

PARENTING GOD'S WAY

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*Pastor Alistair Begg will be a plenary speaker at the
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INTRODUCTION

What is the greatest problem facing our nation? Is it the convoluted agenda of a political party, the threat of environmental catastrophe, or gathering storms on the international front? Is it the dire prophecies of Wall Street economists? No. Most people today would agree that the most troubling road on which our country is traveling begins and ends at our own front doors. It's all in the family. For the last three decades, the idea of the traditional family has been under cultural assault. Every movement from the so-called sexual revolution to same-sex parenting has taken its toll on the foundational building blocks of our society. Now the social scientists realize that the damage has been significant. Families are reeling. Single parents struggle in the rubble of broken homes, and children come of age dizzily on the joint-custody merry-go-round. Parents are sending distress signals. How can we save our homes? Does anyone know the answer? Someone does. He has had the answer all along, and He is waiting for us to ask for it. We can find

the redemptive, creative details lovingly recorded in an ancient book and fleshed out in the author's own Son. In God lies the perfect answer to parenting, for God the Father is the perfect parent. Let's explore what He has to say first to fathers, then to mothers.

BEING A FATHER GOD'S WAY

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FATHERS GONE?

Men are masters of the art of delegation. Give them a task, and they can quickly assign just the right person to do it. A simple phone call? Let the office assistant make the connection. Household chore? One of the kids can get it done. Something in men gravitates toward a well-ordered corporate structure.

Yes, delegation is a wonderful thing, but what about abdication? What if we assign away our own responsibilities? Another word for that is abandonment, and that is largely the sad state of Christian fatherhood

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today. Fathers are meant to nurture and admonish their children in the Lord Jesus, but many delegating dads have abdicated that lofty seat of authority. Let mom or the school or the church staff have the job. If all else fails, there is always the television set. Thus, we look up and down the pews and see wives, mothers, and single women in our churches—but few men. To offer a different spin to the Peter, Paul, and Mary song: Where have all the fathers gone?

PAUL ON PARENTING

In Ephesians 6:4, the Apostle Paul tells us where those fathers should be: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” This exhortation is repeated in Colossians,² so we know it is particularly important. Fathers are to spend plenty of time with their children, training and instructing them. This time with their children simply cannot be delegated.

Just the same, modern men have tried to do so. In an age of career advancement and unprecedented leisure time, the daily task of fathering has struck too many men as unglamorous. They have left their work to others, and with these results: rising rates of suicide among minors, criminal activity and violence, drug abuse, and homosexuality. We have produced a floundering, confused, and self-destructive generation. This is no melodramatic overstatement, but the conclusion of any number of objective studies. There is no substitute for the work of the father in the home.

AUTHORITY: ABUSED VERSUS ABSENT

So Paul, in Holy Scripture, pleads for fathers to rightfully give their children that time, and these words to the Ephesians were written in a context that would provide a striking contrast to the first-century world of Roman culture. The Roman father was an autocrat. He

could order his children around as if they were cattle. The laws backed his ability to sell them as slaves if he so chose. He could even apply the death penalty in cases of extreme discipline. Against that troubling backdrop, Paul presents a strikingly different parental perspective. He offers a radical suggestion that would cause first-century fathers to shine in a dark time, and it does the same in the twenty-first century. In our own world, the problem is not so much the abuse of authority as the absence of it. Some throw up their hands in surrender. How can anyone know how to be a father without good models? “I can’t be a good father, because, you see, I never had one myself.” Or, “I need guidance to be a father in this modern world, but who has time to take a course or read a book?” Paul puts the lie to these excuses. The beauty of this principle is that no earthly model is necessary, whether from experience or curriculum. We could be surrounded with the most derelict of fathering role models, and we could still excel. For our model is God the Father Himself, as Paul established earlier, in Ephesians 3:14. Everyone shares a perfect heavenly Father, so everyone can be a good earthly one. Let’s discover how we are to set out doing that . . .

BEING A MOTHER GOD’S WAY

THE SACRED DUTY OF MOTHERHOOD

We have seen that God ordains fathers to train and instruct their children in the Lord and to avoid exasperating them. We have noted that too many fathers abdicate this task, when it is their duty alone, and we have reflected on some of the dreadful implications of that abdication.

Where does this leave mothers? Are they relegated to a position of assistant parent, summoned occasionally from the family bullpen for relief work whenever the father is tired or indisposed? Does the Bible somehow

marginalize the place of motherhood in bringing up a child?

Not in the least! We will find that motherhood is, in every sense, the sacred institution established specially by God that fatherhood is. The role may be different, but it is never inferior.

Ask any American. In our country, Mother's Day is a far more profitable day in the greeting card industry than Father's Day. More than one hundred years ago, just before the outbreak of World War I, Congress passed a resolution to honor mothers on the second Sunday in May. President Woodrow Wilson also called on the public to display their flags as an expression of "our love and reverence for the mothers of our country," and so it has been ever since.

Yet today, after one hundred years of reverence for the unique and sacred institution that is motherhood, the U.S. Congress is now busy with resolutions that would just as uniquely damage the position of [...] mothers in America.

A rabid political agenda is determined to legally establish that anyone can be a mother, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or biological relationship. The real mothers, those who have borne the load since creation, are being challenged. Thus it is all the more crucial, in the present political climate, that we come to understand what God says about motherhood. We must hear the message clearly.

We will discover that the Bible clearly affirms the family as the foundational unit of society, that parents are worthy of the highest honor on earth, and that mothers are entrusted by God with a sacred duty, which is theirs and theirs alone.

CAN ANYONE BE A MOTHER?

These new "experts" bring the message that anyone is qualified to be a mother, but the position of Scripture on that issue is quite different indeed. God has a very



special place for mothers in His created order. They are among His most sacred and beautiful gifts to humanity.

However, mothers do not always feel like sacred and beautiful gifts to humanity. Their daily work does not always carry a glorious sheen about it. On any given day, there are lunches and laundry, maid service and taxi service—all of it taken for granted by the permanent guests of the Mom Hotel. As those bright blurs, better known as her children, whiz past occasionally with open hands, and she follows behind with the vacuum cleaner, wearing a deep path in the carpet between here and the washing machine, Mother feels significantly less than special.

"Sacred privilege" is not the phrase which comes first to mind when she pulls herself from her bed early on an overcast Monday morning. No, "privilege" would mean being able to wake up in her own way, rather than opening her heavy eyelids to the sight of the children lined up by the side of the bed with frozen stares and a list of requests. There is Christmas tinsel growing from the carpet, the arms of the sofa are worn through, the refrigerator is empty, there are no clean diapers, and some unidentified finger has scrawled "Go Bulls" in the dust on the coffee table

And they want us to believe anyone can be a mother? Those lobbyists may have spent plenty of time in Washington, but they have obviously spent little in a home.