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Perspective

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Perspective is a monthly journal with articles and book reviews. It is part of the “equipping” ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, where we exist to KNOW, EQUIP, and SEND one another for the worship and glory of God.

SERMON SCHEDULE

January 4

Deliverance

Psalm 6

Guest Preacher: Bryan Pillsbury

January 11

Words Matter

Deuteronomy 1:1-5

January 18

Grace Matters

Deuteronomy 1:6 - 4:43

January 25

Love Matters

Deuteronomy 4:44 - 28:68

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visit www.mvbchurch.org.

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FIGHTER VERSE

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so,
would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
that were I am you may be also.

John 14:2-3 (ESV)

Parenting: The Basics

Aaron Menikoff

The question Jesus received seemed genuine, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” The wealthy man who asked Jesus this question must have known there was something more to life than gold and camels. The Savior pointed him to the Law.

“You know the commandments,” Jesus said. God had made his expectations clear. We are to be holy as He is holy. When Jesus answered this way, a spark of encouragement crept into the rich man’s heart. After all, he was a good person. He knew the commands not to murder or commit adultery. He knew he was to honor his parents and be truthful. He’d done all of these things, or so he thought.

And that’s what he told this confident rabbi, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” But Jesus loved this man. He knew he was spiritually confused and missed the whole point of the Law. Therefore, Jesus did what needed to be done—he went after his heart, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Jesus perfectly diagnosed the young’s man problem: he loved money more than God. He valued wealth above all. But for him to inherit eternal life he’d have to love Jesus more than silver; he’d have to let his stuff go and follow the Savior.

This is true for all of us, isn’t it? God cares about our hearts. We have to love him more than anyone or anything; we have to value him more than life itself. To be a Christian you have to be willing to leave everything behind.

When we read the story of the rich young man in Mark 10, we usually stop when we learn that he went away sad “because he had great possessions.” But what happens next is most interesting. The disciples were flabbergasted. Jesus told them that it is “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” But if that is the case, they wondered,

how will anyone be saved? Jesus said it’s impossible for man, but not for God.

Plucky Peter heard these words, and he wanted to point out just how much he’d given up to follow the Teacher: “See, we have left everything and followed you.” One wonders if there was a tinge of pride in Peter’s heart when he uttered those words. Still Jesus doesn’t rebuke him for his confidence. Instead, rather matter-of-factly, Jesus says:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

You may be asking, “What does this have to do with parenting?” Everything. Let me show you.

First, the family is something many must leave to follow Christ. Our families, even more than our wealth, are given as an example of Jesus as an allegiance that can’t overwhelm our commitment to him. There have been and will be many forced to choose between Jesus and “brothers or sisters or mother or father or children.” Some people love their wealth more than Jesus. Some people value their kids more than Jesus. But we can have only one first love.

I grew up in a non-Christian home and became a Christian around the time I entered college. I’m sure my parents thought that it was a phase, one that I’d get over eventually. A couple years later I was sorely tempted to walk away from the faith. I came home one weekend, and my family strongly encouraged me to lay Christianity aside. At that moment, I knew I had to choose between my family and Jesus. I chose Jesus.

Many of you reading this grew up in a Christian home. You probably know that there came a moment when you had to wrestle with the gospel on your own. Faith cannot be inherited from even the best mom or dad. Thankfully, if you have Christian parents you don't have to choose between your family and Jesus. Nonetheless, to be a Christian—even in a Christian home—is to understand that we can't ultimately turn to our parents for refuge or comfort, we must turn to Christ. Our faith must be directly in him, not through our parents to him.

Second, the family is something you gain when you follow Christ. Jesus is so clear: those who follow him will receive “now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands.” The Lord blesses us, now, with family. Jesus is referring here to the church. If you grew up in even the worst, unbelieving home, God has not left you alone. He has provided a congregation of brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers *in Christ* for you. But even if you grew up in the best Christian home, God has richly blessed you with numerous siblings and parents. The family is something we gain when we follow Christ.

