

Parenting & More  
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## TRINITARIAN LOVE

The doctrine of the Trinity is not only essential for good theology. It's also essential for love. It's a bold claim, but consider it. The Trinity is a union of distinct persons. A reality that pre-exists us. Scripture teaches that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Not just that He is loving, but that He is, literally, love. To the point that we confess an absolute union of distinct persons.

That is not to say that all love *becomes* the Trinity or anything like that. Is it right to take the doctrine of the Trinity and try to stretch humanity to its standards? No. Never. But that's actually entirely my point. I don't need the Trinity as an *example* of marriage. Yet at the same time when a spouse wants his wife to be exactly like he is, he is confounding the persons.

Although we are different than God in so many ways, He has gifted us language that is remarkably helpful! Unity, union, communion, living as one flesh: these are terms to consider and meditate upon. While we may be tempted to treat these nouns as human goals, they are actually accomplished works of God. Dim reflections of a heavenly reality.

We are not called to confound the persons of the all holy, blessed Trinity. Nor are we called to confound those we serve in our vocations.

We are not called to divide the substance, especially not when we're speaking in terms of divorce! Divorce, which is a rending of life and flesh!

Nor is parenthood a rendering, as though children steal bits and pieces from each parent. Instead God grants personhood, even as He keeps us joined together by our very substance.

To be clear: we are not called to be so individualistic that family is as nothing. Congregations as nothing. Countries as nothing, etc. Our Lord did not make a mistake when He chose to weave you in a particular womb, place you into a particular home, etc. Sin shattered, and continues to shatter, our unions. Our corporate beings. And yet, by the grace of God, they are still there.

Can that home change? Yes. Does God work through adoption? As surely as He works through baptism! Because relationships are shadows of the greater reality. The Triune God wants us to love. He gives us *others* to love. He also joins together. Distinction and union, in the hands of the Trinitarian God, are not mutually exclusive.

The Triune God cares about us. And about our relationships toward the rest of the world. Big ones. Little ones. He knows and cares about them all.

When God said that it was not good for us to be alone (Gen. 2:18), He established marriage, but He had also decreed multiplication. God places us in families, communities, nations, on continents, in this world at this particular moment. *We* are not miniature trinities consisting of father, mother, and child in perpetual perfect agreement. But we are distinct while also corporate.

We at once have active & passive roles: earning our bread, but receiving it, too. Contribution and reception.

## BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVES

Family is a primary way that children learn that we are both individuals and collectives. We are distinct, yet brought into unity. Children first get to explore creation with two people who get to explore not only creation but one another in a uniquely knowing relationship. Are you with me?

Satan is hardened in rebellion against God. He twists what is good and so it pleases him to tempt us in two conflicting ways: toward idolizing conformity or diversity.

God made a “universe” of an astounding variety of different things, which cohere into elements, species, and ecosystems. As the Psalmist put it, “O Lord, how manifold are your works!” (Ps. 104:24). Cells, each with their own individuality, come together to form a single organism.

“The body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,” says the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 12:12). He uses biological facts about eyes, ears, and feet as an image of theological and moral truth about the organism of the church. These utterly different organs come together to form one unified body. Similarly, the utterly diverse Christians — with their different personalities, backgrounds, and gifts — who constitute nothing less than the body of Christ on earth, should treat each other in a way that honors each other’s differences, while being completely united in Christ (see vv. 13–25). In the physical body, as in the communion of the saints, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (v. 26).

The unity of variety is also a principle of aesthetics. Some works of art have unity — consider the black canvas of the modern art gallery — but no variety. Others have variety — consider the spattered canvas of the paint-flinging abstract expressionist — but no unity. But the greatest works of art, whether painting or music or literature, have “a lot to them,” filled with details and an abundance of elements interesting in their own terms. And yet — as in the multiple melodies of a Bach fugue or the innumerable characters and subplots of a Shakespeare play — they also all come together into a larger whole.

This fallen world is a realm of heresies, but looming behind all that is true and good and satisfying is the triune God.” And children are placed to benefit from *all* the good theology, *all* the great relationships, and *all* the delight and minutiae of creation.

## GALATIANS 3

A reading from Galatians 3:23-29:

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave[g] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

When infants are born, they are not civilized. They are frankly wild and selfish. ☹️ Adorable but self-centered.

