

Becoming a Parent

Opening Prayer

O God, you are the giver of all we possess, the source of all our blessings. I thank you and praise for calling me to share in your act of creation and nurture as I become a parent. Help me respond to this call with my whole heart, my whole mind, my whole spirit. Amen.

Scripture Theme

Just as Paul wrote to the Philippians, so too God says to new parents: *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart* (Philippians 1:6-7).

Introduction

At certain times in your life you may have carried the assumption that God calls you *once*, for just one purpose. Don't miss the call, or you might spend the remainder of your days in meaningless mediocrity. In reality, it is safe to say that God calls us many times throughout the seasons of our lives, and each call challenges us to stretch further than we might have anticipated or imagined.

Responding to the call of parenting may not be your first response to God's call, but it is surely one of the most meaningful and powerful. You brought home this amazing, beautiful, bundle of joy, and this child is entrusted to your nurture and care and eventual upbringing. Truly an awesome privilege that may fill you with joy, wonderment, and humility. And truly an awesome responsibility that may fill you with anxiety, fear, and hesitancy.

Hopefully, this new vocation will bring your great joy, but as you embrace it, there is no question that it will drive you to seek deeper meaning from it. Allow the big questions to ruminate in your heart and mind:

- ◆ How do I love this child enough?
- ◆ What do I most want to pass on to this child?
- ◆ How will we face challenges and difficulties?
- ◆ Will I lose myself in this child?
- ◆ How do we become a genuine, authentic family?
- ◆ What about faith and religious practice for my child, my family, myself?

Congratulations! You are called to be a parent. You likely have some anxiety, and a whole lot of wonderment for how this is going to go. One thing is certain. As you respond to this call, you will discover an aspect of God that you have not seen or experienced before. Place your trust in God, say 'yes' to the call as best you can, and give it your all.

What's Changing?

This call surely means one of the biggest changes you will ever experience in your life. Becoming a parent is huge, and the adage "*This changes everything*" is apt. In his book *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges writes that transitions always start with an ending. Seems odd, yes, but he maintains that the first step toward a life change is identifying what you are losing and learning how to manage the losses.

Consider

Even if parenthood has, so far, come easily to you, the adjustments required during the year following the birth of your first child is often greatly underestimated, and yet must be accommodated.

Emotions can be raw and vulnerable. Many new moms experience post-partum depression. Deep sadness can well-up for no apparent reason and can lead to doubts and struggle. Dads, too, can experience sadness as they yearn for their former lifestyle, and must adapt to new expectations and responsibilities.

After the birth, most people expect to bond instantly with their baby. We're constantly exposed to images of new parents picking up their newborn and immediately feeling a connection. But for some parents, this attachment takes time to develop – a few days, weeks, or even months – which can lead to feelings of guilt, stress and disappointment. This can be especially hard for new mothers.

It's likely that both parents of your child contribute economically to the family household (i.e. employed), which means both must also contribute to the family dynamic of the household. The two of you must sort through the expectations you bring and form a new family identity that is uniquely yours together. No small task.

Write and/or Discuss

As you embrace this role, and respond to the call of parenting . . .

- ◆ How would you describe the range of emotions you have experienced since your baby was born?
- ◆ What is your comfort level with a new title of 'mommy' or 'daddy'?
- ◆ What mental and emotional adjustments do you need to make in order take on this new role?

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions. Jot down your responses, or discuss them with your group.

Reflect

You may have a wide range of emotions and feelings about becoming a parent. Here a few examples:

- ◆ I want to shower my child with love 24/7.
- ◆ I feel don't feel ready to be a parent.
- ◆ I know what's best for my baby in spite of what others around me are saying.
- ◆ I don't have a clue what to do with a baby in my arms.
- ◆ My own parents (or in-laws) are driving me *crazy*.
- ◆ I want to share my faith (*the* faith) with my child.
- ◆ I don't know how to find time for anything else in my life except my baby.

What would you add to the list? What are your strong feelings and emotions?

All is normal. It's part of the change process. Acknowledge them, and recognize that God is present in them. And pray for trust that God will mold you into the authentic parent that your baby needs and deserves.

Take Heart

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you (Psalm 71:5-6).

O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress. My God in his steadfast love will meet me (Psalm 59:9-10).

What's Emerging in My Life?

Let's consider what might be emerging in your life as a result of these changes. As we do so, let us remember a few things that others have discovered about God's callings in their lives. We can say that responding to God's call will likely . . .

- Lead to happiness in the long run. If it makes you depressed, it's likely not God's call. Although it won't make you immune to all other emotions such as sadness, frustration, resentment, guilt, etc. But if there is no happiness whatsoever, somehow you are not aligned with God's desire.
- Not be easy. It will probably stretch you toward something you never thought you could do or be. But you can do it, especially if you have some help.
- Benefit others besides yourself. If it only involves you, it's not God's call. This is baked-in to grandparenting.
- Not be overly complicated. You'll be able to explain it to others in just a few words.

Consider

Let's focus on the second bullet point: not easy. The call to parenting is not an easy call. The relational dynamics are intense, vulnerable, and meaningful. Every family struggles with the tension caused by competing demands, especially when those demands seem to put family and work in opposing corners. Even those families with only one working parent struggles to learn

the "balancing act." Do the best you can to slow down, focus on what really matters—each other, and make decisions and choices based on the best interests of your new family.

