

# That They Might Know Him

Practical Advice  
for Christian Parents

by

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## Preface

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.—Proverbs 22:6*

Over breakfast one morning on a trip to Colombia, the idea for this little book was born. Our two families were traveling together while visiting a church, and as we met several young Christian couples with children, a desire arose in our hearts to be of some help to parents who are seeking to “bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

Sadly, we are largely without good examples of parenting in the church today. Where are the fathers and mothers in Israel? Where are the godly examples? I am afraid there are very few. And where are the children who are not conforming to the patterns of this world, but rather, with the encouragement and instruction of godly parents, have fixed their eyes on heavenly things?

That morning in Colombia, thoughts like these drew our hearts in compassion toward the parents of our generation who are sincerely trying to follow Christ out of the ways of this world, and who are looking for answers on how to lead their children in the same direction.

Our two families have been closely knit together for

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fifteen years, since we first met in Costa Rica. We have learned from one another, supported one another through the highs and lows of parenting, and continued to point one another to Jesus.

We have also made some mistakes along the way. There were years when we did not follow the Spirit's convictions and teachings as closely as we should have, and our kids suffered from our unfaithfulness. But the Lord, in His lovingkindness, opened our eyes to see how we were not watching out for their little souls as diligently or wisely as we should have been. Both of our families have made a lot of changes throughout the years as the Lord has corrected us and taught us, and it is these things that we feel led to share with you.

The Spirit has led us into some fairly unconventional paths, and away from some things that we once thought were completely normal and acceptable. There were times when we looked at each other and thought, "Nobody else is doing this! People are going to think we are crazy!" But we slowly learned not to evaluate our children or our parenting according to the world's standards, not to blindly accept what our culture was throwing at us, and most especially, to constantly consider the high calling of God, no matter how different it looked from what we saw all around us.

None of us are experts or professionals in this field. We are just ordinary people who have found the one true Source of living waters—Jesus Christ—and He has changed our hearts and changed our lives. He has led us along a very narrow path in the raising of our children, a way which sometimes has felt foreign and strange. But, in His faithfulness, He has thus far led our children towards that land flowing with milk and honey, and, in some

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measure, we can say with David that our children have become like “olive plants all around our table” (Psa. 128:3), living witnesses of the goodness of God and of His ability to lead us.





## Introduction

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.—3 John 1:4*

Over the years, parents have asked us how they can share spiritual things with their children. “How can what I’m seeing and experiencing in Christ be translated into the language of a 5-year-old, or a 10-year-old, or a 15-year-old, so that my child can understand?” “Is it possible to help my children turn their hearts to the Lord and choose to follow Him?” Some wrongly assume that, until a child has been “spiritually awakened,” there is little or nothing that can be done. We have heard parents say, “All we can do is wait and hope that they will one day show interest in knowing the Lord for themselves.” But the truth is, there is so much that you can do now! Don’t wait for them to come to you and ask, “What can I do to be saved?” Their souls were created for salvation, and from the very beginning of their lives you can start pointing them in that direction.

As parents, it is important to understand at the outset that the path God wants to lead us in will look and feel very different than the path that most others walk, even different from many of the Christians around us.

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However, as we learn to walk in His way and become familiar with His voice, we find a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement, and in time (with faithfulness) we are able to see some fruits of His Spirit, both in our lives and in those of our household.

Our primary intention in writing this little book is to encourage every parent to seek the will of the Lord *in all things*, to let Him be the One who guides, teaches, corrects, and instructs in *every aspect of your parenting*. His promise is that “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

Parenting not only demands all of our time, it also requires all of our attention and diligence. For those who do not have children but desire to be parents some day, you desire a good thing! But you are likely unaware of the magnitude of the responsibility required. For those who are already parents, or have perhaps been on this journey for a long time, you know that every step that we take, every word that we say, even our mannerisms, reactions, habits, and desires, will be observed and imitated by our children. The truth is, we will see everything of ourselves reflected in them, both the good and the bad. And it is for this reason that a real submission and conformity to the Spirit of Christ must begin in us, and then, in consequence, it will also begin to be reflected in our children.

The responsibility that falls on parents is no small thing! In the Bible we are told that, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). Here we see that all will be held accountable for our own choices and actions, but there are also a number of Scriptures that imply an additional responsibility and accountability for

the precious souls that have been entrusted to our care. Eli was severely reproved by the Lord because “his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (1 Sam. 3:13). Many of Solomon’s proverbs show that the godly discipline and instruction of our children is a parent’s responsibility before the Lord. This is an extremely important commission, and every step needs to be guided by the Spirit of God.

Consider the following words of John Griffith<sup>1</sup> which describe the crucial role we have as parents:

*Constant and faithful endeavors, with secret cries to God that His blessing may attend them, often prove effectual to the preservation of children. This care over them should begin very early, even as soon as they are capable of distinguishing what pleases and displeases their parents. A self-willed, contrary disposition may early manifest itself in children, which is very earnest to have its own way, long before they can judge what is best for themselves. This disposition should constantly be subjected to those who are to judge for them. Children should never be allowed to prevail by a demanding and self-willed temper, not even when what they desire is appropriate for them to receive, were they in a submissive disposition. In this way, they will quickly and clearly see that it is more to their benefit and comfort to yield an entire subjection to their parents, and that nothing can be obtained by such behavior. This should be done by a firm and steady hand, which will make the work*

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1 *The Ancient Path*, by John Griffith. Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

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*of parents abundantly easier in the government of their children, and may prove a great benefit to them through the whole course of their lives; since by crushing their willfulness in its first buddings, it may thus die away, so as never to gain the pre-eminence. Indeed, everything of an evil nature should be kept down in children by a careful and steady means. And even if parents should prove unsuccessful, as is sometimes the case, they will be clear of their children's blood in God's sight, which is a very great thing; so that though the rebellion and evil conduct of their offspring may be their sorrow, it will not be their sin.*

What great wisdom is contained in these words! And how careful must we be in this important work! I repeat, the responsibility that has been placed in our hands, and the obligation we have to do all in our power to teach our children to walk in the Way, is very great. We are stewards and shepherds of their souls for a short time, and it is only by helping them learn to walk and abide in Christ, that they will find true Life. And if, despite all of our efforts, our children end up choosing one of the many wrong paths, in the words of John Griffith, though this will certainly be our sorrow, it will not be our sin.

Both for ourselves, and for our children, learning to walk with Christ in the "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20) should be the exercise and aim of every single day. Children should not wait until they grow up to begin a serious relationship with the Lord. Nor should they be allowed to busy and entertain themselves with things that lead their hearts in a contrary direction, while parents wait for a time when they are ready to respond to the gospel. No, I

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say again, they were created to know and walk with their Creator, and from a very young age they can learn what it means to walk humbly with their God. All they need is a home environment where God is both feared and loved, and where parents have “no greater joy than to hear that their children are walking in the truth.”



## Chapter 1

# God's Design in Parenting

*He seeks godly offspring.—Malachi 2:15*

In the beginning, God created man, but He did not leave him alone. “It is not good that man should be alone;” He said, “I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:18). God also gave children to Adam and Eve, and thus His design for the family began. Not only were these children the fruit of their parent’s love for one another, and the increase of a natural bond and union; they were also the means by which God would enlarge His spiritual family, giving to each human infant a priceless immortal soul. Even among unbelievers in this fallen world, we still see something of the love and care that naturally flows from parent to child, which remains as a relic or shadow of God’s original design. But only those parents who raise and nurture the immortal part of a child in the wisdom of the Lord, can truly understand why Solomon said, “Children are a heritage from the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psa.127:3).

Many parents would love to have some sort of manual to consult on a regular basis, to ensure that they were

always doing what was best for their children. But though there is no such manual, the reality is we have been given something far more helpful—a heavenly Light—Christ, the light of the world—who is both willing and able to guide us in the right path, if only we are willing to follow! In Isaiah 42:16, the Lord says to His people, “I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.” And in Isaiah 30:21 we find this promise, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.”

The real purpose for families was designed by the Lord, and so it must be taught by His Spirit. Some parents assume that they are doing a wonderful job, and others sink under feelings that they are constantly falling short. But none of our personal assessments have any real meaning or value unless they correspond to the perspective and purpose of our Creator. It is of no use to compare our parenting or our families with the goals and standards of those around us, or to measure and assess our children according to the trends and currents of the world. Of course our children need to grow and learn, and to eventually become independent functioning members of their society, but only the Lord can show us how to teach these things without losing sight of the real reason why He gave them a being in this world. In other words, only the Lord can show us how to raise our children in such a way that our own worldly goals, standards, fears, and ambitions do not impede His desire to redeem, transform, and unite them forever to His heavenly family.

May each of us invite the Lord to search our hearts,



and to show us if we are holding onto personal goals and aspirations for the lives of our children. Are our dreams and expectations based on wrong things that we have learned from our culture or upbringing, from competition with our neighbors, wrong values of the world, social media, or perhaps from our own pride or insecurity? Or do our dreams for our children spring from our own knowledge of God, from a sincere desire to please Him, and a hope that our children will lay up heavenly treasure where moth and rust cannot destroy?

The Lord says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways” (Isa. 55:8). To follow our heavenly Guide means to set aside our own ways and goals, to throw away our own expectations, along with those of the people around us, and to be *willing to be instructed and corrected every step of the way*. Again, the Lord has temporarily entrusted to our care something that is precious beyond words—the immortal souls of *His* sons and daughters. Whatever plans we may have for their outward lives and bodies, these should continually bow, yield and *serve* the eternal plan that He has for them. God does not share our concerns and ambitions to make our children great in the sight of men. He desires that wherever they are—at home, school, work, or with friends—they express the nature of Christ with purity and integrity in both their inward and outward lives. And if this is the case, then regardless of where they are, or what they do, they will be experiencing God’s perfect plan for their life.