Putting these two points together, third, a biblical view of the family is central to our understanding of Christian discipleship. For Jesus the family is a tool to help us understand the gospel. The cost of discipleship is described in terms of choosing Jesus before relatives. The reward to discipleship is portrayed in terms of gaining relatives because of Jesus. There is pain when you lose family and joy when you gain family. That's how the Savior describes life with him—the loss and gain of family.

All this means that we can't truly understand what it means to follow Christ without thinking carefully about what it means to be part of a family. Godly parents who wisely raise their children are providing important mental categories that we need to grasp the spiritual realities of Christian discipleship.

At Mount Vernon, we are a *family* of faith, a congregation made up of kids, couples, singles, parents and grandparents. As a family, it is important for us to know how to raise our children. As we do this well, we will all better understand the gospel. With that in mind, here are five basic and biblical imperatives for raising a family.

First, recognize that children are born with the need for redeeming grace.

It is important for each one of us to understand that sin isn't just something we did; it's who we were. Ever since our first parents rebelled against God in the Garden, each and every one of us has been born with a rebellious nature. Through Adam's sin, we were all “made sinners”—we were born sinful (Rom. 5:19). Not only that, our sinful state has consequences. In Ephesians 2:3 Paul says we were “by nature children of wrath.” This is not the narrative given to us by the culture.

This truth dramatically changes our approach to parenting. Fundamentally, we need to see our children as sinners, born rebels against God and deserving of his wrath. What they need, most of all, is a new heart. They need God's grace to break into their lives and redeem them. Once redeemed, they are still sinners and need God's grace to transform them into the image of Christ “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18).

When my first child was born, we let her watch the video *Baby Mozart*. Someone convinced us (and a few thousand other parents) that if our children watched colorful shapes float around to the sound of classical music, our kids would be smarter than those raised by parents who deprived their children of such artistic wonder. The jury is still out, but I can still hear the voice of the woman that started every episode with the words, “Our highest aspirations are reserved for our children.” As a dad, I knew what she meant. When you have a kid, you are concerned about his or her future even more than your own. Your highest aspirations are no longer reserved for yourself.

What aspirations do you have for your children? I think a lot of parents today are anxious to see their kids graduate from the best schools so that their kids can get the best jobs and support their own families. Financial success is not a bad goal. We want our kids to do well. But if we care more about our children's material well-being than their spiritual well-being, we have seriously underestimated the power and danger of sin. Sin is real and deadly, and it rules the hearts of the unredeemed. Therefore, our highest aspiration for our children must be their salvation.

If we recognize this, we will pray for our kids. If their problem is a rebellious heart, we will pray for redeeming grace. We can give our kids lots of things they need for this life: healthy food, a warm bed, and a shoulder to cry on. But we can't give our kids what they need for the life-to-come. We can't give them a new heart. We were born with hearts of stone and we need God to give us hearts of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Therefore, faithful parents are committed to praying for hearts of flesh. Pray like this: "Lord, I can't give my child what he most needs- You! Go to him, Lord. Give him a new heart. Give him life. Flood him with the redeeming grace that only you can send."

Second, create a home where the Word is treasured and taught.

Some of you may be ready to throw your hands up in the air and say, "If I can't give them what they truly need, what good am I?" Don't give up just yet. God has given parents real work to do. It is our job to create an environment in the home where the Word is cherished, treasured, and taught. God has ordained the end and the means. The end is their salvation. The means is the teaching of the Word. Though our children's hearts are in the hands of the Lord, we have the real responsibility of speaking the life-giving Word of God to those hearts.

Remember Romans 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." We want our kids to call on the name of the Lord. But notice what else Paul says, in Romans 10:17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." For kids to call upon the name of the Lord, they need to hear the word of Christ. They should hear it from us.

Timothy had saving faith, and who taught him the word of Christ? His grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice. Throughout the history of God's people, the Lord has laid it in the laps of parents to pass along the truths of Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:6 says, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Sadly, many evangelical homes are spiritually starving for a lack of the Word of Christ. Is your home a place where the Word is treasured and taught? I believe that there are a lot of moms and dads who want this to be true but are struggling. What can you do if your home is not a place where the Word is regularly treasured and taught? First, get rid of those things that make it hard to treasure the Word. Minds overwhelmed by movies, television, and video games will be underwhelmed by the Word of Christ. Second, make Scripture a natural part of everyday conversation. It should be normal in your home to talk about the Bible. We talk about what we care about: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45b). Share with your kids what you are reading and how you are being affected by the Bible. Dads should lead in this. Third, carve out time for family Bible reading/worship. You will be amazed to see how much kids love learning the Bible from mom and dad. Finally, husbands, pour the Word into your wives. Moms spend the most time with their kids. One way a husband can serve his children is by faithfully disciplining his wife.

