

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Luke 2:52 “How to Be a Good Mother”

Intro. Today is a special day for mothers. On this day we especially honor and show appreciation to our mothers. Normally on this day, I like preach a message in honor of mothers, or in appreciation of mothers. But this morning the main point of my message will be to exhort mothers to be even better mothers. Mothers have a really tough job, and they need all the help they can get. A national survey among 2,020 Americans, which was conducted in February and March of this year by the Pew Research Center, discovered that 70 percent believe it's more difficult being a mother today than it was in the past. But motherhood has always been difficult. If Motherhood was going to be easy, it never would have started with something called labor.¹ So I hope that all mothers with children at home will listen up. And most of what I say about mothers will apply to fathers as well, and some of what I say will apply to grandparents. I will also say a few words of application to the children.

I am thankful to God for the love and devotion He has put into the hearts of mothers. Most of us have been the recipients of sacrificial love from our mothers. We appreciate their dedication to us. I had a good mother. And I believe most every mother wants to be a good mother. And when a mother fails, or feels like she has failed, I do not believe that is her intention. Sometimes the child just has a strong bent toward rebellion. Other times, a mother may be misinformed by the philosophies of the world. In fact, I believe that mothers today are being bombarded with bad information from TV, the news media, magazines, books, and so forth. Back in the 50's and 60's the permissive approach to parenting came into vogue, and it is still with us today. And the pressure is great to conform to the world's thinking. But Paul said in Rom. 12:2, “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In Lev. 18:3-5 God told the children of Israel not to follow the lifestyle and teaching of the Egyptians, nor follow the lifestyle and teachings of the Canaanites, but they were to follow the statutes and ordinances of the Lord their God. If you try to run your home life like the world teaches, then you will have some of the same results that we are seeing today. The world's philosophy, that promotes self-centeredness, has been devastating on our homes and children. So I unapologetically proclaim and seek to live by the biblical standard for marriage and raising children. Those who follow the biblical standard usually have the best results. So this morning I am going to give you the biblical standard for the mother. Follow the biblical teaching. That is what is best for you and for your children.

Now I believe that God selected Mary to be the mother of Jesus because He knew that she would be a good mother. I believe that she contributed to the good child development that we see in v.52. And I believe that a major responsibility of the mother is to help her children develop and mature in the 4 areas mentioned in this verse. Based on interviews with more than 1,000 adults nationwide, a recent George Barna survey discovered that less than one out of every five adults believes that children under the age of 13 are being “superbly” or even “pretty well” prepared for life emotionally, physically, spiritually, & intellectually.² If that's true, we need to do a better job as parents.

¹ Old Union Reminder.

² Barna report, October 26, 2004.

Now I want to give you some biblical advice on how to develop your child in each of the 4 areas that Jesus matured in. First:

I. ASSIST YOUR CHILD IN MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

Notice in v.52 that “Jesus increased in wisdom....” Children start out being ignorant. They lack discretion, instruction, wisdom, and knowledge. They do not know right from wrong. Without supervision and instruction they would kill themselves by running out in the street or drinking some poisonous substance. Even teenagers lack discretion at times. Too many endanger themselves by smoking, drinking alcohol, driving drunk, and engaging in other risky behavior. So what can you do to develop their knowledge, wisdom, and understanding?

A. The first 3 years of life are crucial for mental and educational development. The more time you can spend with that child, and the more you can do to stimulate their thinking, the better off he or she will be educationally. Burton White has written a book entitled, *The First Three Years of Life*. In it he states that those years are the most crucial for your child’s educational development. If at all possible one parent should stay home with the child at least through their first 3 years of life. Then, on through childhood:

B. Spend Time Giving Personal Tutoring - Studies show that 2 hours of private instruction equals 8 hours of classroom instruction. This is one reason why home schooling is so successful. You should read books to your children as early as 2 or 3 years of age. You can enlist the help of others. I remember that when I was a child, I was having trouble with one or two subjects until my sister took the time to tutor me. So parents, if your time is limited, try to get an older brother or sister to tutor their younger siblings. Furthermore, even when you are not directly teaching them, listen to their questions and answer them the best you can. Do any of you have children that ask a lot of questions? Good! That is a great opportunity for teaching. But when mom and dad are both working full-time jobs, it’s very hard to give your children the time they need to develop educationally.

C. Allow and Encourage Creativity. Require them to play. Give them tools for creativity and role playing. Creative and educational toys are good. But while watching TV can be educational, it stifles creativity. It is too passive an activity. So limit their TV viewing.

