

PARENT GROUP SERIES

Parents in the Bible

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES FOR
TODAY'S PARENTS

Leader Guide

Lesson One: A Kid Has To Do What a Kid Has To Do

Objectives: As parents, we love and protect our children; leading them away from danger and toward making the best choices for their life and for their future. The problem we often encounter, however, is this: sometimes what we as parents think is right and best isn't. Some parents have a tendency to make choices for their children based on THEIR (the parents') wants and desires instead of those of their children. Learning how to let your children discover and become the person GOD created them to be is essential for raising children who love and respect themselves, you, and GOD—even when their goals are different than the goals and dreams you have for them.

Parent Take-away: The goal is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning and practical tips and advice they will take to heart for the purpose of learning to appreciate and encourage each child's natural talents and abilities. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting. The ability for parents to guide rather than drive their child's decision-making will also be stressed.

Scripture Focus: *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. ~Ephesians 6:4*

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith." Romans 12:6

Lesson Overview: Our educational system is not being the least bit shy about trying to force our children to choose careers in the fields of science and technology. The STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) curriculum model is not only desired, but expected in most schools these days. Now, while there is nothing wrong with pursuing a career in any of these fields, not every child is capable of doing so. Not every child even *wants* to do so. But society actually frowns upon spending too much time on the arts, English and grammar, practical arts such as home economics, or even history and PE. Not only does this wrongly negate the value of other subjects in school and other career choices, but this mindset is doing our children a great disservice on many levels.

Many times parents are equally guilty of shoving *their* plans and *their* intentions onto their children. Parents decide what activities their kids participate in, who they are friends with, where they go to college...some parents even try to force their opinions

on their children. Again, in doing so, we are doing our children a great disservice on many levels.

This lesson takes a look at what we can learn from the parenting skills of Joseph and Mary, and addresses the disservices we burden our children with as well as looking at why and how we can change that.

Main Idea:

In today's society, science, math, and technology are everything. Well, that and winning. If our children aren't geared toward these things or aren't winning, in society's eyes, they are less than they should be. And sadly, many parents feel the same way. If their child isn't the star of the team, making straight As, or one of the popular kids, they are, dare I say it, embarrassed by them. This must stop! It must stop with YOU! Parents have to stop trying to re-create their children. God knew what he was doing when he made them.

Lesson Goals:

There are three elements to the lesson:

1. *The Set Up*: Introduces the lesson theme and gives parents the opportunity to share how this issue affects their parenting and family life.
2. *Going Deeper*: Gets to the heart of the problem from a spiritual and Biblical component as well as how the world-view of this issue contrasts with that of a Christian viewpoint. Discussion of the Bible text and its relevancy are included in this part of the lesson.
3. *Take Away*: Take-away tips, advice, and practical applications are given. All of these will address the issue from a spiritual aspect as well—making it possible for families to grow and mature their relationship with the LORD as individuals and as a family unit.

The Set Up

SAY:

Thanks for taking time out of your busy lives to be a part of this group. I hope and pray that together we can take a look at some of the parenting examples God gave us in his Word for the purpose of becoming better parents. Being a parent is something that never stops once your child takes their first breath. So whether you are just

starting out or are on the verge of being empty-nesters, you can benefit from our time together.

This week, we are going to take a look at the parenting style of Joseph and Mary. In doing so, we are going to learn the value of encouraging our children to follow their hearts to become the people God created them to be. We're also going to look at the harm that we bring to our children by not allowing them to do so.

Are you ready? Let's get started.

ASK:

Can you recall a time when someone expected something from you that you were not capable of or comfortable doing? How did this make you feel?

Now think about your children. Are you ever guilty of doing this to your children?

How similar are your child's interests to yours? If they are very different, how does this make you feel?

Are you aware of STEM? How do you think it affects or will affect your child's sense of self-worth?

Do you know what your child likes best? What their favorite color is? Food? Are their extra-curricular activities of their choosing or yours? What they want to be when they grow up?

SAY:

None of these questions are asked to make you feel guilty or inadequate as a parent. They are asked so that you will bring your focus to where it should be—on who your child was created to be.

Going Deeper

Begin this portion of the lesson by reading the following scriptures:

- Luke 2:8-19
- Luke 2:39-51

SAY:

Joseph and Mary were given the awesome and daunting responsibility of raising the very Son of God. But when Jesus was just a boy, it's obvious from his actions that he was a normal boy. He went home and was obedient. He played. He went to school. He worked with his dad. He tussled with his brothers.

But it couldn't have been easy for Mary or Joseph. It says they weren't clear on why Jesus said he was doing his Father's work. Surely they hadn't forgotten where Jesus came from, had they? No, but I'm sure their hearts were in their throats from worrying about him, and they were most likely a bit surprised to hear that Jesus knew at such a young age what he was headed for.

Now let's look at one more passage of scripture before we start looking at what we can learn from Mary and Joseph.

- John 2:1-7 and 11-12

ASK:

What changes do you see in Mary from the time Jesus was twelve to the time they were at the wedding when Jesus was thirty?

What do you think brought about those changes?

When have you and your child been at odds over choices he/she is making. Now I'm not talking about things like playing in traffic vs. not playing in traffic or wanting to wear shorts and flip-flops to school when it's snowing outside. I'm talking about things like:

- *I don't like ham and you can't make me like it.*
- *I like wearing pink and orange together. I don't care what other people say.*
- *I don't like sleeping with my socks on. They are my feet and I know they aren't cold.*
- *I don't see why I have to go to soccer practice. I don't even like soccer.*
- *Just because you liked science doesn't mean I have to.*
- *I don't see why you think I have to go to great-aunt Martha's house with you. All I do is sit there and listen to you all talk.*
- *I know not everyone makes it as a model (or whatever) but I have to try or I'll always wonder if I could have.*
- *I would think you would be proud I want to be a Marine.*

Do any of those resonate with you? How?

SAY:

Earlier, I said that by stifling our children's natural abilities and desires, we bring harm to them. Let's spend a few minutes talking about this. When we fight against or even deny our children opportunities to be who they are supposed to be, we...

- *Damage their self-esteem*
- *Destroy their self-confidence*
- *Stifle their rate of emotional maturity*
- *Breed resentment and anger*
- *Squelch their desire and ability to be independent*
- *Set them up for a life of unsettledness and longing for what might have been*

SAY:

When reading this list, most parents would say, "I don't do that!" or "I'd never do that to my child!" Unfortunately, just the opposite is true. We know this because:

- *Over 60% of teens say their parents are one of the top two factors for defining their sense of identity and self-worth*
- *95% of teens say their number one hero is a parent or their parents*
- *73% of parents highly involved in their child's life said part of their motivation was to ensure their child's success and eventual entry into a top university.*
- *39% of children 12 and under admitted to feeling pressured by their parents to succeed.*
- *60% of parents admit to pressuring their young children to read books above their level.*
- *Over 50% of parents start their children in sports by the age of 5 so they'll be ready for more aggressive 'competitive' traveling teams by age 8.*

ASK:

How does it make you feel to know you have the power to do this to your children?

How do you honestly feel you are doing in regards to helping your children be their own person?

What do you think you can and should do to be more supportive and nurturing?

Take Away

This is where we bring it all home—where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. It's time now to give parents practical and Biblical advice, tips, and instruction on how to nurture their child's natural abilities and help them become the person God created them to be.

SAY:

Now let's get down to business. Let's look at some practical ways to be better parents when it comes to helping our children on their way to becoming who they are meant to be.

Not all of these tips will apply to every parent's situation. Some are geared for those with toddlers, while others are geared for those raising teens. But no matter where you are in your parenting journey, you can do something. You have to do something to let your child know just how special, wonderful, and unique they are—and that you wouldn't want them any other way.

Read through the following list of tips and suggestions; noting the age/stage it is most appropriate for. Allow time for parents to ask questions and discuss them.

TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS:

- Allow your toddler to make choices of which shirt or pants to wear, what book to read at story time, which friend to invite for a play date, what kind of toys they prefer to play with.
- Allow toddlers the choice of what to eat. No, you don't have to turn into a short-order cook, but if they don't like what you fix, they don't have to eat or you can offer them a healthy, easy alternative such as yogurt or fruit. Don't worry, they won't starve.
- Don't force your toddler to be best friends with your best friend's child.
- Take the time to watch them; discovering their learning style. Provide opportunities to let them excel in this way.
- Allow them to discover what activities they enjoy. Don't force them to 'like' swimming or enroll them in dance class if they've never expressed any interest.

SCHOOL AGE:

- Supervise their homework—don't do it for them.
- Don't give them false praise. When they make mistakes, gently, but realistically help them understand what they did wrong and ask them how THEY think the

situation should be corrected. Guide them through this process with the ultimate goal being that of teaching them how to make good choices toward resolution.

