One Size Doesn’t Fit All
Aaron Brockett | Genesis 25-28

Well Six Thousand Five Hundred Seventy Days. That is the number of days it takes for your kid to become an adult. It may take a little longer than that, but for them to at least turn 18 that is the number of days you have to pour into their lives and to shape whom they are becoming.

Depending upon your season in life, if you’re a brand new parent and your kids are babies and they are not sleeping through the night, which means you are not sleeping through the night, you are thinking 6,570 – I don’t know if I can make it.

Others of you are empty nesters and your kids are grown and gone. And you are turning to your neighbor and you are saying, “Hold on tight. It goes by so fast. It just seems like the other day our kids were learning how to walk across the living room and now we are watching them walk across the platform to get their degree and just where did the time go?”

God gives us that time with our kids. You will still be their mom and their dad when they are grown up. But, in no other way than in that 6,570 can you shape their lives.

We have said every week that not everyone here is a parent and we know there may be some pain or some frustration that may come with that. We are not trying to leave anyone out. I don’t feel like you will feel left out because the source of our content is God’s word. God’s word says of itself that it is living and active, which is another way of saying it is applicable to you even when, or especially when, you don’t think it will be.

I want to encourage you to stay tuned to this series. I want to thank you, for those of you who maybe had to have some courage to come to a series like this, because it is so important.

If you would please turn in your Bible to Genesis 25 and that is where we are going to be today. Genesis is the very first book of the Bible and if you didn’t bring a Bible with you but you do have an electronic device, you can download our church app for free and there is a Bible on there you can use and follow along with us. I will throw some of these important passages up on the screen. Genesis 25 is where we are going to be in just a minute.

You know one of the premier experts on children and student ministries today, in my opinion, is a guy by the name of Reggie Joiner. Reggie wrote a book not long ago called Parenting Beyond Your Capacity, which I think is just a great title. You ought to check out the book sometime. It has been on my desk for a while.

In chapter one he talks about the very first time that he realized he needed help as a parent. He was 28 years old and he was the father of two preschoolers – a four year old and a two year old. He had just taken a job as a pastor of young adults and families at a large church in Florida. His first Sunday on the job, when church was over, he took his family out to lunch.
It was at a restaurant just down the street from the church, which meant there were a bunch of people from the church at the restaurant all kind of watching him with his family and his kids. He and his wife were really self conscious about the behavior of their four year old and two year old in front of everyone from the church.

That is when his two year old daughter, Hannah, thought it would be fun to start taking orange soda from her straw and make designs in the white tablecloth. His wife attempted a few times, unsuccessfully, to try to get Hannah to stop. Nothing was working and she was getting more defiant. So Reggie got frustrated and he said he doesn’t know what got into him. He doesn’t know why he said what he said. He was just frustrated. We have all been there as parents, especially of toddlers.

So, he got eyeball to eyeball with two year old Hannah. He got really close to her and he said to her in a voice that was only loud enough for her to hear, “Hannah, if you do that one more time you are going to die.” Doesn’t that just warm your heart to know someone else said that and not you? You think that sounds awful but if you have ever been there and you have been frustrated all of the sudden words get faster than your thoughts, he said this and he winced as soon as he said it.

Two year old Hannah was already experienced enough to call her daddy’s bluff. She glared back at him and without even looking at it she just knocked the cup over. The orange soda went all over the tablecloth. He jumps up and all the families in the church are watching this. He jumps up, scoops her out of her highchair to get her out, to talk to her outside. And that is when Hannah at the top of her lungs started screaming, “Don’t kill me, Daddy. Daddy, don’t kill me.” All of these families from the church were like, “That was a good hire right there. That guy knows what he is doing.”

Here is a statement that I think all of us can kind of resonate with as it comes to parenting. Parenting can be one of the most fulfilling, rewarding, and joy filled experiences in life. Yet at the very same time it can be one of the most irritating, exhausting, and challenging adventures that you will ever undertake. There are these dual things going on. And one of the things that really kind of “blows my mind” about being a parent is how little training is actually required before they let you take one of these little human beings home.

Isn’t it just amazing? We had our very first child, we had a boy and we were at the hospital and we paid the bill and signed all the paperwork. They wheeled Lindsay down to the door while she was holding the baby. I went out to the car and drove up and the nurse went out with us to the car. She inspected the car seat to make sure we had put it in appropriately. I can’t remember if she watched me buckle him in or if she actually buckled the baby in just to see if he was in securely. Then she did a terrifying thing. She walked away. It was just the two of us and we were like, “Are we qualified for this? Do we need to have a license to have a baby?”

