

## **Protecting the Minds of our Children**

I'd like to invite all the children to the first few front benches. Today is your day, and as such, I want you all to be front and centre and taking in every word I have to say. No phones, no playing, just your attention. You as well Aaron.

What comes to mind when we think about protecting our child's mind? We may shield them from some of the harsh truths about life. We may try to keep their innocence intact by choosing what we should tell them, and how we tell them. We may have arguments out of their visibility. We may even go above and beyond for them while we ourselves still lack. Correct? Correct.

Psalms 91 v 4-6 states, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday."

How many of us can safely say that our children know that they can find refuge under our wings? They know that no matter what happens, we will cover them under our feathers? How many of our children feel just as safe as we do when we run back to God when we have disobeyed Him or when we are in trouble?

Today we celebrate both the children and our fathers, and though we do celebrate our fathers, I would like to take the time to focus this speech surrounding the topic: 'Protecting the minds of our children'. But, just before I do, I want to take the time out to say a big Happy Father's Day to all the Fathers in the house! The role that a father plays in both the life of the child and the mother is crucial for the upbringing of a child and the sustenance of the family so, today we celebrate you and all that you stand for. Can I get an amen? Amen.

Now, let's take a look at what the word protect means, it means to cover or shield from exposure, injury, damage, or destruction. It means to GUARD. The word mind refers to the element in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons.

Now, we can find over 60 scriptures that refer to God protecting His children from danger within the Bible. Daniel knew God's protection, Noah knew God's protection, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego also knew God's protection. Does your child know your protection?

When I was younger, Shern would always allow me to play with my bigger brother, no matter what type of dangerous game he would have been involved in, because she was always watching. Sometimes we would be outside in the backyard playing 'dutty pot', playing gun war with some of the other children in the community, or even when we would be down by the mango tree where we had built a little zinc house with scraps of clothing on the floor. She would be there when one of us cries out, or there to part a fight, or maybe we needed help to make something. Whatever it is, she was there for us, and in most ways, protecting us. But how do we truly protect the minds of our children?

Protecting the minds of our children alludes to ensuring that their mental wellbeing is intact. That after you have reprimanded your child for disobeying you, that they remember that you love them just the same. This means that you don't turn them away when they tell you that they need a break. Protecting the minds of our children means that we ensure that we don't mentally or emotionally abuse them, and ensuring that the church plays their part as well.

Research shows that 80 to 90 percent of children living in homes where there is domestic violence are aware of the violence. But, what does domestic violence

mean to us? Many people seem to think that domestic violence only attributes to physical abuse among family members. However, it is much more vast than that. There is also emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and physical abuse. I would like to zoom in on emotional abuse for the purpose of this presentation. So, during emotional abuse, someone may be ignoring your feelings, insulting you, ridiculing or insulting valued beliefs, religion, race, heritage, or class; withholding approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment, continually criticising, calling names, shouting at you, or humiliating you in public.

How many of us here are being emotionally abused? How many of us here are possibly emotionally abusing our children intentionally and unintentionally? Because the reality is we were socialised to believe that a few things should remain constant and a norm in our lives and in our household. To believe that it is normal to have a household where our parents constantly fight and bicker at each other. To feel like you are not loved in your own household. To feel inferior and rendered self-conscious due to the constant name calling and being compared to your ‘wukliss father’ or ‘wukliss mother’, or someone that is possibly doing better than you. But that is not a normal household. In reality, what it does, it forces children to have to face traumatic experiences, of which they are not yet developed enough to understand how to process.

Traumatic stress refers to the physiological and emotional response we have to traumatic events. It produces intense physical and emotional reactions such as feelings of being overwhelmed and helpless. Traumatic stress is what some of our children are facing currently. Our children may witness us having arguments with our spouses, fights, or arguments with siblings. We may have punished them with withholding love or food, constantly shout at them and call them

names, or we may compare them to an absent parent that they know that you despise. Those are all examples of traumatic events that lead to traumatic stress.

Have you ever wondered why our children may "lash out" every now and then, exhibit behavioural problems, have sleeping issues such as insomnia or sleeping too much; maybe they have isolated themselves from social activities, or difficulty concentrating? That's because that's the only way they know how to deal with trauma. The truth is, children are yet to have the emotional and cognitive capabilities needed to process trauma effectively, without having outside help. If we do not help our children to regulate their emotions, they will continue to exhibit behavioural problems that both you and them do not understand.

Sometimes children themselves don't understand why they are acting the way they are. Sometimes they don't know how to explain what they are going through or why their behaviours have taken a turn for the worse, and in reality, that is understandable. Why? Because it is only through experiences and parental guidance that they are going to understand their emotions, process them, and then develop a suitable response towards them. But with children that are faced with these situations, it is difficult to do so.

