

*THERE'S A
PLACE FOR
GRACE*

Heidi Billington

Smythe Street Cathedral | May 27, 2018

NOT THAT FAMILY:

The blue mini van pulled up in front of the grocery store. The doors open revealing a week's worth of book bags, gym clothes, suckers and what is that smell? A mixture of week old McDonalds hamburger and overheated Scentsy air freshener escapes. She scurries to stuff the trash that's fallen out on to the parking lot, back into the van floor before the kids pile out. She hisses clearly, oh how we Mom's can hiss so clearly! "Let us not be **THAT** family today please!" Her fair warning as they head in to get the weeks groceries.

TEXTING CONFESSION:

Or she texts her confession to her friend, because somehow maybe that makes it alright, "I'm trying to conjure up supper and I just realized I fed the kids fudgcicles for lunch. Does that make me a bad Mom?"

THERE'S A PLACE FOR PARENTS:

Of course, these stories aren't mine! And of course, these moments are simple in comparison to many of the really difficult moments we face in our parenting ... but how badly do we want things to be **perfect, as parents?** To at least **look** perfect, because truthfully, we know about ourselves. And this is still exactly the **same in the church**, maybe even more so. The desire for perfect parenting.

Yup, today I'm talking to parents, married, single, divorced, co-parenting, grandparents- all the parents. There's a place for parents at the table.

Here's what I've recognized in my 11 years of Parenting:

TWO TYPES OF PARENTS:

There are two types of parents:

- 1- Those who have it all together and
2. Those who don't.

NO!! There are:

- 1- Those who work very hard to look like, or convince themselves they have it all together and
- 2- Those who don't.

This is no different in the church. It may actually be worse.

Today I don't want to **discourage you** in your parenting journey, nor do I want you to walk away feeling **released from the responsibility** of parenting, what I do want you to know is that **There is a place for Grace, for Parents.**

Can we pray together?

THE BIBLE & PARENTING:

Have you ever noticed that certain **phrases** or **bits scripture** can flood the mind so quickly when you're parenting? For instance, how many of us have had part of a verse or phrase fly through our minds when we are on the verge of a **parenting hissy fit**?

Whoever spares the rod spoils the child...

Or with a pointed finger and a raised voice:

Ephesians 6:1,
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right!! Honor your father and mother- which is the first commandment!!"

We skip the parts about loving correction and promises from God. And our voice raises a little more hysterically with each word.

It's not very often we hear with equal fervor:

Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers do not exasperate your children?"

Less common eh.

The truth is Parents, even Christ following parents, we are just sinners.

We are sinners, parenting sinners.

And though this flies in the face of our **Practically Pinterest Perfect Parenting**, (and all the poets and English teachers sighed blissfully at that alliteration!) here's the thing:

Our Sin Makes Space for Jesus. Yup. Our sin makes space for Jesus.

And there is nothing quite like parenting to help us recognize our sin.

This is the **Truth of the Gospel**.

We are **inadequate** for God.

He longs for **relationship** with us.

So, he sent Jesus, his perfect son to **make right**, pay the punishment for our wrong doing.

He's the **only one** who could do this because He is wholly God.

So he died a horrible death with our relationship in the front of his mind.

But he shows us he **conquers death**- and consequently our fear of death- in coming back to life

So, then it's up to us, he offers us relationship if we want it because God wants our **heart relationship**, not our **duty relationship**.

When we recognize our **need**, our inadequacies, and ask Jesus, the almighty son of God if he would go before us, as our advocate to make our relationship with God right. **It begins. Our relationship**, with God begins.

FIRST:

If you haven't put your trust in Jesus yet, **First**, I'd encourage you to seriously consider choosing him today. Today, could be the start for you. I can tell you personally, this has made all the difference for me, all of it.

PARENTING GAPS:

From there, if **we also recognize and admit our need, our inadequacies in our parenting, HE can also can go ahead of us filling in the gaps of our parenting and drawing our children's eyes to him.**

Our Sin Makes Space for Jesus.