- Don't force them to be friends with the 'right' kids.
- As long as they are dressed modestly and weather-appropriate, let them express themselves through their own personal fashion sense.
- Ask THEM what extra activity they want to do...if any.
- Reassure them that you expect them to do THEIR best rather than be THE best.
- Listen to your children. Ask them what they like about school and what they don't...and why. Ask them why they feel the way they do about different things.
- Read the Bible and an age-appropriate devotional book with your child.
- Pray with and for your child.

TWEENS:

- Be involved in their lives, but don't try to be their buddy.
- Ask them what they want to be, what they like, what they don't like, and what makes them happy.
- Be a good listener.
- Don't force your interests down their throats. Let them develop their own interests and hobbies and be supportive of them—even if you don't understand them.
- As long as they are dressed modestly and weather-appropriately, let it go.
- Don't encourage fashion magazines and sports magazines that promote extreme body building, dieting, worldly views of sex and body image.
- Monitor social media; limiting it to a minimum.
- Be involved and in touch with what is going on at school.
- Don't over-schedule your child. One extra activity of THEIR choice is enough.
- Promote healthy eating, exercise, and self-image by doing the same for yourself.
- Provide your child with an age-appropriate devotional book; occasionally reading together.
- Pray with and for your child.
- Be gracious when your child makes mistakes, but not oblivious.
- Assure your child that you embrace their individuality and are their biggest cheerleader.

TEENS:

- Be a good listener and communicator.
- Don't throw away the boundaries, but extend them as their maturity allows.
- Don't force your career wishes on them.
- Monitor their social media.
- Support their future plans by helping them discover the best possible path or paths to get there.
- Pray with and for your child.
- Teach your child basic life skills they need for living on their own (laundry, cooking, mending, simple car maintenance, housekeeping, budgeting, etc.)
- Be gracious when your child makes mistakes, but not oblivious.
- Let your child know that you will always be there for them emotionally and to mentor them spiritually.

SAY:

Joseph and Mary were tired, proud, and in awe of the shepherds' joy and excitement over the birth of Jesus, but they willingly shared him because they knew their son had a bigger purpose. Joseph and Mary were worried and anxious during the time Jesus was 'missing', and they were (according to scripture) a bit perplexed at his reason for being gone. But they didn't stifle him, belittle him. Instead they took him home to finish raising him and preparing him the best they could to become the man that is the Savior.

You can do the same with your children.

Challenge parents to learn the following Bible verse: *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Ephesians 6:4

Invite parents to make any comments in closing before taking prayer requests. Close the meeting in prayer, praying specifically for every parent and their children.

Parent Guide

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Scripture Focus: *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. ~Ephesians 6:4 and “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.” Romans 12:6*

Lesson Overview: Our educational system is not being the least bit shy about trying to force our children to choose careers in the fields of science and technology. The STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) curriculum model is not only desired, but expected in most schools these days. Now while there is nothing wrong with pursuing a career in any of these fields, not every child is capable of doing so. Not every child even *wants* to do so. But society actually frowns upon spending too much time on the arts, English and grammar, practical arts such as home economics, or even history and PE. Not only does this wrongly negate the value of other subjects in school and other career choices, but this mindset is doing our children a great disservice on many levels.

Many times parents are equally guilty of shoving *their* plans and *their* intentions onto their children. Parents decide what activities their kids participate in, who they are friends with, where they go to college...some parents even try to force their opinions on their children. Again, in doing so, we are doing our children a great disservice on many levels.

This lesson takes a look at what we can learn from the parenting skills of Joseph and Mary, and addresses the disservices we burden our children with as well as looking at why and how we can change that—even if our children are having a curriculum shoved at them.

The Set Up

Questions to answer and discuss:

1. How would you describe your childhood; specifically how pressured you felt by your parents to succeed and/or to do things they wanted you to do rather than the things you enjoyed?
2. How did you feel being raised in this manner?
3. As you think about the way you are parenting your child, how similar or different is your parenting vs. the way you were parented? Explain.

We are learning this week that nurturing your child's unique personality is essential to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Take a look at the statistics listed below, then list ways your lack of nurturing, acceptance, and embracing the uniqueness of your child can bring harm to them.

- Over 60% of teens say their parents are one of the top two factors for defining their sense of identity and self-worth
- 95% of teens say their number one hero is a parent or their parents
- 73% of parents highly involved in their child's life said part of their motivation was to ensure their child's success and eventual entry into a top university.
- 39% of children 12 and under admitted to feeling pressured by their parents to succeed.
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- Over 50% of parents start their children in sports by the age of 5 so they'll be ready for more aggressive 'competitive' traveling teams by age 8.

Physical harm

Emotional harm

Spiritual harm

Read Psalm 139:13-14. List a few of the ways your child is wonderfully made and unique.

Going Deeper

Read the Bible text that was used as the basis for this lesson:

- Luke 2:8-19
- Luke 2:39-51
- John 2:1-7 and 11-12

Answer the following questions:

1. How often do you override your child's desires or the choices they make?
2. Why do you do this?
3. When was the last time you let you allowed your child to make a choice that went against your wishes? Explain.
4. What was the outcome?

God created each of us to be unique individuals for which he has specific purposes and blessings in mind for us. It is, however, up to us to let God make them a reality. As parents, however, we have the responsibility to raise our children to desire, seek, and know who it is God created them to be.

Mary and Joseph knew who Jesus was. Hey, visits from angels don't just slip your mind over time. But as they went about the business of raising him, adding to their family, and the other necessities of sustaining their household the people of that day experienced, I can understand how and why they put this on the backburner of their minds. As parents, they couldn't treat Jesus differently than they did their other children. As parents they couldn't let Jesus go off on his own because he was equipped for that yet. It wasn't time.

We know from the incident in the temple that Jesus was aware of who he was by the time he was twelve. We don't know how he knew this, though. Did he just know? Did Mary and Joseph tell him about how he came to be? Did God speak to him?

In the interim, however, Mary and Joseph did their best to help Jesus deal with the emotions and thoughts that had to be going through his head. They allowed him to be himself rather than try to ignore or change who he was.

It's obvious that Jesus is a 'special case'. But when it comes to raising your own children, you need to take a few pointers from Mary and Joseph when it comes to letting your child grow into their personality and purpose.

Take Away

It is time to decide how you are going to apply what you've learned in this lesson. Use the following tips and suggestions to help you be a better parent; one that gives your child the freedom to discover and be their own person, a child who is capable of thinking for him/herself, and a child who seeks God's will for their life.

TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS:

- Allow your toddler to make choices of which shirt or pants to wear, what book to read at story time, which friend to invite for a play date, what kind of toys they prefer to play with.
- Allow toddlers the choice of what to eat. No, you don't have to turn into a short-order cook, but if they don't like what you fix, they don't have to eat or you can offer them a healthy, easy alternative such as yogurt or fruit. Don't worry, they won't starve.
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SCHOOL AGE:

- Supervise their homework—don't do it for them.
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- Teach your child basic life skills they need for living on their own (laundry, cooking, mending, simple car maintenance, housekeeping, budgeting, etc.)
- Be gracious when your child makes mistakes, but not oblivious.

- Let your child know that you will always be there for them emotionally and to mentor them spiritually.

Parenting isn't easy, but it is the most important job you will ever have. Make the most of it and enjoy the blessings God has given you in your children.

Leader Guide

Lesson Two: It's Okay to Have a Favorite...Ice Cream

Objectives: Unconditional love is the greatest gift you can give your children. They didn't ask to be born, so in reality, it's the least we can do for them. Exhibiting this unconditional love is done in a number of ways, but one of the most important things we can (and must) do is to treat each of our children fairly. Failing to do so is a recipe for dysfunction, resentment, and anger. Treating your children fairly doesn't necessarily mean you give each child the very same thing, or do everything you do with one child with all of them. God made us all uniquely different. Your children are no exception. As their parent, you need to be aware and in tune to their individual likes and dislike, needs, wants, and triggers to frustration, fear, and anxiety. In doing so, you will give equal time, resources, and attention to each of them. This lesson will examine the dangers of exhibiting favoritism among your children, how to stop or prevent doing so, and the benefits of being a fair parent.

Parent take-away: The goal is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning along with practical tips and advice they can implement into their home life for the purpose of exhibiting unconditional love through fair and equal treatment for every child. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting. The repercussions of failing to be a fair parent will also be examined and discussed.

Scripture focus: *"Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity." Titus 2:7*

Lesson overview: Accomplishments, awards, good grades, athleticism, musical ability, and oh yes, let's not forget looks—these are the things society says we must possess in order to be noticed and recognized. Sadly, these are also the very things many parents base their love for their children on rather than acknowledging their abilities and gifts, but loving them 'just because'. They (parents) would never admit that is what they're doing because most don't even realize it. But when you consider the fact that nearly half of all tweens and teens feel intense pressure to succeed in school and extra-curricular activities "at all costs", and the fact that elementary-aged children have been quoted as being afraid to tell their parents they don't want to participate in a particular activity for fear of not being as loved as their siblings, I think it is safe to say we have a problem.

