

YOU AND YOUR CHILD'S DEDICATION

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.
(Psalms 127:3, NIV)

We, as Christians, have a tremendous responsibility given to us when the Lord blesses us with a child. By doing so, He entrusts us with the responsibility of raising that child in the way of the Lord while establishing early in his or her life, a foundation built upon Jesus Christ. It is this tremendous responsibility that causes us to think of baby dedications as "family dedications". We feel that the whole family unit needs to be lifted up to the Lord so that each member will be able to keep his or her responsibilities.

But first, what exactly is involved in "dedicating" your child to the Lord? As mentioned previously, children are a heritage from the Lord. He gives them to us to bless us, and because of this we must be willing to give them back to Him. Referring to the loss of his sons and daughters, Job proclaimed, and said: ". . . *The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*" (Job 1:21, NIV). Job realized that the Lord God had given him his children and that He was also the only one who could take them away. We too must be willing to totally submit our children to the will of our Father.

A perfect example of "dedicating" a child to the Lord is given to us in 1 Samuel 1:11, 26-28. Hannah, being barren (or without child) for many years, was weeping before the Lord because of her condition. As she was weeping, she made a vow to God, saying: "*O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.*" (1 Samuel 1:11, NIV).

God honored Hannah's request and gave her a son named Samuel. Hannah then, in keeping her vow, dedicated (or set apart) Samuel unto the Lord. We see here a beautiful example of what our attitudes should be towards our children and their relationship to God. We are to do the most we can to "set apart" our children to God until the day that they can make their own choice (something all of us must do at one time or another). By dedicating our children to the Lord we are making a vow to raise them in His ways and not our own. We are committing ourselves to this promise and we must do all we can to keep it. The following is a list (though not exhaustive), of some of the things we as parents should do as part of keeping our vow.

1. Pray constantly for your child.

A parent's responsibility to pray for their child does not end at his dedication but continues until the day he commits his own life to the Lord and beyond. Job gives us an example of this in Job 1:5, "*When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.*" (Job 1:5, NIV)

2. Instruct your child in the way of the Lord.

We are taught in Ephesians 6:4 (NIV) to "*bring them (your children) up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" And Proverbs 22:6 adds, "*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*" (Proverbs 22:6, NIV). If we, while our children are young, instruct them in this way, it is highly likely that those ways will develop into a life-long commitment. Parents must know "the way." We all continue to "learn Christ" (Ephesians 4:20,21) and to be taught by Him which leads to the next point.

3. Be a living example of Christ to your children.

It does not do your child any good to instruct him in the way of the Lord if you yourself do not walk what you talk. Therefore, you must always be examining yourself and your witness to your children. In Proverbs 20:7 the Bible says, *"The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him."* The main reason for the blessed state of this man's children is that they have someone to look up to and use as an example to model their own behavior and more importantly, the whole of their life. We as parents must strive to be that example to our children even as Christ is our example. Modeling goes well beyond "behavior." What *we do* flows out of *who we are*. How well do you understand your new life in Christ? (Galatians 2:20) You teach according to *who you are*...your identity in Christ.

4. Discipline our children in the same way the Lord disciplines us.

The book of Proverbs teaches us many practical aspects concerning the discipline we are to provide for our children. Some of the Scriptures that relate to this subject are as follows:

"The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother."
(Proverbs 29:15, NIV)

"Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul."
(Proverbs 29:17, NIV)

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."
(Proverbs 13:24, NIV)

Other References:
Proverbs 19:18; 22:15

As you can see by chastening or disciplining your child you are showing your love for him or her. This brings us to the motivation for discipline. Any discipline you give to your child should be done for his profit and not as a release for your own anger and/or frustration. Remember, you are to discipline your child in the same way that the Lord disciplines you. God never strikes at His children in anger, and you shouldn't either. Colossians 3:21 (Amplified Version) reads, *"Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children - do not be hard or harass them; lest they become discouraged and sullen and morose and feel inferior and frustrated; DO NOT BREAK THEIR SPIRIT."*

We as parents are not in the business of breaking our children's spirits, but instead we are to encourage their spiritual growth. Explain to them why you must discipline them, carry out that discipline, and then most importantly, LOVE THEM. If you are able to do this, then you will be disciplining your children in the way the Lord would have you to.

Summary: As mentioned previously, these are but a few of the responsibilities that God calls us to as parents. It hardly needs to be said that if you yourself are not a born-again Christian, these responsibilities will be impossible to keep. The dedication of your family to God is something too serious to be entered into lightly. It is hoped that this paper has helped you to recognize the extent of this commitment that you will be making. If you have any questions concerning anything that has been said, or not covered, please write them down and ask them in your upcoming appointment.

Jesus said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* (Matthew 19:14, NIV).

