

Parenting & Discipling in God's Plan

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture reading is a selection of passages from throughout the Bible. Please follow along on the screen or in your bulletin. Starting in Genesis 1, we read, Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing.

That creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heaven, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

But after the fall, sin entered the world. We read in Genesis 6, Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Matthew 28 says, Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

[1 : 3 0] And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you, always, to the end of the age. As Jesus' disciples responded to his command, we read in Acts 6 and 12, And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith, and the word of God increased and multiplied.

This is the word of God. Great. Thanks, Henrika. Yeah, a bunch of passages. Now today, yeah, it is Mother's Day.

And today is again a kind of free topic. So I wanted to kind of connect it to Mother's Day. Next week we're starting a new series of One Corinthians. And yeah, we've been talking about Mother's Day already.

[2 : 5 3] But I wanted to kind of lay a, hey, a biblical foundation under that. That actually, hey, what we're saying is right. And so how does Mother's Day, how does mothering, fathering, because it's Father's Day in a few weeks, how does it actually fit with the Bible?

What does it fit with God's plan and what he's doing in the world? So that's what I wanted to speak about today. We're going to do that with kind of what's called biblical theology.

Now, what is biblical theology? It's basically looking at a topic through the storyline of the Bible. And we've been doing that the past four months as we learned the storyline of the Bible.

But that's how you should actually look at topics. Because there's a storyline in the Bible, which means things kind of tend to change. Right? There were things that are in the Old Testament that have changed in the New Testament.

So if you sin in the Old Testament, you need to offer an animal sacrifice. Of course, as Christians, we know for forgiveness we need Jesus. In the Old Testament, you can't eat pork and shellfish.

[3 : 5 3] I don't mind the shellfish, but I'm really glad I can eat pork in the New Testament. Right? Things have changed. How God, yeah, it's the same God but a developing story.

And so what I wanted to do is, yeah, look at being a mother or father, how that relates to the Bible story. And we don't have to look very far for that. Because it's already in the very first chapter of the Bible.

Right? What is the very first command? God makes the world, makes a beautiful world. He creates mankind. What is the very first thing he says to them? And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Right? The very first command that he gives them is have children. Become a father and mother. Go and have children. It's a very basic part of humanity. But why?

And that's what we are going to think about. Well, it is, I think, to spread God's rule around the world. What God wants, why should they multiply? Because God wants his rule to spread all across the world.

[4 : 59] And in this case, here in the beginning, it's through having children. Now, why does God want them to be fruitful? And look how it goes on, right? Be fruitful and multiply.

Fill the earth and subdue it. And have dominion over the world. So it's about, they are supposed to go and rule the world. Right? But what is their rule? Well, 1 verse 26.

It says that, and God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And so the idea is, yeah, they are supposed to rule the world.

But they are God's image. They are to reflect God. They are to basically rule the world God's way, which is God's loving rule. Right? God is the loving ruler of the whole world.

But how does he exercise that? Well, through humans. It's a bit, I think Kevin explained that a few months ago. In the past, you know, the king, all around his kingdom, he would put statues of himself to show, hey, this is, you know, I rule here.

[5 : 58] Well, God is doing that. But we are the image. We are God's rulers, in a way. Which is a wonderful thing that God wants that. Right? He wants the whole world to be filled with his loving rule.

Of course, which in a way is worth thinking, right? Why have children? Maybe in some parts of the world, well, because it's an insurance policy. Someone can take care of you when you're old.

Maybe these days, a lot of people, well, children, it's for my status, for my happiness.

I want children because I think it will make me happy. Actually, originally, then this is part of God's plan for the world, to fill the whole world with his rule. But, of course, is having children enough?

Because the problem is, of course, that we're no longer in the beautiful world God made. What happened? Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, they, well, they rejected God, right? They rejected his rule. We can rule the world ourselves. We can do it our way. And that became a great mess. And that's what, I mean, they did a lot of things, right? They built cities, and they developed technology, and they made art and music in Genesis 4.