This problem is not new to society. As Solomon said, everything that has been will be again...including showing favoritism toward your children. Case in point: Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac and Rebekah showed extreme favoritism to their twin sons, Jacob and

Esau. In looking at how Isaac and Rebekah's divisiveness shattered their family, we will learn the how and why of not making the mistakes they did. We will also look at several modern-day situations between parents and children that model this same type of behavior for the purpose of teaching parents what it takes to be fair and the reasons for doing so.

Main Idea:

- Give parents the knowledge and tools they need to treat each child fairly
 - To grow a parent's spiritual commitment to their children and to help their children to mature in Christ by mirroring the unconditional love he has for us
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Lesson Goals:

There are three elements to the lesson:

1. *The Set Up*: Introduces the lesson theme and gives parents the opportunity to share how this issue affects their parenting and family life.
2. *Going Deeper*: Gets to the heart of the problem from a spiritual and Biblical component as well as how the world-view of this issue contrasts with that of a Christian viewpoint. Discussion of the Bible text and its relevancy are included in this part of the lesson.
3. *Take Away*: Take-away tips, advice, and practical applications are given. All of these will address the issue from a spiritual aspect as well—making it possible for families to grow and mature their relationship with the LORD as individuals and as a family unit.

The Set Up

SAY:

We've all heard the saying about a mother's love being exhibited in the fact that when there's just one piece of cake left, she's suddenly not hungry anymore. But have you ever thought about how she decides who gets that last piece of cake? Does she divide it between her children? Does she choose based on who cleaned their plate the best or who has been well-behaved throughout the day?

Dividing the cake equally between each child is the only solution that is fair. Why? Because giving to one child what you can't or won't give to another is unfair...and poor parenting.

During our time together we are going to look at the parenting skills of Isaac and Rebekah. These two could have easily been candidates for the BAD PARENTS OF THE YEAR award. But just like everything else in the Bible, God is able to work through their sin to bring his plan to fruition. And just like everything else in the Bible, it is there for the purpose of teaching us how to be more like him.

ASK:

Do you agree or disagree?

Why do you think some parents show favoritism?

Do you understand that gifts, time, and attention are something every child deserves in equal measure, and that these things are different from recognizing one child's accomplishments appropriately and disciplining only the child who needs it?

What do you do to avoid showing favoritism?

When have you been guilty of showing favoritism?

Do you think there are times when you have to show favoritism? EXAMPLE: A newborn needs more attention.

SAY:

Parents don't intentionally cause trouble and contention between their children. They don't want a family that is full of resentment and dysfunction. But unless parents are willing to commit themselves and their home to God, be honest with themselves and are willing to learn from the mistakes of others, resentment and dysfunction are what they'll get.

So let's get started. Let's take yet another step in being the parents God wants us to be.

Going Deeper

Begin by reading the following verses:

- Genesis 25:19-34
- Genesis 26:34-35
- Genesis 27:1-44

NOTE: This may seem a bit lengthy, but it is important to read through it to get a clear picture of what happened and why.

After reading the text (or having members of the group read), spend a few minutes discussing what took place. Let parents share their thoughts on what was read and be prepared to answer such questions as:

- Why did God let Rebekah get away with that? (God had a plan for Jacob that he was going to fulfill in spite of Rebekah's sin in trying to take matters into her own hands)
- How did Isaac not know? (He was old, sick, nearly blind, they had no lights in the tents, it was a well thought-out ruse)
- Why couldn't Isaac take back the promise he'd made to Jacob? (It was a cultural thing. To have taken back the promise or oath would be dishonorable—even more dishonorable in Isaac's eyes than what Jacob did)

ASK:

Aside from the lies that resulted from Rebekah's favoritism toward Jacob, what other problems did her favoritism cause her family? Her marriage?

The Bible tells us that both Isaac and Rebekah had a favorite son, but we only read how Rebekah acted upon it. Why do you think this is?

What were the lasting effects of Isaac and Rebekah's poor parenting?

What does this say to you about the importance of treating your children the same?

SAY:

Deanna is the middle child in her family. She is an adult with children of her own now, but she is still experiencing the hurt and resentment that comes with what she views as favoritism. Deanna explains the reasons for her feelings by saying that her parents paid all expenses for her older sister, Val, to go to college, dental assistant classes, and a year or two on the mission field (because she wouldn't take the initiative to garner support from other people/churches). Years later when Val's husband died suddenly, their dad told Val not to worry about paying back the \$8,000 she and her now deceased husband owed him.

She went on to say that her younger brother had declared bankruptcy and been bailed out by her parents. A few years after that, he and his wife almost lost their house because they couldn't pay for it, so Dad and Mom to the rescue—paying off the \$60,000 mortgage, putting the house in their name, and letting him live there, paying what he could when he could (which is literally nothing). They even pay the

taxes, insurance, and upkeep on the place and hand out gas money to this 40-something 'man' whenever he says he needs it.

Deanna, on the other hand, has never taken anything from her parents. She and her husband did borrow money from them at one point, but paid back every single penny earlier than the timeframe they had agreed upon. She has held a job since she was sixteen, paid for the two cars she bought before she was married with her own money, and never took a penny from them for her education because scholarships and jobs took care of it.

Her parents don't see that they've done anything wrong. They've rescued the ones who needed rescuing, but done nothing for the one who is independent, responsible, and the first to come to assist them when they (her parents) need help in times of sickness—even though she is the only one who doesn't live in the same town as her parents and siblings.

Deanna is a successful and dedicated Christian wife, mom, grandma, author/speaker and servant of God, but she feels hurt and resentment toward her parents' attitude. She also has no relationship with her siblings because of their actions and attitudes. This is something she admits she struggles with in her heart and mind.

ASK:

What do you think about Deanna's situation?

What would you do if you were her?

SAY:

Isaac and Rebekah's favoritism was the result of the different personalities of their sons and their ability to connect with them.

It's not necessarily wrong for a parent to feel closer to one child than another—say, a father and son or daughter who both enjoy hunting or a mother and son or daughter who enjoy photography. But this doesn't give the right or excuse to be more attentive to them. You simply find ways to connect with your other children—even if that means getting out of your comfort zone. It's not about YOU...it's about your children and giving them the best parents possible because they deserve it.

ASK:

How well do you feel you relate to each of your children? Why do you feel this way?

What are some things you can do to better relate to your children?

SAY:

Showing favoritism is dangerous to your family, your marriage, your relationship with God and your child's relationship with God. When you show favoritism, you:

- Send the message that you love one child more than the others
- Send the message that the non-favorited child is unworthy of your love, time, and attention
- Send the message that what the non-favorited child does doesn't matter
- Instill doubt in the mind of a child that they are loved by God
- Demolish the non-favorited child's self-confidence, self-esteem, and desire to succeed
- Bring friction into your relationship with your spouse
- Teach your children to put you and your spouse in contention with one another
- Cause resentment between your children
- Push the non-favorited child toward destructive behaviors and toward unhealthy relationships because they are longing and desperate for acceptance

Let's work together to make sure these things don't happen to your family and your children.

Take Away

This is where we bring it all home-where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. It's time now to give parents practical and Biblical advice, tips, and advice on how to avoid the pitfalls of favoritism that brings divisiveness to families.

SAY:

Now let's get down to business. Let's look at some practical ways to recognize the danger signs of showing favoritism, how to combat favoritism, and how to make for sure and for certain that each of your children knows they are equally loved, respected, appreciated, and admired for the wonderful, unique person they are.

Not all of these tips will apply to every parent's situation. Some are geared for those with toddlers, while others are geared for those raising teens. But no matter where you are in your parenting journey, you can do something. You have to do something to strengthen your family's bonds of love and unity in God and in each other.

Read through the following list of tips and suggestions; noting the age/stage it is most appropriate for. Allow time for parents to ask questions and discuss them.

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:

- Be consistent in disciplining your children. The rules apply to everyone.
- Children this age don't understand quality vs. quantity, so be sure each child has an equal number of Christmas and birthday gifts to open
- Make one day of the week special for each child—letting them choose what game to play, books to read, meal to fix, etc.
- Resist the urge to say 'no' too often to children this age in regards to helping with or being around a newborn. Instead, include them in the process whenever possible
- DON'T always include the newborn in your time with your toddler or preschooler. The baby really doesn't know the difference, but your older child(ren) do.
- Ask your child what they want to do or offer choices and let them decide
- Do not give false praise, but give sincere compliments
- Regularly pray for and with your child
- Regularly tell your child how much you love them for who they are

ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN:

- Be consistent in disciplining your children. The same rules apply to everyone
- Do not pay your children for good grades—the grade is enough recognition
- Do not compare your children to each other or other children
- Attend sporting or other events for ALL your children and display an equal amount of enthusiasm for each of them
- Children this age don't understand quality vs. quantity, so be sure each child has an equal number of Christmas and birthday gifts to open
- Don't automatically assume that what one child likes the other will like
- Create opportunities for your children to work and play together
- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
- Do not pay allowance to children who don't earn it
- Have special dates with each individual child
- Don't force or expect younger children to follow in their older siblings' footsteps
- Pray with and for your children
- Regularly tell your children how much you love them for who they are

TWEENS:

- Be consistent in disciplining your children. The same rules apply to everyone
- Do not pay your children for good grades—the grade is enough recognition
- Do not compare your children to each other or other children
- Attend sporting or other events for ALL your children and display an equal amount of enthusiasm for each of them
- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
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- Have special dates with each individual child
- Don't force or expect younger children to follow in their older siblings' footsteps
- Give gifts that are chosen specifically for each child
- Provide opportunities for each individual child to shine
- Don't give false praise, but give sincere compliments
- Pray with and for your child
- Regularly tell your child how much you love them for who they are
- Regularly show and tell your child how much you respect and admire their individual capabilities

TEENS:

- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
- Do not pay allowance to children who don't earn it
- Have special dates with each individual child
- Don't force or expect younger children to follow in their older siblings' footsteps
- Do not compare your children to each other or other children
- Do not pay a reward for good grades—the grade is reward enough
- Be consistent with discipline and expectations for your children—especially when you have teen girls AND boys
- Pray for and with your child
- Regularly tell your child how much you love them for who they are

- Regularly show and tell your child how much you respect and admire their individual capabilities.

