

SERMON NOTES
I Kings 16-22; Acts 13:1-3
“Pastoring Your Children”

Intro:

- What are the goals and passions of your heart that are driving the way you are raising and guiding your children?
- *If your children grew up to become what you desire and envision them to be and to do – what would that look like?*
- Or – looking at it from another perspective – what are your greatest fears or worries concerning your children?
- *How would your kids answer those questions based on daily life at home? What would your kids say about what most pleases or displeases you?*
- Many kids growing up in Christian homes learn that what really matters to their parents – what really determines whether their parents are delighted or disappointed in them – *are things such as getting good grades or having lots of friends or excelling in sports or being attractive to boys or being accepted in the most popular social circles or staying out of trouble or preparing oneself to get a good-paying job or marrying someone who is respectable and successful*
- *What are the primary responsibilities the Bible gives to parents?*

Deuteronomy 6:4 - 7 (NIV) ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Ephesians 6:1 - 4 (NIV) ¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” ⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

- *Love God with all your heart and teach your children to love God and obey His commandments*
- *Teach your children how to live under authority and to please the Lord by obeying you*

- *Bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord and the truths of the Gospel*
- *Exercise loving authority over your children, not harshly out of anger or with a domineering desire for control – but rather as God's agents training them to submit to God's loving authority*
- *Teach your children how to experience God's grace and live out the transforming power of the Gospel*
- *Ted Tripp (Shepherding a Child's Heart): "Parenting is shepherding the hearts of your children in the ways of God's wisdom... The central focus of parenting is the gospel. You need to direct not simply the behavior of your children, but the attitudes of their hearts... Your parenting goal cannot simply be well behaved children... Ultimately, your children must internalize the message of the gospel with its promise of forgiveness and internal transformation and empowerment."*
- *Christian Parenting is Shepherding your child's heart toward allegiance and love for God*
- *If you are a parent – and especially if you are a father – then you have been called to be the pastor of your home*
- *Just as a pastor of a church shepherds the congregation in the direction of becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus – so also parents are called to shepherd their children toward becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus*
- *In fact, the most important and influential pastor in your child's life is not me or Mark or Tony – the most important and influential pastor in your child's life is the head of the family – whether that be the father or a single parent*
- *In the OT, Kings were called to be shepherds of God's people – to exercise their kingly authority as God's agents under God's sovereign authority to serve God's purposes*
- *In the NT, church leaders are called to be shepherds of God's people – under God's authority, serving God's purposes*
- *Parents have a similar calling in relation to their children – they are called to be shepherds or pastors – exercising parental authority as God's agents, under God's authority, serving God's purposes*
- *From this week's One Year Bible readings, we will learn what God values in leaders and apply this to our parenting*

I. DEVELOPING A HEART THAT IS LOYAL TO GOD

- What is the most important commandment in the Bible – according to both Moses in the OT and Jesus in the NT?

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV) ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

- *What God desires – and requires – first and foremost, is a heart attitude of love and devotion and loyalty*
- Then follow the instructions for parents to teach their children to obey God's commandments
- **The heart determines behavior – so God focuses first on our heart attitude toward Him and then on our external behavior in relation to His commands**
- *Parents are to follow this same approach in shepherding their children – namely, focusing first and foremost on matters of the heart*

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) ²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- *It is easy for parents to get sidetracked with behavioral issues because they are so visible and often so irritating*
- Many parenting techniques are focused primarily on modifying the child's behavior to make the behavior more pleasing to the parent
- *And indeed, parents must teach their children proper behavior and must correct and discipline bad behavior*
- But parents must also look deeper than the external behavior to the attitudes of the heart
- **Children are not dogs – and there is more to parenting than obedience training**
- ***The heart is the wellspring of life – therefore, parenting is chiefly concerned with shepherding the heart of the child***
- From a very early age, children are capable of responding either positively or negatively to the love and authority of God
- *It is that heart attitude toward God that parents must pay careful attention to*
- Ted Tripp calls this a “**Godward orientation**” – and a Godward orientation – or lack of same – will go a long way in shaping a child's heart and behavior

