

“To our great shame, far too many Christians raise their children without much thought as to what makes parenting distinctively Christian. Secular patterns of thought and habit have deeply infected Christian homes, and an antidote is urgently needed. Thankfully, it arrives as *Parenting by God’s Promises* by Joel Beeke. This is a truly helpful and healthy book for Christian parents—deeply biblical, theological, and practical. Parents, prospective parents, and churches will want to keep *Parenting by God’s Promises* close at hand.”

—DR. R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

“In this book, Dr. Joel Beeke provides information that is in keeping with what we have come to expect from his preaching and writing: biblically based information about parenting, practical illustrations that really illustrate, and specific instructions that will help people to know how to put the directives of Scripture into practice. In this book, every Christian parent will find solid, dependable, practical, biblical help for bringing children up God’s way. Dr. Beeke places a correct emphasis on the centrality of God’s grace and sovereignty, and the importance of parental responsibility. Parents who are looking for a right perspective and practical help for facilitating this right perspective will find this book to be an excellent guide.”

—DR. WAYNE A. MACK
President, Strengthening Ministries International
Author, Strengthening Your Marriage

“In an age of pragmatism, Joel Beeke is a drink of fresh, cool theological water. Raising children is about more than just surviving until they leave home; Beeke reminds us that Christian parents must view their roles in the broader context of God’s redemptive work. Our goal must be raising children who, by God’s grace, come to know and follow the Lord who has redeemed us and called us to Himself. This is a daunting task, and parents need all the help they can get. For those desperate to hear a clear, thoughtful, biblical, theological, Reformed treatise on the subject, *Parenting by God’s Promises* is a valuable read. ”

—DR. VODDIE BAUCHAM
Pastor of preaching, Grace Family Baptist Church
Spring, Texas

“The defection of young people from the church is creating great concern in our day. Oftentimes the solutions seem to exacerbate the problem. Joel Beeke’s book, *Parenting by God’s Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, is a sane, biblical word in the midst of the chaos. The book blends a vibrant covenant theology with wise, practical instruction. Moreover, it keeps a balance between family and church in the nurture of our children. This book is an important read for pastors, elders, parents, and grandparents.”

—DR. JOSEPH A. PIPA JR.
*President, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Greenville, South Carolina*

PARENTING

How to Raise Children

BY GOD'S

in the Covenant of Grace

PROMISES

JOEL R. BEEKE



Reformation Trust
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Parenting by God's Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace

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To
Foppe VanderZwaag,
faithful pastor, counselor, friend, and colleague,
with whom I have been privileged to co-labor
for ten years of pastoral ministry,

and

my loyal **Family Living Class attendees**
at the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation
of Grand Rapids, Michigan,
who have patiently listened to a much longer version
of this book

Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

—2 SAMUEL 23:5

THIS IS NOT SO MUCH one promise as an aggregate of promises—a box of pearls. The covenant is the ark which contains all things.

These are the last words of David, but they may be mine today. Here is a *sigh*: things are not with me and mine as I could wish; there are trials, cares, and sins. These make the pillow hard.

Here is a *solace*—“He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Jehovah has pledged himself to me, and sealed the compact with the blood of Jesus. I am bound to my God, and my God to me.

This brings into prominence a *security*, since this covenant is everlasting, well-ordered and sure. There is nothing to fear from the lapse of time, the failure of some forgotten point, or the natural uncertainty of things. The covenant is a rock-solid foundation to build on for life or for death.

David feels *satisfaction*: he wants no more for salvation or delectation. He is delivered, and he is delighted. The covenant is all a man can desire.

O my soul, turn today to your Lord Jesus, whom the great Lord has given to be a covenant to the people. Take him to be your all in all.

—Charles H. Spurgeon¹

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FOREWORD

JOEL BEEKE IS THE IDEAL writer for a book about parenting. Let me explain.

Not everyone does everything equally well. For example, the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic is noted for his interpretations of Mahler and Sibelius, but (curiously) has received a fair amount of criticism for his conducting of the mainstream works of Beethoven and Brahms.

It is the same when it comes to parenting. If, then, I were asked, “Who is the best author to write a book on parenting?” I would want to suggest someone with sensitivity and biblical insight, someone who is an impeccable example of the task himself; I wouldn’t want “just anyone” to write it. I would want a man who has modeled godly parenting in his own family; a man who would not simply provide us with pop psychology and trite observations; a man whose commitment to Scripture is without question; and a man who has had years of experience, both personal and pastoral, in the rearing of children.