In a perfect world, maybe parents could give infants freedom? But we’re Lutherans. Babies are born enslaved to sin. We baptize them. And guard them in body and soul.

The law was our guardian. Our tutor. Our pedagogue. Our teacher. But now we have been set free and established as heirs.

This does *not* mean that we therefore throw out the law. Nor does it in any way imply that families no longer practice pedagogue! The proper work of a parent is to educate and raise up a little lord. It is to prepare children for their inheritance of salvation and dominion over the earth.

We do what we can, for body, soul, and training. And we often include teachers in that, sharing parental authority with them. Christian teachers help immerse children in the Word of God and the wonders of Creation. Christian teachers speak God's Word, calling children to obedience, knowledge, discernment, etc. For the sake of salvation and present and future service toward others. Including eventual care for creation also.

Still, school is not the entirety of a child's life. Why should children take care of their toys? Because *stuff matters*. Much of a child's obedience is designed so that they can grow into greater responsibilities. Take care of a little and perhaps you'll be gifted with more.

Why should children learn to listen? As practice for listening to God's Word!

Why should children *play*? Because they are not born for slavery but delight, praise, and care for creation. Thanks be to God children also *learn* during play. What is play but interaction with creation, including the human ability of conjure mental images commonly called imagination?

Parenting is about enabling children. *Leading* them. To educate is to lead from and lead toward. We lead from knowledge and experience. We lead toward God's Word and our neighbors, cultivating skills and opportunities along the way.

But there is a sense in which parents parent themselves out of their jobs. Yes, parents stay parents, but parents of adults is a different ball game. Like the Prodigal Father, we often give our inheritance to our children while we yet live. We cannot control them. Though we rejoice when they return to us, especially when we're certain they remain in God's gifts.

## THE DEVIL

As Christians, we should be aware that the devil attacks anything which can turn us to Christ:

- “Did God really say” detracts us from God's Word.
- “Knowledge of Good *and Evil*” distracts us from *trust*, wisdom, and discernment. In other words, it only adds evil.
- Parenting becomes *parent-centered*.
- Children are increasingly either idolized or unwanted.
- Marriage is portrayed as narrow and enslaving (“balls and chains”)
- Women don't want to be women, and we can't seem to let boys be boys.
- Knowledge and education? Are downplayed as constructs, as though there is no truth.
- Discernment, as a concept, is removed or isolated.
- Even science is politicized into power and privilege rather than a source of data and verifiable patterns.
- Gnosticism denies the body.
- Post-Modernity wants to deny the mind, too.

- And, in an odd cultural swing to extremities, who has room for the Holy Spirit with so much spirituality all over the place?

The devil is happy to pit hate against the body, sex against marriage, work against family, *leisure* against goodness, and entertainment against beauty.

But the devil is *not* in control of the system. He may fight the substance of life, but all He can do is empty. He cannot prevent that it is the *Lord* who fills.

The Lord says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11. Luke 11:13).

How do the evil give good gifts? By their vocational offices retaining elements of goodness that God wove into it. It is the Lord at work, even through unbelievers.

So parents get to learn some lessons from children, especially while young. Children can be examples of humility. Obedience. Trust. And by being a child they effectively pull out both the vocations of child and parent in us.

Children remind us that dependence is to be honored, not exploited. We are *honored* to be dependent upon our God. It is a position of love. Dependence is tied to positions of *reception*. And how we treat our children will demonstrate just how real that is to us.

As least for a while, children do take more than they can give. Family is not about keeping track of percentages and balances. Still, are little Christians also called to serve their neighbors? Sure. Though it will look different at various stages. Hunger cries are pretty practical and helpful, if you think about it. They *are* helping their parents.

Some children will grow faster than others or in different directions. It keeps the grownups in their lives on their toes, but God can handle it. God can work through it. (☺)

It demonstrates that our neighbors need personalized attention. There are many personalized things in this world, including temptations, struggles, and needs. But forgiveness is central of every relationship and every age.

Family vocations are slow to change. But then a child grows into maturity. Perhaps marriage and parenthood. Meanwhile the abilities, services, and opportunities within family vocations change all the time. Exponentially. Until finally children must care for the parents.

Chart for Vocation of Parent

Role: Source

Duty: Guide, guard, provide, *send*

Proper work: Education for salvation and dominion

Perk: Affection

Temptation: Neglect, hyper-management, refusal to let children go

Crosses: The crosses of parenthood. Children can break your heart. And even when you’d rather die in their place, they simply are no longer that kind of part of you.