It seems like every significant thing in life requires some sort of training, preparation, or certification except for being a mom or a dad. If you want to get a good job or a good career you go through 16, 20, 25 years of schooling. You don’t just wake up one day and say, “I think today I will be a doctor.” Or, “I think today I will go in and be a school teacher. I think I will be an electrician.”

You don’t just walk into a hospital and say, “I just want you all to know that I am available to operate today on the next patient if you like.”
“Well, what qualifies you?”

“I just have a desire.”

You don’t drive down to the Indianapolis airport and walk up to the Southwest desk and say, “I am free to pilot the next plane to Atlanta.” They would escort you out because you are not qualified for that. Why do you think that is? Well because the very well-being and the lives of people are at stake, sort of like parenting. Yet there doesn’t seem to be any training that is required.

A few years ago there was a guy by the name of Malcolm Gladwell who wrote a book entitled *Outliers*. Maybe some of you read that book. In it he talks about something called the 10,000 hour principle. Basically, what he said is it takes a minimum of 10,000 hours of experience for you to be considered an expert at anything. 10,000 hours. So can I just ask you – how many hours of experience did you have on the job before you became a mom or a dad?

I don’t know about you but for my experience level the needle was resting right at zero. Maybe some of you grew up and you were babysitting. Or, maybe you had nieces or nephews so that gave you some experience with kids. But it still doesn’t really qualify you to be a parent. It is just an awesome task and an awesome responsibility.

What is happening is that I think many of us, what we do, is we take a parenting toolbox (so to speak) into our relationship with our kids and the tools that are inside the toolbox are hand me down tools from our mom or our dad. So, we end up adopting phrases and techniques that our mom and dad used on us. And we just don’t understand why it doesn’t work on our kids. That may be, partly, because it didn’t work on us! We are trying to use this and we are trying to hand this down. So what ends up happening is that our parenting becomes random and reactive. Then we fail to be consistent and intentional in our approach.

Last week we said that it takes different parenting skill sets to parent babies as opposed to toddlers, and elementary kids, and adolescents. I think the same thing can be said when you become the parent of more than one child. When you become the parent of more than one child it changes the landscape drastically, doesn’t it?

Maybe you have heard the thing before that when you just have one baby and his pacifier falls out of his mouth and onto the ground, you incinerate the pacifier. You have to get rid of that. Then you have the second baby and the pacifier falls onto the ground. You put it in boiling water to try to sanitize it. If you have a third baby and the pacifier falls on the ground you just wipe it off on your leg. Then when you have a fourth baby and the pacifier falls on the ground, you let the dog lick it and then put it back. Things just change. You have to go from a man to man to a zone sort of a defense there.

Some of you know this to be true – just because two people have the same mom and dad doesn’t mean they respond in the same way. Just because they come out of the same womb, just because they share the same DNA, doesn’t mean their personalities are anything alike.

Here is another way of saying it – when you become a parent of more than one child, one approach does not fit all. So you have to become a student of your kids. You have to figure out what their hopes, and their dreams, and their aspirations are. This doesn’t mean they are in the driver’s seat by any
means. As a parent, you are still in the driver’s seat but you are just intelligent about the way you interact with, relate to, and discipline your kids. Because the way in which they are made is “custom”.

God custom made every single person in this room. We see this in scripture in Psalm 139:13-16, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

That passage is just awesome for a number of different reasons. We are just saying that God is highly intentional about every single person here today, so our parenting needs to be highly intentional as well. Your kids are custom made and therefore they need a custom approach.

In Genesis 25 we see an example of two parents whose names were Isaac and Rebecca. They just totally overlook this. I think it is important as we look at this passage together that this narrative in Genesis 25 is not primarily about parenting. There is a whole other thing that is going on in this narrative, but parenting is still involved in this passage. So what I want to do is understand the whole scope of this narrative but then take a close-up approach to Isaac’s and Rebecca’s parenting and see what we can learn from this.