Joel Beeke meets all of the qualifications mentioned above. In this rich and surprisingly accessible book, he combines the skills of a teacher-preacher and a faithful expositor of Scripture with the warm-hearted devotion of a husband and father who has seen the fruits of that which he writes in his own family and those over whom he has served as a faithful shepherd.

I have known Joel for a quarter-century, spent many days in his home, and watched as he and his dear wife, Mary, nurtured their children. True, I must acknowledge that Joel is a dear friend. My endorsement, therefore, could be viewed with suspicion. But, truth to tell, the friendship has been sustained and deepened because Joel is a friend “in whom there is no guile”; what you will read in these pages comes from someone who models that of

which he writes.

Books on parenting, like books on sin, can sometimes produce more guilt than genuine help. Sometimes that is so because there is a failure, at the very heart of the book, to understand the nature of the gospel and how it applies to the duty of parenting. That is not the case here. I so wish that Joel had written this book twenty years ago. It would have helped me, as it now will help you, in the task of being a servant of Christ in our home and in our family. But had he written it then, it would not have been effused with so much grace and understanding.

You probably decided to buy this book before reading what I have to say. You made a wise choice. Now, turn the page and allow a pastor-father-husband to help you with gospel grace and love.

—*Derek W. H. Thomas*

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Introduction

PARENTING WITH A STRONG HOPE

MY DAD CLAIMED HE WOULD never earn a diploma for good parenting. I suppose most Christian parents feel that way. We all need help in parenting; the only “perfect” parents I know are those who don’t have children.

This book is written for Christian parents, who, in dependence on God’s promises, yearn to train their children in the way of holiness. It represents a condensed form of lectures given to the Family Living Class of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I am a pastor (the complete series is available at www.sermonaudio.com). My aim is to bring you a Reformed, covenantal perspective on parenting and to address a number of practical issues not commonly included in child-rearing literature.

This book differs substantially from typical parenting books, which emphasize techniques. This book stresses that parents may raise children with a strong hope based on the covenant promises of God—although this does not mean that parents have nothing to do.

When I speak of the covenant of grace, I mean the promises and commands of God to His people in Christ, binding them together forever (Gen. 17:18). We call this bond a covenant because it is sealed with God’s oath (Deut. 7:8–9). We call it the covenant of grace because it comes out of God’s eternal decision to show grace, stands on the accomplishment of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, offers salvation to people as a gift of grace, and implements salvation through God’s regenerating and transforming grace.

Thus, the covenant of grace is the promise by which God cements the

relationship between Himself and His people in Christ. By the Spirit's grace, God binds Himself as the God and Father of all who believe, trust in His promises, and rest in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, as the only Savior. He promises to forgive their sins for Christ's sake, to fill them with His Holy Spirit, and to grant them eternal life. Believers, in turn, are bound to this one true God, to trust in Him and to love Him, forsaking the world, crucifying their old natures, and walking in the way of godliness.

The covenant of grace is like a wedding vow that God will never break. The sacrament of baptism is the wedding ring, the outward sign of our union with Him. People broken by sin who have been taught by the Spirit to trust in the gospel are the bride. And Christ is the groom—indeed, the heart of the covenant.

This covenant of grace was first revealed in the promise of a Savior that God gave to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). It was more fully expressed in the promises God made to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:7). Finally, it was renewed, confirmed, and enlarged by the shedding of Christ's blood at Calvary (Matt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 1:20). As in all the covenants God makes with human beings in Scripture, the covenant of grace is extended to believers and their children (Acts 2:39).

Children who are born to at least one believing parent are properly called covenant children (1 Cor. 7:14). As heirs of God's covenant, these children are received into the visible church by baptism. The act of baptism confirms God's promises to them and places them under obligation to seek His kingdom and the salvation offered to them in Christ. Growing up in the community of the church, they are nurtured by the prayers of believers and by the preaching and teaching of God's Word, including its rich invitations and solemn warnings. Their parents are bound to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The congregation to which they belong is also responsible for their evangelization and instruction.