D. Repeat Words of Wisdom – Jesus developed in wisdom. Mothers typically give advice and words of warning. Keep it up. The book of Proverbs is an excellent example of how parents are to impart wisdom to their children.

Children, you need to do your part. Listen to instruction. Do your homework. Ask questions.

II. ASSIST YOUR CHILD IN PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Notice in v.52 that “Jesus increased in ... stature....” If someone saw Him after several months, they might have said to Him, “My, you have grown!” And since Jesus grew up to become a carpenter, I have the idea that He grew up to become a strong man, with strong hands and arms. He was no weakling. During His ministry He walked miles and miles, and climbed

mountains to pray.

So what should you do to help your child grow up physically?

A. **Make Sure They Eat Right.** Children lack discretion. They choose food based on how it tastes, not on the basis of whether it is good for them. So help them to eat a good balanced diet, including fruits and vegetables. They need protein for muscle development, and calcium for bone development. They should not eat too many animal fats, sweets, and other processed carbohydrates. If your kids are drinking mostly soft drinks instead of milk, they are probably not getting enough calcium, and some soft drinks can even deplete calcium from the body. Listen, kids do not raise themselves very well. They need parental guidance & supervision. Yet in our fast-paced society, more and more of our children are getting diets of fast food and junk food.

What about a child who refuses to eat what you set before them? Some foods are just not tolerable, and it will not hurt to offer an alternative food that is healthy. I really did not like English peas as a child. They just about made me throw up. So knowing that, my mother did not serve them often. There are plenty of other green vegetables that I would eat. But if they will not eat it anything that is healthy, then take the plate away, wrap it up & put it away. Don't let them have anything else. When they get hungry enough, they will probably eat what you have served.

B. **Encourage Physical Activity & Exercise.** By nature, younger children have so much energy and they are usually very active. God made them that way, because that is an essential part of their physical development. However, more and more young children are not getting enough exercise because they are glued to the TV, video games, & the Internet. Don't let that happen to your children. Limit those activities. Then, by the time our children reach the teenage years, they tend to become less active. So we need to encourage participation in sports or other forms of exercise. Perhaps the best exercise is what you do together as a family.

Children, you need to do your part. Get out and play. Sign up for sports or other forms of physical activity.

III. ASSIST YOUR CHILD IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Notice that Jesus also gained "favor with God." He developed spiritually. Based on that Barna survey I referred to, 71% said children get inadequate spiritual training. Someone said, "Developing the mind is important, but developing a conscience is the most precious gift parents can give their children."³ A good conscience, and a proper fear of God, will give your child self-control. So let me encourage you to do the following:

A. **Developing Christian Character Should Be a Priority** - Too many parents put far more emphasis on their child's educational & physical development. However, your child's spiritual development is the right foundation for everything else. 1 Tim. 4:8 says, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." I also see this principle in 1 Sam. 16:7, "The LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" We put so much emphasis on physical attributes, but God looks on the heart? Does your child love God? Does he or she have a heart of obedience to God? That's what matters the

³ John Gray in "Quotable Quotes," *Readers Digest*.

most. And notice the principle found in 1 Pet. 3:3-5. There Christian women are instructed to resist the temptation of putting the main emphasis on outward beauty. Rather, they should focus on the “hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” So what should we do? In Eph. 6:4b we read that fathers, and no doubt mothers as well, are to bring up their children “in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Spiritual training and development are not to be neglected, but given a priority.

Now what happens when a parent puts physical, social, and educational development above their child’s spiritual development? Well they are telling their children that the Lord, His church, and His Word are not very important. Furthermore, if the Lord, His Word, and His church are not important to you, then your children will follow your example.

B. Teach Your Children Spiritual Truths and Values - Biblical instruction is to be given in the home. The church, Christian schools, and other organizations lend support, but God holds Christian parents responsible for the Christian training of their children. Dt. 6:6-7 says, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

This means, of course, that you need to learn the Word of God yourself. You need to read it & study it, both on your own, and in Sunday School and church. Then, you should teach your children directly from the Bible through family devotions. Cheryl and I used to read Bible story books to our children that had discussion questions at the end of each story. In 2 Tim. 3:15 Paul told Timothy “that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy was taught the Word of God from an early age by his mother and grandmother. Prov. 3:3-4 says, “Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.” That last phrase parallels part of our text.