Just interestingly enough, earlier this week my son asked me what I was preaching on (which was really cool). He is getting to the age where he’s like, “Hey dad, what are you preaching on this Sunday?” I said, “Genesis 25.” And he said, “That is Isaac and Rebecca.” I asked how he knew that. He said, “That is my favorite story in the Bible.” I don’t know why he told me that, other than he thinks there are some things I need to learn so I need to pay extra attention. But then I started studying it and I am like, “My son picked this? He may have issues here.” You are going to see that here because there is some major dysfunction going on in this passage.

Let’s look at it together. Hopefully you already have your Bibles open. Genesis 25:19-28, “These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham fathered Isaac and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.” Do you guys all have that?

Verse 21, and there will be a pop quiz after the service. “And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren...” We saw that last week in a young lady by the name of Hannah, “… and the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her...” So it was a rough pregnancy, “… and she said, ‘If it is thus ...’” in other words, if this is really your will, “… why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.’ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb.”

Surprise! Yes some of you have had that surprise. Verse 25, “The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak ...” every young mom’s dream right there, “... so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while
Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac ...” because of that, “… loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

So what we see happening here is you have two imperfect, flawed, parents like all of us who have the opportunity and the privilege to be a mom or a dad. And they can’t get pregnant and God blesses them with twins and inside the womb the boys are already going at it, and they are wrestling, and they are causing problems.

How many of you ladies, I am just curious, are the only female presence in an all male household? Yes, look around at those hands and make a mental note, and know we are praying for you. There will be more square footage in heaven for you than the rest of us because boys just have a tendency to mix it up.

Before they are even born this is happening. There is a lot going on in this passage. Esau and Jacob are going to be the ancestors of two very different nations of people and those nations are going to divide and we are still seeing ramifications of that today. So Esau is born first. They are twins. Jacob comes out right after him grasping hold of his heel, which is symbolic of the conflict that is going to exist between the two of them. These two boys couldn’t have been any more different. Esau is born and he is covered in hair. He is like a little miniature Chewbacca or something and he is born. Jacob comes out and these two guys are different.

Esau has testosterone coursing through his veins, and his favorite color would have been camo, and he would have had a gun rack in the back of his pickup truck, blaring country music. He would have fit right in with the Duck Dynasty crew. When I think of Esau, that is who I think about. Then you have Jacob who is a little more domesticated and he prefers to prepare the food rather than go out and kill it. That is fine. But because of their differences, Isaac sort of has more in common with Esau so they hang out more. Rebecca sort of has more of an affinity for Jacob.

You know what? It shouldn’t alarm you as a parent if you have more than one child, that you begin to feel that you have a little more of an affinity with one over the other. It doesn’t mean that you favor them or you love them more than the other. It just means that your personalities maybe click a little more. Maybe you see more of your side of the family in them than the other. That is ok just as long as you are intentional about building a relationship with the child which doesn’t come as easily.

So ladies, maybe some of you have a little girl who is shaping up to be a tomboy and so that means you’ve got to take extra measures to do things that connect with her heart. Guys, this means that your son may not love baseball as much as you do and as much as that maybe hurts you, you say, “Well, what are they interested in? I am going to take an interest in that.” So you build a relationship with them that is custom made.

I think this is really important and this doesn’t get stated nearly enough. Your kids may know that you love them, but are they aware that you like them? I think that is a different thing. Of course mom and dad love me. But when you intentionally take an interest in what they are interested in, it communicates to them that you actually like them and that you like being around them.

You know USA Today did a poll and they interviewed teenagers. They said, “When you get stressed out (teens), where do you go first? Where do you run first?” Do you know what the number one answer
was? It was music. Teens run to music first – isn’t that a comforting thought? Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars are counseling your kids. Number two they run to their friends. Then number three they run to television. Do you know where moms came in on this list? – 32. And dads came in at a whopping 48. Whew – way to go dads! I think when your kids know you like them. When your kids know you are making an effort to take an interest in what they are interested in, I really do believe that moms and dads would work their way up the list.

There is already this natural conflict that is going on between Esau and Jacob and it just gets fueled by the favoritism of Isaac and Rebekah. Because they don’t take the time to build a custom made relationship, the tension reaches a boiling point in Genesis 27:1-13. “When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, ‘My son’; and he answered, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.’ Now Rebekah ...” who was in the other room, “... was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, ‘I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, “Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.” Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.’ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, ‘Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.’”