[7 : 05] But then Genesis 6, well, what is God's verdict? Well, we read it, right? Genesis 6, and the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. I mean, they filled the earth, yes.

But they filled it not with God's rule. They filled it with violence, right? As people just lived their own way, everyone for themselves. It was a terrible world. But if people just go their own way, yeah, they just fill the world with sin.

And so God said, so when God kind of starts things again, he says, no, no, we need to not just have children. We need to teach children, right? So in the law, the famous command that he gave to Israel, you know, Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. These commandments will be on your heart. You shall teach them to your children, right? Children need to learn to love God, right? Otherwise, the earth will be such a mess.

But if everyone loves God and therefore loves their neighbor, that is when the world will be good. Now, again, that's a challenge for us, right? But if we want a good world, we need to, well, teach children right and wrong.

[8 : 17] Teach children God's ways. As often Hong Kong parents, we can be focused on exams and grades and violin exams and ballet and everything. If children don't love God, we just bring more sinners into the world.

It's not a good thing. No, children need to, yeah, that's what we need to do. Of course, teaching isn't enough. Ultimately, people become Christians by God's grace, which is something to remember, right?

Because some of us here, maybe you're older and you have children and they are actually currently not following Jesus. And maybe you feel, well, have I done something wrong? Have I not done what

God wanted? Well, maybe you have, but ultimately it's about grace. Ultimately, it's about people's own response. And you don't necessarily have to feel guilty. Probably you've done a great job. It's just, yeah, things are, yeah, things are not machine, right? It's not like this goes in, that goes out. At the same time, that means it's also a bit hopeful. Most parents, if you ask them, they will feel like a failure. Wonderfully, God saves people despite their parents.

[9 : 26] That's a wonderful thing. But still, we shouldn't be complacent, right? The only thing is if you never talk to your kids about God, they will end up not believing. That's pretty sure. But how does this then develop?

Okay, you know, in the New Testament, of course, there's a few sentences about parents. Well-known Ephesians 6, verse 4, right? Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

But actually, this idea of the rule of God spreading around the world, it becomes something much bigger. It is through discipling everyone. We read just now the Great Commission, right?

This new beginning, Jesus died and he rose, and now he gives a command. It's a little bit like Genesis 1. Not just in that way, but what does Jesus say, right?

It's again about his rule, right? All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. God has now made him the ruler over everything. And then what are people supposed to do?

[10 : 27] Well, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. So, again, it's about his rule spreading, right?

So, people, they think, well, Genesis 1 and Matthew 28, those are two things we need to do. We need to kind of build culture, right, and technology and art, and we need to grow the church.

No, I think it's just one thing, and it's the fulfillment, right? How does now the rule of God spread? It's not through children. It's not necessarily through families.

It's through everyone, well, yeah, all Christians go and disciple all nations. That is how it now works. And you see the same thing in Acts, right?

Because what then happens, you know, Jesus, he starts the church, and the disciples go out, and then we read those verses from Acts. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied.

[11 : 26] Right? 12 verse 24, it's these summary statements all throughout Acts. The word of God increased and multiplied. Now, that's the same idea of multiplying, right?

That was in Genesis 1. What did God want? He wants multiplication. Even the word increase is part of that. Now, this is a little bit nerdy, but Luke, he's a Gentile, not a Jew.

He can't read Hebrew. In the Greek translation of Genesis 1, it's God says to Adam and Eve, increase and multiply. So when Luke says, hey, the word of God increased and multiplied, this is Genesis 1.

This is God's original plan for the world. It's now happening. As people are preaching the gospel, as disciples are made, that's how the word of God, that is how God's plan is now happening in the world.

As, yeah, the word of God increased and multiplied, which is really exciting. Again, do you want Genesis 6? Do you want a world filled with violence?

