

The Uncomfortable Neighbors of Parenting in Christ

I. The Example of Jesus

- Matthew 5:43-48
- Jesus was frequently hanging around all the “wrong” people . . . at least, from the world’s perspective.
- Instead of cloistering Himself in ivory towers, Jesus interacted with people, and He invited the outcasts and the unclean and the sinners to come to Him. How many times did Jesus interact with the sick and dying? How many times was He swarmed by the poor and destitute?
- And when He wasn’t healing people from all sorts of gross maladies . . . both physical and demonic, He was associating with fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, and thieves.
- **“Jesus often leads his followers to people they would otherwise avoid.”** —Zac Eswine—

II. The Motivation of Jesus

- Luke 5:30-32; Luke 15; Matthew 5:21-22
- Spending time with the broken was the very nature of His calling. He came to seek the lost.
- The angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents because they understand how *impossible* it is. Sinners don’t repent. Sinners sin. But when God gets involved, He makes it possible for supernatural things to happen. When Jesus steps into the picture sickness is healed, demons flee, and the most vile of sinners are made holy.
- This is why Jesus had absolutely no problem putting His hands on lepers. He enjoyed saving the lost. He even went so far as to be tortured and die so that He could purchase the salvation of the very men who tortured and murdered Him.

III. The Call of Jesus

- If you are a born again follower of Jesus, then you are said to be “in Christ.” It’s your current position.
- Now, if you are in Christ, then His neighbors are your neighbors; His traveling companions are your traveling companions.
- And if you think that you can be a follower of Christ and yet perpetually surround yourself with the beautiful and the blessed and the “clean” and those who don’t need anything . . . you don’t even make any sense. If Jesus is over there with the needy and the broken and the spiritually destitute, then you’re not following Him when you hang out with the other group.
- But, instead of judging the people with whom you *choose* to associate. Let’s consider the neighbors over which you had no choice.
- Let’s consider your children.

IV. Our Uncomfortable Neighbors

- **The Physical Insanity of Parenting**
 - No parent-child pairing makes sense from a human perspective.
 - Typically, people prefer to associate with those who are on their socio-economic level or higher. Most people prefer to be around those they perceive are a few rungs up on the social ladder — people who are richer, more popular, and more powerful.
 - And yet God has created a world where adults are required to produce and care for individuals they would otherwise ignore.
- **The Spiritual Insanity of Parenting**
 - Our children have nothing to offer us. They are completely dependent and needy. Some may even say they're a drain on our physical and spiritual resources. Parenting is hard. It's taxing. It requires more than we possess to do well.
 - And yet God — Who has hidden spiritual majesty in earthen vessels — enjoys empowering incapable people to do things they cannot do.
 - Whether our kids come to us biologically or we choose them through foster and adoption, we are inviting into our homes very uncomfortable neighbors.
 - They represent all of the worst things about the people with whom Jesus surrounded Himself — they are foolish, weak, sick, and broken. But they bring additional struggles with them. They're not otherwise capable adults struggling with sin and sickness, they're helpless little kids who don't even understand their situation let alone are able to address it.
- **If we're going to parent in Christ, then we have to be prepared to do the following:**
 - **We must love those who are physically impotent.** Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of all life, loves us all even though we're completely incapable of keeping ourselves alive. Our children's inability to take care of themselves is not an excuse to resent them.
 - **We must love those that are spiritually dead.** Jesus came to seek and to save the lost — of whom we are the chief. Our children's spiritual deadness or immaturity shouldn't push us away, it should be the thing that draws us to them.
 - **We must love those who are unlike us.** I don't even need to explain how unlike us Jesus is, and yet He became like us to win us. The fact that you and your child don't see eye-to-eye is no excuse. The fact that you may be a man and she's a girl doesn't mean you don't have the right to talk to her about important topics. The reality that your child doesn't think like you or like the same things as you isn't a relationship-stunting problem.
 - **We must love those who hate us.** Even though they are so needy, and even though we've sacrificed to provide for them in every possible way, they are going to often love themselves more than they love us. In those moments, they hate us (biblically speaking), and yet in those moments — if we're in Christ — the most obvious thing we should do is love those who hate us and do good to those who persecute us (Matthew 5:11).
- God has given our families the opportunity to mirror the relationship God has with us. That is the beauty of parenting uncomfortable children. We get to be Christ to them. And that's the joy and wonder of being an Ambassador Parent.
- But our kids have uncomfortable neighbors too. If we didn't have much of a choice in who our kids are . . . they had even less of a choice. That goes not only for their siblings, but also for their parents. Part of being an Ambassador Parent in Christ is leading our kids in how to interact with and love their uncomfortable neighbors and help them respond to *your* brokenness.
- God didn't just give them the best parent for them, God gave you the best kids to use to mature you and grow in your sanctification.