

The Joy and Privilege of Parenting:

***Parenting our children the way God
parents us***

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Introduction

In the Garden of Eden, God joined Adam and Eve together as husband and wife. One of the purposes of marriage is the procreation of children. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). God blessed them with Cain, Abel, Seth, and more that are not named.

Children are a blessing from God. They are a gift—a precious treasure entrusted to our care. As the psalmist says, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them” (Psalm 127:3, 5). Parenting, therefore, is not merely a duty—it is a sacred privilege, a calling from God Himself.

God calls parents to have their children baptized, to teach them His Word, to instill in them godly values and virtues, to provide for their physical needs, to care for their emotional well-being, to protect them from harm and danger, to pray for them, to discipline them by curbing bad behavior, to forgive them, and to love them.

And when our children are grown and leave the home, we pray that God will lead them to a godly spouse, so that they too may establish a family and pass on the same faith and values to their own children. Blessed indeed are the parents who, in the words of Psalm 128:6, “see their children’s children.”

The family is the foundational building block of society. It is within the home that children first learn faith, love, respect, and responsibility. God promises those who keep the Fourth Commandment “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:3). Christian children, then, grow up to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel and responsible members of society. When the family is healthy, rooted in God’s Word and ordered according to His design, then the church is strengthened, and civil society thrives. But when the family is broken, then we see a loss of respect for authority and a breakdown of morality in both church and community life. Strong families produce strong and faithful citizens. For this reason, we must invest in the health of the family, for in doing so, we are building the future of both the church and the nation.

Parenting is not easy. The days can be long and exhausting—changing diapers, cleaning up messes, helping with homework, driving them to practice, keeping peace in the home, preparing meals, and getting little ones ready for bed. In the midst of the chaos, it’s easy to feel worn out or overwhelmed.

And yet, parenting is also filled with deep joy. There is joy in watching our children grow. There is joy in hearing them sing hymns, seeing them perform in their first recital, cheering them on at graduation, celebrating their wedding, and watching them raise children of their own. These are moments of great joy and thanksgiving.

But the greatest joy of all—the true goal of parenting—is to bring our children to Jesus. We want them to be baptized, to know Christ, to trust in Him, to walk in His ways, and to love whatever is just and true and good. Our goal in parenting is to hand down the Christian faith to the next generation. Some parents will say that the goal of parenting is for their children to have academic success, good manners, strong character, financial independence, and a fulfilling career. While these may be worthy pursuits, the ultimate goal is that our children confess the Christian faith, remain active in a faithful Lutheran Church, be nourished in the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, and live lives of repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sins. Above all, we want to see our children and grandchildren in heaven.

Therefore, parents take seriously your sacred calling. Bring your children to the waters of Holy Baptism, where they are united to Christ's death and resurrection. Bring them to the Divine Service every Sunday, where Christ gives His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Teach them God's Word and the Small Catechism. Read Bible stories with them. Hold regular family devotions. Pray with them and for them. Sing hymns together. Train them in virtue, wisdom, piety, good works, and healthy habits.

It is our prayer that through such faithful instruction and godly example, our children will grow in grace and ultimately "yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).

Parents are children of God

As parents, we must never forget that we are first and foremost children of God. He is our true Father, and we are His dear children. We were baptized into Christ, adopted into His family by grace. As the Apostle John declares, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1).

Our heavenly Father gave us life in the womb of our mother, and He continues to sustain our life through His daily bread. As the Small Catechism teaches, God gives us clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all we have. He defends us against all danger and protects us from all evil. And He does this not because of anything we've done, but solely out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. For all this, it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

In the same way, as parents, we provide for our children. We give them clothing and shoes, food and drink, and a safe and loving home. We protect them from danger and guard them from physical and emotional harm. And like our Father in heaven, we do these things not because our children always behave or express gratitude, but out of love and mercy. They are a gift from God entrusted to our care.

God is merciful and gracious to us as His beloved children. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8). In love, He sent His Son to die for our sins and to overcome our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Through the Law, He reveals our sin; through the Gospel, He forgives it. God disciplines us because He loves us and shows compassion to us “as a father shows compassion to his children” (Psalm 103:13). In response, we live repentant lives, bearing fruit freely and joyfully.