That just reads weird, doesn’t it? Here’s the thing. He has a conscience. He says, “Mom, that doesn’t sound right to me. You are asking me to be deceptive and it is not going to work because physically we are two different individuals.” I don’t think I would have said it that way but that is the way he wants to say it. Verse 12, “Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.” In other words, “What if dad embraces me? What if he reaches out and he is going to know I am not his son Esau and then he is going to think I am mocking him. He is going to think I am trying to intentionally deceive him in his old age and he can’t see.” You have to admire his conscience.

Verse 13, “His mother said to him, ‘Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.’” If you know the rest of this story, or if you don’t, it will be great reading for you just to go ahead and read on in this maybe sometime later this afternoon or this week. What ends up happening is that Rebekah encourages her son Jacob to be deceptive and he eventually is. He goes in and he impersonates his brother and he receives his brother’s blessing. Esau comes back and he is furious with his little brother. He wants to kill him. So Jacob has to go on the run and as a result Rebekah never sees her favorite son ever again.

As I said earlier, this narrative is not primarily in our Bibles to just teach us about parenting. There is a whole other thing going on – a redemptive purpose that God is going to use to work through all of this. But there is parenting involved in the passage. When we take a close up look at it, there are four application handles that I want to pull out and apply to our lives today. So if you are taking notes, these are some things you might want to write down.
Here is the first thing. Here is the way I phrased it – **When it comes to parenting you need to put your oxygen mask on first.** One of the things we notice here in this passage is that Isaac’s and Rebekah’s relationship (and I even think her character) has some significant cracks in it.

Have you ever been on an airplane and they go through the safety talk? They say, “If in the unlikely event of the loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling...” What do they say next? “Please securely fasten your oxygen mask first before assisting others.”

I remember the first time I heard that I thought that was kind of selfish. Shouldn’t I assist others before I assist myself? But then you kind of think about it and you say, “I am not going to be good for anyone if I am passed out.” I think oftentimes as parents we are starving for spiritual and emotional oxygen. We just don’t have anything to give to our kids.

I think Isaac and Rebekah were suffocating spiritually and emotionally and as a result their kids paid for it. We learn this principle that it has to be in you before it can ever be in them. In other words, if you want your kids to have a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, if you want them to follow Jesus, the best thing you can do is not just bring them to church, it is not just give them religion. The best thing you can do is follow Jesus authentically yourself.

If you really want your kids to grow up one day and have a healthy marriage, the best thing you can do is you can model having a healthy marriage yourself. You don’t have to fake it. It doesn’t mean that you are not authentic and real. It just means that you make your spouse the priority. The best thing you can do to love your kids is to love your spouse.

Oftentimes this happens and I think it just happens by accident. When a young couple has kids their children become the center of their universe. I can understand how that happens. We have been there because they are so dependent upon us for everything. What ends up happening is the couple slides into this behavior where the children become the most important thing and they end up neglecting continuing to build a relationship with one another.

You know what ends up happening is that 18, 20, or 25 years later, when the children leave, you realize, “I am married to a stranger. I don’t even know my spouse anymore because we quit working on our relationship when our children were born.” You can’t give your kids what you don’t already have.

You know what? Your kids are the only people that have a front row seat to your entire life. You can fake it with a lot of people, but you can’t fake it with your kids. Even if you do think you are faking it with them, they still know. They still have this front row seat and they see the in-authenticity of your life. On the other hand when they see the authenticity of your life it has a great impact on them.

I think this is one of the reasons we are losing a whole generation of young people. They see one thing at church but an entirely different thing at home. This is so convicting for me because I am a pastor. There is kind of an added lens of complexity in that.

My grandfather is a pastor so my dad grew up in a pastor’s home. For those of you who have a church background you know that preacher’s kids are called PKs. PKs have a tendency of either growing up and being straight arrows and really fruitful if they saw their mom and their dad living out at home what they saw in church. They really benefit from that. But if they don’t, then PKs have a tendency to be some
of the most jaded individuals. They have a tendency to be some of the most sarcastic, cynical people. You know what? It’s rightfully so, because they saw two different things.

Don’t just raise your kids in church. Raise your kids in Christ and put your oxygen mask on first.

Here is the second application point. We need to pursue each of our kids strategically. There are all kinds of things that are vying for your attention and if you don’t intentionally schedule time with your kids, someone or something else will replace your influence.

