

Parenting Years 6-12

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[0 : 00] All right. Well, I think we're just about there and settled. If we haven't met before, my name's Scott Firewaltus. I'm one of the pastors in Beaufort.

I also help oversee our community groups here at One Harbor. And I have the privilege of helping to lead this session for 6- to 12-year-olds. And we also have some panelists, the Blues, Mark and Jen Ballou, Amanda Morrow, and my wife, Katie, who we'll have up here at the end of my talk. I'm hoping we have some fun together and can kind of feel a bit of a team spirit as we kind of wade through these waters of parenting, the good, the bad, the ugly.

We've got a value at One Harbor. Hopefully you guys have heard before that it's okay to not be okay. It's just not okay to stay that way. And so I think for some of us who maybe are struggling a little bit with parenting, I want you to know that it's okay.

And we've taken a big step just by being here this morning. So I really appreciate that. As a church, we appreciate it. And I'm sure your kids will appreciate it over time. So the plan for the next little over an hour is I'm going to share some thoughts I've got that I've been thinking about this week.

[1 : 18] And I think I'm hoping will be helpful for you. Do that for 15 minutes or so. And then we're going to bring some of these parents up and just open it up to questions. Brian Hart really teed us up well, I think, with a great presentation on how the gospel can really influence how we parent, our motivations, and just how we go about shaping our children.

And then let's get into some of the practicals. You know, that's kind of the big picture. I'm hoping some of what I share gets into a little bit more specific. And then by the end, we can get into the nitty-gritty.

Whatever questions you may have from that talk, from mine, we'll get into discipleship and technology. You guys remember some of our other points for the Q&A;?

Developing gifts. Developing gifts. Parenting multiple ages. We'll try to touch on a few different areas. And then if you just have questions that don't fit in any of those categories, we'll get to those too.

Sound good? All right. A little bit more about me. I grew up an only child, and now I have five kids. So I've got the perspective of kind of both worlds.

[2 : 30] We've got kids ranging from 8 to 22. Our youngest, Leah, is 8. Couldn't be cuter. Annie, 10. Jack, 12. Our oldest daughter, Emma, is 14.

And then I've got a son who's 22 but is actually the newest addition to the family. His name's Andres. We met him when he was 15, adopted him at 16, and he's been a part of our family the last six years.

We've been on kind of a wild ride, a little crash course, and having a teenager and now a young man in his 20s. And I think, full disclosure, when Leah asked if I would help lead this, part of me was excited to just try to be helpful.

And then I thought, wow, for every day that I feel like I'm parenting well, I feel like there's four or five other days where I'm just feeling like I'm falling short. I'm kind of missing in action as a dad or I'm there but I'm not really there.

I don't know if your dads can relate to any of that. I'm just distracted with other things. And really, if I can confess something to you, there's days where I feel like I've really taken my kids for granted.

[3 : 38] And that's kind of heartbreaking when I hear myself saying that. You know, I'm missing moments with them. I find way too often I'm focused on their flaws.

You guys ever do that? Where you see all the things that aren't quite right as opposed to what is good and beautiful in their life. And I think as parents, or at least for myself, I can find myself focused more on the pain than the privilege.

And the responsibility and burden over the delight and the honor and just the possibilities of these children as they grow up and who they're going to be and what their lives will be about, what their families may be in the future.

And I was just thinking about this, you know, kind of hanging out with our youngest, Leah, the other day and just remembering when I was a kid. And I would be so excited to get, like, I grew up watching Star Wars.

And I might get a little action figure. And I was blown away at how cool this action figure was. Maybe for some of the ladies, you got a plastic doll. And it was like, wow, this is like, this is a really cool gift.

[4 : 45] And now God has entrusted us with people, little real life kids that, you know, make us laugh and bring so much joy and challenge and really refine us as people.

And yet I kind of miss that. And I miss the joy in that they are gifts to us. So part of what I would love for us in the next 15 to 20 minutes is to really appreciate our kids and the amazing fact that God has gifted them to us and entrusted us with them.

