

Pastor-teacher Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

DOCTRINE OF PARENTING-7 (The malady of the child-centered marriage)

God established the blessed unity of the powerful bond between a husband and wife *over* their relationship with their children before any children existed.

Genesis 2:24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

The blessed relationship between a husband and a wife not only precedes their love for their children. Their love for each other is to continue growing during the raising of the children and long after the children have left the home. However, in our broken society parents are increasingly becoming more child-centered than spouse-centered. This is not good for the child or the marriage. Many parents feel they are doing themselves and their child a favor by making almost everything in the family about the child. By making the child the most important thing in life, the child will be less prepared for adulthood, and the marriage will be put at greater risk for stagnation and the “twenty-year marital fracture,” when divorces occur when children become independent. When many of today’s children become independent, they lack maturity and responsibility in no small part because they were almost “idolized” or at least pampered throughout life. Consider how difficult it would be for a child to grow up being the special focus of attention only to leave the home and enter into a world that is not going to treat him the way he has come to expect.

Many parents today are afraid of their children: They want their children’s love more than anything else, and feel it represents proof that they are doing a good job as parents. In former years, the majority of parents primarily wanted respect from their children, which made things considerably easier for the child and parent. Parents weren’t so afraid of being momentarily disliked by their children for enforcing the rules. Now, a post-modern psychological revolution is taking place in many homes. Parents feel weighed down with a sense of guilty responsibility. They are led to believe that everything they say or do to their children will have a lasting effect of good or evil. As a result, many have become uneasy, embarrassed, frightened, and frankly immobilized as their children practically take over their homes. The net effect of all of this is that many modern parents are afraid to demand respect from their children or their children’s friends.

Many parents have surrendered to a permissiveness that is both unworkable and devastating. They have become weak, passive, and indulgent. They continue to give to their children, and the children never stop taking. Often this is a reaction to the parents’ own failures or deficiencies in life: e.g., “I did not have this as a child, so I’m going to see that he does—no matter what!” They want their child to be thin because they were fat; they want their child to be athletic because they weren’t; mothers push their daughters into unwanted careers because they do not enjoy being a housewife; mothers who had no boyfriends growing up, push their daughters into silly and premature “steady relationships;” and fathers who push their sons into careers because of their own goals or missed opportunities. Instead of parents learning from their bad experiences, they compound them *into* their children. Instead of preparing the child for

adulthood, many parents live vicariously through their own children and when the children do not measure up, they are devastated.

What can be done about an unhealthy child-centered family? First, each parent should understand the partnership is more important than parenthood. How you treat your spouse is more important than how you treat your children. You can't really love your spouse and neglect your children. A child's most basic security is knowing his parents love each other. He is assured by this that he will never be abandoned, and is part of a strong, satisfying relationship. The Bible always speaks of marriage responsibility between partners, before it speaks of family responsibility to the offspring.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Colossians 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

1 Peter 3:1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3 And let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. 7 You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Second, parents who make their marriages first priority provide a wonderful model of marriage for their children. The only course on marriage most children ever take is the one at home. Where does a boy learn the privileges and responsibilities of a husband but by watching his father? The greatest gift a man can give to his son is a strong image of stability and tenderness, a daily example of courage and integrity, a balanced combination of leadership and love—all focused by dedication to Jesus Christ and Bible doctrine—Truth as such.

And what does a girl need to see? A supremely happy, grace-oriented wife, beautiful with the charm of a gentle and quiet spirit, attractive because of her love for the Lord and her love for her husband. She loves the Word of God and lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. She is not frantically trying to live her life through her children. Instead of creating a narcissistic monster, she provides a wonderful example of what it means to be a beautiful growing believer adorned with grace and humility.

Third, marriage is permanent while parenthood is only temporary, Gen. 2:24. This leaving-cleaving relationship of a man and a woman is the essence of a family. There is no evidence that children hold a marriage together. *Children were never meant to be the hub of the*

family. Their place is on the periphery, sheltered and loved but respected as children and expected to behave that way. *The center of a family is the relationship between the husband and the wife. All else revolves around that.* In this way, when children leave the family they can do so with the least disturbance to the family unit. If they are the center, they cannot emerge without a serious fragmentation of the whole. The function of the parents is gradually to make themselves unnecessary, to equip and to prepare the child so he establish himself in society as a fellow adult.

A marriage begins with two people and will end the same way. It runs the cycle of parenthood and returns where it started. It starts with a couple in love but doesn't necessarily end this way since there are more divorces after twenty years of marriage than any other time except the first three years. Often this is because of a child-centered home, and when these children are grown and gone, there is no more common center of interest. And these parents, in their efforts to do the best for their children, have actually allowed their children to come between them—to the detriment of everyone involved. In this way, children become home wreckers through no fault of their own.

