

The Seasons of Parenting
July 19, 2020
Proverbs 29:15

Parenting is a LIFELONG endeavor. Donna and I have FOUR ADULT children. We love them dearly, and it is amazing how our RELATIONSHIP HAS CHANGED with each of them through the years.

Just as LIFE HAS SEASONS, **Parenting has seasons**, and this morning, I want to talk with you about **“The Seasons of Parenting”**, and just like Winter one day turns to Spring, and Spring to Summer, and Summer to Fall . . . your SEASONS AS A PARENT will also change.

Right now, you might be MIRED IN THE Preschool years. There are times when the days CAN'T END SOON ENOUGH - when you have a grumpy 2 or 3 year old who WON'T STOP WHINING or those late nights when that TEETHING baby is MISERABLE and making your nights long & sleepless. Some of you are wondering if there will ever be a day when you have NO MORE DIAPERS to change!

Trust me, those LONG DAYS & NIGHTS will end, and you will enter ANOTHER SEASON of life with those little ones. Then, one day, they won't BE SO LITTLE any more, and you will look back and wonder what happened to the time that seemed to creep along for so many years!

TODAY, we are going to DIVIDE PARENTING into 4 Seasons. All four seasons are UNIQUELY DIFFERENT. Each comes with their UPS & DOWNS - their FUN & FRUSTRATIONS - their JOYS & STRUGGLES.

And the way we relate to our children WILL CHANGE with each new season. The key is to UNDERSTAND THE SEASON you are in and then to adjust to the changes that that new season requires.

Let's look first at the YOUNG YEARS (birth to 5 years) - the SPRING season of parenting. I think the PRIORITIES OF THESE YEARS can be best described by **Proverbs 29:15 - “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”**

NASB - “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”

The early years are all about the child learning to do things guided by his parent . . . not his own way. I believe the Bible is clear; every child is born SELFISH & FOOLISH to varying degrees. Letting a young child set HIS OWN AGENDA or set the agenda for the family is a FOOLISH THING to do, but, it happens ALL THE TIME!

The Early Years of parenting are all about SETTING PROPER BOUNDARIES for your child with the parents setting THE DIRECTION for his life - What is good - What is NOT GOOD - What is acceptable behavior - and what is not acceptable!

For example: When we go to the grocery store, how will the child behave? How will we NOT BEHAVE? When we are RIDING IN THE CAR, what is **acceptable IN THAT BACK SEAT?**

Remember, that child is learning to LIVE IN YOUR WORLD - the one established by Mom and Dad. You DO NOT GO to live in their world, they arrive to live in yours! TRUST ME, **their world will not be a fun place to live in!**

From the start, most children WILL BATTLE YOU for control of the home. It usually starts with A BATTLE OVER when and where they will sleep! From there, it goes to fun battles LIKE WHAT they will eat. The STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL & DOMINANCE has begun! **Who’s world will we end up LIVING IN?**

Let me give you 4 PRINCIPLES that I hope will help you stay in CONTROL OF YOUR HOME at least to the degree that any parent with children can stay in control.

1. Be consistent with your rules and expectation! If it is wrong today, it needs to be wrong tomorrow. It should not depend on your MOOD - or on HOW TIRED you are - or on WHICH PARENT is enforcing the rules. We will talk more about this later!

It takes a lot of time and energy to be consistent. Depending on the child, you may have to fight the **same battle a thousand times!** Children learn VERY QUICKLY how long it will take for mom or dad to GIVE UP THE FIGHT! They learn WHAT ROUND you will surrender, and they will stay in the fight until you do!

Some strong-willed children will go TOE TO TOE for 15 rounds if necessary, but when your **authority is challenged**, you have TO WIN. Once you LOSE CONTROL, it is very difficult to get it back!

Always follow through enforcing the rules you have set or with the instructions you have given! Children quickly learn if your WORDS (YOUR INSTRUCTIONS) mean anything! Don't make EMPTY THREATS, and don't create rules you don't PLAN TO ENFORCE!

2. Parents are responsible to establish the boundaries for a young child! Boundaries are LIKE FENCES - they define for the child **what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.**

EX: It is OK to say you DON'T LIKE SQUASH, but it is not OK to THROW IT on the floor. It is acceptable to GET MAD at mommy if she does something you don't like. It is not acceptable to HIT HER or to TALK DISRESPECTFULLY to her when you are angry.

Establishing HOUSE RULES (or boundaries) for a young child is very important. You must also establish FAIR & AGE APPROPRIATE RULES. And you must communicate **clear, enforceable consequences** when those rules are broken. And remember, both the boundaries and the consequences MUST BE CONSISTENT day to day, hour by hour!