So I'd like for you to take just a moment in the spirit of that and think about your child or your children. Put them in your mind. Picture them and think what makes them special to you.

Maybe something about their physical appearance, their personality, the things that make you smile. What are you appreciating about them?

What do you enjoy about them? Our children are precious, aren't they? They're absolutely precious. Psalm 127 tells us that children are a gift from the Lord.

[6 : 02] The God of the universe who created all of this, sustains it all, gave you your child, your children. And it's not some accident, some random thing that was predetermined.

So guys, our time with them is flying by. So I've got an 8-year-old Leah, but we've also got a 14-year-old Emma, who I feel like just a few years ago was going to elementary school and 6 years old, cute, and just, you know, wondering how elementary school was going to be for her.

Now she's 14 and about to go to East Carteret. Last night we're at the mullet bucket game, and I'm just realizing, wow, my little girl is off to high school. Time just flies.

And the reality kind of hit last night. As fast as these years have gone, the next four will go by like that. And then whether it's college or who knows what the future looks like.

So as a reminder for me, and maybe, you know, kind of joining me where I'm at, our time is passing by. It's fleeting. What are we going to do with our time with them?

[7 : 06] How do we make the most of the opportunities that we have with our children while they're with us? So I think we appreciate them. We cherish them. We look to build them up as best we can.

And the reality, I mean, I think Brian hit it great. God has entrusted us with him. There's a sense of stewardship in this gift that he's given us. You know, and thinking about what he wants for them, I think it's the same thing he wants for us.

And there's a lot of different ways you can word this. Brian put it a little differently earlier. But I think he wants us to be mature, faithful, confident adults who live full, heroic lives glorifying him.

Think about it. That would be a great life. He wants us to build our lives on the solid rock of Jesus and his ways over the shifting sand of our culture and culture's ways.

So how do we do that? How do we raise up kids to be mature, faithful, confident adults who live full, heroic lives? And I think that we do it through three main areas.

[8 : 10] There's so much that can be said today. So we'll just kind of touch on these three areas. But I'm hoping this gives us a framework for how we think about developing our kids, developing people in our life. It's through three ways.

Relationship, direction, and capabilities. Relationship, instilling direction, boundaries, and possibilities. And then the capabilities.

How do you do certain things? How do you cook food? How do you make friends? All of these things. Our kids don't just know. Someone needs to teach them that. So we'll start with relationship. This is where we get to express love. The reality is we may be the closest person our children are ever in a relationship with.

Maybe one day it's a spouse or a friend. But at least for the time being, we are their main thing. And I feel like they have two primary needs.

[9 : 07] Significance and security. They need to know that they matter. They need to know that they matter, that they're important to us and to God. We want to build their confidence, but with a

strong sense of identity in God.

Who God's created them to be. They need to know that we're for them. I think that's huge. It's like when Brian shared about getting that B. I was pretty happy with B's in high school.

But you could tell that was a real struggle for him and how much it meant to know that his father was for him and believed him. It wasn't about a grade as much as who Brian was becoming.

So identity is huge. I think as parents, we get to really speak into our children's lives who they are. Let's tell them, you are.

And complete the sentence. You're fully loved by God. You're fully loved by your mom and I. God made you. You know, I think sometimes when I see something special about our children, in my better moments, I might say, boy, God made you to be fast.

[10:14] Or, you know, God sure made you with a great sense of humor. Whatever it is, they just tie it back to the fact that, yeah, they're special. But God made them that way.

And so they can really appreciate who they are and who God is. But I think there is that balance as well of when they stumble. You know, say, yeah, we're sinful.

We make mistakes. We fall short. But because of Jesus, God sees us as his sons and daughters. I mean, that is an incredible identity well beyond being, you know, my son or daughter.