- *Will the child respond to God's goodness and kindness with love, delight and worship?*
- **Or will the child set his affections and his will on worldly goals?**
- *Will the child develop a God-reliant heart or a self-reliant heart?*
- *Is the child growing to know and love and trust the living God – or turning to other sources and other gods – to broken cisterns rather than living waters?*
- *Is the child developing a heart attitude of submission toward God's Authority and God's Word – or an attitude of rebellious self-will and independence?*
- *Is the child developing a tender heart and repentant attitude when she does wrong – understanding that she has sinned against God and not merely broken a family rule – or does she respond to correction with a defiant and hard heart?*
- *Is the child learning how to experience God's mercy and forgiveness when she sins – or does she cover up or deny or excuse or blame others for her bad behavior?*
- *Is the child developing a biblically accurate picture of God's character – or does the child mistrust God's goodness?*
- **The first priority in pastoring your children is not merely to shape their behavior more to your liking but to orient your child's heart toward loving God and obeying God**

- Especially when children are young, parents can control many of the influences that shape the child's development
- *But as children grow older, how they respond to peer pressure and worldly temptations and life's challenges and adversities will depend on the condition of their heart*
- Children who lack a Godward orientation and love relationship with God are more vulnerable to peer pressure and temptation and to being wounded by life's hurts and disappointments

- **A healthy Godward orientation is marked by two heart attitudes toward God: love and fear**
- Parents cannot create these heart attitudes, but can help the child cultivate them

- *Love for God will motivate and empower a child or a youth to want to obey and please and serve God*
- **We love because He first loved us**

- There is great spiritual power in children learning from the earliest age the life-giving truth: *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong.*
- **A love relationship with God will guard a child's heart from being damaged and hardened by life's hurts and disappointments and unfairness and adversities**
- *A love relationship with God will enable a child to cling to the goodness of God even in the midst of setbacks and hardships*
- **There is also a place for fearing the Lord as well as loving the Lord – these two heart attitudes are complementary, not contradictory**
- *A proper, healthy, godly fear of the Lord will enable children to turn from evil and to do good*
- We taught our girls that we have many spies at church, at school, and in the community who will report back to us if they see them behaving badly
- *We also taught our girls that even if no adults were present to get them in trouble – that God was always watching everything they do, and we are praying that He will bring their misdeeds to light and that He will discipline them Himself if we are unaware of what they are doing*
- **Of course, this is all presented in the context of a love relationship with God – He is not some angry Deity eagerly waiting to punish every act of disobedience**
- **But because He loves us, He leads us in paths of righteousness and corrects us when we follow self-destructive paths of sin**
- When we were in London on the tube, we heard this announcement hundreds of times: *Mind the gap when you are departing the train*
- There was a small gap and step down between the train and the platform
- *To “mind the gap” is to pay careful attention to the gap*
- No one needs to tell parents to pay attention to their children's behavior
- **But the Bible instructs parents: *Mind the heart – pay careful attention to your child's heart***
- *Is your child or teen developing a heart attitude of love for God and fear of the Lord?*
- *Of course, nurturing a love for God in our children is greatly aided by the parents treasuring Christ above all else in their own lives*