## Chapter 2

# What Lies Deep in the Heart

*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.—Psalm 51:6-7*

Every human being, in some measure, enters into adult life and marriage with their own backlog of problems, brokenness, fear, insecurity, lies, and other encumbrances. Some of this is the product of their upbringing, as their parents have often fallen short of God's design to love, nurture, and lead them in the way of Truth. And some is the result of their own choices, having, as Paul says, "conducted themselves in the lusts of their flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3). These now carry in their hearts various stains and scars of sin and darkness which have great potential to continue bearing fruit in the next generation.

I mention this to point out that newly married husbands and wives do not enter marriage as blank slates, ready to learn how to be perfect parents. Their own sins, wounds, and bad experiences have already laid a deep

foundation in the heart, and these will naturally carry over into the way they relate to and raise their children. This is inevitable, *unless* they are willing to open their hearts before the Lord, and allow Him (with His searching light) to show them everything within them that must be consumed or redeemed by the power of God. Only He can make things right. Only He can effectively deal with the lies, wounds, strongholds of the mind, and inward bondage that are the painful companions of nearly every human being. No amount of self-help books, therapy, or human effort can cleanse our hearts from the effects of sin and lies. Christ has to do it. But first, *we* have to be willing to see and acknowledge what His light will reveal in the depths of our hearts. As Hugh Turford wisely said, “What can manifest our true aim in every action? Not books nor preachers, but only the Spirit of the Lord, who is an inward Light.”<sup>2</sup>

In the old covenant, when any kind of sickness or infection appeared on the flesh of an Israelite, they were commanded to immediately show it to the priest, and allow him to determine both what it was, and what action should be taken. The people were not permitted to ignore these diseases, nor to assess or deal with them in their own way, but rather to receive the priest’s diagnosis, and then apply the God-ordained remedy. In a very similar way, every inward infirmity of our heart ought to be brought before our great High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself, with humble desires to find both His perspective and His remedy for our inward condition. Every time we discover an “infection” of bitterness, fear, pride, lust, selfishness, envy, anger, or whatever else grows and spreads

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2 *Walk in the Spirit*, by Hugh Turford. Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

in our fleshly nature, these sicknesses should lead us straight to our High Priest, so that we can be thoroughly cleansed through the redemptive work of the cross. The reason this is so important for us as parents, is because we cannot effectively lead our little ones to spiritual life and health, while we remain bound to so many harmful and contagious sins, lies, and inward wounds.

Perhaps the idea of being “bound to sin” brings to mind things like adultery, addiction, stealing, and idolatry. But do you ever feel unappreciated or unaccepted? Do you struggle with feelings of rejection? Do you fear losing control of the people and situations around you, and so do all that you can to control your environment, or keep a tight grip on everything? Do insecurities reign in your mind, controlling much of what you do or don’t do? Do you find yourself preoccupied with your physical appearance, striving continually to look good, feel attractive, and seek praise? Do you manipulate the truth for your own benefit, carefully crafting what you say or don’t say in order to achieve your desired result? Do you struggle with feelings of anger, annoyance, jealousy, envy, or lust toward people? All of these examples, and many more that could be mentioned, are symptoms of a deep heart sickness, and that sickness is called *sin*. If we as parents are truly going to know the Lord, and be able to lead our children in the way of life and truth, it is of the greatest importance that we first recognize these diseases for what they really are, and then invite the Lord to expose, confront and uproot everything in us that is not of His nature. The Lord must do a great purifying work in our hearts in order to free us, so that we can “bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It is His desire to set us free from both the root and

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the effects of sin, and if we will only let Him, He will gladly work in us to wash our hearts and create us anew in Christ Jesus.

## Chapter 3

# The Holy Spirit, our Teacher

*You have something in you, then, which shows you what is good. It makes good manifest to you. Now the Scripture says “whatsoever makes manifest is light” (Eph. 5:13). Therefore, this something, which shows you what is good, is light. It is the light of God’s good Spirit shining in your heart.—Mary Ann Kelty*

Perhaps the best parenting advice I ever received was right before we were married. A wise and experienced mother looked me in the eyes and said, “The Holy Spirit can be your Teacher. Let *Him* teach you how to raise your children.” At the time, I had no idea just how true and important these words were.

The Spirit of God is a perfect leader and a faithful teacher to all who will listen. David said, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psa. 23:3). If we pay close and careful attention to Him, we can all come to know the Master’s voice in our inward man, and learn what it means to be taught of God.

Many Christians say that they cannot hear God’s voice, or that they struggle to distinguish it from the lying

voices of the flesh, the world, and the devil. But, as strange as it may sound, learning to hear the voice of God begins with an honest and heartfelt *willingness to do His will*. First the heart must submit, and then the inward ears begin to open. Jesus said something very similar to this in John 7:17. Speaking to a crowd of Jews, He said, “*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own.*” This seems ridiculous to the proud mind of man. Reason says, “First tell me God’s doctrines, and then I’ll decide if I want to do His will.” But Jesus turns it entirely upside down, and says, “No, first present a willing and submissive heart to your Creator, and then you will have no difficulty discerning His voice.”

Scripture tells us that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). There is nothing of the Spirit that the carnal mind can naturally discern or understand. But God has given to man a measure of grace, a light that shines in our darkness, an “implanted Word” (Jam. 1:21) that helps us see and distinguish true good from evil. And if we are *willing to do His will*, this gift of grace will not leave us to ourselves.

As we see in so many of Christ’s parables, this measure of grace starts small, but it has the capacity to grow, if we will only pay attention and submit each time it appears. Though it begins like a tiny mustard seed, or a single talent or mina, as we become familiar with its inward convictions and corrections, and learn to obey them, they become stronger and clearer, and the right path becomes plain. You don’t have to be smart or gifted to follow the Lord in this way. In fact, speaking of what he



calls God's "Highway of Holiness," Isaiah the prophet says, "Whoever walks this road, although a fool, shall not go astray" (35:8). The only determining factor is whether you are *willing* to remain on this road, and *be led* in all things by Him, and not whether you have wisdom, experience, or great knowledge of the Bible.

Slowing down our active and forward will, turning to Christ's light, and obeying His convictions, does not come naturally to man in his fallen condition. But it doesn't take long living this way before we begin to see and feel that God's path is truly better and safer than our own. This is how we learn to delight in His corrections, and love His judgments, for, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psa. 19:9-11).

Until we learn to trust in His goodness, it is very easy to shrug off the convictions of the Spirit. The "reasoner" (i.e. satan) plants excuses and justifications in our minds against each and every conviction we feel. And the more time we spend considering the enemy's reasonings, the more likely we are to give in to them. This is true in our own lives as parents, but it sometimes feels even more difficult to yield to the convictions of the Spirit when they touch the lives and the emotions of our children. Excuses and temptations to ignore our convictions often abound. Thoughts like: "But this book was a gift from their grandparents! It can't be that bad." Or, "I don't want to always appear so strict. Little things like this don't matter very much," etc. The Spirit whispers in our hearts how to protect our children and lead them in the way of right-

eousness, but when we reason away our convictions and permit our children to do the very things which we felt a tug in our hearts telling us they should not do, we deny the Spirit's gentle leading and reject God's kind attempt to protect them.

The Holy Spirit will never lead you astray. Although the convictions you feel may at times seem radical or extreme, or look far different from how other Christians are raising their children, do not look to your friends or neighbors to get your bearings on what is right, acceptable, good, or godly. Trust in the Spirit's ability to lead you as you lead your children. The Lord will not take away anything from them that is truly good. He knows that purity is the only path to happiness. The leadings, teachings, and convictions of the Spirit have only one purpose: to protect our children from what will hurt them, and to lead them to the only Life that can ever fulfill them.

Some parents ask, "What if I misunderstand what the Spirit is saying? What if I make a mistake?" You *will* make mistakes. Nobody is naturally good at hearing God's voice, or discerning spiritual things. The important thing is not that you hear correctly, or understand perfectly what to do in every case. The important thing is that you *remain willing to do His will*. As long as you are willing, then the Lord can easily correct your mistakes, and teach whatever it is that you need to know. He knows when our mistakes are made because of weakness and immaturity, and when they are made because of carelessness or self-will. Again, the reason for the errors and regrets we experience in parenting have nothing to do with lack of skill or knowledge. The real reason is because we don't take the Spirit of God as our true Guide and Teacher.

And this very same seeking and submitting to the

inward voice of the Spirit of God should be taught and encouraged in our children from a very young age. The Lord begins to call, convict, and warn our sons and daughters just as soon as they are old enough to choose wrong paths. For example, every young child knows that they shouldn't lie to or deceive their parents, because they feel an inward Witness that convicts them of wrong even before they do it. Or when they attempt to sneak food from the kitchen, or speak cruelly of others, they feel a sting in their heart that either warns them beforehand, or convicts them afterwards, for having done something so contrary to the nature of their Creator. This is not just their natural conscience; it is the Holy Spirit working *in their conscience*, and if they will heed His voice, they will experience with increasing clarity and certainty that He always seeks to protect them from wrong.

