

When Scripture Meets the Silver Screen – Parenthood

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Acts 2:42, 46-47

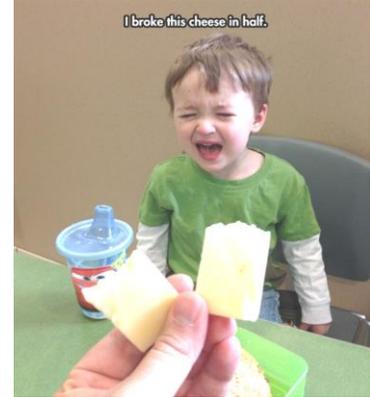
This summer we have been on a fun journey as we look at all the many ways Scripture meets the silver screen. You know, I often sit through movies and say to myself, “This would preach!” I’ve always been amazed at how readily God speaks to me sometimes – even through film.

Today we will be looking at how God is speaking to us through the movie *Parenthood* that was released in 1989 and starred a fantastic array of actors. I loved this movie and it’s still one of my favorites. *Parenthood* had almost every type of parenting challenge in it: parents trying juggle multiple kids with multiple issues, single parenting, parenting a grown kid with issues, parents who are trying to raise the “perfect” kid, and even grandparents who step in to parent their grandchild. Such a wide array of what it means to “parent.”

Now for those of you who think you can check out of worship today because you are not a parent – think again. Today’s message is for ALL of us! We ***will*** talk about parenting but what we will discuss goes well beyond parenting in the home – this includes the village my friends, so please listen and come on this journey with me.

I’m a mother to two great kids – Morgan who is 19 and Gavin who is 16. I’ve enjoyed every phase of their lives and also can remember the challenges that came with each phase. Friends, parenting isn’t easy. And, my guess is that if you are a parent as well, you’d agree with that statement.

Just to help us lighten up a bit this morning and set the stage for this roller coaster of parenting I have some fun pictures to share. I found these on Facebook and laughed so hard I had tears rolling down my face. Maybe you can relate to some of these. These pictures were posted under the title: “Why my kid is crying.” Let’s take a look:



Yeah, I remember those days and it sounds like you do as well. This is where we begin today's message and a look at our first movie clip. Here you see Gil and his wife having a tense moment before the big school play. They have just gotten the news that they are expecting their fourth child and Gil is feeling stressed. He hates his job and wishes he could quit, he feels like more children will mean more responsibility, and he's doubting his own parenting skills based on some issues his other three kids are having. There's a lot going on. And then enters Grandma with ultimate wisdom. If you have kids, my guess is that you can relate to the roller coaster. It's a crazy mixture of exhilaration and fear, joy and frustration. But regardless of the fears and frustrations associated with this roller coaster ride, we parents jump on it and soak in every moment. We have hopes and dreams of raising our kids to be happy, successful, and to thrive in their adult lives. And, as Christian parents, we strive to share our faith with our children so that they will also know the love of Jesus and have a personal and deep relationship with him. For us, this is fundamental on our roller coaster ride.

So how can we, as parents, raise our kids to know Jesus, and become thriving, happy and healthy adults? And, as we will see a little later, how can this village, the family of Christ, support parents and help them lead their kids to Christ? I believe Deuteronomy has an answer for us.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

"These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting

around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up.”

Making our faith a central part of our lives, both at home and away from home, builds a true FAMILY of faith and instills life-long eternal values in our children.

In 2017, LifeWay released the results of their *“Research Study on How Kids Really Grow Spiritually.”* This study involved 2,000 Protestant adults who finished their parenting journey with one or more kids now between 18-30. Of the parents who indicated their young adult children are still active in church and have a strong faith, here are the top TWO things that took place in their home as their children were growing up:

1. The child regularly read their Bible (or had the Bible read to them).
2. The child regularly spent time in prayer.

The third on the list is another important thing you can do to effectively share life-long eternal values with your children:

3. **The child served in and attended church regularly.** (Each drop in frequency of a family's church attendance correlated to a drop in the child's faith development.)

