

SERMON NOTES
Romans 5:1-2; 8:15-16
“Grace-Based Parenting”

Intro:

- Until this year, I would have said that the best book on parenting that had the greatest influence on my parenting was Dr. Ross Campbell’s *How to Really Love Your Child*
- But this year I have discovered the book that I wish I had written
- I went to a seminar by Dr. Tim Kimmel at the Christian Counseling Conference in Nashville in September entitled: “*Grace-Based Parenting*” and have since read his book by that title as well as *Raising Kids for True Greatness*
- Those books come the closest of any books I’ve read to describing the parenting philosophy and approach that Beth and I followed in raising our daughters
- *Not that we succeeded in putting into practice everything in those books – but what Tim Kimmel teaches at least describes what we were aiming for*
- Dr. Tim Kimmel (*Grace-Based Parenting*): *God wants us to raise kids who love Him, live for Him and make an eternal impact in their world.*
- Most of us would say Amen to that
- *Beth and I resonated especially with that final phrase: **make an eternal impact in their world***
- We didn’t want to settle merely for raising nice Christian kids living nice, safe Christian lives that were spiritually irrelevant to the lost world around them
- *We were aiming for raising fully devoted followers of Jesus who would grow up to be high-impact servants and witnesses of Christ making a significant difference for Christ in their world – starting in their elementary school years and continuing through their high school and college and adult years*
- The question is: *How?*
- Granted that no parent can control the outcome of their parenting – *children and teens are free moral agents who can make their own choices* – sometimes contrary to the wishes and convictions of their parents
- Parents cannot control the outcome – but different styles of parenting will influence the outcome in different directions
- *I believe Grace-based parenting is the style of parenting most likely to produce kids who love God, live for Christ and make an eternal impact in their world – because Grace-based parenting is God’s style of raising us to become like His Son, Jesus*
- ***Grace-based parenting provides an atmosphere of grace that meets the true inner needs of kids and helps build the character qualities that lead to true greatness***
- ***Grace-based parenting is simply treating your children the way our heavenly Father treats His children***

- *Thus grace-based parenting depends on understanding how our heavenly Father treats us*
- The texts I just read in Romans 5 & 8 are not “parenting” texts – rather they are texts that teach us how God treats His children – *which makes them parenting texts if you have eyes to see and ears to hear*
- Not just a few “parenting” sermons a year – but nearly every sermon I preach has applications for parenting – *because every sermon that helps you grow in your knowledge of God and His ways – every sermon that helps you grow in your understanding of the Gospel and how to live it out – every sermon that helps you experience God’s grace – is a sermon that can make you a better parent*
- **One of the greatest obstacles to grace-based parenting is a distorted view of God and how he treats us – poor theology will lead to poor parenting**

I. ALTERNATIVES TO GRACE-BASED PARENTING

- In our evangelical Christian sub-culture, we have created a parallel universe to the world around us
- *We have Christian bookstores with Christian fiction and science fiction and romance novels*
- *We have Christian radio and TV // Christian concerts // Christian cruises*
- *We have Christian school systems*
- *We even have our own lines of clothing and breath mints*
- You would think this Christian sub-culture would be producing Christian kids living distinctive Christian lives as Christ-followers – *kids who are shining like stars in the universe – as Paul writes in Philippians 2*
- Yet the reality is that a majority of kids raised in evangelical Christian homes and churches are either indistinguishable from the non-Christian kids of the world or are spiritually irrelevant nice kids who are making little or no impact for Christ in the world around them
- Dr. Kimmel: Common Christian parenting styles that undermine the raising of kids who can live for Christ and make an impact in their world:

(1) *Fear-Based Parenting*

- *Fear-based parenting is marked by a fear of the world // a fear of Hollywood // a fear of public schools // a fear of Halloween // a fear of the gay community // a fear of liberals // a fear of Hillary and the Democrats // a fear of rock’n’roll and rap and long hair and body piercings // a fear of evolutionary teaching // a fear of unbelievers*
- Fear dictates the approach and plan for parenting – which is – to isolate our kids from the world and contain them as much as possible in the Christian parallel

universe and sub-culture – *because the world is too corrupt and the faith of our children is too fragile to survive in such a corrupt world*