The prophet Samuel was still a small boy when the Word of the Lord was revealed unto him (1 Sam. 3:7). The Spirit of God was given to man to "guide us into all truth," to "teach us all things" (John 14:26, 16:13). His voice is contrary to the voices of this world and the desires of our flesh, but with a soft and willing heart, even a young child can hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and learn to follow Him.



## Chapter 4

# **It Starts with Us – The Parent’s Responsibility**

*Parents must first be acquainted with the way of Truth,  
and the nurture and admonition of the Lord themselves,  
before they can train up their children therein.*

*—John Griffith*

In several places in Scripture, children are called “the fruit of the womb.” This is a fitting expression, because they truly are the fruit or increase of us, both the good and the bad. Not only do we see in them the same fallen nature that we find in ourselves, but we frequently see them expressing many of the same wrong habits, temperaments, and tendencies that they have learned or inherited from us. To lead our children out of these things, *we* first need to be led by Christ. This goes far beyond just telling them that Christ should be our leader. We must demonstrate before them a continual surrender of our lives and wills to the guidance of His Spirit. This is the only way that we become qualified and equipped to lead our children in the same path. We cannot expect them to go somewhere that we are not willing to go ourselves, and a

living example speaks much louder than words. For example, it's one thing for a mother to say in exasperation to her child, "Don't be so selfish!", and quite another thing for the child to watch her mother live every day with a selfless heart, quietly serving others and seeking nothing in return, having found true contentment in her Creator.

Again, the work must begin with us. Merely believing Christian doctrines or attending church services will not make us good parents. A new birth must arise within us, occupying an ever-increasing space in our hearts, and driving out everything of the contrary nature we have grown so accustomed to. If we will keep our hearts low and humble before the Lord, accepting His reproofs and uniting our will to even the smallest manifestation of His light, then we will, over time, experience a real change of nature. He does all the work by His grace, or implanted Seed, as we continually look to Him, follow, and obey. And this ongoing work will not only change our hearts, but will naturally overflow and touch those around us, manifesting His workmanship and our submission to Him. Even young children are able to see and feel these things. They may not have words to express what they feel, but witnessing the Lord's work in the life of a parent is one of the most impacting things that a child can experience.

When children are young, they naturally want to follow someone who is stronger and wiser, someone who will show them the right direction and teach them what they don't understand. Parents are often eager to fulfill this role when it comes to outward things that pertain to this world. They protect their children from physical harm, provide for their needs, educate their minds, and lead them in paths towards earthly success. This, of course, is an important part of our role as parents, but far

fewer are concerned with the guidance and growth of their eternal soul. Without at all minimizing the physical needs of our children, our primary occupation should be to offer our children a living and consistent example of what it means to follow and please our Creator—always teaching, sharing, and modeling what the Lord has made real in our hearts. This is not empty words or lifeless doctrines, but our own living experience. If our children hear only words, but do not see a consistent example of true godliness, humility, and love, then our christianity will likely have very little impact in their hearts.

The example we provide for our children every day will do one of two things: it will either help steer their hearts towards life and salvation, or it will make their way harder to find it. Of course not everything depends upon us and our example. The Lord begins to draw their hearts by His Spirit from the time they are born, convicting them for evil, and drawing them to Himself. But the environment we provide for them in our homes is incredibly important. God has always used the words and example of fathers and mothers to break up the fallow ground of their children's hearts (Hos. 10:12) and prepare them to receive His heavenly Seed. Clearly we cannot force our children to seek the Lord, or to give their hearts and lives to Him. But what we can do, and what God calls us to do, is to do all in our power to make straight in their hearts a highway for our God.

### **Who's Going to Raise Them?**

*We knew that we could not be too careful of our children's earliest years.—Amy Carmichael*

Choosing to have children is a huge decision, and this

is quickly followed by another very important one—who is actually going to raise them? Mom? Dad? Grandma? A nanny?

For mothers with an established career, this can be an especially difficult decision. Stepping away from work to spend your days wiping noses, cleaning up messes, and potty training can sound a little daunting, especially when you consider that it takes *years* to raise a child, and not just a few weeks. This may seem like a tremendous sacrifice, and if you have already invested a lot of time and money in a career that is important to you, you may wonder if it's really worth it.

The question of where and with whom your child will spend the majority of their youth is an incredibly important one, and something to be considered very carefully. Pray long and hard before deciding under whose watchful eye you will entrust your children. Who can you trust to nurture and protect your child's spiritual development? Who will be a good example to them? And seriously consider: could there be anyone better equipped to care for children than their own mother? Having been given the miraculous ability to carry a child for nine months in the womb, and then the capacity to feed the baby from her own body, it's clear that moms were specially designed to nurture and care for their children. Their God-given affection, care, and intuition, alongside a father's strong presence and love, provides a child with the most ideal environment to feel safe, to be nurtured, and to grow.

Of course, there may be parents who find themselves in circumstances that do not allow for the mother to be at home with her children. Or there may be seasons when it is necessary for Dad to stay home and take on this role. In all cases, following the Spirit's gentle leading is the surest



way to discover and do what is best for your children. As with everything else in parenting, if you seek the Lord's will above everything else, including your career, He will surely lead you aright. Always keep in mind that your child's *spiritual* development is the primary concern—that is, the nurturing and growth of their immortal soul. True love for our children will keep us seeking and praying to know what this means in every stage of their lives.

It is a precious gift to be able to spend your days among the people you love most, the ones God has entrusted into your care. Though it is not always easy, and there are plenty of challenges to be met with each day as you bump into selfishness, laziness, and other sinful tendencies (both in your children and in yourself), the rewards are nevertheless immeasurable. There will be innumerable occasions every day to invest in your child's development, and continual opportunities to teach them what is true and right. You will be present to comfort them when they are sick or get hurt, or to talk them through all of their questions, fears, and doubts. When bad attitudes, poor choices, or dangerous temptations appear, you will be there to share the wisdom and experience you have gained from the Lord, always looking out for their soul and their eternal well-being.

In choosing to stay home with your children and raise them yourself, there will be sacrifices to be made, and your family may have to live more frugally than you would have otherwise chosen. You may have to sacrifice your hope for a nicer car or house, vacations, private lessons, or a gym membership in order to make it financially possible to stay at home with your children. You may not be able to have the same lifestyle as those around you. But these temporary things are of little consequence compared with

the eternal investment made in the life of your child. A modest home where love prevails will far surpass all earthly riches and comforts. “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble” (Prov. 15:16). Or as Samuel Crisp wrote:

*Let us be content with few things, never seeking to gratify our carnal appetites, nor to follow the customs of men, but rather seek how we may so govern our earthly cares and pleasures that we may bring most glory to God, most health and peace to our own souls, and do most service to the Truth. And if this is our aim, certainly a very small portion of the things of this world will suffice us.<sup>3</sup>*

Choosing to raise your own children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) is one very significant way that you can “do service to the Truth.” In all likelihood, it is the greatest job you will ever have. Regardless of how important you may be in your workplace, or how much respect you receive or money you earn, nothing compares to raising a child. It is hard and humbling work, but it comes with its own incomparable reward.

You will never regret the time spent with your children. And when they have grown up and left home, you will look back upon all your time together with great fondness and appreciation. You will never look back and wish you had spent more time in the office, had a higher salary, or lived in a nicer house. But if your children grow up in the care of nannies, relatives, and teachers, it is likely you will regret the lost time that could have been spent investing in their hearts, shaping their minds, and just

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3 *The Life and Letters of Samuel Crisp*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

enjoying their presence.

### **Who's In Charge?**

*Never give in to disobedience, and never threaten what you are not prepared to carry out.—George MacDonald*

It is essential that children know who is in charge. A child who thinks they call the shots (because their parents have let them do so) is unpleasant, difficult to manage, and will struggle all their life with submission to God and authority. Remember, you are the parent; they are the child; therefore, it is important to take the lead. If your child is doing something they shouldn't, or is about to do something they shouldn't, say "no," and be firm. A child as young as 8-10 months old will begin to understand the meaning of the word *no*, and will stop what they are doing to look at their parent.

Oh, how it pains me to see a young mother in a battle of wills with her child! The mother says *no*, the child argues or cries, and the mother gives in. Will this be a one-time incident? Not a chance! Every time arguing, tears, and complaining are successful for obtaining their desire, children walk away even more confirmed in the effectiveness of this method. And this sets the stage for a lifetime of anger, protest, and then self-pity whenever their wills are crossed. Don't ever let begging or complaining move you from what you believe to be best. And remember, arguing with children only encourages them to be contentious. If you have said *no* to your child, stick with what you have said, and don't back down. This does not mean you need to raise your voice or be unkind. Be gentle and loving, but be firm. Use a calm, steady voice, and do not engage your child in emotionally-driven

arguments. Kindly and unyieldingly maintain your stance.

There may be times when you realize you made a mistake in saying *no* to your child. Perhaps you spoke out of anger or impatience, or responded too quickly without giving the matter sufficient thought. If your child is old enough to understand, go to them, apologize for your mistake, and explain to them clearly that you are changing your answer, *not* because they talked you out of it, but because you realized that you were in the wrong.

Some say that we owe our children an explanation for every *no* that we give them. Others suggest that we should avoid the word altogether and look for other alternatives, perhaps more positive words. But *no* is an important word for both parents and children, and it should most certainly be used throughout the course of their upbringing. Being told *no* is healthy for children. It helps them learn what is good and bad, wise and foolish, and how to stay within the bounds of what is safe and right. It reminds them continually that they are under authority, and that they should be careful to serve and to please their parents. And perhaps most importantly, saying *no* to our children teaches them that their own will should not be their leader.

