

The right kind of parent—what exactly does that look like? Someone who helps with homework and is active with the PTA? Who pushes kids to be successful and make good choices? Who highlights accomplishments and punishes bad behavior?

Moms and dads everywhere have all sorts of opinions. Biblically, though, we don't give credence to our own opinions. God's Word tells us that there is a right way to raise a child. And since God knows we're different, and our family situations look different, He doesn't simply give us a rigid set of rules to follow. Rather He directs our attention to one thing. The Word calls this the FIRST thing.

All that other parenting stuff is important. Very important. But we must get the FIRST thing right, so all these other things will fall into place.

There are a ton of good parenting practices out there. [Point out examples of Jochebed, Hannah and Mary .. and Timothy's mom (& grandmother) In NT]. The truth is that we moms, parents should try and emulate the many best practices we can see in the Bible.

We must have good discussions about good parenting practices, but we can only have those discussions within a certain context. Otherwise, even with the grandest intentions, those best practices will fail. I'm not saying this. The Bible actually teaches this. Jesus actually taught His disciples:

There is a FIRST thing

Everything else is a NEXT thing

Mix the order and you will fail. Get the order right, and you will always succeed.

Go with me to Matthew 6. I want to talk to you about FIRST things. We need to learn to recognize and commit to FIRST things before focusing on NEXT things.

In His famous sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches us clearly what needs to be FIRST. Matthew 6: 31-33 (NIV). "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek FIRST his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In all your parental planning, in all your "I'm gonna be the best parent ever" thinking, it's important to get our FIRST right.

What's FIRST? His Kingdom and His righteousness. Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul and so many other bible heroes struggled with this. Every time the focus shifted to a personal ambition, personal gain, personal win - they faced disastrous consequences. But every time their attention was on seeking God's Kingdom and God's righteousness, everything fell into place. This is the Kingdom-First principle - and while you may be very familiar with this passage, we're going to look at it more closely in the context of parenting.

As believers, many of us inherently want to please God. We want to seek Him. On some level, at least mentally, we actually do desire this God-FIRST life. So why do so few Christians actually live it out? Desire vs reality. There's a gap. It was certainly true in my own life. [Share testimony]

Kingdom-first living - I wanted it, but didn't know how to get there. Desire vs reality. How do we bridge this gap? Let's unpack this important truth from Matthew 6.

Because my job as a parent is not only to teach my children good things they're supposed to do, but teach my children that they're Kingdom children, that they've been called to Kingdom things, commanded to complete a Kingdom mission. It's not just that I raise obedient children. I want to raise Kingdom minded children as well.

Back to Matthew 6. First, notice the context. Matthew is explaining how Jesus contrasts an earthly Kingdom with a godly Kingdom. In both kingdoms we are pursuing something. In Matthew 6, after teaching about prayer and fasting Jesus introduces this concept of storing up treasures. Look at verses 19 - 24:

Matthew 6:19-24 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

There are many temporal pursuits - but they won't amount to much in the end.

Earthly treasures - worldly successes may not be bad but they have no eternal value. (all the best parenting practices we mentioned earlier - all are good, but you can't take any of these to heaven! They are not everlasting.)

Good parenting practices are good - even necessary. But they need a proper context because they will not pass from this life into the next. Only Kingdom practices will accompany us for eternity. We must be careful with how we raise our kids. Without proper context, with prioritizing, without first things first, we can mess up our loyalty.

Our “eye” verse 22 or focus is either directed towards earthly pursuits, or heavenly pursuits. We have a choice here between 2 pursuits - 2 kingdoms. And because one can be in direct conflict with our commitment and loyalty to Jesus, we cannot pursue both. If first things are not first, our seemingly worthwhile pursuits, our good practices can all become idols in our life.

Because the pursuit of God’s Kingdom is so important, Jesus takes the time to spell it out for His disciples 2000 years ago, and for us today. Matthew 6: 25 - 30

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”

“But what about ...” YES, the comforts and necessities of life are important - what to eat or drink. YES, we should provide for our kids, give them good things to enjoy, things that will be of benefit to them physically and emotionally. But as Jesus instructs us - do not worry or be anxious about any of those things - FIRST! Keep First things first! Those are all NEXT things, not the FIRST thing. This is what distinguishes believers from non-believers. It’s our witness!

SO what’s the FIRST thing? How do we keep first things first? How do you and I live this Kingdom-FIRST life so we can practice Kingdom-First Parenting? There are three Kingdom-First principles from this passage that we can study and apply to achieve Kingdom-First parenting:

1) KINGDOM-FIRST parenting requires diligent effort.