Status: Father or Mother

PARENTAL IMMATURITY

Nothing matures an adult quite like a child's immaturity. My experience has very much been mutual growing up! A striving to be more mature than whatever age my child is.

Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (1 Cor. 13:11). Childish ways should be outgrown and left in the past. Or, more precisely, we should let future generations develop through those stages.

When parents fail to grow up, their kids often do too. What I often find daunting is the thought that we are several generations into *not putting away childish things*. Look around. Young Adult books sell better than Adult books. Sex sells, but not just because sex feels good. Sex is tied to youth. Vitality. Freedom. But many of the freedoms that people want are not the classical virtues associated with it. It's having what I want when I want it. It's emphasizing "It's mine" and "it's my choice."

Which is effectively the *opposite* of everything the nourishing estate and vocations in general stand for.

Parenting books can be quick to say, "Trust your instincts." While there is some truth to that, there is also truth in this, an excerpt from Titus 2:

as for you, teach what accords with sound[a] doctrine. 2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,

Teach and so train to love. This task is assigned to pastors and older men and women, because these things are not presumed to come naturally within a fallen world!

St. Peter also addresses immaturity in this way:

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:2-3)

*Rebirth* includes something of an infancy. And God provides exactly what we need, through that stage and in every other: His Word. His means of grace. His assembly of believers, our family. Parents are not always mature, yet God works through them.

Tradition is what is handed over. Not that traditions are inherently sacred, but in a high view of vocation, in a sense, the handing over part may be! Christian life one of ongoing religious catechesis. Perhaps the Christian life is also one of ongoing *vocational and religious* catechesis.

## CONFESSION

"How Christians should be taught to confess," "which are these sins which we know and feel in our hearts?"

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

When we are struck. By all the overwhelming in life. When all we want to do is to come clean, unburden ourselves, face our Lord with honesty, what can we do?

Without a basic understanding of family vocations, we lose one of the most basic starting places of all. We lose who we are and who helps us. We lose our first place of education and socialization. Without a concept of *child*, how can we understand what it is to be a child of God? And, as current times treat concepts in abstract and at times bizarre ways, how can we be sure how others understand our most common, comforting expressions? Like heavenly Father.

Yet our Lord comes to us using *words*. Working through our flesh. Reminding us those whom He has placed alongside us.

It is a gift from that we can work *for* family. Rest *with* family. Entertain with *goodness* and embellish life and language with beauty. In Christ, *we* are triumphant. Receive God's gifts and WE will be filled, as will our relationships!

Vocation is what is laid across our shoulders so that we uphold others. Accomplish good. And do even more than we can on our own.

Our small parts. Work together by the grace of God in a beautiful system of order. Individuals themselves become small parts in something greater.

We can talk about it as an order within creation. Creation, because fatherhood, for example, does exist throughout humanity. And think of that creation: God uses building blocks, patterns, ingredients. Quantities. SPACES. Boundaries! He uses each one of us and the various ways we fill our days and combines them into a vast range of possibilities.

## RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

There was a time when people considered the birth of a baby to be a religious experience. Babies were elevated as miraculous. Of course, childbirth is not anything like the kind of religious experiences folks seek out today. Quite the contrary. It is a time of life out of extreme pain, labor beyond most elements of control.

A woman sacrifices herself during labor. Even if she gets an epidural, her body offers a tremendous service: one of life or death, for herself and the child. (Americans still die in childbirth or following. Infants still die in childbirth or following. There is still significant healing that needs to follow.)

But nowadays, some idolize abortion. It is held as a defining point of empowerment and control. It's held up as a liminal experience, like a graduation into adulthood. A grasping of destiny. In short, it does offer the sort of religious experiences some people are looking for: you sign up, show up, and get comradery & self-righteousness afterwards.

What Christianity sees as enslaving, the world sees as liberating. What Christian sees as evil, the world sees as good, and the world is evangelizing its slavery. Terms and understandings slip into assumptions all the time. As naturally as calling a tissue a Kleenox. Kids just pick it up. Everyone thinks they are helping, when things continue to spiral out of control for both sides.

Obviously, this is not ideal for Christian parents. An ideal environment can make parenting a whole lot easier. If that ideal environment is never, ever, ever left, of course, and if no one less than ideal comes in! Which doesn't happen.

