

Raising Children in an Evangelical Family Environment: Biblical Principles Applied to the Family

Ljubinka Jambrek
Bogoslovni institut, Zagreb
ljubinka.jambrek@zg.t-com.hr

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Summary

As Creator, God designed the family and determined the standards and rules for living and functioning in the family. As a basic unit of society, the family is to reflect God's glory. God's plan for marriage and the family has not changed, only the human approach to this institution has changed. Therefore, it is vital to re-emphasize how important it is that the family functions according to biblical standards. This article deals with raising children in an evangelical environment which assumes God's presence, the reading and keeping of God's Word, love between the parents, prayer, and worship of God. Clear goals for raising children are presented. This work offers valuable and lived examples of biblical discipline. It discusses the topic of discipline from childhood to the teen ages, trust, responsibility, communication and relationship with God. Finally, the article points out the importance of times of family worship.

Key words: family, marriage, God's plan, raising children, biblical discipline, family worship

Introduction

The raising of children takes place in the family, the church and in schools, but what happens in the family is primary and most important. However, what is the purpose of raising children? What is the goal of the specifically evangelical raising of children? Why is it so important? How can biblical principles be practically applied in daily family life? I will attempt to answer these questions by

considering biblical principles and their application in our family.¹

God created humans in his image. A child is a person in a small size. Therefore, a child also needs to reflect God's image. Since children are not mature, parents need to train and raise them in the way that will enable their development into a person after God's character. When we got married, my husband and I asked the Lord to give us children, but with a special clause in that prayer. Although we wanted children very much, we boldly asked God not to give us children if they were to belong to the devil. We did not want to bear children to the devil (cf. Jn 8:39-45). We prayed that if God wanted to give us children, that he would make sure they would be saved and serve him. Now we have children who love God. We believe that in his grace God foreknew their futures and knew of our determination to raise them for his glory. Our goal is to train our children to come into the fullness of maturity in Christ for the glory of God, the Father, to escape the deeds of the flesh (which are many), and to abound in the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25). We teach them not to sow into their flesh in order to avoid reaping destruction, but to sow into the spirit in order to reap eternal life (Gal 6:8). We are resolute in encouraging a biblical upbringing for children because that is pleasing to God and a blessing to the whole family, church and society. In future generations, who will praise and serve God, if not the children of those who have experienced God's goodness and grace?

There are many of life's challenges ahead for children, as there are for adults. Warnings can help make children aware of the dangers prowling in the world and will cause them to be cautious and obedient to God's Word. Children should be taught to embrace only good influences, and to reject the bad. How will they learn which are good and which are bad? They will learn with the help of God, and with help from us, their parents. They need help in choosing music, movies, company, friends, literature, and internet content; they need advise on dating and choosing a spouse, etc.

The Evangelical Family Environment

Every family creates, changes and renews the environment in which they live. It can be an environment of love, joy, understanding, mutual respect and service to one other. It can also be an environment of unending arguments, rivalry, cursing, offence, humiliation, etc. It is crucial for raising children to create an environment

1 My husband and I are in our 21st year of marriage and God has blessed us with three children. Our oldest son is 19 years old and studies theology at the Biblical Institute in Zagreb. Our daughter is 16 years old and in her second year of gymnasium. Our youngest son is 14 years old and in the 8th.

where they can grow and develop to their maximum potential.

An evangelical family environment can materialize under the influence of God's presence, by the reading and keeping of God's Word, by fostering love between the parents, praying, and worshipping God. Evangelical Christians who are parents create and form this environment for their families on the basis of God's Word and the help of the Holy Spirit, forming it to God's purposes and goals.

God's Presence. God's presence cannot be falsely presented: either his presence dwells with us, or it does not. If people live by God's commandments, they can be sure that God will dwell in their homes. If not, the loss will be on their side. If people are faithful to God, he will be faithful to them and answer their prayers. If parents want to teach their children how to live in accordance with God's will, they must fulfill God's will themselves because children recognize when their parents do not do that which is asked of them. Along with God's presence also comes God's glory, and others notice that. A family fulfills its purpose if God's glory is reflected in it.

