

ParentMinistry.net/KIDS presents

Parenting
Well ^{In} A
Messy
World

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My wife and I have had lots of experience learning about children and parenting over the last decade. In fact, we love children so much that we both decided years ago to dedicate our lives to investing in children and their parents. My wife Marissa is an amazing public school teacher, and several years ago, I stepped out of the educational field to become a children's minister at a local church. In both of our careers (more of a calling, I should say), we have had a plethora of time to observe children and their parents, to coach and learn from parents, and to be reminded on a daily basis how much children these days need parents who are willing to go to hell and back for them in order to invest deeply and love extravagantly.

My wife and I have a 4-year-old little girl and another one on the way. During the past four years, I have made it a priority not to allow this busy life I lead to crash into my family dynamics. I've learned that without parenting intentionally, the busy schedules, deadlines, and expectations from outside the home can gain control over my life and cause my family to take a back seat for the sake of getting ahead, feeding my insecurities, and making everyone else happy. If I allow the busyness to own me, I then forfeit a healthy parenting dynamic in exchange for an approach that fosters stagnant relationships that lessen my influence in the life of my daughter and, therefore, weaken my potential to help her develop spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally.

It's sometimes easy for me to be intentional about the unimportant stuff in life. I'll schedule when I need to mow the grass and wash my car. I'm very goal-oriented in my career, and if we're talking about a trip to Disney World, then I'll spend weeks processing the best plans. It's not that any of that stuff is bad, but when I compare how much energy I put into mowing my grass and realize that the weeds are getting more intentionality from me than my children are . . . that's when I have a problem. But the good news is that I can turn this ship around! And if you find yourself in the same boat, you can turn yours around, too. Through simple techniques and strategies, you can begin parenting well in a busy world.

Chapter

1

Knowing My Prorities

Knowing My Priorities

It's not about me.

I wonder how many times it will take throughout my life for me to need the reminder that this life I've been given is, in fact, not my life at all. Every breath I breathe belongs to God, and so, no matter how much I desire this world to revolve around me, I am constantly reminded that my life needs to revolve around my Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is a tension that will always exist. Until the day I breathe my last breath, I will need to reflect on this truth and, on a daily basis, commit to live by a set of priorities. In doing so, I have taken the first step in parenting well.

My first priority: God

My relationship with God has to be first. I know what you're thinking: "Of course it does, Adam. That goes without saying." But stop a second and think about how often we place God at the bottom of our priority list. I'll be the first to confess that I struggle with God being my top priority. I lose count every week of how many times work and other distractions get in the way of where God is leading me.

I'll even let emotions become my top priority. For example, Marissa and I are in a four-year-process of selling our house in the city we lived in before I took on a job as children's minister at a church in another state. We've gone back and forth with having our house as a rental property and putting our house on the market. Just last week we remodeled the house and put it on the market once again. You better believe that I've struggled this week with worry being at the top of my list of priorities instead of simply trusting that my Creator is in control.

It's hard to keep God first, but without Him at the top, you and I will constantly struggle with parenting well. It's a deep relationship with our heavenly Father that allows us the peace, clarity, and strength to manage a busy life without giving up on our responsibilities as parents. Here are three things you can start doing today that will help keep God first in your life:

1. **Schedule daily quiet times with God, to read the Bible and pray.**
2. **Find a church to call home and work to intentionally connect with a community of Believers.**
3. **Look for ways each day to show love to those around you.**

When I made the conscious decision to place God at the top of my list of priorities, I was then able to work effectively on my second priority, my marriage.

My second priority: My marriage

Trying to parent well in a busy world while my marriage falls apart is like trying to navigate the open seas without a rudder. My wife and I will be tossed around the rough waters, unable to stick with a direction, because we are not on the same page; we are unable to gain stability because our emotions are constantly tossed about; and we are unable to maintain a happy home, because it is difficult to find peace and rest when seas are rough. Other than my relationship with Jesus Christ, nothing else can come before my relationship with my wife--not even my child.

