

Today is Mother's Day; a day in which we honor our mothers, but in reality, we should honor them each and every day, because where would we be without them. We celebrate this day by giving our mothers flowers, cards, gifts, taking them out to dinner, breakfast in bed, and many other ways. Let me share with you again this year, a great Mother's Day card that I found.

It was one of those big cards written in a little child's printing; like a first-grade handwriting. On the front was a little boy with untied sneakers. He had a red wagon and toys all over the place. He had a little cut on his face and there were smudges all over the card. The card read: "Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say for me every day when I was growing up." When you opened the card up, there was the prayer: "God help you if you ever do that again." Of course, none of you ever said that prayer, right!

Now this morning I want to take a somewhat different approach from the traditional Mother's Day message, and look at a responsibility that each one of us as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, friends, neighbors, and grandparents, have in raising our children, and for many of us, our grandchildren. Children are a precious gift from God and God expects us to give them the best life possible. Jesus loves children and they love Him. Now one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible is when Jesus stopped on His way to Jerusalem and His destiny with the cross to spend some time with the children. Listen to how this is recorded in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 13 through 16.

Read Mark 10:13-16

One of our earliest memories from Sunday School is the picture of Jesus blessing the little children. He had one on His lap with the other boys and girls standing or seated all around Him. Looking at this picture, before we could even read or write, we learned that Jesus is a friend of every child. We learned the most wonderful lesson of all; God loves each one of us and cares about us, and we have worth even as children. Another childhood memory is singing “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so.” This beautiful song reaffirms God’s love and care for us, both as children and adults.

As I said earlier, children are a precious gift from God. Look at the prominence of children in Jesus’ ministry. Not only did He take them in His arms and bless them in this story, but on another occasion in the 18th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples and used the youngster to teach us that if we are to enter the kingdom of God, we must become as little children. Now the kingdom of God has been defined as “a state of society upon earth where God’s will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven.” In other words, to enter the kingdom is to accept and do God’s will as we pray each Sunday in the Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus was telling the disciples and us today that unless we accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, we will never get in. To truly receive Christ into our hearts and experience the grace, forgiveness and love of God, there must be childlike qualities in each of us. These qualities include the innocent trust of a child, realizing that we are dependent on God, obeying God, having a short memory of past wrongs, and freely accepting God’s gifts of love and grace. In other words, to grow closer to God, we must be a kid again.

When Jesus came to live among us, He came as a child. He grew up as a child in a working-class home in Nazareth. He basically shared all the same childhood experiences that we all have had. As a child, Jesus grew physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially just as our children and grandchildren grow today.

Throughout history the importance of children has been recognized. President Abraham Lincoln once wrote: “A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting when you are gone. He will attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies that you like, but how they are carried out will depend on him. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. The fate of humanity is in his hands – in the hands of a child.”

Two men were talking about what to give their children for Christmas. One commented that his son had a closet full of clothes, boxes full of toys, a storage room full of bicycles and scooters, and a go-cart in the garage. In his frustration of trying to think of a gift for his son, he asked: “What do you give a child who has everything?” But this morning, let’s turn that question around: “What do you give a child who has nothing?” Children come into this world with nothing. They come with young minds and enormous possibilities for both good and bad.

When God made a nation and called it Israel, He spoke frequently about the responsibilities of being a parent. Throughout the Bible, God instructed the Israelites on what to give their children. For the remainder of time we have this morning, let’s focus on this question: “What do you give a child who has nothing?”

Think about the numerous instructions that we as parents have to give to our children. We teach them how to talk, eat, comb their hair, tie their shoes, brush their teeth, ride a bicycle, and a thousand other things. As most new parents quickly realize babies don't come with an instruction manual. They need their parents or someone else to help them learn the many tasks needed to survive in life. Training cannot and should not be left to chance.

The Bible teaches the necessity of a parent training their child. As Proverbs 22:6 states: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it." Or as the *Message* paraphrases it: "Point your kids in the right directions; when they are old, they won't be lost."

Once T. DeWitt Talmadge preached a sermon entitled "Things We Never Get Over." Among the things he mentioned was parental neglect. Training a child is a once in a life time chance in the child's life. As parents and grandparents and those who influence the early development of a child, there must be a sense of urgency, for as many of us know all too well from experience our children grow up extremely fast.

The writer of Proverbs tells us to train a child in the way they **should** go, not in the way they **want** to go; there's a big difference here. Let me repeat that: "train a child in the way they **should** go, not in the way they **want** to go." The word "train" in Proverbs 22:6 can be translated to mean to imitate or to dedicate. Training a child means the parent has experienced the way of God and says: "This is the way; walk in it." If you do not teach your child the ways of the Lord; you can be sure that the devil will teach them the ways of sin.