It is for precisely this reason that God, in love, “chastens every son whom He receives.” Scripture speaks clearly and frequently about the necessity of submitting to God’s discipline for our own benefit. In Hebrews 12, we read:

*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom*

*He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

Here we see plainly that God’s fatherly discipline is for man’s own good, and that subjection to His Spirit yields life, holiness, and peace to those who are trained by it. The reason for this is really very simple: it is because the will of man is a very deceptive and dangerous guide. Every form of sin, evil, and corruption that has entered this world, has sprung up from man rejecting the wisdom and love of his Creator in order to follow his own will. When man lives according to his own will, believing and following “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes” (1 John 2:16), he never fails to run towards his own destruction. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, “I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts” (Isa. 65:2). Through Jeremiah He says, “You have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart” (Jer. 16:12). And

the repeated defeats and disasters that fell upon Israel in the days of the judges are said to be because “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 21:25).

Humans need heavenly discipline because without it, we invariably wander away from the path of life. Following our own will, we walk ourselves into further and greater darkness, corruption, insensibility, and ultimately into a permanent separation from God and all good. And children need parental discipline because their fallen and selfish will begins to take wrong turns at a very young age. Those who think faithful discipline is not necessary or appropriate for young children simply have not yet understood the nature of fallen man, or the tendency and aim of his deceitful desires.

In the words of Mary Ann Kilty, “A child who is able to understand that he wants something, is also old enough to understand that he cannot get what he wants.”<sup>4</sup> Children need to understand that they cannot (and should not) get everything they desire. What great harm is done to children when parents indulge their every wish! Jeremiah says, “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam. 3:27). It is good for children to be under the authority of a wiser and more experienced parent, and to learn to submit (without arguing or complaining) to a guide who is far more reliable than their own selfish will. Although they will naturally protest at first when their wills are crossed, they will ultimately feel safer and more secure in an environment where “no” means *no*, where “yes” means *yes*, and where growing up is a continual exercise in learning to submit to the will of one who is wiser and more righteous than they are.

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4 *Gentle Gertrude; A Tale for Youth*, by Mary Ann Kilty, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

In some situations, it is not even necessary or appropriate for our children to know why we say *no*. It is better for them to just learn to accept what they are told. In Deuteronomy 3, Moses asked God if he could “cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan” with the rest of the people. The answer he received from the Lord was, “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” (vs. 26). Here we see that God did not explain to Moses His reason for saying no, but simply and sternly told him not to mention the subject any more, and then gave him instructions concerning what he should do next. Moses, with humility and reverence, submitted to his Father’s will without demanding an explanation. He responded in obedience, having learned that the One who was leading him certainly knew what was best.

When children learn obedience and submission to parents, we are laying a foundation for teaching them obedience and submission to God. Of course it does not guarantee that they will give their lives to Christ and submit their hearts to His Spirit; but if they do, they will have far less of their own strong will to contend with. In the wise words of Elizabeth Prentiss, “How can they yield to God who have never been taught to yield to human authority? And how well fitted will they be to rule their own households who have never learned to rule themselves?”

## **Discipline and Correction**

*Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul.—Proverbs 29:17*

It is certainly appropriate to discipline wrong behavior. Children sometimes need strong correction with

repercussions in order to see clearly that they have done something wrong, or to learn from experience that bad choices have bad consequences. It is very important however, that all forms of discipline be motivated by love and a desire to redeem, and never by anger, retribution, or personal offense. And we have found that, very often (though not always), punishments can be avoided altogether by creating an environment of respect and love, where kids feel more rebuked and corrected by displeasing their parents than they would by temporarily losing toys, privileges, or time with friends.

When it is necessary to bring correction to your child, make sure that they understand very well what they are being disciplined for and why it is wrong. Using a calm, controlled voice, explain to them the consequences for their misbehavior, and help them to see how they could do things differently next time. Rashly disciplining children without taking the time to teach them will not help them learn from their mistakes.

### **It's Not Fair!**

Over the years we have learned that, rather than making parenting decisions based on what appears to be “fair” for our children, it is far better to always aim at what is *good* and *right*. There are several reasons for this. First, because *fair* is a very vague and subjective term that depends upon innumerable variables. Second, because what may be fair is very often not *right* for every situation. Children are different, circumstances are different, and looking to fairness as a standard for allowing, refusing, choosing, disciplining, etc. often proves to be a mistake. What is right for one child, might be very wrong for



### *The Parent's Responsibility*

another, even if it seems like the fair thing to do. And thirdly, parents who are always appealing to what is fair in their interactions with children often end up finding that children lay hold of the word and use it against them. “Mom, that’s not fair! You gave my brother more than me!” “Dad, that’s not fair! My sister got to stay up until 9:00 when she was ten!” When human opinion about fairness is the standard for making decisions, even young children can appeal to it as an authority that is *above* their own parents. “You can’t say no to me, Mom, because that’s not fair!” But when the righteousness, truth, goodness, and wisdom of God is the basis for all family decisions, then every member of the family is under God’s authority, and parents can appeal to His perfect standard as both the reason for their decisions and the source of their authority over their children.



## Chapter 5

# Marriage

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.—Ephesians 5:25-33*

It would be impossible to talk about Christian parenting without touching on the subject of marriage. A husband and wife whose lives are both centered in Christ,

and made “one flesh” in Him, is the only foundation for a strong and healthy marriage. And such a marriage, standing upon Christ, is the God-ordained environment for raising a family and establishing a loving home.

The relationship that a child witnesses every day between their father and mother will doubtless be one of the most influential things in their life. It will not only shape their understanding of love and service, but will often make lasting impressions about the nature and character of God. Observing mutual love between parents helps children grow up feeling safe, secure, and cared for. It lays a foundation of trust, upon which parents can more easily guide and teach their young ones, both in things natural and spiritual. A healthy and godly marriage is not only best for parents, it is the ideal environment for children to learn love, humility, and submission, both in their relationships with members of the family and in their relationship with the Lord.

Wives, allow your husbands to take the lead, to be the head of the family. Do not prod, coax or manipulate (albeit subtly) in order to get your way. Trust him to lead your family, as God has put him in that position. Remember that your own heart cannot be entirely submitted unto the Lord while you remain unsubmitted in any way to your husband.

Husbands, lead your family by *servicing* in great humility and love, always looking to Christ for wisdom and guidance. Let your authority come from being submitted to your Head, and let any greatness come from being the least. Remember, leadership is not a superior rank, but a higher degree of responsibility, and a greater call to serve.

Husbands and wives should never hide anything from

## *Marriage*

each another, regardless how small. Being *one flesh* means that your lives have truly become one, and you must live this way in all openness, honesty, love and dependence. *Independence*, or seeking to hold onto your own separate life, is a great wrecker of marriages, and therefore a ruiner of families as well. And clinging to independence will also keep you from submitting your whole heart to the Lord.

There is nothing more beautiful than a home where the children are submitted to the parents, the wife is submitted to her husband, and both husband and wife are submitted as one unto the Lord. This is the divine order, and as children grow and mature, they will feel that it is safe and right, and ultimately be more likely to submit themselves to such a wise and good God.

### **Submission**

Paul says, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). Verses like this tend to make wives a little uncomfortable. When Paul’s words are read from an entirely natural or human perspective, without the light of the Spirit, they offend our pride or our sense of self-worth. The word “submit” generally carries a negative connotation, and brings along with it thoughts of a lesser status, or of abuse and bondage. And it is true that some of these Biblical expressions have been misused and misapplied in wrong and hurtful ways. But the real meaning of this word, and the spiritual experience of what Paul describes here, is actually a very good and beneficial thing. In the kingdom of God, the last is the first, the greatest is the least, and the most preeminent is the servant of all. The church is not supposed to live in her

own independent will, but rather to renounce her will entirely, and live in continual submission to Christ her Head. This is the divine order, and the benefits of a submitted heart are many—protection, for one; also, the submissive heart of a wife greatly eases her burdens. And in a truly Christian home, the submission of wives to their godly husbands is a reflection of the surrender and submission that should be the continual posture of our hearts before the Lord.

### **Respecting the Lord's Work in your Spouse**

As a married couple walks together in the Lord, they may not always experience the same thing at the same time. Of course, both need to encounter the same general work of God in the heart—namely, an inward death to the fallen nature of flesh, and the increase and reign of the Spirit of Christ—and yet, God's proceedings or dealings are specifically designed for each individual according to their particular condition. One may find themselves in a dry wilderness season, while the other is being refreshed with dew from heaven. Or one may be reaping the peaceful rewards of obedience, while the other is feeling corrections for unfaithfulness. Whatever the Lord may be doing or allowing in each, it is imperative that both husband and wife recognize and submit to the work of the Lord in their spouse. For example, if one feels a particular conviction from the Lord about something they should or shouldn't do, whether it is big or small, the other should respectfully listen, and then encourage their spouse to be faithful to the Lord's leading, knowing that in so doing, they are both honoring Him and supporting their spouse. If we are willing to submit with humility to the Lord's work in our

husband or wife, He will strengthen our marriage and establish it on the true Foundation.

### **The Important Role of Fathers in Decision Making**

In some families and cultures, it may be the norm for a mother to make most or all of the decisions concerning child-rearing without much involvement from the father. Having perhaps always operated in this way, many moms feel confident in their own experience and judgment. Though it is certainly appropriate and necessary for moms to make many small, day-to-day decisions on their own, it is also essential for husbands and wives to collaborate in the work of parenting, and to develop the habit of making all important decisions together.

