

A photograph of a woman and a young child looking upwards in a field of tall grass. The woman is on the right, smiling broadly, and the child is on the left, pointing upwards. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass under a bright sky.

SACRED BEGINNINGS
Child Dedication

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The greatest legacy you will leave your child is the memory of a home in which *God's will* has been obeyed, *God's Word* is loved, and *God's day* is honored.

Loving parents naturally want their children's lives to be healthy, wholesome, and prosperous. Those who have committed their lives to Christ understand these blessings are only released by following God's ways. Jesus said that, ". . . My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10)."¹ That is why parents can leave no greater heritage for their children than to ensure that they are grounded in Christ: the source of true life! That grounding takes place from the moment children are conceived. Parental influence is powerful. It outweighs all else in shaping children's lives. God planned it that way.

God instituted the family from the very beginning when He created both male and female—not a solitary individual, but two people (Genesis 1:27). Though each unique, the two are nevertheless "one" (Genesis 2:24), carrying the imprint of God. When God made man and woman in His own image, He created a marriage, a family.

"Family" is a word that is rooted in God: God is Father—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Himself, God is a "divine family." We see this in the way that God relates to people throughout the Bible. God reveals this "family" aspect of His nature in various ways: God is our Father, God is Husband to His people, God is like a nurturing Mother, and Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church.²

The believing family is a reflection of the divine—its identity, life, and power come from God. Having children, for believers, is a response to God's words of blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28 NKJV). Yet, raising children according to God's way is no easy task. The responsibilities of parenting can be overwhelming. Parenting is a charge that only God can give, only Jesus can fully model, and only the Holy Spirit can help parents to do effectively.

The good news is that God is on our side! He has established safety within godly homes and marriages, insulating them from the erosion of a world system that is set on wearing them down and breaking them apart. This protective covering starts with dedicating our lives and our children to Him.

¹ All texts, unless otherwise noted, are from the NLT.

² See Isaiah 9:6; 54:5; 62:4; 63:16; 66:12-13; Hosea 2:19; Matthew 5:16; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2.

WHAT IS CHILD DEDICATION?

Dedication is a celebration in which a person or a thing is consecrated, or set apart, to God's service. In biblical times, many different things were included in these dedication ceremonies: the temple (2 Chronicles 2:4), a field (Leviticus 27:16), a house (Leviticus 27:14), articles of precious metal (2 Samuel 8:10), even spoils won in battle (1 Chronicles 26:27).

In one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture, Elkanah and Hannah presented their young son, Samuel, to God in an act of child dedication (1 Samuel 1:19-28). Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving to God (1 Samuel 2:1-10) is a wonderful model of praise and dedication for all who seek to honor Him through their lives. This is the same thing that Joseph and Mary did when they presented Jesus in the temple as an infant (Luke 2:27).³

Based on these biblical truths, child dedication is a public declaration by Christian parents—to God and their local congregation—stating that they are surrendering their child for His purpose and His will. It is a commitment to *stewardship parenting*, which will be covered later in this reader. It is also an invitation to the church to come alongside parents. The church is called to encourage parents in the nurturing role of raising their child to lead a godly life. This is why child dedication is all about relationship not ritual.

The dedication ceremony is a time to publicly pray for and bless the child, much like Jesus did in Mark 10:16 when “He took the children in His arms and placed His hands on their heads and blessed them.” It is also a time for the parents to commit, in front of witnesses, to guide their child towards a personal relationship with Christ. More about what is intended in the dedication ceremony is included below.

ARE INFANT BAPTISM AND CHILD DEDICATION THE SAME THING?

The heart and motivation of believing parents who practice either infant baptism or child dedication are often the same; yet their belief in what is accomplished is quite different. The sheer fact that parents are coming to God with their child, whether for infant baptism or child dedication, indicates they are making a commitment to lead their family in His ways. Essentially, they are saying in front of witnesses, “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Those who practice infant baptism often do so because they believe that at that moment one receives forgiveness of sin and is given a new nature. Many other believers find no reasonable biblical or historical evidence that this is the case, as forgiveness of sin is based on faith in Jesus Christ alone. Scripture is clear that water baptism is the symbolic and public confession of a commitment to follow Christ in His death (our death to sin) and His resurrection (our being

³ The dedication of Jesus had further implications—it was a fulfillment of the Old Testament law as He was the firstborn son (see Exodus 13:2, 12; Luke 2:23).

raised to new life in Him). It conveys the truth that we, who are born again, are dead to the past and alive in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is an act of obedience, faith, and unity with Jesus.