I have divided the book into four sections. Chapters 1–5 examine the theological foundations for parenting in the Scriptures and the Reformed view of how believers should raise their children in the light of the covenant of grace. Chapters 6–14 examine believing parents' office-bearing

responsibilities in child-rearing as prophets, priests, and kings in the home. These chapters provide the basic framework of parenting. Chapters 15–19 address practical areas, such as teaching children piety, how to listen, how to control their speech, and how to handle sibling relationships. In this section, I also summarize the extraordinarily helpful Puritan teaching on child-rearing for today. Chapters 20–22 focus on major issues in raising teenagers—helping them discern God’s will, resist negative peer pressure, and control their anger. In the conclusion, I explain how we can glean comfort from God’s thousand-generation covenant (Ps. 105:8) by preparing our children for marriage and for leaving home, and by preparing ourselves to be God-honoring grandparents. Two appendices contain Cotton Mather’s resolutions on parenting and some thoughts on how churches should treat children. Finally, note that study questions for each chapter are included in the back of the book; these may prove useful for individual reflection or group discussion.

Though I have read a significant number of parenting books, I have not, for the most part, consulted them in preparing this book. I wanted this book to flow primarily out of my study of the Scriptures and my experience as the father of three children and a pastoral counselor to other parents. Hence, there are few endnotes in this volume.

I pray that God will use this book to assist you to parent in accordance with His promises and His covenant, and in dependence on Him and His wisdom as the perfect Father in Christ Jesus.

COVENANTAL

Part

FOUNDATIONS

One

FOR PARENTING

Chapter 1

ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH THE COVENANT



*And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down,
and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace,
and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.
In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,
saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land.*

—GENESIS 15:17–18A

HAVE YOU EVER FELT DEEPLY discouraged about your family? Perhaps you understand the doctrine of God’s covenant. You know that you and your family are in God’s covenant. But you still look at your children and ask: “How can God’s promises come true for them? How can anything good come out of this mess we have made of things?”

There is great encouragement for Christian parents in the covenant God revealed to Abram (later called Abraham, Gen. 17:5). Genesis 15 describes the establishment of this covenant and its implications for child-rearing, as well as how we relate to that covenant.

The chapter begins, “The word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”

(Gen. 15:1). The thought of reward stirred Abram to his depths. He had felt a huge emptiness in his life for many years. He had no child. So, Abram responded to God's Word, saying: "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? . . . Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (vv. 2–3). God promised Abram that He would give him a son, an heir of his very own, and then added, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them . . . so shall thy seed be" (v. 5).

Hearing these mighty promises, Abram "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (v. 6). This important statement, quoted several times in the New Testament, stands forever as the root and anchor of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

A Confirming Sign Requested

To confirm his faith, Abram asked God for a sign. Acknowledging all the promises that God had made to him, Abram asked, "Whereby shall I know?" (v. 8). Abram was not abandoning his newfound faith; he was simply confessing his weakness and the need of a confirming sign from God to strengthen that faith. That's why Abram was not rebuked as Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was rebuked (Luke 1:20). Abram's question sprang from faith, not unbelief. Zacharias's identical question dripped with unbelief. He impugned the promise of God, so God closed his mouth until John the Baptist was born. But faith can have questions. Abram was asking the Lord for confirmation, saying: "Lord, what Thou art saying to me is wonderful, but how can I know it? Confirm it for me, please. I have lived all these years with no hope of a child of my own."

We should not take Abram's request for a sign as something akin to the practice of many people today in asking for providential signs. They are often looking for an interesting "coincidence" to help guide their decisions. We cannot deal here in depth with how God guides His children.² Suffice it to say that Abram's concern was deeply redemptive. How would God fulfill His promise of a Mediator? How would He execute His saving purpose?

Abram, remember, did not have any part of the Bible, but we have the whole Bible. We also have the history of how God faithfully kept His promises to all the generations of His people. Best of all, we have Christ, the seed of Abraham, who by His death and the shedding of His blood confirmed and renewed the ancient covenant with Abraham and his seed as the “new testament in my blood” (1 Cor. 11:25; Gal. 3:16, 29; Heb. 8:6–12). “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:20). For this reason, the sign that Abram received is also a sign for us, especially as Christ fulfilled it in His death on the cross. Moreover, God signifies the same truth to us in the sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which are confirming signs for believers today. So, let us lean on God’s Word and sacraments, on His covenant and on the promises, all of which point to His trustworthy Son, “the Strength of Israel [who] will not lie nor repent” (1 Sam. 15:29), and keep laboring for our children.

As we do so, God teaches us that the success of happy, well-adjusted, spiritually minded, Christ-honoring, God-glorifying, Scripture-grounded children growing into adulthood is *never* because of us. Sometimes the Lord makes us realize our own insufficiency so that we learn to rest completely on the trustworthiness of His covenant and on the character of God Himself as the Author of it.

