

# Discipling Our Children

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, in Genesis 2.15, the Lord God took the man, Adam, and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Now, as we study the roles and responsibilities of men, we keep coming back to this verse because it implies more than Adam's obligation to work in the garden.

Now, yes, this mandate was given to Adam, the first man, but it's a mandate for all of mankind. And that's quickly understood when we turn over to Genesis chapter 9 and we see the Lord giving this mandate all over again after the flood in Noah's day.

Obviously, he doesn't use garden-specific language in that case, but all of the obligations given to Adam are given to Noah and his family, implying that this is, in fact, a perpetual mandate that did not end with Adam in the garden.

We should also understand that when God says, work it and keep it, he implies more than the garden itself. Yes, the garden is obviously included in that, but Adam was to work and keep everything that God had placed under his stewardship, represented, of course, by the garden, and I believe that includes his wife and his family.

[ 1 : 27 ] Now, we might ask, how does one work and keep his family? Aren't these terms better suited for agriculture? Well, as we talked about, the word work means to cultivate.

It means to nurture. And the word keep means to guard and protect. So, we've applied these terms as they relate to marriage, but it's interesting because the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, seems to echo this two-fold mandate when he writes to fathers about raising their children.

And we find this in a couple of places. The first is Ephesians 6-4. This is where Paul writes, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Now, I don't know if you heard it in that. We have the protective, do not provoke, and we have the nurturing, bring them up.

As fathers, we work by bringing up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, as Paul says, and we keep by not provoking our children to anger.

[ 2 : 46 ] We are working and keeping our children in these ways, just as Adam was told to work and keep everything that God had placed under his stewardship. We could also consider Colossians 3-21.

But it only provides us with half the mandate, though it's worth noting how Paul expresses it just a little differently. That's where he writes, Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

So, if maybe we put these passages together, Paul says, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, lest they also become discouraged, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

So, evidently, God intends for the so-called masculine mandate to extend beyond Adam, and even beyond physical labor in the garden.

It extends to us today. It extends to the various types of work we have today, and it extends to our marriages, as we've talked about, and it extends to our parenting.

[ 3 : 52 ] It extends to fatherhood. And that's our focus today. And please notice Paul's address in both Ephesians 6-4 and Colossians.

It isn't fathers, mothers, Sunday school teachers, public educators. No, Paul very specifically says, Fathers.

Fathers bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Yes, mothers have a role. Sunday school teachers have a role. Everyone in the church has a role, but the responsibility of raising children to know and to follow the Lord is primarily, explicitly given to fathers.

Now, what exactly is it that fathers are commissioned to do regarding their children? Well, in the masculine mandate, Richard Phillips says, According to the Bible, the two main obligations of fatherhood are to nurture, work, and protect, keep.

A man is called to work the hearts of his children that they might become fertile soil for the gospel and devotion to Christ. And a man is called to keep and protect his children from the influences of sin in the world and in their own hearts so that all the efforts to draw that young person's heart to Christ may not be swept away.

[ 5 : 25 ] Now, notice how many times in that one paragraph, Phillips uses the word heart. Work the hearts. Protect the hearts. Draw the heart to Christ.

You see, our tendency as fathers is to become somewhat legalistic in our approach to parenting. We want to shape our children's behaviors.

We want to see them doing right, not wrong, and that's good, but it can also be very superficial, and that's the problem. It doesn't really address the heart of the matter, pun intended.

So, what is the heart of the matter? Well, it's the child's heart. That's what we're after. We all remember what Christ said about some of the most religious people in his day.

This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me. We don't want that for our children.

[ 6 : 28 ] The Pharisees and many others throughout Israel were seemingly doing all of the right things. They worshiped in the synagogues every Sabbath. They met in Jerusalem for the feasts and the annual sacrifices.

They kept the commandments of God, at least on a surface level. But it was all for nothing because their hearts were far from God. So, we can bring our children to church every Sunday.

We can mold their behavior by disciplining them when they do something wrong. We can help them memorize the Bible. We can do a lot of things that put their outward conduct more in line with God's will, but that doesn't mean we've successfully reached their hearts.

Phillips writes, If I had to pick just one verse on parenting from the book of Proverbs, the main source of our biblical wisdom on this subject, it would be Proverbs 23, 26.