Based on this biblical understanding of baptism, we follow the scriptural example of dedication. We encourage parents to dedicate their child when he or she is a baby. However, if a child is older and has never been dedicated, we believe it is still important and are happy to help desiring parents to do so. At whatever age dedication occurs, we then encourage the parents to lead their child toward a personal conscious faith at the earliest age possible, before taking the step of obedient baptism with understanding.⁴

DOES CHILD DEDICATION ENSURE SALVATION AND A PLACE IN HEAVEN?

Scripture makes it clear that salvation is based on one thing: that we **believe** in Christ!

- John 3:16: “For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who **believes** in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”
- Acts 2:21: “But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
- Acts 4:11-12: “For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”
- Acts 16:31: “They replied, ‘**Believe** in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.’”
- Romans 10:9: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **believe** in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

As salvation is based on faith in Christ alone, the act of dedication does not make a child a Christian. Rather, dedication is a point of beginning: an act of sacred trust. To dedicate a child is to “devote him or her” to the Lord “as long as he or she lives.” We see this clearly illustrated in the account of Samuel’s life. Elkanah and Hannah, Samuel’s parents, in an act of dedication say:

*“Now I am giving him to the Lord,
and he will belong to the Lord his whole life . . .”*

1 Samuel 1:28

Samuel was taught by Eli the priest and ministered in the house of God (1 Samuel 2:18). As a young child, Samuel grew “in favor with the Lord and with the people” (1 Samuel 2:26). Later, however, we see that “Samuel did not yet know the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:7). Throughout the rest of this chapter, we find that God revealed Himself to Samuel, who then responded with faith, making a personal, conscious decision to follow God.

⁴ For more on water baptism, see the reader *Sacred Beginnings: Water Baptism*, by Pastor Marty Walker, The Sanctuary, Santa Clarita, CA, 2011.

This gives insight into the significance and power of child dedication. When Elkanah and Hannah presented Samuel, they released him to God. As parents, they recognized that Samuel was a gift from God and willingly gave him back as if he was never theirs in the first place. They also understood that God's plan for Samuel's life was bigger than their own; and that He was able to both keep Samuel and to complete His work in Samuel's life (Philippians 1:6). Their faith-filled act did not ensure Samuel's salvation; rather it paved the way and made room for it.

WHAT IS THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE IN CHILD DEDICATION?

Elkanah and Hannah show us the proper perspective that is needed in child dedication. The foundation is the recognition that your child belongs to God first. He created your child.

"Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from Him."

Psalm 127:3

When you look at your child it would be right to say: "This is God's child. This child has come out of the Unseen.⁵ This child has been born into a sinful world, for which Jesus died and came to save. This child is called by grace to the inheritance of eternal life. God's desire for this child is that he or she would grow to love Him and live for Him."

Dedication loses its meaning if you are not ready to recognize God's right to your child. Once your child is released, you must regularly keep in mind that he or she has been given to God and you are now *stewards*. This may counter your expectations on your child, your dreams for your child, or speak to your fears about your child. As parents, you volunteer for the purpose and pleasure God chooses to make of your child's life. In this you relinquish control, trusting God for your child, and acknowledging the gift and responsibility of loving stewardship over him or her.

WHY IS DEDICATION SO SIGNIFICANT?

Every moment you, as a parent, will make decisions (disciplines and instructions) that affect the developing character of your child. The parenting wisdom of the day teaches children that they are the center; that life is about their desires and dreams, that approval is everything or that life is ultimately about getting what they want immediately. You need, more than ever, the grace, power, and wisdom of God to counter this onslaught of worldly reasoning.

Dedication provides the opportunity for you to come in prayer with one of the greatest requests you will ever bring: "Lord, help me to be Your kind of parent; the kind of parent that meets with Your approval." Ask for the ability to bring your child up with the discipline and instruction that comes from Him (Ephesians 6:4). Dedication is agreeing with God's Word that His desires matter most, that His plans and His ways are higher than yours (Isaiah 55:9),

⁵ Unseen or Invisible, which is a name for God. See 1 Timothy 1:17 and Hebrews 11:27.

and that He is building a godly legacy in your family when you put Him as the primary focus of your actions and desires.

Dedication is significant because it is the moment you offer yourself and your child entirely to God. This involves sacrifice. It means full and complete surrender—a cutting away. At the dedication of Jesus (Luke 2), the full weight of this is seen in Mary. It was there that Simeon, a righteous and devout man who eagerly waited for the Messiah, took Jesus in his arms. First, Simeon praised God and then he prophetically spoke that Jesus would be the Savior. Finally, he blessed Joseph and Mary, ending with these words directly to Mary: “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but He will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose Him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul” (vv. 34-35). We know in hindsight what this meant: the opposition to Jesus would reach its climax at the Cross and Mary would experience piercing anguish.

