Kingdom Parenting
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PART I

Foundations

By Myles Munroe
As with everything else in life, effective parenting begins with God. Who is better to turn to for the foundational principles of parenting than the Author of life and the Founder of marriage and the family? From the dawn of the human race, God’s design has been for us to raise up offspring to populate this planet. Producing and parenting children are a big part of the original mandate humanity received from our Creator:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness;…” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:26-28 NIV).

God’s first recorded statement to man established the principle of parenting: “Be fruitful and increase in number.” Man was
commanded to reproduce after his own kind and God created “man,” both male and female, to make human increase possible through sexual union in the context of marriage. In other words, God created Adam and Eve and then told them to have children. And just as God created Adam and Eve in His own image, their children would in turn bear the image of their parents.

Genesis 5 verifies that Adam and Eve fulfilled this mandate faithfully, as did the generations that succeeded them:

*This is the written account of Adam’s line. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man.” When Adam had lived 130 years, He had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth* (Genesis 5:1-3 NIV).

God created man (male and female) in His own image and likeness. Notice that the general term “man” includes both male and female; men and women together make up the race that is known as “man” or “mankind.” And together they in turn produced children in their image and likeness. The rest of the chapter lists each generation of Adam’s descendents up to the days of Noah and his sons. In each case, whether referring to God and man or to parents and their children, the words “image” and “likeness” deal with more than just external appearance; they relate also to internal qualities.

**Goal #1: To Reproduce the Nature of the Parent in the Child**

From God’s original mandate to man to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth, we can identify three basic goals of parenting. The first goal of parenting is to reproduce the nature of the parent in the child. This is part of the meaning behind the word “image.” In creation God is Father and mankind are His offspring. By creating us in His image, God intended for us to have and to reflect His nature. In the same way, the first goal
human parents should have is to see their nature reproduced in the lives of their children.

**Goal #2: To Reproduce the Character of the Parent in the Child**

The second goal of parenting is to reproduce the *character* of the parent in the child. This is the other part of “image.” The full meaning of the word “image” refers to the true nature and character of a thing. So when God said, “Let us make man in our image, our likeness,” He meant, “Let us create man in such a way as to reflect our nature and character.” In other words, we were created to be like God: to think like God and to display His distinguishing characteristics—“like Father, like son.”

Likewise, human parents want their children to be like them; to share the same values, carry the same demeanor, and display the same characteristics. We have succeeded as parents if people who know us can walk up to our children and say, “You remind me of your daddy,” or “You’re just like your mama.”

**Goal #3: To Reproduce the Behavior of the Parent in the Child**

Parenting should have the goal of reproducing the *behavior* of the parent in the child. When God created mankind, His goal was to bring about children who were like Himself in every way: children who looked like Him, thought like Him, displayed His characteristics and qualities, and acted like Him. Human parents should pursue the same goal with their children. Ideally,
children should view God and the world and respond to life in the same way their parents do.

**Have No Fear**

If we want to find the perfect parenting model, we need look no further than the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus was just like His Father because they were of the same essence. In every way Jesus was the prefect representation of His Father. He even told His disciples plainly, “…Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father…” (John 14:9 NIV). Time and again Jesus made it clear that He did nothing on His own but only what He saw His Father doing. (See John 5:19.)

Speaking of Jesus, Paul said in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” In other words, Jesus was the perfect reflection of His Father in every way.

Here’s an example. One of Jesus’ most common phrases to His followers was, “Fear not,” or, “Be not afraid,” or some other variation of this message. God the Father, as Creator and Lord of all things, fears nothing because He is greater than everything. As a faithful and loyal Son of His father, therefore, Jesus had no fear. This is one reason why Jesus’ life on earth, short as it was, was so powerful and effective. Unlike us, Jesus was never driven or overcome by fear; He was driven only by His Father’s will. But He constantly had to comfort and reassure His disciples against being afraid. These were men and women who were supposed to be just like Him, created in the image of God. Patiently and in love He rebuked them for not acting like “Daddy.” In fact, one reason Jesus came to earth was to parent us or “re-parent” us, so to speak, by teaching us how to think and act like our heavenly Father.

Paul followed the same tack with Timothy, his son in the faith, when he wrote, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7 NKJV). God
is not a God of fear and, as His children, we should not be children of fear. Likewise, we should raise our children to be free of fear, because our goal as parents is to reproduce children who will be like their parents and, ultimately, like God, the original Parent and Father. Love is the antidote to fear.

