

McCabe United Methodist Church
Confessions of A Struggling Parent: Lessons Learned (So Far) (part 2 of 3)
Luke 1:39-45, 56-58: November 17 & 18, 2012
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Confessions of A Struggling Parent: Lessons Learned (So Far)

First, a confession. I'll be the first one to admit that I wasn't the world's best dad. Ray, hit the nail on the head last week when he talked about not being available for his family. This was also my crime. I hate to admit it, but I was a better dad to the churches I served than I was to my own family.

I had this built-in excuse. I can't be home because there's a meeting at the church and it's my job to be there. Or, I can't go to that activity or game because I have a Bible Study or some class at church. It's my job. Or, I can't be with the family today or tonight or tomorrow because I'm working on my next message or my next something. It's my job after all.

Do you see the problem? Most everything church-related came before my family. I might have been a fair pastor, but I was a lousy dad.

In 1997, we moved from West Fargo to Bismarck. I made a promise to our two youngest. By this time, our oldest daughter had already graduated from high school and she had decided to stay in West Fargo. I told Tracey and Knute, the two youngest, that if they moved to Bismarck and tried to like it, I would do my best to be a better dad.

They agreed. I can report that I was a better dad in Bismarck, but I still wouldn't win any '*best dad awards*'.

This is the first lesson in *dad-hood* or *parenthood*. Be available. I don't care what kind of a job you have, your family has to come first. Yes, you can work hard. Yes, you can climb the ladder of success, but your family has to come first. Period.

Lesson number two is this: You are not alone. I can remember when Nancy and I were young parents. We were scared. What do we do with this ten-pound ball of humanity that suddenly just showed up? Sometimes she was crying, sometimes cooing, sometimes hungry, sometimes wet or worse, sometimes tired and sometimes wide-awake.

First time challenges and concerns came at us like a freight train. "*Oh my goodness, she has a rash, or a runny nose, or a cough.*" What do we do? Or, "*she isn't talking yet. My sister's baby is talking. What's the matter with our baby,*" Or, "*she isn't walking. Our neighbor's baby is walking already.*" And on and on we go.

When it comes to parenthood, there is a learning-curve. The first thing to learn is this: you are not

alone.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew what to do. Do you remember the story? She found out she was pregnant. The Bible tells us that she went with haste . . . with haste to her cousin Elizabeth's house.

Do you remember the saying, "*it takes a village to raise a child.*" Mary went looking for her village. She found a part of her village in Elizabeth. Both of them were pregnant and changing. Their bodies were changing. Their thinking was changing. And so what did they do? They leaned on each other. They learned together. They figured out that pregnant ladies put on weight. Pregnant ladies need a lot of rest. Pregnant ladies don't always feel the best. Pregnant ladies get crabby and it's OK.

Parents, and the rest of us, we are not alone either. God in Jesus Christ is with you. Check out Isaiah 43: *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God. You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.* Isaiah 43:1-4 (NRSV)

Parents, grandparents, young people, old people, rich people, poor people, we are all part of the village and we are never alone. God in Jesus Christ is with us.

Which brings me to my third lesson in parenthood. Education. Education is a learning process. Some of it is formal education through our schools and Sunday Schools and some is not-so-formal especially when it comes to matters of faith and ethics and morals.

Children are always watching. Have you noticed? They're watching not only their parents, but they're also listening to and watching the rest of us. They listen to us and the language we use. They see how we solve problems and handle stress. They hear our opinions and attitudes. They see what's important to us whether it's the church or the family or issues of right and wrong. And as they look and listen, they are learning. They're filing all this information somewhere upstairs and one day they might grow up to be just like us. Scary, isn't it?

This is why I believe our *Family Link* program is so important. I can't think of a better education than for you to sit down with your family every night and spend time with them talking, reading the Bible, discussing the Bible, praying and blessing each other. Can you imagine the good that you are doing for your son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter? Can you imagine the lessons that are being taught when you invest fifteen minutes a day in your family?

If for some reason you are not participating in the *Family Link* program, I urge you to start today.

