvation of China." There is never a day in my life as a child where my Heavenly Father has got so much going on that He will not listen to everything I have to say and give me His undivided attention.

Now, I know in saying all that, that God is a very unique Being, and God, to my great misunderstanding and being able to comprehend it, I do not know how God can hear 50 billion people pray 50 billion things and yet keep everything separate. My goodness, I lose my car keys four times a day. I cannot even get them back, but that is obviously why He is God and you and I are not. That concept is such a great pattern. Much of the Bible is simply patterns that God has laid down, written down, displayed to us, that if we pick up those patterns, we too can follow some great truths and some great lessons. Wherever I go in the Bible, you are going to find that God is issuing statements that tell you and I that He is always available, regardless of my behavior or even my spiritual condition.

II. Challenges to Parental Availability

As a parent, part of the unconditional acceptance that we talked about last week, part of that unconditional acceptance is making yourself available for your child or for your children. Parents are not doing that, and much of the problem for that is life itself. Life today is absolutely a whirlwind. I know even in our world in the church here, I was telling my wife the other day, it seems like once you hit Memorial Day, the summer just goes into a tornado, and it is over before you know it. Here it is Labor Day weekend when it was just yesterday we were at the Memorial Day picnic. Where did it go? It is just like, "Wow," you turn around and it is gone.

Life is so hectic; it is so busy. We are busy with our schedules and all that we have to do. Many times as parents, many times as Christians, we take the things that are most precious to us for granted. Certainly, many times in all the busyness of life, our kids get lost in the shuffle. I know that it is true of most churches, and I think this is a terrible thing for churches to do. Yet I have to confess to you that there was a time in my life when I was part of it and thought that that is what you needed to do. God delivered me from that and showed me that that is not the way to do it.

Most churches really have a control issue with people. They do not want to lose their people to other churches. They are always afraid of other competition. They are always afraid that you will

go someplace else or somebody will find you. They also want to basically control you and everything that you do. One of the ways young men are taught in ministry today in seminaries in the Baptist circles, anyhow, I cannot speak for anybody else, but I know it is true in the Baptist arena, is the fact that the first thing you do if you want to build a church, this is what you are taught: you get a group of people, and you have to get them committed to something because they are taught that once you get the people committed, they will stay.

In most churches, the first thing that they get them committed to is basically a building project. Get people financially locked in; you get some humongous project that is way out of realm, and then you lock the people into it. Of course, that is a bad thing to do. Then the second thing that they get you to do is they schedule throughout the week: Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night, Sunday night. The next thing they do, or the next controlling issue, is get you to church every time the door is open. They have you there Sunday morning, Sunday night, and then usually they have something on Wednesday night, and then usually there is something another night of the week. They try to—I know some churches that have something going on every night of the week. Then the next part of that is to make you feel unspiritual if you are not there.

Of course, the end result of that is families splitting up and losing their children. Everything in your life, even God and the Bible and the Word of God and church, has to be within a balance, and getting it out of balance, no matter what it is, even a good thing, is a bad thing. When we started our church, I basically took the position that I preach a little longer on Sunday morning, and I feel like that on Sunday morning and Thursday night, that is the main thing. If you are a leader, that is a no-brainer; you need to be here for that. But I found that having you here every night is not a good thing. I suggest that on Sunday night, you take that time and spend it with your family. Take that time to go and do something with your family, that it is your time, that you can have that relationship time with them. I think that is really a good thing.

Once Monday starts, it usually gets pretty hectic, and you are caught up with work and all of those things. I learned very early on that if I am going to get you involved in anything, and I am going to get you invested in your time in anything, it is going to be the Word of God first, and that will take care of itself. You give me any group of people, and you give me Sunday morning and let me do what I need to do, and you give me Thursday night, and then you give me the option to work one-on-one with them throughout the week, and then leaving some time frame for special meetings or things that come up like the leadership and the Joshua classes, stuff that does not take every week, that comes up on a rotation period, you can get everything done that you want to do and still give your people plenty of time to do the things that they need to do.

Added to that, let us face it, we are living in a society where many times both parents have to work. That is not a good scenario. It really is not. But in our society today, it is sometimes almost a necessity, and it just really is. I am not criticizing anybody that does; I am certainly not. I am just dealing with the reality of the facts. Many times that happens because the parents have been very undisciplined in their debt. Because of that, it requires both parents to work because they are not very disciplined in their spending, and they have credit card debt, or they bought a lot of things. Many times it is just on the basis of things, "I have to have this, I want this, I want that, so

I have to work harder, longer. You have to get a job so we can do it." But in either case, obviously, it is not the best scenario, even though legitimately many times it has to be done.

Many times parents do not use very good judgment on how many children they have. These are all things that I have seen parents that had children that just followed the open womb policy. I had one person tell me one time, "Well, God opens and closes wombs because He does it in the Bible. Therefore, if God does not want you to have kids, then you will have them. If He does not want you to have them, you will not have them." Let me tell you something, that may be true in the Old Testament, but brother, you better be careful taking that theology into the New Testament, or you are going to wind up with the Brady Bunch in your house. It may have been true in the Old Testament; you do not find a single account of it in the New Testament, and there is a reason for that. But who reads the Bible anymore and figures out how this stuff works? It is the difference between God dealing under the law than God dealing under grace, and some things that in both cases you have responsibility for.

