

**THREE-STRANDED PARENTING:
Discovering the Partnership of the Holy
Spirit for Supernatural Parenting
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Cathy and I have seven children. Neither of us can imagine how we could have raised them without the help of the Holy Spirit. In a day when 69-88% of children from evangelical families are leaving the church as they enter adulthood (*Lifeway Christian research*), we are more convinced than ever that partnering with the Holy Spirit is a vital part of successful child rearing.

If this partnership is to be fully realized, at least five things are necessary:

Parents must create an atmosphere in their homes where the Holy Spirit is welcome, and the presence of God can be experienced.

One of the amazing revelations of Scripture is the fact that God desires to live in our homes. This is beautifully illustrated in the story of the Ark being taken from Kiriath Jearim to the Palace of David. After the Philistines had returned the Ark to Israel, it stayed in the house of Abinadab for years (1 Samuel 7:1-2).

After God killed Uzzah for touching the Ark while it was being transferred to the tabernacle of David, it resided in the home of Obed-Edom for three months (2 Samuel 6:11). The home of Obed-Edom was so blessed that David himself moved the Holy Ark of God into His own palace in a tent that had been especially prepared for it.

“After David had constructed buildings for himself in the City of David, he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it.” (1 Chron.15:1 NIV)

“Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, ‘My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the Lord has entered are holy.’” (2 Chron. 8:11)

If we are to fully experience the reality of God’s living presence in our homes, we must develop and maintain an atmosphere that is fit for His presence. We must never forget that God is always looking for places where His presence can rest.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?’” (Is.66:1)

The atmosphere I am describing is created through worship and maintained through a commitment to never grieve or quench the Holy Spirit.

“Let us go to his dwelling place, let us worship at his footstool, saying, ‘Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.’” (Ps. 132:7-8)

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:30-32)

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, ...” (I Thess. 5:19-21)

One of the most powerful illustrations of the importance of having the presence of God in our homes is found in the life of David. In 2 Samuel 11:11, we discover that the Ark of the covenant was not present in David’s palace when he sinned with Bathsheba:

“Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!’”

Parents must cultivate in their children the ability to experience God’s presence and to perceive and respond to His communication with them.

Although God can speak audibly, He typically speaks to His children through feelings and sensations, visions and dreams, and the internal voice of their conscious mind.

Feelings and Sensations –

The most elementary way God communicates with His people is through feelings and sensations. All of us have either heard or used expressions like, “I felt God’s presence,” or, “God was really here today.” These expressions are all examples of this kind of communication. Sadly, many of us never leave this elementary form of experiencing God. We are satisfied with simply feeling His presence when we could be talking to Him. After all, if God has gone to the trouble of coming to visit us, He probably has something to say. In fact, He has probably been saying a lot of things to you but you simply don’t recognize them, because as a Spirit being, God rarely communicates audibly. The fact that all of us can fail to recognize God’s voice is described in Job 33.

“For God does speak— now one way, now another— though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds.” (Job 33:14-15)

It is important to help our children recognize when what they are sensing is from the Holy Spirit. I did this by describing to them what the power and presence

of the Holy Spirit felt like in my own life. This gave them a framework from which to judge their own experiences. I would also use the characters of Scripture to illustrate how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of His people.

Visions and Dreams -

Visions and dreams are a form of communication through which God communicates with His children through images and pictures. Although some visions can seem almost material, they are typically simple images and pictures on the screen of a person's imagination. Unlike imagining something, however, the person does not conjure them up, but they are actually initiated by God. As for dreams, they are simply divine visions that come while a person is sleeping. Whether it was Paul who saw the vision of Ananias coming to minister to him (Acts 9:12) or Joseph who was warned by God in a dream (Matt 2:13), Scripture is filled with accounts of God speaking through these forms of communication.

The Voice of God –

In I Kings 19:12, this form of divine communication is referred to as a "gentle whisper." This internal voice of the Holy Spirit is probably the very thing the apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8:16 when he says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Other than the written Word of God, this is the primary way that God communicates with

His people. In order to help you understand how to teach your children to hear God's voice, let me use an example of how I taught my own children how to hear the Lord. As a parent, it did not take me long to realize that if I did not teach my children how to hear the Lord's voice, sooner or later they would stop talking to Him. When it came to hearing the Lord's voice, I would ask my children to say their names aloud and then to imagine their names being said within their minds. With visions, I would have them select their favorite food. Once they had identified it, I would have them close their eyes and either picture that food in their imagination or say the word in their mind. This enabled them to easily grasp how to recognize both visions and the internal voice of God in their conscious mind. Once they had grasped the concept, I taught them to ask God what was on His mind every night before they fell asleep. While they were in that place of reflective calm that normally precedes falling asleep, they would simply focus on the Lord and wait for Him to speak. Through this process, my biological children learned how to hear the voice of their beloved Savior and Friend.