So also, as parents, we show mercy and grace to our children. We are called to be slow to anger and abounding in love. Because they are sinners just like us, we use God’s Law to show them their sin and, for Jesus’ sake, we forgive them. We discipline them because we love them. And in the context of that love, our children grow to love us in return—freely and willingly.

We learn to parent our children by looking to the way God parents us, His own dear children. Our heavenly Father, loves us, provides for our needs, instructs us through His Word, and disciplines us when we stray. He is patient. He forgives our sin on account of Christ’s death and resurrection, and He guides us in the way we should go.

In the same way, we are called to mirror His love and His grace and mercy in our homes by showing patience, offering forgiveness, providing guidance, and leading our children toward what is good and right. The more we reflect on how God cares for us, the better we understand how to care for those He has entrusted to us.

The Gift of Parental Authority

What is the Fourth Commandment? Honor your father and your mother. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

God has entrusted parents with the authority to care for, nurture, and raise their children. This authority is not given by the state or culture—it is given by God. It is divinely instituted.

Parents are called to exercise their authority with humility, remembering that they themselves live under God’s authority. They must be mindful that they stand in the place of God for the sake of their children, reflecting the heart of their heavenly Father.

In this calling, parents serve as God’s earthly representatives—gifts from Him given for the protection and blessing of their children. God has placed them “in His stead” to guide, teach, and love the children He has entrusted to their care.

This authority is a sacred trust. Parents must never abuse it by leading their children into sin or away from God’s truth. Parental authority, rightly exercised, is a gift to be treasured—a holy calling given for the good of the next generation.

Yet, many modern views of parenting, especially among progressive circles, reject the very idea of parental authority. They insist that children should be free to make their own choices without guidance, correction, or discipline. In such thinking, parents are no longer seen as God-appointed authorities, but merely as equals who consult their children rather than lead them.

The Role and Duty of Children

Just as God entrusts parents with authority, He also calls children to receive that authority with honor and obedience. Children are to listen to their parents, trust them, and learn from them. The Fourth Commandment speaks directly to this calling, “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). In the Small Catechism, Luther explains this commandment: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.” St Paul echoes this truth when he writes, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). Even when parents do not perfectly fulfill their role, children are still to respect them as those whom God has placed over them. To honor one’s parents is to honor God Himself, for He is the One who appointed them. In fact, obedience to the Fourth Commandment is an expression of obedience to the First Commandment. When children trust in their parents, then they also trust in their Heavenly Father.

Even Jesus, the Son of God, submitted Himself to His earthly parents. Luke tells us that as a child, Jesus “was submissive to them” (Luke 2:51). His obedience was the perfect fulfillment of God’s law. And even on His final moments on the cross, Jesus honored His mother, entrusting her to the care of the Apostle John (John 19:25–27). In this way, Christ shows us that obedience to parents is a fruit of faith and a reflection of the Gospel.

Scripture promises blessings for obedience, but it also warns children of the dangers of disobedience. Proverbs says, “Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22), and again, “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother” (Proverbs 15:20). To dishonor one’s parents is to dishonor God, rejecting the authority He has established for our good.

An example of disobeying and rebelling against God-given authority is found in the account of Eli’s two sons. Though they served as priests, they were corrupt and did not know the Lord. They abused their position by seizing portions of the sacrifices that did not belong to them, treated the Lord’s offering with contempt, and committed sexual immorality with the women serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Eli rebuked them for their evil actions, they refused to listen. Their hardened hearts revealed that it was the Lord’s will to bring judgment upon them (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–25).

The Meaning and Practice of Discipline

When parents discipline their children according to the Word of God, they are forming disciples. Discipline is the process of educating, correcting, shaping, and guiding a child in the way of our Lord. As we will learn, parents discipline their children when they teach God's Word, model a life of faith, set boundaries, correct bad behavior, forgive sins, and guide their children in the way of truth. This kind of discipline trains children to love what is good, to reject what is evil, and to walk on Christ's path of righteousness. In this way, the home becomes a place where God's Word and the precious Gospel are passed down from one generation to the next.