John wrote:

…God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:16-18 NIV).

God wants His children to bear His likeness. When we were born again and received the Spirit of God, we received a spirit not of fear but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. This means that the same power that belongs to God belongs to us because we are His children. The same love that characterizes Him, characterizes (or should characterize) us. Our Father’s mind should be our mind, as well. In other words, we should be fear-free, power-filled, loving, level-headed people because all these qualities characterize our Father, and we have the same “stuff” He has.

What difference would it make in your life if you could live without fear? What difference would it make in your children’s lives if they could do the same?

Key Note:

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Be Imitators of God

Sadly, however, most of our children these days live lives that are filled with fear. Why? For one thing, the world can be a fearful place. But the main reason our children live in fear is because we, their parents, live in fear. We have never learned to cast out fear by trusting completely in the perfect love of God—so our children never learn how to do it either. We cannot pass on to our children what we do not possess ourselves.

This is why we cannot live one way and tell our children to live another. Children are great natural learners and they learn best through observation and imitation. If our words say one thing and our actions another, our children will pick up on our actions and ignore our words. For this reason we must be very careful to live the way we want our children to live.

The old adage, “Do as I say, not as I do” is a recipe for parental failure. Our children learn much more from our example than they do from our words, especially if our example and our words do not agree. Words and examples that reinforce each other, on the other hand, work to great effect in reproducing our nature, character, and behavior in our children.

Parenting is powerful because it shapes the minds, attitudes, and actions of our children for either good or bad. An ancient proverb says: “Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right” (Prov. 20:11 NIV). Children learn their behavior by watching and imitating the people they see the most, usually parents, especially during the child’s formative years.

So how can we set the right kind of example for our children? By referring, as always, to the Bible, the instruction manual provided by God, the original Parent. Paul, who knew something about spiritual parenting, wrote: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1-2 NIV).
How do we imitate God? By living a life of love. Remember, love is the antidote to fear. And how do we know how to model love? By looking to Christ as our example. Jesus modeled the nature, character, and behavior of His Father, and if we imitate Him in word and deed, we will provide our children with a reliable model on which to pattern their own lives.

**Parenting Must Be Intentional**

No one parents effectively by accident. Effective parenting must be intentional; it must be planned, focused, and have an expected end in mind. Good parents don’t leave the job to chance; they do everything they can to prepare themselves and to know what they are doing.

Even for conscientious parents, however, there are a couple of major challenges to deal with in raising children well. The first of these is the simple truth that parents can only parent the way they themselves were parented. In other words, no matter how conscientious you are in your desire to parent your children well, if your own parents did a poor job—if they failed to model the love and character and behavior of God before you—you likely will have a difficult time overcoming the effects of their example. Try as hard as you will, there will be times when things get tough as a parent and you will find it very easy to slide into the pattern established by your own parents, because that is what is most familiar—and most comfortable. Learning solid biblical
principles of parenting is the key to breaking those negative patterns, but it will require serious and continuing effort.

The second challenge we all must deal with as parents is the reality of sinful human nature both in ourselves and in our children. Genesis 5 says that Adam produced children and descendants in his own likeness and image. He did a good job; like Adam, we all are “perfect sinners.” Adam was so “effective” in his parenting that when he fell, his descendants fell. We inherited his sin nature. The Bible says that because of Adam’s disobedience, disobedience entered into the hearts of every human being.

Because all human beings are sinners, none of us had perfect parents and none of us will be perfect parents. All we can do is learn the biblical principles, commit our way as parents unto the Lord, and trust Him to work powerfully in our children’s lives beyond what we can do on our own.

Sin essentially is rebellion, and it is deeply rooted in all our hearts. Anyone who is a parent knows that rebellion is in the hearts of their children from birth. You don’t have to teach your child to lie; lying is “built in.” You don’t have to teach your child to be jealous of your affection toward another child or to be greedy for another child’s toy; your child comes by these traits “naturally.” This is why the Bible says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15 NKJV). Where did this foolishness come from? By direct lineal descent from Adam, the first human father. And the “rod of correction” refers to disciplined, deliberate, conscientious, purposeful, and intentional parenting.

Whether negative or positive, parenting is a powerful and inescapable influence. Everybody is parented by somebody. We each reflect in our lives and our attitudes the nature, character, and behavior of those who have influenced us the most. We tend to become like the person who parents us and he or she may or may not be our biological parent. This is true also for our children. You can be a father or a mother and still not be a parent,
because a “parent” is the one who has the most formative influence in a child’s life.