Now this brings up a touchy subject that we each may have different opinions on and that is discipline. The *Message* paraphrases Proverbs 23:12 as follows: “Don’t be afraid to correct your young ones, a spanking won’t kill them. A good spanking, in fact, might save them from something worse than death.” As I said there are many different opinions on how to do this.

Like the mother in Baltimore a few years ago, who gave her son a “love whooping” on national TV and drugged him away from a riot. Some wanted to give her the “Mother of the Year Award” and others criticized her. Many of us grew up when spanking was an acceptable form of punishment. Unfortunately, this has been taken to the extremes in some cases resulting in physical damage and even death to a child; child abuse is totally unacceptable in our society, and should be unacceptable in all societies.

As I have shared with you before, my dad believed strongly in the philosophy: “spare the rod, spoil the child.” There were three of us boys, and thus, there were definitely times that we deserved a whipping. Of course whenever there was an incident, there were always three different opinions on what happened and who started it. So in order to be fair, Dad just whipped all three of us. I used to think that it was better to be the last one hoping that the old man would get tired, but hearing my brothers crying was worse and Dad seemed to get his second wind with me. But you know, as I look back over it, Dad taught us right from wrong, and all three of us have turned out alright in life; well at least my two brothers did.

While discipline is hard, it is necessary if we are to point our children in the right direction. There are no easy answers to the right way to discipline, and each situation is different. Judy and I did not follow my Dad's approach to discipline in raising our sons, but used other methods. This is where the agape love that we have discussed many times before comes in; "always seeking the best for the other person," especially a child.

Just because a child wants something does not mean that it good for them or that they deserve it. Remember sometimes our Heavenly Father says no to our prayer requests because He always knows what is best for us. I have watched with admiration as my younger son Ben disciplines his sons by refusing to let them watch a TV show or restricting their computer time. Discipline helps train a child; it is a demonstration of love. The *Message* paraphrases Proverbs 13:24 – "A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them."

In addition to being careful on how we discipline children, we must also be extremely careful as to our attitude towards them. As adults we can have a tremendous influence on the development of a child's self-esteem. Constant negative comments and belittling a child can scar them for life; while positive reinforcement can make a world of difference. A teacher of ten and eleven year old boys in Germany would take off his top hat and bow before the boys each morning as he entered the class room. When asked by one of the boys why he did that, he replied: "Who knows what one of you may become." One of the boys was named Martin Luther, who would become the Great Protestant Reformer.

Children are not robots to be programmed or puppets to be manipulated. We must allow them to be themselves; to reach their full potential. Someone said: "We need to give our children two things. The first is roots, and the second is wings. We need to give them a sense of belonging. But we also need to give them freedom to prepare them to be on their own." Recall the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The father granted his youngest son's request and gave him freedom. While the boy was far from home he was never far from his father's heart. Evidently, the father had trained him right as a child because when he came to his senses in the pig pen of the far country he returned home to his father, but the father had to give him the freedom to grow up.

As many of us have learned from experience, releasing our children to allow them to grow up to become responsible adults in a dangerous world is probably harder than nurturing and protecting them. The role of parents in the life of their child is awesome, but as they grow up, the child must assume the responsibility for making their own personal decisions. We must raise our children to be able to stand on their own two feet. Someone once told me that you know that you have raised your children right when they grow up and become your best friend.

Now religion is not as much taught as it is caught. Families are wise in bringing their children and grandchildren to Jesus Christ and leading them to trust Him as their Lord and Savior at a very early age. It has been said that three-fourths of those who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior do so in their childhood. The best gift parents can give their children is to live godly lives before them. Children imitate the parents either good or bad. The best way to explain what a Christian is - is to be one.

So, what kind of example are you setting for your children, grandchildren, or the neighbor's kids? I heard about a drunken father who returned home one cold winter evening. Snow covered the ground. The father staggered up the walk, went into the house, and went to bed. The next morning he looked out the window and saw his little son staggering in the snow. The father asked: "What are you doing, son?" To which the little boy replied: "I am trying to walk in your footprints."

Raising children is an awesome responsibility, and it is definitely not easy in today's world. Now we don't have any children here at High Desert, we are mostly grandparents, but that does not mean that we should not take this responsibility seriously. There are many things we can do for our grandchildren and the children in our neighborhood. We can live our lives in such a way that they can see Jesus Christ. When given the opportunity, we can share who Jesus Christ is with them. And hopefully, sometime in July, you can invite them to our Vacation Bible School, and I encourage you to fill out the bulletin insert.

What do you give a child who has nothing? You give them God and introduce them to Jesus Christ. As I have shared with you before, if I get to heaven, it will be because of my mother who shared her faith with me; she lived it out every day of her life. And I pray each day that my sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren will also be there because of the faith that Judy and I are hopefully passing on to them.

I thank God for all those people who shared their faith with me. May God bless every mother, and every person, who got us here today. Happy Mother's Day! Amen