Setting a Tone for Your Christian Family

Part 2 of 2: Biblical Encouragement for Overwhelmed Parents
with Darrell L. Bock and Chip Ingram
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Darrell Bock: How do you wrestle with the balance between and then you're getting at this with this illustration section that triggered the question between being supportive of the person. I want to communicate, I'm really behind you and yet at the same time saying in effect but this road that you're on is really ... And now we're talking about kids who are at an age where you really can't control what they do. In fact I think one of the mistakes that parents make is they live - one of the myths is they live with the impression they can control what their kids do. And I think that inevitably gets them into trouble. So how do you deal with that balance?

Chip Ingram: Well I have four grown kids. They're all married now. And what I would say is when we communicate things in anger about things that disappoint us, we will probably not be heard at all. The hardest things I've ever had to say to my kids, one is you have to say them. Don't talk to one another and don't tell all your friends about all this issue with one of your kids that's eating you up inside. When you're calm and in your right mind and prayed up, you need to look your kid in the eye and you need to say, "Honey," or "Son, I need to tell you something. I love you very, very, very much but this decision or that relationship is breaking my heart. And you can go down the - you're at that age you can make that decision. But I'm going to tell you that the consequences of that decision look like that and it's going to be painful. And I'm for you and I love you but I have to warn you."

Darrell Bock: So again we're back to the principle I think that I'm hearing that you're helping them own the decision but you want to - if I can use an analogy, you're like the traffic signs on the highway that tell you watch out, there's a slippery corner coming up, you know, that kind of thing.

Chip Ingram: And I think we have to when they make certain decisions. Like my one son, he was a very - we've been very open about it. There was a point in time where it was hey, you know, "If I want to stay out till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning," or this or that. I said, "You know we have very few rules but there's other kids in the home." One, our energy, you are messing up my marriage, son and you are disrupting our whole home. And we did all the things that you could do. Very strong-willed kid and I remember sitting in the car and tears running down my cheeks. And he told me, "Dad, you know, I really like you as a person. I just wish you weren't a Christian, Dad. I don't think I buy any of this stuff about God or Jesus and so I'm going to live my own way and this and that."
And we'd been through this journey for like three and a half years. And I remember saying, "You know, Son, I think I've taught you all I can. Your mom and I love you. We're praying for you. If you're at the point where you want to call all the shots in your life, I want you to know that you also get all the responsibility. So if you can figure out how to make a living, food, find a place to live but you have a decision. And the decision is whether you agree or disagree, you can live in our house with a good attitude. You don't have to believe anything I believe but you won't wreck our home or you can move out and I'll give you 48 hours to pray about that. And now this was not - you don't bluff with this kid at all.

And so that was a tough one. He eventually came out of his bedroom about three days later and there was a real change but he was so manipulative I thought yeah we'll see how this goes. And we went through a journey and you know to be honest too, I felt like of all my kids he's probably wired a lot like me. We're both intense, both strong leaders. I feel like a lot of his was insecurity and hurt and as a young dad afraid to fail, I was unintentionally throwing gasoline on the fire of his strong will. So I was pretty stupid at times as well. And he was very rebellious and so anyway there was a real turning there and God did an amazing work in his life. He later became a worship pastor and after that started writing Christian songs that we all sing.

**Darrell Bock:** Oh, wow.

**Chip Ingram:** And our dream as his parents was oh, God, help Jason just not be in the ditch. And yet it was that perseverance, that strong will. And later on I said Jason, I mean you know as a pastor you're thinking was it that message, you know? Was it - and you know what, he actually wrote a song about it. He said, "Dad, here's what it was." He said, "You weren't worried about me embarrassing you in church. At home you and mom are the same as outside."

And he said, "When tears flowed down I realized this Jesus means so much to you and Mom, I really had to take a second look. And down deep what I realized is I think I wanted to see how far I could push the boundaries. And I found out how far and the thought I realized, wait a second, what really matters and what's really important?" He said, "I had a couple days of wrestling, is there a God?" And he owned his own faith and that was a big turning point but it's really hard. I mean because it was - is what you said. It's one thing, you know, you put up the stop sign, you are the - but there's times where if you go through that, you now only slip, you're going to go through a guardrail and you're going to go over the cliff.
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**Darrell Bock:** It's a hospital is on the other end, yeah, yeah.