What does that mean? When Abram asked for a sign, God told him to gather some animals, cut them in two, and put the pieces on two sides so that someone could walk down the middle (Gen. 15:9–10). Abram knew what was happening; the steps God had commanded were part of a common way of making a covenant in his day. The two covenant-making parties would cut some animals through the middle and make two parallel lines with the pieces. Then both parties to the covenant would walk down the center, between the halved pieces. When they got to the end, they would shake hands, as if to say, “God do so to me, and more also, hewing me in pieces as we have done to these animals, if I break my covenant with you.” So, God was saying: “Abram, you want a sign, so I will give it to you. I will give you a wonderful sign of the covenant.”

Abram got the animals, cut them up, and waited for God to come so they

together could walk between the pieces. But God didn't come. Abram waited all morning but God didn't come—all afternoon, and still God didn't come. It was a long, hot day for Abram. He was alone in the desert, undergoing a difficult trial of faith. He had obeyed the command of God. He had killed and divided the animals. But instead of the Lord, Abram's only visitors were birds of prey.

Birds of prey are used in Isaiah 46 and other places in Scripture as a metaphor for an evil conqueror. In the context of Genesis 15, birds of prey serve as a type of the unclean heathens and of the powers of darkness. The unclean heathens, such as Pharaoh and the Egyptians, would attempt to devour Abram's descendants. The birds were also a type of the powers of darkness, of Satan, who would attack the seed of Abram and would desire to prevent the birth of the Messiah.

As parents, we know a little about this kind of struggle as our children grow up. Throughout the morning time of a child's young years, the noon-time of his years as he approaches his teens, and the afternoon time of the teen years, we wait. What happens? Perhaps it seems as if God is never going to work in our children. We train them in Christian education, they hear sermons every Sunday, and we are faithful with family worship, but the child is not converted. What's the use? Instead of God coming, what comes? Vultures.

That's what came for Abram. In verse 11, we read, "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away." Doesn't it seem that child-rearing is a lot like that—driving away vultures from our children's lives? There are so many vultures out there, so many people, so many things, and so many enemies that want to get at our children and destroy them.

Abram's trial of faith is often the trial of God-fearing parents. We plead God's promises and look for His benediction, but all we see are vultures. So many birds of prey come down to feed on our children. So much wages war against God's covenant and His promises. Think of our children. They are covenant children, but so much is against them. Their own hearts, the world, Satan, and sometimes even their own friends or our own poor examples as parents are like birds of prey swooping down on them to devour them.

The vultures come and pick away at our children's inward spiritual lives

and their outward obedience. All of society is screaming to them: “Do your own thing. Go your own way. Stand up for yourself. Be cool. Look out for number one.” Everything they hear in the world is basically contrary to the Bible. How do we handle it when all we see are vultures and it doesn’t seem as if God will ever come—when nothing divine seems to be happening in their hearts and lives? If anything, as they enter adolescence, they seem to be losing ground, becoming more hardened, more rebellious, more conformed to this world.

We must stand our ground, as Abram did, holding fast to the word of promise, obeying the word of command, looking to the God of the covenant.

An Impossible Task Attempted

Abram grew weary of protecting the sacrifices, of driving away the attacking birds. He could not sustain the vigil. After an entire day of watching and working, he fell asleep. Verse 12 says, “And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.”

In one sense, we who are believers can identify painfully with this experience. When God delays fulfilling His promises, we are prone to slacken our watchfulness. Our prayers lose their power; we become less active in using the means of grace. We become weary in seeking, weary of fighting against enemies, weary even of praying. Do you ever feel that way? You have tried and tried, and at night, when you put your head on the pillow, you begin to weep. You’ve been striving, trusting, and hoping for so long, and you are so tired. Your spouse is tired. You fall asleep, exhausted. Where is the covenant-keeping God?

In another sense, however, Abram’s sleep was no ordinary sleep. Verse 12 says that he fell into a deep sleep—a supernatural sleep, if you will. The same language is used of the kind of sleep into which Adam fell when the Lord opened his side and formed Eve from one of his ribs (Gen. 2:21). God caused the deep sleep to fall on Abram, but it was clearly unusual, for Abram could still feel the “horror of great darkness,” that is, a darkness that was supernatural. In the following verses, the Lord explained this horrible darkness as a

kind of prophecy of suffering to come. God said: “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years” (v. 13).

Other indications that the sleep was unusual are the facts that Abram could hear what God was saying to him and that he could see what happened next: “When the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram” (vv. 17–18a).

