

How can I best support my adult children?

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Julie Lythcott-Haims' (PIC) in her book *How to Raise an Adult* tells this story on pg. 110: In 2005 a young man named Richard graduated from an Ivy League college and two years out of college was on the fast track at a prestigious New York investment bank. He made \$250,000 annually - it was right before the 2008 crash - and worked extremely long hours. Richard's mother, Jan, thought to herself that, pay aside, Richard was being worked *too* hard. So Jan did something sleuthing and found the fairly well-concealed landline number for Richard's boss, and called him up on weekend to complain. The boss was polite but was seething inside. When Richard came to work on Monday, instead of being permitted to enter the bank of elevators that soar to the skyscraper's top, the security guard handed him a cardboard box containing the personal items from his desk. On top of the box was the note: *Ask your mother.*

Jan made a mistake trying to support her adult son. Have you ever made a parenting mistake? I sure have; countless times. Don't be bashful; raise your hand if you've ever made a bad decision as a parent. Every parent makes bad decisions. Stop kicking yourself, my brothers and sisters. I'm well aware that some of you live in a constant state of guilt over the mistakes that you've made and the since you've committed in your parenting. Jesus Christ covers every parenting sin you've ever made and the grace of Jesus Christ is more than enough to overcome the mistakes we make. You do not help your children by kicking yourself for your parenting sins. You do not atone for your parenting sins by punishing yourself. In fact, by living in guilt for your parenting blunders and trying to atone for past sins you tell your kids and everybody else who's watching that the blood of Jesus Christ isn't enough. But it is, praise God!

Parenting is hard. It's hard to know what to do and when to do it. I'll never forget leaving St. John's Hospital just outside of St. Paul, MN. It was May of 2001 and Korby had just performed the amazing feat of giving birth to our first born son. I had recently turned 24 in March; Korby was 25. As we were packing our stuff, I had a moment of disbelief: "They're not going to let us leave with a baby, are they? Surely, they know I don't know what I'm doing! How come they haven't given me the instruction manual yet?" I was floored at how unprepared and ill-equipped I felt.

I still feel that way. Unprepared. Ill-equipped. The question asked of me is, "How can I best support my adult children?" How should I know?! I've never raised adult children; so I don't have success stories to share. But this church is filled with parents of adult children who can offer you empathy and advice. We have godly moms and dads who've walked with their 20 somethings, early 30 somethings and beyond and they can encourage you and give you advice concerning the challenges of supporting adult children. So, let me challenge you: if you're looking for some wisdom and advice in parenting however old your children might be, find a couple who's been there, whom you admire, and ask for advice. Humble yourself; ask them,

“What did you do? What seemed to pay off?” And then, more often than not, take the advice. Humility doesn’t just listen to advice, humility takes advice a lot, too.

I don’t have the experience, but I do have the word of God. At the end of our sermon today I’ll remind you of a few things that we all should be doing to help our children; I say “remind” because I don’t think they will be all that new. But God has led me to one big, overarching word of encouragement and instruction from the scriptures that I pray He will use to help you encourage and support your adult children. If you are parents of minor children, pay attention; don’t check out. You will hear plenty of info that you can implement in your parenting now to help your children when they are adults.

To begin, it’s important to remind ourselves of good, biblical theology concerning the structure of a home, the nature of a parent-child relationship to answer this question: how can I best support my adult children? The scriptures are clear: a man and his wife are to multiply and fill the earth if God permits them to do so (Gen. 1). The act of procreation is an amazing gift and responsibility that God has given a couple and God absolutely holds them responsible in how they raise, support, teach and empower their children; parenting requires sacrifice like little else does. And because of this high calling, responsibility and sacrifice, children are given a mandate from the Lord to honor, to respect, to obey their mother and their father. (Ex. 20:12) “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Col. 3:20), “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” A husband and his wife are entrusted by God with the function and management of a household, and dependent children are to respect that calling from God and obey the authority of his father and mother. So, children still at home (and we’ll talk about the difference between kids at home and adult kids no longer at home), obey and respect your parents. This God’s command for you.