Wives should consider the measure of wisdom and experience that their husbands possess, as it may offer a different perspective from their own, and help bring a more balanced viewpoint to the situation. Independent of the father, a mother's perspective may at times be emotionally charged or overly empathetic when a situation with their children calls for more seriousness or firmness. Sometimes moms make the mistake of being too indulgent or dismissive in order to avoid an uncomfortable interaction with a child. John Griffith mentions the distress he sometimes felt when observing young people heading down a dangerous path, "due to the reckless indulgence of parents, especially mothers, making themselves mere slaves to the stubborn desires of their children."<sup>5</sup> Regardless of what culture you live in, or what was normal in the home you grew up in, don't make the

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5 *The Ancient Path*, John Griffith, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

mistake of trying to raise your children with an independent spirit. Both moms and dads are able to receive wisdom and guidance from the Lord, and should consult together in all important parenting decisions.

### **A Note to Single Mothers, or Wives of Unbelieving Husbands**

Parenting in a family led by a father and mother who are seeking the Lord is ideal. But in this fallen world, our circumstances are not always ideal. Do not lose hope; the Lord is good. He will provide. He knows your needs and loves you and your children more than words can describe. As you look to Him for strength and wisdom, He will be your Guide, and will supply what is lacking. Lean heavily upon Him; look to Him in everything. Seek the support of godly families around you, and entrust your children into the care of the One who both created them, and continually calls them to Himself.



## Chapter 6

# What to Expect from Them – The Child’s Responsibility

*To “begin at the beginning” is good counsel with respect to every undertaking, and especially in the raising of children, whose discipline, to be effectual, should commence with the earliest dawning of intelligence, and the first manifestations of self-will.—Mary Ann Kelty*

Children are capable of so much more than we generally give them credit for. In today’s culture, it has become common and easy to dismiss their ability to do what is right and good, saying, “They’re just kids—we can’t expect too much of them!” But children were not only given a conscience, the Lord has also sown a Seed of His own light and grace in their hearts, which never ceases to teach and strive with them in order to bring them to the Truth. We do them a great disservice by discounting their capabilities because of their age, either by believing that they cannot yet walk in righteousness and wisdom, making excuses for their immaturity, or requiring very little of them. Parents who expect very little from their children

will have children who feel little motivation for growth and improvement.

Children are also *physically* capable of more than many parents today seem willing to believe. It only takes a quick glance back in history about one hundred years to see that children were both willing and capable of carrying far more weight in the family than what is normal today. We often allow them to spend much of their time in idleness and indolence, thinking that because they are kids, their life doesn't yet have much of a purpose. But it does! The truth is that "real life" has already begun, and their time (even as children) is precious. And while playtime is perfectly appropriate and healthy for young children, there is also plenty of time to develop good habits. Even little children can learn to serve others, to understand the importance of hard work, to learn lessons of humility, self-control, and many other values and virtues.

## **Loving One Another**

Real love is a fruit of the Spirit of God. The world has tried to define love in a myriad of different ways, but man's version of love always comes out from self and points back to self. The true meaning and experience of love has to be written on our hearts by the finger of the Lord, and this is only experienced as we are willing to lose that fleshly life or nature which is not capable of real love.

You may ask, if true love is something that comes only from the Lord, what can we do as parents to foster it in our children? The answer to this question is: *we can do a lot*. First of all, we can refuse to accept the common lie that fighting and contention between siblings is normal and acceptable. Parents generally don't like to see fighting

in their families, but they often act like it should be expected and tolerated. This is simply not true. Angry words and hurtful actions should not be allowed, and it is our duty as parents to correct every appearance of anger, bickering or fighting, never allowing our children to treat each other badly. Whenever evil is not corrected, its tendency is to lodge in the heart and grow. So parents should always intervene when they hear wrong things proceed from the mouths of their children, quickly letting them know that this behavior has no place in the family, and requiring the offender to immediately apologize to their brother or sister. Of course we cannot transform the hearts of our kids, but we can provide them with a stable environment where affection, respect, sensitivity, and humility are modeled and encouraged. And we can also manifest a strict and consistent disapproval of all rude words, name calling, sarcasm, arguing, and aggressive playing, giving these things no place to abide and grow in our families.

Our hope and prayer as parents should be that our children will come to experience the genuine work and fruits of the Holy Spirit for themselves. But while the Lord is beginning to lay this foundation in them, parents must be faithful both to correct everything in them that works contrary to His purpose, and to continually point them to the Lord. We can also foster real love in our kids by helping them to see the root of self that is behind all bickering and fighting, and at the same time encourage them to turn to the only One who can change their hearts. This can (and must) certainly be done with words, but don't forget that the way that we *live* before our children every day is an even louder testimony than what we say with our mouths. If kids are accustomed to witnessing acts of love,

service, gentleness, and genuine affection between parents, and know that the Root behind these fruits is the heart-changing power of Christ, they will be much more likely to turn to Him with a desire to experience the same work.

### **Words that Edify**

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.—Ephesians 4:29.*

When children first begin to articulate a few words, parents usually get very excited and want to teach them to repeat more and more words. But as they grow a little older, and their vocabulary expands, it becomes apparent that they need some instruction on what to say and what to leave unsaid. My children *love* to talk, and though I value what they say, I often feel prompted by the Lord to remind them to watch every word that comes out of their mouths. Even though they may never use inappropriate language, many children are prone to speak freely and carelessly, feeling a desire to express almost every thought or opinion that passes through their mind. It's not difficult for an attentive parent to notice how much of what their child says is spoken with a desire to draw attention to themselves. Something in our fallen nature always seeks to be the center of attention, the smartest or funniest person in the room. The natural man loves to be noticed and praised, and children learn early on how to use their words to flatter, entertain, deceive, or manipulate for their own advantage. Proverbs 10:19 is undeniably true: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

Words are perhaps the best form of communication that the Lord has given us, but we have to be so careful and wise in how we use them, and teach our children to do the same. The preacher in Ecclesiastes said it well: there is a time for everything. There is a “time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecc. 3:7). We are not suggesting that families must sit around in a gloomy silence, but rather that we teach our children to think before they speak, to choose their words carefully, and to keep their mouth submitted to the Lord. The Bible has much to say about the power of the tongue, and it is a power that can bring great blessing or much harm. How wisely did King Solomon exhort us in Proverbs 13:3, that “The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.”

### **Learning to Share**

We all recognize the value of sharing, and certainly every parent wants their children to be willing to share. But to raise up children who are kind, generous, and selfless, is quite a task, and many parents feel like they are losing the battle.

Though it has already been mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that there are two seeds or natures that are striving for dominance in all of us. There is what Scripture calls flesh, or the sinful nature of fallen man. And there is also a gift or Seed of grace that is sown into man from God, which has a very different nature. The soul of man has freedom to yield to one and to deny the other, but it cannot serve two masters. The one that is encouraged, fed, and followed will grow. The one that is resisted and rejected will dwindle and disappear.

I mention this here because both love and selfishness are attributes of *a nature* that can grow in the hearts of our kids. We cannot force them to yield to God's grace, nor compel them to deny the desires of their flesh, but we *can* provide an environment that will foster one or the other. The right environment is incredibly important, because while on the one hand it protects them from "making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14), on the other, it points them and encourages them to always choose what is good, right, and true.

If we are hoping to see our children share with each other and learn to show kindness and selflessness in their relationship with others, it's important to consider the environment we are offering them. Some parents will not consider having their children share a bedroom or even share their toys, believing that it is easier if each child has his or her own things. It may indeed involve less work to teach their children the value of sharing, but consider what this is encouraging in their hearts. There's no doubt that having their own things may avoid a measure of conflict in the beginning, but it also fosters a sense of "me" and "mine." It gives a place for selfishness to grow, and creates greater problems further down the road.

Parents should begin to teach their children to share from a very young age. Our role is to purposely and consistently guide them into considering other people's desires and needs above their own, and to help them to recognize where their unwillingness to share comes from. This takes daily practice! And there is great opportunity for such practice when a second child is born into the family. As soon as parents have more than one child, the first (whether they want to or not) must begin to share their parents' time and attention. In many families, this is

a time when selfishness begins to show its ugly head, and it is a good opportunity to promptly show disapproval of that nature, and to point the hearts of our children to a very different one.

As they get older, children should be encouraged to share their crayons, toys, and even their clothes. Clinging to an object with a selfish attitude should never be considered acceptable behavior. If your child clings to something so firmly that they get upset when someone else wants it, the parent should intervene, help the child understand what they are doing, and insist that they give it up, at least for a time. They likely will not be very pleased with this decision, but do not back down because of a bad reaction or an outburst of emotion. Many parents are coerced into changing their minds by the strong will of their children, especially when they cry or threaten a tantrum. But be firm, even if there are other people around and you feel like you are causing a scene. While others may be thinking you should just give the poor child whatever he wants, remember that if you do, you will be setting a precedent for further conflicts, and feeding a nature that never stops seeking its own pleasure and gain. If you remain faithful in these daily exercises, little by little, with God's love and wisdom, your child will feel less inner resistance when they are required to share.