You know the very last verse of the very last chapter of the very last book in the Old Testament is Malachi 4:6? How many of you have read Malachi 4:6 lately? Do you know what it says? To be fair, I didn’t know. It had been a long time since I had looked at it. It is interesting to me what the significance of that verse is. It is the very last verse in the Old Testament before what is called the Inter-Testament period, which is 400 years of silence before we get the book of Matthew where God just wasn’t speaking. There weren’t any prophecies nor were there any further visions or revelations.

We have actually studied this before. There was a lot of stuff going on in history to prepare for the Gospel message to come so there was intentionality behind it. But if you weren’t going to speak for 400 years, don’t you think the last thing that you would say would be something you would want people to remember? That is why Malachi 4:6 is so important. It is up on the screen. Let me read it.

Malachi 4:6 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers …” In other words, God says the very first casualty of sin is the family. It just gets blown apart. But through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ His hope is that the hearts of parents and the hearts of children will be turned back together once again.

And you have to pursue your kids strategically because it won’t just happen by accident. Life is pulling on you and, especially the older they get, life is pulling on them. You end up just kind of continuing to drift further and further apart. You have to schedule it in, you have to be intentional about it, and you have to figure out ways of relating to them that are meaningful to them.

Now, a few years ago Lindsay and I read a great book by Gary Chapman – many of you probably read it – entitled The Five Love Languages. Do you guys remember that book? It is a marriage book that says you need to love your spouse in the language in which they receive it. So the way that you feel loved may not be the way your spouse feels loved and vice versa. You have to figure out what love language your spouse speaks and get fluent in it. So the love languages are like physical touch, words of affirmation, acts of service, and gifts.

Lindsay and I were talking about this about two years ago on a date night. We figured out each other’s love languages a long time ago and we have tried to work on that. We brought this up in a conversation one night. We said, “What do you think the love languages of our kids are?” So we just started to go down through it. What do you think Conner’s (our oldest son) love language is? Immediately both of us were like, “Quality time.” That kid, he just wants to hang out. He just wants to soak up time with you and it doesn’t matter what it is but he just wants to hang out with you.
Our oldest daughter, Campbell, her love language is just words of affirmation. She just eats it up. You come to her and you say, “Sweetheart, you look beautiful today.” Her face turns red and she buries her head in your stomach and she looks up and says, “Say it again daddy!” She just loves it.

But you know my middle daughter, Kennedy, she is wired very differently. In fact last Sunday afternoon after church was over I had to teach a Discovery class and I was exhausted. I went home at the end of the afternoon and she was up in her bed hanging out. I walked up and I laid down next to her and I said, “Kennedy, you are beautiful.” She goes, “I know.” She was just like – she didn’t even care. It is not her love language.

But do you know what her love language is? It is gifts. She loves to get gifts and she is always writing me little notes and pictures and giving me a gift and she gets a big smile.

I can come home and say, “Hey Kennedy, daddy got a gift for you today.”

“Oh, what is it?”

“Ah, a paperclip!”

She is like, “Oh that is amazing.” She grabs the paperclip and she loves it.

Our youngest daughter is 15 months so, I don’t know, her love language is getting her diaper changed or something. I don’t know. We will figure it out one day. We are looking forward to it.

We said, “You know we have to figure out how our kids feel loved and invest in that.”

Just this last Monday night – my son is playing baseball right now so I took him to baseball practice. After that we had to run an errand over in Fishers. We are in the car together. We had spent about 2 ½ hours together that evening and he just finally started to open up. We had been around each other long enough that he started to open up and talk. At 8:30 we were headed back home – that is his bedtime. But I thought, “Man I need to seize this opportunity. I don’t want to let it go by.”

I wasn’t even hungry but I swung into Chick Filet and we walked in and sat down in a booth and we just got eyeball to eyeball with each other and for the next 30 minutes we talked about school. We talked about sports. I had him rank all of his favorite classes in order. I had him rank all of his favorite sports in order. Then we talked about girls. And 15 seconds later we moved onto the next subject. So we rolled in the driveway at 9:30 that night and Lindsay is like, “Where have you been? His bedtime was an hour ago.” I said. “He just finally started to open up and I had to take advantage of that.”

You know she told me a couple of years ago (because I have to travel quite a bit), “Man, when you spend about 20 or 30 minutes wrestling with Conner, he is better behaved for me when you are out of town.”

