

***Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* by Paul David
Tripp: Book Critique**

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Summary

Paul David Tripp (2016), in his book *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, offers a follow-up book to his previous parenting book, *Age of Opportunity*. After hearing from so many parents about how they responded to what he said in *Age of Opportunity*, Tripp became frustrated that people were attempting to put into practice what he wrote about, but what was missing from anything that they said to him was the gospel, the foundation behind what he wrote. Tripp further believes that if parents activate a grand perspective view of parenting based on the gospel rather than an ownership view of their children, there would be less confusion and dysfunction in child-rearing. His aim in writing this book is to give parents “vision, motivation, renewed strength, and the rest of heart that every parent needs” (p. 13). He also desires to remind parents that parenting is a life-long process, not a series of drama-filled events.

Tripp utilizes the ambassador role that believers are given at salvation and applies it to the parenting-child relationship. As ambassadors, Tripp emphasizes that parents are to “faithfully represent the message, methods, and character of the leader who has sent him” (p. 14). The ambassador represents the will of the one sending, and in the case of Christian parents, it is “about what God in grace has planned to do through us in our children” (p. 15). Tripp attempts to take the burden off of parents to perfect their children as he reminds parents that it is only God who can effectively change the heart of a child. Tripp details the **fourteen gospel principles** he outlines in the book through parenting examples, including his own shortcomings as a parent and scripture, all surrounded by his main emphasis on grace.

Critique

While initially excited about reading this book, this reader felt after reading a few pages and then further, a few chapters, that the author said the same thing repeatedly. The overarching theme of the grace of the gospel dominated each of the fourteen principles Tripp laid out, even though grace itself was listed as one of the fourteen principles. Tripp provided many case scenarios relating to issues many parents face while raising children; however, when it came to examples of his own parenting, Tripp was really tough on himself and how he handled certain parenting tasks.

This reader found something to ponder when Tripp said, "Parents, here is what you need to understand: God has given you *authority* for the work of change but has not granted you the *power* to make that change happen" (p. 61). This reader's initial response was *but what about the power of prayer?* While one cannot change a person's heart, one can pray for the child's heart to change. This may be one of the exercises of parental authority Tripp refers to but never fully addresses.

Tripp also only partially expresses the Holy Spirit's role in a child's life. This reader is unsure who the audience is when Tripp states, "Our children are not just disobedient; they are disobedient because they are lost" (p. 98). If Tripp is speaking with parents of newborns, toddlers, or unsaved children, this statement rings true. However, if Tripp is speaking with parents whose children have received salvation, this statement is not true because these children are no longer lost but are saved. A child's decisions post-salvation should be markedly different because they possess the full power of the Holy Spirit within them—there is no junior Holy Spirit portion for those under the age of eighteen. A lot of this book is based on the premise of the outward choices of a child reflecting the inward doings of the child (this can actually be said

of all people), and assumes most children are operating from an unrepentant, unsaved heart position. What changes a family is not just the gospel principles outlined by Tripp but, ultimately, the receiving of the free gift of salvation because of grace through faith. This reader would be curious to know what Tripp's children would say their father parented like and whether his parenting helped them find the One who would ultimately change their hearts.

Tripp addresses one of the most significant issues many parents face in raising their children: the issue of control. He states, "God calls you to do more than just battle for control. He calls you to engage in a battle that is the battle of battles. It is the battle that is the main drama of the story of redemption that is the main theme of his Word" (p. 169). Parenting is more than the needs of parenting a child: guidance, protection, instruction, wisdom, authority, rules, structure, preparation, understanding, confrontation, discipline, warning, love, forgiveness, and security (pp. 166–169). Parenting is a part of the battle for every child's soul. As such, parenting is not about raising a child solely for the identity of being a parent; parenting is about participating in the will of God, for one's child. It is a holy work, never to be divided and never off duty.

Evaluation

Gospel-centered parenting is an admirable goal for every Christian parent. Tripp has done a service to parents and those in ministry who come alongside parents in their journey to raise children in writing this book. While this reader appreciates the heart behind the message found in this book, this reader would not recommend that it be used as a stand-alone tool for parenting. In Tripp's attempt to interweave grace throughout the ups and downs of parenting, what Tripp is suggesting within these fourteen gospel principles might seem too lenient and unstructured for raising children. As a parent of adult children, in his writing, Tripp looks backward at his parenting and believes that some of his decisions and actions may have not had any, or not

enough, grace. However, by doing so, he fails to extend to himself the same grace he discusses throughout the book.

God, as a loving parent, extends both grace and instruction as a means to grow and cultivate a person's heart. While parents are in no way a substitution for God, the biblical instruction to train up a child in the ways of the Lord found in Proverbs 22:6 is a parental responsibility. The ways of the Lord are multi-faceted and include reliance on Him, the study of God's Word, trust, faith, prayer, grace, mercy, and the work of the Holy Spirit. While Tripp is accurate in saying that parents cannot manufacture life-change in their children's hearts, parents need to remember that while the law exposes sin and is a guide for godly living, it is grace and mercy that rescues, transforms, and delivers a child (p. 201). Parents need to lead their children in the ways of the law while allowing the blanket of grace to cover it all. It is almost as if Tripp needs to combine *Age of Opportunity* with this book (or at least recommend that both be used as a resource together).