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Child-rearing: Pray Without Ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)

Introduction (Review) – We began this study looking at the foundational purposes in child-rearing for the covenant people of God. We saw through the promises granted to Abraham and Sarah that child-rearing is connected to the gospel promises for the world (Gen 12:1-3, 18:1-19, Gal 3:5-9, 26-29). Wonderfully connected to that, we saw that God's New Covenant promises are to us and our children (Deut 7:9, Psalm 102:28, 103:17, Acts 2:39) and that every duty we are called to flows out of faith in God about these promises (Eph 2:8-10). As Francis Schaefer put it in the title to his book, "How Should We Then Live?"

Faith Resulting in Prayer – With regard to child-rearing, parents should talk to God about their children before talking to their children about God. God is sovereign over everything, has predestined everything, has promised us everything, and therefore, we should pray. This follows the pattern we find in, for instance, Eph 1-3. We do not pray because God needs to be brought up to speed about our lives. God knows everything and is the source of everything already. We pray in large part because He wants us to learn this. God has ordained the ends as well as the means to His ends.

Pray Without Ceasing (1 Thess 5:16-18) – We should pray without ceasing. This should be prayer that comes from "*rejoicing always*" (v16). There are many trials associated with child-rearing and so, armed with our theology and faith, we learn to rejoice always (2 Cor 6:10). This should also be prayer that comes with "*in everything give thanks*" (v18). So often our prayers are motivated because of deep concerns over the welfare of our children, and so, armed with our theology and faith, are prayers are offered with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6). In order to pray without ceasing, we must pray according to the purposes and promises of the covenant. Rejoicing in God's plan to save the world through the Seed of Abraham, and giving thanks for the covenant promises to us and our children, we can and must pray about anything involved in raising our kids.

Corporate, Public Prayers – The theology of covenant child-rearing is a theology of an entire culture, and therefore this is something we should pray about regularly as the people of God. This is why the general needs of child-rearing are constantly brought before us in our church, and this is why we welcome our children in the worship service with us. In this service, we are bringing our children and our prayers concerning our children before the throne of God.

Family and Personal Prayer – In families, the prayer should be more specific and particular, considering specific temptations, trials and tasks that are before them as a family. Parents should use prayer as an investigative tool, asking God to bring all aspects of the child's life to light. There should be prayers for the present and for the future, including future spouses.

How Should We Then Pray? – Praying without ceasing means that our prayers come in different styles and formats, and this is certainly true when it comes to all that needs to be prayed over in this area of our lives. Here is a very imperfect and non-exhaustive list of the ways in which we are to pray. (*you could probably encourage one another with additional suggestions and applications...*)

Pray (and Sing) the Psalms of Promise – Sing Psalm 128 (for instance) regularly around your table claiming those promises while you sing, adding your AMEN with faith. Also, learn to pray claiming the promises for your great-great-great grandchildren now. These promises are to a thousand generations which is a longer period of time than mankind has been around. Most of you will, by God's grace, be an ancestor to tens of thousands of people. So, pray for them.

Pray the Lord's Prayer – Pray through it and use it as a model to pray about every circumstance in your child's life, again considering the purposes and promises of child-rearing.

Pray the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32, Cantus page 428) – Simeon sang over a child. Likewise, we can look upon our children according to the promises of God and depart (from our day) in peace.

Pray in Great Times of Distress (1 Sam 12:13-23) – David is a model for us in times when, whether due to our own folly or other circumstances, we are in a grave situation. There are times we should put everything else aside and pray fervently. This is not for lack of faith; it is because of faith.

Pray Through Passages Like Eph 3:14-21 – Consider one of your children and pray through Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. It teaches you the kinds of things to pray for which God is pleased to hear.

Take Advantage of What is Already Going On – At the beginning and end of seasons, give thanks, seek a blessing, pray particularly for those involved (school year, soccer season, anniversaries, birthdays, Mother's Day...)

Pray With Your Children – Ask your children to give thanks at dinner (for instance) and while they are praying, pray silently for that child. Honor them for leading the family in prayer.

Pray With Your Children – What do they want prayer for? Nothing is too trivial for God, so don't let anything be too trivial for you. Teach them how to pray by how you pray; follow up with them over that special concern.

Pray With Your Children – When the family has particular needs, lead the family in prayer, teaching the family together to trust and plead and persist and believe God for His good care and perfect timing.

At Unusual Times – Try praying in the car, after dinner instead of before, while you are running; how about before you watch those

TV shows (for protection, insight, wisdom, and maybe for the set to blow up if necessary?)

Pray Without Ceasing – “*You do not have because you do not ask.*” (James 4:2). Who told you to give up?

Dave Hatcher – May 13th, 2007

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