Now, congregations are *great*. They are a tremendous! But that doesn't mean my kids didn't first learn about both vampires and Santa in Sunday school.

Vocations are going to tie us together with those who aren't like us. Whether it's dissimilar family members or politically opposed neighbors. They are supposed to! God sends His servants to everyone. Here's an analogy: even a walled off commune borders the rest of the world. The rest of the world can still offer the commune help.

## CULTURE ISN'T ALL BAD

When we think of culture, we can think of all sorts of things which are not inherently *bad*. Culture exists with both tools and temptations. Art, music, and stories serve to communicate and reinforce the cultural values.

Who can tell me what gift God gave to Noah before Noah and his family boarded the ark? It's not immediately beforehand, but there is some evidence for it in Scripture. Musical instruments helped keep Noah's family sane for a year. We should learn from that!

Christians can still use culture to our advantage; we just have to use discernment about what and how. For example, *The Simpsons* were funny. I don't really think I was inherently damaged by the show. At the same time, do I want my kids to see dads as so stupid? No. Especially since *so many shows* feature dumb dads.

It's one of countless cultural expressions. If we think in terms of temptations coming, in part, through culture, as sort of a collective form of individual tempters, we can act accordingly. If we *know* something is tempting to us, we can try to avoid it, both as individuals and as cultural consumers.

Having said that, culture doesn't always come with labels. You may avoid shows that highlight LGBTQ+ characters. Honestly? The folks here are probably more likely to be tempted by shows that make fun of people we disagree with.

Culture is being used as an active tool against marriage, parenting, and children. We might be quick to look to protect our children. But do we protect ourselves? Our marriages? Because those are part of the yard, so to speak, children grow up in.

I'm not saying that we need to avoid every show with a dumb character. At this point that would be pretty impossible. But are we really aware of what tempts us? It's a big question. One that can change day by day.

And it's a big question for parents about their children: what is currently tempting *my* children? Because, again, parents *want their kids in the cycle* of repentance, forgiveness, new life.

One of the oddities of our own American cultural developments is that we've got Peter Pan syndrome and we have it bad. Kids? Want to grow up. Adults don't! Adults misremember childhood and long to have that freedom from responsibility. And the US is determined to elevate teens and children as the source of real good.

Adult culture has been infantized. And parents and grandparents are increasingly unsure what to share with children.

How do we even understand our bodies? Is it primarily through what culture says is attractive, aka sexual? Parents don't want to *have* body issues, let alone pass them on to their children, but we do! And often need help with that.

Again, perspectives can reverse. Instead of accosting ourselves with societies' laws about attraction and expectation, why not consider our children's bodies, which are so beautifully, wonderfully made. Let's all eat our vegetables and get moving. But let's love our bodies, and our spouses' bodies, as we understand our children's bodies to be: amazing. Young children may not have hit puberty yet, but the wide variety of body types they may grow into . . . are still *embodiments*. Gifts! Creations! That for which Christ has died!

That's what we have, in our bodies, too!

### UNFIXED Parenting

Much to common disappointment, parenting is not a fixed to do list of things to teach and practice. One is always adjusting to one's child *and* to whatever else the child is being exposed to.

There are things that previous generation never had to teach. That I suspect future generations will. Thanks be to God that His Word remains the key:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God[b] may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

God's Word will not be silenced. God's Word will go out, in preparation and in battle, to do as God sends Him.

In parenthood, life is not a game. But there are still offensive and defensive moves. We pick battles and pray to win the war. With our children. Our communities. This world of ours. Even this flesh of ours!

Moreover, we try to remember—and show our loved ones—that we really are one team, one unit, united to support one another and God is very willing to work through us for good in this world.

### SOCIETIES LAWS

Society loads us up with emotional baggage and social scarring. It actively encourages human experimentation with utterly uncontrolled outcomes. So I won't be listing parenting philosophies or books anyone needs to read. Except *Family Vocations*, which is more basic and lay-friendly than this series of lectures has been. These lectures are to help you as harder questions come up!

In the vocation of parenting, God keeps things kind of broad. God does *not* say there is only one way to raise up a child.

God already knows how to raise up children for Himself. He's done it before. From the dirt of the ground. From a rib. From the womb of Mary. From the dead rocks of our hearts. From the fleshly union of man and woman. And He says, Love your neighbor. Trust God, not earthly princes. Seek forgiveness. Don't hurt or harm your neighbor. Honor marriage. Discipline children. Observe what I have commanded you. Treasure my Word.