Allow parents time to look through these lists and discuss how they feel about them and how they can or already do implement them into the dynamics of their family.

SAY:

Isaac and Rebekah pitted their sons against one another and were themselves at odds with each other. There was no cohesiveness or joint parenting in their home. Both Jacob and Esau knew where they stood with their parents and acted upon that knowledge for their own personal gain.

I've not mentioned this until now, but at this point I'm going to bring up the fact that it was God's plan for Jacob to be the leader of Israel. We don't know why. It really doesn't matter why. What matters is this:

- God could have and would have worked things out for his purpose without the lies and deceit
- God had to work around Rebekah's sin
- God doesn't want to work around us or in spite of us—he wants to work through us and for us

Allow parents to make a few final comments before taking prayer requests and closing the session in prayer. Be sure to pray for each individual family.

Parent Guide

Lesson Two: It's Okay to Have a Favorite...Ice Cream

Objectives: Unconditional love is the greatest gift you can give your children. They didn't ask to be born, so in reality, it's the least we can do for them. Exhibiting this unconditional love is done in a number of ways, but one of the most important things we can (and must) do is to treat each of our children fairly. Failing to do so is a recipe for dysfunction, resentment, and anger. Treating your children fairly doesn't necessarily mean you give each child the very same thing, or do everything you do with one child with all of them. God made us all uniquely different. Your children are no exception. As their parent, you need to be aware and in tune to their individual likes and dislike, needs, wants, and triggers to frustration, fear, and anxiety. In doing so, you will give equal time, resources, and attention to each of them. This lesson will examine the dangers of exhibiting favoritism among your children, how to stop or prevent doing so, and the benefits of being a fair parent.

Parent take-away: The goal is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning along with practical tips and advice they can implement into their home life for the purpose of exhibiting unconditional love through fair and equal treatment for every child. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting. The repercussions of failing to be a fair parent will also be examined and discussed.

Scripture focus: *“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity.” Titus 2:7*

Lesson overview: Accomplishments, awards, good grades, athleticism, musical ability, and oh yes, let's not forget looks—these are the things society says we must possess in order to be noticed and recognized. Sadly, these are also the very things many parents base their love for their children on rather than acknowledging their abilities and gifts, but loving them 'just because'. They (parents) would never admit that is what they're doing because most don't even realize it. But when you consider the fact that nearly half of all tweens and teens feel intense pressure to succeed in school and extra-curricular activities “at all costs”, and the fact that elementary-aged children have been quoted as being afraid to tell their parents they don't want to participate in a particular activity for fear of not being as loved as their siblings, I think it is safe to say we have a problem.

This problem is not new to society. As Solomon said, everything that has been will be again...including showing favoritism toward your children. Case in point: Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac and Rebekah showed extreme favoritism to their twin sons, Jacob and Esau. In looking at how Isaac and Rebekah's divisiveness shattered their family, we will learn the how and why of not making the mistakes they did. We will also look at several modern-day

situations between parents and children that model this same type of behavior for the purpose of teaching parents what it takes to be fair and the reasons for doing so.

The Set Up:

Answer the following questions:

1. After having your first child, did you worry about how you would ever be able to love another child as much as you do the one you have?
2. If you have more than one child, how did your worries take care of themselves?
3. Do you find that you have more in common with one child more than the other(s)?
4. How do you let this affect your parenting?
5. In what ways could or would your children accuse you of showing favoritism?
6. Would they have a solid case against you?
7. How often do you and your spouse argue or disagree on how you are parenting your children?

As you look at your answers to these questions, what changes do you feel you need to make?

Going Deeper:

Begin by reading the following verses:

- Genesis 25:19-34
- Genesis 26:34-35
- Genesis 27:1-44

1. What are your thoughts on these verses?
2. Who do you think is most at fault in this story?

3. Do you think Rebekah loved Jacob more because of God's message to her, or was her favoritism caused by something else?
4. Below is a list of words describing what happened to Isaac and Rebekah's family because of their favoritism. Have you experienced any of these in your own family?
 - a. Unfair treatment between siblings
 - b. Lies and deceit
 - c. Resentment between siblings
 - d. Resentment of parents because of their favoritism
 - e. Receiving more than your siblings because you were favored
 - f. Alienation from family because of favoritism
 - g. Depression, anxiety, self-deprecation due to being the non-favored child
 - h. Feelings of entitlement due to being a favored child
5. If these were applicable to you, how have you dealt with these situations?

The saying, "Children learn what they live" is a true one. Think about it...Isaac was the favored child in his home. He lived in a home where his brother Ishmael was sent away so that he wouldn't be in the way of Isaac being his father's pride and joy—which, by the way, is why we have the problems with Islam and the Middle East that we have today, but that's a discussion for another day.

We also know that with faith in God's guidance and care, we don't have to allow any poor parenting skills we lived as a child to permeate our homes. We can look at Isaac and Rebekah's mistakes and learn from them rather than repeat them.

Take Away:

It's time for you to decide what YOU are going to do to ensure your children feel equally loved, respected, appreciated, and valued. In doing so you not only strengthen the bond between you and your children, but you strengthen the bonds between your children and between your child and God.

Take a look at each of the lists that apply to your home and commit to doing what it takes to be a parent whose favoritism only shows when it comes to ice cream...and pizza.

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:

- Be consistent in disciplining your children. The rules apply to everyone.

- Children this age don't understand quality vs. quantity, so be sure each child has an equal number of Christmas and birthday gifts to open
- Make one day of the week special for each child—letting them choose what game to play, books to read, meal to fix, etc.
- Resist the urge to say 'no' too often to children this age in regards to helping with or being around a newborn. Instead, include them in the process whenever possible
- DON'T always include the newborn in your time with your toddler or preschooler. The baby really doesn't know the difference, but your older child(ren) do.
- Ask your child what they want to do or offer choices and let them decide
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ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN:

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- Children this age don't understand quality vs. quantity, so be sure each child has an equal number of Christmas and birthday gifts to open
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- Create opportunities for your children to work and play together
- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
- Do not pay allowance to children who don't earn it
- Have special dates with each individual child
- Don't force or expect younger children to follow in their older siblings' footsteps
- Pray with and for your children
- Regularly tell your children how much you love them for who they are

TWEENS:

- Be consistent in disciplining your children. The same rules apply to everyone
- Do not pay your children for good grades—the grade is enough recognition
- Do not compare your children to each other or other children

- Attend sporting or other events for ALL your children and display an equal amount of enthusiasm for each of them
- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
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- Pray with and for your child
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- Regularly show and tell your child how much you respect and admire their individual capabilities

TEENS:

- Insist on respect and good manners between your children (best accomplished when you do the same with your spouse and children)
- Require your children to do chores—some just because they are part of the family and some for allowance
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- Regularly show and tell your child how much you respect and admire their individual capabilities.

Leader Guide

Lesson Three: It's Not Your Job

Objectives: As parents, we feel it is our responsibility to protect our children. And to some extent, it is. But often times, parents take it too far. Sometimes parents protect their children not only from danger, but from responsibility and from the consequences of their (the child's) actions. In doing so, the child is left with no sense of remorse, responsibility, compassion for others, or understanding that consequences for our actions are part of growing up. Learning how to let your children discover and become the person GOD created them to be by allowing them to experience the results of their mistakes and sin is essential for raising children who love and respect themselves, others, you, and GOD—even though it can be extremely painful to do so. This lesson focuses on standing by your child during those times when they need to pay for their mistakes instead of standing in *for* them. We will look at why God desires us to parent in this manner and how it affects the dynamics of your relationship with your children.

Parent Take-away: The goal is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning and practical tips and advice they will take to heart for the purpose of learning to be supportive rather than a crutch and how to help your child learn and grow from their mistakes rather than shield them from the consequences of messing up and, therefore, robbing them of the opportunity to grow and mature. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting.