- Tim Kimmel: *“Fear-based parenting is the surest way to create intimidated kids. It’s also the surest way to raise Christian kids who either don’t have any passion for lost people, are indifferent to the things of God, or out-and-out rebel against their parents, their church and their Lord.”*
- Kids raised in fear-based homes are not bold, confident kids who are ready to change the world for Christ
- *They are intimidated kids – intimidated by unbelievers – intimidated by lost people – intimidated by sinners -- sometimes even intimidated by the kids in their own church youth group*
- Fear and intimidation are NOT marks of Christ-likeness
- *Fear is rooted in a lack of faith and confidence in a mighty God*

Romans 8:15 (NIV) ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*”

1 John 4:18 (NIV) ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

- *Kids who are secure in their parents’ love and secure in God’s love and who understand who they are in Christ – who understand in their heart what it means to be God’s beloved children – need not fear what the world will do to them*
- Is the world corrupt and full of evil influences?
- *Of course it is – but no more so than in the 1st century Roman Empire when the apostle John wrote:*

1 John 5:4 - 5 (NIV) ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Grace-based parenting aims to raise kids of strong faith who are overcomers and world-changers – not timid, fearful kids who feel uncomfortable and anxious whenever they step outside their Christian bubble

(2) Evangelical Behavior-Modification Parenting

- This approach to parenting assumes that the proper environment, the proper information, the proper education, and the absence of negative influences will increase the child’s chances of turning into a fully devoted follower of Jesus

- *This approach suffers from two faulty assumptions: (1) The battle is primarily outside the child, and (2) Spiritual vitality can be transferred by means of inputting proper biblical information*

Romans 7:17 - 20 (NIV) ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

- *Where's the battle?*
- *Not primarily out there – in the world – but primarily in here – in the heart*

Galatians 5:16 - 17 (NIV) ¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

- *It doesn't matter whether your child is home-schooled, Christian-schooled or public-schooled, your child's only hope for living a victorious and Christ-like Christian life is to surrender her heart to the Lordship of Christ and to draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh*
- *Because the problem isn't out there in the world – the problem is in here – sin dwelling in our sinful nature*
- *It's not about external behavior – acting like a nice Christian kid when she is around other nice Christian kids*
- *It's about the heart – and you don't find out what's in the heart until the child's faith is tested and challenged*

Randy Alcorn: *“The Christian life is far more than sin management. Behavior modification that's not empowered by God's heart-changing grace is self-righteous, as repugnant to God as the worst sins people gossip about. Children who grow up with graceless truth are repelled by self-righteousness and attracted to the world's slickly marketed grace-substitutes.”*

(3) Image-Control Parenting

- This style of parenting assumes that people will know that you are a good Christian parent raising nice Christian kids by means of your kids' religious performance: *meeting behavioral expectations such as church attendance, appropriate dress, appropriate hairstyles, appropriate language, appropriate movies & entertainment, achieving awards for Scripture memory, etc.*

- When our kids are meeting these kinds of external behavioral expectations, then we can hold our head high as parents knowing that we have earned the good parenting stamp of approval from other church members
- *This style of parenting works fine for awhile with young children and compliant older children – but rarely produces teenagers and young adults with a deep heart passion for Jesus Christ and his mission*
- Parents make a mistake when they are more concerned with their own image than with their children's heart
- I faced this issue recently in terms of making plans for Emily's wedding reception
- *You would be hard-pressed to find two 23-year-olds with a more passionate love for Jesus Christ and his mission than Mo and Emily*
- They want their wedding and their married life together to glorify Jesus Christ
- *They also want to celebrate their wedding with a dance at their reception*
- There will also be some champagne, wine and beer available for those who wish
- *There is nothing in the Bible prohibiting serving wine at a wedding celebration*
- But I must admit – the thought crossed my mind: *What will some church people think? – a Baptist pastor's family having a dance and alcohol at their wedding reception?* That should set some tongues a-wagging
- *After all, what kind of example is that to set for the congregation?*
- Then again, Jesus didn't seem too concerned about what kind of example he was setting when he turned 6 large jars of water into 150 gallons of wine at a wedding
- *150 gallons! That's a lot of toasting!*
- Beth and I decided not to exchange grace-based parenting for legalistic, image-control parenting at this stage of the game -- *so we will be celebrating Emily's wedding in a manner consistent with the precedent set by Jesus*