Reading and Keeping God's Word. It is exceptionally important for Christians to read and keep God's Word. If they read God's Word, there is a better chance it will be memorized and kept. People cannot share what they have not got. If people have God's Word in their thoughts, on their lips and hearts (Jos 1:8-9), God will give them success in their enterprises.

In our family, from our children's earliest years (even before they started talking), we read Bible stories to them from children's Bibles and prayed with them – corporately and individually with each child according to his or her age. We spent quality time each night as a family for spiritual training in the faith. When they were young, the greatest form of punishment to our children was not a spanking, but the possibility that we would deprive them of a reading from the children's Bible; that is the extent to which it had become a part of them. When they learned how to read for themselves, we regularly bought them adequate children's Bibles and Christian books. By the help of the Holy Spirit, and by sharing God's doctrine unobtrusively and in an age-appropriate way, our children have come to love God and his Word. They regularly attend church, both together with us as a family, and independently.

Love between the Parents. Very early on, our children learned that my husband and I love Jesus first, our family next – where we equally love everyone – and finally others outside the family. We were careful not to hide our love, but to show it in a very moderate and discrete way (i.e. greeting each other on the way in or out, holding hands, polite behavior, etc.). Children observe their parents and learn behaviors that they will eventually adopt as spouses themselves. If the parents' relationship is cold and distant, it does not send the children a good message. If parents “compete (encourage one another) toward love and good

deeds,” the children will have a good example to follow. Mutual love between husband and wife should be a reflection of God’s love in them, and of their love for God. If spouses come near to God, they will be closer to each other. In that case, the children grow in an adequate environment for their spiritual and psycho-physical development, with the hope that they, too, can experience the love God has presented their parents with. The world could be different if we would all attend to that which is for the benefit of others (according to Phil 2:4); the Christian family must reflect this evangelical environment as an example to others and for God’s glory.

Worship of God. In his prayer to God the Father, Jesus said: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (Jn 17:4). Following Jesus’ example, all we do should serve for the glory of God. There is much boasting among Christians, many empty words and empty wishes, because there is little faith and endurance in worshipping God, not only with words, but with life in general. Worship encompasses every area of life, not only what relates to the church. Christians are people who must stand behind their faith at all times. If it was not so, the Reformation would not have happened – if it were not for those who continued to proclaim God’s Word, we would not have been introduced to God. Worshipping God should be a part of the daily life of an individual, a family, church, and finally, a society. When people glorify God, he does not withhold his goods from them. He gives them everything abundantly. Children see how their parents live, whether they pray in times of lack, whether they give what they have, and whether or not they stay faithful to God in times of hardship. Children will not become “holy” because they have been told to do so. They will not learn how to worship God if they observe their parents only as they sing worship songs at Sunday services. Children adopt the examples they see. Parents should be the primary examples of worshippers before God to their children. Therefore it is important for them to see their parents in their daily worship of God through words and actions. This is an environment that will promote their spiritual growth.

A Home of Prayer. Prayer is not only a routine to be taken lightly or done habitually. Prayer is an interaction with God. In prayer, we talk to God and we listen to him. A family who prays together will never grow apart because God holds it together. Bonded in prayer with God, the family is invincible for Satan’s arrows, except for the times when God allows for our faith to be tested. Parents provide protection for their children. Sometimes parents can be so eager in their care for the physical lives and development of the children, in order for them to not be deprived in comparison with other children, that they forget the most important thing and deprive them of dwelling before God in prayer. In our family, we pray individually, and we pray corporately. Our children openly share their

prayer needs with us knowing that we lift them to God. And again, when we are faithful to God, he remains faithful and fulfills not only our needs, but also many of our desires, as seen in Psalm 37.

For years now, our family has kept a good practice of blessing the children in prayer before going to school or out of the home. Along with regular individual times with God, my husband and I also have a daily time of prayer together as a married couple. Our children see this and respect our time with God; they know that it is the key for a happy marriage and family. We believe they will inherit this good influence from us. We want our children to be constantly under the protection of Christ's blood. We are their intercessors. By this, we are establishing an anchor in God, believing that one day our children will not let their own children go to school or elsewhere without just such a prayer shield. If God is always with us, then we desire for him to be with them too.