The last lesson is this: Grace and forgiveness. Grace is love glorified. It's love on steroids. It's love multiplied. Grace is being loved even when a person doesn't deserve to be loved.

Did you hear about little Johnny and his sister who visited their grandparent's farm? They gave him his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target.

One day, as he walked back to the farm, he saw his grandma's pet duck. On an impulse, he took aim and let it fly. The stone hit the duck and the duck fell dead. Johnny panicked. Desperately, he hid the dead duck in a wood pile. He looked up and saw his sister watching him. She had seen everything.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "**Sally,**" the sister's name, "**let's wash the dishes.**"

But Sally said, "**Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?**" And she whispered to him, "**Remember the duck!**" So Johnny did the dishes.

In the afternoon, Grandpa asked Johnny and Sally if they wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "**I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper.**"

Sally smiled and said, "**That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it. Don't you?**" Again she whispered, "**Remember the duck.**" Johnny stayed home while Sally went fishing.

After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he couldn't stand it any longer. He confessed to his Grandma that he had killed the duck.

"**I know, Johnny,**" she said, giving him a hug. "**I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. I just wondered how long you were going to let Sally get by with treating you like that?**"

Guilt. Guilt is like rust on iron. Pretty soon the rust starts gnawing at the metal and eats it away. Guilt does the same to us.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew all about guilt. There's a story in Luke two about a trip to Jerusalem. Jesus was 12 years old and he stayed at the temple while his parents headed back home.

This is the stuff of movies. Somewhere along the way, they discovered that Jesus was missing. Picture this: Joseph thinks Mary knows where he is while Mary thinks Joseph does. Now, try to imagine their guilt when they realize that neither one knows. Listen to their conversation. "**Mary, I thought you knew. Mothers are supposed to know these things.**"

"**No,**" Mary shot back, "**I thought you knew. Fathers are supposed to know.**"

Can you feel the guilt?

Back to Jerusalem they go. Now, can you imagine what they said to Jesus? Take a look at Luke 2:48. **“SON.”** Can you hear the tone of voice? **“SON, why have you treated us like this? Why did you give us these heart attacks?”** Poor Jesus, he probably got grounded for the next two years.

Guilt is when you let the dog lick the mashed potatoes off your daughter’s face. Guilt is when you sometimes give in and let your child eat cake instead of vegetables. Guilt is when you’re sometimes too tired to read a bedtime story to your child. You feel guilty, don’t you?

This is where grace comes in. Grace is looking in the mirror and saying, **“Well, I did it again. But, I’ll do better next time. I’m not a bad mother or father or person. I am learning.”**

A husband went on a business trip. The mother stayed home with their three young children. The mother had one of those days. Do you know what I’m talking about? Finally, she locked all three children in the play room where it’s safe, shut the door, and slid down the wall in exhaustion. Guilt tells her that her mothering skills stink. Grace tells her, **“It’s OK. You’re doing your best. You’ll have more chances.”**

Grace is critical. There is a pattern to grace. First, you give yourself grace. If you don’t feel the grace and love of God in your life how in the world do you expect to show God’s grace and love to others?

Have you ever been on a plane? Do you remember the instructions you’re given by the stewardess before the flight takes off? **“In case of an emergency, the oxygen masks will drop down.”** Now, if you’re a mother with a child on board, do you remember who puts on their mask first? The mother does and then the child.

Grace works the same way. First, you show grace to yourself and then you pass it to others. This is step number two: We show grace to others including our children. Even if your son or daughter shoots the pet duck and kills it, you show them grace and love and forgiveness.

And third, because we show grace to others, that grace will come back to us. Its how grace works.

Today, I have a pretty good relationship with my three kids. It’s not perfect, but it’s pretty good. I love them and I know they love me.

1) Be available. 2) You’re not alone. 3) Education is a learning process. 4) Grace and forgiveness is important. Although these four lessons will not make you perfect, they will make you better.

John 14:27 is a blessing. It’s a blessing for parents, for you, for me, for all of us. The blessing is this: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*

-John 14:27 (NRSV)