With all that goes on many times with the busyness of life, our jobs, we basically get desensitized to our children. We lose touch with them and their needs. Many times it is just the plain fact that we are worn out. We have nothing left to give. It is a situation that is probably the number one problem with young couples. If you have not figured it out yet, if you have not gotten this yet in the time that we have spent in this, it ought to be abundantly clear to you by now that your children are up for grabs, and that you are the determining factor whether you or someone else has more influence in their life.

III. The Power and Responsibility of Parents

If you have not gotten anything out of this, you ought to know by now that if you grow up and your children come to the point where they want nothing to do with God and they want nothing to do with church, and they follow a lifestyle that is totally—I mean, every parent has problems with their kids; I am not talking about that. I am talking about a totally devoid of anything with God. At the end of the day, folks, I do not know what to tell you. You cannot blame anybody but yourself. I promise you, if you look back, and we look back in our lives, we see a lot of issues that we just never really got a hold of ourselves. It is nice when we as parents like to blame our children's problems on something else or somebody else, but at the end of the day, it comes back to us.

How many times I have seen parents wait until their kids are 16 or 17 years old and then want to jump into their lives. I have to tell you, it does not happen that way. It just does not happen that way. By the time they get to that point in their life, they do not want you. They have something else. Your window of opportunity with your children is very narrow. By the time they are 16 or 17, if you have not done what you need to do, it is going to be something else or somebody else that has their attention, and you are going to be on the outside looking in.

I think another big mistake that parents make with their kids, and I think this is true in marriage also, is you have to realize that life itself, the most important things of life, are not made up of big things. The most important things of life are made up of little things. That is what is really

important. My wife and I try to take time every week, or whenever we can, just to get away from everything, go down someplace, walk around, get out. It is important not only with your spouse, but it is important with your children. You have to have that time where you can just stay focused on what you have to do.

I found out in dealing with people, as in marriage, as in with children, it is the little things. It is the special moments. It is not how much money you spend on them or the things that you give them. I am not saying you should never spend money on your child or your wife, or you should not do things, but you do not want to let that be the emphasis. In all of life, you should be your child's best friend. There should be nobody on this planet that they would rather talk to about their issues than you. That just does not happen by itself, ladies and gentlemen. It just does not. They just do not reach a point where you have got to help them get to the point in their life where they understand that you are their best friend, and they would rather listen to you and talk to you and take your advice over the advice of anybody else in this world.

You ought to be your child's best friend. You ought to realize that you are the greatest gift that you can give them. You need to be their hero. When anybody else, whether it is a teacher, whatever, when anybody else on planet Earth says something to your child, whether it is a friend or it is a teacher or whatever it may be, your child ought to look over their shoulder and look what you think about it before they ever decide what they think that person said is true or not. It is just that simple. You ought to be your child's head cheerleader. You ought to be president of their fan club. It all comes because of how much time that you spend with them and the availability they have of your life, and really how you see it and your time with them and what you really focus on.

As I said, in most marriages, as with most children, it is not the big things. It is not the fact that you have got to go out and spend a thousand dollars on them. It is the fact that you are willing to spend time with them, give them your undivided attention, show them the affection, and appreciation, and the acceptance that we have talked about in the other areas.

We have looked now, if you remember, on this section here, we have looked now at, and today will be the sixth one, the six absolute principles. I wish, if we had a place, one of the things I would like to do, and we cannot really do it here, but I would have liked to have charted these out for you on a big board. I would have liked to have them up here where every week we could just come down, and it would be a visual in front of you. If somebody is enterprising out here and you would like to take all the stuff that I have talked about and chart it out and put it out on a piece of paper and print it out that we could give it to the people, I think that would be great. Get everything in there, all the different aspects that I have talked about, and kind of correspondingly put them together. I think that would be good.

You remember, we started out with grace and truth. I told you that on the truth side, there are two things that you have to instill into your child: that is a respect for authority and an understanding that because of authority, we have an accountability factor. I told you that as a parent, you can never compromise truth with your child. Your child needs to grow up understanding that there are boundaries, that there are limitations. They have to understand that when they do something

wrong, there are consequences, and they have to realize that they are basically responsible for their actions.

I see a terrible thing many times parents do when they raise their children, and their children are basically never wrong. How many times we have seen that? Every time the kid has had a problem, it is always somebody else, not my child. It is this person's fault or it is this person's fault, or "you do not understand." We are always creating some circumstance that takes away from the personal responsibility of our children. That is a very dangerous thing to do. Very dangerous thing to do. They need to know in life that there are boundaries. They need to know not only are there certain things that they are not allowed to do that are wrong, but when people do things that are wrong to them, they have a way they have to respond to it. Not responding is just as wrong as the wrong that somebody did for you. It is just that simple.

We were talking Thursday night in our great Bible study, and I said many times I have said to two people who are having issues, or two couples that were having issues, I would say to them, "You are wrong for what you did, but you are wrong for how you handled it." It is always 50-50. This idea that your child will never be in the wrong, that you feel like you have always got to protect them, you always got to make excuses for them, you always got to come up with some other idea that takes away from the bad that they did, is a very dangerous thing. But yet it happens all the time.

We saw that authority and accountability are absolutely crucial. The next four within our six were affection, appreciation, acceptance, and now today we are looking at availability. They fall, we now know, on the grace side. Where truth is the ability to hold your child accountable and to deal with them on issues in truth, the grace side is how we administer truth. These four things mark our performance as a parent.