[12 : 29] I hope you don't. God has a wonderful plan for the world, namely to fill it with his rule. Had Jesus' rule, love God, love your neighbor. Don't you want a world where everyone loves their neighbor?

Don't you want a world where everyone follows Jesus' teaching? That would be wonderful. Well, that is what God, in a way, is doing. But the thing is, yeah, as we've mentioned earlier, that means it's no longer just about parenting.

Israel was very family-focused, right? This was one nation with tribes and families, and each had their own piece of land, and that's where they lived, and they wouldn't really go out. It was very, yeah, family-based.

But now, well, make disciples of all nations. In a way, the world is already filled with people, which is they don't know Jesus. And so, fill the world with Jesus' teaching, and then it will be filled with God's rule.

Which means, yeah, we can all do this. You don't need to be a biological parent to take part in God's plan of filling the world with Jesus' rule. Everyone can do this, a few disciple people.

[13:37] Which, again, is great news, right? There are people here who maybe, yeah, you're single, and actually you're getting on, and you feel, I will never be a parent. Are you missing out on doing what God wants you to do?

No, you don't. Because, actually, the bigger picture is about filling the world with disciples. And it could be your own children, but it could be anyone.

It could be one of the many people here in the church who you help grow. And so, yeah, you can play your part in God's plan. You can be, yeah, a spiritual mother, like we said earlier.

Right? Dina, she's a great mom to Lani and Etan, but also she's a wonderful disciple. And even without biological children, we can do that. Spiritual mother, spiritual father.

And the idea that all of you get a bag. That's not a kind of, you know, kids party, everyone gets a prize, but otherwise someone feels left out. No, there's something real there. In the family of God, actually everyone can be a father or mother when they disciple.

[14:42] Of course, I don't want to say that parenting is kind of optional. That, hey, being a mother is kind of comparable to once a week reading the Bible with someone. Man, being a mother is so much work.

Because, yeah, children don't need to grow just spiritually. They need to grow physically. Babies are so helpless. There is so much work involved in parenting. So much cost. And then a child costs like six million dollars until they finish uni.

It's a lot of, and an amount of time. And children's years are so important. Right? I mean, 18 years discipling one person or two or three.

It's a lot of work. But actually, imagine if people get to uni and they've never been raised. They've never been told right and wrong. They've never learned anything. And then we try. And now we tell them the gospel and they'll be wonderful Christians.

No, they'll be so far from God. These children's years are so important. I thank God for, you know, for mothers, for fathers who are kind of pouring their lives into their children.

[15:42] And let's celebrate that today as well. But, at the same time, yeah, spiritual fathering and mothering is a wonderful thing.

That's what we want to talk about. And that is kind of my first point, right? That's actually, yeah, we should be discipling. It's not just about fathers and mothers. Actually, God's plan is about disciples. Discipling. But, at the same time, we talked about it earlier. What does it mean, then, to disciple? What is that like? And the funny thing in the Bible is, discipling, it says it is like parenting.

You want to know how to disciple someone? Well, it is like parenting. Let me give you a few funny examples. Well, funny. Here is Paul, and he talks to the church in Thessalonica about his ministry there.

They are kind of, they've had some people telling them funny things about him. And he says, no, we were, you know, we were really genuine apostles. We really disciplined you. And what does he say in 1 Thessalonians 2?

[16:44] Verse 7. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves.

Because you had become very dear to us. We were like a mother. Verse 11. You know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Hey, we were great. You know, our discipling was really real and genuine and from God because we were like parents. Later, Paul tells Timothy, how do you choose a good elder?

Well, what kind of father are they? Because, well, if someone doesn't manage his own household well, how will he care for the church? Basically, if you're not a good father, you're not a good elder because those things are very similar.

So, discipling is like parenting. And that's what I want to explore a bit. How is discipling like parenting? First of all, often, it's basically old to young, right?