Because we are just beginning to figure out how our children give and receive love, you know what all this equals? It equals building a family environment. Maybe you have heard this statement before – where family identity is strong, peer pressure gets really weak. But where family identity is weak, then peer pressure is strong.
Here is the third handle of application – **You need to fight for your kids relentlessly**. Do you know the Biblical word for fighting for your kids? It is discipline. That is what it is. You fight for your kids, you fight for their hearts, and you desire to shape their lives. Now discipline is maybe one of the most difficult responsibilities you have as a parent because nothing ever trains you for it and you probably have some baggage from your upbringing (whether it is good or bad) that you have to sort through.

So, maybe your mom and dad did a really good job with this or maybe they did an awful job with this. What we have a tendency to do is; number 1 - we fail to think through how we are going to discipline our kids and the values and priorities that are going to determine that. We just never think through that until they spill orange soda on the white tablecloth for the first time. Then we resort to, “If you do that again, you are going to die.” We never think through all that. Maybe, if our parents did it in such a way that was demoralizing, we have a tendency to overreact and we go the opposite direction.

Do you know what the Bible says in Proverbs 22:15? “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child…” Man, isn’t that true? Folly is bound up in the heart of a child meaning they are born very naturally self-centered and greedy and they are going to make mistakes and they need shaping. It says at the end of that verse, “…but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”

You know there are a lot of people who don’t like that verse because they think this is advocating child abuse or it just sounds too harsh. You know what? This verse really has very little to do with a rod and very little to do with the whole issue of to spank or not to spank. What this verse is asking here is, “Am I willing to fight for my kids by establishing clear expectations and ramifications for their actions or am I going to let them drift?”

That is your primary responsibility – to shape them into who they are becoming. They don’t naturally want to grow up to be responsible, fruitful adults. You have to shape them in that. You know what? At a very early age your kids learn the fine art of manipulation. They do, don’t they? They figure you out way before you figure them out. Discipline says you say to your kids, “I will be loving, I will be gracious, I will be patient, I will be as understanding as I can, I will flex, and I will negotiate but I will not be conned.”

That is essentially what you are saying whenever you are disciplining. That is what that passage is talking about. In Hebrews 12:11 it says, “For the moment discipline will seem painful rather than pleasant, but later…” But later, but later – and we are going to talk about this next week because some of you are like we did everything we could and our kids still did not turn out well. We are going to talk about that next week. But this is saying if you discipline your child the fruit of that is going to come much later, “…but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” And earlier in that passage in verse 6 it says, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves…”

So, discipline is based on the spirit of loving intentionality. And I think it is important that you don’t discipline when you are angry and you don’t discipline when you are tired or stressed. Some of you are like, “When will I discipline? Because I am all those things all the time.” You know the truth of the matter is that you could be an expert in this, and your parents may have done it well, and you really feel like you have a handle on this. There will still be moments when you will blow it. Just in frustration you will say something you wish you wouldn’t have said. You will be unfair – you didn’t have all the data and you accused your child wrongly. You know what? The best thing you can do is to go in and to apologize. In fact I think that may be more impactful than the discipline itself.
There have been moments when I have lost it with my kids and maybe I said something that was a little too harsh or I was just a little too impatient. I will go into their room a little bit later and sit down on their bed and say, “You know daddy messed up today. You shouldn’t have acted that way but I am so sorry that I responded to you that way.” You know what? Those moments are so powerful and you have their full attention. So don’t let those moments escape you.

Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, don’t invoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” When your kids step out of line – and they will – and when they cross a boundary – and they will – it is important to shape the will without breaking the spirit, “That behavior is not acceptable in this house but you always will be.” Sometimes you can make a point and force the right behavior but lose them in the process. Have any of you ever been through that? You make the right point, you forced the right behavior and you totally lost their heart.

By fighting for our kids, here is what we are communicating to them, “You are accepted and loved by me even though you choose to walk away from that love. Your behavior may not always be acceptable, but you always will be. You may drift, you may make bad decisions, or you may rebel. I may have to let you fall flat on your face over, and over, and over, and over again. My love for you might have to be tough at times but you will never lose it.”

I know some of you and I’ve even had you come up to me and talk to me before. Some of you are empty nesters and your kids are gone and you say, “Aaron if we would have had this information 20 years ago it would have been so much better.” Some of you maybe feel a little bit guilty because maybe when your kids were growing up or when they were at that formative age you weren’t walking with the Lord. So, consequently, you did not lay that foundation with them. You didn’t lead them into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ in fact you might have done some things that were really damaging. So now that they are young adults and now that they are out of your house you really feel guilty about it. You are like, “I was too preoccupied with my career, and I was too critical, and I was too demanding, and I just really messed that up.”