Biblical Guidelines for Raising Children

Fear of the Lord. The Bible gives guidelines for raising children in a way that is pleasing to God. After receiving the commandments, the laws and the instructions God gave him for teaching the Israelites, Moses clearly stated:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates“ (Deut 6:4-9).

Love for God is shown by accepting and keeping his Word and by passing it on to our children.

Prior to his death, Moses gave God's law to the people and invited them all “so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD,” and especially emphasized that the invitation to keep the law also applied to their children: “Who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD” (Deut 31:12-13). The Proverbs accentuate that the fear of God is a fountain of life; it delivers from the snares of death (14:27) and “through the fear of the Lord, a man avoids evil” (16:6). It is needless to mention how many are those (adults and children) who fall into evil for lack of fear of the Lord. If parents want their children to follow the path of God's wisdom, they should instruct them in the school of wisdom since “the fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom” (Pr 15:33), for developing a God-pleasing character.

God's Discipline. Citing the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16) in his epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul encourages children to be obedient to their parents in the Lord and to honor their father and mother in order that all may be well with them and they may enjoy long life on the earth. He exhorts parents, however, to avoid exasperating their children, but to bring them up instead in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4).

Many parents hesitate to discipline their children because they are not sure how much discipline is enough for raising children in the instruction of the Lord, and what is practically assumed (Selig, Arroyo, 1989).

Bible verses that speak about the deeds of the flesh and the consequences of it do not apply only to adults, but also to children. Therefore, parents must instruct their children to know what the Bible says about it. Some of the passages clearly distinguish the deeds of the flesh from the deeds of the Spirit (Rom 6; 8:5-8; Gal 5:19-21, etc.).

Parents have to be on guard for their children and protect them from secular influences that might separate them from God and encourage them toward living in faith (Col 2:6-10). The Bible exhorts us: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Pr 22:6).

Christians know that the Word of God is the best guide for life, and believe the best outcome of raising children comes with the help of the Holy Spirit. But parents must not get disappointed if it requires much time, energy and investment. It is worthwhile to come before God without fear, knowing that one has done everything possible. God's principles guarantee children a good future and fulfillment of God's promises (even as an inheritance for future generations), because God's promises are eternal and undying, just as is his Word.

Salt and Light to the World. Christians cannot be salt and light to the world (Mt 5:13-16) if they are as tasteless and dark as the world itself. So our children cannot suddenly become salt and light when they become adults, spreading Christian influence, if we have not taught them in the way of the Lord. We all are called to *be salt* and to *be light*. This is not only a nice-sounding phrase heard in sermons, but an invitation to change our lives according to biblical standards that will result in a change in the lives of others. If God's people are like a city on a hill (Mt 5:14), it is impossible for the world not to see its light.

By raising children according to God's commandment in Deut 6:1-9; Eph 6:1-4, etc., parents can influence other parents as salt and light, expecting changes in society. If they give up raising their children in the love and instruction of the Lord without trying, they irretrievably commit their children to Satan's influence that leads directly to hell. If Christians allow for this to happen, they have to know that they will answer to God. It is better to decide to be faithful to God regardless of the outcome. Children are his possession, only loaned to the parents. Parents

can and should enjoy their children and share life with them, but also need to be aware that they are presented by God to the parents and therefore need to be raised for God's glory.

Jesus said that tasteless salt gets thrown away. The devil claims the children (and even adults) whom nobody instructs in the way of the Lord, and he tosses them this way and that under his influence, like a toy on the waves, until his final goal in which they end up together with him in hell, far from God's presence. Although this is a frequent case (many children of believing parents have suffered this destiny), no Christian would voluntarily commit to doing exactly this. If parents fail to fulfill their obligation in raising their children according to God's explicit instructions, they inevitably surrender them to the devil's fate. Not only those who make a certain agreement with the devil (I know people who have done this) are his servants, just as not all who go to church are automatically God's servants, but through their actions they can indirectly surrender to this or that leadership. The Bible says that it is not possible to serve two masters. This applies to both children and adults because God's law is given to all and everyone must keep it.