Scripture Focus: *“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.” Proverbs 23:13*

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” Proverbs 22:15

Lesson Overview: Society has no problem with pushing our guilt onto someone else—letting them take the blame for what you do. In fact, not too long ago, a former professional football player stood before a group of NFL players and told them he knew for a fact that there would be a time when they did something wrong. He went on to say that few, if any of these incidents are done without the knowledge of more than one person, and that someone in each group is going to have to be designated the ‘fall guy’.

Wow! What is that teaching the players? It's teaching them that it is okay to cheat as long as someone is willing to pay the price for everyone involved without implicating

the other guilty parties. But this mindset is all too prevalent in all aspects of society—even the homes of parents with the very best of intentions.

This lesson is going to focus on a few verses in the book of Job and the parenting skills of Job and Mrs. Job. From these short passages, we are going to discover what it means to raise children who not only know what it means to take responsibility for their actions, but to learn and grow in the process.

Main Idea:

Being a loving parent does not mean shielding your children from being disciplined or punished for their mistakes and wrongdoings. No, a loving and Godly parent will say to their child, “I love you enough to allow you to take whatever is due you, and to stand beside you letting you know I love you no less than I did before.” It means that as a parent you will express your pride in your child for having the integrity to own their mistakes and learn from them.

Lesson Goals:

There are three elements to the lesson:

1. *The Set Up*: Introduces the lesson theme and gives parents the opportunity to share how this issue affects their parenting and family life.
2. *Going Deeper*: Gets to the heart of the problem from a spiritual and Biblical component as well as how the world-view of this issue contrasts with that of a Christian viewpoint. Discussion of the Bible text and its relevancy are included in this part of the lesson.
3. *Take Away*: Take-away tips, advice, and practical applications are given. All of these will address the issue from a spiritual aspect as well—making it possible for families to grow and mature their relationship with the LORD as individuals and as a family unit

The Set Up

SAY:

During this session, we are going to discuss a difficult subject—the subject of letting our children go through difficult times. More specifically, we're going to talk about the importance of allowing our children to suffer the consequences of their actions.

ASK:

When have you stepped in to protect your child from getting hurt—either physically or emotionally?

Why did you do it?

What are some examples of times when it is okay or even necessary to do so?

EXAMPLE: Keeping a toddler from running into the street.

What are some examples of when parents should back away and let their children face the consequences of their actions?

Read each of the following true testimonies from or about parents who have had the opportunity to shield their child from responsibility and consequences. After reading each one, take a few minutes to discuss the situation and let parents comment on how they would handle the same situation.

John spent thirty years as a state law enforcement officer. His four children knew that when they became old enough to drive, they would not be allowed to use their dad's position to try to get them out of being issued a ticket or being stopped by another officer. One night John's sixteen year-old son was taking one of his younger sisters to dance class. He was pulled over for having a tail light out (he didn't know it was). The officer ran his license, discovered who he was, and said he would let him go without even a warning, but to get it fixed by the next evening. The young man thanked the officer and then asked him if he would please let his dad know that he didn't ask for any favors. The officer laughed and said, you got it...and I'm sure your dad will be proud to know it.

The principal of a small-town high school was also the father of the star player of the girls' soccer team. One Friday night, a group of students, including this young lady, were caught drinking and smoking pot at a secluded location. They were all taken into custody, parents were called and community service was doled out with a heavy hand. The following Monday, the state athletics commission contacted the principal to find out the particulars of the situation and to remind the principal that any students involved in sporting events

would not be allowed to play the rest of the season (as per the laws of the organization). The principal 'failed' to include his daughter's name on the list, but when other parents figured out what had happened, they contacted the commission for the purpose of making sure everyone was treated fairly. When called to task for what he'd done, the principal, who was also a leader in his church, tried making excuses for her. In the end she was forced to pay the same consequences as the others, and the principal was asked to resign.

Betty was riddled with guilt over her third son's learning disabilities and mild birth defects caused by the fact that she started smoking again during her pregnancy after the sudden death of her mom. Throughout the rest of her life she shielded this boy from everything. She made excuses for his undisciplined behavior, contradicted any discipline her husband gave him, and made excuses for his lack of trying in school. Her actions destroyed her marriage and strained her relationships with her other two boys. Later in life she supported "Dave" financially because it "wasn't his fault" he got fired from one job after another. She even bailed him out of jail after he broke into his father's shop and stole hundreds of dollars-worth of tools, as well as property he'd stolen from others. Betty died several years ago and "Dave" has been in and out of jail and homeless for most of his adult life.

"Turning my daughter over to the Christian children's home was the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's also the best thing I've ever done. Chloe was a happy, healthy child who loved school until she turned twelve. That was the year she started thinking she was fat. Chloe isn't and wasn't fat, but because some kids made a comment about her muscular legs, she went off the deep end. Nothing I said or did mattered. We even took her to a Christian counselor, but she still continued to be rude, defiant, and obsess about her body. I know a lot of her negative behavior was related to the fact that her body was hungry and reacting to a lack of nutrition, but that didn't make it any easier or tolerable. When she was fourteen, my husband caught her in the backseat of a car with a boy behind a deserted building in a very compromising position. That was it. We weren't willing to let our daughter throw her life away and possibly end up raising our grandchild. It would have been easy to blame my daughter's actions on the media, the fashion industry, and the kids who made comments about her, but that wouldn't have resolved the problem. Yes, these things all have a role in her behavior, but ultimately it was her choice to do the things she did. Chloe spent two and a half years at the Children's home under strict, loving, and Godly supervision and counseling in a family setting with some amazing house parents. It wasn't easy for any of us, but today Chloe is a strong, responsible, loving, and Godly teenager who knows what it is to take responsibility for who you are and what you do."

Going Deeper

SAY:

Once again the Bible is an excellent source of wisdom, teaching, and encouragement for parents in regards to teaching them to be responsible for their own actions rather than doing it for them.

The passages of scripture we are going to look at come from the book of Job. Job is probably not the first book you think of when you think about Biblical and Godly parenting instruction, but let's go to God's Word, and I think by the time we're done you will have changed your mind.

Read the following passages of scripture.

- *Job 1:1-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.*
- *Job 2:7-10 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*
- *Job 42:12-17 The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he*

saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

SAY:

The old saying, "less is more" is very appropriate in this case. Even though these passages of scripture are not long, they speak volumes. From these verses we learn:

- Job and Mrs. Job pamper their children even though they are grown.
- Job and Mrs. Job are aware of their children's habits of letting their celebrations get out of hand.
- Job goes above and beyond to shield his children from the consequences of their actions by offering peace offerings to God in an effort to take the blame on himself.
- Mrs. Job was hurt, grieving, and angry over her loss—as any mother would be.
- Job and Mrs. Job's marriage remained intact and was obviously strengthened as a result of their loss and Job's physical suffering. We see this in the fact that:
 - God blessed Job and Mrs. Job with even more
 - Job and Mrs. Job gave their daughters an inheritance rather than leaving them at the mercy of their brothers and/or husbands.
 - The fact that Job lived to enjoy four generations of his second family indicates that these children were responsible and family-oriented rather than reckless and spoiled.

While I know the main focus of the book of Job is not on the sacrificial offerings Job made on behalf of his children, I also know that this information was not put there by accident, and I also believe that it is no accident that no mention of this same action is recorded in regards to his second family.

Job and Mrs. Job learned a lot about God through their experience and suffering; part of which was the fact that we are all responsible for our own actions, thoughts, and attitudes.

ASK:

What are some of the things you did as a child and teenager that caused you to deserve difficult or even painful consequences?

How did you react to these situations?

How did your parents respond to you during these times?

Did your parents ever step in and take your punishment for you?

Did your parents every get you out of a jam by declaring you innocent even though you weren't?

SAY:

Now let's throw the light back on us as parents.

ASK:

What do you feel are the short-term dangers of covering for your child? What are the long-term dangers of doing so?

What do you think children learn from being made to live out the consequences of their actions?

What do you want your children to learn from doing so?

How do we, as parents, balance the lesson of consequences with not defining our children by their negative actions and mistakes?

How does God do the same for us?

SAY:

God's expectations, unconditional love, and merciful forgiveness for us are exactly what we need to be extending to our children.

Take Away

Take a few minutes for 'story time' by reading "The Berenstain Bears and the Slumber Party". After reading the book aloud to the group, take a few minutes to discuss the story and talk about the way Mamma and Papa Bear handled the situation.

ASK:

What would you have done in this same situation?

SAY:

Now let's get down to business. Let's look at some practical ways to be better parents when it comes to teaching our children to be Godly, responsible individuals.

Not all of these tips will apply to every parent's situation. Some are geared for those with toddlers, while others are geared for those raising teens. But no matter where

you are in your parenting journey, you can do something. You have to do something to ensure your child learns to be a person of integrity, honor, and the hands and feet of Jesus.

Read through the following list of tips and suggestions; noting the age/stage it is most appropriate for. Allow time for parents to ask questions and discuss them.