And what does Proverbs 23, 26 say? My son, give me your heart. Give me your heart.

[ 7 : 40 ] Give me your heart. Since reading that, I have wanted to hang that verse in every room of the house, simply to remind myself that my role as a father is not merely to shape the conduct of my children.

I want their hearts. As Proverbs 4, 23 says, Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

The heart represents the entire person, his mind, his affections, his will. So, wherever the heart goes, the body follows.

And conversely, if the heart isn't in it, no amount of external conformity will accomplish anything. As John Flavel wrote, If the heart is not conquered, nothing is done.

In other words, there's a difference between a compliant child and a converted child. Good behavior can be little more than a shiny veneer if the heart isn't changed.

[ 8 : 51 ] Or if the heart is untouched by grace. The proverb doesn't say, My son, give me your behavior. Or give me your body.

Give me your presence. No, it says, My son, give me your heart. We as fathers want to see the hearts of our children penetrated.

Softened. Led in the right direction. You see, if the heart isn't changed, what will happen when the child grows up and moves out and begins living independently?

Well, I know what happened to me. Suddenly, I realize, wait a minute, I don't have the same restraints I used to have. There's nobody here to tell me that I can't do something. So, I began following my own whims and desires.

And they led me in all the wrong directions, of course. But if the heart is changed, from it flow the springs of life. If the heart is changed, then a person, a child who grows up, won't want to change their behavior.

[ 10 : 01 ] That good conduct, that obedience to God will have become more than mere ritual or compliance to his or her parents' wishes. It will be who they are.

It will be their person. So, even on their own, living independently, if the heart is changed, they will continue to walk with God. And they will do so happily. They will do so willingly.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says, I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. I think Paul's approach to ministry is insightful and can teach us something about what it means to be a father.

Paul, as we read in his letters, never shied away from the hard truths that believers need to hear. He didn't avoid warning them.

He spoke very positively about things such as discipline. And yet, he always did so with a kind of fatherly love and care. He didn't rely on power or coercion as much as relationship, as much as loving persuasion.

[ 11 : 16 ] He lived by the advice he gave to others. Do not provoke your children to anger. But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

He worked and kept. He nurtured and protected. Understanding all the while, and we should too, that ultimately, the heart of your child is in the Lord's hands. But we're trying to create that soil that's ripe for a harvest one day.

So, rather than wielding weapons of anger or what we might call authoritarian harshness, Paul used truth and love.

He always made it known how much he loved these people, how much he cared about these people. And I believe that's what we're called to do as fathers with our children. Phillips writes, Before we can convincingly plead, my child, give me your heart, it must be evident to the child, we have sincerely given our own.

Fathers, it's fairly easy for us to default to a strict, tough love, non-affirming approach to parenting.

[ 12 : 31 ] Sadly, we often practice a do as I say, not as I do approach, where we insist that our children do exactly what we say when we say it, no excuses.

Despite the fact that we are not leading by example very well. Well, parenting is not an engineering project. We would love a nice, simple manual that tells us step by step what we're supposed to do and get all the pieces in the right place.

But it's not that way at all. It's not an engineering project. It's a relationship. And heart work goes two ways. So, before we can credibly say, my son, give me your heart, we need to notice what the rest of that verse in Proverbs says.

My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. Before we can expect to have any meaningful influence on our children's hearts, not just their behaviors, but their hearts, we need to show them our hearts.

Philip says we must begin by giving to our children what we seek to receive from them. I'll give you an example, a negative example.

[ 13 : 53 ] To my shame, I have caught myself intervening when my children begin arguing with one another. They get hot-tempered, and they begin yelling at one another.

And my impulse is to run into the room and start shouting, hey, we don't talk like that in this house. And it's usually about 30 seconds later where I think, well, I just blundered that, didn't I?

How can I credibly teach my children not to shout at one another while I am shouting at them? How can I credibly teach my children? How can I credibly teach my children? How can I credibly teach my children? So, there are three basic areas where we want to do everything we can to give or to show our hearts to our children.

The first is in our affection and our delight. And we have the supreme example of this in Scripture. Just before Jesus began his earthly ministry, he goes to John the Baptist to be baptized. And as he's coming up out of the water, what does his heavenly Father say?