You know what He doesn't say? "Good luck." He doesn't need to, because He is *with us!* At every age, through every stage.

Parents share responsibility and authority over children. Motherhood is honored in the Scriptures. Moses preached: "'Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his **mother.**' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" (Deut 27:16, 22)

Also, as male as God reveals Himself to be, He still says, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Is 66:13). Therefore we can join the psalmist to say, "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me" (Ps. 131:2).

## ADOPTION

Adoption is no less binding than blood. My husband's parents are my in-laws, right? In law they are my parents, and in the reality of my God-given vocations I believe them to be my additional parents. In law, adoption makes parents. Often with state certifications and government-provided licenses, but if we were scattered over desert islands and there were orphans to care for, we would make our own law. The generations would care for the younger generations. Period.

We were adopted by God (Romans 8:14-17). Even the Israelites, God's chosen people through Abraham, were adopted (Romans 9:4). The book *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, by Russell Moore offers this gem of a quote, "You are designed to love 'your own flesh and blood,' but your design is redeemed in Christ to see as your flesh and blood those who you previously didn't recognize as such."<sup>1</sup>

But if you'd like to get technical—and, why not, right?—Christian adoption actually *is* by blood—the blood of Christ, the Lamb that was slain. It is the reality of grafting.

The two vocations with their services, parenting and serving as children, cultivate and strengthen a familial bond. Again, fulfilling one role encourages the other. Though it cannot force it. Now, God-forbid, if the child needed to be replaced, one would seek a permanent bond with security for both body and soul. Sometimes there is movement between households even apart from marriage. What's important is that everyone gets what they need.

## GOD AT WORK

It is God who actually grants children. God who makes them grow, learn, discern, etc. God raises! He weaves a child from what the parents contributed for months. He grants life, growth, and *attachment*. But God doesn't just work on the child. He works through the mother's womb. Rearranges organs, heavens, it's a bit crazy for me to think about. By the work and gift of God, the woman serves as a mother without even knowing it. Without assent, thought, or intentional effort.

Some would say the unborn are parasitical. Taking what isn't theirs. Some emphasize that the mother's body is doing exactly what the body is supposed to do! Automatically! Naturally!

As for me, it's just a wonder what the Word of God works. Because there are plenty of times when automation and nature are *not* good. Reflexes can *hurt* and *hinder*. Sin touches everywhere.

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<sup>1</sup> P. 106.

In those early days of pregnancy, there's not much a father can do. Yet God has determined to work through fathers and mothers *together* in service to children. A father's service is simply direct toward the mother and indirect toward the child. It's still service. And once you value both direct and indirect service, it opens up other vocations, too.

- Teachers serve their students directly. Indirectly you are shaping their families, friends, communities, careers ahead, and maybe generations to come.
- Likewise, pastors. Your points are going to come up at Bible studies wherever your young parishioners end up in these mobile days.
- Husbands serve their wives directly. Sometimes children less directly. Sometimes more. It all counts!

Vocations change and grow into additional opportunities. We don't grow into fewer responsibilities. Neither do our kids. Instead, we serve more and more directly, while our indirect service too is a vehicle for the love of God.

God has determined to work through both mothers and fathers. The very Incarnation of His Son is a reminder to Himself of the one flesh union of marriage and childhood. Which, again in Christ, calls out His own divine parental attributes toward us in love and mercy.

It is because *God* is at work, and *His Spirit and Word in our lives*, that we can serve in our vocations *bodily*, even apart from intent or knowledge of service. "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

I wrote a children's book on vocation. You can look through it on the table. (All my books are on the table.) In one illustration, a boy picks up a toy for his little sister. He hasn't thought through what's he's doing yet he's helping his sister directly and his parents indirectly. And "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). And what loving purpose He has, making us brothers in Christ! Thanks be to God!

#### DO NOT EXASPERATE

Parents, in the Table of Duties, hear this:

- Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Eph. 6:4

The world is overwhelming. It's overwhelming to kids, too. Fathers, do not exasperate. Do not give gifts that aren't ready to be carried. Instead, train. Instruct. Prepare. Guide. Help.

St. Paul says, "[C]hildren are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Corinthians 12:14) and that's worth noting.