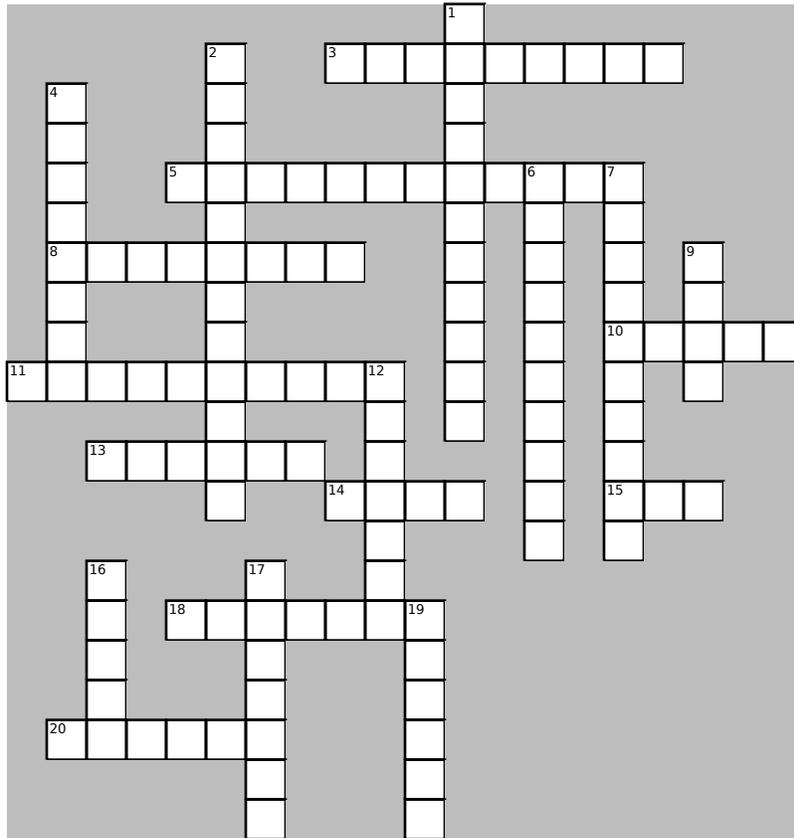
It is important to continue to grow the marriage through all of its various cycles. This requires growing spiritually together in the Lord through His Word, keeping your partner first in your affection—ahead of your children. Find your completion and satisfaction as a human being in your spouse, so you won't seek it from your children. Continue the courtship. Lack of affection between father and mother is one the greatest causes of a deteriorating marriage—which becomes more obvious when the children leave home. Don't allow yourself to be a slave of your child's activities. Don't let the Little League, music lessons, athletic events, and parties to negatively effect your time and relationship with your partner. There will come a time when the child will leave, and you will find yourself in an increasing blissful state of marriage or empty and bored life as the kids now have their own lives—to some degree without *needing* you!

Marriage is not usually wrecked by some spontaneous affair but rather by a slow leak—continued negligence and inattention. Marital vegetation can take place even while a couple lives, eats, and sleeps together for decades even if that is all they do. It is vital to invest your life and love in your partner so you both can share in the responsibility of raising the children together, all the while growing in deeper love year after year for each other. Only by doing this can a partner enjoy life regardless of how the child turns out and avoid the curse of depending upon a child or his positive or negative volition. Then and only then can parents continue to be a position to be a blessing to their child.

Parents who make their children the center of their lives cause untold misery on themselves as well as add pressure and discomfort to the child. There is a phenomenon, even among some in the doctrine circles, where parents actually hold over the child's head the fact that the children had the privilege of being raised in Bible doctrine: “After all of the doctrine I have taught you (cf., “after all I have done for you).” The problem, once again, is that the parent is child-centered instead of God-centered. Parents are supposed to provide for kids. The idea that the kids owe the parents for doing what the parents are supposed to do is ludicrous. It is every parent's responsibility to train, love, and provide for the children. The children do not owe the parents for that which the parents are supposed to do *before God*. Every adult offspring must be given the freedom to live his life before or away from the Lord! All we can do is train them up in the Lord and leave the rest up to God.

