

Parenting Talk #1 – Imagine the End

Intro

Welcome parents! Thank you so much for joining us in this first step of Baby Dedication Celebration. My name is Kendra Fleming. I've been involved in ministry to families for almost twenty years and am the mother of four teenagers. I definitely don't claim to know all there is about raising kids, and I've made my share of mistakes along the way. But I, along with a few great friends, hope to encourage you and get you off to a great start as you begin this journey called parenting!

Baby Dedication Celebration is more than a great party! Although celebration is definitely a BIG part of it, you are at the very beginning of one of the most important jobs you will ever have. As your church, we don't want to miss this opportunity to tell you some of the really important things that you need to know. Now, this will not be ALL that you need to know. We encourage you to read books and talk to other parents who are further down the road than you. There is so much to learn as you grow as a parent.

We are going to ask you to listen to the following three Parenting Talks. They aren't very long, and there is a simple homework assignment with each of them. This is a very important "first step" in the Baby Dedication Celebration process.

We truly feel that there are a few things that will matter most in the heart and life of your child. That's what these Parenting Talks are all about, and we don't want you to miss them.

In just a minute you will hear a talk by Carey Nieuwhof. He is a pastor and good friend. He is also the father of two teenage sons. He has a great message to share with you.

Here is the question that I want you to think about as you head into this talk: When you think about the day when your child is all grown up and ready to head out on their own, what do you hope they know? More importantly, *who* do you hope they have become?

Script

Hi, I'm Carey Nieuwhof, and I serve as the senior pastor of a church north of Toronto, Canada. My most important title is that of husband and dad. My wife Toni and I are parents to two teenage boys, Jordan and Sam. In so many ways, like you, that's the core of who I really am.

I'm so excited that you as a parent have chosen to consider taking the important step of dedicating your child. You are taking the first step in making the most important investment you can make in the life of your son or daughter.

We're particularly thrilled you're doing this because parenting can be so overwhelming. I remember taking my oldest son home from the hospital as a first

time dad and bringing him into our little apartment in Toronto. At the time, I had one overwhelming question on my mind: How do I not break him? He seemed so small and so vulnerable. As a dad I was just overwhelmed trying to figure out how to hold a baby, how to lay him down in his crib...I just didn't want to break him.

Parenting can be so overwhelming – I know. I remember Toni and I read articles and consulted pediatricians to develop a strategy to get our kids to sleep through the night, to eat their vegetables and to get them to take their naps.

When you are the parent of young children, it is easy to be so focused on the day to day that you lose sight of the future. Yet, here's the thing...what you are doing right now, in the day to day, *is* shaping the future.

That's what I want to talk about today. I want to encourage you to not only think about today, but to think about the future...to imagine the end. To understand that your little one *will* grow up. They won't always be this tiny little baby that you're holding today. What you do to prepare them for their future really matters.

Right now, most of you can't imagine that this sweet little baby, who isn't even old enough to walk or tie her shoes, is one day going to drive away to college. I mean that sounds inconceivable.

It's hard to believe that your son, who is trying his best to sit up or take his first steps, will be a senior in high school and asking for the car keys every weekend. Those days seem like another world compared to where you are now.

But it's coming. It amazes me that I am going to be sending my eldest child to university shortly and that my youngest starts high school in a few months. I realize time passes, but I just had no idea it would happen so quickly.

I also know as a parent that there's so much to think about when raising your kids. It's overwhelming, isn't it? How do you develop them? How do you make sure they get all the influences they need to succeed? You might already be thinking about getting them into T-Ball, music lessons, or the best preschool. You're beginning to think about preparing them for their future.

But if we *only* focus on how well they hit a ball, or their score on the SAT, we can miss the point.

100 years from now the only thing that will matter in your child's life is their relationship with God. Let me say that again... 100 years from now the only thing that will matter in your child's life is their relationship with God

The temptation as a parent is to think about and plan for what our kids will DO in future. Most of us want them to do well at school or to excel at sports. All of us want them to find good jobs, find a spouse, settle down and have a family of their own one day.