Remember we talked about there were four types of parents:

1. The autocratic, that is always basically "my way or the highway."
2. The permissive, who never, unless their children just live like hell, come home and sleep at their house, feeds them, clothes them, and gives them everything. Yet they are out running around all over the world drinking and smoking and partying and all of this stuff what they do. We basically aid and abet them by letting them live in your house and pay the bills and take care of them.
3. Then we have the uncaring parent, or what we call the neglectful parent. They do not provide anything for the child. It is the gates wide open, "do what you want to do, come home when you want to come home, see you when we see you."
4. Then we have what we really want to focus on, which is the relational parent. One who biblically builds a relationship with their child in the sense of really putting it and getting it to the point where they can build that relationship.

In 30 years of ministry, I have basically seen every mistake that a parent can make. Yet in my 30 years, I have made many mistakes as a parent. I have seen that every—and I really hold myself to a higher accountability standard than you do, because I have seen the mistakes that they make. There really is not any excuse for me as a parent not to do what is right with my family. I have

seen the mistakes, and many of you have not. But needless to say, I have seen every mistake that parents make and can make, and why their children grow up the way that they do, and many times why their marriages are the way they are. At the end of the day, it comes back to you understanding how to apply these principles.

How many times I have seen a guy or a girl swallowed up into a sin because of lack of availability from their parents. There is an absolute awesome power in parenting. When he says back there in Psalms, "as arrows are in the hand of mighty men, so are children of the youth," that is an understatement. Many times as parents, I think we forget the awesome power that lies within us in our ability or in our inability to biblically be the right kind of parents.

How many times I have dealt with a girl who had a bum for a father, and the father is a jerk and cares nothing about God or the things of God. Maybe sometimes the mother is a good mother, and sometimes she is not either. How many times I have seen God rescue that little girl from that scenario, bring her into ministry, and watch her come to the point—I can remember, I think, right now in my mind, years ago, two girls in particular that I watched come out of that scenario. I worked hard at getting them to come to church. I worked hard at getting them on some kind of equal basis. Those two girls, and they are about four years apart, by the way, not two sisters or anything, but those two girls in particular would sit down with me and tell me some of the most heartbreaking stories I have ever heard in my life. They would tell me stories how their parents did not care for them. They would tell me stories how they loved the church and they loved me and how this and that. They would go through all of these things and how that they hated that lifestyle and how they were so glad that God set them free from that lifestyle. In both of those cases, those girls wound up marrying men just like the zero their father was. It is incredible.

I need to tell you something this morning: I do not have, as a pastor, I do not have the power to overcome your power as a parent. I just do not. Sometimes it works out; most of the time it does not. There is no more powerful person on this planet in the family system other than the parent. You have incredible powers as a parent, and you can either use those powers for the honor and glory of God, or you can abuse those powers and use it for yourself. Your children will go as arrows are in the hands of mighty men.

Psalms 127:4

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

I do not know what to tell you. I have seen parents, as I said earlier, make excuses and justify everything their child did. It was always—how many times I have seen this over the years—it was always somebody else's fault. I have been in situations where the kid was an absolute jerk. The kid was problem after problem. When you try to deal with it and bring the parent into it, the parent would always point out either you or the church or somebody else that that was the real issue. They just would never deal with their child the way that they needed to. They always excused and justified the attitude or the lack of spirituality with their child. They would always have an excuse. They would always start out of their mouth, "Well, you do not understand." No, you are wrong. I understand much better than you understand. But they always have the thing, "Well, you do not understand. Well, she has to go against this, or he has to do this, or this is

against them, or that is against them." They are always coming up with somebody else is the problem. The truth of the matter is, if you want it right down to the bottom line, the kid is not even the problem. The problem is the parent. The problem is the parent.

I had a guy say to me one time that had three, four kids, and they were all just hell on wheels. He came to me when they were now like 18, 19, 16, and 17. He said, "Rob, what can I do?" I said, "The best thing you can do is get yourself fixed so you cannot have any more kids to pollute this world with." That is the best advice I can give you today. You know why? Because nothing else is going to work. Nothing else. You are not going to do what you have to do. You are not going to get into that situation and deal with it. I do not know what to tell you. That is exactly what we are up against many, many times.

IV. The Importance of Personal Change

It is a crazy thing. I told you before, when we started this, if you are going to change your kids, if you are going to change your children, you have got to start by changing yourself first. Come to think of it, this is around our eighth week in parenting classes. I would like to ask you a question this morning as a parent, and I do not really want you to give me an answer, but I would like to ask you. I made that statement on the very first thing that we talked about. I have made that statement no less probably than 50 times throughout the last eight weeks. I have said it in almost everything by design. I wondered this morning, you as a parent, I wonder, sitting here this morning, eight weeks into this material, I wonder what you have now written down in your life that you need to change about you. I really wonder how many of you sat down and took that to heart and really went through and said to yourself, "Wow, here are some things I need to change."

You know why most of you do not? You know why most of you never thought twice about it, or you hear it when I say it, and it might sting you for a short period of time, but you did not do anything with it. If the rapture came right now and God stopped our church at the door and said, "Okay, every parent at church, let me see your list of the things that you put down in those eight weeks." You know why you have not done it? I am going to tell you why you have not done it: because you are not going to do it. That is why you are not going to change anything about you. You know why? Because you do not think you are the real problem, and that is going to transfer right down to your child. That is why if you had to deal with your child this morning on an issue, those little guys down there, they do not see that they have a problem either. It all comes back to the fact that you will never change your child until you are willing to change things about you first.