In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don

Parenting-7



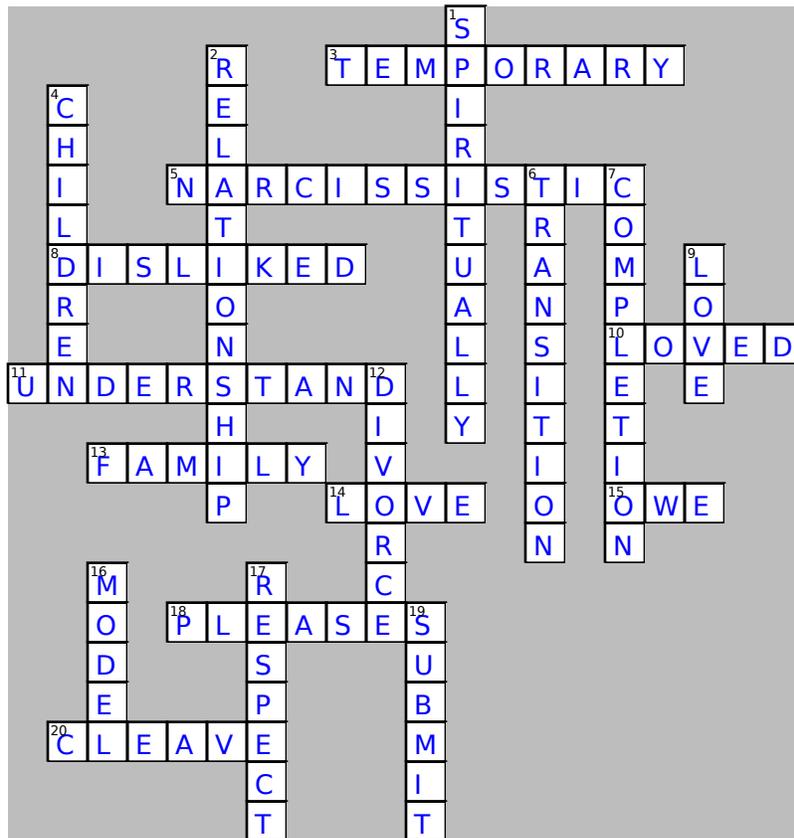
Across

- 3 Marriage is permanent but parenting is only ____.
- 5 By making the child the most important thing in a family, the child has a good chance of becoming ____.
- 8 Modern parents often fear being ____ by their children.
- 10 Previous generations of parents demanded respect from their children, our generation of parents demand to be ____ by their children.
- 11 In 1 Pet. 3:7, husbands are commanded to ____ their wives.
- 13 Children are never to be the center of the ____.
- 14 Parents must continue to grow their ____ for each other through the various stages of life.
- 15 Children do not ____ parents for what parents were supposed to do.
- 18 Children are to be obedient to their parents, for this ____ the Lord, Col. 3:20.
- 20 Gen. 2:24 teaches that a child shall grow up, leave and ____ to another.

Down

- 1 A thriving marriage requires both husband and wife to ____ grow together in the Lord.
- 2 The center of the family is the loving ____ between the husband and the wife.
- 4 Modern parents often attempt to make up for their disappointments in life in and through their ____.
- 6 A child that is the center of the family will have great difficulty making the ____ to independent adulthood.
- 7 Husband and wives are to find ____ in each other, not in their children.
- 9 In Col. 3:19, husbands are commanded their wives.
- 12 "Twenty-year fracture" refers to ____ of parents when child leaves the home.
- 16 Parents have the privilege of providing a good ____ for their children on the blessed nature of marriage.
- 17 Enforced humility/obedience on children is required for the development of genuine humility and ____.
- 19 In Col. 3:18, wives are commanded to ____ to their husbands.

Parenting-7



- Across
- 3 Marriage is permanent but parenting is only ____.
 - 5 By making the child the most important thing in a family, the child has a good chance of becoming ____.
 - 8 Modern parents often fear being ____ by their children.
 - 10 Previous generations of parents demanded respect from their children, our generation of parents demand to be ____ by their children.
 - 11 In 1 Pet. 3:7, husbands are commanded to ____ their wives.
 - 13 Children are never to be the center of the ____.
 - 14 Parents must continue to grow their ____ for each other through the various stages of life.
 - 15 Children do not ____ parents for what parents were supposed to do.
 - 18 Children are to be obedient to their parents, for this ____ the Lord, Col. 3:20.
 - 20 Gen. 2:24 teaches that a child shall grow up, leave and ____ to another.

- Down
- 1 A thriving marriage requires both husband and wife to ____ grow together in the Lord.
 - 2 The center of the family is the loving ____ between the husband and the wife.
 - 4 Modern parents often attempt to make up for their disappointments in life in and through their ____.
 - 6 A child that is the center of the family will have great difficulty making the ____ to independent adulthood.
 - 7 Husband and wives are to find ____ in each other, not in their children.
 - 9 In Col. 3:19, husbands are commanded their wives.
 - 12 "Twenty-year fracture" refers to ____ of parents when child leaves the home.
 - 16 Parents have the privilege of providing a good ____ for their children on the blessed nature of marriage.
 - 17 Enforced humility/obedience on children is required for the development of genuine humility and ____.
 - 19 In Col. 3:18, wives are commanded to ____ to their husbands.