[ 15 : 07 ] This is my beloved Son, whom I am well pleased. God the Father was present with his Son.

He made his love for his Son known and audibly expressed his delight in him. We can learn from that.

One of the first things we are told about God the Father's relationship to his Son is that the Father thought his Son was doing a great job, which obviously he was, more than our children will.

Do our children know how much we love them? That's a sincere question to ask ourselves.

Do they know? Do we say it? Do they know that we take pleasure in them? Do we encourage them? Or is all they ever hear from us things like, No.

[ 16 : 11 ] Stop that. Don't do that. Richard Baxter tells parents, Tell them oft of the excellency of obedience, how it pleaseth God, and speak often with great affection of how much you love them.

If they perceive that you dearly love them, they will obey you the more willingly, and obey you in heart, as in outward actions. Well, the second way we can show our heart is through our time and attention.

This one can be tough for us. But if all our children get from us are the leftover scraps of the day, they will be hungry, and they will look elsewhere.

We talked about this when we talked about how the curse relates to marriage. Under the curse of sin, our work became much harder. It's more consuming.

It demands more of us. So we are always tempted to give most of our time, the bulk of our time, to our work, which is understandable. But perhaps we give more of ourselves to our work, more of our time, more of our attention than what is absolutely necessary while forsaking our wives and children.

[ 17 : 34 ] Well, here's what you can do. Every morning, on your commute to work, listen to the song, Cats in the Cradle.

I'm only half joking. We need to give our time and attention to our children, not treat them as though they're a chore at the end of the day that we have to get through.

The third way to show our hearts is through integrity. We might even add repentance to that, but certainly integrity. Charles Spurgeon once said, train up a child in the way he should go, but be sure that you go that way yourself.

If we're not modeling holiness to our children, they will eventually see through the facade. You can't teach your children to be truthful. If they see you telling lies or always making excuses, you can't teach them to be patient if clearly you are not a patient person.

You can't speak to them about the importance of confessing sin and seeking forgiveness if they never see you confessing sin and seeking forgiveness, even with them at times.

[ 18 : 53 ] How can we teach our children about the value of prayer or reading the Bible? If they never see us praying or reading the Bible. As the Puritans used to say in some form or another, God pities, God pities the children of praying, loving parents.

So fathers, the ones whom God explicitly gave the responsibility to work and keep their children, we need to examine ourselves very regularly.

Are we giving our children our affection? Are we giving them our time and attention? Gladly, willingly, happily. Are we modeling integrity for them?

Because at home, they see it all. Richard Phillips writes, to really open up a child's heart, a father must observe the work and keep model of Genesis 2.15.

There must be the working as a father nurtures and cultivates the soil of a child's heart, and there must be the keeping, the correction, that is to be exercised in a relationship of joy and love.

[ 20 : 04 ] By the way, we'll consider correction and discipline in greater detail next time. Well, Phillips, he provides four very helpful ways that we as fathers can attempt to reach our children's hearts.

And you'll find that each one of these requires deliberate investment. These are things that, they're not going to happen by accident. And they're not things that are going to be especially effective unless we're relatively consistent with them.

And those four things are, we'll go through them one at a time, but read, pray, work, and play. Read, pray, work, and play.

So first, we read. We saturate our homes with the Word of God. And you'll notice this pattern was given to us a long, long time ago in what we call the Shema of Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Verses 4 through 9. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

[ 21 : 20 ] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in the house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. You see, we should be making the most of every opportunity, day in and day out, all day long, in every situation, to teach our children the Word of God.

Now, sometimes, this comes through very specific family devotional time when you are specifically reading and teaching the Bible to your children. But I don't want to neglect all of those ordinary

moments throughout the day when we have opportunities to teach the Word of God.

You will find many, many teachable moments if you're looking for them. So, instead of just laying down the law with your children, as we're prone to do, we tend to be a little bit lazy in this regard, we just say, stop that, don't do that.

Well, how about take what they're doing and connect it with something that Scripture teaches. It's there. We take the time. We can do it.