Marissa and I both made the decision early in our marriage to put our marriage as our second priority in life, and with that decision, we committed to work hard to see constant growth. We've been married for eight years now, and I can honestly say that, with each passing year, my love for her increases exponentially; I value our friendship more and more; and I work harder than I did the year before to make sure she knows I love her unconditionally.

Until my marriage is successful, parenting will always be less than what it could be. So I believe in three practices to help stay focused on making marriage my second priority:

1. **Maintain the first priority (God)**
2. **Work constantly at being a better listener (ex: Put down the phone when my wife is talking and look her in the eyes.)**
3. **Look for ways to show my wife that I still passionately love her (ex: This could be anything from giving her a card to going grocery shopping with the kids while she relaxes at home.)**
4. **Work hard to communicate immediately and honestly with each other when tensions arise (ex: Marissa is the queen at this! One of the most important rules that she believes in is never to go to bed with an unresolved issue . . . And I have the sleepless nights to prove that she means business.)**

Once I committed to my first and second priorities, I was then able to move on to discover what it takes to parent well in a busy world.

My third priority: My children

I want to help make Emma's childhood as awesome and as wonderful as possible. Not by buying her everything under the sun or always making sure she gets her way, but by being the best father I can be. I want to make sure Emma knows without a doubt that her daddy will always love her unconditionally, will listen to and help guide her through the messiness of life, and will always desire for her to have a growing relationship with Jesus.

Every parent wants to be a great parent. None of us start out concocting schemes to mess up our children. It's instinctively in our nature to want the best for our children. But why do so many parents never rise to the occasion when it comes to investing in their children? Why do some parents seem to "get it," while others seem lost at every turn? I can tell you this--it's not because one set of parents is better than the other; it has nothing to do with levels of intelligence and abilities. It comes down to deciding to be intentional, and in no other area of parenting does this become clearer than when we look at parenting well in the middle of the busy lives we all live.

Life sometimes seems like a cluttered closet--so messy and busy that evaluating the situation is exhausting because we don't know where to start the de-cluttering process. As has been the focus of this chapter, it starts with deciding on your list of priorities. Wherever your children fall on your current priority list, your next plan of action should be to follow four simple steps that will help get parenting back into its proper place and perspective. The following four chapters will deal with each of the four steps.

Final thoughts on priorities

If you ask most people, they'll tell you they live by a set of priorities, but that really isn't the case. Here's a test to see whether or not you live by a set of priorities:

1. **When someone asks you to name your list of top three priorities in life, do you have to pause in order to think it through? Those that live by priorities make them a part of their existence, their DNA. If you have to think about it, then you don't live out priorities.**
2. **Let's say you pass the first test. Great! Now give me examples of how you live out your**

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priorities. Again, if you can't shoot off examples, that's a good sign that you have an idea of what your priorities should be but have not yet come up with a game plan for how to implement them.

It is not my goal to make you feel badly about yourself with this little test but, rather, to help you become more self-aware so that you can solidify and live out your priorities. And to be completely transparent with you, my opinion is that if you call yourself a Jesus Follower, you're married, and you have kids, then you already have your top three priorities. And in no way, form, or fashion, should anything else in this busy world interfere or take the place of those three things. Your job, your favorite sport, your music, and your favorite TV show all take a back seat to these top three priorities.

But don't stop with just three priorities! Keep going! Decide what you value most in life, add that to your list of priorities, and then come up with a game plan involving steps and goals to fulfill your priorities and be intentional with your life.

Chapter
2

*Step One of Parenting Well:
Fight for Simplicity*

Step One of Parenting Well: Fight for Simplicity

Human beings tend to make things harder than they need to be. We can't even seem to make simplicity simple. The tension here is that we live in a world that can easily come crashing down on us with events, meetings, and commitments, and we eventually get to the point where we look at our calendars and are challenged to find even a few minutes to be with our children.

This is not good.

So let's talk about how to make simplicity happen. I honestly believe that when I carry out these three easy practices on a consistent basis, I end up with more than enough time to invest in my child.

Use a schedule for your children.

It amazes me how many people will schedule time for everything under the sun, but when it comes to time with their children, they would rather just play it by ear or give them the scraps of whatever time is left over.

