

As Parents we have a Choice

“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”
(Proverbs 24: 3- 4)

The circle of concern or the circle of influence

All parents have a choice: They can choose to live in either a "circle of concern" or a "circle of influence". Parents who live in a circle of concern are always reacting to events and circumstances. They rarely plan or look ahead. Often, they end up putting out fires and racing from one crisis to another. Parents who choose to live in a circle of influence, on the other hand, are usually one step ahead. Planning and preparation are part of their everyday lives. They know their desired goals for their family and they plan accordingly in order to achieve them. The blessing of a child is about the parenting way of choosing to live proactively, in a circle of influence with God in the centre. As pastor, it is my duty to help parents to learn how to parent with a plan in order to become the kind of parents that God wants us to be. God wants to be in the centre of our lives as we seek to be intentional in handling the challenges of parenting such as disciplining, communicating, social behaviour, handling anger, teaching money management, and many others. The concept of parenting is a biblical concept. Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to teach their children to choose the right path. Deuteronomy 6: 6-9 calls parents to be intentional in talking with their children about God and God's word on a daily basis. Ephesians 6:4 exhorts parents to bring up their children "with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord". These and other verses emphasize the importance of careful planning and preparation when it comes to raising godly children. To help equip parents for this task, there is a key concept:

The godly star versus the ungodly star

Just as navigators of years past used the North Star to guide their vessels and reach their intended destinations, so also we parents need a "godly star" to help us keep our families on the right course. The godly star is the moral centre of the family, or the core beliefs, values, and principles that help families to stay on the course which God wants us to follow. For Christian parents, this godly star will include biblical beliefs and values such as those found in the Bible. The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5: 6-21, the golden rule in Matthew 7:12, the new commandment of Jesus in Matthew 22: 37-40, and the love chapter in 1st Corinthians 13 as well as other important principles support and strengthen the family. One of parents' most important parenting responsibilities is to identify and communicate the family's godly star. In fact, the Bible teaches that parents must clearly articulate their godly star if they want to keep their children from being pulled out of course by an even larger, more magnetic star called the "ungodly star". The ungodly star represents the values of popular culture. It is the cultural ethos that encourages children to do what feels good rather than do what is right. It pursues instant satisfaction of desires rather than practicing to be able to wait for it. It means to look out for "number one" rather than live for God. Regrettably, the ungodly star is bigger today than ever before, and it continues to grow at an exponential rate thanks to the entertainment industry. Parents, who want their children to follow the family's godly star rather than be pulled out of course by the huge ungodly star, must be proactive in identifying and clearly communicating their values to their children.

From beginning, a life of faith

Our children begin life with faith in us parents. As little children depend on their parents for caring concern that continues day by day, they may protest when they do not

receive food immediately but don't worry about earning a living to buy that food. In a very real sense, children depend totally on their parents for nourishment, affection, and protection. So are the Lord's eyes upon those who hope in His unfailing love (Psalm 33: 18,19). When our children grow, we send them to school by faith. We believe that we can trust teachers to educate our children well. We depend on teachers to instruct our children and assist them in the learning process. Without teachers, our children would be greatly handicapped at the point of developing their minds and skills. So we must trust God and pray that He will be with the teachers while they serve our children. It is also our obligation as parents to be examples of Christian life and conduct, caring more for the well being of our children and their salvation than for our jobs, professions, and ministry in the church or social standing.

Each one of us needs to have faith in God. In John 14:1, it says: "Do not let your heart be troubled. Have faith in God and have faith also in me." Why? Because "without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). If we have such a faith, this will also be a teaching example for our children!