(4) High-Control Parenting

- Fear-based parenting often leads to high-control parenting
- *Most vulnerable to this style of parenting are conscientious, devoted parents who love the Lord and came to Christ as young adults after sowing some wild oats as teens and college students*
- They want to protect their children from the negative consequences of sin that they experienced in their younger and wilder years
- *So unwittingly they engage in controlling behaviors intended to produce in their children the right beliefs, the right values, and the right choices in order to spare their children some of the heartache they experienced in their pre-Christian days*
- That style of parenting will bring out the worst in strong-willed children

- There is a high degree of fear running through all these styles of parenting – *fear of the world // fear of sin // fear of what other people will think // fear of our children losing their faith // fear of our children repeating our mistakes*
- At the root of these fears is a flawed theology – a distorted view of God and how he relates to us – and to our children
- *In order to create an atmosphere of grace in which to raise our children, we first need to learn how to live in an atmosphere of grace in our own relationship with God*

II. CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF GRACE

- *How does God treat us as His children?*

Romans 5:1 - 2 (NIV) ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Amplified: Through Him also we have access by faith in this grace – this state of God’s favor – in which we firmly and safely stand.

- **Grace – God’s undeserved favor -- is the state in which we live in God’s Kingdom – Grace is the environment in which the whole of our Christian life is lived**
- *This does not mean that God does not discipline His children when they disobey Him – but it does mean that all discipline takes place in the context of God’s grace*
- ***God’s attitude toward us is always determined by His grace***
- *God loves us just as much when He is disciplining us for our misbehavior as when He is commending us for our obedience and service to Him*
- **Grace means that God accepts His children regardless of merit // *He serves His children’s needs without any sense of resentment // and He motivates His children to a higher holiness without any condemnation***
- So let’s apply that to your own life as parents:
- *God loves you and accepts you regardless of how good or successful you are in your parenting*
- *God offers you all of His love and wisdom and resources to help you in your parenting without begrudging you anything He has to give*
- ***And God motivates you to a higher level of effective parenting without condemnation***
- **Here’s the good news of Grace-based parenting: *You don’t need to be a perfect parent to practice grace-based parenting***

- **Grace-based parenting has worked for me and Beth – and few of you have blown it as badly as I did in 1994**
- *God's grace is greater than all our sins and failures*
- All of us are going to sin as parents – *we are going to sin against our spouse and against our children // we are going to exercise poor judgment // we are going to react with carnal anger rather than godly patience // we are going to fall prey to temptations in our own struggles of living in the world // we are going to turn to our own false comforts // we are going to get trapped in the Crazy Cycle at times in our marriages*
- **Sin does not disqualify us from grace-based parenting – sin is an occasion for inviting the grace of God into our lives // our marriages // and our families so that we can create and maintain a daily atmosphere of grace in our homes**
- Can you see the inconsistency in trying to practice grace-based parenting with a perfectionistic attitude?
- *It is not perfection that creates an atmosphere of grace in our homes – it is humility // honesty // admitting our flaws and mistakes and wrongs // apologizing and asking forgiveness of other family members // and acknowledging our dependence on God's grace -- that creates an atmosphere of grace in our homes*
- **Cast all your fears and anxieties on the Lord – for He cares for you – and His attitude toward you is always full of grace and unconditional love**
- *Invite His grace into your life // into your marriage // into your home*
- Beth and I were both a little anxious and perfectionistic as parents – especially with Erika – two first-born parents raising a first-born daughter
- *Fearful that any mistake we made would warp Erika for life*
- By the time Emily came along – we were more relaxed as parents – and more confident
- *I think that surviving Jill's toddler years may have helped give us some improved confidence*
- Most of you in this room are very conscientious parents – and some of you are somewhat perfectionistic
- *And one of the things I would say to you is: **Relax** – Rest in the grace of God and Relax*
- I'm not talking about being careless or negligent or irresponsible
- *But relaxed parents make better grace-based parents than uptight and fearful parents*
- Now – how as parents do we raise our children in an atmosphere of grace? What does that actually look like?
- Tim Kimmel: *The Delivery System for Conveying Grace to children*