Left to follow their own will, children are unlikely to learn self-denial, kindness, and generosity. We enter this world assuming everything revolves around us, and not thinking or caring much that others can be helped or harmed by our actions. It's certainly a long road, but with loving correction and instruction, accompanied by a good parental example, our children will grow in selflessness. It's the Lord that changes their hearts, but we must

continually turn them from evil and direct them to Truth. Over time, in our home, we have seen our children grow up to help and serve one another, and it is truly gratifying to witness frequent scenes of kindness as they go about their day. While one runs to prepare hot chocolate, the other gathers a plate of cookies, each one desiring to serve the other.

### **Chores and Responsibilities at Home**

When it comes to learning to work and take on responsibilities, home is the perfect place to start. There is much truth in the old saying “what costs little is worth little,” and there comes a time when children need to learn the value of what they have by working for it, rather than assuming that their needs and wishes will always be provided by others.

As is the case with every new stage of child-rearing, giving our children chores and responsibilities in the house will require much patience, love, perseverance, and practice, but with a little time and consistency they quickly learn that every member of the household carries some degree of responsibility. The earlier they learn this the better. Realizing the corrupt condition of her heart later in her life, Elizabeth Ashbridge wrote in her diary, “It would have been better for me had I been brought up with far less indulgence.”<sup>6</sup> What a great error it is to believe that indulging our children’s desires and preferences is the best thing we can do for them!

Responsibilities both inside and outside of the house will differ greatly depending upon the age and maturity of

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6 *The Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)



each child. Household chores such as weeding the garden, making the bed after waking up, picking up toys after playing, setting the table, washing the dishes, taking out the trash, and learning to help with the laundry, are simple activities that can be learned when children are still very young. Assigning daily chores like these not only helps to develop a measure of work ethic in children, but it also teaches them to appreciate and value the work that their parents are doing for them all of the time. And perhaps even more important than this, being made to work instead of play during part of their day will help children learn what it means to deny their will, and to regard their desires as less important than their responsibilities.

Parents, don't be surprised or discouraged when you meet with bad attitudes or complaints in response to giving your children chores and responsibilities. When children are not yet accustomed to helping out around the house, it is to be expected that they will not want to stop what they are doing in order to work. But when self-will manifests itself in complaining or anger, let this be a teaching moment with your child. Patiently and gently explain to them where all whining and grumbling comes from, and why it is that people tend to respond in that way when anything crosses their will. Moments like this (and there will be a lot of them!) can be extremely useful for talking with children about the nature of Christ and the nature of flesh, and for teaching them self-denial, submission, patience, and perseverance. The truth is, we learn little or nothing about these virtues until we find ourselves taken out of our bubble of comfort and pleasure.

So be firm in requiring even young children to help and serve wherever they are able. These little, simple activities will expose the condition of their hearts, and

create many opportunities to talk about important subjects like sin, selfishness, and our great need for redemption. It is always a bit trying to wrestle against the strong and contrary will of a child, but these opportunities should by no means be undervalued and avoided. Without them, it would be impossible to see our hearts. In her book *Gentle Gertrude*, Mary Ann Kelty said, “Nothing is so small as not to cause some consequences; and whatever is capable of rousing your emotions and testing your temperament, is something very important, no matter how insignificant it may seem to you.” In other words, we cannot call something small or irrelevant if it is able to bring out a bad attitude or selfish temperament in a child. If it’s big enough to make a child complain, argue, or disobey, then it’s a big deal, even if they are only refusing to pick up a toy or make their bed.

### **Choosing the Right Friends**

*Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.*  
—1 Corinthians 15:33

Young children are very impressionable, and the friends they associate with will naturally have some measure of influence over the development of their character, values, and beliefs. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Pro. 13:20). For this reason, it is important to teach children from the very beginning to recognize and esteem a godly character. When kids are taught from a young age to value goodness and righteousness in another’s life and heart, they are naturally drawn to associate with such persons.

When I was a child, I heard much talk in my family

about who was famous, who was talented, who was rich, funny, smart, and influential. Whether my parents intended this or not, these are the sorts of things that I was taught to notice, appreciate, and aspire after. But I never remember being encouraged to take notice of someone for being humble, or faithful, or honest. I don't remember ever hearing somebody praised for their godliness or integrity. I grew up thinking little of these virtues, and in turn, did not look for such things in the friends I chose.

Without consistent instruction and conversation about what is good and true, a child will naturally gravitate toward friends merely because they are funny or fun, or because they have similar personalities or interests. Friendships founded upon such things often uphold and encourage more vice than virtue. But when parents are faithful to teach and model for their children the value of honesty, integrity, kindness, humility, selflessness, and goodness, kids are far more inclined as they grow and mature to seek out meaningful relationships, and not ones based merely on entertainment and fun.

The importance of talking openly and regularly with your children about *choosing what is right* cannot be overstressed. Every child will inevitably witness an enormous number of things that they should neither agree with nor participate in. They need to be prepared for such occasions, having gained a measure of discernment to know right and wrong, and the strength of character to say *no*. When children have frequently heard the voice of their parents confirming the inward convictions of the Spirit concerning virtue and vice, good and evil, they are better equipped to resist what is wrong.

Parents should also be vigilant over their children's

friendships when they are young, investing the time necessary to get to know their friends and their families, and to remain involved. When my kids were young, I always enjoyed having their friends come over to play, and often preferred that they spent time together at our house rather than at their friend's house, especially if they were from a family I did not know very well. This gave me the opportunity to observe my child's interactions with their friends, and also to get to know the other children myself. It is important to know your children's friends well, to welcome them into your home and take the time to talk with them. Invite them to stay for dinner, and ask if they would like to join your family in your evening devotions. Doing so will not only allow you to keep an eye on the relationships your children are forming and the choices they are making, but will also give you more of an opportunity to guide the nature of their friendships.

Younger children often need a little help and guidance in knowing how to spend time constructively with their friends. Playing together can be good and appropriate for young children, and they are often perfectly content finding a game or activity to do together. But as we all know, immature souls sometimes turn harmless play into displays of selfishness, pride, competition, or some other kinds of interaction that may not feel right. In such situations, it can be helpful to steer young friends toward something more constructive, like baking, drawing, or building something together.

As your child grows older and begins to come and go from the house more often, let it be known that your home is always open to their friends as a welcoming place to hang out. A plate of homemade cookies on the counter never hurts! Doing so will give your child's friends

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frequent opportunities to observe the values of your family, and you will also stay actively involved in your growing child's life and relationships.



## Chapter 7

# Education

*Mind the moral nature, and it will take care of the intellectual. In other words, the best thing for the intellect is the cultivation of the conscience.—George MacDonald*

The entirety of childhood is about education, and perhaps more than anything else, a parent is a *teacher*. From the very first day of their life, both you and the ones you have chosen to care for your children, have been teaching them. Parents teach their children how to live, how to relate to people and to the world, how to meet their basic needs, and so much more. A careful parent will teach their children how to love God, how to serve others, and how to live righteously and blamelessly in this world. Careless parents are also teachers, and their lessons are every bit as influential, but these lessons will be a continual detriment to their growth, and an obstacle to the purpose for which they were created.

Parenting is so much more than just taking care of children and meeting their physical needs. Each child is created with a capacity to love and serve their Creator, and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Kids are constantly observing,

learning and absorbing. The important question for parents is, *what* are they learning and absorbing? And what are their daily interactions with us teaching them as days, weeks, and months pass by?

Between the ages of 0-18 years old (and of course parenting does not end at 18), you will have 6,570 days to teach your child. There is so much for a child to learn, and each day provides an opportunity for many lessons. It is easy for parents to focus on the big things we do for our children, such as teaching them to drive, taking them on vacations, or making sure they get accepted into a reputable school. But far more important than any of these things, are the innumerable little things that make up every one of those 6,570 days. The daily example we give our children is perhaps the greatest lesson they learn from us; we have mentioned more than once that actions speak louder than words. But beyond this, there are countless teaching moments throughout the course of these days, and it takes thoughtfulness and sacrifice to stop what we are doing and take advantage of these opportunities. Being an attentive and consistent teacher to your child day after day, not overlooking the many small opportunities to help them grow, is what makes the greatest difference over time.

## **School**

We've talked about how raising children is such an incredibly important job, one that requires the utmost diligence and care. But what about when our children are not with us? Many children spend the majority of their waking hours at school. How can we be sure that they are being educated well, both in an academic sense, and with



respect to morality and character? How do we know that they are not falling prey to peer pressure, harmful influences, and moral corruption? These are extremely important questions. Choosing the right path for schooling is not a decision to be taken lightly. From public school, private school, online school, to homeschool, there are a variety of options, and each one brings its own special considerations.

Think of your child as a young, tender plant, just starting to grow. The environment you place that little plant in will make all the difference in the world to it. Just as a plant needs sunlight, water, and protection from everything that could uproot or trample upon it, children likewise need a healthy environment where they are fed and nurtured. Until they are strong enough to stand firm in what they know to be true, to resist temptation, and not be wrongly swayed by what they see and hear around them, it is important that they are both protected from unhealthy influences and surrounded by good ones.

There are some who suggest that children who are “sheltered” from evil, or raised in a “bubble” where they do not encounter the ways of the world, will not become socially adept adults or functioning members of society. I suppose this is possible in some extreme cases where sheltering is motivated by strange beliefs or irrational fears. But our experience with our own children, and with many others we know, is that this concern is generally groundless. The truth is that familiarity with the ways and evils of the world does not make children more judicious or wise, and it very rarely (if ever) makes them more likely to choose a path of virtue and godliness. Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “You don’t have to smell every trashcan in the neighborhood to learn what garbage is.” More often

than not, the wrong things that children see and hear around them on a regular basis come to feel very normal to them. Over time these things become ingrained parts of how they process and comprehend their experiences and emotions, how they see life, and how they form goals and expectations for the years ahead of them. The heart and conscience of man is easily corrupted, and this is the reason why God was always so unyielding in His requirement that Israel should not intermingle or intermarry with the evil inhabitants of the land.