Let me give you young parents a SOBERING TRUTH - **You get whatever behavior you are willing to live with from a child!** If you are willing to live with a SCREAMING TODDLER pitching a fit whenever he doesn't get his way, then that is what you will probably have to live with!

If you are NOT WILLING to live with a particular behavior, then you must punish it and change it! I'm not saying that will be easy, but with FIRMNESS, FAIRNESS & CONSISTENCY, you can change almost any behavior over time.

One last point, **remember that these boundaries change as the child grows older and more responsible.** That is why riding your bike in the street might be fine for an 8-year-old, but not for a 4-year-old. The key here is you give MORE FREEDOM to a child who is willing to TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY that comes with that freedom. Many boundaries change EVERY YEAR.

3. Apply Appropriate Discipline as it is needed. Spanking (not beating) a child is an appropriate form of discipline for a DEFIANT CHILD. A defiant child is one who OPENLY CHALLENGES your authority!

This is the child who yells, NO! when asked to go to bed - or take a bath - or eat his dinner. In essence, THERE IS A MUTINY in the home when this kind of behavior happens, and it must be MET WITH FORCE!

Mom, Dad, when your AUTHORITY IS CHALLENGED, you must win and you must WIN DECISIVELY. If you don't, you will lose CONTROL OF YOUR HOME - and worse, you will LOSS THE RESPECT of that child.

He is **challenging your authority** because he wants to know if you are REALLY IN CHARGE or if you will BACK DOWN! I have seen many homes where a 3 OR 4-year-old ran the home because that is exactly what mom and dad do! It is SAD TO SEE!

Let me make this clear - NEVER SPANK a child for BEING A CHILD! They will spill things, they will break things - or FOR BEING IRRESPONSIBLE - they will leave TOYS OUTSIDE that should have been brought in Children will be both!

This is where you USE OTHER FORMS of discipline - like TIME OUT - or PICKING UP PINE CONES - one of my wife's all time favorites with our children!

You need to educate yourself on what **age appropriate behavior is** I have seen parents who are expecting WAY TOO MUCH (or TOO LITTLE) out of a child. Learn what you should expect out of a child then discipline them appropriately when those expectations are not met.

Here's the rule: For Childish Irresponsibility, you SHOULD TEACH. For OPEN REBELLION, you BETTER WIN!

4. Learn to give choices rather than giving orders! You can say, “Go take your bath now”, or you can say, “Would you rather take your bath first or brush your teeth first?” One is GIVING AN ORDER; the other is GIVING A CHOICE. Both will get the outcome you want, **but one almost always creates a fight - esp. with a strong-willed child.**

No one at ANY AGE likes to be told what to do, but everyone LIKES CHOICES. As a parent, the **choices WE GIVE are determined by you - what is acceptable to you!**

This works really well **with some strong-willed children,** because it empowers them in a good way - in an ACCEPTABLE WAY. They get to do the ONE THING they so strongly desire - and that is to BE IN CONTROL.

A side benefit is that children are also learning to make decisions, which is a HUGE PART of growing up! I’m not suggesting this will solve all your problems, but try this one before you dismiss it.

Eph. 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

These EARLY YEARS are all about TRAINING & DISCIPLINE. The first 5 years of life SETS THE PATH for a child. This season of parenting is DIFFICULT, BUT SO IMPORTANT. You are not BABY-SITTING those little ones. You are MOLDING THEM in ways that will be felt for the rest of their lives!

The next season is parenting (Summer Season) is the Elementary School / Middle school Years (6 to 12 years). **Luke 2:51-52 - Then He (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased (or grew) in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**

We are told earlier in the Chapter that Jesus was 12 years old at this time. He was in what I call **the Growing Years.** **These are the years we are starting to experience the outside world with Mom and Dad.**

The early years are when the CHILD ENTERS the world **of** mom & dad. During this next period of time, they really begin to come in contact with the outside world, but hopefully, it happens **while mom and dad are there to guide, influence, and interpret the child's first experiences with the things of this world!**

Let's look at 4 principles of raising children during this season of parenting:

1. You and your spouse must be on the same page in what is allowed and expected from your child! For most families, MOM IS THE PRIMARY influencer in the child's life during the EARLY YEARS. I'm not MINIMIZING THE ROLE of dad, but mom is usually there much more of the time during the EARLY YEARS, but during this second season, dad usually begins to take a much LARGER ROLE.

This is why it BECOMES VITAL that mom and dad are on the same page when it comes to HOUSE RULES & EXPECTATIONS. Have you ever seen a child get told "NO" BY ONE PARENT, only then to turn around and be told "YES" by the other one?