(1) *The Freedom to be Different*

- “*Different*” = *unique / weird / bizarre / strange / goofy / quirky*
- Different does NOT mean: *disrespectful // sassy // disobedient // defiant*
- *The freedom to be different is not a license to be obnoxious or rebellious – but it does mean the freedom to be expressive and creative regarding clothing and hairstyles, for example*
- Tim Kimmel tells the story of his teenage son wanting to bleach his hair – several years before this became a popular trend
- *The request was made respectfully – without any defiance or rebelliousness*
- Tim wrestled with the question: *What will my friends think?* – but wisely ended up giving permission to his son
- Tim Kimmel: *“My advice to parents whose friends criticize them for having different kids: Get new friends. It’s easier than trying to get new children.”*
- His story reminded me of the time that Jill was in college and wanted to cut her hair short and bleach her blonde hair red
- *As I recall, Emily was the do-it-yourself hairdresser on that occasion*
- They didn’t quite get all the way to red – it was more of a Nick Hansel orange
- But even that wasn’t quite enough to set Jill apart to express her full individuality
- *Some time after that I picked her up from college to come home for spring break or part of the summer*
- She had done something that she was sure would get a rise out of me
- *Much to her initial disappointment – I’m not a very observant person sometimes – and did not notice the addition to her face*
- In the car she kept talking and I sensed she was trying to get my attention – and finally – out of the corner of my eye – I saw something unfamiliar
- *I did a double take – and then saw it -- an eyebrow ring*
- You thought I was going to say nose ring – no – that came later – in Nepal
- *And of course, all of this was right before we were scheduled for a major family picture for posterity*
- *Jill is someone who desperately needs to know that she can be loved by us – and can become a fully devoted follower of Jesus – without sacrificing her individuality and being expected to conform to how all other Christians look and dress and act*
- **For Jill – and many others like her – Grace means the freedom to be different**

(2) *The Freedom to be Candid*

- What do you do if your parents seem so certain about their faith – and you’re just not?

- *The people at church seem so confident that what they believe is truth and the only way – and you're not so sure?*
- Your other family members and people at church talk about God and Jesus as being so real in their daily lives – but He just doesn't seem real to you?
- *Sometimes you wonder if He's really there or if He really cares about you*
- *There was a time when Jill was in high school – and again for awhile when she was in college – that she was plagued by these kinds of questions*
- She was not experiencing God and His Presence and His love in her life
- *She believed in God – but He was not making a difference in her life*
- Surely there was more to the Christian life than just trying to behave like a good Christian
- *She wasn't sure how much longer she wanted to keep living the right way if God didn't show up and make Himself real to her*
- Jill was not one to be satisfied with faking it
- *She wasn't going to commit her life to something just because other people told her it was true*
- She needed to experience the reality of Christ in her own life – and she wasn't
- *She tried reading her Bible and praying and going to church and doing the things Christians are supposed to do to experience God – but it wasn't happening*
- Painful – and scary -- words for a pastor to hear coming from his daughter
- *Was Jill losing her faith?*
- *What would people think if they knew?*
- We were not shocked – or angry – or disappointed
- *We listened carefully – without judgment – and commended Jill for her honesty*
- We did not press the panic button
- **We were confident that God loved Jill and could make Himself known to her in real and practical ways that would satisfy her mind and grab her heart**
- In the mean time, we wanted her discussing her questions and doubts with us rather than turning to people who might lead her astray with false answers
- ***We wanted Jill to experience the real thing – a truth so true and a faith so solid and an experience of God so real that she would be willing to give her life to it***
- No pat answers or clichés would suffice
- *We would let Jill work out these things for herself – and we would patiently wait for God to disclose Himself to her*
- Jill did – and God did – and Jill's heart and mind now belong fully to the Lord Jesus Christ
- **For Jill – and many others like her – Grace means the Freedom to be Candid – the Freedom to be honest about her questions and doubts**

(3) The Freedom to Make Mistakes

- There is only one way to grow in Christ-likeness and to make a significant impact for Christ in the world – by our hearts staying connected to Jesus Christ
- *What happens when we disconnect our heart – when we decide that we want to be our own master?*
- We tend to follow the crowd
- *If we are surrounded by an exclusively Christian environment – we will continue to behave like a respectable Christian even while our heart is disconnected*
- We learn how to fake it
- *What we don't learn is how desperately we need Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord – every day*
- Some Christians live this way the rest of their life – they behave Christianly enough to be respectable church members but their heart is not fully surrendered to Jesus Christ and their impact in the world is negligible
- *But what happens when we disconnect our heart from Christ and live as our own master in a non-Christian environment?*
- Our dark side manifests itself in more visible and obviously sinful ways
- *Our outward behavior begins to reflect the unhealthy condition of our heart*
- We get a glimpse of the kind of person we can be apart from Christ
- *We begin to see how much we need a Savior – every day – and that we can become our true self and best self only when we choose Jesus Christ as our Master*
- We are forced to wrestle with a choice: *will we live for the temporary pleasures of sin – or will we surrender our hearts fully to Jesus Christ?*
- **Grace-based parents give their children the freedom to make mistakes so that they will have the opportunity to see their desperate need of God's grace and learn what the Gospel is really all about and so that they will have to wrestle with the issue of choosing to serve sin or Christ**
- **Grace-based parents are aiming for a Christ-reliant heart**
- *What are your children relying on for their growth in Christ-likeness – a Christian environment? Or the saving power of Jesus Christ?*
- The reality is – most kids will never find out how much they need the saving power of Jesus Christ on a daily basis until they have seen what their dark side is capable of
- *The dark side usually doesn't come out in the Christian parallel universe – the dark side comes out in the real world*
- That's when the real teaching of the Gospel can make a difference – when a child sees her sin nature and her need of a Savior and begins to understand the meaning of grace and the need for the Holy Spirit's power

