



**ERRORS**  
**Parents Make**  
and How to Avoid Them

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CANON  PRESS

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To Lisa, who has given me such a wonderful life,  
and with whom it has been a joy to train children.

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# Introduction

Lisa and I were sitting on our bed weeping. We had attended a class on child training, arrived home, and started talking. We realized that we had been breaking some very basic training principles, resulting in us too often being frustrated with the behavior of our first two children. It grieved us to know that we had failed our kids. That night consisted of grief and repentance before God. It began a journey to learn and discover all we could about parenting. That was 1995, when we had a five-year-old girl and a two-year-old girl. Now, after adding three more children (another girl and twin boys), I've tried to put in your hands the fruit of that labor.

I wanted to write something that provides general principles and yet is extremely practical. I've found that the parenting books I agree with theologically are often strong on principles but weak on application. On the other hand, books that are strong on practical application sometimes lack the biblical foundation that is needed. This book sifts out the best nuggets of truth from the many books, videos, and seminars my wife and I have learned from, while correcting the theological errors and out-of-balance applications that some of those instructors teach.

This book is similar to the book of Proverbs: it offers general truisms, not promises. There are no formulas guaranteed to produce well-behaved children who love and honor God. But there are mistakes to avoid and Biblical principles to apply. This book lays out many of them.

Though there is a chapter on teenagers, this book is mostly for parents of *young* children, ages one to twelve. This book does not cover infant care.

You need to read the entire book to get the full benefit. Otherwise, you risk missing the general principles that support the specific applications. Not every tool works in every situation. Say you were going to paint your house, and you heard that home improvement stores suggest using “glossy finish.” If you went to the store and bought gallons of glossy-finish paint and used it everywhere, you’d have a remarkably ugly house. There are places to use a glossy finish, and there are many more places not to use it. You need to know which is which. The same is true in parenting. You have many tools at your disposal: warnings, spankings, time-outs, naps, etc. The key is knowing when to use each one. If you read this book from beginning to end (rather than just skipping to the sections that you think you need), you’ll learn not only how to be a better parent to toddlers or middle schoolers, but how to be a better parent *period*.

I’ve always said there are two things that people won’t let you criticize, and one of them is their

parenting philosophy (the other is their “experience” with God; him “speaking” to them). Some parents are hard-nosed and fundamentalist. They tend to only focus on behavior. They are usually strong on rules (girls can’t wear makeup, babies shouldn’t sleep with Mom or Dad, only homeschool, etc.) but weak on love, warmth, and relationship. Then there are the liberal, natural parents, organic foods and all. They would criticize you for *not* allowing your children to sleep with you; they would also criticize you if you ever bought your kids chicken nuggets from McDonald’s. Finally, there are the proud and self-righteous, “I’m not self-righteous” parents who criticize both of these parenting styles. These parents are above the fray of discussing parenting philosophies. They simply want their children to “love Jesus and other people.” They refuse to promote any parenting philosophy—except for the one they’re actually promoting, the “just focus on Jesus, not rules” philosophy.

This book seeks to correct the imbalances of the first two types of parents while dispelling any sort of self-righteousness in parenting. A teachable, humble parent asks for help from older, successful parents. A teachable, humble parent reads all he can about parenting, listens to all he can, watches everything he can, and attends numerous seminars and workshops to learn about parenting. If your children are disobedient and disrespectful,

admit you are doing a poor job, and then go get help. Don't sit around and say, "I've tried that, and it didn't work," or "I guess I just have especially strong-willed children." Those sorts of comments tell me that either you didn't try the right thing or you didn't apply it in the right way. The fact that you are reading a book like this says a lot about your humility and willingness to learn.

This book is divided into a brief biblical foundation, eight errors parents make, and forty-six ways to avoid those errors.

The *Biblical Foundation* is essential because the Bible must be our standard and rule for faith and practice. There are certain paradigms that we need to have correct before we do anything else.

- Error 1 is *Shifting Blame*. Parents must take personal responsibility for their homes and their children's behavior.
- Error 2 covers *Low Expectations*. Parents today seem to have wrong expectations about the whole concept of raising children. I argue that those expectations are unrealistically low.
- Error 3 is having a *Child-Centered Home*. Parents should regularly step back and analyze who or what controls the family. Parents must remember that they are the authority and the leaders in their household.

