

# Family Connection

*"Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates." Deut. 6:5-9—The Message Version*

## First Things

The following is an excerpt from **Sacred Parenting** by Gary Thomas



Our natural (but not necessarily holy) inclination to make life as easy as possible for our children, coupled with our focus on what we really want them to achieve, ultimately tells us parents what we value most about life. In what we stress with our children, we reveal the true passion of our own hearts.

In a remarkable message titled "Gospel-Centered Parenting," pastor C.J. Mahaney of Gaithersburg, Maryland, warns that when we spend most of our parenting energy on producing "successful," intelligent, well-behaved children, our good intentions can suffocate even better aims. What is the most important thing for our children? Mahaney asks. Is it to make it into Harvard or Yale law school? Is it to make it to age twenty-one without suffering a single scar or a single broken heart? Is it to raise a child who says, "Yes, sir," and "No, ma'am," and who becomes financially independent? Though these are worthy goals, ask yourself a question. Is a child who has never been in the hospital, who is comfortable and familiar with the protocol of eating at a fancy restaurant, and who is a managing partner at a major law firm—but whose soul is in eternal peril—really the kind of son or daughter you want to produce?

The Bible gives us a strong warning in 1 Samuel. High Priest Eli had two sons who slept with women workers and who gorged themselves on God's offerings. Their father's position allowed them to live in relative luxury, and though Eli despised what they did, he didn't stop them. You might say he chose his son's happiness over their holiness and, in doing so, elicited God's wrath. "Why do you honor your sons more than me?" God scolded Eli (1 Samuel 2:29). Eli's sons became God's enemies, to the point that the Bible tells us, "It was the LORD'S will to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:25).

How terrifying to think that my kids could feel happy on the way to receiving the full brunt of God's wrath! Which is why C.J. Mahaney reminds us that the "main thing" of parenting is praying, working, and striving for our children's salvation—and not just their salvation, but that they, too, will become servants of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I want my children to echo Paul, who called himself "a servant of Christ Jesus...set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). Rather than seeking mere behavior modification, sacred parenting points our children to their need for a relationship with God and his wonderful answer to this need. If they never experience this emptiness, they will never appreciate God's remedy.

If behavior is about achieving the right chemical balance more than looking honestly into our own sinful hearts, then the gospel message of forgiveness, repentance, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit becomes irrelevant. Mahaney tells his son after a bout of discipline, "You see now why both you and Daddy need a Savior?" This is sacred parenting—it looks at the heart, it admits real failing, and it recognizes the real solution: salvation.

If our kids never hurt; if they never sin but are only "sick"; if they never "fail but just get "cheated" by an unfair coach, teacher, principal, and so on—they will never sense their need for a Savior. They will always take Adam's lame approach, blaming someone else for their own spiritual failing. And ultimately they may face God's wrath because of it.

Yes, it hurts us when our kids hurt, but it devastates our kids' eternal perspective far more when we hide their need for a Savior. Our hardest hurt may actually be their *most important* hurt. What a tragic loss if the hurt we spare ourselves is bought at the price of our children's salvation.

C.J. Mahaney's teaching reminds this dad to keep first things first—beginning with the gospel. This means accepting a very difficult but very important truth: Ultimately God's kingdom far out weighs in significance the personal comfort of my children. As much as I adore my children, as crazy as I feel about them, I betray them if I put their happiness and comfort over God's overall purpose in their lives and in our world.

*"When a parent loses the early confrontations with the child, the later conflicts become harder to win. The parent who never wins, who is too weak or too tired or too busy to win, is making a costly mistake that will come back to haunt him during the child's adolescence. If you can't make a five-year-old pick up his toys, it is unlikely that you will exercise any impressive degree of control during his adolescence, the most defiant time of life. It is important to understand that adolescence is a condensation or composite of all the training and behavior that has gone before. Any unsettled matter in the first twelve years is likely to fester and erupt during adolescence. The proper time to begin disarming the teen-age time-bomb is twelve years before it arrives." - James Dobson, **Discipline with Love.***

The message "Gospel-Centered Parenting" by C.J. Mahaney can be purchased at [www.sovereigngracestore.com](http://www.sovereigngracestore.com).