- 1. Parents serve as role models.** Children learn by example—and their parents are their first and most influential teachers. Children watch and imitate what their parents do and do not do, what they say and do not say. They learn from our church attendance—whether faithful or sporadic. They notice how we speak to others, how we handle conflict, how we use a smartphone, and how we live out the Christian faith. They learn from us what it means to repent when we sin and how to forgive one another. Over time, children begin to mirror their parents' values and confession of faith. A child's character often reflects the home in which they were raised. This is why faithful parenting matters so profoundly.
- 2. True discipline is an act of love.** It must be firm, yet always gentle in spirit. It flows from love—not from anger, frustration, or a desire for control—and is carried out for the sake of the child's well-being. Colossians 3:21 warns, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Proverbs 13:24 reminds us, "He who loves his son is diligent to discipline him." And Hebrews 12:6 assures us, "For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." For this reason, parents cannot passively watch their children wander down paths that lead away from Christ. Love compels them to correct, guide, and train their children in righteousness and virtuous living.
- 3. Children are to take their parents at their word,** trusting that their instructions are given for their good. As Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." At times, a parent may simply say, "Listen to me" or "Trust me." Children naturally ask "why," and while there is a proper time for reason and explanation, they must first learn to obey simply because their parents have spoken. As they mature, parents can guide them to understand the reasons behind their guidance, so that obedience flows not only from duty, but also from understanding and wisdom.

Discipline as Instruction and Correction

The Greek word for discipline, *paideia*, has different meanings, but here we focus on its sense of *instruction* and *correction*. In parenting, these go hand in hand forming the foundation of raising children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Let us look at these in turn.

1. First of all, discipline begins with instruction (education). God has given parents the responsibility to instruct their children, but the primary responsibility falls upon the father. Throughout Scripture, God calls fathers to pass on His Word and His ways to the next generation. In the Old Testament, the Lord chose Abraham “that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice” (Genesis 18:19). God spoke to the people of Israel—especially to the fathers—saying, “Make [My Word] known to your children and your children’s children” (Deuteronomy 4:9). Solomon says, “A wise son hears his father’s instruction” (Proverbs 13:1).

This divine calling continues into the New Testament. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Martin Luther recognized this biblical pattern and urged the head of the household—especially the father—to teach God’s Word and the Small Catechism to his family.

Yet the mother plays a vital role as well. She nurtures the faith of her children as she reads Bible stories and prays with them. As Solomon writes, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8). Scripture tells us that Timothy learned the Word of God from childhood through the faithful instruction of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). This teaching made him “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

Both parents, therefore, are called to teach. God gives the mandate to parents saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). Parents are to take every opportunity to teach God’s Word—whether at home, on the road, at bedtime, or at the start of the day.

Through the Scriptures, children learn what is right and wrong. The Ten Commandments reveal what is sinful, such as unbelief, disrespect for authority, anger, hatred, sexual immorality, theft, gossip, and discontentment. At the same time, they teach what is good, such as faith toward God, respect for godly authority, the sanctity of life and marriage, the proper use of possessions, a good reputation, and the virtue of contentment.

The Scriptures also teach children about the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who created us, redeemed us in Christ, and sanctifies us. Through the Law and the Gospel, children learn repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sins. God’s Word trains them to live as baptized children of God, resisting the impulses of the old Adam and giving free rein to the new man. They are to renounce sin and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in faith toward Christ and love toward one another. When they are confirmed, the Lord’s Supper strengthens and sustains them for their journey to heaven.

Alongside God’s Word, parents establish household rules, boundaries, and expectations—such as picking up toys, cleaning their room, and clearing the table. Children must be taught

obedience, respect, sharing, and responsibility. Boundaries are not only for correcting bad behavior but also for helping children feel safe, secure, and valued. Like fences around a yard, rules provide a safe space in which children can grow and thrive. Such order reflects the design God built into His creation, especially within the family.

This instruction happens in many settings: mealtime, daily devotions, conversations at home or in the car. It also happens in a more formal instruction in Sunday School, Catechism class, or at a Lutheran School. Most importantly, children receive the Gospel when they hear it read and preached in the Divine Service. There, the Holy Spirit works through the Word and Sacrament nurturing faith and good works.

2. Discipline also involves correction. When a child's behavior is wrong or harmful, parents must guide the child away from sin and toward what is good and godly.

(a) Verbal Correction: Correcting a child's misbehavior can take on many forms. Often, it is verbal: "Don't hit your sister," "Clean up your room," or "Be respectful when someone is talking." Verbal correction may include a gentle reminder, a firm warning, or a strong rebuke—depending on the situation.