That's true. That's special. That gives them a sense of security. But the more they realize that God loves them, loves them enough to send his own son, Jesus, and now they're secure for eternity and that they're fully loved.

That's powerful stuff. We get to shape how they see themselves. Some general tips, kind of in this whole area of just loving them well, relationship. And I'm preaching to myself right here as reminders for me to not just be around them, but to really engage with them.

[11:21] I think a lot of it is focused attention. You know, Brian talked about technology. I'm the worst at just, without even thinking of it, I pull my phone out. And in that moment, what am I telling them?

What is it that they're picking up? Not only that that's normal, but that whatever I'm looking at in my phone is more important than them in that moment. So put the phone down. Remove distractions. You know, we'll talk more about electronics and technology later, but I think it really starts with us. What are we modeling? What are the boundaries that we're putting in place for ourselves? I think eye contact is huge.

To listen well. This is another area where I'm consistently falling short, but to really listen and to show them we're listening, maybe even repeating back some of what they're sharing with us.

Oh, wow. You know, meeting them kind of where they're at in the story and if they're excited to join them in that, if they're struggling to really feel some of their pain. I think an important thing, at least for dads, I think a lot of our moms do this really well, is the importance of touch.

[12:28] You know, to give a hug, to give kisses, to rub backs, to tickle backs, to, you know, even just I'll grab my sons kind of from back of their neck, you know, and just draw them in close.

I mean, they're not getting that, hopefully, from too many other people, right? These are our moments to really express our love and our care for them. Have fun together, you know?

I mean, we were kids once, too. You know what it's like when all of a sudden an adult, especially mom and dad, they enter into their world and play the games and go to the park and play chase and tag.

Those are fun moments. I had a friend of mine share with me something that I haven't done nearly as much as I'd like to, but just the idea of surprising them, whether it be with a little gift or all of a sudden, hey, let's go do this, kind of the spur of the moment, just excitement and breaking up the monotony of the day for them.

And I think for me, you know, it's kind of, even though I'm trying to help them to be unselfish, a lot of times I'll invite them into my world, hey, do you want to go on the boat with me? Do you want to do the things I want to do?

[13:40] But to say, hey, what do you want to do? If they like a, you know, Fortnite game, play Fortnite with them, or at least watch and try to figure out what they're doing. You know, I think it's just, it's, yeah, it's respecting them enough to, yeah, to really engage with them in what they like, to play with the hamster, you know, do the things that they enjoy alongside them.

And I think it's in those moments that we can have the meaningful conversations that we want to have with them. It's when we're just sitting in the treehouse, and all of a sudden something might

come up.

To be fully present in that moment, I think bedtimes, I'm realizing, are huge. If you guys aren't maximizing bedtimes, I encourage you to try it. It's amazing that they don't want to go to bed. They want to stay up later. Like, this is our moment where they actually want a little more time, and they're happy to spend it with us, whether it's reading stories, telling stories.

A little tip, maybe you guys are already clued in on this, but, you know, I always thought I had to make up these stories. And, you know, part of me kind of enjoyed the challenge, but after a while, it's hard to keep coming up with new stories.

[14:56] So I started to go, hmm, what movies did I like as a kid? I'll tell that story if they haven't watched it. And it's like, Dad, you're the best storyteller ever. So I remember I told my boys, this probably isn't good for every age, but I told my boys the Stand By Me story, where the boys go off on this camping trip and find a dead body, and, I mean, all this, but I had inserted me and my friends, who they've met as the characters in this story.

I mean, you want to talk about, like, they're hanging on every word, you know? And, man, it was just such a good moment that I had with my boys. So I think sharing stories, and within those stories, you can emphasize certain aspects of what wasn't good and what was heroic and helpful.

And I think one area that, you know, it might sound like the thing we have to say at a church parenting workshop, but it's beautiful, it's true, it's something I hope for all of us to enjoy, and that's praying together with our children, whether it be before bed, whenever those moments are, and not just when they're scared about something, but just day in and day out, praying for them, reminding them of who God is, what God's about, and then praying for other people.