Third, do the hard work of disciplining your children.

Parents today have made parenting very complicated. We have books to read, conferences to attend, and the daily responsibility of getting to our children's heart. Long gone is the simple plan laid out by my parents: "Go outside and try not to get hit by a car." My parents obviously didn't go far enough, but let's not overcomplicate parenting.

One of the simplest and most important duties you have as a parent is to discipline your child. It's your responsibility to expect and to enforce obedience. The key text to see this is Hebrews 12:7-11:

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? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? 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. 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.

If you are a child of God, he disciplines you. He loves you and he wants you to be holy. But the path to holiness is paved with painful discipline. God uses the pain, disappointment, and even the regret of everyday life to transform us into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Parents who truly love their children will discipline them. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” This is not a rock-solid guarantee that your discipline will lead to “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” That’s in the hands of the Lord. But God uses the faithful discipline of parents for the good of children.

The English pastor, J. C. Ryle, said we should train our children with tenderness and affection because they “are weak and tender and should be handled delicately.” Discipline must be done gently and compassionately, but it must be done. It is your duty, as a parent, to expect and enforce obedience. That’s discipline.

How do we do it? The answer is a long one. I’d strongly encourage you to find some godly, more-experienced parents and ask them to walk you through what they did. Learn from them. Nonetheless, here are three tips I think you should keep in mind as you process how to appropriately discipline your kids.

First, decide where to draw the line. In other words, figure out what you expect from your children. Every family is different. Expectations change with the age of your kids. Constant conversations between mom and dad are needed. Let godly friends chime in. Some lines are obvious: “You don’t hit other people.” Some lines are not-so-obvious: “You can’t have dessert unless you eat all your peas.” Different parents may have different lines. There is room for disagreement. But each parent should carefully decide what will be encouraged and discouraged in the home.

Second, once you know where the line is, call your children to obey and punish them when they disobey. In other words, expect and enforce obedience. The worst thing you can do is teach your children that disobedience isn’t costly. We’ve all given instructions and not followed through. But parents should strive to be consistent. Kids thrive when they know what the expectations are and that they will be enforced.

Third, realize that this kind of discipline is hard work. As parents, we need to be working on discipline as long as our kids are awake. It’s going to be tiring and strenuous, especially when the kids are very young. It’s easy to yell at your kids, but hard to calmly, patiently, and lovingly discipline them. Nonetheless, do the hard work of helping your child understand how he/she disobeyed. Gently punish him/her for disobeying. Then carefully restore him/her into a right relationship with you by explaining he’s/she’s been forgiven, hugging him/her, telling him/her you love him/her.

Why is all this so important? Because God gives parents to children for their protection and prosperity. Your commands are for their good. You discipline them because you want to see them succeed and flourish. Children who understand what it means to obey a parent are beginning to understand what it means to obey God. If your words are weighty in their lives, they can begin to see how weighty God’s Word should be in their lives.

Don’t forget that discipline is an opportunity to share the gospel. We all disobey. We all deserve punishment. Sin has consequences. We all need Jesus. Only he can take away our sin. Only he can bear our punishment. Every time you discipline your child, you have the chance to help them see that disobedience is costly, and that’s why we all need a Savior.

Fourth, set an example for your children to follow.

I want to give my kids an example worth following. 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” 2 Timothy 3:10 says, “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings.”

It’s important that I live in such a way that my kids can follow my words and my life. One pastor said, “To give children good instruction, and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them in the way to hell.” These are serious words. What kind of example are you setting for your children? Do they see you treasuring the Word of God? Do they see you evangelizing your neighbors? Do they see you loving the local church? Don’t underestimate the importance of a godly example.