The most effective means of securing a godly generation for the future is for parents to teach their children, and live consistent Christian lives. And that’s why Satan is so bent on destroying the home. It is the home that communicates values from one generation to the next. When you break up the family, or dramatically change the family, you disrupt the flow of values from the parents to the children. And that’s exactly what Satan and humanists want to do. The goal of atheistic and humanistic leaders is to get children away from their parents. Haven’t we seen that come to pass? They have expelled Bible reading & prayer from our local schools and replaced it with humanistic, relativistic values. It could get worse. State-run day care could be just around the corner, especially if a liberal is elected president! And if it is state-run, you can be sure it will be void of the Bible, prayer, and Christian values. The U.N. in 1959 put out a “Child’s Bill of Rights.” In it was written these words, “Day-care is a powerful institution...A day-care program that ministers to a child from 6 months to 6 years has over 8,000 hours to teach him values, fears, beliefs, and behaviors.” And I ask, “Who’s beliefs and behaviors?” Well, if it is state-run, they will not be God’s values!

I want you to think about this. If you rely on 2 hours/week of spiritual education in Sunday School and Church, think of how little they are getting. If your child is spending 30 hours/week in public education, they are getting no spiritual training there. If they watch TV and play video games 20-30 hours/week, they are probably getting very little spiritual training there.

The 20 hours a week older children & teens spend with their friends will include little or no spiritual training. So the vast majority of the week they are being exposed to very little spiritual training; instead, they are often getting messages that are contrary to the Christian message. So we need to do something to increase exposure to the Word of God, and decrease exposure to worldly messages. Parents, help your children develop spiritually.

C. Live Your Christian Convictions Consistently. Your children will learn more by observing your example than they will by listening to your words. Paul understood the power of a good example. He said in Phil. 4:9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do.” Paul not only taught by word, but also by example. Parents should do the same thing. And parents need constantly to be alert to every possible opportunity to relate the teaching of Scripture to life situations. When your children violate Scripture, you should be able to tell them what God’s Word says in each situation. For example, I’ve quoted to my children the command, “Pay no man evil for evil.” You should also look for opportunities to teach & reinforce positive commands of Scripture. When we teach Scripture this way, it seems more relevant, and less theoretical.

D. Be Thoroughly Involved as a Family in a Good Church - Heb. 10:25 says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another....” A new study just came out that says young children of churchgoing parents fare better behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively than do children of parents who never attend church. In fact, the more often the parents attend, the better off the kids are.

The study by sociologist John P. Bartkowski and a team of researchers at Mississippi State University examined data from the nationwide Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which evaluated first-graders by interviewing parents and teachers. Examining the ECLS data, Bartkowski and his team concluded it is “quite clear” that religious attendance impacts children positively. They said, “In many of the developmental domains featured here, the children who are doing the best are in households where both parents attend worship services frequently.”⁴ So bring your children to church on a regular basis. Enroll them in S.S., VBS, & our AWANA program.

E. Seek to bring your child to a saving knowledge of Christ at an early age. Again, 2 Tim. 3:15 says that “the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” We should teach our children the Word of God, including God’s law, so that they may realize that they are sinners in need of a Savior. The Word of God will show them what Jesus did to save them from their sins. Although he may be a good child, say his prayers, read his Bible, attend S.S. and church and always obey his parents, he still needs the Savior. Children do not grow into the family of God; they are born into it through the new birth. There must come a definite time when they pass from death unto life, when they receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior. Jn. 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” He needs the righteousness of Christ, not his self-righteousness. But the parents must exercise great care not to pressure the child too soon.

F. Pray for your child regularly. Prayer is an essential aspect of spiritual development.

⁴ <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=25549>, Posted on May 1, 2007 by Michael Foust.

Pray with your child also at bedtime, meal time, and other opportunities.

G. Lead them into Christian Service. The precious values of salvation are not to be selfishly enjoyed, but are to be passed on to others by faithful witnessing, deeds of kindness, and words of encouragement. Rick and Amy Brink have taught their children to serve the Lord. The family takes a turn cutting the grass here at church. Several of the children have helped out in S.S. and in our AWANA program.

Children, you need to do your part. Don't complain about coming to church. Read your Bible. Pray. Develop both a respect of God, and a love for God. Grow in "favor with God."

Finally, parents should:

IV. ASSIST YOUR CHILD IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Notice that Jesus also gained "favor with man." He was well rounded. He was not a strange super-spiritual "freak." He developed socially as well. People in the community thought well of Jesus. I'm sure He was polite when speaking to people. He had good manners. Even so, we need to teach our children to so live that they have favor with people outside the home. Christ was not anti-social, and neither should we be anti-social. Being a dedicated Christian should not turn you into a social freak or oddball.

