

PARENTING

with Dr. Holly Taylor Coolman

SESSION ONE Introduction

Session Summary

In this first of these five video lessons, Holly Taylor Coolman provides an overview of the Christian vocation of parenting. She begins by noting how human beings were created by God for community, and this is quintessentially seen in our belonging to one another in the church and in families. Throughout the history of the church the family has always been regarded as especially important, and the family is a kind of miniature church: it is a worshipping community, having various members with differing gifts of grace, and whose life together is ultimately determined by love.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss these two texts: **2 Corinthians 13:11** and **Ephesians 4:32**. How should the gospel of Jesus Christ bear upon family life?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Dr. Coolman indicates that "The heart of Christian Love is that we love not simply as we have been loved, but as Christ has loved us. In this way, family of life can be more than a tally sheet of debits and credits, but rather a place for the kind of love that God demonstrates. It comes only from the overflow of the one who offers love. And the way parents exercise authority too can be shaped by that recognition. If the task of parents is to shepherd their children who are also brothers and sisters in Christ, parents will do that most effectively if their authority is embedded in and extends from their own obedience to Christ." How should the relationship between parents and children be shaped by the gospel?
3. While we are very prone towards individualistic patterns of thought and behavior today, what are some ways that the family is called to be like a miniature version of the church?
4. What are some of the greatest challenges of bringing the gospel to bear upon your thoughts and practices about family life for your family in particular?
5. Dr. Coolman quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer as saying "God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the image that seems good to me, that is, in my own image; rather, in his very freedom from me God made this person in His image." Especially as parents, how can we keep clearly before us that distinction, between cultivating children who reflect our own image, or loving the image of God in the particular person before us in our children?

Group Prayer

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.

SESSION TWO

Parenting as Apprenticeship

Session Summary

This lesson introduces apprenticeship as a framework for reimagining the vocation of parenting. Dr. Coolman notes that parents can very easily fall into default modes of thinking about parenting that are more akin to management, especially after technological and economic changes in the last few centuries transformed domestic life. But a model of apprenticeship can reframe our relationship with our children as disciple-making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 11:1**, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” What has to be the case in order for us to exhort others, and especially our children, to imitate us?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. This week's lesson began by asking: “What is parenting?” What are some common ways that our non-Christian culture answers that question?
3. Dr. Coolman proposes conceiving of parenting as a Christian “apprenticeship.” How is this a helpful framework for conceiving of what parenting is, or what challenges does this model involve?
4. Dr. Coolman notes that often parenting involves something approximating “management” of our children, doing things *to* and *for* our children; what are some practical ways that you can do things *with* and *alongside* your children? Why is that important for your relationship as a parent to your children?
5. Dr. Coolman indicates that “a child who sees his/her parent apologize, even more, sees a parent apologize to him/her, is being apprenticed.” Why is it important to apprentice our children into contrition and repentance, and what are some practical ways we can do that?

Group Prayer

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SESSION THREE

Rethinking Discipline

Session Summary

This third lesson turns our attention to an often challenging aspect of parenting: discipline. "Discipline can be fruitfully imagined as apprenticing children to gather their energies together and direct them towards the purposes of love..." Key ideas in this lesson include an invitation to reimagine discipline beyond behavior modification, and to think about it in terms of apprenticeship into the skills needed for a life of virtue.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss this passage from **Hebrews 12:5–11**. Here Hebrews quotes from the book of Proverbs on discipline; how do the wise and the foolish regard discipline? Why is it important for parents to remember that they are children who are still disciplined by God as Father?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Dr. Coolman indicates that "discipline primarily involves not parents shaping their children, but children gaining the skills that will allow them to act purposefully in the world... What parents should aim at above all is not simply to teach children to be respectful, but to love. If we are Christians, love ought to guide us in everything." How does love relate to discipline in parenting?
3. Dr. Coolman in her lesson notes a few of the benefits but also the shortcomings with behavioral models of discipline. What would it look like to raise children beyond the limits of a behavioral model? What would it mean to focus on acquiring needed skills?
4. She also provided two practical examples of ways to help children acquire skills of discipline: to help limit overwhelming options to become more manageable for children, and to help children appreciate delayed gratification. What are some practical ways you can help your children cultivate those skills?
5. How can you grow as a parent to better model for your children a disciplined life?

Group Prayer

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SESSION FOUR

Navigating New Technology

Session Summary

This week we turn our attention to one of the most significant challenges in parenting today: how to relate wisely to technology. While throughout human history parents have always faced various kinds of challenges, the advent of digital technology in the last few decades has significantly changed both parenting and childhood, and not always for the better. While in earlier years parents need to actively shepherd and safeguard their children's relationship to technology, over time parents need to help children themselves learn how to make wise decisions with respect to using digital technology.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Romans 6:12-23**, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." In the theological imagination of this passage, human beings are bondservants, either of Sin or of Christ; how would you characterize the relationship between slavery and freedom in this passage?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How would you characterize your own relationship to digital technology? Is it a tool we use carefully for wise purposes, or does this tool use us? Regardless of our intentions, how do we actually, routinely model using technology before our children?
3. Dr. Coolman notes how insights into human psychology have been used to make digital technology as engaging as possible, which is detrimental to our capacity for attentiveness. She also quotes Simone Weil, that "prayer is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God. The quality of attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer." Why and how must we cultivate attentiveness as Christians and parents?
4. She also compares screen time with highly processed foods. What are some practical ways to minimize or delay our children's use of digital technology, and safeguard the content they consume when they do?
5. Dr. Coolman notes that especially between the ages of 11-15, bullying via digital technology is an increasing problem, as well as body image issues, and inappropriate contact from others. What are some practical ways to help your children themselves learn how to cultivate the skills of using technology wisely?

Group Prayer

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SESSION FIVE

Parents—And People, Too

Session Summary

This final lesson is devoted to conceiving of parenting as a *vocation*. At times parenting can seem overwhelming and can slip by very quickly. Hence, it can be all the more helpful to reimagine the vocation of parenting under the broader category of the calling of God on our whole life as Christians. If we grasp this, and continually remember it, that can transform how we imagine and practice parenting for the good of our families and the glory of God.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 1:2, 9**. How would you characterize the general calling of all Christians in the Christian life?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Dr. Coolman says: "A parent who is thinking of the vocation of parenting in isolation is losing track of the larger Christian account of vocation. Every vocation or calling is built on the single central calling of baptism. Before God calls a person to any particular task or any particular role, God gives this more primary call to be reconciled through Christ and enfolded in the larger purposes of God, saving, healing work. Before anything else, God invites each of us to know ourselves as beloved and to enter into this relationship of intimacy and trust with God through Christ. Parenting, understood this way, is a call to love from one's own deepest reality of having been loved." Why is this vision of Christian vocation crucial for discerning how to carry out the vocation of parenting?
3. Dr. Coolman notes that modern life is often very isolating for parents. What are some practical ways you can find opportunities for rest and for intentional, meaningful, enriching alone time with your spouse for your marriage?
4. Dr. Coolman recounts numerous examples of ways she benefited as a parent from friendships and community such as meal sharing, childcare, and more. How can we in the church be resources to one another in practical, tangible ways?
5. Dr. Coolman indicates that "Bringing moments of lightheartedness back into the day-to-day of parenting can unexpectedly reorient the whole work to joy. And an older adult who will serve as prayer partner, perhaps as a mentor, is possibly the single greatest gift to a parent who finds himself or herself struggling with their faith." How can you as a parent nurture your faith and continue practicing the virtue-forming skills you hope to apprentice your children into?

Group Prayer

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.