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:

- Tell your child in ADVANCE what you expect of them and what the consequences of misbehavior will be...then follow through.
- Don't make too many rules. Focus on what really matters—issues of safety, respect for others, and self-respect. In other words, getting muddy splashing water out of the tub, or not eating all their peas shouldn't be grounds for heavy discipline (if any).
- Be consistent. If time out or swats on the fanny are given for something once, they need to be given for that same behavior whenever it takes place.
- Don't make excuses for a child's negative and naughty behavior. See it for what it is—negative and naughty—and deal with it appropriately. Some of the most common excuses parents give (and shouldn't) include: tiredness, boredom, hungry, missing a parent, out of sorts....
- Make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
- Pray with and for your child.

ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN:

- Be consistent and make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
- Tell your child in ADVANCE what you expect of them and what the consequences of misbehavior will be...then follow through.
- Don't blame other children for your child's behavior (My child wouldn't do that if they weren't with so-and-so)
- Don't embarrass or humiliate your child by disciplining them in front of their peers, but don't allow your child to make false excuses for their consequences. EXAMPLE: If they are grounded from a playdate, they shouldn't be allowed to tell their friend they cannot come because they have to go to Grandma's house.
- Don't hold your child's mistakes over their head. Deal with the situation and move on.

- Pray with and for your child, have family devotions, and encourage your child to have personal devotions as they gain reading skills.

TWEENS:

- Be consistent and make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
- Tell your child in ADVANCE what you expect of them and what the consequences of misbehavior will be...then follow through.
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- Adjust your child's boundaries, rules, and expectations as they get older—giving them more responsibility as they EARN it.
- Pray with and for your child, have family devotions, and encourage your child to have personal devotions.

TEENS:

- Be consistent and make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
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- Don't hold your child's mistakes over their head. Deal with the situation and move on.

- Adjust your child's boundaries, rules, and expectations as they get older—giving them more responsibility as they EARN it.
- Gracefully and tactfully let your teen know that they will not be treated like a 'little kid' if they don't act like one.
- Don't automatically take your child's side against a teacher OR a teacher's side against your child. Hear both sides and go from there.
- Pray with and for your child, have family devotions, and encourage your child to have personal devotions.

SAY:

Job and Mrs. Job are not portrayed as being bad parents, and that is not the impression I want to leave with you, either. Instead, I want us to leave here realizing that Job's dedication to being an intercessor between God and his children is not what parenting is about. As parents, we are not to intercede on our child's behalf when they have wronged someone or done something they shouldn't have. Instead, we are to stand beside them, offering love and encouragement as they pay the consequences for their actions and become stronger and wiser in the process.

Allow parents to look at the lists of tips and advice and briefly discuss them before encouraging parents to memorize the Bible verses and praying for each family to end this session.

Parent Guide

Lesson Three: It's Not Your Job

Objectives: As parents, we feel it is our responsibility to protect our children. And to some extent, it is. But often times, parents take it too far. Sometimes parents protect their children not only from danger, but from responsibility and from the consequences of their (the child's) actions. In doing so, the child is left with no sense of remorse, responsibility, compassion for others, or understanding that consequences for our actions are part of growing up. Learning how to let your children discover and become the person GOD created them to be by allowing them to experience the results of their mistakes and sin is essential for raising children who love and respect themselves, others, you, and GOD—even though it can be extremely painful to do so. This lesson focuses on standing by your child during those times when they need to pay for their mistakes instead of standing in *for* them. We will look at why God desires us to parent in this manner and how it affects the dynamics of your relationship with your children.

Parent Take-away: The goal is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning and practical tips and advice they will take to heart for the purpose of learning to be supportive rather than a crutch and how to help your child learn and grow from their mistakes rather than shield them from the consequences of messing up and therefore robbing them of the opportunity to grow and mature. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting.

Scripture Focus: *“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.” Proverbs 23:13*

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” Proverbs 22:15

Lesson Overview: Society has no problem with pushing our guilt onto someone else—letting them take the blame for what you do. In fact, not too long ago, a former professional football player stood before a group of NFL players and told them he knew for a fact that there would be a time when they did something wrong. He went on to say that few, if any of these incidents are done without the knowledge of more than one person, and that someone in each group is going to have to be designated the ‘fall guy’.

Wow! What is that teaching the players? It's teaching them that it is okay to cheat as long as someone is willing to pay the price for everyone involved without implicating the other guilty parties. But this mindset is all too prevalent in all aspects of society—even the homes of parents with the very best of intentions.

This lesson is going to focus on a few verses in the book of Job and the parenting skills of Job and Mrs. Job. From these short passages, we are going to discover what it means to raise children who not only know what it means to take responsibility for their actions, but to learn and grow in the process.

The Set Up

John spent thirty years as a state law enforcement officer. His four children knew that when they became old enough to drive, they would not be allowed to use their dad's position to try to get them out of being issued a ticket or being stopped by another officer. One night John's sixteen year-old son was taking one of his younger sisters to dance class. He was pulled over for having a tail light out (he didn't know it was). The officer ran his license, discovered who he was, and said he would let him go without even a warning, but to get it fixed by the next evening. The young man thanked the officer and then asked him if he would please let his dad know that he didn't ask for any favors. The officer laughed and said, you got it...and I'm sure your dad will be proud to know it.

The principal of a small-town high school was also the father of the star player of the girls' soccer team. One Friday night, a group of students, including this young lady, were caught drinking and smoking pot at a secluded location. They were all taken into custody, parents were called and community service was doled out with a heavy hand. The following Monday, the state athletics commission contacted the principal to find out the particulars of the situation and to remind the principal that any students involved in sporting events would not be allowed to play the rest of the season (as per the laws of the organization). The principal 'failed' to include his daughter's name on the list, but when other parents figured out what had happened, they contacted the commission for the purpose of making sure everyone was treated fairly. When called to task for what he'd done, the principal, who was also a leader in his church, tried making excuses for her. In the end she was forced to pay the same consequences as the others, and the principal was asked to resign.

Betty was riddled with guilt over her third son's learning disabilities and mild birth defects caused by the fact that she started smoking again during her pregnancy after the sudden death of her mom. Throughout the rest of her life she shielded this boy from everything. She made excuses for his undisciplined behavior, contradicted any discipline her husband gave him, and made excuses for his lack of trying in school. Her actions destroyed her marriage and strained her relationships with her other two boys. Later in life she supported "Dave" financially because it "wasn't his fault" he got fired from one job after

another. She even bailed him out of jail after he broke into his father's shop and stole hundreds of dollars-worth of tools, as well as property he'd stolen from others. Betty died several years ago and "Dave" has been in and out of jail and homeless for most of his adult life.

"Turning my daughter over to the Christian children's home was the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's also the best thing I've ever done. Chloe was a happy, healthy child who loved school until she turned twelve. That was the year she started thinking she was fat. Chloe isn't and wasn't fat, but because some kids made a comment about her muscular legs, she went off the deep end. Nothing I said or did mattered. We even took her to a Christian counselor, but she still continued to be rude, defiant, and obsess about her body. I know a lot of her negative behavior was related to the fact that her body was hungry and reacting to a lack of nutrition, but that didn't make it any easier or tolerable. When she was fourteen, my husband caught her in the backseat of a car with a boy behind a deserted building in a very compromising position. That was it. We weren't willing to let our daughter throw her life away and possibly end up raising our grandchild. It would have been easy to blame my daughter's actions on the media, the fashion industry, and the kids who made comments about her, but that wouldn't have resolved the problem. Yes, these things all have a role in her behavior, but ultimately it was her choice to do the things she did. Chloe spent two and a half years at the Children's home under strict, loving, and Godly supervision and counseling in a family setting with some amazing house parents. It wasn't easy for any of us, but today Chloe is a strong, responsible, loving, and Godly teenager who knows what it is to take responsibility for who you are and what you do."

Answer the following questions:

1. How well do you feel like you handle your child's misbehavior?
2. How do you require your child to deal with the consequences of their actions?
3. Have you ever stepped in to rescue your child? Why?
4. What was the outcome?

5. What do you want your child to learn from the mistakes they make?
6. What steps do you take toward teaching your child to make right choices rather spending more time on discipline and consequences?
7. How do you think your parenting will change in regards to this aspect of parenting as your child gets older?

Read through the parenting stories/testimonies again and write down your thoughts on how each one what the outcome would have been if handled in an opposite manner.

Going Deeper:

Read the following passages of scripture. Afterwards, write down a few thoughts on what you just read.

- *Job 1:1-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.*
- *Job 2:7-10 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among*

the ashes. His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

- *Job 42:12-17 The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.*

Answer the following questions:

1. What circumstances, if any, do you feel parents should protect their children from the consequences of their actions?
2. Would you agree or disagree that the need to rescue your children will be greatly reduced if you parent consistently with clearly defined expectations and guidelines? Explain why you feel this way.
3. List some ways in which your behavior as a parent and as an individual will influence your child's ability to learn and grow from dealing with the consequences of their actions rather than be fearful of doing so.
4. It is important to stress to children that ALL actions have consequences and that the consequences of our actions can be good, bad, or indifferent. What are some things we can do as parents to teach our children to think before they act—resulting in more positive consequences rather than negative ones?

