

5. The Biblical Foundation for Helping Children Grow Spiritually

In our last topic, we saw that the mother and grandmother of Timothy helped to develop the foundation that Timothy needed in order to place his trust in Christ. Today, we will be looking at the Biblical foundation for helping children to grow spiritually and to move toward spiritual maturity. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says, “And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This is the process of helping a new Christian grow from the point of spiritual birth to the point where they become a man of God. These verses give us some key Biblical principles to help that growth occur.

Once a child, or any other person, places his or her trust in Christ, then there are some key principles to help them grow and mature spiritually. First, we see that the growth must have Scripture as the foundation. Verse 16 says that all Scripture is God-breathed. The view that a child develops of Scripture will have a very important impact on how that child will apply the Word of God to his life as that child grows and matures. If a child does not understand that all Scripture is God-breathed, that child will not expect the Word of God to change and transform his or her life. In contrast, if a child knows that all Scripture is God-breathed, that child will realize that the Word of God will change his or her life. Godly parents help a child to recognize that all Scripture is God-breathed.

Second, we see that all Scripture is profitable or useful. The word that is translated “profitable” is used four times in the New Testament. It is used twice in 1 Timothy 4:8 where we read, “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” Here, we see that physical training is useful for some things but godliness is useful for all things both for the present and for the future. Titus 3:8 says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” Here, we see that Christians are to pay attention and make sure that they do good works because these things are useful. As we combine these thoughts with 2 Timothy 3:16, they show us that all Scripture is useful to develop godly lives and to equip us for effective ministry to others. That is why godly parents want to help their children become familiar with the entire Bible.

Third, we see that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine. The word that is translated “doctrine” is used 21 times in the New Testament. Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” In this verse, the word is translated “learning”. We see that the entire Word of God was written for our learning so that we can grow as we learn, understand and apply the Word of God to our own lives. The Word of God helps us to know what we will become as our lives are being transformed by it. As we help our children learn, understand and apply all of Scripture to their lives their lives will also be transformed by the Word.

Fourth, we see that all Scripture is profitable for reproof. The word translated “reproof” is only used one other time in the New Testament. That is in Hebrews 11:1 where we read, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In this verse, the word is translated “evidence”. The verb form of this word is used 18 times including John 16:8-9 which says, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” Here, we see that the Holy Spirit convicts and convinces the people of the world of the sin of unbelief. Taken together, we see that Scripture provides the evidence to convict those who are not Christians of their sin of unbelief. If our children are not yet Christians, the Word of God gives them evidence of their sin of unbelief.

For Christians, we see that the Scriptures convict them of other sins. Hebrews 12:5 says, “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him.’” Here, we see that the Lord rebukes people of their sins when they hear the Word of God. This means that the Word of God shows people where they come short of what God wants them to become as they see what they are doing wrong. Christ shows them through the Word those areas where their lives still need to be transformed. As we teach our children the Scriptures, they are learning what areas of their lives need to change.

Fifth, we see that all Scripture is profitable for correction. This is the only place in the New Testament that the word translated “correction” is used. It means *to restore something to its original or right state*. When God created Adam and Eve, they were without sin. That was the original state of mankind. Sin completely changed that state. Mankind became controlled by separation from God; fear, guilt and shame within and blame of others. Christ is called the second Adam. Correction is helping a person learn to understand and apply the Word of God to their daily lives so that their lives are being transformed. As we help our children grow in their understanding and application of the Word of God in and to their lives, they are in the process of becoming more and more like the second Adam and less like the first Adam.

Sixth, all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness. The word “instruction” is used in Ephesians 6:4 where it is translated “training or nurture”, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” The word that is translated “righteousness” is used 92 times in the New Testament and speaks of *actions that are pleasing to God*. These include things like integrity, purity of life, and right thinking, feeling and acting. As we instruct our children from the Word of God, our goal is to help them learn what the Word of God says about the way to grow in godly character and life.

Seventh, Paul told Timothy that the goal of parents teaching Scripture to their children is to help each child become a man of God. First, we see that a man of God is a Christian that has become complete and mature. Colossians 2:10 says that every Christian is complete in Christ, “And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” However, Ephesians 4:14-15 warns that we are not to remain immature, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the

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head--Christ--..." Instead, we are to grow and mature. As a result, our goal as parents is to help our children grow to spiritual maturity.

Eighth, Paul told Timothy that the second goal of parents teaching Scripture to their children is to equip their children to speak the Word of God to others. In the Old Testament, we see that the phrase "man of God" is used seventy times and always spoke of a person that spoke for God. As Christians, 1 Peter 2:9 says that every Christian is a priest that is to speak for God, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Here, we see a goal of our teaching as we teach our children is to equip them to speak for God.

Ninth, Paul told Timothy that we are also to equip our children in several other areas so that they are equipped for every good work. The other verse that uses the phrase "the man of God" in the New Testament is 1 Timothy 6:11, "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness." There were certain things that Timothy was told to flee. We need to show our children from Scripture things they need to avoid to be transformed. In verses 3-5, Timothy was told to flee from pride and the things that are the result of pride. In verses 9-10, Timothy was told to flee from the love of money and the things that go along with a love of money.

Timothy was also told to follow certain things. In verses 6-8, he was told to pursue godliness with contentment. Here in verse 11, he was told to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and gentleness. Then, in verse 12, Timothy was told to, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Finally, in verses 13-16, Timothy was told to be faithful in following the example of Christ until Christ comes. As parents, we are also to equip our children by our example and by our teaching of Scripture so that they begin to do these things in their lives.

The Lord has given us a great privilege as parents or church leaders. Many of us have physical children and we are to help them become mature and equipped for every good work. Some of us may not have physical children. However, all of us can have spiritual children as we teach the Scripture to newer Christians and show each one how to become a man or a woman of God. Just as most people have physical children, Christians are to grow and mature and then have spiritual children to whom they teach the Scripture and show how to become mature. Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 4:17, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." May the Lord richly bless you as you help both physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity.