

VISION FORWARD



3 WAYS YOUR FAMILY SHOULD BE ABLE TO TRUST YOU

by Pastor Jonathan Evans

It was a week or two before my son Joshua and Hayley got married. I recognized a season of parenting was ending and was reflecting on that. “How do I know I’ve done well?,” I asked God. I felt the answer come in the form of another question: “Does Joshua love Me well? Does he love Hayley well? Does he love his family and extended family well?”

Alissa and I have talked about our parenting and, while our children in the end will make their own decisions and be responsible for their own actions, we want to be able to say at the end, “We did the best we could. We did all that God asked us to do.”

As disciples, we all desire to look Jesus in the eye and hear Him say one day, “Well done good and faithful servant.” We are stewards under His authority and our aim is to please and be faithful to Him. In the same way and for the same reason, if God has entrusted us with a family, we want to hear

Him say at the end, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

Trust is a sacred thing. Trustworthiness is beyond compare. So here are three ways your family should be able to trust you:

Can they trust you to love God well?

Can they trust you to love them by learning from God? As it regards marriage/family, my faith hasn’t guided me as much as Jesus has guided my faith. Faith needs an object. In fact, our faith is only as good as its object. Faith is my living, moving commitment and trust towards Jesus Christ, the Solid Rock of my salvation. It’s the clinging of my heart to Him, the fixing of my eyes upon Him. It’s asking Him everyday with regard to my marriage and family, “Lord, teach me what to do?”

Can they trust you to love God’s Word? I love God well by being strong and courageous to obey His Word, neither turning from it to the left nor to the right. We can say to our family, “The Bible says,” but they should also “read” the Bible in your life. The living and active Word of God should be living and

active in you. What they see matters! Do they see you reading the Scriptures? Do they see you worshipping at church? Do they see you serving others? Do they see you repenting and asking for forgiveness? Let the Word of God dwell in you richly, making a permanent dwelling in your thoughts, decisions, and actions.

Can they trust you to love God's people? Can your family trust you to love the church well, God's people well? Biblically you cannot love Christ and hate His church, because the church is His bride. If someone wants to have a relationship with me, but hates Alissa, my wife, the relationship becomes impossible. Yes, the church is ugly at times, flawed and imperfect. We are sinners saved by grace. But Jesus died for her to purify her. We love the church, ultimately, for the sake of Jesus who purchased her with His precious blood.

Can they trust you to love them well?

As I've married young couples over the last few years, including Joshua and Hayley, I've begun adding a sentence to the end of the traditional vows. I feel the sentence clearly and succinctly summarizes the promise they are making: "I am yours completely, exclusively, and permanently by the grace of God". The words "by the grace of God" are the most important words in that statement. Why? Because who has the power to keep such an enormous and magnificent promise? You don't know the future, but you are making a promise that the future won't change your promise. You don't know the circumstances you'll face nor the price it'll cost you to be faithful everyday, but you're making a promise that no matter the circumstances and no matter the cost you will keep your promise.

When you make a promise, you are behaving like God (Numbers 23:19). In Exodus 3:12, 14 God makes a promise to Moses: "*I will be with you*". And God makes the same promise to Joshua, Moses's successor (Joshua 1:5). On the basis of what can God make such a promise? On the basis of what can Moses and Joshua trust God to keep His promise? On the basis or the ground of: "*I AM WHO I AM*" — the revealed character of God.

Can your family trust you to love them with your character? To allow the "I AM WHO I AM" now revealed in Jesus Christ to dwell and live in you, forming His character within you? To ask Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, to

empower you to keep your promises? Can your family trust that no matter the future you are the one who will be there with them? At all times can they trust you to pray for them? To show them affection? To give them encouragement? To build them up? To give them time and show them interest? And, especially, to sacrifice for them?

Can they trust you to love them with your personal involvement? Having and leading family is a tremendous sacrifice on your part and, in a hyper-individualistic culture, sacrificing what you want and who you are is shocking, radical, against the "religion" of the day. Long gone are the days in America when the individual sacrificed personal desires for the good of the family. Today the family is expected to sacrifice all for the sake of the individual. But this is not how it is to be in the family or families of God.

The nature and character of God is love: to lay down your life for another. It is to be involved, not isolated. Joshua and Hayley's wedding was both private *and* public. I said they were committing to everyone attending that they would seek for their marriage to add something good to their lives. That just as all those present had been a part of their lives up until then (and would continue to be), so now they were also committing to being a healthy part of their lives moving forward. Are you personally involved with your family? Can they trust you to lead them to be personally involved in the lives of others?

Can they trust you to love your home well?

Home means the land or the place of your dwelling, a "homeland". Can your family trust you to love them by cultivating your home, the land/place of your dwelling, well? The difference between a wilderness and a garden is the attentive hard-working farmer. A home and a land cannot cultivate itself. We must watch faithfully and diligently over our homes.

Another way of talking about cultivating your home is to talk about the *culture* of your home. Culture doesn't simply exist; a culture is cultivated, created. A culture is a personality. Every business, organization, church, home has a personality. Some organizations are known for being generous while others are known for being ruthless. Some families and homes are warm and welcoming while others are cold and distant. Whether we see it or not, our home has a culture and personality. And our children will reap the fruit of the culture we sow.

Can your family trust you to cultivate a Christ-like culture in your home? And hand in hand with that, can they trust you to love them by understanding the culture and “the times” they are living in? As both disciples and families, Jesus is praying to the Father for us (Jn 17:14-15). We are to be in the world and sent into the world, but not of the world nor confused with the world. The times that we are living in can be complex and overwhelming, but we must remember that the Lord of all cultures and over all times is interceding on our behalf. He will lead us in the truth and His wisdom through the issues of our day.

Personally, I've sought to help my children understand three aspects of the times/culture they/we are living in:

1) The modern self — over centuries we have decisively turned inward and search for meaning, purpose, and moral authority there. Our feelings are now our highest authority. We no longer look to any external source of authority.

2) Sex and sexuality — if feelings and inward desires are the highest authority, then sex and sexuality become central to “who I am,” the authentic self.

3) Technology and Politics — technology leads us to believe all of life is malleable and that it's possible to conform life and ourselves to our every whim and wish. And, because sexuality is central to who we are, then sexual identity becomes central to politics and total affirmation of our identity becomes the goal or agenda.

Can your family trust you to love them by both examining the times and teaching them from the Scriptures about the heart of man, the human body, the purpose of humanity in the image of God? You need not be a philosopher or a pastor. It is enough that you should be a worshipper of Jesus, a lover of God's Word, and a student of humanity (especially of your own heart).

And, finally, understanding the times, can your family trust you to love them by loving the world you are in well? This will involve both grace and truth. Your home should smell like or have the aroma of Jesus, which to some will be the aroma of life and to others of death. To those for whom it is life, welcome them. As disciples of Jesus, our “belief system” gives us the resources to welcome into our home those who

disagree with us and with whom we disagree, even to share a table and have a relationship with them. But the belief system of the world does not and cannot offer the same kind of resources.

Dear Elim Grace, as we seek to live by faith as families, let's take to heart what Paul wrote with great joy and conviction: our “family...is named” by God (Ephesians 3:14-15). To be named is to reveal the inner being, the true nature of that person. A name given us by God is more than a label. It's God's sign signifying bringing us into existence, exercising His dominion and authority over us, and giving each of our families their appropriate role in this life and community. Our families can reveal the nature and glory of God to the world around us.

A community will never rise above the families that live in that community. Is it possible, then, that we are born for such a times as this not only as individuals but also as families? Is it possible that Jesus has sent us as a family and a people into this community for such a day as this? It is! So let us humbly and wholeheartedly look to Him and depend upon Him who's given us a name, a trust, a promise, and the power of His Spirit. “But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). God has entrusted us with something beautiful and powerful: a family. May we look Jesus in the eye one day and hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant”.

BOOKS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Here are four books I've found helpful as I've sought to love my family and our church family well:

- 1) *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy and Kathy Keller
- 2) *Children of the Living God* by Sinclair Ferguson
- 3) *Strange New World* by Carl R. Trueman
- 4) *The Four Loves* by C.S. Lewis

PARENTING 101: Babies

by Phil and Judy Ryan

Parenting is for the long term not the short term. So, on any given day when you feel like a failure, remind yourself of this. One of the other things to remember is that you are Your Heavenly Father's child so like any good Father He is also with you. In His word (the Bible) there are lots of good lessons on parenting. With Your Heavenly Father and Your Elder Brother Jesus and the guiding power of the Holy Spirit in your life you are not going to fail; you are going to thrive as a parent.

Babies need gentle care and attention. They should come with a label that reads handle with care. Parents are often overly concerned about not knowing enough before their first child is born, but with the Father's love for this new life comes wisdom ready for your asking both in the form of others in the family of God and your personal family and in the Word of God. Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward - Psalm 127:3.

One of the greatest things to learn in parenting is to speak life into your child's life. This is done through a number of different ways as your child ages. For babies it comes in the form of you looking them right in the face and gently talking to them. Singing worship songs and hymns are also great ways to calm babies. Done before naps, they have a way of calming your heart before the Lord so to your child. Worship music helps you to be more ready to be the blessing that your baby needs too.

Pray over and for your child out loud. Maybe you found math to be very challenging throughout your school years then pray that your baby will not only find math easy but enjoy doing math. Maybe as you pray the Spirit prompts you to see this child speaking another language; then pray that your child will find other languages easy and enjoyable to learn. Ask Your Heavenly Father how to pray for this little one and pray for what He shows you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your baby won't interrupt with questions but they will hear your words. Remember John the Baptist was empowered by the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. Babies love soft gentle words and songs directed at them from mom or dad. This also

starts a process in you as a parent of speaking life into your child's life.

There is still the need to set some boundaries even for babies at least beyond six months of age. Crying is what babies do for several reasons. They hurt, they are uncomfortable, they are hungry, they want attention. If you have fixed the first three and they simply want your attention and stop crying when you give it to them and start up again the minute you put them down, then normally, you know that it is attention seeking. Yes, babies crave attention, just as we all do. You can set a five-minute rule when putting a baby down. If they cry for five minutes, go check to see if anything has changed, like they have filled their diaper, and correct any issues; but if they stop crying and nothing else has changed then calm them down (sing them a song or pray over them that they would want to rest and be at peace) and return them to bed and wait another five minutes before returning to them. This is a learning process for parents and the baby so it may take some time. Stay the course as it will pay off later.

As a parent, resist the temptation to have your baby sleep in your bed. Babies need their own bed and that is where they need to learn to sleep. There can be exceptions like when they are sick but even then, it is best to get them asleep and then return them to their own bed. This especially goes for nursing moms; don't let sleep overtake you before putting your child back to their bed.

Don't let the process overwhelm you by asking for His peace and patience when you want to give in or give up. Also seek out other older mothers and ask them for advice. Invite them into your home situation and ask them to share things that have worked for their babies. Remember they are there to be a blessing and a help; not to judge you or your parenting skills or your home for that matter. Let them bless you with their wisdom and encouragement.

Next up will be Toddler to four year-olds.