[ 22 : 44 ] In fact, that's precisely what Paul tells us to do, doesn't he? Bring them up in the instruction of the Lord. Not your arbitrary commands, not just shouts of, do this, don't do that, but specifically in the instruction of the Lord.

Explain to them why when you're telling them, don't do that. Explain why. Open up the Bible and show them. Remember that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

we need our children to hear the Word of Christ as often as possible. Sitting, walking, lying down, rising up, as the Shema says.

Every opportunity we have. Phillips adds, God's Word is living and active, Hebrews 4.12. It gives life to believing hearts, Isaiah 55, 10, and 11, and imparts light to the eyes and wisdom to the inner man.

Psalms 19, 7 through 9. Holy Scripture should form a regular part of our conversation so that our families are not merely reading the Bible as some kind of ritual, but studying and discussing together its life-giving teaching.

[ 24 : 08 ] And again, this is primarily the Father's responsibility. Not the mother's, not the Sunday school teacher, not even the pastors. It was given to fathers.

Fathers bring them up in the instruction of the Lord. And I'll give you just a few pieces of practical advice and short bullet points that I didn't find a way to fit in elsewhere.

Start early with your children. Don't wait until they're older. Man, kids can retain things at a younger age than I ever thought was possible. both for good and bad, by the way.

If you failed to start earlier, start now. Right away. Make your teaching as engaging and age-appropriate as possible. If you need some help, ask someone.

How do you do it? There's plenty of great family devotional books out there. Be deliberate. Again, saturating your home with God's Word is not going to happen by accident.

[ 25 : 15 ] You have to think about it. You have to pray about it. You have to put in the effort. And lastly, if you feel inept or unqualified for this task, well, welcome to the club.

But also, God gave you your children and He gave you this command to bring them up in His instruction. Not to mention a wife to help you.

So, putting all of that together, I think it's very well possible He may just equip you for the task. And, if all else fails, turn to Him for wisdom.

Trust that He will equip you for this. Well, second, after reading, we pray. we lead our children to the throne of grace. We teach them both how to hear from God through reading and then how to speak to God.

I like what Philip says. This is accomplished as parents bond with their children by praying for them and with them. I mean, is there anything sweeter than a father and his children seeking God's face together?

[ 26 : 28 ] So, fathers need to establish a habit of regular praying with their children, meal times, bed times, family devotional times, and times in between.

J.C. Ryle once said, if you train your children to do anything, train them to a habit of prayer. So, we're praying regularly with them, but we also want to teach them how to pray for themselves.

For example, we can teach them the various components of prayer, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. It's important that they hear us praying in these various ways and specifically praying for them and praying for their needs.

Let them hear us pray, Lord, children are your heritage. Thank you for my children. Lord, help Johnny with his test at school tomorrow.

Lord, thank you for having helped Johnny with his test. And here's a vital one. Lord, save Johnny. Draw him to yourself.

[ 27 : 42 ] Grant him repentance and faith. Let your children see that you care about them through prayer and that you care about nothing more than their salvation and that you understand that it is only by God's grace which is why you're turning to the Lord for this.

Last Sunday I gave my testimony at Grace Baptist and I told them about my conversion. I said I wasn't at church when it happened. There was no preacher in the room. I wasn't reading a Bible. I couldn't remember the last time I read a Bible. I was all alone when I suddenly felt the crushing weight of my sin and I fell to the floor and I began praying. Well, no one told me to pray. Why did I pray in that moment? Well, on the one hand I give credit to God but on the other hand my parents were very instrumental over the years in teaching me that if I have any need at all if I need anything at all I should go to God in prayer. And all those years later that was my instinct. In that moment I must pray. Let your children hear you pray for yourself.

[ 29 : 04 ] Let them hear you confessing your sins. Let them hear you asking the Lord for help when you need it. This means we have to be somewhat vulnerable in front of them.

And like I did with Bible reading let me give you a few practical bullet points. Memorized, recited prayers are fine for young children but practice extemporaneous prayers as well with your children. Cultivate an environment of prayerfulness. For example, if you hear an ambulance drive by the house teach your children let's stop and pray for whoever is in need.

Teach them that prayer should be our first response always. Fathers, when you're praying vary the lengths of your prayers. Try to avoid using the exact formula every single time.

