**Facing the Challenges of Single Parenting**

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Single parenting is a tough job, so you certainly need clear guidance. And the Bible does speak to you from cover to cover. “Good,” you reply. “I’ve been looking for some help. Give me some verses aimed at single parents that tell us what to do with our kids.”

Sorry. The Bible doesn’t always answer questions based on how we ask them or give us the truth in the categories or format we want. There are no “ten commandments” in Scripture that exclusively address single parents.

What should we make of the absence of biblical commands specifically for single parents? Let’s begin with a more fundamental question: Were there any single parents in the Old and New Testament faith communities? Surely, yes. Then why were they excluded from biblical counsel on how to parent? The answer: They were not excluded. When God spoke to his people, he talked to married parents and single parents without distinction. In other words, the general commands given to all parents pertain to you. Single parents are not a special subcategory.

What are God’s directives to parents? Christian authors summarize biblical parenting duties in various ways, but most include the following:

• Provide physical and emotional care

• Provide verbal instruction

• Provide physical discipline

• Model dependency on Christ that grows into his likeness

• Pray for and with your children

You cannot give as much time, energy, skill, and creativity to these five tasks as two parents could. But God does not expect double effort from you. You cannot do the work of two adults and must not try to do it. But what you should do, in dependence on God, should include these five ministries toward your kids.

Further, while you may receive help from others—your parents, friends, church family, and so forth—you remain the God-appointed parent of your children. Do not concede to others this authority, responsibility, and opportunity. There is no biblical doctrine of “grandmother’s rights.” In God’s providence, you, not your mother, are parenting the children God entrusted you.

**Pay Attention to Your Children’s Response to Your Single Parenthood**

It is wise to monitor how single parenting affects not just you but your children as well. In whatever way you became a single parent, in the same way, your children have lost a parent. You are not the only one needing help to respond and adjust wisely. Your child’s other parent has died (if you were widowed) or has left home (if you were divorced), or may be unknown to your child (if you have not revealed the biological parent’s identity). Do you know how your children handled the event that left them with just one residential parent?

Here, you must reject a pair of lies. First, do not lose sight of your child’s responsibility to love, trust, and obey God despite unpleasant circumstances. A broken home does not excuse unbelief, rebellion, ingratitude, or idolatry. Teenage rebellion is, at the end of the day, rebellion. And rebellion is a sin, to be compassionately but wisely confronted.

Second, reject hopeless notions that “doom” your children to future problems simply because they lack two married parents or because of the negative influence their other parent may exert. Your children are not “victims” or “products of broken homes.” They are people in God’s image who can know Jesus, follow Jesus, and live meaningful lives that please him. Along with my testimony, I can name several godly men and women who grew up with only one parent.

Consider Timothy in the New Testament. We meet him in Acts 16:1, where we learn that his mother was a believer in Christ, but his father was not. What future did this hold for this young man? Listen to his spiritual “father,” the apostle Paul, describe what God brought about despite a non-Christian dad:

• “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5).

• “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14–15).

God used a godly mother, a godly grandmother, and a godly mentor to teach and model the gospel for Timothy. He can use similar influences in your child’s life, confirming the apostle’s encouraging promise in 1 Corinthians 7:14: “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”

What steps might you take as a single parent when your ex-spouse exerts a negative influence on your kids?

• Entrust your child to God. Remember that God owns your child. You are a steward, not the owner. Humbly ask God to work directly in your son or daughter’s life and to use other means of grace to save, protect, and strengthen him.

• Appeal directly to your ex-spouse to change, restrain, or curb offensive behavior out of love for your children. If that fails, pursue other recourses of appeal or accountability. This might include provisions in your shared parenting agreements for counseling or mediation or enlisting the help of friends or extended family. In severe cases, you may need to contact the police or child protective services.

• Continue to model and teach the gospel to your children, reflecting Christ-likeness that will contrast and counteract the unbeliever’s lifestyle in refreshing ways. Ask God to help you walk according to the Holy Spirit—to demonstrate the Spirit’s fruit and make Jesus attractive to your children as they face their forks in the road. In some cases, you may need to caution and advise your children before or after they spend time with their other parent: “Daddy may do some things differently than I do. I do what I do because I am trying to follow Jesus. Your dad, at this point, is not seeking to follow Jesus. Respect your dad, love your dad, and pray for your dad. This is how you should handle it if he…”

• Remind your children that they must also decide if they will follow Jesus. They cannot blame any parent or anyone else for unbiblical modeling.

• Invite one of your pastors or elders to sit down with you and your children to give them a biblical perspective on what happened in your marriage, how God looks at you and your ex, and how God wants the children to treat each parent as they shuttle between two houses. This is especially vital if your children are being given a sinfully biased perspective on these matters.

Amid this, God has given you a practical opportunity to teach your children about his sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness. You cannot resolve all your children's problems, but you can convey a rich, big picture of God and his ways. Connect them to the God of all hope, the Romans 8:28–29 God who brings hope and purpose to your life and theirs.

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