

Podcast 278 God-Centered Parenting

Scott: Good morning, Steve! How are you today?

Steve: I am well and rested. We just celebrated Easter two days ago and had a wonderful time

Scott: Hallelujah!

Steve: We had the joy of helping Ethan with his four foster children sit in church. They've been practicing sitting at home during family devotions, so they're getting better at it, but there's one of them that's got ants in his pants. I totally relate to that boy because that's how I was and still am in some respects.

Scott: I was going to say, did your boys sit still in church?

Steve: I've always been of the opinion that you learn to sit still by practicing at home first. We had family devotions for 20-30 minutes, and as a result our kids sat through regular church services their entire life.

Steve: I think it's unfair to try to expect children to sit still in church if they haven't been taught to sit still at home first.

Steve: Tonight, I'm going to be on the Homeschool Summit, which is sponsored by the Homeschool Association of Colorado. The topic of the summit this year is "God-Centered Parenting." How's that for a title?

Scott: That's some big shoes to fill.

Steve: I really like the title. The more I've meditated on it and chewed on it, I believe that that's the only way to parent is by being God-focused, God-centered. Tonight - I've already done a recorded broadcast - is going to be the Q&A with the audience asking questions, so this will be interesting. Pray for me if you think of me.

Scott: Will do.

Steve: Let's pray before we go any further on this one. Father, thank You for being our God, and thank You for calling us to be parents, and that's what we're counting on as parents is that we will be God-focused and God-centered. And I pray that You will give us ears to hear what You have for us today and help us to incorporate Your principles and the life of Jesus into our homes. Help us to convey what we've received from You to our children. Give us all ears to hear today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Steve: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with Whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." (James 1:17) I like that verse because that's the first thought I had when I heard the title, "God-Centered Parenting."

As a parent I want to pass on to my children a love for God and a love for His Word, but the only place I can receive it first is from above. This morning, in my daily Bible reading, I came across a verse that is not familiar to me. It's John 3:27, which says, "A

person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.” Normally when I read John 3, I’m thinking about Nicodemus being born from above, but what a passage. You can’t receive one thing unless it is given to him from heaven. So in order for me to pass on to my children thoughts of God, love of God, truth of God, grace of God, I need to be receiving it first from Him.

If everything good and perfect comes from above, and if I can’t receive even one thing unless it is given from above, then I need to focus on above. One of my favorite themes has been, for nine years this month, John 15:9: “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.” John 15:9. Jesus Himself, it appears, received love from the Father before He passed that love on to us. “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.”

We know in 1 John 4:19 it says, “We love because He first loved us.” I don’t want to take out of the equation that we want to pass on forgiveness, we want to pass on grace, we want to pass on truth. But I believe love encompasses all those, and is over all of those. “God so loved that He gave His Son.” We’re going to focus on the love aspect, and that’s why I’m quoting 1 John 4:19. Are you a gardener, by any chance?

Steve: This is the growing season in PA. I have cut the grass once so far. I’m probably going to cut it again this afternoon if I get some time. Everything we see is growing, because another verse that was very instrumental in my walk in 2012 is found in Ephesians 3:16–17, where Paul prays for the Ephesian church, that they would be able to assimilate, or take in, God’s love. And he prays this prayer, third chapter, and I’m breaking into the middle of it, but he says,

“According to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love...” Then he goes on to talk more about that. But those words, “rooted and grounded in love,” resonate in my heart, because I think of myself as a plant. I think of myself as somebody who wants to bear good fruit. I want to bear good fruit first in my family, and then in my neighborhood, etc. But what I’m finding is, the more I’m rooted and grounded in the love of God, the more I’m able then to bear fruit. So we’re going to talk about roots a little bit.

The first is that roots are not seen, generally, yet they are essential to the life of the plant. It’s through the roots that the plant receives water and nutrients. That made me think of three passages in Scripture. Psalm 1:1–3: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Since he is like the willow tree in my backyard, which is right beside the streams. He’s a tree planted by streams of water. He’s meditating on the law, he delights in the law,

and he's soaking in nutrients from the water. Isaiah 37:31 says, "The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward." Beautiful expression. I do remember from when we studied trees in school that there is a correlation between the root system of the tree and the height of a tree. If the roots went down deep and strong and had a good base, then the tree could grow high and strong.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 puts both of those Scriptures together: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

I do believe that we're entering a time of drought. I believe that, as pleasant as spring is and as delightful as life is at this minute, the storm clouds are coming, the drought is ahead of us. That's just my conviction. There's a part of me that is rejoicing in the Lord and in His goodness, and there's another part of me that's girding my loins and preparing for seasons of drought.