You as a Christian, and I as a Christian, we need to be in our lives in a constant state of change for the good. I know enough about human nature. I have been in this business too long. You are not going to tell me that I am going to say something like that that really is the key to everything, and we are eight weeks into this, and you have not even stopped and considered what is wrong with you as a parent. You have not detailed it out. You do not have a plan by this time to attack whatever the issues are so you can change your child. You know why you will not do it? I will

tell you why: because you are not going to do it. You are not going to do it because that is human nature, and that is just the way that it works.

You hear me talk about this all the time, and I want to keep for all those of you that are going to work with me in ministry down the line, and for those of you who are going to take major areas of this ministry, I cannot help but think, and I have to hold back my excitement because I do not want to get off my even thing, but I have to look ahead that, here we are. Notice how God is giving us everything we need as we progress toward the plan that God has given us. I talked to you about starting a counseling ministry around the first of this year, a year from now, which would be around the first of the year, with some great concepts and ideas of how to do that. Obviously, we could not do that with what we have here. So now God, out in front of us and ahead of us, is preparing a way, or at least it seems that way, that He is giving us the facility that we need that we can handle what happens as we grow, and you have a place to work with people that is a thousand times better. We only get this place on Sunday morning and Thursday, and then there are all kinds of people who use it in light of us. We are talking about a place that is ours 24/7 that we can come in at the middle of the night and do something if we want to. It is ours, and the possibilities of that, if we are dealing with people, is really unlimited.

I try to keep those parallels before you, and I try to show you how that you are never going to make a good pastor unless you make a good parent. You are just not going to. I do not know how to get that across to you. I do not think that we really understand the bottom line. You know what the real issue is? We talk about this all the time, and we point it out because you need to see it, but churches are failing today. There are churches that are gathering themselves together in great groups meeting, and the pastors are all coming together, and they are all talking about one major issue: why our churches are dying and not growing. I had a friend of mine that is a pastor, and he just came back from a conference that there must have been 500 pastors at that conference, and the main topic of that conference was why are our churches dying? In every case, the guys that they brought in put the answer or the problem not on the pastors, but on the world or society itself.

You hear standard answers: "Well, in the time of Noah, nobody got saved." "Well, people do not care about God." "People are turned off of God." They are blaming it on secularism. Sixty years ago, they blamed it on communism. They will blame it on all the homosexuals. They will blame it on this. They will blame it on that. They will blame it on the fracture of our society and the lifestyle. All of those things. I am not saying those things are not bad. But what I am saying is this: those things never have, never will, nor ever could they impact the power of God on this planet. The power of God is just as powerful today as it was 50 years ago, 100 years ago, or 500 years ago.

The problem is, if you walked out here on the street, you will see that there is a big power line going down that street. Those power lines go to a central substation down here, and everything is fed for this particular area from there. Now, if you walk around the back of this house, you are going to find that there is a meter on this place, and that meter goes down on the ground. Somewhere in there, it goes out to that pole, and it feeds its power off of that. That is how it works. All of that is—we do not have time to get into electricity this morning, but I could take

electricity and show you the Trinity and show you everything, because any time you have got power hanging on a pole, you have got something. But we do not have time to get in that this morning.

Let us say the power went out. If the power went out in this building, and it is just gone, does that mean that necessarily that the power is off the line going down here? Not necessarily. If the power is off here, the power is on somewhere. It is just a break between the central source and where we are at now. So we think that there is no power. But when everybody around us has got power, except we do not have power, that is where most churches are. The problem is not the power of God; the problem is there is a break in their power line between the main source and where they are at. They are walking around saying, "Woe is me! Look at the times we are in!" When the problem is the power on the pole is just as powerful today as it was two thousand years ago. The problem is we have got a break in the connection from point A to point B. But nobody wants to see that. Nobody wants to deal with that. We as human beings love to blame our problems on somebody else. That is just the way we operate. That is the way we work. That is the way we are.

The reason why churches fail, and I am going to take this thing down to the lowest common denominator for you, the reason why churches fail is the reason why most parents fail. I told you earlier that the Bible is a book of patterns. It really is. The Bible, when you look at the earth, when you look at the society that we are in, when you look at the universe, when you look at your own body, when you look at your own life, when you look at ministry, you look at your family, the Bible, whether you know it or not, is a blueprint of all of those things. The Bible is to an electrician what a schematic is. He opens up that power box, and there is a whole page of squiggly little things that to you and me means absolutely nothing. But he can trace where everything is at by that schematic because he understands the pattern. You are going to find that when a man builds a building, he has to make architectural plans. To you and me, it looks like nothing. To him, it is every joint, every coupling, every bolt, every angle iron, every piece that is going to put it all together to make the thing work and make the building what it needs to be. It is the same thing. The Bible is the book for patterning, for ministry, and it is the book for ministering to your family.

V. Understanding Different Cultures

I do not know of a time in my life where I think that probably churches and missions especially have failed for the last 40 years in America. American missions have been an absolute disaster around the world. I will tell you why it is, and not many people see this, but it is a true statement. The key to ministry, whether it be you going around the world or us reaching Kansas City or you reaching your family, depends on one very important thing: and that is the understanding of different cultures. Your family is a different culture than you are. If you are a man, your wife thinks differently than you do. She does not look at things the same way.