Parents must communicate to their children the necessary skills to interpret and apply the Scriptures to their lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.

If our homes are to be the place of transformation God has intended them to be, they must be centered on both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. For this to be realized, our homes must be places where the Word of God is modeled, experienced, read, and applied. If the parents do not practically live out the Word of God, their children will typically lose all respect for it. Modeling alone, however, is not enough. Cathy and I discovered that it was critical for our children to learn how to practically apply the Word of God to their own lives before they left home. Moses alludes to this transforming process in the book of Deuteronomy:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The 21st century version of this process involves teaching your children the necessary skills for properly interpreting and applying scripture. For Cathy and I, this involved helping our children to advance from reading the Bible for information, to reading the

Bible for interpretation, and then to reading the Bible for application. Questions about Bible information include, "What did you read today?" Interpretation questions could include, "What did it mean?" Application questions could be something like, "What did this passage mean to you?" How quickly they progress through these stages depends on both your child's reading level and their spiritual maturity. The story of Jonah is a good example of how this process can work:

"What did you read?" (the fish swallowed Jonah)

"What did it mean?" (Jonah disobeyed God, so the fish swallowed him)

"What did it mean to you?" (If I disobey God, something may swallow me!)

I would also teach them to ask the Holy Spirit to help them understand and apply the Scriptures to their own lives.

Parents must properly condition the consciences of their children, so they can both recognize and respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

According to the apostle Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, God wants to sanctify our spirit, soul, and body. One of the mediums through which the human spirit operates is the conscience. Through our conscience,

we can experience both God's pleasure and displeasure. It is critical for us to develop and maintain what the Bible calls a "good conscience."

***"Holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith."
(1 Timothy 1:19)***

A good conscience is one that works properly. In other words, it convicts us when we sin, and it confirms us when we are walking rightly. Scripture delineates a number of problems that can affect the human conscience.

Defiled/Seared Conscience -

***"Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."
(1 Tim. 4:2)***

***"To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted."
(Titus 1:15)***

***"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."
(Eph 4:18)***

All of these scriptures illustrate the tragic effects of sin on the human conscience. Much like physical nerve endings, the conscience can be damaged to the point that it can no longer feel spiritual pain. When this

occurs, it is critical to re-sensitize the conscience through memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

“I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalms 119:11)

Practically speaking, it is important for you to help your children recognize what sinful behavior can do to their conscience. There are many examples that can be used to reinforce these concepts with your children. Depending on their ages, you can discuss anything from calluses on your feet to dirt and/or mud on your hands. When they are older, the effect of fire on the human nervous system is great example. In areas where your child’s conscience does not seem to be working, I recommend that you have him/her read, meditate on, and memorize Scriptures that deal with their current sinful patterns.

Weak Conscience-

On the other hand, the human conscience can also be overly sensitive. In Scripture, this is referred to as a weak conscience. A weak conscience is best understood as one that makes a person feel guilty even when no sin has been committed.

“But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.” (1 Cor. 8:7)

Typically, the root of a weak conscience stems from

theological errors, legalism, condemnation, and/or wounding. With children, it is important for them to understand the difference between the true convicting work of the Holy Spirit and Satan's attempt to imitate it (condemnation). Practically speaking, these are some of the differences between conviction and condemnation that should be pointed out to your children:

Conviction brings hope; condemnation brings hopelessness.

Conviction condemns your sin; condemnation condemns you.

Conviction reconciles you to God; condemnation separates you from God.

Conviction is typically peaceful, patient, and gentle; condemnation is typically harsh, strident, and merciless.

It is important for your children to realize that God's written Word, not their conscience, is their final authority. If God says they are forgiven, then they can accept that reality, no matter how they may feel.

Parents must configure the world view of their children to reflect the norms of Scripture.

With the rise of PostModernism and Pentacostalism, there has been a major shift in how both believers and unbelievers view the world. It is important for us to remember that many Christians in the West still view the world two-dimensionally. In other words, they acknowledge the reality of both temporal and eternal worlds. The Biblical view, however, is three-dimensional: temporal, spiritual, and eternal. It is in the second dimension – the “spiritual” world – that God, angels, and demons operate.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 6:12)

“... in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Eph. 2:2)

It is important for your children to be exposed the validity of the spiritual world as well as the Biblical principles for operating within it. Depending on the age of your child, this process includes understanding spiritual authority, recognizing the presence and attack of demons, and perceiving the presence and protection of angels. Practically, helping your children respond to night terrors and early child-hood fears is a good place to start.

In closing, I want to remind you of what Jesus said about the importance of the Holy Spirit's ministry:

“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7)

In this passage, Jesus states that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives would be better than having him present physically. As you introduce your children to the third person of the Trinity, you will see their lives being empowered and transformed in front of your very eyes.