We are all called to live according to God's will and by the standards we find in the Bible, while God spreads his own influence. Nobody has influence on God's influence. If Christians are Christ's fragrance, (as well as the children who need to be raised faithfully, sacrificially and perseveringly), God will spread his influence through them. Not only us, but others will do better because of us, as in the narrative from the book of Genesis where everyone in Egypt, and even his father's people in a far away land, benefitted because of God's hand over Joseph. Christians can bring change if they are willing to pay the price, which is often very high. As salt and light, Christians have a greater influence if they are not ashamed to confess that Christ lives in them.

Relying on God's Grace. When people have asked how my husband and I managed to raise children that are so special and obedient, we answer that it was the result of God's grace and thousands of hours invested in raising them. Some of those people say that they would want our results, but without our efforts and labor. But if parents complete their part of the job in raising children, God will do his part. It is not difficult for him to help in raising children according to his will; parents only need to ask him. God's Word says that God creates in us to will and to act according to his good purpose (Phil 2:13) and that he has given us everything necessary for life and devotion (2 Pet 1:3). Therefore, if we lack wisdom, for example, we must ask from God and he will give it to us (Jas 1:5), and if we need something else that is in accordance with God's will, we should pray according to the text of Matthew 7:7, while it is really best if we pray according to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and

all these things will be given to you as well.” The same rules apply to adults and children. By our fruits, people will recognize whether we are (and if our children are) Christ’s disciples or not (Mt 7:16). Since all is available for life and devotion, we cannot excuse ourselves, but fulfill the commission, while God gives us the grace to act.

Parents raise their children in accordance with the extent of their own knowledge of God, but regardless of the invested effort and prayers, they cannot guarantee that their children will follow and remain on God’s way – the way of salvation and sanctification. Every believing parent would like for his or her efforts to be worthwhile and for his or her child to be among those who will not depart from the way in which he or she is instructed (Pr 22:6). However, unfortunately, just as Judas strayed from Jesus (although he was trained in the same way as the others), it is possible that some of the children in whom believing parents invest efforts will go their own way when they are grown. Many parents struggle with this and blame themselves because they failed to raise the child according to God’s standards. It is not easy to live with the knowledge that one child (or all the children) rejected God and has turned to his or her own way. There are many parents with just such an experience. Whether the parents are believers and serve the Lord in full time ministry, or whether they have a secular occupation, the responsibility for raising the children according to God’s standards remains the same. Every parent is obligated to raise his or her children in accordance with God’s regulations adopted through the reading and keeping of his Word, and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. While parents with secular occupations are more “easily forgiven” for failing to raise their children according to God’s principles, parents who serve in full time ministry to God are observed under a magnifying glass, and often condemned even if the Bible does not make that distinction.² God is equally graceful to all who strive to build their characters and the

- 2 God calls: “Hear, O, Israel...” (Deut 6:4-9). Since the Church is a spiritual Israel, the message applies to all: “Hear, O Church...”, and not only, “Hear, Ye spiritual workers, while the rest are free from the responsibility...” It is not written explicitly, but the practice is such that much more is expected from God’s servants (God also expects more regarding the sanctification and the serving), but the responsibility for raising children is equal for all parents in all times. As it was for Israel, so it is for the Church. God’s servants are expected to leave full time ministry to God if they have failed to raise their own children well. For if they have not been able to raise their own children, how can they raise the church? In other words, they are not a good example to the flock. People in church must be able to look up to their elders, therefore they carry a greater responsibility. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-9, there are standards for an overseer’s ministry. Because of these divine requirements which God has set up for elders and deacons, it is rightly expected that the leaders and spiritual workers serve as a model. There is no accusation here (the Bible does not permit that to anyone, while at the same time it encourages the naming and confessing of sins), rather an invitation to administer seriousness in the performing of any ministry to God. Unfortunately, there are two extremes in practice: withdrawing from full

characters of their children to reflect his glory.