5. How well do you own YOUR mistakes and deal with the negative consequences of YOUR actions? How do your children perceive your actions in these circumstances?

Take Away

Take a few minutes for 'story time' by reading "The Berenstain Bears and the Slumber Party" to your children (even teenagers will find it fun). Afterwards, talk to your children (if they are old enough) about what happened and how they think YOU would have handled the situation.

Read through the following list of tips and suggestions; selecting the age/stage that fits your family's situation.

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:

- Tell your child in ADVANCE what you expect of them and what the consequences of misbehavior will be...then follow through.
- Don't make too many rules. Focus on what really matters—issues of safety, respect for others, and self-respect. In other words, getting muddy splashing water out of the tub, or not eating all their peas shouldn't be grounds for heavy discipline (if any).
- Be consistent. If time out or swats on the fanny are given for something once, they need to be given for that same behavior whenever it takes place.
- Don't make excuses for a child's negative and naughty behavior. See it for what it is—negative and naughty—and deal with it appropriately. Some of the most common excuses parents give (and shouldn't) include: tiredness, boredom, hungry, missing a parent, out of sorts....
- Make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
- Pray with and for your child.

ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN:

- Be consistent and make sure the 'punishment fits the crime', so to speak. Don't be too harsh—making your child resentful and fearful. Remember...the object of consequences is to LEARN from their mistakes.
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PARENTS IN THE BIBLE: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES FOR TODAY'S PARENTS

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- Don't automatically take your child's side against a teacher OR a teacher's side against your child. Hear both sides and go from there.
- Pray with and for your child, have family devotions, and encourage your child to have personal devotions.

What will you do to be a parent who teaches their child to own their mistakes and mishaps and to use those situations for the good?

Leader Guide

Lesson Four: When You Are Both Mom and Dad

Objectives: Over 25% of children under the age of eighteen in the US are being raised by single parents—primarily single moms. What's more, a large percentage of these households are living paycheck to paycheck—barely making ends meet. And even then many are dependent on some sort of assistance to do so. What's more, tens of thousands of families are separated due to military deployments and a parent whose jobs take them away from home for extended periods of time on a regular basis, or even incarceration. Being a single parent isn't easy, but it isn't impossible. It's not even impossible to be a great single parent or a parent whose partner is not physically present who raises loving, responsible, and Godly children. The objectives of this lesson are to learn the two F's of parenting that are important for all parents, but that are especially challenging, yet detrimental, to single parents—the two F's being FAITH and FIRMNESS. We will do so by looking at two excellent examples of single parenting in the Bible: The Widow of Zarephath and the father of the prodigal son. From these two examples we will also learn how to trust others in being a part of our parenting journey and to extend grace to our children while at the same time allowing them to learn from their mistakes.

Parent Take-away: The goal of this lesson is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning and practical tips and advice they will take to heart that will allow them to become parents who aren't afraid to trust God for their family's provisions and to teach their children that God always has our best interests at heart and always has a plan for our lives. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting to bring parents to a place of being able to teach these truths because they believe them.

Scripture Focus: *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1*

“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” Proverbs 13:24

Lesson Overview: Books galore have been written and parenting 'experts' abound; all of them with their own ideas of how we should be raising our children. Some say to let your children figure out who they are all on their own with little to no 'interference' (that's code for guidance and discipline), while others warn parents against letting your children have much freedom (that's code for thinking for themselves) until they leave for college or get a job and strike out on their own. Some

'experts' say any type of physical discipline is WRONG and nothing short of abuse, and others promote going the route of emotional discipline—even to the degree of public shaming. This lesson is going to give parents the Biblical view of having faith in God to protect their families, to bring his plan to fruition, and the Biblical view of parenting and discipline as well as the reasons for these practices. Parents will examine their personal feelings and views of putting their full faith in God when it comes to their children/family along with their views of discipline. In looking at the Biblical accounts of the Widow of Zarephath and the Prodigal Son, parents will learn why faith and firmness are important parenting tools and how to implement them into their parenting plan.

Main Idea:

The main idea of this lesson is to guide parents toward a more Biblical style of parenting and discipline through faith, firmness, and grace.

Lesson Goals:

There are three elements to the lesson:

1. *The Set Up*: Introduces the lesson theme and gives parents the opportunity to share how this issue affects their parenting and family life.
2. *Going Deeper*: Gets to the heart of the problem from a spiritual and Biblical component as well as how the world-view of this issue contrasts with that of a Christian viewpoint. Discussion of the Bible text and its relevancy are included in this part of the lesson.
3. *Take Away*: Take-away tips, advice, and practical applications are given. All of these will address the issue from a spiritual aspect as well—making it possible for families to grow and mature their relationship with the LORD as individuals and as a family unit.

The Set Up

SAY:

Today we're going to look into the lives of two single parents—the Widow of Zarephath and the father of the Prodigal Son. We're going to look at how their

faith, firmness, and grace made them the Godly parents we should all be striving to be. We are also going to ask ourselves some hard questions about whether or not we are following the Biblical principles of parenting and what we can do to become more like the parents God desires us to be.

Are you ready? Let's get started.

ASK:

Who do you trust to help you with your children?

If you are a single parent, what are the hardest aspects of being a single parent?

How do you cope with these difficulties?

Is there anyone specific you look up to in regards to their parenting skills? Who and why?

How would you describe your parenting style?

Do you pray for your children on a daily basis? What do you pray for them?

How do you handle it when your children make choices that are not in their best interest?

How does the age of your child affect how you handle the poor choices they made?

After parents have had an opportunity to discuss the answers to these questions pray for the parents in the group and move on to the next step in the lesson.

Going Deeper

Begin this segment of the lesson by reading the following passages of scripture:

1 Kings 17: *Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I*

have directed a widow there to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'" She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah. Sometime later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

Luke 15:11-24: Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of

mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

SAY:

The Bible tells us that the widow was directed by God to provide for Elijah. We don't know how God directed her to do this, but we can see from what she said that she was a bit unsure of how to do so. She promised or did the whole 'swearing on a stack of Bibles thing' that she didn't have anything to feed Elijah when he asked.

ASK:

Does God direct us to care for others even when we have needs of our own?

How does he do this?

What directions like this has he given us?

What would your reaction be if someone came to you and promised you wouldn't be without if you helped them—especially if it meant possibly endangering your child or that your child might go without?

SAY:

The widow trusted Elijah and God, and all went well...for a while. When the widow's son gets sick however, she becomes somewhat angry and accuses Elijah of allowing or even making her son sick to punish her for something she did. Elijah assures her that this isn't the case, and when the boy dies, Elijah also becomes angry at God.

ASK:

Have you done something to or for your children out of faith and obedience to God and afterwards felt as if you were being punished or ignored for doing so?

How has this affected your faith?

SAY:

God heard Elijah's prayer (and I'm sure the prayers of the boy's mother) and brought the boy back to life. Once this happened, the widow's faith was restored and there was nothing she wouldn't have done for Elijah or for God.

ASK:

How does it make you feel when you stop and think about the fact that your children are on loan to you from God—that they are his to do with as he pleases just like the rest of creation?

After parents have had a few minutes to discuss this question, direct the discussion to the second passage of scripture.

SAY:

Parenting is a daunting task when you have a spouse to help you, but when you are on your own, the task of parenting can be almost overwhelming at times. You don't have anyone to whom you can say "They're your kids, too, so take them for a while—I need a break." When your kids do something good or are recognized for something positive, you hear "You're doing a great job." When they get into trouble or aren't doing so well, you hear "It's got to be tough being a single parent, so don't beat yourself up. You can only do so much."

The truth of the matter, however, is that there comes a time when your children will need to make their own choices and decisions. And when that happens, you need to:

- *Have faith in God that he will protect them when they make poor choices*
- *Have faith in your children to live in obedience and faith as you have taught them*
- *Be ready and willing to extend mercy and unconditional love when they make poor choices (which they will)*
- *Be ready to extend mercy without sending the message of tolerance and acceptance of their poor choices*

ASK:

Have you ever been the prodigal son? If so, how were you treated by your parents? The people in your church?

Has your child ever been the prodigal son? How did you react?

Spend a few minutes during the discussion of this question to 'list' some things children of all different ages might do to need the grace of a parent extended to them.

ASK:

What is your relationship with that child now?

Is there anything your child could do that you don't think you could extend mercy to them for?

Why do you feel this way?

Is there anything you think you might do to your children that would cause them to not forgive you?

What special circumstances do you feel single parents face in either or both of the situations we've looked at during this lesson?

What have these stories taught you about becoming a more faithful, firm, and merciful parent?

SAY:

The final aspect of Godly parenting we are going to look at in this lesson is discipline—being a firm parent from a Biblical perspective.

Re-read the Bible verses given earlier in the lesson:

"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." Proverbs 13:24

SAY:

When people read the word 'rod', they freak. We can't be beating our children with rods, now, can we? Of course not! But that is not what this verse is talking about.