The exact interpretation of the two emblems of the smoking furnace and the burning lamp has been debated. Some believe there actually was only one emblem described in two ways, partly because the verb is in the singular, indicating that the second emblem may simply be clarifying the first. However, the passage can be understood as speaking of two emblems by a figure of speech called a hendiadys, which is used for emphasis. Given the context and commentary in Deuteronomy, I opt for the latter understanding.

In this interpretation, the smoking furnace is a symbolic representation of the furnaces in Egypt in which the people of Israel would burn bricks. Elsewhere, God explained what He meant—that Egypt was like this iron smoking furnace (Deut. 4:20). Thus, the smoking furnace appeared as a confirmation of the prophecy that Abram’s offspring would suffer affliction as slaves in Egypt (Gen. 15:13).

The burning lamp symbolized the presence of God in Christ, who is the light and salvation of His people. Later, that burning light, as a pillar of fire, would appear in the night to give light to Israel in the wilderness. God caused this burning lamp to pass between the pieces of the heifer, the goat, the ram, and the birds that Abram had divided, because the covenant of grace is made on His sole divine initiative, and only in Christ.

With this interpretation, the added significance was that the Lord would actually be present with His people in Egypt and would be the secret to their continued existence despite all the forces working for their destruction. What Egypt would do to destroy Israel, the Lord would do to refine Israel. He would be with His people, knowing their sufferings and afflictions (Ex. 3:7) to such an extent that they, like the burning bush, would burn and yet not be

consumed (see Ex. 3:2). That was confirmed by what the Lord said in Genesis 46:4: “I will go down with thee into Egypt.” In other words, God said to Abram: “In My Son, I will go down with you into Egypt. May I Myself, and My own beloved Son, suffer utter death and destruction if I fail to keep My promises to you.”

So, God came while Abram slept, showing that the fulfillment of the covenant promises did not depend on Abram, who was beset by failures and weaknesses as a father. I find that enormously comforting. All that was required of Abram was to be “fully persuaded that, what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21).

An Unbreakable Covenant

I’ve asked hundreds of parents over the years for their wisdom on child-rearing. As my children grew up, those questions increased. Many of those parents had teenagers; some had grandchildren. I asked them, “What can you teach me?”

Many of their children were believers who had grown up to be God-fearing, stalwart sons and daughters of the church of Jesus Christ, and had become His devoted servants, godly husbands and wives, and the fathers and mothers of the rising generation of the church. But when I inquired of their parents, almost all of them said something like this: “I have no secrets. As a parent, I fell short in so many ways. All of it was the grace of God. My only secret was to keep trusting in Him.” That is what the Lord teaches us.

As the years go by, more and more we realize that if our children turn out right, it is only because of amazing grace. We remember God walking between the pieces, the burning lamp in the great darkness of the night. His Word tells us, “He is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Also, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

We confirm the covenant when we have our children baptized, but God Himself established it. The covenant is one-sided (from God) in terms of its establishment, though it is two-sided (God and us, by grace) in terms of its maintenance. Here we are faced with the age-old challenge of balancing

our personal responsibility and God's empowering, sovereign grace. We must obey, yet God tells us that the result belongs to Him. As with all our good works, God rewards our obedience as parents not according to its merit but according to a measure of the fullness of His grace toward us in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Question 63).

How comforting it is that He reassures us, as if to say: "I will superintend this whole process. I will give you the wisdom you need at the moment you need it. You will fail often, and to keep you humble I'll allow you to fail. Yet I'll provide what you need at the proper time. Entrust your children to Me. You cannot give them new hearts, but I can, and I *will* do it because I am a covenant-keeping God."

We rest on this unbreakable covenant. In this covenant of grace, we meet a *giving God* and stand before Him as Abram did, as *receiving parents*. That is symbolic of our whole spiritual lives, both private and public. With regard to the salvation promised to us in the covenant, we are receiving sinners approaching a giving God. What have we contributed to our own salvation? Absolutely nothing; it is all of grace. Thank God for His covenant, and for the burning lamp that passed through the pieces of the animals, which confirmed that covenant to Abram and to all who are in Christ, Abram's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

On any other basis, we would have a very serious judicial problem. What if the establishment of the covenant were a matter of mutual agreement, mutual responsibility, and mutual liability? The terrible penalty of death and destruction would stare us in the face every day, all the more so because we know that we cannot keep our word, and sooner or later we must fail and so fall prey to the terrible wrath of God against all covenant breakers. Far from supporting our faith, such a mutually established covenant would crush us; more, the covenant conditions would demand our death. As covenant-breakers, we would become bloody corpses, like the pieces of dead meat. Isn't that what God said breaking the covenant would do to us?