One of the many mistakes believers make is to conclude that certain things will never happen to them. For example, we know we have done all we can to raise our children well and to be able to claim that our children will never go astray from God or become problematic teenagers. Still, a humble attitude of dependency on God in this issue is a much better choice than this assertion. We must remember that children also have a free will, and they grow. When they grow up, they become independent and it is entirely upon them whether they will cling to God or to the world. Everyone can fall, and therefore the Bible cautions us to be careful not to fall (spiritually) even if we think we stand. Children, too, can fall and parents need to be near in order to be able to help them. Children should be certain that their parents will love them regardless of their sin, even if it is repetitive. In the gospel of Luke, chapter 15, there is the narrative of the prodigal son and the loving father. The father accepted his son again (after he repented), but it can not be said that he came to like him again because he had never stopped loving him. Did not God have the right to reject and condemn him? Yet, amazingly, he did not do that, but instead, he showed him mercy and acceptance through his father. Thus, we also should not condemn and reject others. If children do not listen to their parents and move on to their own way, the parents must be careful not to lock the door behind them because they might return after realizing and repenting from their sin. If parents have locked the door behind them, then they will not be able to stand as the loving father of the prodigal (which represents our heavenly father) with arms outstretched, and hug them. My husband and I often tell (and show) our children how much we love them, and none of our three children questions our love toward them because long ago we told them that we will love them equally even if they commit a horrible sin, even though we would greatly suffer because of it. Does not the Word of God teach us exactly this?

Building Friendly Relationships with our Children. Jesus once said to his disciples: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned

time ministry (or in the worst case, taking the ministry away from a person) without taking the reasons into consideration or detecting any responsibility, or remaining in the ministry regardless of the negative testimony. A drastic example of this would be the refusal of God’s servant to help others because of failure to win his own children for God, or on the other hand, when a divorced minister serves as a marriage counselor. Christians need to know exactly what their call from God is, and endeavor to fulfill their commission, but also be able to discern if God has denied them the anointing for ministry because of personal sin or failure. As parents, however, we are called (this is a lasting commission) to work for the spiritual wellbeing of our children, even seemingly unsuccessfully and although only in prayer, because only God knows the outcome of our prayers.

from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). Christian parents should not be masters over their children, rather friends who will share life with their children and communicate to them all they have heard from God. If parents want to be able to help their children, especially in problematic situations and important decisions, they should build parental-friendly relationships with them from their earliest days. Many parents grasp at an illusive hope that their children will obey and honor them as teenagers or as young adults even though they have failed to build up a relationship with the children during their crucial years. Husbands and wives should be able to communicate as spouses, parents and families, along with the required communication with God. If parents learn to communicate with their children (and communication must always be mutual), they can hope that love and harmony will dominate in the family, as opposed to disturbance and division. Although we are called to mutual acceptance within the family, there are things we should not accept even with our loved ones, such as sin and self will, for the benefit of the whole household, ourselves, and most importantly for God’s sake. Therefore, we are called to raise our children in the love and instruction of the Lord.

Discipline in Raising Children

In his perfect plan for people, God has provided a “manual” for spiritual growth – the Bible – which also contains additional instructions for the family, and thus for raising children in the love and instruction of the Lord. It could be that the assertion, “for ten measures of love only one measure of discipline is sufficient” does not sound realistic, but I know from experience that it is possible. We have raised our children with much love, but in firm discipline for which they have learned to honor us, and which also shows obedience to God. Immersed in the unlimited love of the parents, loved and appreciated as a priceless gift from God, children do not resent their parents for disciplining them because they are overwhelmed by love. In such an environment, children learn that discipline is necessary and they accept it more easily. If we first explain to them why discipline is necessary, and if we lead them through life (instead of driving them without personal example) toward higher standards of conduct, they will understand and willfully accept necessary correction in love. In the book of Hebrews, we read about the way God disciplines us as his children:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons” (12:5-8).

Discipline administered in love will not hurt children, but help them.

A global misconception must now be clarified. Under the influence of non-Christian world views, many (even a great number of Christians) believe that children should not be disciplined and that eventually they will learn how to discover their potential. Contrary to this conventional opinion, my husband and I believe that according to the teaching of the Scriptures, we should train our children with discipline and instruction along with the required love. We began raising our children in the discipline of the Lord at their earliest ages, when they were only several months old.³ We have taught them what is good and what is not: “For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life” (Pr 6:23). One of the extreme measures for training in the discipline of the Lord is spanking, or use of a rod. The Bible is explicit about this: “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Pr 13:24), and “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death” (Pr 23:13-14).