But then, something happens. A child matures more and more so as to not need the care, instruction and protection of his parents. That happens little by little over the course of years culminating at a time when he becomes his own man; she becomes her own woman. The child is now an adult. And, as often is the case, becoming adult means assuming adult responsibilities. One’s own home, one’s own job, own car, own clothing, own health insurance, own pets, own bills, own bosses to deal with and on and on, right? In many cases, adult children find a spouse of their own and begin having children of their own. So, here’s what takes place: when a child progresses into adulthood a new household is formed under the responsibility of the Lord. Whether that’s a single young man or woman renting an apartment or purchasing her first home, or if that’s a young couple beginning their married life with children soon to follow. These adult children now become responsible to God themselves in how he or she now establishes her or her own home. It’s not that they don’t need their parents anymore (they obviously still do, including the help of the family of God), but the help is different; it’s no longer as an dependent, obedient child, but now as a fellow adult responsible to the Lord.

That’s one of the big challenges of parenting, isn’t it? Slowly letting go, slowly helping children become more and more independent while they are still at home and are dependent on mom and dad so that one day they can be successfully accountable to the Lord. I can vividly

remember watching my boys learning how to tie their shoes or cut their meat; there was a part of me that wanted to keep doing it. I can do it better; it's taking too long; you're not doing it right were thoughts that ran through my mind. Cooking food, earning their own money, learning to wash their own clothes and cleaning their own toilets. Negotiating their own busy schedule with their teachers, coaches and bosses, resolving their own conflict with other people and the millions of other challenges they face are things children need to learn how to do on their own. Parents guide, teach and instruct, but eventually they must discern when to step back and let their children do it on their own before God and with his help. But it's hard to know when that should happen; every kid is different. And for some, letting go is hard because of what parenting has become to them, not because it's particularly hard for a child.

Why is it important to talk about these things? Because God has different expectations for adults and children. And if we don't know God's expectations for our children whether they live at home or whether they are adults, then we can not support and encourage them appropriately. I think there is a level of truth in the generality that I'm about to share (so it's not completely right, but it's right in a whole lot of ways): Children who live at home, who are still in elementary, Jr. high or High school, God doesn't expect much more of you than obeying your parents. Really! If you obey your parents in the Lord you are doing very well! But God has more expectations for adults. And that means then that when a child progresses from childhood to adulthood, God's expectations change. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Thess. 4. Paul begins this chapter by giving some instruction on how to live a life that pleases the Lord. He says in vs. 1 "walk and please God" more and more. And then he tells this church how to do that. Be pure in your sexual lives is the first thing he talks about. He then addresses the brotherly love they should have for one another. In the next breath he moves onto how followers of Jesus should conduct their lives in public; how they should live "before outsiders." Let's get a running start in the middle of vs. 10 (READ vs. 10b-12).

Do you see the expectations in those last two verses? "Work with your hands," meaning, get busy with your bodies and do hard work to make a living. And work in such a way so you're dependent on no one. Now, let me say something briefly about work and welfare as there's a connection here. Followers of Jesus should be the happiest of people to help others in need. Friends, we should be known to be eager to find ways and systems and solutions to help people whose hands don't work well to earn a living. Followers of Jesus should also not be bashful in asking for help if their hands don't work. The gospel has taught us to humbly ask and receive help when we need it with gratitude in our hearts to God. Finally, though, followers of Jesus should be the hardest working bunch on the planet. If it is possible for followers of Jesus to use their own hands, feet, minds and mouths to earn their own living, they should be eager to do that so that we are not dependent on anyone. Not because there's shame to be dependent on someone if God has decided to limit the effectiveness of our hands, but because there is great shame to be dependent on another when God has given us hands and feet that do work just fine. God doesn't promise us our dream job, dream compensation plan or dream benefits. He promises to provide our needs and he does that principally by providing us with hands that can get work done that earns a paycheck. There is no shame whatsoever if you pay your bills and

cover your expenses in what our world might consider or call demeaning work, but there is great shame in refusing to take a job because you don't like it or because it conflicts with your hobbies and remaining dependent on others. Even unbelievers know they must work, pay for their bills and provide for their dependents.

Parents, I really believe one of the best ways you can support your adult children is to encourage and expect them to step into these expectations so as to live properly before outsiders and give glory to God by their hard work. I think adult children are hurt when they are shielded from assuming the godly responsibilities that adulthood brings. When parents treat adult children like they are pre-pubescent children, needy and unable to do things for themselves with the hands God has given them, we shield our children from the very responsibilities God has called them to assume robbing them the opportunity to grow and honor God with their lives. Get this: almost every child will have to learn how to do it without you. Sadly, some of us have to deal with the horror of our children passing away before us, but not most of us. Most of us will depart from this earth with our children saying goodbye to us. And then they will be on their own and God will hold them accountable for how well they represent him in this world. And if they are unable or unwilling to do that which even unbelieving people know to do, take care of their responsibilities and be dependent on no one, God will hold them (and us) accountable.