The burning lamp, symbolizing the presence of the pre-incarnate Christ, passed through the pieces in order to say: "You cannot do this. It is too much for you. Because I am a merciful Savior, I will do it for you. I will be bloodied.

The sword will pierce My side. And out of My side will come blood and water so that you, Abram, can go free; and you, father, and you, mother, as well.” All our sins of parenting can be washed away with the blood of Jesus Christ; all our weaknesses can be clad in His great strength. God not only establishes the covenant in Christ, but sends His Son into the world to shed His blood as the blood of the covenant, the blood that cleanses from all sin. What amazing grace—God sheds His Son’s blood instead of ours.

What exactly was the sign God gave to Abram? The sign was God Himself, in the person of His Son, passing through the pieces. God was saying: “I am willing to be broken for covenant breakers. I am willing to shed blood for people who deserve to have their blood shed. Abram, trust Me; it is going to be all right. I will take care of everything. I am the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. I am the burning lamp; I am your light; I am your sacrifice; I am your everything.”

In the sacraments of the new covenant, God does the very same thing. The water in baptism points to the cleansing blood of Christ and the life-giving power of the Spirit. The broken bread points to Christ’s broken body. The wine that fills the cup points to His blood. Christ says: “Be washed with this water. Eat the bread, and drink of the cup. These are New Testament signs of My covenant faithfulness. Since I have died for you, I will certainly take care of you. It is My grace from beginning to end. I have set My hand to it. I am a covenant-keeping God. In love, I am with you always, in the midst of your families, as I am in the midst of My church.”

The Bible uses the word *family* or *families* more than three hundred times. God is a family-working God. Yes, He must save each one individually, but He is committed to working from generation to generation. So, when you fall asleep, when you fail, when you are overwhelmed and worn out from trying so hard, cast all this weariness of soul and body on God, and trust Him to undertake for you (Isa. 38:14).

When your children are grown and they have their own little ones around their knees, and they in turn are worrying about their children’s futures, you can sit them down and say: “My son, my daughter, as you worry now about these little children, so I once worried about you. But the God of the covenant

will help you through, as He helped me. He is faithful.”

My siblings and I grew up in a wonderful family and were converted at rather young ages. I often attended church meetings with my father, and I heard two people ask him similar questions about his children in two situations: “How is it possible that all of your children were converted?” They were really asking, “What did you do right to make this happen?” I don’t think he was aware that I was listening as he answered.

One time he said, “It was the prayers of their mother.” The second time he gave a better answer. He looked that brother in the eye and he said, “It was the covenant faithfulness of our God.” That is *the* answer. What good was Abram? He fell asleep. He really could do nothing to fulfill God’s promise to him. But the burning lamp took care of him and his descendants. In the same way, what good are we as parents? Yet God takes care of us and our children.

John Calvin said that in true prayer a believer, like Christ in Gethsemane, “may with all freedom cast his cares and griefs into the bosom of God, who permits us to deal thus familiarly with him,” “for hereby the saints, by little and little, discharge their cares into the bosom of God.”³ That is what we need to do as parents—take all our worries and put them in the lap of our covenant-keeping God, trusting Him with the outcome. One day, when all the storms are over, we will wake up from our deep sleep, look around, and say: “My covenant God—what a God He is! How is it possible that I have children like this, being such a sleeper and such a failure? It is nothing but pure grace.”

Look to the Covenant-Keeping God

My encouragement to you is very simple: look to the covenant-keeping God. This book offers many lessons on how to parent. But first of all, I want you to look higher than the practical “how to’s.” Yes, you have to parent with “how to’s” in hand, but do them even as you look higher, ever higher, trusting God and saying to yourself: “I will not deny the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be my strength.”

Do not try to walk through the pieces as a contributory power, either

to your own salvation or to the salvation of your children. You cannot add to God's burning lamp. He is the perfect light and He has shed the perfect blood. You cannot add one stitch to His robe of righteousness. Don't try; it offends Him. Just trust in that blood; trust the Son of God. Trust in the covenant-keeping character of God. Trust His heart of mercy. Heed the command and promise of the Lord Jesus Christ: "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9–10). Walk by faith, leaning on God's covenant.