God is in control, but His protection requires our obedience

Moses as a small child was in danger of death, being born in a period during which Israel was under oppression of Egypt. By sovereign choice of God, Jesus was also born during a time when Israel was under oppression, this time by Rome. Moses' birth, his escape from death and all the events of his youth were under God's directions, in order that He might deliver Israel from bondage. Likewise, Herod's attempt to kill Jesus and God's way of protecting the child revealed several truths about God's methods of guiding and protecting His people. But both Moses and Jesus were not protected without their families' cooperation. Protection requires our obedience to God. God may allow some things that are hard to understand to enter into our lives in order to accomplish His will through us. In a real sense, Christ began His life on earth as a refugee and a stranger in another country. To our limited understanding, it would have been easier if God would have removed Herod, immediately, just to avoid the difficulties of the family escaping to Egypt and all the trials involved in those circumstances. Don't you think, even though if God would have done that, there would have been other problems for them to face (Matthew 2: 19-23)? We will always be in need of God's protection and providential care for we will always have an enemy whom we need to deal with. The longer we live, the more problems we must solve. They challenge our faith and stretch our patience. Each difficulty provides new options for personal growth and maturity. The truth in this is that God's plans for us are more wonderful than our hopes, and His grace is much greater than our difficulties.

How do we achieve these parental goals?

First, we must learn that husband and wife don't own the marriage, but they steward for one another's love. People who honour God privately will show it by making good decisions publicly (Matthew 12:35). It is not true that what we do in private is our own business and does not bother anyone. What we do in private, will determine for example, how we treat our families. It is correct that we have a right for privacy, but when we hurt our family, this is wrong. To sustain our families, we need character, not talents. We need to discipline our lives with truth: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). Communication is the basis of life. "Everything in life is based on relationships. The sun communicates to earth and creates the process of photosynthesis by which plants provide food for animals and people. The moon communicates to the earth, and the tides are set so the earth does not flood. True of sun to earth, pollen to

flowers, blood to body and people to people. Therefore, parents should communicate with one another for marriage and family goals are achieved through negotiations.

Balance is the key to the family life

Secondly, balance is always the key to a healthy living. If a person works too much, not sacrificing quality family time, although he or she might reach the top of the corporate ladder, the achievement and material gain is not commensurate to the price the person has to pay for a neglected family. On the other hand, living in this competitive world, we also have to prioritize our work or professional career both for personal growth and to be able to financially support our family. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to balancing work, home and family. It's all about providing for your loved ones and making good choices that bring your family closer together. We balance and juggle many responsibilities while we keep work, home and family running smoothly. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." (Psalm 126:5) Mentally, emotionally, physically and financially, balance is the key to life. Anybody with a check book knows that. Riding a bicycle proves it. Ballast in a ship needs it. A family life must have it, too. Our children may not always listen to us, but they will always imitate us. In the Bible, family means "father's house." A father's and also a mother's responsibility is to provide intimacy, discipline, love and value for his family. Gangs are counterfeit families, because they provide what a father failed to give. The example set is not in the words that are spoken but in the deeds done as a pattern to be followed. It is not the parents' responsibility to make all his children's decisions for them but to let them see him make his. Children feel, act and then think. But parents think, act and then feel. Feelings follow actions. To change your feelings, change your actions. Acting before you think is a sign of immaturity while thinking before you act is a sign of maturity. Crisis doesn't make the family, it only exposes it for what it already is. It's the character of the parent that stands in a time of crisis. For decisions are rooted in the character and a good character is formed by the grace and power of God (Ephesians 6:10).

The family mission statement

One of the most effective ways how we as parents can communicate our values to our children is by having a family mission statement (Matthew 7: 24,25). This is why the study of the Bible as family is important. A family mission statement won't keep us from making mistakes and getting off track occasionally but either, by keeping us focused on our godly star, a family mission statement will redirect us and help us to get our families back on God's path. The Bible encourages us parents to involve our children in the process of dealing with the family mission statement, explaining that children need to feel involved in the process if they are to have a sense of ownership in the values expressed in the mission statement. Though the participation and understanding of children who are not yet in elementary school will be limited, even young children can participate in a simple mission statement based on the golden rule or the new commandment of Jesus. May God give grace to us all on this way!