- The great danger in parenting is to send our children mixed signals
- *We teach them with our lips that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever – that knowing and serving and worshiping God is our highest priority as a Christian family*
- But then we face difficult choices in life as we live in a culture that does not honor God above all else
- *We face conflicts between honoring God and making more money // conflicts between honoring God and excelling in sports // conflicts between loyalty to God and loyalty to our team or our company or our friends // conflicts between church worship and a sports tournament or earning some extra money or attending a family activity*
- And sometimes we decide one way and sometimes a different way – and our kids become confused as to what our family values and priorities are
- *And confusion leads to a divided heart and compromise with the ways and values of the world*
- Unwittingly, some Christian parents are teaching their children that we need to function in society on its terms, and sometimes that means compromising our loyalty to God in order to achieve other important goals in life
- *To get along and get ahead and be successful in this world – sometimes other things need to come first*
- **Nothing is more important to God than a heart that is steadfastly loyal to Him**
- *And nothing grieves God more deeply than bowing before things that are not God and that cannot satisfy the deepest longings of the soul*
- As you read through the books of I & II Kings – or Chronicles – notice the primary criterion used in evaluating the kings of Judah and Israel

1 Kings 16:30 - 33 (NIV) ³⁰Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. ³¹He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³²He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. ³³Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

- *No mention of Ahab's foreign or domestic or economic policies or health care reforms or tax rates or even of his ethical or moral conduct*

- Ahab was judged on the basis of his heart attitude toward Yahweh – the one and only true and living God
- **The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart**
- Imagine if a US President were found guilty of having an adulterous affair and impregnating another man's wife and then sending that man to the front lines of the war in Iraq or Afghanistan with instructions for his commanding officer to make sure he was killed in action
- *Most Christians would be demanding impeachment of such a President for his immoral conduct*
- **Yet King David is esteemed in Scripture as a man after God's own heart – in contrast to many other kings**
- *David sinned greatly – yet his heart was devoted and loyal to God all the days of his life – in contrast to many other kings*

1 Kings 11:4 - 6 (NIV) ⁴As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. ⁵He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

1 Kings 15:3, 5 (NIV) ³He (Abijah) committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. ⁵For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD'S commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

- *Was God displeased with David's sins of adultery and murder?*
- **Of course He was – read II Samuel 12 – David was severely rebuked for his abuse of power**
- *But sins can be forgiven – if the heart is devoted to God and seeks His mercy*
- **When God looked at David's heart – God saw a heart that was fully devoted to the Lord his God – and God forgave David's bad behavior in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah – though did suffer some negative consequences**
- *Some of David's royal descendants – kings of Judah – were devoted to Yahweh and some were not*
- **But not one king of Israel was devoted to Yahweh – not one shepherd of Israel had a right heart attitude toward the one true and living God**
- **Ahab was the king of Israel, but he was not even the leader of his own home**

- *Jezebel was the spiritual leader of their family*

1 Kings 21:25 - 26 (NIV) ²⁵(There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. ²⁶He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)

- *Jezebel wore the pants in that family, as in the story of Naboth's vineyard*
- **Ahab coveted the vineyard of Naboth next to his palace, but Naboth refused to sell his family inheritance to Ahab**
- *So mighty King Ahab went home to pout and sulk*
- **Jezebel then seized control of the situation and had Naboth killed so that Ahab could confiscate his land**
- *When men do not lead – strong women will fill the void – for better or for worse*
- **As king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel assumed they had power and authority to do whatever they pleased**
- *They forgot that all human authority is exercised under God's authority*
- **When human leaders abuse their power – God exercises His judgment**
- **A prophet condemned their abuse of kingly power and prophesied Ahab's death**
- *Ahab devised a plan whereby he would go into battle with King Jehoshaphat of Judah – with Jehoshaphat wearing the royal robes while Ahab wore a disguise*
- **For some reason I cannot fathom, Jehoshaphat agreed**
- *No matter – there is a Sovereign Ruler in heaven whose purposes cannot be thwarted by human scheming*
- **In the midst of the battle, a soldier fired an arrow at random into the air – not even aiming for the king – and the arrow just happened to find the chink in Ahab's armor and fatally wounded him**
- **Human leaders – or parents – who abuse their power – will one day have to settle accounts with Almighty God**
- **Parents are God's agents to teach children obedience to authority**
- **Parents do not discipline bad behavior because they are in a bad mood or annoyed or angry or hurt or frustrated**
- *Parents correct disobedience because it is their divine calling to teach obedience to children so that children will learn to please God*