[17:54] Old to young. I mean, of course, two Christians of similar age, they can read the Bible together and both grow together. That's a wonderful thing to do. But usually when you hear discipleship, you think of a mature Christian, you know, taking on board a younger Christian and

teaching them, right?

Because they know so much more usually, right? A mature Christian reading with an immature Christian, like a parent. Because children, they don't know very much. They need to learn all that. And they learn that from their wise, mature parents in most cases, right? Again, that's what the Bible says. So, Titus 2 talks about older women.

Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good. And so, train the young women to love their husbands and children. A great ministry for older women to teach younger children how to be a woman of God.

It's kind of behind the wow ministry, right? Wow does it really well. So much mentoring of older women discipling younger women. Because it's like parenting. Because, second, as we said earlier, it's about all of life.

[19 : 04] You know, being a follower of Jesus is about your whole life, right? Everything under the rule of Jesus. It's not just knowing a few things from a Bible story. So, it will mean about, you know, what is it like to be a Christian at work?

What does it mean to be a Christian spouse? What does it mean to be a Christian neighbor, a Christian citizen, a Christian parent? Now, all of life thing, yeah, you can't get that from a book, right?

You need that from someone who has walked this. Now, even in Deuteronomy, and that's basically parenting, right? Deuteronomy 6, you know, you shall teach this to your children.

You'll talk about it, well, when you're at home and also when you walk on the road and when you lie down, when you rise, basically all the time. Isn't that how parenting works? You are with your kids all the time and you kind of, you know, you walk on the street and you see something and you talk about it.

And something else happens in the news and you talk about it, right? So much of it is just about all of life. And not just, okay, let's sit down for half an hour and do it. No, it's about all of life.

[20 : 09] And yeah, so there's so much value in older people discipling younger people. EJ and I, we just finished marriage counseling, premarital counseling with two couples.

Yeah, we've been married for 22 years. We can share a few things about how not to do it. That's really, there's value in just experienced people teaching younger people about all of life.

The thing is, of course, Hong Kong is so busy, right? You need to schedule an appointment like one month later, maybe. It would be nice if that was different. Parenting and discipleship is very personal, right?

It's not about content. We think often, okay, teaching. So you think of a classroom, someone at the front, and here's a textbook. It's not like that, right? It's relationship because when it's personal, someone can be an example.

And children, they learn from their parents what they do, not just from what they say. Okay, so being a good example is so important as a parent. Likewise, as a disciple, what does it look like to be a Christian spouse, a Christian worker?

[21 : 14] You can actually show that. You can be an example rather than just talk about it. But then you need to have, you know, you need to share life. You need to have a relationship, right? It's not just a reading.

And finally, what a lot of people say when I ask this question, okay, why is discipleship like parenting? Well, it's slow and frustrating. Right? Parenting takes so much time.

I wish every time I told my kids to do something, then they would just perfectly do that the rest of their life. That's not how it works. If that happens to you, that's not doing something wrong.

That's what it's like, right? Because we are all slow. We're all sinners. Sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back, which means it's just patient, ongoing love and ongoing pointing to the gospel, pointing to God, pointing to God's word and just bearing with people, which is why you need time together and relationship and all those things.

Spiritual growth can be like that. I used to be an engineer. As most of you know, engineering is so easy, right? Here's a machine. You put the right input, so you get the right output.

[22 : 23] If you don't get the right output, well, either it's broken or the input is wrong, but it's fixable. Parenting is not like that. Your child is a person. They're complex. And it doesn't work.

And the same thing with discipling. It's not just, okay, here's the right Bible passage. Out comes a perfect Christian. It doesn't work like that, right? It's slow. So, yeah.

But it's wonderful. We say walking with people. That's what's the kind of standard expression here. That's such a good picture, right? Walking with. It suggests a long-term commitment of a kind of someone who is really with you and with you on that journey together. That is such a great image. But that is what parents do. That is what discipling is like. And so, yeah, for all of us here, can you try to be a spiritual parent? And that might be with someone else's children. I think it's wonderful how some of the youth leaders are investing in my kids, in youth. But also kind of older Christians taking on younger Christians and being like a spiritual father or mother. [23 : 33] And let me especially think, hey, if discipleship is like parenting, who would be a great kind of discipler? Hopefully it is a parent, right?

