

SHARED PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

In our third study on the home, we considered marriage, the foundation of the home; and in that study we noted that one of the purposes of marriage is procreation (bearing children). Genesis 1:28 records God as telling Adam and Eve, "'Be fruitful and multiply.'" In Jeremiah 29:6 God said to men, "'Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters.'" In First Timothy 5:14 Paul said, "I desire that the younger widows marry and bear children."

No, marriage isn't necessary for procreation, but from these verses it's obvious that God expects procreation to take place as a natural result of marriage; besides, whether it be by choice or not, people who marry but don't have children (naturally or even by adoption) miss out on one of the greatest blessings that God has bestowed on mankind.

What exactly is a parent? According to Webster, our word "parent" is related to a Latin word meaning "to give birth to"; he then went on to say that the word "parent" refers to "one who begets or brings forth offspring." Literally, then, a parent is one who has had a literal part in the conception of a human being; however, Webster also said that a parent can be "a person who brings up and cares for children." This idea reminds me of Luke 2:27 and 41 where the Bible uses the word "parents" to include Joseph as the father of Jesus in the sense of the one who had the guardianship of Jesus. I mention this because what we consider in this study on parenthood includes anyone with children in his/her custody, whether they're fostered, adopted, step, or birth children.

From the etymology and the definition of "parent," we conclude that *Parents Are Providers*: they provide the necessary elements to create life; and that being true, they are then responsible to provide the necessary elements to maintain the life they create. So let's approach our study in the best way that I know—by looking to Jesus as a child and to God as a father.

Jesus was the ideal Child.

What better way to determine the responsibilities of parents than to evaluate the growth process of the only perfect child who ever lived?

Before we look to Jesus, though, think about this: Suppose you had no choice but to give up your child; but then suppose you had the privilege of knowing hundreds of couples, any of which you could choose to raise your child. Wouldn't that be an extremely distressing task? Well, Yahweh was once in that type of situation when He had to send His Son to Earth: out of the hundreds of couples He could've chosen, He had enough faith in the characters of Joseph and Mary to allow them to be the earthly parents of His only and divine child, something I can't even imagine! Since God felt that way about their ability as parents, then we shouldn't fail to reflect on them as an example for us to follow by considering what the Bible says about how Jesus was raised.

Luke 2:52 tells us that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." Luke described four qualities that Jesus' parents had a part in cultivating in Him.

- He advanced physically, indicated by the clause that He "increased ... in stature";
- He advanced mentally, indicated by the clause that He "increased in wisdom";
- He advanced socially, indicated by the clause that He "increased ... in favor with men"; and...
- He advanced spiritually, indicated by the clause that He "increased ... in favor with God."

Providing for Jesus *physically* included such natural things as clothing and sheltering Him.

Luke 2:7 tells us that they "wrapped [Jesus] in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger," reminding us of the "*storgos*" love we talked about in our first study of this series. Vine, in his Greek lexicon, said that "*storgos*" is the "love of kindred, especially of parents for children and children for parents"; it refers to "natural affection" (Romans 1:31 & Second Timothy 3:3), the words "heartless" and "inhuman" being antonyms for it. It's self-evident that parents are the physical providers for children: Second Corinthians 12:14 reads, "The children ought not lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children"; in fact, in a general statement, Paul said that "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" or infidel as the KJV reads (First Timothy 5:8).

What have we given up in order to help ensure the physical necessities for our children?

Providing for Jesus *mentally* included such things as schooling Him.

Luke 2:47 tells us that "all [the teachers, verse 46] who heard [Jesus] were astonished at His understanding." I'm convinced that His parents saw to it that He was well schooled; although I'm not sure I'd go this far, some scholars have even stated that Jesus wouldn't have been called "Rabbi" (e.g., John 1:38) unless He had a degree from some renowned formal institution of higher learning.

What have we given up in order to help ensure success in this world for our children?

Providing for Jesus *socially* included such things as training Him in proper manners.

Instead of insisting on being "the speaker of the hour," Luke 2:46 tells us that Jesus was once found "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions," reminding us of the "*agape*" love we also talked about in our first study of this series. Dr. Ed Wheat said that *agape* "is a mental attitude based on a deliberate choice of the will"; likewise, John Bisagno said that it "is always equated not with what one feels, but with what one does. Love is something you do." See, when many, or perhaps most, of us are in a situation like Jesus was in, we "feel" the need to "have the floor," but *agape* forces us to "do" that which is civil or courteous by listening to figure out where the other person is coming from in order to understand why he acts and speaks the way he does; by doing this, a person is much better able to deal with another's misdeeds or misunderstandings, especially if it has to do with something that isn't even sinful (cf. First Peter 3:8).

What have we given up in order to help ensure social graces in our children?

Providing for Jesus *spiritually* included such things as teaching Him God's religion.

Luke 2:41 tells us that "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover." Joseph and Mary obviously knew the Old Covenant well enough to know that they were expected as parents to train their child up in the way of the Lord. Do any of us doubt that the parents God picked for His Son wanted to be like their father Abraham who "command[ed] his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19)? Do any of us doubt that they taught Him diligently when they sat down, when they walked, when they laid down, and when they rose up" (Deuteronomy 6:7)? Do any of us doubt that they followed in the footsteps of their forefathers who taught their children God's laws that the next generation might know them, that they in turn might declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God and keep His commandments (Psalm 78:1-7)? Surely not!