I was at a Raytown South football game a couple of years ago, and I was watching up there, and I was sitting in the back. Obviously, the mom and the dad sitting in front of me, their boy was playing football for Raytown South. They were all excited, and they had their jerseys on with his

number on it. They had the whole nine yards. I was watching all that. The boy was a running back, or one of those guys that run with the ball. They snapped the ball, gave it to him. He made a great play around the end, and it started to really look like he was going to break it wide open. About that time, out of nowhere, came two of the biggest mugs you ever saw in your life and just splattered him on the field. I was sitting right behind, and here was the reaction: Mom jumped up and said, "Oh, my God, they have killed him!" Dad jumped up and said, "Way to go, son, get up and give it to him again!" Immediately I saw two different cultures. Mom said, "Oh, my God, they killed my baby!" He is 6'4", 300 pounds, hit you like a freight train, baby. The dad said, "Get up, son, way to go!" See, two different viewpoints.

There is a great book, and it is a secular book, but it is a great book. Every husband and wife ought to read it. That book, "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus," it is so good because it is so true. The reason why marriages fail is because husbands will not, or cannot, or refuse to transcend into their wife's culture and the wife back to his culture. A husband has to see and understand why his wife says the thing that she says, reacts the way that she reacts. When we expect her to say, "Get up there and get him, son," she is saying, "Oh, they just killed my baby." They do not look at life the same way. Your children do not look at life the same way.

Back in my day, growing up, it was called the generation gap. The generation gap was, "How come my son is so weird, and how come I am so normal? How come he thinks things like that, and I think things like this?" The difference is you are talking about two different cultures. Now, that basic concept has destroyed the churches and missions. Pastors do the same thing. Missionaries around this world that I have been associated with, and that is why I am very leery of them, what they want to do is this, and this is what they are taught. They are taught by American seminaries to go out and to get into missions. But what they are taught is that if you are going to whatever country, let us say you are going to China, if you say you are going to Mexico, what they are taught to do is to basically live separate from the people they are trying to reach. You will find that those missionaries in every situation I have been in over the years on missionary trips, I know this is true, they all live in little compounds together. They will all have a little American flag on their window. That pastor or the missionary will have a little American flag on his lapel. He will completely desensitize himself from the culture that he is trying to reach, trying to reach that culture while he is still trying to maintain himself as an American. They will have holidays that America has down there. They will completely ignore the culture's holidays that they are in. They will not understand the music of that culture, so they will bring in American songs and try to rechange their culture.

It is like one guy said after years, he told me this. He says, "After years and years and years of beating my head against the wall, I finally went to somebody and I said," he says, "Why will you not come to my church? I have invited you for five years. I have tried to do everything I know how to do to get you to come to my church." He says, "Do you not know?" He says, "Why will you not? I just have to know, I am so frustrated. Why will people not come to my church?" He says, "Missionary man, that is real cheesy. We know you love us. We know you love my soul, but you do not love me. You will not accept my culture. You are an American coming down here, bringing your American ways into our culture. You are refusing to come and be one of us."

Watchman Nee was a great missionary. You know why he was a great missionary? Because he abandoned his own nationality, and he became one with the people that he wanted to reach. You know where that pattern is in the Bible? The pattern of that in the Bible is the great missionary, the Lord Jesus Christ. When He came down to earth, He abandoned everything He was, and He became what He wanted to reach. It is so easy to see. In fact, in your Bible, you have two kinds of patterns when it comes to those things. Do you ever know that Christ was the perfect missionary? He left earth to come down to be a missionary to planet Earth, and He became. Yet the Bible says that He is the perfect pastor because the Bible says over there, I think it is 1 Peter, that He is the Bishop of our souls. The bishop in the Bible is a pastor. He is the perfect missionary. He is the perfect pastor, and yet at the same time, He is my Heavenly Father. So to me as a child, He is my perfect Father. He is the perfect pattern in all three.

You ought to be a missionary. You ought to want to pastor someday as far as working with people, or certainly your own family. The bottom line is this: most of you are fathers to children, or in some respect, grandfathers or grandparents. The bottom line is this, you ought to follow the perfect pattern. Yet at the same time, so we would have some kind of relevance, He gave us imperfect patterns. I love it. God gave me a perfect pattern in Christ and everything that I see. Then He gave me imperfect patterns in men: David, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Paul, Timothy, John. He gave me an imperfect pattern to show me how an imperfect pattern can get as close as the perfect pattern you can get without becoming the perfect pattern.

There is no reason why we have to struggle with the things that we struggle with. There is no reason for us not reaching our children and changing the events of their lives except one: we do not want to. We do not want to. We do not want to. Of course, you are going to find that the key is reaching into those cultures, both in ministry and both in your family. Children are a different culture, the generation gap. This is why, and most people do not know this, but this is why in the early book of Acts, and how many times I am asked this question, how many times in the book of Acts and the early part of Acts, am I asked this question, why God is doing the things that He is doing? He is coming down, and He has somebody speaking in tongues. So we get all whacked out about that and think that that is something I have to have today. We see Him doing great miracles and doing this and doing that. So we all get whacked out and think that that is what He is going to do today through people, through men. We see all these weird things happening in the book of Acts, but because we do not know the Bible and we do not know very much about God, we do not know why it is that way in the Bible.

Let me tell you why God had to do it that way. Because from 606 BC, when God basically was finished with His people, the nation of Israel, you got 400 years. Those Jews are scattered throughout all of Asia Minor and literally all through the known world for 400 years. They have lost touch with God. Many of them lost their own language. That is why they are speaking in tongues in Acts chapter one, because they do not understand their Hebrew tongue anymore. All of them have lost their culture. They have amalgamated into everything that was out there that had nothing to do with God. Basically what had happened is the same thing that happens with your family, your wife, your children, is the fact that they grew apart from God. God was an absolute standard that He wanted them to keep. For 400 years, they had gotten so far from that

standard that they are barely recognizable of what they were in the Old Testament. You had a generation gap. You had a generation gap between what God was and wanted them to be and to what they actually were.