Of course we understand school to be a place where children go to learn, but it is important to keep in mind that they will learn a whole lot more than just academics. While they are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, they will be surrounded by teachers and peers who will no doubt have some measure of influence in their lives. Each teacher has their own perspective on life, their own experiences and beliefs that they will invariably share with their students. Whether they intend to or not, everybody communicates to those around them what is real, normal, or valuable from their own viewpoint. Friends, classmates, and teachers become loud voices in children's lives, and all of these relationships can be either helpful or harmful. As many of us remember from our own childhood, spending years in school was a mixed bag of ideas and influence, ones that have very likely shaped who we are today.

These things are not written with a design of inciting fear in parents, but rather *thoughtfulness* about this important decision. Of course there are many factors that play into the decision of where your child will go to school, things like finances, where you live, and whether or not both mom and dad are working. Some of these things may

be beyond what we can control. But, at the very least, we can all consider these things with seriousness and humility before the Lord, seeking wisdom and perspective from our heavenly Father. He will not lead us astray if we seek Him with all our heart, and earnestly desire to do His will.

### **A Different Approach to Education: Homeschool**

While traditional schooling may be the best option for some families, or perhaps the *only* option, there is a lesser-known method of education that we would like to discuss here: *homeschool*. In the context of a healthy Christian family, home can be an ideal environment for learning.

Your first question may be, “Is that even legal?” Education laws differ from country to country, and you will have to do a little bit of digging to see what legislation is in place for your particular country. In most countries, teaching your children at home is allowed, but there will likely be requirements that you will need to abide by, such as accountability to your local school district, or end-of-the-year testing. Though it may be an uncommon or unpopular option where you live, do not discount homeschooling just because you are unfamiliar with it. Do some research for yourself, and more importantly, spend a considerable amount of time in prayer, asking the Lord for His perspective on what is best for your child. How you educate your children is an incredibly important decision, because it will determine both how and where your child will spend an enormous part of their childhood. Do not be hasty in making this decision, and don’t allow yourself to be limited by your own experience or swayed by

cultural norms.

The advantages of homeschooling are many, but perhaps the greatest benefit to children is the valuable time spent within the context of their own family. Greater time spent with a person usually amounts to a greater influence in their lives, and by educating your child at home, you will be spending around *nine-hundred more hours with them every year* than you otherwise would. That is a lot of time! Not only time to teach academics, but countless opportunities to share your wisdom and experience, to instill godly values, and to point them to Christ. Homeschooling also gives parents the opportunity to prayerfully consider the appropriate time to introduce sensitive topics to their children, rather than letting their friends or teachers be the first to broach these subjects, often before they are ready, or in a manner that is undesirable.

Homeschooling can look very different for different families because it can be adapted and tailored to meet your children's needs. Students who are strong in a particular subject have the freedom to accelerate through it at a faster pace. Or if a child needs extra attention or help, there is time and opportunity to focus on a specific subject and advance more slowly. Parents can think "out of the box" in the instruction of their kids, and there is no rigid timeline that must be adhered to. Many parents find there is no longer a sense of rush or hurry, because in reality, homeschool students have much more time in their day. There are no buses to wait for or rides to school. There are no lines to wait in, wasted hours in study halls, or unnecessary busy work. The entire day can be adapted to the needs and abilities of each child, and it is exciting to see how much can be learned and accomplished in one day

when children have more time and freedom to invest themselves in the things that really interest them. As George MacDonald said, “Favor the development of each in the direction of his own bent.”

For example, one of our children developed a great interest in woodworking, and when he was 12 or 13 years old, he began spending a good amount of time in our basement workshop, learning skills that eventually opened the way for him to become a homebuilder and business owner. Our daughter always had a remarkable interest in science and nature, and would pour over books, taking notes and memorizing facts. Sometimes she would sit outside for hours to observe plants and birds, sketching elaborate pictures and journaling about everything she saw. Today she teaches nature classes to children, and loves to share her insight into the world of plants and animals and why God created them. Our other son quickly showed an aptitude for computers, and because he was homeschooled, he was able to dedicate large portions of each day to learning programming skills. He now works as a computer programmer. Our youngest daughter is still in school, but she too has been able to focus on her own unique interests and abilities in the course of her education, and no doubt will have a similar story.

These four children were raised in the same home, with the same parents, and yet God created each of them with unique interests and abilities. And while all of them learned reading, writing, math, history, science, and all of the basic required courses of study, being educated at home also gave them the time and opportunity to follow their own God-given inquisitiveness, and to learn valuable skills that have carried over into adult life.

One common concern that is voiced by many parents

is that they are not experts themselves, and so will not be able to adequately educate their child. But I can tell you from my own experience that you do *not* need to be an expert, or even well-educated, in order to homeschool your child; you just need to be resourceful and committed. I mean, you need to be willing and able to do a little bit of research in order to lead your child to the right books, resources, and “teachers.” I use the word “teachers” loosely, to refer to anyone and anything that a child will learn from. Some of these teachers are more obvious sources of knowledge, like parents or grandparents, a piano teacher, a particular curriculum, an educational website, or a workbook. But there are less-apparent “teachers” that are also extremely valuable, like a building project, a walk through the woods, a science experiment of the child’s own invention. With homeschool, not all of the learning is from books and lectures. Children learn through simply observing things like water tension, clouds, or a marble rolling across the surface of a table. And they learn by interacting with what they see, like using a tool, balancing on a log, or mixing paints to obtain a desired color. Very often it is the child’s own curiosity that leads to these teaching moments, and because they are interested, lasting impressions are made. Sometimes, more than actively teaching, the parent’s role is just to help steer the child as they willingly investigate and learn. Homeschooling tends to develop a love for learning in children, as well as an ability to learn independently. Following the path of their own personal interests and the excitement that comes from growing in understanding, kids often learn without a need for constant oversight.

Another common concern that almost every homeschool parent initially faces is the fear that their child will

not have friends, or will end up being socially awkward. I know this seems like a legitimate concern for parents who are new to homeschooling, but in all of the exposure I have had to homeschool families over many years, I have never seen this happen. Homeschool children may not have as many friends as a typical student in a public or private school, but they always manage to build relationships and establish close friendships. And one of the wonderful things about homeschool friendships is that they are not bound by the constraint of age. In traditional schools, children normally only relate to others in their own class. But with homeschool, these distinctions are far less prevalent, and a younger and older child can easily become friends. Experience has shown that homeschooled children are generally very competent in relating to both adults and to kids of all ages, and can carry on conversations with ease. And all of this is learned from observing their parents in everyday experiences, like watching how their father relates to a neighbor, or how their mother talks to the cashier at a store. It is parents—and not teachers or friends—that teach their children how to communicate with and relate to other people, how to look a person in the eye when talking to them, how to respond to questions and to be polite.

Allow me to offer something of a side-note here. It has grown increasingly common in some countries and cultures to have only one child. Of course there are circumstances where it is impossible or unwise for a mother to give birth to a second child. But in other cases, the choice to have only one child is made by parents because of finances, careers, or lifestyle preferences. To these, I simply and humbly desire to share how, over and over, I have watched siblings become the best of friends,

and be made a blessing and a help to one another in so many different ways. If the Lord has blessed you with health and ability, consider letting Him also provide a younger sibling (or siblings) for your son or daughter, and so create an environment where they can be raised together as friends, sharing the same values and principles. “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord; happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psa. 127:3,5).

One of the wonderful things about homeschooling multiple children is that there is so much that they can learn together. While your children may be at different levels in some areas, such as writing or math, much of what you decide to do for school can be done together as a group. There are no hard and fast rules mandating that physical science must be taught in 8th grade, and biology in 9th. Or that social studies must be covered in 5th grade and world history in 6th. In my experience, many of these subjects are actually better learned together, even if your children are somewhat different ages. Learning together as a group, they can all read the same books, do the same science experiments, go on the same field trips, and master concepts together.

When my children were young, I started out every morning on the couch reading aloud to them. They would come downstairs on cold wintry mornings, still in their pajamas, curl up on the couch together, and eagerly listen while I read to them. Then we would eat breakfast together as a family, as the county school bus drove past our house before the sun had even risen. The kids would then brush their teeth, get dressed, and calmly start their school day. There was no hurrying about, no chaotic rushing to choose the right outfit, no forgetting school



books, or running to catch the bus on time. Of course there were still occasional tears, tantrums, and strong wills that needed a parent's attention, but the atmosphere was a calm and loving one, right in our own home.

## What to Read?

Not all books in the children's section of bookstores or libraries are truly appropriate or helpful for children. The words of the apostle Paul are often repeated in our home: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Cor. 10:23). In our day, there are multitudes of children's books that are considered innocent, or at least not evil, by the general public. But just because they are popular and widely esteemed, does not mean that they are suitable or beneficial for the tender hearts of our children.

Selecting good reading material for our children is another thing that parents should be particularly careful with. As we have already mentioned with reference to other subjects, *time is precious and young hearts are very impressionable*. The things we give our time to are the things that both grow in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives. In her journal, Alice Hayes wrote, "Surely the love of God is to the children of men, so that they may prize time while they have it and make all things ready that pertain to eternal life."<sup>7</sup>

It's easy to fall into the trap of allowing our children to spend hours reading frivolous books of questionable morals under the pretense of wanting them to develop good reading skills, or simply desiring them to learn. But

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7 *The Life of Alice Hayes*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

what exactly are they learning? In her autobiography, Madam Guyón relates the following experience from her childhood.