Your whole life should be a pattern worth imitating. Of course, we aren't perfect. Our kids won't see perfection in any of us. But they don't need to see perfection; they need to see humility and repentance. Show them what to do when someone falls short. Let them see repentance and faith in action.

Not long ago, I told the kids I was preparing a sermon on parenting. I asked them, "Do you remember a time when I said I'm sorry?" They couldn't remember a particular instance, but they did remember it happening. I asked them how they felt to hear me say, "I'm sorry." Some said they were relieved to know they weren't in the wrong. All of them said that my sin had made them angry. By being short with them, raising my voice, and wrongly accusing them, I disobeyed Ephesians 6:4. I provoked my kids to anger. It's important that I practice self-control. I should never lose my patience with my kids. But it is just as important that I apologize when I do. They need to see holiness at work in humility.

If you think your example is unimportant, think again. A friend of mine, who is now a pastor, told me about the way the Lord used his grandfather to save him. Let this be an encouragement to you, whether you are a mom or dad, grandmother or grandfather, uncle, aunt, or friend. Children are watching you, and your example may very well be part of the puzzle used by the Lord to lead them to saving faith.

My grandfather was a faithful Christian whose main goal in life was to raise a family that believed in and lived for Christ. I observed him attend church faithfully, teach Sunday School every week, and lead his church as a deacon. In addition to this, I saw him establish relationships in his community for evangelism and once witnessed him not charge an elderly woman for four new tires. He constantly spoke about the gospel. All four grandchildren rebelled and ignored his counsel, including me. A letter he wrote to me in my early high school days, but ignored and forgot about until I was in college, was a key instrument God used to bring me back to himself. The letter pointed me to Christ and explained to me what true wisdom from Christ looks like and how sin would destroy me. This letter spoke truth into my life and helped me to see my sin and need for Christ. It had a great effectiveness because it matched his life.

Fifth, make Christ, not children, your life.

Do you remember that rich young man from Mark 10? Jesus said he had to leave what he valued most. He wouldn't. Then Peter pointed out that he had left everything behind to follow him. Jesus didn't correct him because that's what it means to be a Christian. You leave it all behind: homes, mother, father, brothers, sisters, and children. You leave it all behind because to be a Christian is to care more about Jesus than anything.

This takes us to the heart of the gospel. When God came into the world he left honor behind, took upon himself human flesh, and then went to a cross where he died in the place of sinners like us. You could say that Jesus left everything behind to save us. He loved his Father and he loved us more than his own life. If we are going to follow him, we have to love him more than anything, too.

We can't parent well without this gospel. The best parents make Christ, not children, their life. If you make your children your life, you'll either be too indulgent—spoiling them all the time and never saying, "No," to them. Why? Because you've made an idol out of your kids' approval. You care more about what your kids think of you than about what's best for them. Still others will be too strict with their kids—constantly pushing them to do better. Why? Because you've made an idol out of their success. You care more about what your children do than who they are. You care more about their performance than their heart. Either way, you are following your kids, not Jesus. You've made your kids your life, not Christ.

Some of us have made some serious parenting mistakes. Things you can't really fix. It's too late. But there is hope for you. The gospel is bigger than your parenting sins. If Christ is your life, you can rest in him even in the midst of failed parenting. Take your sins, even your parenting-sins to Christ, ask for his forgiveness, and pray for him to be at work in the lives of your kids.

I know that for some of you an article like this is so hard because you may have desperately wanted kids but couldn't have them. Maybe it's because you've lost children. Maybe it's because your children are gone and now you feel terribly alone. What can you do? Again, the application is the same: make Christ, not children, your life. Find comfort in him.

It is a real privilege to be at a church with so many children and to be able to share life with so many brothers and sisters working so hard to be godly parents. Take these imperatives to heart, and don't worry! God has given everything you need in his Word and Spirit to equip you to be a parent after his own heart.

