


The Principles of Parenting

BY KIM STILWELL

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black beanie and a patterned scarf, is laughing and throwing a large amount of snow into the air. A young child in a brown winter coat and a yellow pom-pom beanie stands next to her, also looking up at the snow. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with bare trees and a bright, hazy sky.

As I look back over 27 years of parenting, I believe there are three main keys that are helpful. Nearly every important part of parenting falls under one of these categories. There are no magic formulas (how I wish there were sometimes), but following these three principles is a huge step in the right direction.

Point Them to Christ

In everything we say and do, we should point our children to Christ. Our lives to be so focused on this that it becomes as natural as breathing. These kind of statements should be scattered throughout our conversations with our children.

"This morning when I was reading Scripture the Holy Spirit reminded me of the neatest thing"

"Isn't that sunset beautiful! I love God's creativity."

"I'm so glad that God decided you should be part of our family."

"Mommy is trying to be like Mary and sit at the feet of Jesus by having my Bible reading and prayer time instead of always rushing around like Martha to get everything done."

We also point our children to Christ when we give them loving correction. When there are consequences for their sinful behavior, we are teaching them to be more Christ-like. When we discipline in love and patience instead of anger, we are pointing them to Christ. When we correct by saying phrases like, "You do not honor God and you do not honor me when you speak to me in that tone," instead of getting angry or arguing back or making their disrespect about us, we are showing them the reason for their ungodly behavior.

We also point our children to Christ by making God's Word important. Do you take your children to church on a regular basis? Do they see you reading the Bible and praying? Do you encourage them to do these things? Do you incorporate teaching God's Word into your routine? (In our family, we required Bible reading and Scripture memory. It was part of our school day. At some point they all reached the place where they took ownership of their own time and God's Word.) Do you share the gospel with them on a regular basis (while not pushing them to make a salvation decision that is not genuine just to please us)?

Another way we point our children to Christ is by how we treat others. Do you reach out to others and encourage your children to do the same? Do your children see you come alongside the hurting? On the rare occasions you must speak negatively about someone to your children, do you do it with compassion and grace or do you "bash" the person to bits? Do you treat your family with the same kindness and respect that you treat those outside your family? (No one is as quick to spot hypocrisy as your tweens and teens.)

Pray for Them

The longer I am a parent, the more I realize how important it is to pray for our children. No matter how busy we are, we can silently pray and ask God for His wisdom and help concerning our children. We can pause a few seconds in the heat of a difficult moment and ask for wisdom and grace. We can also ask His help for ongoing, pressing issues concerning a particular child. Now that my kids are older, I have more time of concentrated prayer for them (and others), and it has been such a blessing to me to be able to pray extensively for them.

Praying helps us realize our dependence on God in our parenting. I'm at a stage in life where my children make most of their own decisions. Jeff and I are here to support, guide, pray, and give advice, but unless we think they are making a sinful decision, one in which we would lovingly confront other brothers and sisters in