- The goal of grace-based parenting is not to protect our children from the world and to prop up a weak faith and disconnected heart with a Christian environment that enables them to fake it – *but rather to lead our children into a life-transforming, holiness-producing, authentic heart-relationship with Jesus Christ that will enable them to become overcomers and witnesses in the world*
- ***Grace-based parenting assumes that children and youth will sin – and then teaches them how to apply the Gospel to their sin struggles***
- Children do not need to hide their sins – or deny their sins – or feel ashamed for their sins – or fear rejection because of their sins – or try to fake Christian behavior when their heart is disconnected -- *rather children in grace-based families learn how to be honest about their sins and confess their sins, and how to experience God's love and forgiveness when they do sin, and how to draw upon the power of the Spirit to overcome sin in the future*
- Some parents live in fear that their children are going to sin – that's like living in fear of your children growing up – *it's going to happen*
- *Jesus can deal with sin – already has, in fact -- so teach and equip and prepare your children how to deal with sin when it happens*
- **Teach your children the power of grace to forgive and cleanse all their sins**
- ***And teach your children the power of grace to overcome sin and produce holy, Christ-like lives***
- Show your children that they can approach the throne of grace confidently so that they may receive mercy and find grace to help them in their time of need
- **Grace gives children the freedom to make mistakes so that they can learn what the Gospel and unconditional love are all about in real life**

On to point 3 of my 5 points – just kidding

--this will be a two-part sermon to be concluded Nov. 11

(Concluding illustration of the difference between fear-based and grace-based parenting):

- Where should Christian parents send their kids to college?
- Fear-based parents: *Safety-first – We need to keep our kids safe and protect their faith by putting them in a Christian college environment*
- What about grace-based parents?: *Mission-focus – preparing kids to participate in Christ's mission in the world is priority number one – and that can take place equally at a Christian college or a secular university – because it's not about the environment – it's all about the heart*
- A neutral choice
- **A Christian with a strong faith and a Christ-reliant heart and a vital heart-connection to Jesus Christ can thrive spiritually in any environment – Christian, secular or even hostile**

- The components that help build a strong faith are worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism and missions
- *At a secular university, the student will have to work harder to be strong in worship, fellowship and discipleship*
- At a Christian college, the student will have to work harder to be strong in ministry, evangelism and missions
- We were neutral and gave our three girls the choice of whether they wanted to go to a Christian college or a secular university
- *As you know, Erika chose Bethel – a Christian college; Jill chose Iowa State; and Emily made the best choice of all – to be a Hawkeye (just kidding)*
- Erika made it a priority to get off campus and into the world doing ministry and evangelism and missions in inner city Minneapolis, Mexico, Venezuela and Spain – *all preparing her for teaching in an inner city Hispanic neighborhood in San Antonio when she graduated*
- Jill made it a priority to get involved in SALT company and Cornerstone church in Ames – and Emily made it a priority to get involved in 24/7 and ParkView Church in Iowa City – and both were involved in vibrant worship, fellowship, discipleship and outreach on campus and on mission trips
- *All three thrived spiritually and graduated strong in their faith and prepared to participate in Christ’s mission in the world*
- Erika had no spiritual advantage over Jill and Emily by attending a Christian college – all three had wonderful opportunities and challenges for spiritual growth
- *Because it’s not about the environment – it’s about developing a Christ-reliant heart that can thrive in any environment*
- And it’s not about keeping our kids safe – it’s about preparing our kids to join Christ’s mission and to make an eternal impact in their world

Prayer

“As for Me and My House”