But:

One thing's needful; Lord, this treasure  
Teach me highly to regard.  
All else, though it first give pleasure,  
Is a yoke that presses hard!  
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,

No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.  
This one thing is needful; all others are vain--  
I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain! (LSR 536)

Teach the faith. A *lot of practical stuff* will follow!

Who can tell me what historically aligns with the vast majority of movements toward literacy? Christianity. Christianity is a religion of the Word and that Word is a treasure to read! I wrote an article for *The Canadian Lutheran* June issue on “God’s Gift of Literature.” You can google it.

As Lutherans, we could probably take any single good thing and write books about how extraordinary a creation it is! And that’s what we get to share with our children! All the goodness and beauty and truth found in Scripture and the earth is what we get to share through little child-sized bites.

My father always said, “There are no boring things. Only boring people.” My God has made no boring things. People just may not put in the effort to realize the gift and excellence of it.

So we, as adults working with children, get to introduce them to the wonders of God’s Word and the wonders of God’s World. We get to introduce them to patterns, explanations, and revelations.

Raise your hand if you like to know correct answers. Good! Kids do too. So let’s teach them the catechism. If there’s one thing kids “get,” it’s that there are questions and answers. Likewise, if you recall, boundaries!

And, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever children drive us crazy asking us questions, they are proving, once again, that we are to be catechetical people. “What does this mean?” The question and answer format is something we never outgrow. We aren’t supposed to! We remain God’s children, dependent upon His Word.

## HUMILITY

There’s nothing quite like parenthood to humble! We all have questions and want answers, too.

Two of the most poignant pictures of parenthood are these: Job, who sacrificed every day after his children’s parties, lest one had fallen into sin, and Samson’s mother, who again and again, wanted the angel of the Lord to, “come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.”

I so relate. “Isn’t there more to know? Please?!”

All Hannah could do after dropping off Samuel to Eli was give him a little robe on their yearly visit to offer sacrifice. Surely she longed to do more!

Luther has *strong words* for parents in the Large Catechism under the Fourth Commandment:

“Therefore let all people know that it is their *chief duty*—at the risk of losing divine grace—first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so gifted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.”

At risk of losing divine grace!

Now, there are all sorts of philosophies, but theology is much more practical than any anthropological, parenting, or educational philosophy, because it's *revealed*. In words we can understand! And it isn't about experiments or assumptions but God's Word applied to sinners.

Parents need to use their words. And parents need to use God's Words.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6  
So teach children the ways of the Lord. The ways of baptism, repentance, and the Lord's Supper. The centrality of the Word and the weaknesses of human understanding so that they can avoid some stumbles while knowing where to turn for help and healing.

Parents need to help the baptized get to church to receive God's gifts of faith. The parents need to learn that those little kids are going to go through the Christian life cycle of repentance, too, and *those kids need forgiveness. And practice in repentance. And words so they can understand what they are going through.*

## DISCIPLINE

Discipline comes from the same root as disciple. Discipline teaches and trains using boundaries. Yes to this but no to that. *Distinctions* as well as facts. *Distinctions* as well as *commonalities* and unifying factors.

Different kinds of boundaries allow you to teach children in clear, understandable ways. Yes, another child is doing that, but other families have different rules. "In *our* family we . . ." this, that or the other. "God's put other parents over that child."

Boundaries are something children grow to understand pretty quickly. Gray areas can come after lots of other clear groundwork. But, again, vocational terms can cut through quandaries pretty well.

Discipline is for children *and* their parents. ☺ As Hebrew 12 reminds us:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reprov'd by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives."

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12

## GOD'S PRESENCE IN VOCATION

God speaks. His Word goes out. His Word works His will.

*We* are part of that will, as are our vocations.

God has designed creation in such a way as to work *for us, in us, and through us*, individually and collectively at different levels.

When people speak of vocation as a Lutheran understanding of Christian life *and* God's presence in the world, we get to think about all the ways that God's Word continues to work today. Yes, in the means of grace! Alleluia! Also in creation, as He continues to be the only source of life and every good thing. In God vocation God's Word continues to ring out for love, service, self-discipline, and faith.

In our vocations, God's Word isn't particularly glamorous. It's by definition made mundane. But it is no less *for you or for the good of you and your neighbor*.

God's Word sanctifies. It is God's Word which sanctifies life! And when we remember all that God does, even through what little we can offer, in our services and our cycles of repentance and renewal, all we can do is give thanks! Rejoice! Relax! And better love those around us and the blessings God has given us.