Not only do roots take in the nutrients and the water; they also establish and make the plant firm in the soil. They provide anchorage, hence the phrase from Ephesians 3:17, "Being rooted and grounded in love." Interesting that the Amplified Version takes a couple more words to help us grasp that. They said, "And may you, having been deeply rooted and securely grounded in love," making that point.

The only other time that that word "rooted" is used in the Bible is in Colossians 2:6-7: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." There we go again. "Rooted," "built up," and "established." We have roots where we receive nutrients, we have roots that help us to be anchored and firm and grounded, and we have soil.

We've got to read this passage here, because it's found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have the Parable of the Sower. "The sower sows the Word. And these are the ones along the path, where the Word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the Word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the Word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the Word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the Word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." (Mark 4:14-20)

When I read that parable, I take it very seriously. May God deliver me from the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for things, and may He help my heart to be good soil. I want to have a soft heart, a teachable heart that is pliable enough to listen to God, and it's also a heart that is sensitive and willing to apply what he hears.

John 15:9, which I mentioned at the beginning: "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." Jesus ends that verse with four words: "Abide in My love." This is consistent with the picture of roots. Our roots have to go deep down into God's grace, deep into God's love, deep into His truth and His Spirit, and we have to be rooted and grounded in God.

Scott: Well, just back up a few verses, and you've got that whole illustration there. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

In verse 5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I remain in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

Steve: Let's put it together. Abide in the vine. My experience has been that it was very difficult for me to abide in God's love and to be transformed by that abiding until I first believed it. It took some effort on my part, many studies of Scripture – that's where the book **Knowing God's Love** came from – because I had to be transformed in my thinking. I had to really believe that God was for me and that the One Who knew me best loved me most.

Then God took me to a different level when He said, "Okay, now that you're solid in believing the truth, now let's spend some time together." And I began waiting on God and communing with God and experiencing His presence. There is another verse that says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," found in 2 Peter 3:18.

I think that that's the other part of roots, they don't stop growing. Roots continue to go down deep. In fact, in my little biological research I think I found out that one of the longest roots that they found was 60 meters or 200 feet. And there are places where there's not much moisture in the soil. Oftentimes, the roots will stay near the top because that's where the water's coming down from heaven, unless they're next to a stream. Then they can send the roots over to the water. But if you're in a rocky place or a desert place, sometimes these roots will go right down deep until they find that water.

I like that thought. Being rooted and grounded is not static. It's not once I find some water, now I can chill. I need to continue to pursue God and grow in grace and grow in knowledge.

Back to our topic of “God-Centered Parenting,” and my conviction that it’s very difficult to give grace until you’ve received grace. It’s very difficult to give forgiveness until you’ve received forgiveness. It’s very difficult to love well until you’ve been loved well. Everything comes from above. Everything comes from God. If I want to pass on and be a conduit of God’s love, His grace, His forgiveness, His truth, then I need to first be rooted in it and let those nutrients flow through me, up into the plant, and then I have something to give to my children.

I had assumed when I began having children that my kids would just catch stuff from me. I was reading my Bible every day, I had some seminary training, I was very involved in my church, and I just figured that now, I’m going to let what I have flow into my children, because I have an abundance!

For most of my parenting career I wasn’t intentional about my own relationship with God as much as I am now. I’m very cognizant now, and I’m a much better conduit the more I spend time being intentional about abiding in His love, abiding in the vine, being rooted and grounded in grace. So that’s my take on God-centered parenting. What do you have to add to that?

Scott: Well, just with that last piece you were saying there, I’m just remembering having little kids, and there’s so much pressure to get it right, especially when you’re trying to be a God-centered parent. And it’s just, you know, you want to be spending time with God and all that, and everybody always complains about, like, “Oh, how do you do this?” You know, younger parents are always complaining about, “How do you find time to spend with God, and how do you do all this right?” And they stress so much about it. And just a few minutes of trying to rest in Him and connect with Him, it is enough a lot of days.

Steve: I really believe it’s my responsibility as a parent to be rooted and grounded and keep pushing downward, and a lot of that work is going to be, as we started off, it’s going to be unseen. It’s not going to be measurable. But it’s going to bear good fruit. If we’ll invest whatever time we have, even five minutes like you say, because the only way I’m going to be a God-centered parent is to be rooted in God from beginning to end.

Let’s pray, and let’s pray especially for those people that are struggling to find five minutes or ten minutes. Father, there’s always a way of escape. And I pray that you will help us all find the time to be rooted and grounded in God in new ways, and teach us how to do it, and encourage us. And I pray that we will be like those trees planted by streams of water. Help us to have good root systems so that we can bear good fruit in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. In Jesus’ name, amen.