I'm a big planner. If you look at my weekly schedules, you'll find that I schedule quiet time with God, work-related projects and meetings, workout sessions, and time with my family. When it comes to Emma, I can get pretty specific. I drop Emma off at daycare every morning before going to the office. During the drive to daycare, we plan out stuff to do during the week. She loves going to Miss Lucille's, an antique shop in town. As we pass it on our morning commute, she'll mention wanting to stop by there on our way home one day, so I'll make a note of it and put it on my schedule. Sometimes it's Kroger she wants to visit, so that she can push around the kid-sized shopping cart for an hour or so. (Are you starting to see the signs of my 4-year-old becoming a shopaholic?) So again, I'll make a note to myself, and then we'll schedule a time to go.

People make time and schedule the things they care about most, and that's a fact. When I go from talking about doing something to actually scheduling something, then I go from "maybe" to "for sure." Schedule, with as much detail as possible, times that you want to invest in your child. This is what is called being intentional with your time when it comes to parenting well in a busy world.

Assess your days.

Now that I schedule my time with my daughter, I can easily assess how I'm doing. Everything on your list of priorities needs to be measurable. If I have no intention of assessing the priorities that I'm scheduling, then I can never expect to grow and improve.

This sounds a lot harder than it actually is, so let me break it down.

In the evening, spend a few minutes looking over your day's schedule to see if you followed through with what you scheduled. Did you actually catch lightning bugs with your child like you had promised? Did you go out to the ball field and play catch? Did you go on a family walk? If not, then think through why you weren't able to commit. At the end of the week, take time to assess your week's schedule overall. Do this at the end of the month, as well.

Assessing your month is great, because it gives you that 30,000-foot view of your schedule, which reflects your priorities. When assessing days, you are at ground level, and weeks offer you a 10,000-foot view of your schedule. But a monthly assessment allows you to see the big picture. At this high altitude, you can start to really assess if you have too much going on in your life and need to simplify, if you might be able to do more, or if things are going well.

Reflect and improve.

After I've assessed my schedule and days, I can then take time to reflect on the busyness of life and decide on a strategy for improvement. Am I going golfing too often instead of focusing on events my wife and child could enjoy with me? If so, I need to scale back on the golfing trips. Is hitting the gym so much causing me to miss out on precious family time with my child in the evening? If so, maybe I should go to the gym three days out of the week instead of six days. Or maybe instead of spending two hours at the gym, I should just focus on getting more done in one hour.

Upon reflection of your own schedule and days, decide on a game plan for your improvement. Ask yourself, "How will next month be better than this month?" Go ahead and make the changes on your calendar. The processes of reflection and coming up with an improvement strategy are so important, that I suggest scheduling a time to assess your schedule, scheduling a time to reflect on your success, and scheduling a time to come up with a plan of attack for improvement.

Chapter
3

*Step Two of Parenting Well:
Don't Try and Parent Alone*

Step Two of Parenting Well: Don't Try and Parent Alone

It's a common misconception that parents will instinctively know how to parent well. Some parents mistake loving their child well with parenting well. I've worked with parents who love their child like crazy yet have no idea how to parent successfully. This is why parents need help. And the good news is that help is out there!

Partner with a local church.

Any church worth its salt has a children's ministry designed not only to help children grow in their relationship with Jesus but also to partner with their parents. It makes no sense for the church to take on the role of a child's most important spiritual leader when the parent holds the majority of both influence and time in the child's life. In a best-case scenario, churches have only 40 hours with a child in a year, whereas parents have thousands of hours with them. A healthy children's ministry views itself as having a smaller role than the parents do in a child's spiritual development, with its biggest job being to support and supply parents with the resources needed to carry out their role as their child's most important spiritual leader.

Here's what a healthy children's ministry should be able to offer your child:

- **Small groups**, where you will be able to get to know the leaders investing in your child every Sunday.
- **Take-home tools** to use with your child during the week that will reinforce what was covered on Sunday, because what happens at home is much more important than what happens at church.
- **Easy access to staff**, so that parents can ask questions or set up times to meet. The children's ministry team should be easy to approach at gatherings on Sundays and should be just a phone call away during the week.