God’s law is given to us as an overseer to help us mature and reject sin. Therefore we need to discipline children from their earliest ages, not because we do not love them, but exactly because we do love them, so that they can embrace God’s law and escape the snares of sin. In his book, *Bringing Up Boys*, Dr. James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family and one of the leading experts on family, recommends prompt (immediately after the action) reactions and discipline in cases when children refuse to obey and show disrespect to their parents. Late advice or punishment does not acquire the desired result. Numerous times over the long-term experience of raising children, we have been convinced that we are doing well in the timely disciplining of our children. Without this, little children become experts in moving the boundaries of what is allowed. Our task as their parents is, for their benefit, to always bring them back within the boundaries set by God.

Whenever the discipline of one of our young children was required, as parents we primarily tended to examine the situation realistically and objectively, involving the child. This included a dialogue about the act committed by the child that should not be committed, followed by an explanation about the necessity of the discipline, and lastly, setting the form and height of the punishment. The

3 As a measure of discipline, we used to gently spank our children on the diaper by hand. It did not hurt them, but by their reaction we knew that they could understand it. It is interesting that at the age of only a few months, they knew the difference between when we would discipline them by way of a gentle spank on the diaper, and when we would pat them in affection. Although they could not yet speak, they showed us by the expression on their faces.

form and height of the punishment should vary depending on the personality of the child and his or her readiness to cooperate; usually an instructive dialogue is sufficient. We have discovered that it is important to include the child that is being punished in the dialogue about the required punishment. Children usually know what is good and bad, what is wrong and right, so our children often surprised us by setting a higher punishment for themselves than we as parents appropriated.⁴

Considering the fact that very young children are immature, discipline is justified and necessary for them to learn what is good and bad; it can also serve as a timely escape from situations where a child may otherwise have to face the destructive consequences of their actions (as is the case with many teenagers).

Almost everything in the lives of children can be solved with a reasonable dialogue and a prayer, under the condition that this method is used from their earliest ages. Trust is built through years of continuous involvement in the life of a child. Otherwise, success is not guaranteed. An older child (a young man or a young woman as Edwin Luis Cole calls them in his book *Sexual Integrity*) has already built up attitudes on almost everything, and hardly accepts the “lecturing” of his or her parents who were absent from his or her life when he or she needed them most. We must necessarily consider adolescents as adults, because that is the way to their heart and cooperation. A great deal of patience and mutual forbearance is needed in order to achieve an agreement. But in our experience, by an argumentative dialogue and invested desire for understanding of the attitudes of the young person, rules of action can be agreed upon for almost everything (for example regarding going out, fashion styles or word usage, outer appearance, music, etc.). But in the plentitude of “rules” parents should be careful not to neglect what God considers as important in young people. That is their heart. If parents succeed in getting a child to act and look according to the

- 4 When our oldest son was only six years old, he did something that required a punishment. After explaining that what he did was wrong, we examined the possibilities for the most painless and yet most instructive discipline. Our goal was for the instruction to be lasting, not only temporary. We were greatly amazed at the objection of our son when he heard that we had assigned him a smaller punishment than what he deserved. When his father asked him how many “spankings” he would have given his son for the same act, he answered: “More, (it was almost twice more) because what I did deserves far more than what you said.” After the punishment, he thanked us, confirming that it was for his own good, and not because we do not love him. This sense of “righteous judgement” at such an early age surprised us both. Realizing that his involvement in the evaluation of the situation and the reduction of the punishment out of pure love acquired its goal, we instructed him to do good and administered a minimum of (but firm) punishments seasoned with a warm hug and a new affirmation of our love for him; and his brother and sister were meanwhile learning what they should and should not do! After that occasion, we rarely had to explain again why discipline was necessary. All three of them knew that it was for their own good, and that we value their obedience.

parent's understanding of the spiritual, but their hearts remain cold for God, not much has been achieved, except additionally discouraging them from investing efforts in getting closer to God. This is not to say that parents should accept everything the young adults in their families lay before them. Parents have the responsibility to govern their families. Children must obey their parents, and not vice versa. But, the family cannot walk together if they do not agree upon it. I strongly believe that each family needs to endeavor to build and spread God's kingdom together. If we leave our children on their own, how can we win others for God? We should not neglect the fact that many unbelieving parents also put great effort into raising their children well. Still, Christian parents additionally endeavor to raise their children in the Christian faith, for God's glory. This is a major difference between well raised children from the world (although not according to God's principles, but to the accepted principles of the world), and well raised children raised for the glory of God according to his principles as a token of hope for future generations.