What if we posed a different question? Instead of asking what do I want them to do? What if we asked *who* do I want them to *become*?

See, when you ask that question your perspective changes and priorities shift. When you ask the question, “Who do I want them to become?” you begin to place more value on teaching them the things that will shape their character and their relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Ultimately, who they are will shape everything they do. It will determine what kind of athlete they become. It will shape how they handle success or failure. It will impact the quality of their relationships and ultimately it will determine the kind of husband or wife and father or mother they will one day become. Character shapes everything.

The heart of you children’s character is their relationship with their heavenly Father. God clearly gave a responsibility to us, their parents, to lead our children into a growing relationship with Jesus. To introduce them to a God who made them, who loves them, and who desires to have a relationship with them.

When I think about my responsibility as a parent, I love this passage where Moses stands in front of the Israelites. It was an audience of parents and the community in which they lived. He starts by saying that God is the one true God. Then he proceeds to tell them the most important thing that they need to do. Here’s what the passage says...

Love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your strength.
These commandments that I give you today
are to be upon your hearts.
Impress them on your children.
Talk about them when you sit at home
and when you walk along the road,
when you lie down and when you get up.
Deuteronomy 6:5-7

Moses clearly communicates that *parents* are in the best possible position to help their kids learn what it looks like to love God with all of their heart. That parents should talk about it when they are at home, when they are driving in the car, when they get up...basically all of the time. That as parents, it’s our job to introduce our children to a personal relationship with their heavenly Father.

As the father of two teens, I promise you I see this much more clearly now than I did ten years ago. With my oldest son Jordan heading off the engineering next year at university, I promise you my focus is not just the fact that he got into a great school, my focus is who he’s going to be once he’s in that school. At the heart of both Jordan and Sam’s lives is their relationship with their heavenly Father.

We believe the most important thing a parent can do is introduce their children to a relationship with their heavenly father.

That's the end that matters most to all of us and to your child.

See, as a parent, the focal point you choose now will help you navigate everything you encounter over the next twenty years.

(STORY: About learning to drive when I was sixteen and worrying about what to focus on...my dad told me to look to the end of horizon and my peripheral vision would sort out all the distractions.)

Here's the pivotal question: not what do I want them to do, but who do I want them to become? Ultimately, you want their character and life shaped by a vibrant relationship with their heavenly Father.

So what steps can you take today that will start you on that journey?

- We want to challenge you to pray with your spouse for the day when your child accepts Christ. Make this a focus of your prayer, a focus of your heart, and an "end" that motivates your everyday life.
- Second, we want you to take few minutes and write out a description of the kind of person that you hope your child will become over the next 18 years. Yes, you can include a love for baseball or hockey! But I want you to describe the kind of character that you hope to see in your child. What do you hope to see? Humility, a strong relationship with Christ, a deep concern for others, kindness, a love for truth, a strong work ethic, wisdom? Think about the kind of heart that you want to help develop in him. Who do you want her to *become*? Over the years, this might be a letter that you share with your child someday, or it might just be something that you pull out once or twice a year to remind yourself of what matters most when it comes to raising your child.

This week, pray together for that day when your child will place trust in Christ and gets to know his heavenly Father. As you prepare for dedication take the time to imagine the end and write out a description of the kind of person you hope to see your child become one day. Start with the end in mind: not what you want them to do, but who you want them to become. Writing a description of who you want them to become will help you clarify how you parent today.

When you have finished writing down your thoughts, put this paper somewhere where you can find it easily. You will be asked to bring this sheet to the actual Baby Dedication Celebration Event where you will read your thoughts to the family and friends there with you that day. All of you will have a chance to pray together for your child's spiritual journey over the coming years. This group will also pray for you to have God's wisdom and help as you commit to helping your child develop a relationship over the years with God.

Parents, thank you so much for listening today and for doing your homework. I want to assure you that you will be so glad that you figured out where you are headed in your parenting right from the start. It is one of the best ways I know to help all of us as parents focus our priorities on what matters most.