Shepherds were as common as ATMs and quick-stops back in those days. If you weren't a shepherd, you had a few in the family and as friends. Everyone was familiar with the job of shepherding and with the tools and tricks of the trade, so to speak. The rod was one such tool used in a number of ways.

The rod was crooked at one end for the purpose of grabbing a sheep or lamb quickly to protect them from being attacked, to care for their wounds or to rescue them from briars, rocks, or rushing water. The rod was used to prod them along and keep a stray sheep or lamb with the rest of the flock. The rod was also used to hook their leg; knocking the animal off its feet so the shepherd could catch it for whatever reason was necessary.

In the same way, parents need to catch their children up to keep them from harm and danger. They need to prod them along with instruction, discipline, and expectations in order to keep them on the right path. And yes, we even need to figuratively knock our kids off their feet once in a while to get their attention and to stop them from doing something that will have possibly life-long repercussions and consequences.

ASK:

What do you think of being a parent who doesn't spare the rod?

After discussing this question for a few minutes pray for the families in your group before moving on to the next segment of the lesson.

Take Away

This is where we bring it all home—where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. It's time now to give parents practical and Biblical advice, tips, and instruction on how to be a parent who is firm, yet loving, who puts their faith in God and his plan for their children, and who shows mercy when their children need be shown mercy.

SAY:

Now let's get down to business. Let's look at some practical ways to be more Biblically sound parents.

Not all of these tips will apply to every parent's situation. Some are geared for those with toddlers, while others are geared for those raising teens. But no matter where you are in your parenting journey, you can do something. You have to do something to let your child know you love them enough to be the parent God desires you to be.

Read through the following list of tips and suggestions; noting the age/stage it is most appropriate for. Allow time for parents to ask questions and discuss them.

TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS:

- Pray for and with your children
- Set clear guidelines and boundaries for your children
- Set realistic expectations and consequences for disobedience
- Read Bible stories to your children that show the faith we can have in God
- Be consistent in your discipline and praise
- Find a friend or family member who is older than you are to mentor you in your parenting (this person needs to be a Christian)

ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN:

- Pray with and for your children
- Read the Bible stories we studied tonight to your children and talk about what happened—asking them how they feel about what happened

PARENTS IN THE BIBLE: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES FOR TODAY'S PARENTS

- Read Bible stories with and to your children that show the faith we can and should have in God
- Be consistent in your discipline and your praise
- Demonstrate a life of faith in God
- Set realistic expectations, rules, and consequences for misbehavior
- Find a friend or family member who is older than you are to mentor you in your parenting (this person needs to be a Christian)

TWEENS:

- Pray with and for your children
- Read the Bible stories we studied tonight to your children and talk about what happened—asking them how they feel about what happened
- Read Bible stories with and to your children that show the faith we can and should have in God
- Be consistent in your discipline and your praise
- Demonstrate a life of faith in God
- Set realistic expectations, rules, and consequences for misbehavior
- Find a friend or family member who is older than you are to mentor you in your parenting (this person needs to be a Christian)
- Allow your tweens to make more choices of their own whenever possible
- Allow (and require) your tweens to deal with the consequences of their choices (good, bad, or indifferent)
- Talk to your tween about the choices and mistakes made by their peers, yourself at that age, and those they see on television and the movies

TEENS:

- Pray with and for your children
- Read the Bible stories we studied tonight to your children and talk about what happened—asking them how they feel about what happened
- Read Bible stories with and to your children that show the faith we can and should have in God
- Be consistent in your discipline and your praise
- Demonstrate a life of faith in God
- Set realistic expectations, rules, and consequences for misbehavior
- Find a friend or family member who is older than you are to mentor you in your parenting (this person needs to be a Christian)
- Allow your teens to make more choices of their own whenever possible

PARENTS IN THE BIBLE: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES FOR TODAY'S PARENTS

- Allow (and require) your teens to deal with the consequences of their choices (good, bad, or indifferent)

Dismiss the group in prayer and encouragement to memorize the Bible verses and make an effort to do some of the things on the above list(s).

Parent Guide

Lesson Four: When You Are Both Mom and Dad

Objectives: Over 25% of children under the age of eighteen in the US are being raised by single parents—primarily single moms. What's more, a large percentage of these households are living paycheck to paycheck—barely making ends meet. And even then many are dependent on some sort of assistance to do so. What's more, tens of thousands of families are separated due to military deployments and a parent whose jobs take them away from home for extended periods of time on a regular basis, or even incarceration. Being a single parent isn't easy, but it isn't impossible. It's not even impossible to be a great single parent or a parent whose partner is not physically present who raises loving, responsible, and Godly children. The objectives of this lesson are to learn the two F's of parenting that are important for all parents, but that are especially challenging, yet detrimental, to single parents—the two F's being FAITH and FIRMNESS. We will do so by looking at two excellent examples of single parenting in the Bible: The Widow of Zarephath and the father of the prodigal son. From these two examples we will also learn how to trust others in being a part of our parenting journey and to extend grace to our children while at the same time allowing them to learn from their mistakes.

Parent Take-away: The goal of this lesson is to provide parents with spiritual reasoning and practical tips and advice they will take to heart that will allow them to become parents who aren't afraid to trust God for their family's provisions and to teach their children that God always has our best interests at heart and always has a plan for our lives. Tips and advice will be offered for all ages and stages of parenting to bring parents to a place of being able to teach these truths because they believe them.

Scripture Focus: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1*

"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."
Proverbs 13:24

Lesson Overview: Books galore have been written and parenting 'experts' abound; all of them with their own ideas of how we should be raising our children. Some say to let your children figure out who they are all on their own with little to no 'interference' (that's code for guidance and discipline), while others warn parents against letting your children have much freedom (that's code for thinking for themselves) until they leave for college or get a job and strike out on their own. Some 'experts' say any type of physical discipline is WRONG and nothing short of abuse, and others promote going the route of emotional discipline—even to the degree of public shaming. This lesson is going to give parents the

Biblical view of having faith in God to protect their families, to bring his plan to fruition, and the Biblical view of parenting and discipline as well as the reasons for these practices. Parents will examine their personal feelings and views of putting their full faith in God when it comes to their children/family along with their views of discipline. In looking at the Biblical accounts of the Widow of Zarephath and the Prodigal Son, parents will learn why faith and firmness are important parenting tools and how to implement them into their parenting plan.

The Set Up

Today we're going to look into the lives of two single parents—the Widow of Zarephath and the father of the Prodigal Son. We're going to look at how their faith, firmness, and grace made them the Godly parents we should all be striving to be. We are also going to ask ourselves some hard questions about whether or not we are following the Biblical principles of parenting and what we can do to become more like the parents God desires us to be.

Who do you trust to help you with your children? Why do you trust these people?

If you are a single parent, what are the hardest aspects of being a single parent?

How do you cope with these difficulties?

Is there anyone specific you look up to in regards to their parenting skills? Who and why?

How would you describe your parenting style?

Do you pray for your children on a daily basis? What do you pray for them?

How do you handle it when your children make choices that are not in their best interest?

How does the age of your child affect how you handle the poor choices they made?

Going Deeper:

Read the following passages of scripture:

- 1 Kings 17
- Luke 15:11-24

Write down your thoughts on each of these accounts in the Bible:

One:

Two:

The Bible tells us that the widow was directed by God to provide for Elijah. We don't know how God directed her to do this, but we can see from what she said that she was a bit unsure of how to do so. She promised or did the whole 'swearing on a stack of Bibles thing' that she didn't have anything to feed Elijah when he asked.

Answer the following questions:

Does God direct us to care for others even when we have needs of our own?

How does he do this?

What directions like this has he given us?

What would your reaction be if someone came to you and promised you wouldn't be without if you helped them—especially if it meant possibly endangering your child or that your child might go without?

Have you done something to or for your children out of faith and obedience to God and afterwards felt as if you were being punished or ignored for doing so?

How has this affected your faith?

Is there anything your child could do that you don't think you could extend mercy to them for?

Why do you feel this way?

Is there anything you think you might do to your children that would cause them to not forgive you?

The following describes what it means to apply the rod of discipline. Read it and answer the questions that follow:

Shepherds were as common as ATMs and quick-stops back in those days. If you weren't a shepherd, you had a few in the family and as friends. Everyone was familiar with the job of shepherding and with the tools and tricks of the trade, so to speak. The rod was one such tool used in a number of ways.

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How do you feel about applying the rod of discipline?

How does this Biblical instruction to parents differ from your parenting style?

How is it the same?

What, if anything, do these stories and the instruction of Biblical discipline teach you about becoming a better parent?

What will you do, if anything, to bring your parenting style more in line with what God outlines for us in his Word?

Take Away

This is where we bring it all home—where the rubber meets the road, so to speak.

Not all of these tips will apply to every parent's situation. Some are geared for those with toddlers, while others are geared for those raising teens. But no matter where you are in your parenting journey, you can do something. You have to do something to let your child know you love them enough to be the parent God desires you to be.

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