A teenager's growth and development happens on all levels, thus, the child grows physically and resembles an adult person, but also grows emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Parents must provide all of their children a spiritual and physical security (a shelter) and protection from what might harm their development and growth. If, for the sake of physically healthy development, a child needs to consume a healthy diet, it is even more important that the child receives spiritually healthy food. Without diminishing the importance of healthy nutrition, emphasis is still placed on healthy spiritual development, where parents are primarily called to help in choosing spiritual food for their adolescent children. First and foremost, the parents themselves must know God's Word and incline toward living in accordance with it, otherwise they cannot be convincing in this matter when raising their children. If they do not believe in what the Bible says yet require their children to believe, it would be like parents who smoke teaching their children about the damaging effects of smoking, alcohol, etc. God did not provide the Bible only as a manual for training others, but parents too must live in accordance with it, otherwise their word is powerless. This is the reason why many children do not obey, much less honor their parents. To be an example to others is a biblical requirement, not an option. Regardless of a child's age, parents are a primary example (excellent, average or bad) of Christian living to their children. Therefore, raising teenagers should be pervaded with biblical principles applied in their parents' lives, and by which principles they prepare them for the immediate entrance into adulthood. This applies to resolving conflicts too. If conflicts arise, parents should resolve them according to biblical principles. It will not be long before some adolescents will establish a family of their own and become primary examples to their own children. The question

is, however, will that be an example pleasing to God or an example according to secular principles?

Carol E. Lytch asserts that parents can establish their children in the faith by keeping the explicit rule to go to church regularly as a family. She maintains that children should be involved in the life and ministry of the church, and that parents should give them their unreserved support by establishing cooperation with the parents of other teenagers in the church, etc. A teenager's regular involvement in the life of the church during that turbulent age will determine his or her future steps and firmly pave the way by which he or she will go after becoming independent, especially when opportunities come in which he or she will need God's help. The influence of God's Word over many years' of children's attendance in church with their parent(s), will be like a river bed where God's living water flows – the Word – with a solution for all of life's situations. Before the parents even realize it, such instructed young people will be able to serve the Lord in his intended purposes because, as faithful parents, they have assured their children water from God's wellsprings. Although teenagers consider themselves to be sufficiently mature, and though they really can make an independent decision to receive Christ, they need their parents' help and the parents must remain a versatile support for them as long as necessary in order that they may come to maturity as people whom God will use.

Raising teenagers should be biblically based. Taking the Scriptures as a foundation, we certainly will not bypass the passage in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where we see the multiple role of God's Word in training believers, as well as their children and teenagers: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Parents must keep in mind that they are not raising their children only for themselves, but for God and the sake of his kingdom. Our teenagers need to be those who will be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" or, as in Ephesians 4:12, holy people of God prepared "for works of good service."

There are several things parents should avoid in disciplining children, especially teenagers. One of them is to avoid discipline during the height of anger because of the danger of unjust punishment. If parents are too angry, the punishment will be more severe and often unsuitable in comparison to the deed that was done. Physical punishment of teenagers is rarely needed. It is too offensive for that age. James Dobson (2001) recommends physical punishment for children under ten years old, and then only in cases of willful disobedience, while with teenagers other methods are to be sought such as dialogue, agreement, motivation, and, in extreme cases, deprivation of something valuable to them, such as going out, fellowships, monetary allowance, etc. If the goal is not achieved

even with the denying of privileges, additional temporary working obligations can be assigned (Selig, Arroyo, 1989). Wisdom is needed in determining the level of punishment in order to prevent resentment and resistance toward labor. On the contrary, parents need to teach their children that working is a blessing, not a punishment.