That is why we need this last application handle - Every parent needs to cling to God’s grace desperately. What is the number one tool in your parenting toolbox that you need? It is God’s grace. Because you will fail and He will use those opportunities to shape you.

You know what? Some of you, it makes you cringe when you hear God referred to as a Heavenly Father because you didn’t have a very good example of an earthly one. You know you need to let God father you. Psalm 68 God says that. It says, “He desires to be a Father to the fatherless.” Maybe this is one of the best things that you could do. You could just come to God regardless of your situation, whether your kids are young, or if you don’t have kids yet, or if they are old and out of the house. You come to God and you say, “God, will you father me? Can I cling to your grace desperately? Because I need it.”

One of the key differences between Christianity and every other world religion or faith system that is out there – and there are a lot of key differences – one of the main ones is the fact that our God is the only God that asks us to refer to Him as Abba. You know what Abba means? Literally, the literal translation, means “daddy”. How intimate is that? It means daddy. He desires that you will call Him Daddy, that you will be fully dependent on Him. And, the best thing you can do as a parent is to let God, our Heavenly Father, father you. You may have some damage, and some baggage, and some mistakes in your life. That is why you need to cling to grace even more desperately.
I have a good friend who, this last week, was telling me about his six year old son. He said, “I was on my way home from work and my wife called me. She said, ‘I just want to give you a heads up about your son,’” which is always – you know that the following information is going to be interesting. That is the first thing your spouse said to you, “I want to give you a heads up on your way home – your son.” These were two things that clued him off right away that what was about to be said was pretty significant. She said, “Your son took a big can of orange spray paint and spray painted a big “X” in the driveway, the length and the width of the driveway.” He said, “Really? Is it that bad?” She said, “You can see it from space. It is huge.”

So he gets home, and he drives around the corner, and sees this huge orange “X” in the driveway and he said he just had to laugh. He is like, “Oh man.” He walks in and his son is as white as a sheet hiding behind his mom. He walked up to his dad and he has his piggy bank in his hands. He says, “Dad, I hope this is enough to buy a new driveway.” So he recognized the moment and thought, “This is a beautiful moment to shape the life of my son.” He said, “Let’s get into the car and let’s go to Lowes. I bet Lowes has something to fix it.” They went to Lowes and they found some kind of chemical that takes orange spray paint off driveways and got some steel wool. They went back and he was on his hands and knees most of the evening scraping this orange “X” off the driveway.

The next week they had some family visit them and he overheard his son talking to a family member about it. He walked outside and he pointed to the driveway and said, “That is where I spray painted that big orange “X”.” He was kind of proud of it at that point. The family member said, “Wow that must have taken you a long time to take care of.” He said, “No, I wasn’t strong enough to take away the stain, but daddy was.”

You know what? That is exactly where some of you really need to be at right now. You need to cling to that truth for whatever your stain is – and we all have one. You are not strong enough to take away the stain but you have an Abba Father who is.

Friends, that is the Gospel message. It is not religion, it is not church attendance. It is the fact that there is a stain that you cannot take out on your own. God sent His Son so you could be a child of God. The best thing you can do in all of your weaknesses and deficiencies is to come before Him with arms open and say, “God, will you father me at this moment? God, I just don’t think I have lived up to the expectations of what a good parent should be. God, would you forgive? God, would you make a way for me to be able to connect to the heart of my child once again?”

So, we are going to take communion this morning as a part of our response to this message. I just invite you if you are walking with Christ to share with us in this meal. If you are not, just feel free to let it pass and to sit and think about what you have heard. I just ask that there not be a lot of commotion around the room right now. We will just spend some time in the presence of the Lord as we take communion together. We are going to worship right after we do this so don’t be alarmed as we just respond in worship to our Heavenly Father.
Let’s pray.

*Father, we come to You right now and we thank You for the fact that You are our Abba Father and the best way we can learn how to parent is by allowing You to be a father to us. Some of us need to be adopted into Your family. Some of us need to cling to Your grace desperately. We pray that You would give us wisdom and strength to know that even in the process of parenting these little people that You have given us as this awesome responsibility to do, that You are still trying to capture our hearts and minds as well. It is in Jesus’ name we pray.*