Consider the implications of this: Who parents your children? Who has the greatest daily or ongoing influence over their growth and development? A schoolteacher? A daycare worker? A babysitter? Television programmers? Either you parent your children or someone else will, because children are not equipped to raise themselves. They will find guidance somewhere, and unless you provide it, you may not like the results.

My oldest brother and his wife told me a story once about their daughter and her daycare center. The two of them are elders in their church. They love the Lord and are raising their children to love and serve Him, as well. One day when their daughter was two or three, she dropped something or hit her hand and uttered a four-letter curse word. Her parents were shocked. They said, “What did you say?” So she repeated it, because she thought they really wanted to hear it again. This man and woman of God, who are church elders and are full of God’s Word, had just heard their precious daughter speak a word she had never heard at home!

As a result, my sister-in-law called the daycare center and spoke to the director: “What kind of language do you allow the children to speak? Our daughter is saying a word we don’t appreciate and have never taught her. Can you explain this to us?”

The director “explained” that they were planning to move their daughter from upstairs to downstairs because the upstairs...
children upstairs talked that way. What kind of an answer is that? My brother and sister-in-law both found it necessary to work and were paying good money to a daycare center that was teaching their daughter things that were opposite to what she was being taught at home!

Don’t misunderstand me; my point here is not to evaluate the benefits or deficits of daycare. My point is this: who’s parenting your children? Conscientious parents must be on constant guard to protect their children from negative formative influences. Effective parenting must be intentional!

**Righteous and Godly Offspring**

The three primary goals of parenting are to reproduce in children the nature, character, and behavior of their parents. According to the standards established by the Creator in the beginning, parenthood takes place properly only within the context of marriage. So marriage is the vehicle God established through which children are to be brought into the world. By design, all children are supposed to have two parents: a mother and a father who are married to each other. Believing parents have the responsibility to raise righteous and godly children. In fact, the Bible even says that this is one of God’s primary purposes for marriage:

*Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?* (Malachi 2:10 NIV).

This verse stresses two things: first, that God is our Father and second, that marriage is the context through which God wants to father us. The “covenant” here refers not only to the spiritual covenant God made with the nation of Israel, but also to the covenant of marriage, which is a visual symbol of the spiritual covenant. That marriage in view here is made clear several verses later:
the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth (Malachi 2:14-15 NIV).

The nation of Israel was in deep trouble because they had abandoned their covenant with God and began to serve foreign gods. Also, the Lord no longer paid attention to their offerings, in large part because they were breaking the marriage covenant through divorce, thereby disrupting God’s plan and desire to raise up “godly offspring.” God not only wants to father us; He also wants to father godly offspring through us. What an awesome responsibility—and privilege!

Ultimately, marriage is not for us as much as it is for God. Marriage, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:31-32, is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Two people become one flesh. And Malachi says that God made them one because He was seeking godly offspring. In effect, God is saying that the whole point of marriage is so He can have some people through whom He can parent kids.

So the primary purpose of parenting is to produce righteous and godly children for God. The word “righteous” means “right positioning” or “to be in right relationship.” In other words, the

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The purpose of parenting is to raise up children who are in right relationship with God—children who are in line with God’s will and who desire to please Him—children who reflect His nature.

This involves nurturing and training a child’s conscience to be tuned toward God. A conscience bent toward pleasing God will help children avoid sinful or destructive behavior, not out of duty but out of love. They will desire to please God because they love Him. The proof of good parenting is seen in how our children behave in our absence. If they do the right thing for their conscience’s sake, even when we are not around, we have succeeded as parents. We have raised righteous children.

The word “godly” means “god-like.” Godly children are children who reflect not only God’s nature but also His character and His behavior. Here is where the challenge really comes in for parents. We cannot hope to raise godly children unless we are firmly committed to living as godly parents. This means we must allow God to shape and mold and direct our wills and our hearts—we must allow God to Father us—so that we become faithful, loving children who do His will out of love and thereby model godly character and behavior for our children. In this way God can fulfill His plan and desire of fathering godly offspring through us.

Biblical wisdom says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6 NIV). There is nothing more worthwhile or of greater importance in this world than for parents to commit themselves to living godly lives and raising righteous and godly children who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is God’s design. This is His plan. And this is the purpose of parenting.