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Genesis 18:18-19  (H: husband reads, W: wife reads)

(H)“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

God confirmed his promise to Abraham that he would make Abraham to be a great and powerful nation and all nations on earth would be blessed through him. Being a blessing even to one’s own family is not an easy matter. Yet, God’s promise was much bigger. Abraham would become a blessing to the all nations on earth. These verses also teach us that there is a condition on this promise.  Abraham must direct his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord. No condition is met, no promise is guaranteed.

The question is then how we direct our children. My wife and I have six children and we’ve been in this business for 25 years. Therefore, we should know something about raising children.  Maybe or maybe not. Raising children is such a wholesome and tricky issue. Only one thing I can tell is  that children do not grow with auto pilot. It is a manual process.

(W) Having a child is difficult. People think that I had children like a piece of cake. I didn’t mean to discourage you, but one child after another morning sickness didn’t get any better.  I suffered the whole 9 months with no discount.  And raising them was and is equally difficult.  For 10 years, we managed with plastic wares and didn’t have a decent meal together since babies kept climbing up the table. We didn’t get rid of the carpet for 15 years. I had to throw away number of mattresses that were stained with pee from children. We never had clean walls. There were countless days I started a day without washing my face and stayed that way all day. But these were even minor concerns. The real deal was to educate them in God’s way.

Directing the children in God’s way does not only mean to teach them the Bible though it is an essential part. My husband and I taught the Bible to our children one on one basis so that we could hear from them more than endow the bible knowledge. Otherwise, our conversation would end up, “How are you? How was school?” “Good.” “Anything new?” “No.” Directing children encompasses various aspects in life. Here are a couple things my husband and I attempted.

(H) In a family there is such thing as zero tolerance. Everything should be permissible, but a few things should never be allowed. Theses untouchable things are the core values that parents want to implement.  For example, in my family lying is the worst crime.   You can break things and you can mess up the house with toilet paper all around the house, but you cannot lie. Once upon a time,   our children broke something valuable and nobody admitted it. All were scared and they ganged up against me.  I negotiated that if anyone come out clean, the sin will be forgiven.  One came out and that was the end of the story.

Second, no violence in a family.  No one should hit anybody in any circumstances under any justifiable reasons or throws something at a person. ‘I do understand your frustration, but you cannot express your anger that way. There are ways you can express in a socially acceptable manner.’ This is an education. Once I observed people in order to learn what is the key element that makes a family happy, and I concluded that it is mindfulness. So my wife and I dealt with selfishness seriously more than anything else. We only had three simple basic rules in my family and those rules were not to be compromised.

(W) Children are innocent. In the meantime, they need to learn what is acceptable and what is not. They would test their parents to see how much they can stretch. During the period of 1.5 years to 3 years old is the golden opportunity we educate our children that there is such thing as authority in the family. It is the time that a child begins to understand, but having bit of difficulty in expressing fully.

If a child behaves unacceptable way in my family, my husband- discipline is usually my husband’s job- would say sternly, “No” to the child. All my children are afraid of their father’s eye sight. They said that if he is angry, his eye color changes to very light brown. However, the child will do it again forgetting what had happened.  His father would say clearly, “If you do one more time, I am going to spank you.” The child will do it again. On the third time, there is no negotiation, no excuse, no crying, no but or no next time. The child will be spanked maximum three times as was promised. In this way, the child knows that his father keeps his promise.

(H) I respect my child as an individual and I demand the same respect from my child. I play and talk with my children all the time. At the same they should know that I am not the person they can mess with. They know that when I say something I mean it. Children need to learn the authority of the father. Then they will learn the authority of their heavenly father. God gave this authority to the parents. Parents must use it wisely. They should not abuse it. If a father excessively and unreasonably exercises his authority to his children, that is called abuse. At the same time, if a father doesn’t exercise his authority and leaves the children in the wild, it is called abuse too.

In my many years of experiences with babies and children at the church, I learned that even little children have spirit to understand spiritual things.

(W) So we do not exclude children in our family discussions. Dinner time was the always the time to talk with all kinds of issues. I highly recommend to the family to have at least one meal a day together.  Later our family dinner table discussion developed to a family bible study time on Sunday. During this time, we discuss all kinds of issues.

From young age, I regarded and worked with my children as my coworkers. Children also needs mission at home. Parents are not the only ones to serve, but they also need to learn to serve others. Through this process, the children naturally developed mindset of working together. We worked together to prepare a meal, clean up the house, preparing music to entertain the guests.  A couple months ago, Josephine invited Mary to her company to work together as soon as she graduated. They have been working together for a long time at home and already developed close working relationship.

(H) It is crucial that you have to spend time with your children. Someone asked how to spell ‘Love’. Of course it spells ‘L O V E’. But he said it spells, ‘T I M E’. Relationship doesn’t magically come one day from above even for a closest relationship such as parents and children. You need to spend time together, doing things together.

Communication is essential part of raising children. Up to the elementary school, communication tends to be or can be one way, and it can work. We don’t see many issues since our children are mostly listening. As long as they don’t get into obvious trouble, we assume that they are doing okay. Then when they grow to be in junior high school and hormone kicks in, they begin to show an attitude and ask annoying questions. Some parents are frightened thinking that their children become rebellious. The worst part is that they either oppress their children harder and lose them or leave them out of fear. Yet, if you have developed good communication relationship from young age, all issues can be easily resolved.

(W) When kids grew older, they needed more than food and cloths. They, especially daughters, needed mom whom they could talk, receive counseling and spend time. So I quit the job and stayed at home to be available. Later, in order to encourage our struggling children, I became a student myself to show that their mom was also in the same struggle.

In our children’s lives, music played a vital role. Each one tried different kinds of music instruments until they found their own. For example, Sarah began her instrument with a violin. She didn’t like violin because Mary, her older sister played violin better than her. Then she switched to Oboe. She broke reed many times and she didn’t like the oboe teacher. Later, she began cello, and it was her instrument. When she was struggling during her junior years with emotional ups and downs, cello was her best companion. She later confessed that she could not think of her life without cello. Cello was her voice and her silent listener. When there is music, house atmosphere is much different.

Family’s physical health at home is also a very important part of raising children in God’s way. Though I was busy with work, study and ministry, I intentionally paid attention in preparing meal for the family. Before marriage, I didn’t know how to cook. But since my husband loves eating, I developed cooking skill in a way my husband likes. He feel loved and welcomed when he came home from work as soon as he sees well prepared food on the table. Feeding family with food with touch of a mother is an important thing in my family.

(H) My mother tragically lost her daughter and became an alcoholic and passed away at the age of 49. It is hard to imagine the family life with an alcoholic mother. I had desire to provide my children a happy family. And I tried. I consider my children as God given sheep. I came to America to take care of sheep who are others’ children. But if I am not able to take care of my own children’s spiritual well being, I am not sure if I am doing well before God.

I witness that in order to provide the best environment to our children, husband and wife must love each other. They say that home is the closest place to heaven. Children learn what the love is when they see their parents love each other. Long time ago, I read Emil by Jean Jacque Rousseau, and I despaired because it was too much for me to practice. He himself failed to educate his own child.  It is a difficult task to raise our children in God’s way. No one say that it is easy. But it is doable.

We, as parents, cannot take all the responsibilities or blames on how our children will turn out to be. But at least, we need to take it as God given mission and give the best we have.

May God help us to be good parents so that God’s blessing may flow to our children and the generations after so that the whole world would be blessed.

One word: direct our children in God’s way.