You know what the reason was for the gap? Because they did not stay consistent with the principles that God had given them. You know where your generation gap comes into your family? You allow it to happen. You allow your child to go off in one direction when you stay stationary in this direction. Pretty soon, after five or six years, you wonder why your child is thinking the things he is thinking. How many times have dads said to me, "Why do these kids come up with the craziest things in the world? You know what my son said the other day?" Hey, if you had been part of that process all through his life, you would have been able to correct him out of that thinking. You would have been able to keep him from getting those weird concepts, and the generation gap would have never happened in your life. But because we failed to penetrate the cultures of our own family, one, your wife, two, your children, because we failed to penetrate into that culture and become one with our child, become one with our spouse, become one in everything that we are doing in our lives with them, just like the missionaries. We isolate ourselves in a little world, and we choose what we are going to let in and who we are going to let in and when we are going to let it in. That is exactly what happens, and that is how it fails. It is exactly how it fails.

The key to your family and your ministry is understanding their different cultures. I have said it before: if you are a father here, your first church that you need to pastor is your family. You hone your pastoring skills with them. If you are not a good parent, I do not know how to tell you this. If you do not have control and authority in the concept of being able to deal with your children, I did not say your children would always do what is right. I am interested in how you deal with them when they do not do what is right. Not everybody in this church is going to do what is right. You do not judge my pastoring skills by everybody doing what is right. You judge my ability to be a good pastor by how I deal with it when I have to deal with it. Most pastors want to ignore problems, just like a lot of parents want to ignore problems. Of course, there lies the problem. You as the leader have to be able to transcend into their world and lead them.

It is very obvious to me that many of you, or many parents, not maybe necessarily you, but many parents cannot do that. It takes a lot of hard self-discipline and a lot of work. When you are already overwhelmed, when you are already tired, when you already have all that you can say grace over, so to speak, I am telling you, just like God will get the short end of the stick, your children will get the short end of the stick. That is why some of you now, eight weeks into this, if I made you produce the paper this morning that shows the thing that is wrong with you that you are working through the Bible and taking seriously, the reason why you have not done it yet is because you are not going to do it. You running home this afternoon and getting it all out now because I said something just proves the fact that you will never do it because tomorrow or next day or next week, you will be off to another issue someplace, and it will be lost as it was in your mind after I said it. That is why so many men fail in pastoring. You give them 40 people, and a year later they are down to 10, and then a year later from that, it is him and his wife.

Good leaders have to understand that there are certain things that you have to do. You show me a man that can do that, who can get his family to live under his authority while they are in his house, and he gets to them the vision, and they all become one together in joining through each other's culture and get this thing running, I will show you a good pastor. That is why in 1 Timothy 3:5, the Bible says that a pastor has to rule his children well. It talks about his house. People are living under his house. Then he says in the next verse, how would they take care of the house of God if they cannot take care of their family? The answer is you will not. You will not.

Most pastors that I have dealt with in my own ministry that I have trained up, I will tell you what happens, and I see it all the time. The issue of pastor becomes a prideful thing. You like to have that piece of paper, do you not? Sure you do. You like to have that thing that says you are a pastor. You like to strut around the churches, and I have seen it all in churches that I have been. You get some guys and grow up, and it has been all my ministry. Now you strut around and you talk about how you are a pastor, but in your own family and your own life with your own wife and your own kid, when you are faced with the issues, you just simply will not do it. You are a P.P., a pretend pastor.

Time, availability. Your children need you, and giving them material things or anything outside of the vision that God has given you will just not work. They may work short term, but it is not going to work long term. When I was a kid growing up, some of you older people remember this. We did not have the exorbitant power things that we had. We had those 40 amp services or 100 amp services, and they maybe had four fuses in it. Remember those? What happened was if you blew a fuse, you would go down, you did not have any more fuses. Somebody raise your hand and tell me what you did. You put a penny behind it. Rebecca Becker, she has no idea what I am talking about with fuses. She has grown up in a fuseless generation. I see the confusion on your face. All right, we are going to get you a fuse box. We are going to explain it to you next week.

What you had was a little box about this big, and you opened it up, and there were four little round fuses that you screwed in. Oh, Sandy remembers, do you not? Tell her. They went into the—it was like a light socket switch or a socket, and you screwed the fuse in, and it made connection with the power, and then it fed your house. When a fuse blew, it meant that you had too much, your hair blower was going on, and it took too much amps, so it popped the fuse. Today it pops your breaker, so you just go down and snap the breaker back. This is the modern world. In my day and age, it was a fuse. In our house, my dad never had any more fuses. So what you did was you took the fuse out, copper penny, put it in there, screwed it in, and it made re-contact. What it did was it, for a short period of time, it reintroduced the energy back into that fuse and allowed you to get through. The problem was, that was a good short-term fix. The problem long-term: it burns your house down.

That is what many times we do as parents. We take the—I mean, it was—I am not saying it was easier for my dad or my mom to put a penny behind it at 9 o'clock at night than it was to find an all-night hardware store and go out and drive around and get the deal. Short-term, it looked good. But we are all standing out in the yard shivering because the house is burning, and I am there in my underwear at 9 years old. Long-term, it did not look very good. That is the way it is many

times with parents. The short-term looks good, and obviously it takes less work. But the long-term, it burns your house down. It burns your house down.

