



Session 1

Stewardship of our children

When I was pregnant with my first child, we had a threatened miscarriage. Over the few days it played out, I pleaded with God to save this baby because he was *mine* and I loved him already. Then God spoke to me about the story of Hannah and Samuel. Hannah cried out to God for a baby through years of infertility – then once she finally had her child, she gave him back to God while he was still young. God answered her cries, but called her to steward a child, not own him. For us, God saved our baby and our son was born, and we also began to understand that God’s intention for parenting may be different to the values we see in the world around us.

The world tells us we own our children - we must control their behaviours, protect their interests and steer their choices. But the Bible tells us that our children belong to our heavenly Father. God created our children, loves them beyond measure and has designed them to live life in relationship with Him. We lay down all we own to be in relationship with God and ~He calls us to steward everything before us on His behalf – and that includes our children.

When we start to think about ourselves as stewards rather than owners of our children, we can experience freedom from fear and condemnation. Once my threatened miscarriage stopped, I quickly began to worry about the next complication in pregnancy and then I planned ahead to all the things I could worry about once my son was born! But God showed me that His love for our son was greater than mine, He made and had a purpose for our son, not me. I

realised that until I trusted God enough to relinquish ownership, I could not parent free from fear.

Often the responsibility and challenge of parenting can cause me to think about my inabilities. However, when I choose to believe that God created my children and then chose me to parent them, I can trust that He will give me all I need to be a great parent. It's not about being 'super-parent' or having everything in order, but about trusting that God will equip me for the job He has designed for me to do. We can only parent with purpose and freedom if we relinquish our control and fear.

To steward a child, or 'parent' them, we are called to love them without condition and direct them towards a relationship with their heavenly Father. The Bible tells us to "start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6) You may have been raised with the idea that when a child becomes old enough they can choose whether to pursue relationship with God. But here the Bible is telling us to 'start them off', not wait for them to be old enough to hold a debate.

Knowing that God created us intentionally is an important foundation for faith. There are simple ways we can help our children to understand that God made them and everything around them. For example, you could tell a toddler playing with bricks, "God loves making stuff too, and He made you to be like him!" Or you could point out the detail of God's creation to a child playing in the garden. As we look for small opportunities in everyday life to show our children that God made everything and God made them, the foundation bricks of faith are laid in their lives. I often don't have answers to my children's follow up questions, like, "So does God like playdough too?" But I don't need to, as it's all about them forging their own relationship with God. I suggest they ask God themselves, setting an expectation that God is interested in all their thoughts and that He wants to speak to them. While we want them to be speaking to God, it is important to go back to our children and help them process what He has been saying to them. As our children hear from God for themselves, their faith will keep on growing.

So as we parent, rather than 'own' our kids, we set both them and ourselves free from worldly expectations of parenting. God entrusts us to parent, but doesn't leave us on our own to do it. Part of our role is to point our children to the truth that they were intentionally created by God because He wants to know them. He loves it when they chat with Him and He delights in their very existence, even more than we do as their parents!

Principles:

1) Kingdom parenting involves stewardship not ownership

- 1 Samuel 1:28 (Hannah and Samuel) 'So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he shall be given over to the Lord.' (NIV UK)

2) God created our children intentionally and for purpose

- Psalm 139: 13 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.' (NIV UK)
- Zephaniah 3:17 'The lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save, He will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.' (NIV UK)

3) Our role is to direct children to relationship with God

- Proverbs 22: 6 'Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.' (NIV UK)

4) Parenting is not about my inability, but trusting in God's ability.

- Proverbs 3:5 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.' (NIV UK)

Questions:

- What is your current mind set on parenting? Is it based in fear or freedom?
- Are you currently in a position of stewardship parenting or ownership parenting? What does this look like for you, your child and your family?
- How do you direct your child to God? What will you do this week to try to do this?
- Do you trust God with your child? What does this look like?