This happens far too often in family life. Parents, you have to GET ON THE SAME PAGE. Usually, one parent is MORE LENIENT, and one is STRICTER when it comes to discipline. This is NORMAL, but, if you will work together and MEET IN THE MIDDLE, you will usually be at a HEALTHY PLACE for your children!

Leniency creates major problems and being overly strict and protective creates its own set of problems. Healthy parenting is found in the middle ground! Work together, and find that place where you are both comfortable. It will take GIVE AND TAKE from both parents!

2. Treat your children with respect! Giving respect is the best way to EARN RESPECT. Giving respect does not mean being a weak parent - quite the opposite. It is having the STRENGTH TO RESTRAIN YOURSELF from treating your children unfairly. You are MODELING RESPECT for them!

We need to show children HOW THEY SHOULD EXPECT to be treated. From the time my children (especially my girls) were about 9 or 10 years old, I would **never enter their rooms without knocking first**. I wanted them to know I respected them as YOUNG LADIES. I wanted them to RESPECT THEMSELVES. I wanted them to expect young boys to respect them!

3. We need to spend a lot of time with children during these ages!

Obviously, children need our TIME & ATTENTION at every age, but this TIME PERIOD IS DIFFERENT. This is the age where YOUR PRESENCE is welcome and needed.

Remember, they are starting to INTERACT in a much greater way to the world. They need both an INTERPRETER and A DIVERSION FROM the world's attractions!

They need AN ALTERNATIVE to TV & internet games. Do things as a family - play Games - teach your kids to play dominoes or Monopoly, or Card games. Make vacations with the family a priority.

We couldn't afford expensive vacations when our children were these ages. But, I think our kids will tell you they have some of the best memories from our times camping each summer.

Coach your children's sports team. You can learn about the game as you go. This is what RECREATIONAL LEAGUES are all about. Ride bikes together - Fish together - just spend as much time with them as possible during these ages. Give them HEALTHY, FUN alternatives to the attractions of the world!

Influence is a function of time together! You can't influence someone you are not around. If you want your children to listen to you, **you have to be the primary voice in their lives!**

Get them OFF THE COUCH. Rescue them from their VIDEO SCREENS. Yes, you won't have much time for yourself if you do what I'm telling you; you will have plenty of time for that hobby once they are gone, and they will be gone soon enough!

4. Give them age appropriate chores around the house! Children need to learn the importance of working together as a family. They also need to LEARN THE LIFE SKILLS that come with work around the house.

This is where children **learn responsibility.** This is where they **grow in confidence** as a person. MS students can do their own laundry with just a little teaching. ES students can clean their rooms - they can make their own lunch for school.

Yes, it will take some work on your part to teach them. and yes, it is often easier to do it yourself, but our goal is to **TEACH THEM** that they can handle life without you!

During these important years, they are getting introduced to the outside world. **Make sure you are there to HELP THEM PROPERLY interpret and understand it!**

Many parents FEAR THEIR CHILDREN learning about this outside world. Yes, it is so opposed to what you are trying to teach your children. But, it is better that they are exposed to SOME OF IT WHILE YOU ARE THERE to help them properly interpret that world!

Make sure YOU ARE THERE especially during these elementary and middle school years!

The next season of parenting is the Fall season. These are the TEEN YEARS from ages 13 to 19 years. Today, for many, this might extend up to age 22 or maybe even to 25. If it goes much past there, we have a problem!

We will call these, **The Exploring Years - This is the time when a teenage child begins to explore and experience the world without Mom and Dad right there beside them.**

This is the time when ALL OF YOUR TRAINING & DISCIPLINE will hopefully pay off, though I have learned that there **are no guarantees.** Every child has a FREE WILL to make their own choices, but don't think YOUR INVESTMENT in them will pay no dividends - It will.

The verse I love to reference for parents during the TEEN YEARS is **Daniel 1:8** “**But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.**”

Daniel was a teenage boy when he was taken from his home in Judah. He finds himself captive in the WORLD HEADQUARTERS of paganism. He’s in Babylon. Yet, even in this **pressure packed, reprograming HIGH SCHOOL in Babylon**, he remained faithful to those things he had been taught from the Holy Scriptures by his parents!

Your children can make this SAME DECISION! We have to TRUST THEM, and we have to **trust what we have taught them!** Let’s look at 4 principles for this season of parenting.

1. Give your child room to grow! You must make a conscious effort to TAKE A STEP BACK during these years. Yes, you can solve many of their problems by STEPPING IN, but is that what is best for them? Yes, you can MAKE LIFE EASIER for them BY INTERCEPTING their problems, but is that what is best for them?