So, parents, if we want our kids to have a strong faith that lasts into their adulthood, these are three easy and effective ways to make that happen –

- 1. Read Scripture**
- 2. Pray**
- 3. Come to church**

That sounds just too easy and too good to be true doesn't it? I think that we struggle to do all three of these things because of the many obstacles we face as parents. And here is the REAL rollercoaster part: Busyness. School and sports schedules. Work demands. Other family obligations. But we try, don't we? We want our kids to have a strong faith so we do our best to prioritize Scripture, prayer, and church.

My fellow parents, hear me when I say that you are not alone. First and foremost, your God, your beloved heavenly Father, is walking this journey

with you. Second, I want you to look around this room. You are not alone because every person in this room is part of your family in Christ and we are your support system. And three, this church – YOUR church – is committed to helping you parent through every phase of your children's lives and to be your partner in the faith development of your children.

This Fall we are launching a new parenting ministry called "Phase." This will begin with a six-week study I'm leading in the chapel and I hope all of you parents out there will join me. Our hope is that we can build a strong support system for parents and with parents. We want to be prayer partners with you and your children. We want to show you ways to pour Scripture into your children's hearts. We want to help connect you with other parents who are in a similar parenting phase that you are in and help to build a support system for all of you. We want to provide learning opportunities to equip you for and educate you on the phases your children are going through so that you can better understand them and support them.

This, my friends, is the church. And, by "church" I don't mean the institution, but rather the people of God . . . God's family. The community of believers. YOU! Ok, if any of you who are not parents checked out on me, here is where you need to re-engage. We are all part of this community of believers so what I'm about to share applies to all of us.

The New Testament speaks volumes about this community of faith and how we are to love and care for one another. This term, "one another," comes from the Greek word *allelon* and can be found around 100 times in the New Testament. These are commands given to the church family about how they are to live together. Here are just a few:

- Be devoted to one another in love. (*Romans 12:10*)
- Bear one another's burdens. (*Galatians 6:2*)
- Encourage and build one another up. (*1 Thessalonians 5:11*)

Oh, and interestingly enough, that last one is the verse printed on the backpack tags we just gave out! So, as you can see, we take this "one another" command seriously.

In the book of Acts, we read about the early church and how this “one another” took place.

Acts 2:42, 46-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

So, the community of believers were hanging out together, supporting each other, reading the Bible together, praying together, and eating together. And we can assume this wasn't just adults – children were part of this as well. People of all ages and stages of life were sitting in the same place. What would this type of “one anothering” look like here at Williamson's Chapel if we committed to supporting parents and their children?

One thing we can do is commit to pray for parents and their children. You know, when I was pregnant, I remember my OB asking over and over if I had a good support system around me and people to help me when my baby arrived. I felt so incredibly blessed to say “YES.” I had my family, I had my church, I had my friends. But, most importantly, I knew I had the prayers of the faithful lifting me up each day. I have no doubt that those prayers were with me during 2:00am feedings, extreme exhaustion, marital stresses, and so much more. Knowing I was being prayed for helped me through all of the difficult parenting phases I've encountered. So, let us all commit to pray for parents and their children!

Another way we can “one another” for parents and their children is to genuinely welcome these children to church. Having these children here, in our community of faith, worshiping with us, is a gift. Seeing all of these kiddos today up here with their backpacks all excited about a new school year should remind us that children are part of our community and we need to prioritize our relationship with them. Let's commit to make eye contact and greet a

child that is not our child each and every week. I encourage you to especially seek those new parents with the baby carriers and make sure to speak to them and smile at their new bundle of joy. Let these families know we love them and support them in this phase of their lives.