However, Mary could not have possibly understood the full implications of this word. Over and over again, she would remember what the angel spoke to her: “He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David. And He will reign over Israel forever; His Kingdom will never end” (Luke 1: 22-23). She would also remember the words of Simeon. Both indicated that Jesus was not her own. He was the Son of God and the plans of His life were not hers to control. She simply, and wonderfully, would play a significant part—she and Joseph were charged with His upbringing.

Are you willing to parent your child as if he or she were God’s and not yours? Are you ready to raise your child according to His plans and not your own? Will you allow God to use your child’s life to His glory in whatever manner He proposes to use? Are you ready to come and give what is most dear to you? If so, then you are ready for *stewardship* parenting.

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP PARENTING?

It is humbling and sobering to realize that God holds parents responsible for the upbringing of their child—not grandparents, schools, the state, youth groups, peers, or friends. Although each of these groups may influence the child, at the end of the day it is the final responsibility of the parent. You have a major part to play, a great responsibility! God has appointed you as a gatekeeper over your child’s life.

In ancient times the gates were established for protection and security. They were also the place of power and authority—the seat of counsel, training, commerce, and strategy for combat. Jesus said, “. . . and upon this rock I will build my Church, and all the powers (gates) of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18). God’s purpose in building His Church is to break the evil hold on these arenas of life, which hell pursues in order to bring confusion and destruction. A gatekeeper must engage in spiritual battle because the enemy is sure to attack.

You are not strong enough in and of yourself to fight this inevitable battle and win. The odds are too great. However, when you have given your child to the Lord you can face all upcoming attacks with supreme confidence. Why? The answer lies in the fact that you have dedicated your child *to the Lord*. A true heaven-and-earth relationship has been established: you are the servants and He is the Master. Therefore, you become “more than conquerors through Him” (Romans 8:37).

Raising a child will bring you to the brink time and again, but dedication will also see you through! When Satan harasses you and makes it appear that your child, in later years, is heading down a wrong path, you can stand on the contract between yourself and the Lord that “As long my child lives, he or she is given to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:28). In doing so, you trust God for His strength, which is great enough to sustain you and to preserve your child (2 Timothy 1:12).

In this confidence, when an obstacle presents itself in your child’s life, you can truly say, “I’m certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6). In the meantime you can continue to faithfully disciple your child.

Without this spiritual understanding, you are essentially on your own, dependent upon human skill and your approach to parenting alone. But with this assurance in God, you can have a foundation—an unshakable faith in the truth of His Word.

*But God’s truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription:
“The Lord knows those who are His . . .”*

2 Timothy 2:19

“Bringing up” a child is more than providing food and clothes. You are called to protect, train, and nurture. In fact, you are responsible for your child’s nourishment. You are not called to change your child’s nature, which only an act of God can do. However, you can *nurture* that nature.

Nourishment comes in the right environment and understanding. An atmosphere that is full of destructive criticism, unrealistic expectations, sarcasm, intimidation, and fear will “provoke your child to anger” (Ephesians 6:4). When this is the climate of a home, no sound teaching can take place. However, an atmosphere that is rich in encouragement, tenderness, patience, listening, and love provides a sure foundation. In such a climate, you can build into the life of your child a precious knowledge of God. This is the difference that is seen in healthy Christian families.

DISCIPLESHIP PARENTING

It is not the will of God for young lives to be wounded or broken. You are called to raise a child in a godly way, in the soil of understanding and gentle care. This is completely opposite of yanking your child out of the ground and forcing

what looks like growth, simply for the sake of appearance. To properly grow, it takes years of cultivation and attention.

Scripture declares that you know “the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6 NKJV). You will if you are vitally connected to God and His Word, for the purpose of personal discipleship. This is known as discipleship parenting. It is leading your child by example (James 1:22-25). Without God’s Word functioning in your life, you are without chart or compass in setting a course for your child. If you are growing in His Word, you will understand the way for your child and lead him or her in it, with all that God grants to you in knowledge and wisdom (James 1:5).

Without God’s Word functioning in your life, you are without chart or compass in setting a course for your child.

It will take discernment, courage, and determination. Again, this is why dedication is so important. It affirms that, like Jesus, your constant cry is: “I want Your will to be done, not mine” (Matthew 26:39). You commit to raise a family that submits its own plans to God’s will. In that is great safety. God’s will, coupled with your discipleship, determine the right pattern and path of your child’s life.

You are to steward your child’s life as God reproduces the character of Jesus Christ in him or her. Jesus modeled the maturation-training course: “Even though Jesus was God’s Son, He learned obedience from the things He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). God will use you as a stake to which your child is braced, as he or she matures and is trained through the storms of life. This means that through you, your child is to learn to love well, to worship well, to give well, and even to suffer well. Therefore, at dedication, commit yourself to be a godly example for your child by faithfully following God.