If you feel like you attend a church that does not support you as a parent, first set up a meeting with the children's minister or children's director in order to express your concern. It might be that you do not understand their strategy for partnership. If you walk away with the impression that your current church does not partner with parents, then my advice is to find a church that does.

Surround yourself with successful parents.

I'm constantly on the lookout for parents who have older kids that are on fire for God and are incredible individuals overall. I want to know what those parents did! I'll set up times to meet over a meal, talk over the phone, or even send an email with questions for them so I can pick their brains and seek out advice. Some of the best lessons I've learned were from ordinary folks who are extraordinary parents.

It's not as awkward as you might think it would be to approach someone for parenting advice. Think about it-- Every parent wants to be an awesome parent, and to have someone approach you to seek out your advice because they've noticed how awesome your child is . . . Well, it doesn't get much better than that! Give it a try. The more, the merrier, when it comes to having a support network of wise parents surrounding you as you learn how to parent well in a busy world.

Be a student of parenting.

Be intentional about learning how to parent well. This is one of the most important jobs we can ever have, and parenting your child will never end. Even after your children are grown, they will still need your guidance and influence in their lives.

If you're a reader, then you're in luck, because there is no shortage of books and blogs on parenting. If you're not a big reader, then check out books on audio or check out online videos that are readily available. With today's technology offering many ways to gain information, there is no reason why parents shouldn't become students when it comes to parenting well.



Chapter
4

*Step Three of Parenting
Well: Create Rhythms*

Step Three of Parenting Well: Create Rhythms

As a preschooler, I had the best time staying at my grandparents' farm during the week. My parents both worked, so mom would drop me off at the farm early in the morning. Before my grandfather would leave for town to run his barbershop, he'd go check on the chickens and feed the pigs. His farm vehicle was an old work truck, and I loved getting to the farm early enough to jump in my grandfather's truck and ride around with him and help him with the chores.

That short drive was magical to me. I can remember the feel of the seat cover, the sound of the loud engine making its way here and there, and the look of an early morning on our beautiful farm. It was nothing short of amazing. My grandfather knew this, too, and that's why he would let me go along with him; it was a rhythm we had established.

My grandmother was the same way, but she took a different approach with her rhythm. She loved planning the coolest trips for all of her grandchildren. With my grandmother, you never knew what kind of adventure you were going to partake in that day. This was her way of intentionally creating a rhythm: we always knew that with our grandmother, something unexpected and wonderful was going to happen--something you would never forget.

Why are grandparents so good at creating magical rhythms with their grandkids? Is it because they have more free time? Nope. My grandparents still run a successful barbershop and work a farm. I think it's because they have had the experience of raising kids, and they possess the wisdom to know that kids grow up faster than you can imagine. Grandparents understand that they need to be intentional about creating rhythms that will foster wonderful moments and lasting memories.

You never stop learning from your parents and grandparents. Mine continue to teach me that I, as a parent myself, need to intentionally look for magical rhythms with my child and carry them out consistently.

As our children grow and change, so will the rhythms we create. Here are a couple of ideas to think about when processing the magical rhythms you can create with your children.

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Magical rhythms might at first seem mundane.

One of my household chores is to load up all the trash and haul it off to the dump a few miles from where we live. A couple of years ago, when my daughter was just two years old, I noticed that every time I got ready to leave for the dump, she would cry. She would say, "Come! Come!" So one Saturday as I was about to take the trash off, Emma, once again, started to cry. And then it hit me that I could create a rhythm with her just like my grandparents did with me!

I remember asking Emma, "Baby girl, you want to come with Daddy to take off the trash?" She smiled and nodded her head with great excitement. As I put her in my truck, her eyes lit up, and she began to giggle. She talked non-stop (mainly stuff I couldn't understand) as we both enjoyed the drive. On the way back, we stopped off at the little gas station down the road, and I bought her juice and some candy corn. Wow, did she like the candy corn!

Upon our return, I told my wife that I would like for that to become a "thing" that Emma and I do together--a "rhythm" of our week. Emma is now four and still wants to go with me to haul off the trash.

