

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, May 9, 2021

THE GOOD PARENT

Guidebook for a Successful Family

(Mother's Day)

A television commercial for a pest control company shows two happy families, one on the right of the split screen and the other on the left. On each side, the camera shows the family sitting on a comfortable sofa. It also shows the flooring and the foundations of the house under them. The voice described the family on the left, whose house had a solid, strong foundation. No problems there.

Then the announcer turns to the family on the right. He lowers his voice a bit, and speaks with urgency as he explains that termites are busily munching away on the foundation of the house of this cheerful, unsuspecting family. Little did they know that a disaster is about to happen!

You and I have been reminded time and again within recent years that the American family is under siege. A series of graphics in a newspaper noted that when those 60 and over were young, an average household often included both parents, and one set of grandparents, as well as children.

For those 40 and over, the household of their youth probably consisted of Mom and Dad, and the children. According to the graphic, today's family is more apt to consist of Mom OR Dad, and the children. The most dramatic change in our society has been the advent of the single parent home. And the consequences of such a cultural shift are disturbing.

It was an event from many years ago featuring a well-known troupe of tightrope walkers. The Flying Wallendas were performing their fabulous "incredible human pyramid" in Detroit when tragedy struck. The human pyramid consisted of four men walking across the high wire, supporting three more men standing on poles that were mounted to the walker's shoulder. Above those three men was a woman seated in a chair. What an act!

That night, as the "pyramid" inched its way across the wire, Dieter Wallenda's knees began to quiver. He yelled out, "I can't hold on any longer," and suddenly the entire pyramid collapsed. Most of the family members were thrown to the floor and suffered

permanent injuries. A few hung on to the high wire until they were rescued. It was a horrifying experience for both performers, and the audience.

Many single parents can sympathize with Dieter Wallenda. They feel as if the entire weight of their family is resting upon their shoulders—and many times it is.

We are conscious of the changing nature of the family as we celebrate Mother's Day. Under the best of circumstances, Mother's Day is one of the most emotionally charged days of the year. For a multitude of reasons. For many of us, perhaps most of us, our mother was the most influential force in our lives. Sometimes in ways in which we are not even aware. Some women today are conflicted because they have to work full-time and still raise a family, while their image of what a Mom ought to be was their stay-at-home Mom who had much more time to devote to child-rearing. So, there is guilt, and stress, and sometimes resentment. Many couples sincerely want to be parents, but are not able, so Mother's Day is especially painful.

Each of you brings a special set of circumstances, emotions and needs with you today, but I believe that there will be universal agreement that the future of the family is important to society and to us individuals. Did anyone here grow up with a mother who modeled sacrificial love? Many of us did. There are few mothers who do not put the needs of their family first. Many fathers do that as well.

Former basketball great Danny Ainge, coach of the Phoenix Suns, shocked the basketball world, when he resigned in the early part of the season so he could spend more time with his family. "Anybody can coach basketball," he said, "but my wife only has one husband, and my children only have one Dad."

Most of us do not have the luxury of resigning our jobs to devote ourselves to parenting, but many fathers, as well as mothers, put their families first, ahead of their own needs. Still, it is difficult not to associate sacrificial love with motherhood. It is politically incorrect to speak of a maternal instinct today, but hard to ignore its existence. As humorist Dave Barry observes, "If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball, and saving an infant's life, she will choose to save the infant's life without even considering if there are runners on base."

Many know the story of Susanna Wesley. Susanna gave birth to nineteen children, ten of whom grew to adulthood. Susanna "home-schooled" her children during their elementary years. The boys in the family were so well-prepared by their mother's instruction that they were able to go to Oxford University at the age of sixteen, with only one year of prep school.

John Wesley became the founder of the Methodist Church. Charles, the celebrated hymn writer, composed over five thousand hymns. Samuel, another brother, was a scholarly priest of the Church of England. And one daughter, Martha, was a member of the inner circle of the famous writer, (lexicographer) Dr. Samuel Johnson.

In a letter written by Susanna, to her son John, she told of her relationship with the children. "I take as much time as I can spare every night to talk with each child apart. On Monday, I talk with Molly, on Tuesday, with Henry, Wednesday, with Nancy, Thursday with Jacky, Friday with Patty, Saturday with Charles, and Emily and Suky together on Sunday." Each child had his or her day.

Once when her famous son John struggled with a difficult situation, he wrote to his mother, "Oh Mother, what I'd give for a Thursday evening!" That takes time to go one-on-one with children, but I can make you a promise. A child who gets that kind of personal attention will turn out to be a credit to his, or her, family.

The love of the Good Parent is sacrificial and it is individual and THE LOVE OF THE GOOD PARENT IS ALSO UNCONDITIONAL.

When Christ lay down His life, it was to say God's love is without any limit. In the language of insurance policies, no "preexisting condition" could cause us to be turned down. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Sometimes, religious people have a tendency to put conditions on God's love. "Well, if you are righteous enough, God will love you." But St. Paul writes, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There are no conditions. God loves you. God accepts you. You are loved.

Here is where many parents miss the mark. They don't know how to express unconditional love because they were never loved that way themselves. There was always an "if" connected to the love they received. "if you make Mommy or Daddy proud, then we will love you. If you make good grades in school, then Mommy and Daddy will love you. If you accept our values, then Mommy and Daddy will love you." Always an "If". The cross is the most precious symbol in this world because it represents what everyone desperately needs unconditional love.

Dr. Joyce Brothers said children need to be loved without qualification so the seed of self-esteem can grow. "Such unconditional love does not mean you set no limits," says Dr. Brothers. "Setting boundaries demonstrates to a child how important he or she, is

to you. When a child oversteps, show disappointment with the behavior, not with the child.”

That’s a fine line, but it is an important one: disappointment with the behavior not with the child. In other words, rather than saying, “Tommy, you are a bad boy,” say, “Tommy, you did a bad thing.” Our children are our children whether they live up to our expectations, or not. And we love them—even when they disappoint us. We love them—even though they have not been all we want them to be.

A simple poem has been circulating by an unknown author. It speaks of unconditional love in a beautiful way:

A weary mother returned from the store,
Lugging groceries through the kitchen door.
Awaiting her arrival was her eight-year-old son,
Eager to relate what his younger brother had done.

“While I was out playing, and Dad was on a call,
T.J. took his crayons and wrote on the wall!
It’s on the new paper you just hung in the den.
I told him you’d be mad at having to do it again.”

She let out a moan and furrowed her brow,
“Where is your little brother right now?”
She emptied her arms and with a purposeful stride,
She marched to his closet where he had gone to hide.

She called his full name as she entered his room.
He trembled with fear—he knew that meant doom!

For the next ten minutes, she ranted and raved
About the expensive wallpaper and how she had saved.
Lamenting all the work it would take to repair,
She condemned his actions, and total lack of care.

The more she scolded, the madder she got,
Then stomped from his room, totally distraught!

She headed for the den to confirm her fears.
When she saw the wall, her eyes flooded with tears.
The message she read pierced her soul with a dart.
It said, "I love Mommy," surrounded by a heart.

Well, the wallpaper remained, just as she found it,
With an empty picture frame hung to surround it.
A reminder to her, and indeed to all,
Take time to read the handwriting on the wall.

Well, the handwriting on the wall for today says that a good parent's love is sacrificial, individual, and unconditional. In other words, a parent's love for his, or her, children is a pale reflection of God's love for us. For God, in Christ, lay down His life for us, not only for the world, but for us individually. There are no strings attached. God's love for us is sacrificial, individual, and unconditional.

AMEN!

"S.D.G."