In harmony with Ecclesiastes 12:13 which states that to "Fear God and keep His commandments ... is man's all," even the Gentile Cornelius taught his household to fear God (Acts 10:2). Ephesians 6:4 commands, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." As I've noted for you before, the word "fathers" here is also translated "parents" in Hebrews 11:23; besides, it's evident that the specific reference of this verse actually points to Moses' mother, not his father. Surely, then, no one will deny that the mother is included in Ephesians 6:4; even though the father may be ultimately responsible for seeing that his children receive the teaching necessary, yet mothers are obviously not excluded. Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20 warn, "Do not forsake the law of your mother." Proverbs 31 is a narration of a mother's teaching (v. 1). And Second Timothy 1:5 has Paul saying to Timothy, "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which was first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice."

What have we given up in order to help ensure eternal salvation for our children? So...

Who will deny that in Joseph and Mary God picked the very best earthly parents possible to raise His divine son and only child? We should, therefore, learn from them, making sure, to the best of our ability, that our children also advance physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

God is the ideal Father.

What better way to determine characteristics of parents than to evaluate the only perfect parent in existence anywhere?

As we said earlier, *Parents Are Providers*; and that's exactly what one of God's Hebrew names has reference to: El Shaddai brings God's provisional quality to mind.

God's provisional quality can be readily seen with reference to His Son, Jesus.

God provided His Son with love.

Immediately after John the Baptist baptized Jesus, God His Father spoke from Heaven for all to hear, saying, "This is My beloved Son" (Mark 1:11). A while after John witnessed that, he confirmed to some of his disciples that "The Father loves the son" (John 3:35), and then Jesus Himself repeated that statement in John 5:20. Later on The Mount of Transfiguration, as we call it, Jesus' Divine Father, once again before witnesses, said, "This is My beloved Son" (Matthew 17:5).

How often have we verbally reassured our children of our love?

God provided His Son with attention.

Jesus said, "I am not alone because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32 & 8:29); and He also said to God, "Father, I thank You that You heard Me" (John 11:41). Paul said that "when [Jesus] offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to [the Father] who was able to save Him from death..., [He] was heard" (Hebrews 5:7); in fact, because of Jesus' prayers, the Father sent an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). Jesus confidently said to Peter once, "Put your sword in its place.... Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:52-53)?

How often have we reassured our children that we're there for them and proved it from time to time with quality time and heartfelt attention?

God provided His Son with an imprint.

Yahweh wasn't just "with" Jesus, but He was also "in" Him (John 10:38); in fact, Jesus said to Philip once, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father.... Do you not believe that ... the Father [is] ... in Me" (John 14:9-10)?

How often have we thought about the example or the imprint that we're leaving on our children and the significance of that imprint on their lives?

So God provided His Son everything He needed, both physically and spiritually. Likewise...

God's provisional quality can be seen with reference to us, His adopted children.

Before we list some of God's provisions for us, we need to recognize that He has the unique ability to be a perfect provider because of His intimate knowledge of each one of us. He knows our names (John 10:15). He knows how many hairs we have on our heads (Matthew 10:30). He knows what we need before we even ask for it (Matthew 6:8).

How well do we know, really know, our children? Because of God's perfect knowledge of our spiritual and physical needs...

He provides us with forgiveness.

Jesus said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14); another way of putting this is, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Based on our obedience to Him, God refrains from giving us what we deserve—punishment; instead He gives us what we don't deserve—forgiveness.

Do we provide forgiveness to our children once they've repented?

God provides us with instruction and correction.

Due to instruction, Paul said, "We are not ignorant of [Satan's] devices" (Second Corinthians 2:11). He also wrote, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, [correcting] every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:7; cf. John 15:1-5).

Do we provide necessary instruction and correction to our children for their eternal good? Or do we rather let them do such things as mouth off or do mean things to people only to laugh at it?

God provides us with rewards.

Jesus, speaking of charitable deeds that we do in private, said, "Your Father who sees [what you do] in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:1 & 4). And Jesus, speaking of private fasting for spiritual reasons, said, "Your Father who sees [what you do] in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:18).

Do we provide rewards—things over/above the necessities of life—to our children when they do well?

God provides us with consistency and equity.

Jesus said, "He (the Father) makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and [He] sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:7-11)?

Do we provide honorable things to our children for their physical and spiritual welfare?

So God has indeed "given us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (Second Peter 1:3), and I hope we do the same for our children.

Summary

Since parents are providers, we should, as Joseph and Mary did for Jesus, provide our children with everything necessary for their physical, mental, social, and spiritual well being. We should provide such things as love, attention, good examples, forgiveness, instruction, correction, rewards, consistency, equity, and everything positive.

A Little Fellow Follows Me

*A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me.*

*I do not dare to go astray,
For fear he'll go the self-same way.*

*Not once can I escape his eyes,
What'er he sees me do, he tries.*

*Like me, says he, he's going to be,
That little chap who follows me.*

*He thinks that I am good and fine,
Believes in every word of mine.*

*The base in me he must not see,
That little chap who follows me.*

*I must remember as I go,
Through summer sun and winter snow...*

*I'm building for the years to be,
That little chap who follows me.*

Walk A Little Plainer, Daddy

*Walk a little plainer, Daddy,
Said a little boy so frail.
I'm following in your footsteps,
And I don't want to fail.*

*Sometimes your steps are not so plain,
Sometimes they're hard to see.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For you are leading me.*

*I know that once you walked this way,
Many years ago.
And what you did along the way,
I'd really like to know.*

*For sometimes when I'm tempted,
I don't know what to do.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For I must follow you.*

*Someday when I'm grown up,
You're like I want to be.
Then I will have a little boy
Who'll want to follow me.*

*And I would want to lead him right,
And help him to be true.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For we must follow you*

~ Unknown

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