These rhythms don't always have to involve big outings, like a trip to the zoo or water park; instead, look for normal, everyday chores and activities where you and your child can hang out together. It might be doing yard work together, going for a walk in the woods, or even playing a video game together. Those small rhythms that you create--that you think will not amount to much--will be memories that mean the most to your child as they reach adulthood.

"The Big Three"

Breakfast, dinner, and bedtime are three of the greatest times to consistently be together as a family. Sadly, most parents go into each of these prime times without planning ahead and intentionally using "The Big Three" for everything they're worth.

For example, you can use breakfast time to talk about the day ahead and all the cool stuff that will happen. Know your child's agenda so that you can spark conversation about a certain activity that will happen that day. Or use that time to plan out some cool

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ideas for what to do after school.

At our house, we use our bedtime rhythm to reflect on the day, pray to God, and remind Emma what she is taught at church in our preschool ministry: God made her; God loves her; and Jesus wants to be her friend forever. The point is, at the very least, to make sure you create rhythms when it comes to being together as a family in the mornings, during dinner, and at bedtime. Always end your day with assuring your child that you and God are crazy in love with them!

Chapter
5

*Step Four of Parenting
Well: Have Fun!*

Step Four of Parenting Well: Have Fun!

The final step toward parenting well in a busy world is simply to have fun with your child. Lead the charge in discovering their passions and interests. *What makes them happy? What is it that brings them joy?*

Right now, it's shopping and Disney princesses for my daughter Emma. And guess what? I can name off every princess, and I'm not ashamed to admit it! For her passion to shop, I take Emma to Kroger at least once every week so we can push around their little shopping carts. But when she is in elementary school, her enthusiasm might be for boy bands and soccer (two things that I am not crazy about). But if Emma turns out to love soccer, then Daddy is going to love soccer, too. I'll become the biggest soccer fan out there! My goal is to wrap myself around the ever-changing passions of my child and support her by enjoying what she enjoys--to enter into her "world" and have fun.

But don't avoid introducing your children to the things that *you* enjoy doing, too. That's not you being selfish; it's you sharing your passions with your children. I allow Emma into my "world," and she appreciates it and feeds off of what Daddy enjoys. For example, I am super-passionate about music. I've been in many bands as a singer, guitarist, and bass player throughout my life, and I write and record music still to this day. Emma and I constantly get out our acoustic guitars and jam, or she'll grab her toy microphone and belt out tunes as I play a melody. To be honest, the best times I've ever had jamming are with my daughter as she sings at the top of her lungs, with her eyes closed and face turning blood red. We also listen to music together and even dance in the living room like we've lost our minds. That's me sharing my passion with Emma, and we have so much fun!

Chapter
6

Closing Thoughts

Closing Thoughts

Parenting well in a busy world is one of the toughest jobs you can possibly imagine, but few things can bring you more joy and satisfaction. My challenge to myself and to you is to work so hard at being a great parent that when your child is grown and looks back at their childhood, they'll be in awe of how magical growing up under your roof was because they had the best parents ever. But before we close, let me add two more points that I hope will empower you to take on these steps with determination and confidence.

It's never too late.

Maybe your children are older now, and you've read this book thinking about how you've lost time. You're thinking that it's too late in the game. Nonsense! It's never too late. As a matter of fact, your children might now be adults, and I would still tell you to carry out these steps.

I have a friend whose father let time get away from him as he worked hard to provide for his family. On a family vacation one year, my friend's father looked at his son (now a young adult) with tears in his eyes and said how sorry he was for not investing in him as a child. My friend told me that in that moment, all the feelings of resentment he had toward his father for not being there for him as a child melted away, and today they have a thriving relationship. Why? Because his father is now intentional and decided not to let a busy world get in his way any longer.

Not *if*, but *when*, you fail

Chances are you've already messed up with a lot of this. And guess what? You'll continue to mess up! It's called parenting. And it is messy. My suggestion is not for you to focus on being a perfect parent but, rather, for you to love your child as best you can each day by being as intentional as you possibly can with your time.

I believe that if you follow the steps provided here and, more importantly, trust in the guidance of our loving God, then you will be on your way to parenting well in this busy, crazy, often upside-down world.