You see, Jesus welcomes the children, in Matthew 19.
It is the adults, the disciples of Jesus even who hold the children back.

Matthew 19:14 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them!"

What do you suppose made the disciples feel they needed to stop the children getting close to Jesus? Were they dirty? Had they been rolling in the mud all morning and they didn't want Jesus's white robes to get dirty? Or did the adults just see them as "less than"?
Jesus **prioritizes** the children, he says, don't get in way of the children coming to me.

PICTURE PERFECT:

But sometimes our desire to portray a **picture-perfect walk with God**, our **picture perfect spirituality**, our **picture perfect parenting**, to our children can get in the way of us having a **real relationship** with them, or even get in the way of them seeing **OUR** need and consequently **THEIR** need, for a relationship with Jesus.

Allow YOUR sin to be the platform for your children to see Jesus's love and grace.

As we recognize our **own need** for Jesus, as the platform for **our own** relationship with God, we can experience his grace, freedom and love.
It is the same with parenting.

It is not until we recognize our need for Jesus **IN our parenting** and allow him to bridge the gap of our imperfection that we can experience the **grace, freedom and love in our parenting relationship with our children.**

PARENTING = RELATIONSHIP

Your job in parenting primarily – long term- is a **relationship**, because without it you have no influence.

Let us prioritize it, let us fight for it.

It is love, showing up time over time.

It is being present and dependable in the regular rhythms of our day to day lives.

STICKY FAITH:

The Fuller Youth Institute has conducted years of research determining what common factors are involved in young adults who stick with their faith through the various phases of growing up. We know that upwards of 60% of kids walk away from faith and the church after graduation. We have to ask- WHY IS THAT?

And then we have to ask for those who don't what is the difference?

The top reasons aren't necessarily that they attended church every Sunday

- you didn't expect me to say that did you?-

but instead,

children whose **faith "stuck"** into adulthood had imperfect parents talking about what they've seen and are seeing God do in their own lives and the lives of those they know, in the regular rhythms of their every day.

Not just their Sundays' but their Mondays. You see how imperfect parenting matters.

Let's crack into the Bible and have a bit of fun today in the book of Deuteronomy, in the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy** is the 5th book in the front end of your Bible.

Those first 5 books can be pretty daunting at times to read through, but they are loaded with some amazing truth about who God is.

Side note, knowing the backstory, before Jesus, makes Jesus's arrival and work and death, so extremely extra cool.

Faith tip: Get to know the back story! The more I do this the more I'm amazed- truly.

In **Deuteronomy chapter 11, Moses**, an often fearful and imperfect leader (and all the leaders took a deep sigh of relief!) is telling the Israelites **how to raise their children**. Now the Israelites were God's chosen people and they had just recently been travelling around and around in circles through the hot, dry desert for **40 years because of their disobedience**- now that's some serious consequences!- But they held to a promise from God for a rich and plentiful land and they were about to see that promise finally fulfilled.

Could you all help me, by reading aloud the word in **bold** as I read to you what Moses says:

“Keep in mind, that I am not talking now to your children, who have never experienced the discipline of the Lord your God, or **SEEN** his greatness and his strong hand and powerful arm.

They didn't **SEE** the miraculous signs and **SEE** what the Lord did to the armies of Egypt and to their horse and chariots- how he drowned them in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. He destroyed them, and they have not recovered to this very day!

Your children didn't **SEE** how the Lord cared for you in the wilderness until you arrived here. They didn't **SEE**... But you **HAVE SEEN** the Lord perform all these mighty deeds with your own eyes!

Your children didn't see how the Lord cared for you in the wilderness until you arrived here. They didn't see.

We've got to TEACH THEM TO SEE

But how? Let's keep reading:

So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, and when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Do you **SEE** how this is all about **RELATIONSHIP**?

Time over Time.

At home.

When you're driving

Tucking them in at bed

Getting them out the door in the morning.

Looking for reminders (you might not actually tie things to your forehead here).

Reminding them of God's provision and protection.

