

CELEBRATION OF PARENTHOOD GUIDE

THE CHURCH AT BROOK HILLS, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

INTENTION OF 'CELEBRATION OF PARENTHOOD'

The gospel is at the heart of God's purpose for all people. Therefore, the gospel should be at the heart of all parent's desires for their children and should affect every part of their family life together. As new family members are added to our families, we hope small group members will join in the celebration of these new additions and begin to pray for the gospel to become real to them through the example and counsel of their parents, through everything that happens in their home, and through the influence of their local church family.

Families play an important role in accomplishing God's purposes for each of us to know and walk with Him. As soon as God created man and woman, He said "...a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Genesis. 2:24) He told them, "...Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth..." (Genesis 1:28) bearing His image (Genesis 1:26-27) throughout all the earth.

Creating family units that bear His Image has been a part of God's plans for mankind from the beginning. We see that clearly at creation in Genesis 1-2 and in the Ephesians 5 instructions for the way husbands and wives should relate to one another. As we add children to our families, parents have an awesome responsibility of raising them to know God, love Him, obey Him and bear His Image throughout the earth.

As Creator, ultimately each man, woman, and child belong to God; yet in His infinite wisdom God entrusts children to parents to "...bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4). Each family member has responsibilities within every family (Ephesians 5: 22-6:4) that can only be carried out by God's grace through prayer. An important avenue of God's grace to families is through a Faith Family who is practicing the "one another's" of Scripture and who are using their spiritual gifts to build up one another in Christ. Sharing life together in the intimate community of a small group helps provide parents with the encouragement and support they need to love their children and one another in a way that models the gospel to their children.

In 1 Samuel 1:11, 26-28, we see that Hannah was barren—without child—for many years. Because she so desperately longed for a baby, she wept before the Lord, making a vow to God that if He would bless her with a child, then she would "give him to the LORD for all the days of his life" (1 Sam. 1:11). God heard Hannah's prayer and blessed her with a son, named Samuel. In response, Hannah kept her vow and took Samuel to the priest, saying, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD" (1 Sam. 1:28).

Regardless of how God brings children to their parents—through biological birth or adoption, yielded surrender is the attitude we as parents should have toward our children and their relationship with God. We should constantly strive to see our children as "given over" to God as we prayerfully and scripturally lead them through the work of the Spirit of God in them and in us. We should see our children as given to us by God to shepherd and lead for a season, but we must be dependant on the Word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ to do His work in us and through us to them.

Our families should reflect God's instructions to the Israelites to make Him and His Word the center of our family life:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut. 6:4-9).

"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him." Psalm 127:3

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Parent's Challenge:

Small Group Leaders: Please use the following information as a suggested guide as you challenge parents to raise sons and daughters "given over" to the Lord.

1. You . . .

- At the heart of your family is *your* own personal relationship with Christ. Your family will only be as strong as each member's devotion to Christ and His ways. The gospel of Jesus Christ—and how that message has affected your life—should be at the heart of raising your children.
 - If they are comfortable, allow family members to share a short personal testimony of how they came to Christ with the small group.
- Each parent and family member should daily think about what God is doing in his or her life, and the ways they are seeking to grow in Him. Strong families are made up of members who are individually committed to knowing God more deeply on a daily basis, and to following His ways for themselves and their family.
 - Read Colossians 3:1-17, spending a few minutes discussing how following these specific commands for holy living for followers of Christ should affect our family relationships.

2. Your Marriage . . .

- In Genesis 2:18, God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* God took one of Adam's ribs and created Eve and the two became one flesh. The greatest gift parents can give children is a marriage that reflects God's love. When raising children, parents must remember that before they were parents, they made a covenant with each other before God to love and support one another until death causes them to part.
 - Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 for a Biblical perspective of the type of love that God desires for parents to model to their children. Discuss these elements of true love and how they parallel the vows they made when they joined together in marriage to create a family. Talk about why it is important to live out these words in front of their children.
- Husbands and wives must be an example of Christ in the way they serve each other. By the way you treat each other, you are showing your children how they should relate to each other, to you, and their future spouse, if God desires them to marry.

3. Your Parenting . . .

- Teach your children. Deuteronomy 4: 4-9 says, *"Be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them"*. Parents need to be intentional in the ways they teach their children God's ways. As God told the Israelites after they left Egypt, God's Word must be at the foundation of your family life. Help your child learn how to make right choices by seeking to align their decisions with the Word of God. Study God's Word so you can teach it and teach them the gospel (Eph. 2:8-10) daily.
 - Read Proverbs 22:6. Discuss what it means to "train" children.
- Be an example. When a parent lives out the gospel according to God's Word, Scripture says, *"blessed are his children after him"* (Prov. 20:7). Paul's words to the Corinthian believers should be a challenge to Christ-centered parents to be able to say to their children: *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1).
 - Read Romans 12:1-2 and talk about what it means to be a "living sacrifice."

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- Pray for your child. James 5:16 says, “*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*” Make God’s Word the basis for your prayers for your children. The prayer of Christ-centered parents powerfully covers their children in ways that will produce change for a lifetime. Our prayer should be for our children to grow “*in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men,*” just as Jesus did (Luke 2:52).

EXAMPLES OF CELEBRATION TIME TOGETHER:

What should your ‘Celebration of Parenthood’ time look like other than talking through the information provided above? A few examples include having 20-30 minutes of dedicated prayer time at the family’s home with whom you are celebrating; review some are all of the Scripture and thoughts from the handout together; have some fellowship time together; invite friends and family members of the said family to join you; allow various small group members to share some of the Scripture and thoughts with everyone along with things God has taught them about parenting under Christ’s leadership. Encourage all small group members to participate in this time of celebration. Emphasize that each group member needs to speak truth into the lives of one another and commit to pray for each other that each parent would model Christ as they shepherd their children.

If you have questions about a baby/child dedication, please contact Kristy Wilder at kwilder@brookhills.org.

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