**Chip Ingram:** And you know what? And I can't stop that and so that's hard.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah, I think the hardest thing being a parent in many ways is - this is going to sound like a strange analogy. It's giving space that they already have if you get what I'm getting at. In other words we think we're giving up space but in fact they're making their choices through their life anyway. It's an illusion to think that you can make their decisions for them. And in fact in many cases I've found that you - that the parents who make all their decisions for their kids in the end oftentimes end up regretting it on the other end.

**Chip Ingram:** Oh, I couldn't agree more. In fact what I think is it starts even earlier is what you want to do is you want to feed your kids adventure, responsibility and vision. And so when they're two, you know, let them help with this. When they're three or four, they get to help make the bed. When they're five, everyone has a job. And then it's - you pray for your neighbors and then they're 10 or 12 and we're going to go to Mexico and we're going to build a house. And then like in my case if they're 12 years old and I've got to go on a trip and we're going to go to Africa, son, strap it on, here we go and we were in dangerous places. But what they saw was we have turned Christianity into being a nice person and trying to control their morality so they don't mess up, make us look bad and we have all these milk toast. We're revolutionaries. We're counterculture revolutionaries. You want to train warriors to make a difference. And a great offense is the best defense.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah and the flipside of that is that if you make decisions for your child all the way through their lives, then when they get to the point where they're having to make decisions, I've seen one of two things happen. They're either incapable of doing it or oftentimes they'll do whatever they want because for the first time in their life they have the freedom to do so and so they just go. And both of those are different kinds of disasters in many ways.
We've talked about teenage years and we've talked about preparing for the mate. Let's talk about what happens when things change, when your child is now a full-fledged adult and you're there. Because in one sense even though the scripture says they go and they make their own home, you're still their parent. I mean I'm still mom and dad and - we still got mom and dad in our house as well as Opa and Opa and Oma. I'm called Opa and my mom is called Oma. Those are German names. So how does parenting change when you're no longer the parent?

**Chip Ingram:**

This isn't original at all and I'll probably mess it up and if someone remembers where I got this they can let us know. But in those really early years when you are instilling values this is the way it is. When children in terms of - you know, Kohlberg and all the developmental psychology of how they think in concrete terms and then in the teenage years, early teenage years abstract thinking. And then when they get older decision making and their brain is still developing. You need to be kind of the commander in the early years and you're laying out railroad tracks. The preteen through the teen years you need to be a coach. Coaches teach and instruct but you're giving away -

**Darrell Bock:**

It's their game.

**Chip Ingram:**

It's their game. And then when they're adults, you need to turn into a consultant. And consultants are asked for their opinion. Consultants, because of their expertise, their love, how you've done things in the past, you want your kids to come to you and ask about things. When you offer a lot, you know, I don't think you ought to do that.

Or I see parents trying to solve their problems - you know, "We had this rough life and it was really difficult" and of course that's where we got close. That's where God really shaped our lives. "But we don't want you to have any of that so here's a down payment for a house and here's how you can live here. We'll pay for your kids' education." I mean again this is right motive, bad application. You need to be that consultant person who doesn't tell them what to do but where you have this relationship where you speak into their life as they give you permission.

**Darrell Bock:**

Yeah and what's interesting is I was joking earlier about the teenage years where you don't get consulted and then all of a sudden in their twenties the phone starts ringing again. It's amazing to actually watch that happen. When a child comes back to you and says, "Dad, what do you think?"
And it's clear they're thinking through and making their own decision. They may be doing it in a way that's different than the way you would do it but they are coming to you for "I just need to bounce this off someone and there are only a handful of people who I think are worth bouncing it off of and you happen to be one of them."