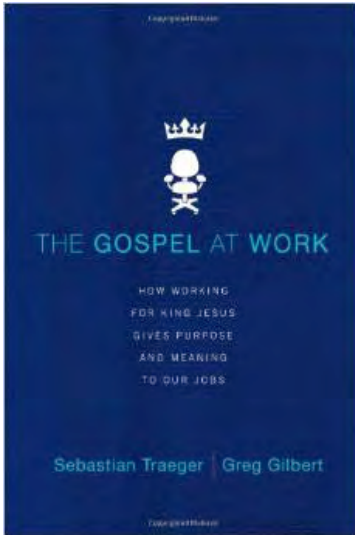
~Aaron Menikoff

Book Review

The Gospel at Work

By Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert

Reviewed by Jesse Brannen



The Gospel at Work is a simple, yet remarkably helpful examination of a

topic that is of great practical importance to Christians – work. The purpose of the book is not to provide a theology of work but to “help some Christians to see a little more clearly why God has given them work to do and how they might be thinking about work in sinful ways” (19). The foundational verses for the book are Colossians 3:23-24: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.” Co-authors Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert explore the practical applications of the truth that all Christians, no matter their vocation, work for Jesus. The heart of their message is that “your job has inherent purpose and meaning because you are doing it ultimately for the King” (16).

Unsurprisingly, the book’s gospel-centered message starts with an examination of sin. The opening chapters are devoted to showing how Christians are tempted to make work an idol by elevating it over Christ as the “source of ultimate satisfaction” (25), and to be idle in their work by failing to embrace God’s purposes for the work he has assigned. Traeger and Gilbert argue that all sin associated with the workplace can fit broadly into those two categories: idolatry or idleness. In every chapter, readers are challenged to identify ways in which they struggle with idolatry or idleness. Any notion readers may have that they do not struggle with these sins is quickly dispelled as the authors show again and again how these root issues of the heart subtly, or sometimes not so subtly, manifest themselves in the workplace.

Traeger and Gilbert show that it is fundamentally the gospel that should motivate the work of Christians and transform their thinking about what God has given them to do. The gospel message applied to work demonstrates that:

Jesus’ work for us, in our place and on our behalf, has really and truly secured salvation from our sin and eternal life for us – the only life that can provide deep and lasting satisfaction for our souls. What’s more, God offers this gift to us without cost! It’s not something we can earn or work to achieve. This means our jobs can never give us what we truly want. Only Jesus can. By his life, death, and resurrection, he has already achieved for us the highest joy, the highest meaning, the highest significance and the highest prize (47-48).

Those who have been born again have a new master (Jesus), a new assignment (love God and love others), and new, eternal rewards. Working for Jesus gives significance to all jobs. It is the gospel that frees the Christian from the bondage of idolatry and idleness at work. The gospel provides the freedom to worship God, serve others, and have joy in work. This is a transforming reality, and one that is central to the practical workplace issues that the remainder of the book explores.

The Gospel at Work tackles questions such as: How should I choose a job? How do I balance work, church, and family? How do I handle difficult bosses and coworkers? What does it mean to be a Christian boss? And how can I share the gospel at work?

For instance, readers are encouraged to apply a gospel-centered approach to choosing a job by evaluating whether a certain job glorifies God and meets their basic needs before considering whether or not the job is something they want to do. This approach prioritizes obeying God and serving others over personal fulfillment. The practical importance and application of these topics are reinforced by the discussion questions that are included at the end of each chapter. The discussion questions are designed for use when reading the book in a small group or with a friend, but all readers should take time to reflect on these questions as they encourage meditation on and application of the key passages of Scripture and the main ideas presented in each chapter. The book's broad focus may leave some readers wanting more depth on a particular topic or question, but the real strength of the book is that it guides readers to apply the biblical principles it contains to their own lives.

The Gospel at Work does much more than simply clarify how work and faith intersect; it shows that encouragement can only be found in the gospel. Work is so much more than a means to an end or a series of daily frustrations. It is an opportunity to worship God and serve others. No matter the job and no matter the circumstances, Christians can find joy and purpose in the remarkable truths that God cares about their work, that God has a purpose for them in their work, and that lasting satisfaction is only found in the person of Jesus Christ. *The Gospel at Work* repeatedly emphasizes these truths and that is why it should be a tremendous help and encouragement to Christians in all vocations.