*God* raises from the dead and raises up children. *God* grants seed. *God* grants growth. God even waters and prunes.

So parents don't have to do everything for children. Kids can have chores. Really ought to, since parents are to train children for their vocations present and future. Including dominion over the earth. And forgiven child of God.

What we can learn from the Reformation is that the solutions we need in our lives aren't more laws, more rules, or more principles for successful living. The major contribution of the Reformation was to place the gospel of Jesus Christ—justification by grace through faith in the atoning work of Christ—and the Word of God at the very center of every facet of Christian teaching and Christian life.

(Optional: if time allows) FAMILY NEEDED

Right now people don't always know what they need. But they need God's gifts in family.

Family is intrinsic to humanity and who we are. How we learn. And grow. It is a part of nature which retains an inherent goodness and power, as we'll hear. Even though obviously the devil, the world, and our flesh will twist, abuse, and neglect it.

Right now people don't even know how to identify themselves. They see sex as one of their only assets and strength. And goals! Increasingly even before puberty! How they can use or be used to get what they want. Too often without realizing what they actually need.

But we? Know what people need. They need *flesh and blood*, not for pleasure but for life: daily and heavenly bread. They need the heavenly Father who has no need of prostitution or objectification of any form! They need His only begotten Son—and, yes, understanding of what begotten means is important. Abstractions abound, but the Incarnation is *anything* but a fleshless ideal.

God elevated human flesh into Himself so that Christ's Sonship is to heaven and earth—in *reality* rather than abstraction! This is huge! Yet basic enough to read aloud in a toddler's storybook. But it takes time. Prayer. Individual attention which is too often missing, no matter how much we say words like relationship.

Vocation is rooted in God's gifts. In His Word. And in Baptism. As God's Word formed creation, and then spoke to Adam, vocation came into existence as part of a web of interconnection, love, and service.

In the presentation of Eve, God institutes marriage—which no other creation has. In God’s promise regarding Eve’s Seed, Christ, she really and truly is a mother to all living creators! Even as Mary really is the Mother of God.

Vocations are not always valued by the world. Or by all the members of our congregations. Christians speak against husbands and wives—their own and others. Christians treat marriage as a means of social advancement. Sometimes like a life sentence rather than a blessing! Christians avoid children. Or speak as though conception is in our hands rather than God’s. Christians rebel against being children. Women rebel against being women, and men rebel against being men.

But thanks be to God it isn’t really a perspective shift that frees us. Forgiveness frees us. Releases us through the means of grace! Yet God’s Word *does also offer* perspective as a very practical, liberating resource. And as we go through the family vocations you’ll see just how family is the answer to prayers so many haven’t even known how to pray.

## CONCLUSION

At a time when people increasingly forgot ties of kinship and bound fates, a fellow asked Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And later, “Who is my neighbor?”

Many fine, wonderful sermons have been preached on this text. And while I will never be a preacher, I do get to speak on vocation. Who is your neighbor: your most important neighbor who is so often overlooked? While I could say it’s your spouse, who is so dear to you, your children, your brothers and sisters, there’s another one. The most important one. Put another way, “Who is the best and most perfect neighbor *to you?*”

Jesus! Thanks be to God!

## NOTES

### Foster Father

#### Isaiah 49:23

Kings shall be your **foster** fathers,

### Fathers Change Diapers

Chores have no gender. I offer you a long but salutary Luther quotation from *The Estate of Marriage* (1522):

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason (which the pagans followed in trying to be most clever), takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labour at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful. Carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers. Or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labour, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight."

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works. . . .

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.

Notice that in Luther, for all of the late medieval era, the FATHER is dealing with the baby's diaper!

Important Bible passages: 1 Corinthians 7:17: “Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.”

Our faith bears fruit in love (Gal. 5:6; 1 Tim. 1:5), and this happens in our families, our work, our communities, and our congregations. In these callings, we also bear our crosses, we sin and find forgiveness, and we grow in faith and holiness.

All our work in the field, in the garden, in the city, in the home, in struggle, in government-to what does it all amount before God except child's play, by means of which God is pleased to give his gifts in the field, at home, and everywhere? These are **the masks of our Lord God**, behind which he wants to be hidden and to do all things. (2)( Exposition of Psalm 147, quoted by Wingren, 138)