I mean, just like I'm selfish and self-centered at times, they can be, and to help them start to think beyond themselves, their friends, their family, the people that are struggling around them, asking God to move in big ways, I mean, that is a cool thing that we get to enter into with our kids.

1 Thessalonians chapter 2 says, For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father, as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

[16:46] So a few things in there stood out, we're to encourage them. You can do this. Picking them back up when they've stumbled, to comfort them, be with them when they're hurting, give them gentle perspective.

You know, I think, when I think back to when I was a kid, it felt like that was the moment. You know, they get cut from the team, or something happened, somebody rejected them.

We have the perspective of knowing that that's just a small moment in the grand scheme of their lives, an even smaller moment in the grand scheme of eternity, but it doesn't feel like that for them. So I think there's just an opportunity for us to bring some perspective, a listening ear, some encouragement. And then I love the last part. Let's urge our kids to live lives worthy of God, to push to overcome adversity and obstacles to live for God.

So let me ask you a couple questions as we kind of close out this section. What if we maximize our relationship with our child? What would that look like to you?

[17:53] If you were just at the most special, beautiful relationship you can imagine with your child, what does that look like for you? And what could that lead to?

For them, for you? And to maybe lead yourself just in one step towards that. What's one thing that you can do that by doing it would make it easier for that relationship to be like that?

So as we're building relationships with them, we want to offer them clear direction. In a world full of noise, and part of the beauty of technology is there's lots of choices, but it also makes for just so many different stimulus in their lives, different ideas.

We get to help them discern what's important, what's not. We get to disciple them to see life through a Christian worldview, to see possibilities, to clarify what's really important to the trajectories.

For some of our kids, maybe the 10-year-olds, the 12-year-olds, to see this is what this leads to. They don't know that. We've seen it. We can share stories from our life, from our friends' lives, and then values.

[19:11] As we disciple our kids, and we're reading from the Bible, and we're reading Jesus' storybook and some different things that we'll probably get into later, we're showing them what God's values are, but we also have some of our own.

For me, loyalty is just really big. So in the stories I tell, I want to really emphasize that. When I see them being loyal, I want to really congratulate them and highlight that for them.

Helping the underdog. There's probably different things for you that just resonate as kind of your core values, these things that are really important to you. We get to give that direction, those sense of possibilities, what that can lead to.

And then also, kind of on the sides of the riverbanks, what are the boundaries? We kind of know what our boundaries are through our parents, through society, through the Bible.

Our kids don't necessarily know those, so we get to spell that out. What's acceptable? What's not? This is where discipline fits in. The purpose of discipline isn't to punish. It's to give consequences, to guide, to redirect, to get them on a path that leads to peace and joy and good.

[20 : 23] Saying no is good. Them hearing no, that's not a bad thing. Also redirecting them at times to what is good for them. And I think, let's remember as we discipline, let's be patient with them.

I mean, think, maybe you're different, but at least for me, God has been incredibly patient with me. Incredibly patient with me. And yet, somehow, I expect our kids to just, I say something once, and they're just a different, mature person.

So let's remember how patient God's been with us. Be patient with them. Let's reinforce identity.

You know, I think this is an area to say, hey Jack, this isn't like you. You're kind.

You're thoughtful. You're, you know, kind of whatever the opposite is of whatever he's been struggling with. And remember, it's a process.

We need to, as Brian said, I love that. Let's be faithful in the corrections. Gentle, consistent. When we're upset, when we're flying off the handle, that's not the time. That's going to be punitive.

[21 : 27] It's going to be punishment to just say, hey, you know what, we're going to come back to this later and address it when we're calm. And I think the goal of discipline for our children is that there is an obedience, not because they're fearful of the stick, but because they trust in us, they trust in God's way that this is what's good for them.