- **Parents: You are called to shepherd your child on God's behalf and you do not need to apologize or hesitate to exercise proper and loving parental authority – *understanding that you yourself are under God's authority in your parenting***
- Having said that, remember this: ***Mind the heart***
- ***Our ultimate goal as parents is NOT to control their behavior – rather our ultimate goal is to shepherd their hearts to love God and then to obey and serve God from a heart that is fully devoted to Him***
- **Better to raise a David who occasionally sins but whose heart is fully devoted to the Lord than to raise a Pharisee who follows all the rules but whose heart is far from God or to raise an Ahab who achieves great worldly success but chases after idols**

II. DEVELOPING A HEART THAT IS PASSIONATE ABOUT SPREADING THE GOSPEL

- Just as we must not settle for raising well-behaved children – we also must not settle for raising children who are saved
- ***Of course, every Christian parent earnestly desires and prays for the salvation of their children***
- **But praying the salvation prayer to accept Christ is just the beginning**
- ***The Gospel is not something we embrace once to get saved – the Gospel instructs and transforms and empowers us in our daily living so that we grow in Christ-likeness and fulfill God's purpose for our lives***
- ***While we were traveling in Scotland on our vacation, we visited evangelist Ian Leitch in an Edinburgh hospital recovering from his massive heart attack***
- **He almost died twice of the heart attack and complications, but was better than we expected and seems to have turned the corner – though he likely won't be able to continue his travelling ministry as before**
- ***It was an emotional, meaningful, and enjoyable 30-minute conversation***
- **I wrote in his wife Morag's blog that Ian understands and explains the Gospel as well as anyone I know – not just how to be saved by accepting Christ as Savior – but how to live the Christian life and experience the reality of Christ living His life in and through us**

- *Do you want to shepherd your child's heart so he or she becomes a fully devoted follower of Jesus?*
- **Then devote your life to learning, studying, understanding, living, explaining, and putting into practice daily the truths of the Gospel**
- *The better you understand and live out the Gospel, the better you will shepherd your child's heart*

- **The great danger in Christian families is that we are prone to parent according to the Law more than according to the Gospel – and that tends to produce children who are either rule-following Pharisees or rule-breaking prodigals – but rarely does the Law produce fully devoted followers of Jesus**

- **There are many children raised in Christian homes who have accepted Christ and yet do not understand how to live out the Gospel in their daily living**
- *To them, living the Christian life is wearisome and burdensome – trying to be good all the time // following all the rules // going to church all the time*
- **And even trying to be good – still falling short – still failing to meet expectations – still feeling guilty and living under a cloud of disapproval**
- *Why bother denying yourself the fun that your friends are experiencing when your efforts to lead a good Christian life just result in defeat, frustration and feeling guilty anyway?*

- *In many cases, we have taught our children Bible stories, and the plan of salvation in terms of forgiveness and getting into heaven, and we have taught them Moral & Religious Rules– but we have not taught our children how to go to the Cross daily for cleansing and how to experience Christ living His resurrection life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit*
- **They are not excited about sharing the Gospel because they are not experiencing the life-giving and life-transforming power of the Gospel in their daily living**

- **If we as parents are to shepherd our children's hearts – then we must integrate gospel teaching and gospel living into every facet of family life and relationships – including our approach to discipline and correction – which must not tolerate willful defiance and yet which must offer opportunity for repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, renewal, learning, empowerment, and restored fellowship without the child laboring under a cloud of parental anger and disapproval for days or weeks on end**
- **Once our children and youth are experiencing the power and the joy and the abundant life of the Gospel – they will see that nothing this world offers can compare with who Jesus is and what He offers us**