TEENS must learn how to **SOLVE their own problems.** Certainly, you can GIVE THEM ADVICE when they ask. But let them WORK THROUGH things. Let them deal with the teacher they are having a problem with. Don’t treat them like THEY ARE HELPLESS! This is how we GAIN CONFIDENCE that we can solve problems for ourselves!

CAN THEY FAIL? That is a possibility, but that is also how they will grow! The BEST LESSONS in life generally come from failure!

2. Respect their turf! Learn the art of **watching them from a distance.** The YOUTH GROUP is their turf. Their High School is their turf. When you are there, you are a **Visitor on their turf.**

Donna and I attended MANY SPORTING EVENTS at Brookwood High School. On the way, I would always remind myself that I was entering their turf. That meant STAYING LOW KEY & out of the way. If they want to see us, they will come FIND US!

Mom/Dad, let them come to you! They MAY OR MAY NOT want to see you right then - this is THEIR EVENT, not yours. You are there as a guest - RESPECT THEIR RIGHT to be with their friends!

I learned very quickly with my children that THEY WANTED ME THERE. They really wanted MY SUPPORT as they played a SOFTBALL GAME or MARCHED in a half-time show. They just didn't want me to STAND OUT. They wanted to know I was WATCHING. They just didn't want me to embarrass them!

Donna and I learned the ART OF BEING INVISIBLE - but what staying away from them did was IT GAVE THEM THE FREEDOM to come find us - to come SIT WITH US when they were ready - but the choice needed to be theirs! RESPECT THEIR TURF!

3. Don't interrogate them. Listen to them. They will talk when they are ready to talk! That usually happens on their schedule, not yours. For our kids, it was usually around 11:30 at night. Just about the time we were asleep, there would come a knock at the door - **"You guys awake?"** - Of course, the answer was always YES!

Then, when they do talk, BE CAREFUL **not to over-react to what they say!** No matter how SHOCKING it might be, you may be STUNNED & EVEN FRIGHTENED at what they are dealing with!

IN THAT MOMENT, just be thankful they are INVOLVING YOU - but don't REACT! Many parents panic and START PREACHING. You will quickly shut them down if you do! And they won't come to you next time!

They need to know YOU ARE SAFE to talk to. Just listen - be that SAFE PLACE - don't force them to SHUT YOU OUT.

Don't condemn what they are saying! Instead, LISTEN & LEARN TO Ask questions rather than PASSING JUDGMENT. **"What do you think about that?" "Is that something you see yourself doing?" "What would be your concerns in that situation?"**

TRUST ME, they already know what you think! They are young adults trying to FIGURE THINGS OUT.

They are LEARNING HOW to think. They are trying to FIGURE OUT what they think. Asking the right question HELPS THEM do just that. Give them room to THINK & GROW, and be thankful they have entrusted you into that circle!

4. Limit the dangers! Know when to step in. Teenagers are not ready for TOTAL FREEDOM by any stretch! **A WISE PARENT learns to let out the right amount of rope!**

I encourage you to **maintain a Curfew** in your home. Ours was usually somewhere between 11:00 and Midnight except on very rare occasions. WE would encourage Double Dating or Group dating over going out alone. We would determine who they could ride with, especially with other teenage drivers. We would decide what parties they could attend and which are off limits.

They may go BEHIND YOUR BACK, and that is to some degree out of your control, but as long as they are IN YOUR HOME, these are all decisions that are **still your responsibility.** YOU CAN'T stop them from making bad decisions, but you can make IT MORE DIFFICULT to make them, and often you can LIMIT THE DAMAGE!

The ART OF SUCCESSFUL parenting is knowing WHAT FREEDOMS your teens can handle, and what they can't handle. Here is the principle to follow: **The more responsibility my teen shows they can handle, the greater the freedom I will give them.**

Remember, during the teen years, you are PULLING BACK, but it is certainly NOT HANDS OFF!

The final season of parenting is the one **many parents dread.** We will call it the Winter Season. It is the time when our children leave our home as adults. **We will call this, "The Independent Years" - The time when our children are leaving the world of Mom and Dad.**

Many parents hate the thought of their children leaving, but I believe this is something to be excited about and to rejoice over.

For if a child is ready to successfully move out and live responsibly on their own, then you have DONE YOUR JOB!

But, the relationship should change. **Very simply: Now they can become YOUR FRIEND!** Up to THIS POINT, that was not THE BEST IDEA! You had other priorities with your child that TOOK PRECEDENCE over friendship, but now that is changing.

Certainly, you will always be the parent, but this new dynamic of friendship is added to the relationship.