(b) Physical Correction: Scripture also speaks of physical correction, particularly in the book of Proverbs. "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24). And "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). And "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15). These verses teach that appropriate physical correction, when done in love and self-control, may be necessary to curb sinful behavior.

In cases of willful disobedience or open defiance, a calm and measured slap on the hand or a spank on the bottom can serve as a clear and effective consequence. Though unpleasant at the moment, this form of discipline sends a strong message that certain behaviors are unacceptable.

(c) Examples of Other Consequences:

- Logical consequences teaches the child that their punishment is related to their misbehavior (i.e. "punishment that fits the crime"): Child draws on the wall, they clean up the mess or child is fighting over a toy, the toy is put away;
- Natural consequences allow the child to experience the natural outcome of their actions: Child refuses to wear a jacket and gets cold; or
- Time-Out provides a child time to calm down and reflect on their behavior.

Whatever form the punishment (discipline) takes, the purpose is to identify sin, repent of that sin, and guide the child back to what is right. When there is a sorrow over sin, parents should speak a word of forgiveness.

Discipline is never easy—for the parent or for the child. It can be painful to correct those you love, and it may be hard for children to understand that discipline is an act of love. Yet Scripture assures us, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Just as pruning a fruit tree may seem harsh, or athletic training may be grueling, so too discipline, though difficult, produces self-control and respect. Looking back on my own childhood, I now see the blessing in the discipline I received from my parents. Though painful at the time, it was a gift of love for which I remain deeply thankful.

Therefore, parents are called to take seriously their God-given responsibility to discipline their children through both instruction and correction. We should not expect behavior to change overnight; growth takes time and requires patience. Because our children will always carry a sinful nature, the need for discipline will never fully disappear. Yet, with consistent guidance, they will learn to curb the sinful nature, showing love and kindness toward others. They will grow in their willingness to listen to and follow their parents. In time, parenting will become less of a struggle and more of a joy.

Sorrow over sin and the forgiveness of sins

The purpose of correction—whether verbal or physical—is not simply to change outward behavior, but to bring about true repentance. Discipline should lead the child to recognize the wrong they have done and to feel sorrow over their sin. A simple and sincere “I am sorry” is a sign of a contrite heart.

Parents should teach their children how to confess their sins toward those they have wronged. When a child hits a sibling, lies, or disobeys, they should be taught to say, “I am sorry,” not out of mere habit, but from the heart. They should be encouraged to name the wrong and express genuine regret.

Yet confession alone is not enough—it must be followed by forgiveness. Parents should avoid dismissive phrases like, “It’s okay,” or “No big deal.” These expressions minimize sin and bypass the opportunity to hear a word of forgiveness. Instead, the parent—or the offended sibling—should say, “I forgive you and God forgives you in Christ.” In this way, discipline becomes a beautiful opportunity to teach both repentance and forgiveness.

Through sorrow over sin and the hearing of forgiveness, the child is continually directed to the mercy of Christ and the power of His forgiveness. Receiving forgiveness should bear fruit in love—love toward parents, siblings, and others. This love flows freely, not from compulsion, but from gratitude. Because of a sinful nature, this love will never be perfect. There will always be the need for parents to discipline their children and teach them to confess their sin and to hear the forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion

God entrusts parents with the sacred task of raising the children He has given them. This calling is both joyful and demanding. It requires patience, sacrifice, and constant prayer.

Yet the devil and the world seek to lead our children astray and draw them away from Christ. It grieves the heart when a child departs from the faith and follows the ways of the world. In such moments, we cling to the promises of God, trust in the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and continue steadfast in prayer.

May God help us to make the most of the time He gives. We will fail at times, for we are not perfect parents—nor will we ever be. In those moments, we ask our children to forgive us, and we ask our Father in heaven to forgive us for Jesus' sake. What comfort it is to know that Christ is our refuge and strength—today, tomorrow, and always. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May God grant us wisdom, courage, faithfulness, and perseverance as we parent. May we love our children, provide for them, protect them, guide them, and teach them the way of Christ and of His precious Word. Our ultimate goal of parenting, by God's grace, is to bring our children to Jesus—teaching them to know Him, trust Him, walk in His ways, and love what is good and true. Our highest aim is that they confess the Christian faith, remain active in a faithful Lutheran church, and live lives with faith toward God and love for one another. And may we, with our children, one day be together in heaven.

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