The most important thing for parents to know (and teach their children) is that the authority for raising children is given to them by God and that they should act accordingly. Not everything put under authority is really given by God; therefore, parents must be honest and allow themselves only what the Bible allows them to do, considering the rule that it is better to obey God rather than men. In raising children, God's Word is the ultimate authority for Christian parents and their children. The goal of the training should be instruction in the Word for the purpose of building a character that pleases God, and not just to seize control (Selig, Arroyo, 1989). The goal is to instruct them toward the way of righteousness, and not to devalue them. They need help in making important decisions, setting goals, building their character, adopting moral values, and in working diligently and serving God and people. Parents need to lift them in their prayers and pray with them. There is much more we can do to build up our children. Love is a practical thing, and not only empty words.

Teenagers are hardly deceived by empty words, and once they feel deceived, they lose trust and a desire for cooperation. Parents' repentance and outstretching of the arms anew helps, with a new promise they are not going to break.

The Position of Family Times of Worship in Raising Children

Every Christian family is a home church, and as such should gather together to worship God. Just as glorifying God in church includes worshipping and praising, singing, ministering with the Word and prayer, so family worship should include the same elements, only in a relaxed environment. The parents' personal relationship with God here comes to expression. If they are close to God, the children can see and experience that, and eventually develop a personal relationship with God as well. Parents cannot pretend in front of their children or present themselves differently. They see how their parents live; therefore it is important to be consistent. Parents can not tell them one thing and do another. Children need good examples. If parents are really faithful to the Lord, it will not be difficult to teach the children the same principles.

For many years now we have had a time of family worship on Friday nights which has changed over time and been supplemented with different activities. Some elements of the worship usually do not change, such as prayer, praise and worship of God, as well as the reading of the Word. We strive to maintain it

regularly and to be spontaneous in the worship. Our conversation includes all that happened during the week and what we anticipate in the next; we put that into the context of God's Word with the purpose of instruction and practical application. Then we proceed with thanksgiving and prayer (when we all participate individually) for the specific needs of our family as well as for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

Conclusion

As individuals, spouses and parents, we have endeavored to express our faith openly and without reservation in all of life's situations, and I believe that it has served as an example to our children and as an anchor for strengthening their faith in God. After twenty years of marriage, out of which over eighteen have been pervaded with the raising of our three wonderful children, we can thankfully give glory to God for enabling us by his grace to bring up our children with love and understanding, and thus make a contribution for the future generations to whom our children and those of other believing parents will be able to convey the good news about the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although I believe that God will reward our efforts and investments in raising our children if we do it as unto the Lord (Col 3:23), I must, however, warn that children have a free will, as do adults, and it is possible that they will not follow our instructions, but rebelliously move onto their own way. We are called to pray continually (1 Thes 5:17) so we should do that for our children too. If we, as parents, fear that our children might reject the Lord or fall from him after we have done everything we can to raise them according to biblical principles, we should commend our children in prayer "to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25) who will keep their souls and continue to raise them according to his own heart, as he indeed, also cares for our training in the faith. With this unlimited providence of God through the Holy Spirit and our diligent endeavor to live devotedly and in the fear of the Lord, I believe that we can raise our children in such a manner as for them to be able to carry the glory of God to the ends of the earth.

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Raising Children in an Evangelical Family Environment: Biblical Principles Applied to the Family

Sažetak

Bog je kao Stvoritelj osmislio obitelj i odredio standarde i pravila za življenje i djelovanje obitelji. Kao osnovna jedinica društva, obitelj treba odražavati Božju slavu. Božji plan za brak i obitelj nije se promijenio, promijenio se samo ljudski odnos prema toj instituciji. Stoga je nasušno iznova isticati važnost funkcioniranja obitelji prema biblijskim standardima. Ovaj se rad bavi odgojem djece u evanđeoskom obiteljskom ozračju koje, uz ostalo, podrazumijeva Božju prisutnost, čitanje i vršenje Božje riječi, ljubav između roditelja, molitvu i proslavljanje Boga. Predočeni su jasni ciljevi odgoja. Rad daje vrijedne i proživljene primjere biblijske stege. Obraduje pitanje discipline od dječje do tinejdžerske dobi, povjerenje, odgovornost, komunikaciju te odnos s Bogom. Na kraju članak ukazuje na važnost obiteljskog bogoštovlja.

Ključne riječi: obitelj, brak, Božji plan, odgajanje, disciplina, bogoštovlje