If you're a parent, maybe actually God has prepared you for this. Because it's quite, you know, often when you get a bit older, maybe you're in your 40s and you think, I don't have much to do here, right?

We have all these wonderful young people on production and on music and on stewarding. And I have nothing to offer. I just need to look after my kids. Actually, you have so much experience to share.

We are such a young church and a lot of people don't have the life experience that you have. Why don't you invest in people and share that? You can be such a blessing to the younger people here. Just, you know, a fresh graduate. No idea what it's like to be a Christian at work. But you've been there for 15 years. You know, a single person or a couple just got engaged. They know nothing about Christian marriage.

[24 : 32] But you do because you've done that for ages. You can be such a blessing. So let me encourage you. Try and do that. Invest in people.

Can you find someone and invest in them? Invite them into your life. Invite them into your home. It's great that Dina is doing that, right? You know, breastfeeding. Hey, you know, don't worry.

Come and visit. And because, okay, this is what life is like as a Christian woman. And people can learn from that, right? Isn't that a wonderful thing? Yeah? It makes the Christian life real.

You know, is Christianity true? Does it work? Well, where can you see that? You can see that in the life of mature Christians, hopefully. And so as people come, as maybe you have them for dinner, right?

You're feeding your kids anyway. Why not have an extra plate for someone else? Yeah, they can learn. That's a great thing. And so people are really good at that. I know it's not easy because you have biological kids and it makes you very busy.

[25 : 30] But actually, if you think about it, if you try and fit it in, you can be such a blessing. Not just here. I've seen it in CGs, right? Community groups. Sadly, it's very separated sometimes.

The young adults, they meet on a weekday night. Family groups, they meet Sunday after the service. Because, yeah, if you have young kids, that's kind of how it works. And yet it can be such a blessing. We had Henry and Florence, an older couple here.

You know, we put them with a group of very young CG. And they were such a blessing there because they had so much life experience to share. Bernard and Angie, they always had a CG of young people.

And again, being spiritual parents to them. And that's been so helpful. So can I encourage you to do something like that? This is God's plan for the world. It may be slow and frustrating and time intensive.

And yet this is such a wonderful thing. And just think about your own experience. Isn't this what happened to you? You know, did you become a Christian all on your own? With a Bible, like an orphan on the streets?

[26 : 33] No, right? People loved you and cared for you. And they were patient with you. Ultimately, right? Ultimately behind it is God. He is our loving Father. God doesn't get frustrated.

But I'm sure he'd be very frustrated with me. But he loved me. And he's compassionate and kind. And keeps guiding me. And he did it for you. And one way he does that is through the people who have born with you.

Who've loved you. Who've walked with you. And now you can do that with others. Isn't that a wonderful thing? This is what God is doing in the world. It's how he's spreading his wonderful rule of love around the world.

And that's the beautiful thing that we can be part of. So, yeah. Things for us to think about on this Mother's Day. Why don't we pray? And then let's sing about God's loving rule.

And his kingdom. Our Father, thank you for your love for us.

[27 : 38] Thank you for bringing us under your rule. When we were far away from you. Coming into our life. Saving us. Growing us. Growing us through the church family. Through people who loved us.

Who invested in us. Who were parents to us. I pray that we would take that up now. In the positions where we are. Some of us have more time. Some of us have less time. We are of different ages. And yet there will be people. We can be parents to. We can disciple. We can help. To obey everything Jesus commanded. Pray that we would do that Lord.

Stir up our hearts. Help us to not be afraid. Not be despondent. That we think we don't have time. But let's try and do this. For your glory. That your rule may spread across the world.

In Jesus name. Amen.