- **And then they will be motivated to spread the Gospel and participate in God's Kingdom mission**
- **And that is our ultimate goal as Christian parents – not merely to raise well-behaved, responsible, successful adults // *but to raise fully devoted followers of Jesus who are joining God in His work of reconciling a lost world to Himself through Jesus Christ***
- **Many of our children, youth and adults have been doing just that through our recent VBS outreach**
- ***And this morning we celebrate one of our own members – raised in this church – obeying God's call to missions***
- **This morning's commissioning service was straight out of the pages of one of this week's readings in Acts**

Acts 13:1 - 3 (NIV) ¹In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

- ***The church at Antioch obeyed the Holy Spirit and sent two of their finest and most valuable spiritual leaders to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles in other lands***
 - **Today we are doing the same by sending Lindsey to spread the Gospel among the unreached peoples of North Africa**
 - ***Lindsey has been shepherded well – by her parents – and by many of you here this morning***
 - ***But why are we sending her so far away to a place with some potential dangers?***
 - **I know that Mo and Emily have encountered some objections from people wondering how they could possibly consider uprooting a family of young children and going to a Muslim country that does not even welcome Christian missionaries**
 - **So the question needs to be answered: *Why? Why Missions?***
- (1) *Because the Creator God of the nations is worthy of being worshiped by all peoples of the earth***

- (2) **Because Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone**
- (3) **Because Unreached Peoples need to hear the Gospel so they can believe and be saved**
- (4) **Because the Second Coming of Christ awaits the fulfillment of the Great Commission**
- (5) **Because it is God's Purpose to exalt Jesus Christ as Lord of the nations and to redeem a People for Himself from every people group**
- (6) **Because Jesus Christ deserves the Reward of his Suffering**
- (7) **Because we experience and show the surpassing value of Christ and His Gospel by our sacrificial participation in His global cause**
- (8) **Because Jesus Christ is the Only Light and Hope of the world**

(Conclusion)

- I want to close with this challenge to men on this Father's Day:
- *What would you think of a nation where most of the soldiers on the front lines of combat were women?*
- Even if you support the concept of women serving in the military, wouldn't you wonder: **Where are the men?**
- Question: *Where are the front lines of combat in the Invisible Spiritual War between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan?*
- The front line spiritual battlefields are these: **Worship / Prayer / Evangelism / Missions**
- **These are the front line ministries where spiritual battles are won or lost**
- One of Cornerstone's strengths is a strong contingent of men who are strong, capable, godly spiritual leaders
- *We see it on our Deacon Board // We see it in men who sacrifice vacation time to work with VBS or to go on mission trips // We see it in men who serve on the worship team or are passionate worshipers in the congregation // We see it in men who are involved in community service projects and teaching Sunday School classes and leading home groups and ministry teams*

- But there are two areas where we need to see more men who will man-up and participate in front line spiritual warfare ministries: *One is prayer*
- ***Intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare prayer are spiritual combat activities, and yet most of our prayer meetings are dominated by women***
- I welcome female spiritual warriors – *but where are the male prayer warriors?*

- I understand that some men feel uncomfortable praying out loud in a group
- ***Question: Does boot camp or basic training in the military – let alone actual combat – ever require men to step out of their comfort zones?***

- One other area where we need men to be men and spiritual warriors:
- ***Perhaps the most difficult and dangerous and strategic front line battle: cross-cultural missions***
- **The last five home-grown missionaries we have sent to the mission field have all been women: *Connie Braden Coy // Jan Kloss // Jamie Johnson // Lindsey Armbruster // Emily Pearson Mogard***
- I pray that we will continue to send out more women as home-grown missionaries
- But at some point the question must be asked: *Where are the men?*

- **So this challenge goes out to young men and to fathers who are raising boys and young men: *Will you answer the call to join these courageous women on the front lines of spiritual combat? And will you raise up sons who will answer the call to take the Gospel to unreached people who have not yet heard the Gospel?***
- Will you do your part to shepherd, mentor, teach, train, equip a young man to be one of our next home-grown missionaries?

Prayer

“He Reigns”