Let's get really practical here, like "parenting style practical". It's kind of like this pile of dirty clothes. You know, the ones that sit beside the **laundry** hamper.

Every day your chil-er –family members peel them from their bodies, and drop them, if you're really lucky, right BESIDE the laundry hamper. Every time they change their clothes, 2 million times a day.

You could never say a word, day after day watching them pile up beside the hamper OR you stop them, each time, and say "Hey, do you see this here? This is a laundry basket, THIS is where the dirty clothes go.

We can stop in the regular every day moments and help them SEE, believing the impact will be greater in the end than that once a week parenting meltdown that raises the roof while expressing the magnitude of their dirt and filth!!

Some day's our parenting, let alone parenting our kids to follow Jesus, seems like a big pile of dirty underwear. We can choose to be **overwhelmed by the magnitude of the job and kick it** under the bed, or we can **rewire our expectations and draw attention to God in the everyday things.**

UNLIKE THE ISREALITES:

Unlike the Israelites, not all of us have seen a **great body of water divide** to create a travelling passage way to freedom, but we may have had a **co-worker** put in a good word for us to help us land a job.

Unlike the Israelites We may not have seen our **enemies drown** as the water crashes in around them ensuring our escape, but we may have heard of someone **talking poorly** of us and the truth being brought to light through no doing of our own.

Unlike the Israelites Maybe we haven't seen a **quail land** on our front doorstep at suppertime each day for years (though I did have a mountain of june bugs just two nights ago), but we may have had a **bag of clothes** land on our doorstep that just happened to be the right size for our growing son.

Unlike the Israelites Maybe we haven't **won wars** by having two friends help us hold our staff over our head for hours, but we may have had a friend show up with a **bucket of ice cream** and a listening ear and tell you, I'll fight this one with you.

Choose to See!

HUMILITY:

But sometimes seeing, and choosing to teach our children to see God at work, involves a dose of humility.

The Israelites couldn't truly tell the story of God's **provision of food**, without admitting how they **wined and complained**.

They couldn't really tell the impact of God's **protection and guidance** through the wilderness, a pillar of fire at night, a cloud by day, without **mentioning their fear and need**.

Can you imagine herding a crowd of 3 to 5 million through the Red Sea! (We complain about getting the kids from the mini-van to the grocery store in any length of time!)

It isn't until we recognize and admit our need, that we find God. And don't we want him smack dab in the middle of our parenting? There he is, offering forgiveness and grace, love we don't deserve.

It is the same in parenting. It is the same in raising our kids to follow God's ways. It isn't until we recognize our imperfections, our needs, and even admit them, that we find God, and he's there offering his Grace to us.

Yeah, there's grace at this table.

So, let's be **age appropriate, and considerate**, but let's not hide our imperfections, our sin, our frustrations from our children.

They aren't looking for perfect parents, they are **looking for a relationship with their imperfect parents**.

Let us teach them to put their **hope and their expectations** in our mighty God, not in us!

Show them what they have not yet seen for themselves.

Reggie Joiner, a leading thinker in Family Ministries says that if you allow Him, **"God is telling a story of restoration and redemption, through your family."**

This is an opportunity for **God's grace to be on display**. God is in the middle of our mess!

And if we choose to look for him in it, our humanness can be the platform for demonstrating His power, goodness and love to the world around us.

But just as powerfully, our reactions our judgments, our harsh words, can show the world around us just that, judgment, harshness, callousness.

ORANGE:

As a church we talk about having an **Orange philosophy**, we want to partner with parents to raise their children to follow Jesus. We believe that YOU have the **greatest influence** in the spiritual life of your child and we want to come alongside you and link arms with you, and resource you.

If **yellow** symbolizes the light of the church and **red**, the love of the family, together our possibilities grow in **Orange**.

Not only are we two great influences in the life of a child, but together, when we say the same messages etc. our two great influences have a much greater impact. $1+1>2$

Outside of **Hannah**, who drops her boy off at the church for them to raise, I don't see anywhere in the Bible where this is the case, instead we see God reminding his people to teach of his goodness, his faithfulness, his power, in the **unforced, regular rhythms of their daily lives**.