Every now and then you might ask your children to pray for you. Again, show them that vulnerability. Show them your dependence on God. Third, after reading and prayer we work.

[ 30 : 19 ] That is, we work with our children assisting them with whatever tasks or projects they have to do and we invite them into our work as well allowing them to help us.

Now, regarding especially the latter that's going to require some amount of patience. Recently, I bought a standing desk for my home office and this is one of those desks that goes up and down at the push of a button and I had to install the top to the frame so I got a number of screws and I drilled the pilot holes and I'm ready to screw these screws in by hand and decided to invite the kids to help me.

So, a five minute job turned into a 30 minute job but looking back I'd say it was worth it. It was worth it. Not only did the kids get to experience a little manual labor listening to the way Crosby grunted you would think he had never worked so hard in his life but it was also just a fun way to bond with them and it said to them you know what dad wants to do this with me.

You know, we're living out an anomaly in human history. Until recently fathers didn't outsource the teaching of practical skills to other people.

They didn't they didn't simply do everything themselves. I mean, the standard practice was they taught their children to work alongside them, usually going into the family business, learning a trade.

[ 31 : 52 ] Farmers taught farming, carpenters taught carpentry and there's a lot of wisdom in that model. We need to find ways to include children in our work to teach them and equally important we should join children in their work.

This could be homework, for example. Danae has a habit of letting the kids empty the dishwasher and one day I was walking through the kitchen minding my own business and Crosby asked, Dad, will you help us?

Well, if I'm being candid, no, I don't really want to help you empty the dishwasher. I can think of a million other things I'd rather do but instead I said, sure, I'll help you and I suppose what they may have learned from that is number one, it's good to be willing to work and number two, it's kind of fun when you do it together.

It's certainly easier when you do it together. There are so many things that our children can and should learn from us by working with us in various ways and among those things is the very mandate given to Adam in the garden.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. As we've talked about, this is fundamental to what it means to be a man.

[ 33 : 13 ] So, especially with our sons, we should be showing them this, teaching them this. It's important that we model this for our children and help them to learn it.

Here's a few practical points. Again, be patient. Be patient. The relationship you are developing with your child is more important than efficiency. Affirm their contributions.

Thank them for helping you. Don't act like they're in the way. Give them some encouragement. Remember that Paul said, we're trying to avoid discouraging our children.

Obviously, the best way to do that is by encouraging them. Lastly, teach your children systematically. Looking back, I didn't always have this.

I would see my dad doing things, but I would say slow down, take the time to explain what you're doing. Show them how to do things so that they understand.

[ 34 : 17 ] Well, fourth, after reading, prayer, and work, we play. We enjoy life with our children. In 1 Timothy 6, Paul says, God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Now, we're to keep that in balance, of course. Life is not all about maximizing pleasure or having a good time always, but God so graciously wants us to enjoy this life, and He has provided us many things for that enjoyment.

Proverbs 17, 22 says, a joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. To avoid discouragement in our children, as Paul says in Colossians, we need to teach our children, better yet, show our children, a theology of joy, if you will.

I can hardly imagine crushing a child's spirit faster than all work and no play. Yes, there are times that we need to be serious, but there should also be plenty of occasions when we are making real effort to experience joy with our children.

And as I was thinking about this, I was thinking about the ways we can actually disciple our children through play. And just to give you a few examples, first of all, play is a great way to win their hearts.

[ 35 : 47 ] Philip says, we need to bind our hearts with laughter and joy in shared play, both one-on-one and as a complete family. You might think of the time we're spending with our children in play as depositing goodwill into the bank account of our relationship because inevitably they're going to come harder moments when you're going to have to make some withdrawals.

And so, it's good to have those deposits made. I don't know who first said it, but I always remember the line that says, rules without relationship leads to rebellion.

In other words, our children need to know that we enjoy them. We're not there to endure them, and I fear that sometimes that's the father's natural disposition.

You know, yes, I've got to put up with you, but I'm not really enjoying myself here. We're not just there to correct them. Psalm 127 says, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward.

It goes on to say, blessed or happy is the man who fills his quiver with them. Happy. Happy.

Second, play can provide a helpful context for teaching our children several important lessons.