- Error 4 is committed when parents *Fail to Discipline*. Some parents believe that discipline squelches a child's personality, that children should be allowed to express themselves, that discipline creates robots. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- Error 5 is *Reasoning with Your Toddler*. If you're negotiating with your three-year-old, you've lost the battle.
- Error 6 is *Neglecting Your Grade-Schooler*. As your children age, they will need fewer overt acts of discipline. But don't let their physical growth trick you into thinking they don't need your continued involvement in their lives.
- Error 7 is *Disrespecting Your Teenager*. Your teenagers have mature bodies but immature minds. You must remember that and not treat them the way they treat you.
- Error 8 is to *Miss Christ* in this entire process. You can have a child who is obedient and respectful but who, in the long run of life, strays from the Lord, disregards the Scriptures, and never has a heart with Jesus Christ sitting on the throne. This is the ultimate error we must avoid.

I pray the Lord will use this small effort to enable you to overcome the common errors parents make.



**P**arenting begins with parents. The biggest problem in your parenting is you. With our biblical foundation in place, it's time to consider eight errors that are common to parents. I've read about these errors, heard about them, and watched friends and acquaintances fall into them over the years. It's time to give some practical advice on avoiding them.

It's tough to hear that the biggest challenge in parenting is parents, because parents tend to be blame-shifters. They come by it honestly. Shifting blame was Adam's response when the Lord confronted him in the Garden of Eden: "The woman whom you gave to me . . ." It is a rare thing to find a person who accepts responsibility for their faults, failures, and sins. Shifting blame is an epidemic. Watch the news, and you'll see some professional athlete or politician make a lame attempt at an apology for his wrongdoing by saying, "If I offended anyone . . . I'm sorry," as if the burden is on others not to be offended by his behavior. This is weak. Parents shouldn't think this way.

I appreciate one of the older couples in my church who has a wayward adult child about whom they have said on more than one occasion, "We were too harsh and legalistic when he was young." I appreciate them taking responsibility for their mistakes. If you're serious about raising godly children, you have to be honest with

#### **ERROR 1**

#### **SHIFTING BLAME**

yourself about how your choices are affecting your household. I'll say it again: parenting begins with parents.

# ACTION 1

## Behave like you want your children to behave.

Your character as a parent spills over onto your children. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. If you are an angry person, your children will be angry. If you are a lazy person, your children will be lazy. If you are a joyful person, your children will be joyful.

Certainly, there are exceptions. Prodigals break the hearts of their godly parents. But, *in general*, your children will turn out loving the things you love, hating the things you hate, and valuing the things you value. How you handle your money, how you respond to a difficult marriage, your basic stance toward God—all of this is absorbed by your children. More is caught than taught.

I can see how much of the way I behave and, especially, how I think about and relate to God is the result of how my parents think about and relate to God. And for that I am thankful to my parents. Although they did not rear me in a Christian home in the early years of my life, when they eventually did become Christians in their mid-thirties, they experienced

a significant change in lifestyle. They grew in and maintained a genuine, lively walk with God. And this has greatly affected me. I've got a long way to go in my sanctification, but I can say that I have a genuine walk with God. In many ways, I can thank my parents for that. My parents were not perfect, but there was nothing fake or contrived about their walk with the Lord. Giving your kids a heart for God should be natural and not manufactured. In order for that to happen, you must develop and maintain a strong personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

So be the kind of person you want your children to be. Make a conscious effort to develop Christlike character. 2 Peter 1:5 tells us to “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.” This means we must take deliberate, intentional steps to grow and change. Seeing the fruits of the Spirit ripen in your own life is the key to seeing them develop in your children.

Dad, if the only time your children ever see you excited is at a football game—guess what? The only thing your children will be excited about is football. Mom, if you say to your thirteen-year-old, “Tell the ticket man you're twelve years old so you can get in free,” don't be surprised when he grows up with a high tolerance for lying. You shouldn't expect your children to be passionate about loving the Lord, working hard, and hating sin if you aren't passionate about those things yourself.

The most important thing you can do for your child is to develop your walk with God. Remember Deuteronomy 6:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:4–7)

These verses remind us that parents are to love the Lord first and foremost. Proper training of children results from a heart that has an overflowing relationship with Jesus Christ. These verses also remind us that when a parent loves the Lord, he will talk very naturally and openly about spiritual things. In a Christian home, you should hear the parents discussing their Bible reading. You should hear conversations about theology and personal holiness. You should hear the family praying together for church members, neighbors, and missionaries.

*You* are the key to raising your kids. You can't hope that the children's ministry, youth group, or

Christian school will be the silver bullet, though those things can be very helpful. Kids need parents who are becoming more like Jesus. The sort of fruit produced in your life will be the sort of fruit produced in your children.