Read

Take a look at "The Vocation of Parenting" by Hannah Anderson (<https://christandpopculture.com/the-vocation-of-parenthood/>). Among other things, here are a couple of her provocative statements:

"Becoming a mother flowed out of a larger life than that I'd been given, a life that had been delivered to me by Providence."

"God used my body to bring them into existence, and he is using my time and energy and love to mature and care for them. But they are not mine."

Write and/or Discuss

God's call in parenting beckons you beyond yourself.

- ◆ In what ways do you resonate with Anderson's article?
- ◆ What scares you the most in responding to this call?
- ◆ What excites you the most in responding to this call?
- ◆ In what ways is parenting drawing you closer to God?

Take Heart

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the one who fills his quiver with them (Psalm 127:3-5)!

How Should I Live?

Now we seek to turn the corner and fully embrace the call as parents. We seek to develop fruitful patterns of behavior and action that bring fulfillment and grace to parents, children, and the family as a whole.

Consider

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to tell us that the best thing we can do for our children is to give them lots of love and affection. When love is never in question, our children are naturally more understanding and tolerant when we need to set limits.

It is also well-established that our children thrive better when their parents have a good relationship with each other. Children do not like conflict, often do not know how to process it, especially when it involves the two people in the world they love most.

And, it's important to manage stress. Children do not like anxiety, and do not naturally know how to process it, especially when it involves the "big people" with whom they live. When parents remain calm amidst stress and struggle, so do children, and relational bonds remain intact.

Having a baby can be one of life's most exciting and challenging experiences. It can also be a bit of a roller coaster—you'll feel joy, happiness and delight at times, but there may be others when you feel stressed, frustrated, overwhelmed and confused. It's important to keep your emotional health in check throughout the journey.

When you feel well and content, you're better able to manage stress, maintain happy relationships, communicate your feelings, and really enjoy life with your new baby.

Write and/or Discuss

- ◆ In what ways do you feel God's love and care flowing through you to your child?
- ◆ Are there any factors in your life that seem to hinder your ability to shower your child with love?
- ◆ What three words would you use to describe your call as a parent?

Consider

Here are links to helpful practices and strategies for responding to the call of parenthood.

- ◆ "Becoming a parent: what to expect. Everyone experiences a wide range of reactions to becoming a parent, from excitement to 'is this really happening!'"
<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/pregnancy-and-new-parents/becoming-a-parent-what-to-expect>.
- ◆ "Getting to know your baby. You can help your baby's development through lots of interaction – playing, cuddling and caring for them."
<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/pregnancy-and-new-parents/becoming-a-parent-what-to-expect/getting-to-know-your-baby>.
- ◆ "Now That You're a Parent" by Gayle Peterson and Sally Sharpe. *My best friend had her baby a few months before I had my son. While I was in the hospital, she called and said, "Congratulations! Isn't it wonderful being a mother!" I didn't know whether to cry or slam the phone down.* <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4386/now-that-youre-a-parent>
- ◆ "The Rule of Family Faith: Practicing the Presence of God in Our Outward Lives" by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. Family spirituality does not always look like "spirituality" as many people understand it. http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/the_rule_of_family_faith_-_miller-mclemore.pdf.
- ◆ "Building Attachments" by Search Institute. Having a 0-2-year-old infant or a toddler in the family can be all-consuming. They depend on their caregivers for almost everything, and they are changing almost daily. <https://keepconnected.searchinstitute.org/understanding-ages-and-stages/ages-0-2/>

Take Heart

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23).

As a father [or mother] shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him (Psalm 103:13).

Blessing for Parents

This blessing may be used with a small group or with the entire congregation.

To the Parents:

Dear parents, congratulations on bringing new life into the world. She or he is a miracle to you and a blessing to all of us. You were called to be co-creators with God, and now you are called to be co-nurturers with God. Your touch is God's touch. Your embrace is God's embrace. And so today we bless you, and we pledge our prayers and support for you.

To the Community gathered:

Please extend your hand in blessing over our new parents. We thank God for them, for all the ways they model God's unconditional love for us. Please respond with "Amen" to each blessing.

To the New Parents:

As you embrace God's call in parenting, may you also experience the blessing of inner growth and understanding.

All: Amen.

As you care for your child's every need and shower your love upon your child, may you be open to the Spirit's guidance as you do everything for the Glory of God.

All: Amen.

As you embrace this call that puts you on duty 24/7/365, may you be blessed with infinite patience, sustained energy, true wisdom, and good timing.

All: Amen.

May you find authentic, faith-filled role models who inspire and energize you at each stage of parenthood, from infancy through the teen years and beyond.

All: Amen.

May you always serve your child and all of God's children with compassion and humility.

All: Amen.

May God bless you with every heavenly blessing, and keep you safe and strong. Know that we carry you in our hearts each and every day. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Closing Prayer

We thank you and praise you for the gift of our children. Through our lives as role models, may they come to know you, the one true God. May the Holy Spirit help them to grow in faith, hope, and love, so they may know peace, truth, and goodness. May their ears hear your voice. May their eyes see your presence in all things. May their lips proclaim your word. May their hearts be your dwelling place. May their hands do works of charity. May their feet walk in the way of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.