Now I think that spiritual development is foundational for social development. The Bible is the best guidebook on how to relate to others. So with that in mind, consider some guidelines for proper social development.

A. Love Your Child Unconditionally - Before a child will grow to love others, he must first feel loved. John said in 1 Jn. 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." With that foundation, he wrote in the next verse, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The foundation for being able to love others is to know that we are loved by God. Your child should also feel that he is loved unconditionally by his parents. So constantly guard against a very real danger of giving the impression that your love for your child is in proportion to his obedience or performance. We must convey love and acceptance. Jesus said in Mt. 18:5, "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me." Don't say, "Daddy won't love you if you do that!" And don't make them feel like they are a bother and a nuisance. *And be sure* to show your love in word and deed, as John said in 1 Jn. 3:18. Our love is conveyed by what we say and what we do. Does our child see our love for him by our behavior? A child is far more affected by our actions than by our words. Now we convey our love for our children in three ways:

1. Eye Contact and Focused Attention - Get down on their level and give them some eye contact. And don't let the only time that you give them eye contact be the times that you are getting on to them. Give your children focused attention. This is giving a child our full, undivided attention in such a way that he feels without doubt that he is completely loved, and that he is important. This is vital to the child's development of self-esteem, and it profoundly affects a child's ability to relate to and love others. TV, toys, etc. are no substitute for this attention we personally give them. We mustn't let ourselves get too busy to do this. Of course, a homemaker can do this much better than a working mother.

2. Physical Contact - Young children need to be hugged and kissed and held. And older children need it also, though in a different form. Pre-adolescent girls need hugs from their

father to give them a good self-image. And older teenage boys need some contact too, like putting your arm around their shoulder, or wrestling, etc.

3. Discipline - The Bible clearly teaches that one way we show our love is by caring enough to discipline. Jesus said in Rev. 3:19, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Parents who do not care about their children let them get away with all kinds of bad behavior. So insist on obedience, and make sure that a failure to obey has consequences. Give your child the security of knowing that there are boundaries. And discipline should start early. As someone has said, "The time to teach obedience is the playpen, not the state pen."⁵

This leads to the next word of advice in helping your child to develop socially:

B. Don't Let Your Child Be a Brat - A child is selfish by nature, and parents have a responsibility to help them become less selfish. So one of the best things you can do for a child is break their selfish will. The will of the child must be freed from the imprisoning slavery of selfishness. Selfishness is a great barrier to inter-personal relationships. One who is spoiled by getting his own way will have a hard time in life because he has not learned how to get along with others, and does not know how to accept responsibility.

The self-will is first asserted in a conscious way at a very early age, and the sooner you break them of that self-will, the better. A good rule to go by is to never give a child what he is crying for or pitches a fit for. Cheryl and I tried to follow that rule. Don't give in to temper tantrums. That will help cure them of being a cry baby. On the other hand, if a child pitches a temper tantrum, and you give in to them, then you can be sure that they will keep it up, not only at home, but also a school, and with their friends.

C. Set a Good Example in Your Social Dealings – Be polite. Use good manners. Avoid the use of angry and hostile words (Eph. 4:31). By your example you will be teaching your children to relate this way socially.

D. Teach Social Responsibility – For example, when your child agrees to sign up for a team sport, they have a responsibility to attend practices and games. They are to be taught that they are not to let their team down by going to King's Dominion when they should be at their game.

E. Give Your Child Responsibilities at Home – They should have some chores. As they get older, let him earn & manage money. This will help prepare him for life.

Conclusion: Mary, the mother of Jesus, was no doubt a good mother. I hope you will follow her example and help your children develop spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially.

Parents, I hope you will commit yourself to being the best parent possible. Ask God for strength. Ask God for guidance. Ask God for patience.

Parent, have you trusted in Christ as your Savior? You are not going to lead your children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ if you have not made that commitment in your own life. We may have some parents here who need to join this church. That will be a good example to your children.

⁵ *Church Quotes*, August 2005, Illus.#C-1381]

Sources: Ross Campbell, *How To Really Love Your Child* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); Lightner-Laing, *Success In Family Living* (Denver, CO: B/P Publications, 1977); John MacArthur, Jr., *Family Feuding: How to End It: Study Notes on Ephesians 5:21-6:4* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles Swindoll, *You And Your Child* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977); Norman Williams, *The Christian Home* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1952). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).