Children (young children and adult children) must learn how to manage life on their own with the grace of God (and here's some great news: God has made them to be trained and prepared to do it). And interfering or hindering that is a parental mistake we need to change.

Failing to allow our children to grow into responsibility by overparenting and hovering causes psychological damage to our children. Dr. Madeline Levine is a psychologist and researcher who has spent much of her professional life studying the influence of parenting on children. And she sees a direct correlation between the psychological struggles of anxiety, depression and worry to overparenting. She says that.

1. when we do for our kids what they can already do for themselves;
2. when we do for our kids what they can almost do for themselves; and
3. when our parenting behavior is motivated by our own ego,

we can damage the psychological well-being of our children.

How so? How does that happen. Here's how: When we intervene in our children's lives and guard and keep them from managing the problems and issues of the world that they can or almost can manage on their own, we are teaching them, "You can't handle this. You need my help. You're going to make an irredeemable mistake." We are teaching them, "You can't do this without me" and if I could add a Christian component to this, "God hasn't equipped you to manage this with his help." Consequently, then, when our children face problems and challenges that require resourcefulness, problem solving skills, conflict management and resilience, they don't have them and buckle under the weight of the challenges.

What does that mean? What should do for our adult children? Let me give you some ideas. First, don't do for them what they can do for themselves. Don't pay their bills when they can pay their bills. Don't make their appointments when they can make their appointments. Don't wash their clothes when they can wash their own clothes. It's one thing to offer your children a gift on a special occasion, but it's another thing to develop the habit of assuming responsibility for something your adult children can manage on their own. Don't do for them what they can (and should) do on their own.

Secondly, if they can almost do something (or should be able to do something) don't just do it for them, teach them how to do it and then back off. Teach them the life skills that they need. Julie Lythcott-Haims has a simple formula; here it is:

- First, we do it for the child
- Then, we do it with the child
- Then, we watch the child do it.
- Finally, they do it on their own completely independent of us.

That takes discipline and intentionality. Train them well, but then let them be. If we parents stay hovering, constantly interfering and "helping," our children do not learn the life skills they need to learn; they must learn how to manage conflict, manage relationships, handle money, be responsible on their own; that means they must do it on their own. Yes, always with the help of God and with the prayers of parents, but without the ongoing motherly or fatherly influence that keeps kids dependent on parents rather than dependent on God (that's the key).

Now, I know that sometimes there are special circumstances or disabilities that require us parents to be more involved than we want to be. Physical or mental disabilities, drug use, pregnancy and depression are just some examples of significant challenges where parents might rightfully help and intervene more than we want. What I would say though is that it's still right and good for us to keep the main goal in sight; helping prepare our children to live into the responsibilities that God is calling them into in spite of the challenges. With God's grace, you can make it as a single mom and we are going to help you learn to be responsible for you and your child. Depression is not a life-sentence to remain tethered to mom and dad; God has provided help for us to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Addiction can be overcome by the Spirit's help and sobriety is achievable. There are many disabled individuals that have learned life skills to live on their own with a helpful support network around them. Of course, these are really hard circumstances and the people of God should be helpful, sympathetic and patient as families navigate these challenging waters.

Can I give two words of encouragement to every parent out there. First, look to give space for your children to assume responsibility. If your child is 8 and they're struggling with friends on the playground, don't just try and fix the problem by ringing another kids neck, teach your child what it means to trust in God, to be a good friend and then give them space to do it. Don't be like Jan and call you children's boss or supervisor or professor and play their lawyer.

Teach them what it looks like to be a godly person in the midst of these challenges and then give them the space to do it.

Secondly, pray. Pray like you've never prayed before. Elijah was just like you; a normal human being, but he prayed and it stopped raining for 3.5 years. What mountains might be moved in our children's life if we would pray fervently and faithfully to the Lord?

There's obviously so much that could and should be said and like I inferred earlier in the message, there are many wiser and more experienced people than me when it comes to this subject, so please seek out help.

#### Questions for the week

- How important is the structure and design of the home?
- What can the church do to support parents of adult children?
- What was the most important or impactful thing you heard today?