PARTNER:

We want to **partner** with you as a church. We want to link arms with you in raising your children to have a faith of their own. We promise to create **consistent and relevant** environments for your child through their different phases of growth, so they can grow in their relationships with God.

As babies and preschoolers we will show them the **wonder** of God's creation, that God made them and loves them and wants a relationship with them. As Elementary school kids, we will teach them who to ask questions and **discover** what the Bible says and how it relates to them. In Middle school and High School we will help channel that **passion** and energy to be used to serve God with their unique set of abilities, finding purpose in Him.

But YOU, must fight for their hearts!

We don't want to see you "**survive a phase**" of parenting. Instead we want you to take it by the horns and thrive in it, soak it up, don't miss it. How often as parents do we hear, if I could go back... you're going to miss this...but in the business of parenting there's little time to pause and really think through what we are doing, how we are going to be **intentional** in what we are doing.

We created an event tonight called "**Seize the Phase**" with that premise in mind. **Let's gather around a table**, let's share truth stories about parenting, the good, the bad and the ugly, lets **support** each other, resource each other and encourage each other. It's not too late to sign up at the back for that tonight 5-7pm.

As a church, we go back to Deuteronomy 11 and we encourage you and resource you to make the most of the regular rhythms of your day to day life, to help you fight for **relationship** with your child, no matter their age, and capitalize on the everyday moments to **SHOW** them God at work in your life:

1. When you are at home- **Meal Time**
2. When you are on the road- **Drive Time**
3. When you are going to bed – **Bed Time**
4. When you are getting up. –**Morning Time**
5. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Our failures can point to our forgiveness.

Psalm 73:26 My health may fail, my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart.

9 years ago, I had a difficult baby wrapped in a cuddly wrap to my chest 23 hours a day and Debbie Lebel leaned over in church, seeing I'm sure, the exhaustion on my face and said "Heidi, at night, I would always go into my children's rooms, when they were asleep and pray "Father God, today, I failed in many ways, but you are their perfect parent, will you **fill in all the gaps** of my parenting?" I've never forgotten that, and rare does a night go by where I don't pray the same thing.

Today, maybe you need to tell your Father God, as his child, God, I've been failing in these ways, will you fill in all the gaps in my parenting?

There is grace for you.

PRAYER: COME TO ME:

Jesus says "tell them to come to me." He means the children. You too, are his child.

Maybe you need to take an **uncomfortable step** out of your seat right now, I'm going to ask you to do it, grab a friend and come to the front and say, **"I'm putting aside my parenting pride, God, help me."** Start coming now.

Maybe today you would ask, will **someone pray with me**, for my daughter, my child, my friend's daughter, myself.

Maybe your **heart is hurting** so badly for a child, a grandchild, the one that got away.

Maybe **your sister has been estranged** from the family for 4 years, taking your niece with her and your heart hurts so badly you can't even talk about it.

Maybe, today you need to be **reminded that though the 40 years** in the desert were so **very long, the miracles along the way were extraordinary, and God's promise was fulfilled in the end, and yes, there were moments you lost hope.**

Maybe today you need to pray and ask God for **today's manna, today's sustenance**, to have just enough strength to keep parenting when you feel like you're doing it all on your own.

Maybe you need to pray for a **fire to light up the dark**, for a way through when there seems to be no way, for the **fire to burn up your fear**.

Whatever it is, could we dare to do that? Could we partner together and show a generation, who hasn't seen yet, this is the miraculous hand of God, I saw it, knew it, felt it, was sustained by it and know that it's true.

Let's show them what they have not yet seen for themselves.

Our sin makes space for Jesus.

Our failures can point to our forgiveness.

There's a place for Grace.

Parenting isn't supposed to LOOK perfect. Not with God. Parenting, like our own relationship with God, is imperfect, and this imperfection, makes room for Jesus to do HIS work. God teach us to see, and teach our children to see, your mighty hand at work in our lives.

Let us be a church that embraces broken families, because we all are broken families.