Remember Jesus' relationship with HIS DISCIPLES. He was the teacher - They were the students - He was the Master - They were the disciples. But after the 3 1/2 years of training, the night before His death, he said the following words to them in John 15:13-15.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

In one sense, NOTHING about their relationship had changed. He was still the SON OF GOD, and they were still SINFUL MEN. But, in another sense, EVERYTHING had changed. Jesus ADDED FRIENDSHIP to the relationship!

Friendship brings in an ELEMENT OF EQUALITY to the relationship. It is Jesus ELEVATING his disciples to a higher place. Even though they were not truly equal, one was still the teacher - one was still the student - one was still the parent - one was still the child. Yet the Parent (the MASTER) ALLOWED the relationship to change!

We must accept our children as GROWN, RESPONSIBLE adults. We must treat them with this HIGHER **level of respect**. Even though in many ways we know THEY ARE STILL KIDS!

Let me quickly give you 4 principles to help you with this transition:

1. Don't re-establish a "dependent" relationship with them once it has ended! Sometimes parents CONFUSE LOVE WITH DEPENDENCE. They like their child depending on them for support, but this is NOT HEALTHY for either the parent or the child.

LOANING money to a child can be dangerous - having to give money so they can pay bills on a regular basis is not healthy. Allowing them to live in your home **without rent or responsibility** can CREATE AN UNHEALTHY situation. The exception would be a short-term period in order to reach a positive long-term goal - to finish school, buy a home, pay off debt.

Dependence will not allow for A FRIENDSHIP. It can only develop when a child DOESN'T "NEED" YOU, then both sides have the freedom to choose to love on the higher place of Friendship!

2. Don't invade where you have not been invited! Respect that they have a life that may or may not include you the way you want to be included!

The new boundaries are set by them, especially when they get married. **This is a really difficult change for most parents** Up until this point, you have always had the UPPER HAND OF CONTROL. Then your child gets married, and there is this other person who HAS SUPPLANTED YOU in your child's life, BUT that is the way it should be!

BUT, also remember, you need to set boundaries for your side of the relationship. You must have to be able to SAY "NO" without feeling guilty for a week!

3. Advice should be given when it is asked for! This is hard when they decide to do things differently than you raised them. You are so tempted to STEP IN and correct them! Be careful! You might just RUN THEM OFF!

"Learn to bite your tongue" This is one of the things Donna and I quickly learned when our children got married! We remind each other that it is OK if they choose a different path for their family!

The exception would be where there is **addiction or mental illness or blatant, destructive sin**. These are times a FAMILY MUST step in uninvited! But these are very rare occasions. Don't make them the NORM!

4. Work to develop and maintain the friendship! ALL friendships take TIME & EFFORT to keep them growing. We still have to PRIORITIZE our family if we want to see the relationship stay HEALTHY.

Make sure you are FINDING TIMES & OCCASIONS to keep your family strong. Sometimes DISTANCE WON'T ALLOW the closeness we desire - but keep MAKING AN EFFORT!

Let me conclude with a FINAL THOUGHT on parenting in general. Outside of a healthy, strong LOVE FOR GOD, one might ask, **“What are the traits I am most trying to develop in my child in order for them to live a joyful and successful life?”** I think the answer is found in Gen. 2:24-25.

In these verses, we have the first mention of a child LEAVING HOME. I think from here, we get a Great Goal for our Parenting:

Gen. 2:24-25 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. “

I see here 4 Key Traits that are must be produced in a Child's life before they are ready to leave home:

1. **They must be able to live independent of mom and dad.** You want your children ready TO LEAVE mom and dad. This means they can survive in life without you!
2. **They are able to make and keep Commitments.** They are ready to make VOWS OF COMMITMENT to another person. You want them ready to “be joined” to another person in a life-long commitment of marriage.

3. **They are able to connect emotionally (intimately) with another person.** If they haven't cut the emotional cord from you, they will find it difficult to have an emotional connection with a spouse. There's only room for two in a marriage! A "one flesh" relationship with a spouse requires that they be FREED OF ANY BONDAGE to you!
4. **They are trustworthy.** They can be "naked" (**physically, emotionally, spiritually**) with another person and be trusted not to shame or harm that person! Have you LET GO enough to find out if YOUR CHILDREN are trustworthy?

We all have made MANY MISTAKES as parents. It is never too late to correct the mistakes of the past. Remember this truth from Scripture: **Love covers a multitude of sins!** When in doubt, keep loving that child!

I didn't say, "Keep doing for that child" or "Keep giving to that child" or "Keep rescuing that child". I said keep loving that child! IT IS NEVER TOO LATE!