

“THE SEASON OF PARENTING”
1 John 4:7-11

Growing in The Seasons of Life Series
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Today I’m going to look at the season of parenting. It is amazing, isn’t it, how quickly our children grow up? Yesterday I was putting them in their car seats and this past June my youngest son was married to Tonya. Believe me, they grow up fast.

As parents every one of us wants to be good parents. We want to have strong families. Yet the fact is that the pace of life we live, the constant pressure of our careers to always produce often puts our families at risk. Is it really possible to achieve success and build a healthy family?

Today we’re going to look at seven things that kids want and need the most. Even if you are not a parent there are children in your life—grandchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbor kids. Now these seven things come from the greatest book on parenting ever written—the Bible. They are seven things that God does for us as our Heavenly Father/parent.

The first thing that our kids need most is compassion. More than anything they need unbelievable, unconditional love. There needs to be a place where they are accepted warts and all. Compassion is where I know everything about you and I still like you.

1 John 4:7 says, *“Let us love one another, for love is from God.”* Love is not natural, you have to learn by practicing. Is there a better place to practice love than on the people you’re forced to live with? If you can learn to love your family you are learning to really love all people.

Three ways to express love—affection, attention, affirmation. Affection is that they need lots of hugs, touches and kisses. Affirmation is that they need to actually hear it, to be affirmed and built up with love. They also need attention. One of the best gifts you can give is to listen to them; to look them in the eye and say “You really matter to me!”

Second, kids need our counsel. They need direction, advice, wisdom. Study after study has shown that the number one indicator of successful children is a stable family value system—that’s counsel. It is so important that kids grow up knowing, “There is a right and there is a wrong.” We all need a foundation; children need to know clear boundaries.

How many times have we heard someone say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.” When I hear someone say this I want to say, “Who are you kidding?” It makes all the difference what you believe. It makes all the difference if you have a solid value system centered in God’s word, in his commandments, in his promises, in his love.

The problem today is that many children often spend more time with passive baby sitters like television, video games and smart phones than they do with their parents. Some years ago Cornell University hooked up wireless microphones to 1000 fathers and studied them for several

weeks. They discovered that the average father spends 37-seconds a day in actual conversation with his children.

You cannot parent or raise children in your spare time. What we often do is give birth to or adopt children, yet then we focus on all our other goals/activities, and we somehow think we can handle our kids on the side. Yet if you have children God has called you to be a parent. And that's not just a one year commitment; it is to help them grow with compassion and counsel.

Third, kids need correction. They need correction because they make mistakes. They need discipline, accountability, training. Proverbs 19:18 says, "*Discipline your children while there is hope; do not set your hearts on their destruction.*" This means that if I don't correct and discipline my children I may be setting them up for failure later in life.

Now the key difference between positive discipline and negative punishment is your attitude. Am I doing this out of anger? If you are disciplining simply to vent your feelings so you will feel better, that's a good clue it is negative punishment. You're blowing up—not disciplining.

The Bible teaches that you need to learn to correct without condemning; you need to discipline without destroying. I definitely know all too well how hard that is. So how are you doing on showing compassion and unconditional love? Are you giving your kids counsel and teaching them right from wrong? Have you learned how to correct without destroying?

Four, kids need confidence. The fact is that life today is tougher on kids than it has ever been before. You adults wouldn't want to be a child growing up today with all the pressures, the stress, the pace, the value systems, the expectations. I believe these challenges are much greater today than they were just a generation ago. Our world is tough on kid's self-esteem.

The world, my friends, is so negative today that the last thing they need when they come home is more negativity. Colossians 3:21 says, "*Do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.*" Are you a parent who is un-pleasable no matter what? If they get A's do you want straight A's or A+'s. Do you yell at them if they don't score more points? Do you expect your kids to fulfill things you never could in school? Un-pleasable parents produce insecure kids.

How do you raise confident kids? You've got to build them up more than you tear them down. You've got to give more strokes than you give pokes. You need to give ten praises to every negative that you give. Why, because the negative is what you remember.

Every child, my friends, needs someone in their corner. They need someone who believes in them and is their cheerleader. They need someone who says, "I know you can do it. I believe in you. I'm proud of you. Go for it. I'm behind you." Kids need confidence.

Five, kids need celebration. Now that is just a funny word for fun. Families ought to have fun. The home should be a place to play. This is a major fault in many homes where everyone is just too busy. Parents often fill their "to do" list so full that they don't have any time for just plain fun with their children.

When my kids were younger they couldn't care less that I was the senior pastor of a growing suburban church; they wanted to know if their Dad is fun. They wanted to know if I can laugh at myself and have fun with them. And since my life centers so much around the church I want the church to be fun. Robes, rigid rules, archaic practices did not impress my kids—they wanted me and the church to be real, to be free to do new things, to be relevant and fun.

Therefore I want faith and the life of a Christian to be seen in me not as a duty or drudgery but as fun and enjoyable; that even our God has a sense of humor and rejoices in us. My friends, faith, service, worship and love for Jesus should be modeled in us as a joy, as fun.

Six, kids need challenges. They need experiences that stretch them; that reveal their talents; that help them develop their God-giving ministry. They need challenges where they can develop responsibility. The best way to develop this, of course, is to increasingly trust them with responsibility. Will they make mistakes?...absolutely! Yet so did we when we were growing up.

The goal of parenting, therefore, is to move our children from our control in the early years, to self-control in the middle years, to a place where they understand God's love and plan for them and can then trust God to control their lives. The only way we grow is with parents who are able to let go and trust, and are willing to help us develop responsibility.

Seven and final, kids need consistency. They need us as parents to be consistent, to not be fickle, to not always be changing our minds. Inconsistent parents can easily produce insecure and bitter children. Our model of consistency, of course, is always God our Heavenly Father. He is faithful in all his promises; he is fair in all his decisions.

Now I need to remind you that there are no perfect parents and no perfect families. Our goal is not at all to have a perfect family but a healthy family. Yet to have a healthy family takes wisdom—wisdom centered in God's Word. If you build your life around the principles in God's Word; if you will establish a relationship with Jesus he will give you the strength and wisdom to do the best job of parenting that you can.

What is the secret of becoming a great parent? The secret is becoming a person centered in God and his love. Claim Jesus in your life as your Lord, your director, your guide. Ask him for wisdom. Spend time in his Word each day.

Get involved in the church; in a ministry or serving opportunity; relate to other people who are also in the same season of life you are. We need each other. We can't do it alone. We need other believers to pray for us, to support us, to help us.

Now you who are children please remember that your parents are not perfect. When you grow up you are not going to be a perfect parent either. Yet your parents are God's will for you. God chose them to bring you into this world, or to care for you through adoption.

What is your attitude toward them? Remember children the Bible tells us that God will bless your life if you honor your father and your mother. May we be true to his command! God's richest blessing to each parent, to each child, to each family.