This is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and He indeed is there as your Helper, Counselor, and Guide. Never doubt the Holy Spirit’s desire to help you in your parenting task!

“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.

He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard.

He will tell you about the future.

He will bring Me glory by telling you whatever He receives from Me.

All that belongs to the Father is Mine; this is why I said,

“The Spirit will tell you whatever He receives from Me.”

John 16:13-15

Stewardship parenting requires the discipline of following God’s ways. As believers, this is the requirement in extending the privilege and honor of parenthood.

“And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.”

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

WHAT IS INTENDED IN THE DEDICATION CELEBRATION?

The entire celebration should be clothed with a spirit of respect and humility—so that it does not miss the mark but rather aligns to God’s Word and will for His people.

The task that you have undertaken is a sacred trust, a divine partnership. Dedication is meant to be infinitely more than just an opportunity to “introduce” your church family to your new infant. In such moments, you need all the help that the church can give. You stand before the altar of God and acknowledge: “Oh God! I cannot of myself or by myself accomplish Your eternal mission for this child’s life; but with Your help it could and will be done.” It is a moment of supreme dedication, not just of the child but you as well.

It is primarily a public declaration of responsibility for you, involving desire and gratitude. So, you come to the altar of God in such a moment in a new, significant sense. The responsibility of parenting is forever. It can never be erased. It must live with you day and night.

That’s why this dedication celebration is also intended to mark the difference in parental living. The striving for spiritual goals in your home becomes much more intense from now on. At this moment, it is fitting that you come with your child, because you are coming to seek help for the experiences that lie ahead.

The fact that you come forward, in the sight of witnesses, is a personal declaration. It signifies your faith in the Christian way of life. It affirms that you cannot raise a child on your own strength. God does not ask you to. You need help, and you approach the dedication to ask for and secure that help.

In this celebration there is commitment and consecration. Prayer is offered and blessing is given. God honors hearts who come before Him in such a way and releases all the resources of heaven. He never forsakes those who love and seek Him (Psalm 9:2; Hebrews 13:5).

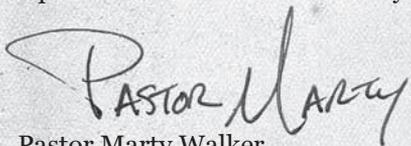
CONCLUSION

Parenting is a great responsibility, but it comes with a promise! There is a reward given to a faithful steward. If any person is meant to be a steward, a parent is at the top of the list. Many professing adults are far more careful to render an account of their taxes than they are of their homes and families. Unfortunately for those many, there will be a full audit and they will come up lacking. But for all who follow God’s ways, the outcome is blessing, peace, and joy (Hebrews 12:11).

The greatest legacy you will leave your child is the memory of a home in which God's will has been obeyed, God's Word loved, and God's day honored. This legacy, established by a lifetime and lifestyle dedicated to a pursuit of God, will likely see *your* child providing the same for *his or her* child as well.

At the time of dedication, you enter a partnership that places, at your disposal, all the resources of Heaven. It is up to your initiative to use them. But they are there! This dedication will be your first step in affirming your commitment to build a godly legacy that will extend to your child's child, and the generations to come.

Under God, it is a parent's gift to help lead a child to be like Jesus. For a parent who has fulfilled this responsibility, these words will be music to the ears: "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). There is no equal reward this side of eternity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Marty Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Marty Walker
The Sanctuary 2012

ADDENDUM

If you have any further questions or would like to schedule a child dedication at The Sanctuary, please do not hesitate to call the church office at 661-252-7255 and talk to our Pastor of Care Ministries.

At The Sanctuary we use vows—typically exchanged by a pastor and parents during Sunday Celebration Services—much like those in a marriage ceremony, to publicly communicate the nature of what dedication is all about. The vows are a declaration and invitation (by the dedicating family), to God and to their community of faith, for guidance and direction in the raising of their child. The following is an example of these dedication vows:

Parental Covenant

Parents, do you recognize your child as God's gift to your home?

And as you return this gift in dedication today, will you dedicate yourselves before the Lord, accepting your responsibility for the life God has entrusted to your care?

Will you earnestly seek God's help and protection in nurturing your child in the knowledge and understanding of the Lord, His Word, and His great love for your child?

As we present your child in dedication today, do you understand that your action declares you are willing to have God take full possession of your son/daughter, allowing the Lord to use his/her life for His glory?

If this is your desire, please agree by responding: **"By God's grace, Amen."**



**WE GROW
A COMMUNITY
OF MATURE LIVES
ONE AT A TIME
BY FIRST UNDERSTANDING,
THEN HELPING EACH PERSON
FULLY EMBRACE
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TRUTH**



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