VI. Building Communication and Intimacy

It is just one of those things. Now the key to this in transcending those cultures and becoming a good parent in a relationship attitude is a couple of things. First of all, I would suggest that you build good communication skills with your child. Obviously your wife, I put them all in the same thing. If you cannot sit down and communicate well with them and talk with them, then there is something wrong. How you become a good communicator—and I have asked this question, "Well, how do you become a good communicator?" Let me tell you how you become—it is real simple. Let me tell you how you become a good communicator: you become a better listener. That is how you become a better communicator. You become a better listener. You listen to what they say.

Do you ever notice how that when you come over to my house, we go up in the upper room, my office up there, and we will sit down, and you will tell me what is going on in your world, or you will lay stuff out to me? Did you ever notice how absolutely attentive I am to you? Have you ever seen me looking around? Have you ever seen me looking at the clock, wondering if you are done yet? Those chairs are swivel chairs. Have you ever seen me just while you are talking just swinging around in that thing up there? You know, catch every word on the flip around as I come around? No. No. I give you my undivided attention. I hang on to every word you say. You know why? Because it is important to me. Because I want to be a good communicator with you. When I am working with you in the Bible, I am communicating the truths of God. When you are talking to me about issues in life at that particular point in my life, I have no other thought in my mind. I am not thinking about what I am going to do later. I am not thinking of what I did today. You have my undivided attention because I am doing something that to me, I do not know how you feel about it, but to me is the most absolutely essential thing I can do to be a good pastor, and that is to listen to what you have to say and to make whatever you are at in life the most important thing in my world at that particular time.

That is what you need to do with your children. You need to learn to communicate well by listening better, listening to what they say. Stop whatever you are doing. Now, I mean, do not let them interrupt. If you are having an adult conversation and your child comes up and pulls and says, "Mommy," you do well to say, "Honey, I will be with you in just a second. Let me finish talking here, and you can tell me what you want." That is a good thing. You do not let them interrupt, but at the same time, when you are not doing anything and they come to you, you give them your undivided attention. You stop what you are doing. You take time to look and to listen. You make their world part of your world. You transcend. Do not live in a parallel universe where you just coexist together. Do not just get into their world and into their life when something goes wrong.

Most fathers come home from work. I understand. They are tired. They have had a bad day. They have got things on their mind. They have issues of their own. You have one or two kids running up to you, and you are tired, and you had all in your mind, and you come home. You are going to

kick back and relax. Now you have suddenly at the door waiting for you somebody who all day long they have been looking for you to come home. They do not understand where you are at, and the real problem is because you have not spent the time to transcend their culture. You do not understand where they are at. So, "It does not bother me. I am really tired right now. Do not bother me. I am tired." See, that is not what they need. That is not what they need. You cannot do that. I know you cannot do it when you get into the ministry, but that is why many men will not make good ministers. They will not make good pastors. They cannot do that.

In both cases, you have to learn to discipline yourself to prepare for your family. You have to put yourself aside. You are the pastor. You are the leader. You have got to keep the vision in your own mind. But my God, I cannot even get you to sit down and list the things that are wrong that you have got to change about you. How can I ever expect you to get to that point? That is why I know that doing this is very important, and we will use this for generations to come. Many of you will do what you need to do, and I already see many of you doing, but I am not a fool to think that many of you will not do anything with it. You will not do anything with it. You are always going to be where you are at today. It is just as simple as that.

I found in reality, and I need to say that, I found in reality that I have plenty of time to do the things that I want to do if I will just get disciplined with my own time. We talk about many times, "We do not have time to do this, none of that," but then when you stop and you look back at all the time we wasted all day long, we have, in most cases—I am sure there is an exception to it—but in most cases, the problem we have is not time; it is how we use our time. It is the fact that we are not disciplined, we are not structured in it. You have got to realize that on your way home from work, you have got to have the vision that you prepare yourself for those little kids. You get yourself, you get your game face on. You get your mindset, "Hey, I am a pastor."

Let me tell you something, you think I just deal with people's problems nine to five? You think when the phone rings at 5:15, I say, "Oh boy, that is a terrible thing you are going through. Well, if you had called 15 minutes ago, I could have helped you, I am off the clock now." I am never off the clock, never. You think there is a time when I sit down and really want to do something I want to do, and the phone rings or somebody is at the front door, and there is an issue there that needs to be taken care of? You do not think there are times in my life where I do not think, "Man, I just really..." You know what you do? I will tell you what you do. You have the vision of what God is doing with you more than the vision of what you want to do with it. You simply say, "You know what, as much as I wanted to do this, as much as I was looking forward to this, you know what, there is something else that needs me more than this right now, and I am going to have to make a choice. I can either say 'call me tomorrow' or I can sit and watch what I want, or I say, 'You know what? I will catch it on the backside. This is more important to me.'" That is what you have to do. You think that is easy for me? It was never easy for me. It is not easy today. But you have got to discipline yourself for what is important in life. What is important in life is your family. It is you. It is your children. It is your wife. That is what is important in life. That is what you have got to focus yourself to, to get to that.