[ 37 : 12 ] Think about how sports can teach them teamwork or maybe perseverance. We can teach them about suffering well when they lose.

That's been a lesson we've had to repeat in our household. We can teach them about creativity by inventing some new games and playing with one another.

Third, play can foster better communication. When I was in North Carolina I had a couple of teenage boys that I was really having trouble connecting with.

So I found this game on our phones that required us to go all over town. We just had to walk all over town in order to play this game. Some of you might remember Pokemon Go.

This predates that but it was something along those lines. I invited them to play and 30 minutes later we were having conversations that I wasn't sure we would ever have. Really opened them up.

[ 38 : 13 ] I'm sure there are many other advantages to playing with our children and I'll be the first to admit it's not always easy. It's a little funny when you think about it. Sometimes the hardest thing to do with our children is just play.

It's hard to find time but it's also challenging to get down to their level especially with young children and play in a way that suits them. But Richard Phillips puts it well when he says we need to bind our hearts with laughter and joy and shared play.

This all requires time for time is the currency with which I purchase the right to say my son my daughter give me your heart. Just a few practical points on this.

Be present when you play. Don't do it begrudgingly. Don't seem distracted or disinterested. Don't be afraid to be silly.

What's the saying? Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. Remember that the point is to have fun with your kids. For them to have fun and for you to have fun even.

[ 39 : 26 ] Obviously we want our play to be wholesome. And lastly I'll say that we want to remember that joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit. And that's and joy is one of the ways joy is one of the things that our children are meant to provide us with.

Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. Now in everything we do as fathers I've always found it helpful to think about the illustration used in Psalm 127.

Again that's where Solomon says, Behold children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior. Think of parenting like this. Your children are arrows and with each one you will pull that arrow from your quiver, you'll set it on your bow, you'll pull back the bow string, and you will aim it.

Now eventually you will have to let that arrow go. Your kids will grow, they'll move out, they'll start their own lives, and your role as a father is to aim that arrow as best you can so that it hits the target when released.

[ 40 : 43 ] Now if we're being realistic, none of us will likely hit the target perfectly. Over the years there will be numerous things that bump the bow or force us to readjust our aim, but we try with God's help to aim it as best we can.

And what is the target? What are we aiming at? I think the Apostle John captures it well in his third epistle when he says in verse four, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

We don't want to lose sight of our primary goal. We're not raising children merely to be good citizens, you know, polite, moral, ethically good. We want them to have a good education and perhaps be successful as adults, God willing, but that's not necessarily our primary goal either. More than anything, more than anything, we want to capture the hearts of our children so that we may lead them to Christ. Philip says the ultimate reason we desire our children to give us their hearts is so that we can guide hearts to Jesus.

In our reading, in our prayers, in our work, in our play, we want to frequently and consistently point our children to the gospel. We want to show them Christ. We want them to see Christ in us.

[ 42 : 07 ] We want to trust in what God says, for the promises for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

And again, faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ. So we as fathers, we want to, should be, the primary instrument by which our children hear and learn that word of Christ. We are all called to make disciples and our first and most important evangelistic opportunity is right there in our homes. It's our children. So fathers, let's work and keep our gardens.

By God's grace, may our children not walk in darkness, but have the light of life through our efforts. I don't know about you, but I want to worship with my children in heaven one day.

I would love nothing more than to hear them say at some point, Dad, thank you for showing me Jesus. Let's pray. Our Lord and Redeemer, you placed the first man in the garden to work it and keep it, and you have given us that same charge.

[ 43 : 21 ] We bless you that your word still instructs our hands and our hearts, teaching us what it means to be a man, to labor, to guard, to lead. Forgive us, Father, for every failure to tend what you have entrusted to us for the times that maybe we've neglected or grown impatient with our children or maybe labored for our own glory and self-serving reasons rather than yours.

Yet, we thank you that your grace is greater than our sin. Make us men who work and keep with diligence, with love.

Help us to nurture the hearts of our children and to protect them from sin's deceit. Help us to lead not with harshness but with love and truth.

And not with simply barking commands but leading by example. Lord, I'd ask that you would bless our homes with your presence and may all our striving aim at the greatest end that our children would walk in the truth and that they would find life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In whose name we pray, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.