ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Session 3

Parents Are Shepherds

Parents Are Called to Guide, Protect, and Prepare

The Question Every Parent Must Answer

In our first session, we learned that children are influenced by many voices. In our second session, we learned that not every influence has a child's best interests at heart. This leads to an important question: What is the role of a parent? Many parents feel overwhelmed by the challenges facing children today as the world, technology, and culture change quickly. Yet God's calling for parents has not changed: parents are called to be shepherds.

What Does a Shepherd Do?

When most people think of a shepherd, they think of protection. Protection is certainly part of the job, but a shepherd does much more than protect. A shepherd guides, teaches, watches, and prepares. A shepherd helps others recognize danger before danger arrives, and most importantly, helps those in their care learn how to live wisely.

> *The goal is not to keep sheep in the pen forever, but to prepare them for life beyond the pen.*

The same is true for parenting. Parents and grandparents possess something few others have: history. They know what is normal for their child, as well as their strengths, struggles, gifts, fears, and patterns. That long-term perspective allows them to notice changes that others may miss. One mother told me that when her adult son moved to Japan to teach, they stayed in touch through regular video calls; although he spoke mostly about ordinary challenges, she could tell from his eyes that something was wrong. Much later he revealed some of the deeper struggles he had faced when he first arrived. Others might not have noticed, but a parent who had watched him grow for years recognized the change immediately.

Parenting Is Preparation

Many parents focus primarily on protecting their children. Protection matters, but protection alone is not enough. Eventually children leave home, make their own decisions, and encounter influences without us standing beside them. Our task is not simply to protect children while they

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are young, but to prepare them for the day when we are no longer there. Children need wisdom, judgment, confidence, and the ability to recognize healthy and unhealthy influences for themselves.

The story of Esther provides a powerful example. Mordecai could not accompany Esther into the palace, make decisions for her, or protect her from every danger. But he had spent years preparing her, and when the critical moment arrived, Esther was able to act with courage, wisdom, and discernment. Good parenting works much the same way:

> *There comes a time when our children must make decisions without us, and the preparation happens long before the decision.*

The Goal Is Not Fear

Sometimes parents hear about dangers facing children and become fearful, but fear, control, and isolation are not the goal. The goal is wisdom.

> *We are not trying to raise fearful children; we are trying to raise children who are difficult to manipulate, who know how to think, understand consequences, trust their instincts, recognize unhealthy influences, and know where to turn when they need help.*

Over the years, I have watched many families. The strongest families were not necessarily the ones with the strictest rules; they were the families that stayed engaged. They talked, listened, paid attention, corrected when necessary, and encouraged often. Their children knew they were loved, valued, and that there was always a safe place to return when life became difficult. That is shepherding.

The Six Skills of Preparation

If shepherding means preparing children for life, what does that preparation look like? Over many years of raising children and working with families, six practical skills emerged again and again to help children navigate relationships, influences, and decisions throughout life:

1
Communication
Teach children to talk. Listen first.

2
Boundaries
Teach children to say no. Guard what is valuable.

3
Discernment
Teach children to see agendas. Test everything.

4
Intuition
Teach children to trust discomfort. Pay attention.

5
Consequences
Teach children to understand cause and effect. You reap what you sow.

6
Media & Cultural Exposure
Teach children to manage influence. Choose your influences carefully.

These six skills do not eliminate risk, but they do help children become wiser, stronger, and more difficult to manipulate.

THIS WEEK

One Thing to Try This Week

Choose one of the following practical action steps to implement this week:

- Identify which of the six skills is currently strongest in your child.
- Identify which skill may need the most attention.
- Ask yourself: “Am I primarily protecting my child, or am I preparing my child?”

LOOKING AHEAD

Digging Deeper

Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd, a shepherd who knows, guides, protects, and prepares those in his care. Parenting reflects that same calling. God has entrusted children to us for a season, and our responsibility is not to control them forever, but to prepare them to walk wisely when they eventually walk on their own. The six skills in the following lessons are designed to help parents do exactly that.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to reflect on the role God has given you:

- When I think about parenting, do I spend more energy protecting my child or preparing my child?
- If my child had to make a difficult decision today without me present, would they have the wisdom and confidence to make a good choice?
- Which of the six skills am I intentionally teaching?
- Which skill am I assuming my child will somehow learn on their own?
- Do my children know they can bring mistakes, questions, fears, and struggles back to me without fear of rejection?
- Am I paying attention to the changes taking place in my child's life, or am I simply reacting when problems become obvious?
- If my child described me to someone else, would they describe me as engaged, available, and interested in their world?
- Am I creating a home where wisdom is being taught, or merely a home where rules are enforced?
- What kind of adult do I hope my child becomes?
- How am I preparing them for that future today?

The goal of these questions is not perfection—the goal is intentionality.

Good shepherds do not simply react to problems; they prepare those in their care for the challenges they will eventually face on their own.

REMEMBER

Key Takeaways

- **Parents are called to be shepherds.**
- **A shepherd does more than protect; a shepherd guides, teaches, watches, and prepares.**
- **The goal is not to keep children dependent forever.**
- **The goal is to prepare them for life beyond our direct supervision.**
- **Wise parenting focuses on preparation as much as protection.**
- **Children need wisdom, judgment, confidence, and discernment.**
- **The strongest families are often the ones that stay engaged.**
- **The goal is not to raise fearful children.**
- **The goal is to raise children who are difficult to manipulate.**