**Chip Ingram:** It's a thrill isn't it?

**Darrell Bock:** Exactly. And you sit there and you offer the best that you can and sometimes that relationship gets to the point of you remember that decision that was about two years ago where you were thinking about this? You're kind of in the same place again, you know, and let's think through what we're going to do. Again, I'll use my son. We've been using our kids as illustrations.

I have a son who is pursuing sports law and when he had - he had an internship at one point. He's in New York City at St. John's University. He had an internship with the New York Rangers. And I urged - you've gotta network like crazy because this is a great opportunity and you can't believe all the people you have the opportunity to meet. You've got to follow up, etcetera, etcetera.

He's a 20-year-old, he's shy, networking is not a concept he's into, he's not there, etcetera. Well, four years later he's looking for a job. He hasn't networked appropriately, etcetera and so all of a sudden - all of a sudden the issue becomes all right, how do you network? I get it. I didn't get it that time. Now let's think about how we do it this time. And to get into that kind of place with your kids is a wonderful - it's a wonderful place to be if you can get there.

I'm going to shift gears slightly because we've talked about our own situations and of course in our situations we're dealing with there's a mom and a dad, you've got an intact household if I can say it that way. But there are a lot of people who will be listening to us who are trying to form a Christian home but it's not an intact family.

**Chip Ingram:** Or it's a blended family.

**Darrell Bock:** Or it's a blended family. So how do you - in one sense the rules don't change but you are dealing with different dynamics. So what advice do you have there?
Well, I've lived through both. My wife came to Christ. She married early and she put him through college and he found he'd make more money selling drugs and ran off with another woman to another state when she got pregnant with twin boys. And I met her two and a half, three years later and she has come to Christ. So she was a single mom.

Well, then we get married two years later when they're about four and a half and now we're a blended family. And I will tell you I watched her live a life as a single parent where there wasn't support, there wasn't people around. And I mean I don't think there's a harder job in the world than a single parent. And a single mom with teenage boys is the recipe for the hardest job in the entire world.

Now, we got the start early and the biological father has never been in the picture. But I would just say to those people you have to go to - and this is where the body of Christ shows up. You've got to get the support and the strength of fellow believers in your life to help give your kids what you just can't give them. I mean there is a design here and the great majority of people now, I think it's 23 percent or 26 percent of America is that intact family you talked about. So the great majority of people listening, that's not it.

Exactly right.

And even without any biological father in the mix is - I still remember when my kids were like 10 or 11 years old and it was like is this deep, deep bond ever going to happen and going to a wise mentor who said keep loving them, give them time, and God did that. But you have all those issues when you have a blended family. So I think one is getting realistic and I think people want this magic poof. And we love Jesus and we have family devotions and now we're going to church.

And thinking that finding that man or that woman is going to answer your problems is a myth. And a lot of people are alone for reasons they're not quite sure of. But a lot of mistakes made in the last relationship, unless you really get healthy and get whole, this sounds so - I don't know how to say this but I've just been around this corner so many times. Get you heart and mind fully filled and get healthy with God and God alone. And then look for resources in the body of Christ. Then move forward if God has an open door and there's biblical grounds for a new relationship.
Darrell Bock: It really is an illustration I think of thinking through the fact that the scripture does talk about other believers as another family. And in thinking about that even though there may be brokenness in the biological family, there's an opportunity for support and the supply of things that you can't give yourself as you've said through that. And really most of us, if we think about our own lives and think about the people that impacted us when we grew up, you know, not everyone who impacted us significantly was a biological member of our family.

I mean I can think of an English teacher in the sixth grade who affirmed my ability to write and think that was very important in my development. She was just another person out on the street other than the fact that she was my sixth grade teacher, or a coach that I had in high school as I was on junior varsity who I was around all the time who - actually this is really interesting. I actually didn't know that he was a Christian until after I became a Christian years later.

