

Critical Thinking and Integration Paper

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The journey of parenting is a hard and rewarding one. People become parents through different means, but irregardless of how we become parents, when we do, we are given a job to love, support and care for an innocent and precious life. Our parenting is significant in our children's lives as they reflect what we value most. They are our heart's mirror, and how we interact with them reveals so much about what we value in life (34, Thomas). The most desirable outcome I have for my child is for him to love Jesus and strive to be like Him. Jack and Judith Balswick, graduates from the Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Psychology, analyze the many parenting styles and parent-child relationships that foster the support and love children need in order to become empowered and mature contributors to society. In 'A Maturity-Empowering Model of Christian Parenting' from the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, the Balswicks propose a biblical model of parenting constructed from theological and universal truths in hopes of demonstrating an ideal parenting style that yields maturity and competence for the next generation of empowered disciples of Jesus.

I've been a caregiver to my 5 year old brother since he was about 2, and in that time I've come to realize that my parental role in his life is a promise worth keeping- both to him and to the Lord. In every season, whether it was the terrible-twos, struggles with potty training, or first day of school jitters, caring for him has been a promise renewed and kept every day. It has been a ministry, a sacrifice and so much more. When I fail, I get back up and try again because my promise to love and discipline him remains. The Balswicks' describe this kind of promise as a *covenant commitment*. It is sectioned off into two-parts for the different developmental stages; the former for infancy to early childhood stages and the latter for preteen to adulthood stages (41,

Balswick, Balswick). The first is the *initial covenant*, or a “one-way conditional commitment” (38). This covenant is cut between parent and infant, usually at birth or upon adoption. As the child matures it becomes a *mature covenant*, or a “two way unconditional covenant”, where both parent and child share a deeper intimacy with one another (38).

Fundamentally, the Balswicks consider the parent-child relationship a reflection of the covenant God made with us. He is the ultimate parent model as He loves us unconditionally and expresses His love for us in a way that exudes both support and discipline. The authors’ Christian worldview lead them to a four-stage process of maturity that is imperative to their parenting model. Accordingly, “...intimacy leads to deeper covenant love; this love leads to an expression of continued grace and forgiveness; this grace offers acceptance and encouragement which increases the empowering process; and empowering and serving stimulates an increased communication and deepened intimacy” (38, Balswick). In essence, there is a covenant love that matures in both parent and child, empowering each individual as they grow alongside one another.

Empowerment is the most crucial factor in the equation that leads to the maturity of a child in the Maturity-Empowering Model of Christian Parenting. The Balswicks reiterate the importance of exercising parental power wisely over and over again. Accordingly, “Power in conventional social science literature is defined as the ability to influence others. Good parenting is the wise exercising of that position” (38). In this sense, parental power is the ability to influence our children through *empowering* them. From infancy to adolescence, empowerment is a continuous process that builds up a child’s confidence and overall character in order to mature

into an adequate individual who empowers others. The Balswicks make careful observations of Jesus' ministry model in order to demonstrate how parents should empower their children.

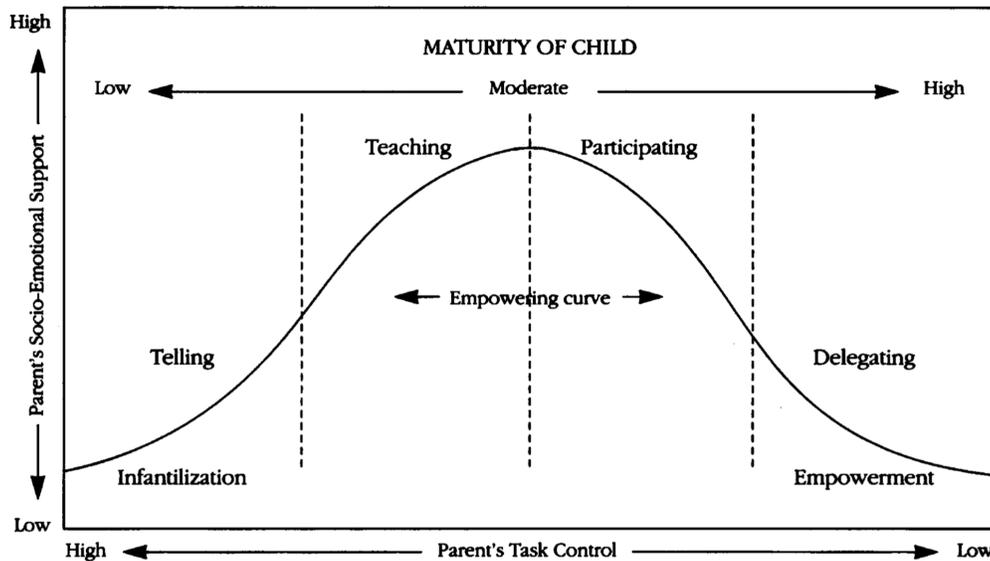
Accordingly, "Jesus provided an empowering model for human relationships which was one of serving others... [He] rejected the use of power to control others, and affirmed instead the use of power to serve others, to lift up the fallen, to forgive the guilty, to encourage responsibility and maturity in the weak, and to empower the powerless" (39). The authors hold a firm belief that the Jesus' ministry serves as the epitome to raising up the next generation.