Finally, and here is the tougher challenge: I encourage us all to consider serving in our children's ministry program. Now, before you go checking out on me again, hear me out. ***I'm a firm believer that how well we teach and lead the children of today in the ways of being a Christ follower will determine the future of the church.*** Parents hold primary responsibility for instilling the love of Jesus and demonstrating faith at home, but the church has a similarly important role to play by demonstrating what the community of faith looks like and how vital a role it plays in their faith journey.

Holly, our Children's Ministries Coordinator, has many opportunities available to serve directly with the children of this church and these opportunities range from one-time events to ongoing servanthood. And before you say that you don't have kids so this isn't for you, let me share a powerful truth with you: some of the most dedicated children's ministry leaders are teenagers. Yes, teenagers. And, no they don't have kids either, but they serve with our younger children and are adored by them.

At VBS this year I volunteered to be a floater and on Tuesday night, Holly asked me to hang out with a rambunctious group of 6-year-old boys until their crew leader, Cameron, arrived. As I sat with these boys, they continued to ask me over and over, "When is Cameron getting here?" and "Where is Cameron?" I explained that he was stuck in traffic and they continued to watch the door. Then, after a little while, a teenage boy walks up and these 6-year-olds lit up and screamed "Cameron!!" He, too, lit up and gave the boys high fives. I then realized that my presence was insignificant compared to this young man who has dedicated his week to these kids. Way to go Cameron and all of the other teens who continuously serve in our children's ministry!

If any of you are still not convinced of the important role we all play in the raising of these children, I want to remind you of this commitment we've

all made, right here, during the baptism of a child – I'm going to ask you to say this aloud with me:

With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness that they may grow in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.

This is said by us – the community of faith – in response to a child's baptism. Notice the use of the plural "these persons" – we are saying this as a commitment to the whole family standing up there. Parents and children. So, as a community of love and forgiveness, we pray for families, love them, support them, and offer them an example of Christ in the ways we live. Parents and children need our support – parents and children need this village, this family of believers!

And, in light of the recent tragedies in El Paso and Dayton, I can't help but wonder if those who perpetrated such hateful acts had a village – if they had "one anothering" going on as they grew up. Did their parents have the support they needed? My dear friends, I have to believe that this world would be a much more loving and peaceful place if we truly practiced the "one another" command and children could grow up surrounded by a community of people who love them with the love of Christ. In other words, this "one another" command could truly transform our world.

Later in the movie, *Parenthood*, we see Gil and his family attending the school play. He quickly begins feeling this "roller coaster" ride as his youngest son behaves just like a preschooler who has a mind of his own. You know, I watch this scene and imagine that he is feeling the stress, he is on the roller coaster, then he takes a deep breath, looks around, and realizes that he's not alone. I see those people around him and imagine that to be his church, his family of believers. They are smiling at him, laughing along with him, and assuring him that it's okay. They are being "one another" for Gil in his roller coaster moment. It's then that he's able to look at his wife and embrace this new phase of their life as they welcome a new child into the family.

I love this scene and I've lived it. I've been Gil in moments of fear and anxiety while parenting. And, I've also been the recipient of loving brothers and sisters in Christ who have supported me and my husband when we needed it most. My children have been loved by those in our faith community and led to know Jesus Christ in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, pre-teen ministries, youth ministries, and missions. These dedicated volunteers took the "one another" commitment seriously. And I can't thank them enough for loving my kids the way they did.

I am so grateful for this village – for the church. I've witnessed first-hand the power of family and "one another" and my prayer is that we continue to live this out through our support and love of parents and children at Williamson's Chapel UMC.

Parents, I hope you'll consider joining me for this new phase parenting ministry that will kick off September 15th. I'll be sending you more information as that date approaches. But in the meantime, let's remember the three things we can do right now to instill eternal values and a love of Christ in our children: **Read Scripture, pray, and come to church.**

And, everyone – all of us – remember our baptismal commitment. Pray for parents and their children. Speak to the children on our campus. And consider being part of our children's ministry team by volunteering our gifts and services. I'm looking forward to continuing to "one another" with all of you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.