And yet everything that he did was designed to encourage the kids that he was coaching from Christian roots but he didn't wear it on his sleeve and so you didn't know - I mean you just didn't know. In some ways I think that was a little sad. I wish in some ways I had known. But the flip side of it is here's someone who impacted me. I had a father who traveled a lot. He was out of the house maybe 200 days out of the year, and so here was someone who represented a father figure when I was growing up when I didn't have one. And I didn't grow up in a Christian home so it was an important hole to plug. I think we all have people like that and so the opportunity for that kind of support to come out of the Christian community is important because it'll come from somewhere. It will definitely - someone will fill that role.

Chip Ingram: And I think at times we've got this a little messed up like everybody wants their own group. You know the singles this group and the younger marrieds this group and the older and not intergenerational. In my wife's case came to Christ, only thought she was going to have a baby, found out she had twins when they were born. No money, the person is gone and there was her boss who led her to Christ. And then there was a group of women in a small little church that helped her learn to pray. And my wife would have dates with God three or four nights a week. She would put those kids to bed and sing and pray.
And when I met her it was like - I mean my background, I had memorized all these verses and I had this head knowledge. And when she talked about Jesus it was like in the kitchen getting a sandwich. She would look at me and go, "Oh, God will never do that." "What do you mean?" "Well, He's not like that." And she had this heart relationship that grew out of the body of Christ helping her and helping her with her kids. And so I think sometimes it's the humility of saying as a single mom or a single dad, you know, I need help. Or realizing you know what, everyone is married in this group but me and I feel uncomfortable. Go to the small group and let that family create a place for you and your kids and realize you have things to offer.

We sometimes think about, you know, we need to help the poor. I got news for you. We need the poor as much as they need us. Our need to give, our need to share, our need to realize it all comes from God is very much as important as people receiving. And the same is true in relationships. It helps couples to be able to take someone into their family and they can do some things that you can't. But it takes some vulnerability and some initiative and sometimes that's very hard.

*Darrell Bock:* Yeah and I really do think this is a difficult area because of the stress that a single parent is often put under of having to be everything to the child with no relief. I mean it really is quite a burden and particularly when it comes in the context of a divorce situation where there can be all kinds of other things going on and hostility, you know, hostile energy wrapped around the house because of what people are going through and you're in court and settling finances and all, it can be pretty tough for kids.

*Chip Ingram:* Yeah, really difficult.

*Darrell Bock:* Well, I appreciate you taking the time to be with us today, to talk about aspects of Christian life and Christian home life. I'll ask the standard journalistic question at the end of an interview. I've been asked this question 100 times and it basically is, is there anything that you haven't had the chance to say or we haven't covered that you think you should say here as we wrap up?
Chip Ingram: I don't want to be overly simplistic but I would say to people if you want to have a great family, get to know God. Spend time with God. I don't care how hard it is. I mean with four kids my wife had to get up at 5:00 in the morning and not a legalistic way, but it is the power of God's word and spending time around God's word and just living the life. God has power and I don't think we experience this power. He can fix families, He can repair marriages, He can restore kids.

And I think we're in a psychological world now so we've taken all the Bible terms and we made them therapeutic terms. And I think at times people - you know, it's not like oh, if I really love God everything is going to be magically okay. But there is a passion and a tapping into the Holy Spirit living within you that is for you and loves you and God wants to help people. And I think somehow we skip over that.

Darrell Bock: And the relational base that that builds gives you the backdrop for having healthy relationships with your kids.

Chip Ingram: And you have something to give and you have a world view that says these are God's kids. I want to be a good steward of God's kids. I don't have control over their outcomes. They have little choosers. I want to create an environment first by how I live.

And again, this is not perfect. I can't tell you. Hundreds of times I apologized to my kids. I'm sorry, what you did was wrong but the way I yelled at you, that was wrong. And kids need to just see you authentically walking with God. And so that would be the biggest thing. I mean I know that's very, very simple but sometimes I think we make it too complicated and think if I don't have a degree in psychology and if my kids aren't in the best schools. And you read all these stories, both in the past and today, amazing leaders have come out of very difficult situations. And God wants parents to know listening today, he could do that in your kids regardless of where you're at.

Darrell Bock: Well, thanks, Chip for being with us and we thank you for joining us at The Table and we look forward to seeing you again when we discuss issues between God and culture at The Table.