The Balswicks support their claim of the importance of empowering children in parenting with critiques on authoritarian, permissive and authoritative parenting styles. The first regards the general failure of conventional authoritarian parenting styles in raising children to be competent and independent members of society. The authoritarian parenting style entails low support and high control; and although it results in children with a high respect for authority, it also yields low levels of independence and limited levels of social responsibility (37). I agree with this claim because I can personally testify that the authoritarian parenting style doesn't produce the best results long term. As someone who grew up within this parenting style, my natural disposition is to respect authority, but it took me a while to understand the importance of social responsibility. I grew up with the mentality that I could be a Christian by myself. Saying I believed in Jesus was enough in my household even though it's not in reality. Learning that I have social responsibility was a big pill to swallow because it was so radically different from my upbringing. Becoming part of a church congregation and serving in ministry taught me that being in community is not just beneficial, but also important and necessary for my faith and emotional

well-being. The Balswicks' second claim is that permissive parenting, which entails high support and low control, also results in a general failure to raise competent children. This parenting style results in children with scarcities in both social responsibility and independence (37). According to the Balswicks' research, the most effective type of parenting is an authoritative style, one that entails high parental control and support (37). Parental control and power denote the same concept of empowering children to be like Jesus, and according to their model, produce maturity and competence.

Lastly, the Balswicks propose there are different forms of empowerment and parenting styles at different developmental stages. Their model displays the correlation between a parent's socio-emotional support and a child's growth in maturity (40).

Figure 1.
A Maturity-Empowering Model of Christian Parenting*



* This figure is based on the Situational Leadership Model presented in *Management of Organizational Behavior* by P. Hersey and K. Blanchard, 1988, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall

On one extreme is *infantilization*. Infantilization requires low socio-emotional support from the parent due to how young the child is. It ranges from infancy to early childhood. The Balswicks describe this parenting style as *telling* because most of the parenting done is literally telling the child what to do. Empowerment comes more into play as the child matures in both age and milestones as pictured in the diagram. Once children are elementary school-aged, this parenting style calls for high socio-emotional support and communication from parent to child. *Teaching* is paramount in this stage because parents are able to moderately communicate and give some responsibility to their children. The parent is producing high levels of socio-emotional support as they teach their child. Ideally, the parent empowers them by building up confidence and character through out their childhood. Then, as the child reaches their pre-teen years, this model calls for a *participating* style of parenting, which asks for the parent to be involved in activities with the child. This fosters a deep intimacy in their relationship and allows for the parent to empower their child to be more self-sufficient and responsible during these formative years. The last stage and extreme of Balswicks' model is *empowerment*. This is the ultimate goal of parenting in the Empowering-Maturity Model of Christian parenting, where the child is now mature and empowered to be independent and competent; ready to go into the world to empower others. The Balswicks' conclude that their model "suggests that with increased maturity, children will need less support and control. They will have matured to the place where they have been empowered to empower others" (42).

After analyzing the Empowering-Maturity Model of Christian Parenting, my own personal mission statement for parenthood has changed. I desire to *empower* my child to be like Jesus.

I can stand in agreement with the theology and ideology in this article because it promotes sound biblical teaching and presents powerful theological claims that align with the authority of Scripture. Unlike traditional parenting models, the Balswicks aim to raise up disciples of Jesus. While analyzing it, one verse kept coming to mind. Thessalonians 5:11 states, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (NIV). I’ve realized parenting is so much more than the number of sports teams my child is on; so much more than having a steady bed time routine; so much more than getting into a Kindergarten ‘gifted-and-talented’ program. While all those things can be great, I’ve found that my objective for Joshua aligns perfectly with the Empowering-Maturity Model of Christian Parenting. I want both him and myself to be like Jesus; to have hearts to serve God; and to empower the powerless. In today’s society, there are enough soccer dads and tiger moms to go around. We need more ambassadors for Christ who will raise up the next generation to be kingdom-minded and God-fearing; a generation that will be like Jesus- one that will encourage one another and build each other up.

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