Notice how Jesus brings in the Father in verse 32. We are His children! We don’t exert effort to become His children - we already are! From a position of being a child of God, a child of the Kingdom, we now exert effort to understand His Kingdom. This is important!

Next, from this privileged position, we must seek. What does it mean to seek? NOT “Oh look, there it is!” Intentional seeking requires effort especially when there are challenges/oppositions. We must be determined to push through. Follow hard after God.

With social media, television, music, school and even church claiming so much real estate in a child’s mind, it can be hard to make sense of right and wrong. That’s why parents must be intentional. Unless we became the dominant influences in our children’s lives, somebody else would.

Moms - we want to have that conversation early that our home doesn’t belong to us, our possessions don’t belong to us. This is not our little private domain where we shut the door and shut the world out and we do all the selfish things we want to do. Even our most private spaces belong to the Lord. They belong for His use. Your toys don’t belong to you, but they belong to God. They’re there for His use.

His Kingdom = His reign and rule. Is Christ’s lordship evident in your life? His righteousness = His way of doing things. Jesus and everything He represents is revealed to us in His Word by His Holy Spirit. [Are you praying? Are you reading your Bible?]

Is Kingdom-mindedness evident in every area of your parenting? Are you regularly reinforcing the fact that God is our Heavenly Father? That He binds us to Himself through covenant?

Parents literally will move to a different home in order to provide the best possible school for their children. For many parents, it is far more important for their kids to make the team than to make it in God’s kingdom. They’ll get their kids to baseball, football, basketball, or soccer practice on time, but not to church. But raising heirs and heiresses of the kingdom takes purposefully positioning them in an environment where they will learn, understand, and apply a kingdom mindset.

Kingdom parenting starts with creating a Kingdom-mindset [personal example].

We must actively cultivate these disciplines in our life because the elusiveness of wealth and the vulnerability of personal need will continue to distract all of us. We must set ourselves up intentionally to guard against these distractions. We must decide for ourselves to seek God through worship, Word, prayer, modeling and reflecting the life God intends for them to have.

2) KINGDOM-FIRST parenting life demands authentic trust.

Moms, Dads - go out of your way, fight your way through to set the Kingdom firmly in front of your family, and then trust God!

Verse 33. God is able (because He is sovereign) and He is willing (because He is all-loving).

That is why we should not be anxious.

Yes, it's a scary world to raise our kids in, but to fret and worry is an affront to the God we call Father! He sees. He knows. He cares.

Worldly fretting - that's what people who don't know God do!

As believers, as God's children, we must live lives that are tangibly different from those around us who have no personal relationship with God. They do not know a Heavenly Father, and therefore cannot trust Him with their daily needs. They cease to have any worthy goals beyond material things and physical comforts.

The problem with even the best parenting practices outside the proper context is that we start to worry about them when we struggle to keep them. Our attention wanders. Danger of divided allegiance - breeds worry and disloyalty. And worry is a sign that we no longer trust God - OUCH!

Difference between godly responsibility vs untrusting worry

Worry can masquerade as responsibility - be careful!

Develop a high sense of your own Kingdom worth and value, and then trusting God will become easier.

Keeping God first, trusting Him above else helps all these other (next) things to fall into their proper place (give practical examples).

3) KINGDOM-FIRST parenting activates perpetual grace.

Verse 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Do not worry about tomorrow, or about NEXT things.

God cares about the birds, the flowers and even the grass! He loves you and will take care of you. We can rest confidently in the loving care of an Almighty God! Today is about today, tomorrow will take care of itself.

The FIRST thing is the first thing! Next things will take care of themselves!

In the wilderness, manna was to be gathered daily, not gathered one day to be stored up for the next. (The sabbath was the only exception). In the gospels, Jesus taught His disciples that they were to ask for “daily bread” - to live every day by daily dependence. Day by day, His mercies are new every morning. He gives grace for that day, on that day.

Lamentations 3:22-25 22 “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” 25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.”

God’s favor and provision are for that day; His mercies are new every morning. He gives grace for that day, on that day.

Jesus did not say don’t aspire to give good things to your kids. But don’t become unduly concerned about these things to the point of worry and anxiety. Your earthly pursuits flow out of your pursuit of God’s Kingdom and His righteousness.

Put first things FIRST!

Kingdom mindset.

Kingdom pursuits.

Kingdom goals.