



Dr. Beeke interviewed on his book:

Parenting by God's Promises

How long have you studied and taught the subject of parenting?

I've been counseling parents for thirty-three years in the ministry, reading and preaching on the subject of parenting for more than twenty years, and teaching a family class on parenting in our church for four years.

What issues does this book address that are not found in most other parenting books?

Theologically, few parenting books provide a solid Reformed foundation for parenting, emphasizing God's gracious promises to believing parents and their children in the covenant of grace. Practically, few parenting books address how Christian parents share in the anointing and threefold office of Christ as Mediator, and should function as teaching prophets, interceding priests, and guiding kings in the home. Also, few Christian parenting books deal with the common challenges of parenting, such as teaching children to listen, taming their tongues, and handling sibling relationships. Finally, few parenting books have chapters devoted to helping teenagers discern God's will, resist negative peer pressure, and manage their anger.

Why do most books on parenting tend to leave parents feeling guilty instead of helping them?

They focus too much on mandates or imperatives, on what parents must do, without relating that to God's fatherly love, His forgiveness in Christ, His promise of the Holy Spirit's power and guidance – all aspects of His covenant of grace with us, the bedrock of parenting, which truly provides help.

How does the covenant of grace encourage parents?

God promises in the covenant of grace that to those who fear Him, He will be God to them and to their children "to a thousand generations" (Ps. 105:8). He binds His people to Himself forever (Gen. 17:18) and seals that covenant bond with an oath (Deut. 7:8-9). What can be more encouraging than knowing that God's normal way of working salvation is by converting the covenant children of God-fearing parents who seek to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4)?

What do you mean by saying parents are to act as prophets, priests, and kings in the upbringing of their children?

As the Heidelberg Catechism tells us (Q. 31), believers are called Christians because they are members of Christ by faith, and partakers of His anointing as our mediatorial Prophet, Priest, and King. As prophets, we are to teach and train our children spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically. We are to be ministers of the Word in our homes, teaching our children the whole counsel of God with prophet-like diligence, example, and zeal.

As priests, we are to intercede for our children as Christ intercedes for us, and strive to imitate His sympathy. We are also to model Christ's self-denial and self-sacrifice. By our priestly actions, we show the love of Christ to our children.

As kings, we are to help our children discern God's will, defend our children from those who would do them ill, discipline our children to root out evil and promote what is good, and offering them wise counsel to guide them in their spiritual and temporal lives.

What are some practical areas in which you offer help for parents of teenagers?

I try to offer parents help in areas that surface in day-to-day parenting. That includes answering questions such as, how can we as parents train our children to treat their siblings with Christ-like love? How can we help our children learn to discern God's will in life's major areas, such as choosing a career or a marriage partner? How can we help our children fend off negative peer pressure and become strong models of positive peer pressure for their friends?

How can we help our teens cope with anger? What steps can we take to prepare our children for leaving home and for marriage?

How can grandparents minister to their children and grandchildren?

In a chapter on grand-parenting, I show that in addition to praying for their children and grandchildren, grandparents should be willing to offer advice to their children if called upon to do so; use family gatherings for teaching spiritual lessons; offer to take care of their grandchildren when needed; model a heavenly hope; and be examples of denying self, bearing crosses, and following Christ.

You say that parenting can be seen as a triangle, with home, church, and school forming the three sides. In what ways do these institutions interact and support the raising of children?

As parents, we bear primary responsibility for raising our children. Since the church we go to and the schools we send our children to (if we don't home-school) should assist us in rearing our children, they should closely represent our scriptural beliefs as parents. When children hear the same biblical truths taught diligently at home, at church, and at school, the cumulative impact of these truths will register indelibly in their minds so that, in most cases, God's general promise in Proverbs 22:6 will be fulfilled: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

You identify three types of problem parents: consensus administrators, horns of plenty, and wishing wells. What are the results of such parenting? How should parents see themselves?

Consensus administrators run their household by majority vote. Children do not learn submission to authority in such households. Parents who are horns of plenty shower their children with money and gifts. Rather than showing true love, this type of indulgence usually produces self-indulgent, demanding, and ungrateful children. Parents who are wishing wells are ruled by their moods and feelings. These moods are so unpredictable that children never know how their parents will respond to their requests. This tends to destroy their children's trust and offers opportunities for them to manipulate their parents to further their own agendas.

Instead of following these worldly and unwise models, parents should see themselves as representatives of Christ, seeking to train their children in a scriptural manner consistent with how they believe Christ wants them to raise them.

How does knowing the gospel apply to being a parent?

In a thousand ways, but here are just three: First, we must show unconditional love for our children as the fruit of Christ's unconditional gospel love for us. Second, we should not be shocked when our children sin, for the gospel teaches us that we are all sinners. We must not disown our children for sinning, either, for Christ does not disown us as sinners. Finally, the gospel teaches us that we must continually be exercised in the gospel if we are to progress in our growth in grace to God's glory. One of the greatest means of such growth is to strive to rear our children in the ways of the Lord. Repeatedly in the gospels, Christ uses children to bring parents to Himself. Think, for

example, of the father of the demoniac in Mark 9 and the daughter of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15.

How has your knowledge of the gospel helped you raise your three children?

When I am tempted to become angry with my children for their disobedience, I try to remember that my children have never failed me even a small fraction as badly as I have failed Christ. So if Christ continues to love me without fail, why shouldn't I continue to love my children without fail?

Also, as the gospel encourages me as a child of God through all kinds of promises, invitations, and encouragements, I must speak to my children words that comfort and encourage them as they strive to walk in God's ways. For example, as my Father tells me through His Word every day, "I love you," so I must tell my children every day, "I love you."

And just as I trust that Christ continues to work in my life to bring me into closer conformity to His will for my life, so I must persevere in all the tasks of parenting, instructing, praying, confronting, disciplining, helping, and encouraging my children, living before them as a sinner saved by grace, walking by faith.

How would you encourage parents of a child who has gone astray, rejecting their godly teaching?

I would encourage them to continue to trust in God's promises (see Prov. 22:6), to believe in God's covenant faithfulness, and to press on in prayer for their children.

I would also tell them not to panic. Children – especially early- to mid-teens – can go through various stages of rebellion. Some seem to go off the rails for a while, only to return a year or two later with even deeper convictions about walking in God's ways. Keep pleading for wisdom and grace to persevere and for the conversion of your child, remembering that what is impossible with man is possible with God.

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