You need to make memories with your children while you can. Laugh, have fun, be one of them. I will tell you something else you have got to do, and I know you will not do this. You would not

do this for anything in the world, some of you. But this is what you have got to do. But you will not. When your kid gets to be about eight or nine years old, or ten or eleven years old, or someplace when you can really have a contact with them, you need to do this. You need to sit down with them and you need to say, "Johnny, let me ask you a question," and get in a serious mode. "Let me ask you a question. You know how much I love you." "Yeah, Daddy, I love you too." "Well, I will tell you what, we have some good times together." "Yeah, we do." "Susie, you are just one of the finest little girls I ever had. I just, we have so much fun here." "Yeah, we do, Daddy. I would rather hang out with you than anything else in the whole world." "Me too, Daddy. I just love you to death." "Let me ask you a question, Susie. John, let me ask you a question. If you could change anything about me as your Daddy to help me be a better Daddy, what would it be?" That is what you ought to ask them.

You see, once you ask them that, listen to what they say, and then you have the, in time, the floor there to build back where you can say, once you answer them and say, "Well, you know what, I am going to really work on those things. In fact, let us make a little chart down here and let you grade me on how well I do this." And then, "You know what, since you brought it up, let me tell you, there are some things that I want you to work on in your life." Now you have a platform, but it was not where you just dropped it on them first. You put it on yourself first, and then you give it to them. You have got to see those things. You know why most parents will not do that? I will tell you what. It is one, you have no intention of changing. I do not know what to tell you. I wish it was true. It was not true. I wish it was not true. Tell me it was not true. Tell me it was not true. It is true. You have no desire to change about you what you need to change. You will find every reason in the world not to hear this message this morning. You are not going to do it, and it is a tragedy. Listen to their answers. Develop that intimate relationship with them. Parents need to understand that you lead your children into these things. They just do not happen.

God always has time for me, always does. There is never a time in my life when God does not have time for me. Whatever pattern we set as parents is the pattern our children will find.

Proverbs 20:7

The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.

You see? Once you set the pattern for your children to follow, they will follow that pattern. In time, you hopefully will see. You know what I am saying? I say it almost every week, over and over and over and over again: you have to change yourself to change your child.

VII. Building Character Traits in Children

In closing, I want to give you this. Take your Bibles and turn over to 2 Peter chapter 1. I want to show you another great Bible truth. It shows us that in time, as your child grows through these four transitions, they get saved, and as they move through the relationship, the fellowship, and into the responsibility stage, you have to continue. This is what I have been talking about all through this, about keep defining the vision. Keep redefining it. Keep putting it into perspective. Keep getting it where it needs to be that everybody can understand how this thing, that they keep

it before them. But there are some things that as this thing goes through these four transitions, you need to build into your child. They do not happen by accident.

2 Peter 1:4

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

2 Peter 1:5

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

2 Peter 1:6

And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

2 Peter 1:7

And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

2 Peter 1:8

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:9

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

What a powerful verse. It says very clearly and plainly, the key to your relationship with God is the promises that God has given you. It shows us that in time there are some things that you need to add to your children's faith. You need to add them to your faith through this process with the vision, the principles of biblical parenting, correct thinking, correct teaching, correct treatment, correct testimony. You build these character traits into your child.

Look at very quickly, look at the first one: it is virtue. You know what virtue is? That is character. Your child does not grow or is not born with character. You have to train them to have character. That is also called integrity sometimes. You have to train them. You have to build that into them.

He says knowledge, that would be the structure of life. That would be the teaching and the training that you give them.

Temperance, that would be self-control, self-discipline. That means that in all things you are balanced, that you take things in life. It means you do not lose it at a volleyball game or a softball game and act like some idiot out there and make a fool out of yourself. You are balanced. You have temperance. Those things you build into your child. Those things just do not happen. Your child just does not grow up and accept the good things and the bad things of life without that. They have got to be built into their lives. You have got to add those things.

Patience. Patience is being content. It is being satisfied with where you are at.

1 Timothy 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

That is a great thing. Your child does not learn to do that just by accident. He has to see that in your pattern. All of these things have to be in your pattern.

Godliness. Godliness is the character qualities of Christ, predominantly grace and truth.

Brotherly kindness. That is the thing, how you treat other Christians.

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Charity. Charity is the last one, and probably charity, and I am not saying any one is more important than the other, but charity certainly sums it all up because charity is the ability for you to give of yourself and everything unconditionally. No conditions to it. That is what Christ did. That is what made Him the perfect missionary. That is what made Him the perfect pastor. What made Him, makes Him the perfect Father. That is what will make you, even though you and I are not perfect, it will get us to the point where we can perfect ourselves under the work of ministry. We will never be perfect, but we can constantly be in a work of perfection. That is what it does.

It is a point where you take these things, and he says in verse 8, "For if these things be in you, and abound," see, lifestyle, you use them. They become part of your life, and you bring them in, your child grows up not knowing any other things than these because they see the perfect pattern that you have in your life, you and your wife. I love this, "make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge," and I love this, "of our Lord Jesus Christ." You notice how we put all three titles there? It was not Christ Jesus or the Lord. It was the Lord Jesus Christ. There is something you want to talk about learning about God componently. Study Him as Lord, study Him as Jesus, study Him as Christ. Put the three together, you have the complete package.

Verse 9 says, "If you lack these things, you are blind." It means spiritually blind. You have no vision. You have no ability to see beyond. All you see is what is before you. Of course, it all goes back to you understanding that availability is the key to your child. Through your availability to him, you provide in his life one of the great patterns that God provides for us, and that is your child has access to you anytime he wants to. There is never a time that you are too busy to deal with them. It is good for pastoring in a church. It is good for pastoring in your family. There is never a time that your children do not have what they need from you.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You so much.