Children exposed to family violence are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and or behavioral problems. Recent research indicates that children who witness domestic violence are more likely to develop anxiety, low self esteem, depression, anger, and temperament problems. These emotional, behavioural, social and physical disturbances can also affect their development and can continue into adulthood.

So, what part do we play in this, both as parents and as a church community? Matthew 11:28-30 says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” We are charged to help our children find rest, just like our heavenly Father grants us rest for our weary mind and bodies, likewise we should provide rest for our children. We are supposed to forgive our children and help them to find their way, a new path from the one that they are currently on - if it is not of the Lord. We are obligated to be continually teaching our children the way of Christ, even if we are getting weary.

The reality is, the ‘art of parenting’ is also something that is passed on during generations. Look at it like this, I’m looking forward to having a child because I want to be able to call him/her one day from their rooms just to tell them to give the remote that is in front of me. Why? Because it was done to me too lol. Not necessarily because I can’t get the remote myself, but because I want the opportunity to do that too. This may be the lighter side of the situation, but the same can be said to the duller side of it. Some may say that no one taught you how to be a parent, but in reality we do take cues from how our parents taught us. The same way that someone may unconsciously ensure that their children pray before going to bed because that is how they were grown, someone else may unconsciously measure their child’s worth based on the amount of work they do for them - why? Because whilst growing up they had the hardest of life and now their child seemingly has a ‘gold spoon’ in their mouth because they don’t have to do all that they did in the past.

Ackerman and Pickering says “Families under stress produce children under stress. If a spouse is being abused and there are children in the home, the children are affected by the abuse.” We don’t want to make the same mistakes

of the past, be it that you had been doing it, or your parents did it. We do not want to make those mistakes, it is affecting our children in ways we do not know - and this is largely attributed to the fact that the children themselves do not know it is happening. 1 Peter 5:6 calls us to humble ourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand. Let's humble ourselves and lower ourselves to the level of that of our children. Let's ask them how they are doing, let's ask them how they felt when you did that to them, or when you shouted at them. Let's also ask them what would they have preferred you do instead. Rickorian hates when anyone shouts at him, if you do, you won't get a thing out of him, he completely closes off. So, instead, you go to him calmly and address the situation. Even if you're upset. You have a better chance of getting the truth out of him when he knows that he is safe, even when he is in trouble. Your child needs to know that they are safe.

This also includes you handling how your household is managed. How are conflicts mitigated? How are you encouraging them? By what means do you encourage them? Are you pressuring them too much? Because yes, we want them to excel, but at what cost? At the cost of them becoming disinterested overall? There are many ways to encourage our children, we just have to find the right and positive motivation to get it done. Also, be aware of your words and your actions towards your children. Know that what you say and how you say things can have a lasting impact on your child. Know that the saying that the tongue has the power of life and death in it, so we will need the strength of God in order to tame it.

No one said that parenting would have been an easy job. The role of a father has its challenges, and so does the role of a mother. And God knows that we would have been weary from time to time. That's also where the church comes in as a body. There is a proverb that says 'it takes a village to raise a child'. This is our

village. Scripture calls us to be devoted to one another in love (Ro 12:10), to regard one another as more important than yourselves (Php 2:3), to bear one another's burdens (Ga 6:2), to speak truth to one another (Ep 4:25), to encourage and build one another up (1 Th 5:11), to be hospitable to one another (1 Pe 4:9), and to be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another (Ep 4:32).

I think the question is, are we doing enough for our children? What programs do we have in place to educate and empower them? What activities do we have for the children to ensure that they look forward to church-related events? What part do we play in each family's life? Does the community know that the church plays a part in the upbringing of their child? Does the church ensure that they are teaching them certain life principles that they will need to go on as they face the different struggles of life? What part does the church play in the stability of the minds of our young ones? The songwriter says, we believe the children are the future, and indeed they are, so what seeds are we sowing? Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, but he made it out because he knew God for himself. Many of our children only know God through us. The weight that the church carries is a heavy one, that is why we have a community of people that is strengthened by God, so no one person carries that burden. Are we bearing that burden well?

I want to end with this charge, let's search ourselves and see if we are protecting the minds of our children. Let's also search them and see if they feel protected. And this is not a one-off thing, chances are if they do not feel protected, they won't tell you right off the bat. But if they see that you are consistent with your care, then they will eventually open up to you and say that 'mom or dad, I felt this way when you did that'. We as the church also need to re-evaluate our stance in how well we are grooming the Christians of tomorrow. Discipleship classes and extra-activities need to be put in place for the growth of them and

ourselves. And children, remember that you are loved, blessed, and highly favoured. Walking in victory and not in defeat, you will consistently be put above and not below, and the Lord will strengthen you consistently.

1 Peter 5:10 - After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Today I spoke on your behalf, and I do hope that I did so well, Happy Children's Day you all.