So I kind of close this section. What might happen if we instilled in our children clear direction? not just for today, not just for this week, but over the next 10 years, 20 years of their life, what might happen if they had clear direction, a clear sense of God's way of life, that they had godly ambition, clear healthy boundaries, discipline that led to maturity?

What would that mean for them throughout their life? And this is the stuff that shapes them. So how does that happen? I think it's through this idea of expanding their capabilities and being really mindful to use our unique talents, our knowledge, our wisdom to teach them capabilities.

You know, how to make friends, how to make decisions, practical things, how to make their bed, how to cook food, how to learn, I mean, you know, how to find things.

I mean, Google's amazing, but how do we go about finding out about, you know, what to buy? All those things that we've learned over our lifetime, our kids don't just inherently know. We get an opportunity to shape them in that.

[22 : 57] And I think the best way is to build around their interests. If my son Jack wanted to buy a computer, that's great. Let's figure out, like, how would I buy a computer? What are the ways that I'm researching it, finding the best fit, and tap into what they're already interested in?

And I think teaching them to know God, to love God, to repent quickly, how to repent, how to be a good friend, and to think it's less about just the principle and more to instill healthy habits.

I read a quote once that stuck with me. People do not decide their futures. They decide their habits, and their habits decide their futures. So what are the habits you can help them develop that are going to be most impactful for them?

What are the habits that you can help them develop? And as I said earlier, our time with them is going fast. Each day really matters.

So what if we were diligent with the remaining time, and we taught them healthy habits to fan into flame their love for God, to teach them the skills they need to be responsible for themselves, and to serve others?

[24 : 06] what might that look like for them? And let's remember something that is kind of sobering, this idea that more is caught than taught.

We can talk about things all day long, but the reality is so many of the things that I do are what my dad did. I'm just following their example. And the reality is more than likely our children are following our example.

It's not just what we say that's important, but we're rubbing off on them. It's the combination of our word and deed, that integrity there, that's what cuts, that's what resonates in their hearts and minds. Whether they realize it or not, we must practice what we preach. 1 Corinthians 4 says, I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then be imitators of me.

[25 : 07] If our children were to imitate us, what would that look like as they grow older? Would it be a good thing? I encourage you to maybe even get home today, write on a sheet of paper, what are the things that you want for them to be imitating from your life?

And what are the things that you wouldn't want? And those are the areas that A, we need to turn from, but even in that, we get to model repentance to them. Hey, I'm just realizing I haven't been a good role model for you in this area.

Here's why. It's not good. I'm turning from it. I'm moving away from it. I don't want life to be like that. We want to be able to say, follow me as I follow Jesus.

So, the most powerful teacher that our kids will ever have is us. It's not a book, a DVD, a sermon, even a great teacher they have for one year of their life.

They have us day in and day out. They're looking to us, we're rubbing off on them, they're listening, our words are shaping them, their identity, their values, the way we live, whether we're generous, whether we're forgiving, whether we're friendly, whether we're, you know, you name it.

[26 : 23] They're seeing in our lives what's really important. So, right now, if any of this, whether from Brian's talk, things I'm talking about, if you're thinking, man, like, I've really kind of been falling short, I encourage you, it's first step is just repenting.

I'm planning on repenting to my own children later today, just letting them know, hey, as I prepared for this, I'm just realizing so many of the areas that I've been falling short. Here's why. I don't want that to be true.

I don't want that to happen again. And even have a little gospel moment of how I can feel free. I don't have to feel ashamed of that because of the power of Jesus in my life.

So if you're feeling that, man, just use that as your first step in really modeling something special for your kids. Well, just like our kids get to learn from us and others, we thought it would be really cool for everybody to not just listen to me and some of my experiences, but we do have some people I'd love to bring up.

And we'll kind of guide through a few of the kind of the common areas we think are challenging for us as parents. But like I said earlier, if there's anything else that doesn't quite fit one of those boxes before we end today, definitely raise your hand and we'll answer those as well.