*I loved reading, particularly romances, to such excess that I spent whole days and nights in them. Sometimes the day broke while I continued to read, insomuch, that for a length of time I almost lost the habit of sleeping. I was ever eager to get to the end of the book, in hopes of finding something to satisfy a certain craving that I found within me. But my thirst for reading only increased the more I read. [Such] books are strange inventions to destroy youth. If they caused no other hurt than the loss of precious time, is not that too much? I was not restrained, however, but rather encouraged to read them under this fallacious pretext: that they would teach me to speak well.<sup>8</sup>*

Of course this does not mean that we forbid our children to read. On the contrary, books can be a huge blessing to children, both intellectually and spiritually. We just need to be very attentive and considerate about which books fall into their hands. After the death of Daniel Wheeler (a minister and missionary to the South Pacific Islands), his son wrote the following tribute to his father's great carefulness and wisdom in this respect. He says,

*My father was generous in supplying whatever books he thought calculated to improve or expand the mind, or furnish profitable employment to the*

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8 *The Autobiography of Madam Guyon*, by Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon. Available online at The Project Gutenberg, [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

*understanding; but very few publications of a frivolous or hurtful nature escaped the vigilance of his watchful eye. On these occasions, he regarded not the inclinations of the children he so tenderly loved; and he has been known, when books that he disapproved had been lent to his children, to return them himself to those from whom they came, accompanied by a frank declaration of his sentiments respecting them.*<sup>9</sup>

It takes wisdom, watchfulness, and courage to “regard not the inclinations” of our children when their literary interests incline them towards hurtful things. And what is a “hurtful thing”? It is anything that draws their young hearts out from the fear and love of God, and into a path of increasing coldness, hardness, and indifference with respect to God’s eternal purpose for their soul. Like Daniel Wheeler, we need to help our children choose books that improve or expand their mind, and inform their understanding, *without* instilling wrong values or awakening deceitful desires, and thereby choking the good Seed that has been planted in their hearts.

There are certainly plenty of good reading materials out there, but it may take a little effort on the parent’s part to search and find these. Often, the kinds of books that catch your child’s attention at the library or on the shelves of bookstores will *not* be the books you want them to read. There is a large amount of children’s nonfiction available that is very educational and can awaken an interest to learn more about science, nature, astronomy, inventors, math, history, and so on. Such books can be very benefi-

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9 *The Journal of Daniel Wheeler*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

cial. I recommend that you take more caution when selecting fiction, as it has more of a tendency to engage the heart and awaken desires, dreams, and aspirations. If you have the opportunity, read fiction books yourself first to determine if it is something you want your child to absorb into their heart, or ask for recommendations from a trusted friend. Keep in mind that the stories, themes, and characters in books, just like movies or video games, can make a big impression on a child, so make sure that your son or daughter is filling their time and thoughts with things you desire them to imitate.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

It is common for parents to think they are doing their children a favor by signing them up for every possible after-school activity. Sports, gymnastics, piano lessons, swim lessons, theater, martial arts, and the like, can quickly consume the entire week, leaving children very little time for their family, and even less time for considering and pursuing spiritual things.

Be thoughtful and prayerful about what activities you sign your kids up for. I say again, everything that gains access to our hearts has great potential to lodge there and grow. What begins as a small interest or hobby often becomes a daily obsession or a lifelong passion, into which we end up investing an incredible amount of our time and thoughts as years roll on. We must always remember that our children's lives belong to the Lord. They were made by Him and for him; therefore, let us always exercise great care in what we allow to fill up their time and their lives.

In Ann Branson's journal, she makes the following remarks regarding the unexpected death of a young

woman who had recently married.

*On her death-bed [the young woman] remarked that she had been too much unconcerned about her latter end, and now her body was so racked with pain that she had scarcely a moment for reflection, or any time to prepare for death. She eagerly desired that others would take warning by her situation. Oh, the necessity for every moment to be rightly spent! May my spirit deeply ponder the worth of time—precious time, of more value than gold, or all earthly grandeur, riches or honor—precious time, how it is murdered by the sons and daughters of men.<sup>10</sup>*

Our son had an interest in music from a young age and began to play the violin. Because of my own ambition for him, I wanted to see him get better and play with the best. There was a somewhat elite after-school program in town that was holding auditions, and I hastily signed him up. He was about 11 or 12 years old at the time. A few days later, we were driving to the audition and had almost arrived when he turned to me and very sincerely said, “Mom, I don’t think I should do this.” He was not nervous, and I knew it was not from a fear of playing in front of others. It was the Holy Spirit gently speaking to his heart, in spite of his mom’s ambition, desiring to protect him from a performance-driven ensemble that likely would have consumed much of his time and led him in a direction the Lord did not desire for him. Our son did not have much to say about it at the time. He only said that he did not feel right about doing the audition. So we turned the

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10 *The Journal of Ann Branson*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

*That They Might Know Him*

car around and went home. I felt rebuked by the Lord for not being more thoughtful or sensitive to what I now understand He was trying to say to me as the parent. But in His great mercy, He spoke gently to my son, steering him in the safest course.

## Chapter 8

### Performance and Praise

*Mary: Oh, mamma, I do wish to have this true light increase. I do wish to be good. I am always so sorry and so ashamed when I see these ugly weeds in my heart. What can make them come up, when I dislike them so much?*

*Mamma: The love of self, my dear—the desire to bring self into notice.*

*—Mary Ann Kelty*

It is certainly true that children require a lot of attention, but we must be very conscientious about the *kind* of attention we give them. Our words and other expressions of approval or disapproval often have more power than we realize. Of course we cannot ultimately control the path that our children will choose, but a faithful encouraging of right things and discouraging of wrong things generally has a great impact on what characteristics develop and flourish in their young hearts.

When our children are young, we should frequently ask ourselves what we are aiming at in all of our interac-

tions with them. For instance, are we desiring that they grow in humility and meekness? If so, then even when they are very young we should be careful not to flatter them (by words or actions) in ways that will build up pride, conceit, or desires to be the center of attention. Are we hoping that our children will grow up to be wise and self-controlled adults? Then we should never praise them for being wild and ridiculous (even if we find it funny), nor laugh and encourage foolish behavior or senseless chatter.

This is a mistake that my husband and I made when our children were very young. By regularly laughing at silly behavior, and repeating our children's funny stories to our friends (while our kids were listening), we encouraged them to be silly all the time. When children see that something they do or say gets a desirable reaction (i.e. praise and attention) from the people they respect, they naturally do it again. And these learned patterns of behavior do not automatically stop when they reach a certain age. What may seem funny or cute when a child is three years old, often appears rude or obnoxious when they are eleven or twelve. But by that time, it is extremely difficult, if not too late, to undo all that has been ingrained in their hearts by years of ill-advised praise and affirmation. Before you develop habits of praising your children for the wrong things, ask yourself if their words or actions in this particular case are really praiseworthy. I mean, are they truly right and good? Should they be encouraged and re-enforced? Or are we encouraging now the very things that we will one day be laboring to discourage? "A flattering mouth works ruin" (Pro. 26:28).

Remember that parents are *always* teaching. We don't just teach the things we want them to learn. We



unfortunately also teach many things that we don't want them to learn! Words are not neutral. And even our body language and silent expressions of approval or disapproval are constantly communicating, instructing, and shaping our children's lives, for good or for bad.

Of course, there is a right kind of praise, and a healthy way to encourage our children for doing something well. "Thank you for doing your chores without me even asking!" or "You worked really hard and did a great job in school today," or "I've noticed how kind you've been to your little sister recently and I want you to know that I really appreciate it," are examples of taking notice of our children when they do what is right and encouraging that kind of behavior. Expressions of unconditional love and affection are also vital to a healthy relationship and should be seen and felt continually.

## **Physical Appearance**

Be careful not to draw unnecessary attention to your child's physical appearance at any age. While it is at times appropriate for children to be neat and clean, it is unhelpful—and even harmful—to lead them to believe that an impressive, attractive, or fashionable physical appearance is important. The truth is, it is not. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

When it is evident to children that their parents desire attractive clothes, stylish hair, and cool shoes for themselves, this will of course awaken similar concerns in their children. And making comments to children such as, "You look so pretty in that dress," or "Those pants look great on you," will only cause your child to consider their

appearance more frequently and more carefully. When comments and compliments are regularly made in a family about physical appearance, it becomes a breeding ground for both pride and insecurity. This is particularly true with daughters, seeing that most cultures scream at them that their physical appearance means everything.

We also need to be very careful not to place too much emphasis on our children appearing presentable in the eyes of others. I remember when I was a new mother, I not only dressed my firstborn son with a desire that he look cute, but also so that I would receive favorable comments from those around me. Thankfully, this vain desire began to disappear as I allowed the Lord to show me the true value of clothes, and the wrong place that they were occupying in my heart. In Matthew 6:25, the Lord tells us plainly that these sorts of things should not concern those who seek an eternal inheritance. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” We shouldn’t forget that the real purpose of clothing is to protect us from the elements and to cover our bodies in modesty.

Even a parent’s fretful concern for cleanliness can put too much importance on outward appearances. I have heard children express a fear that their mothers will punish them if they return home with dirty clothes, or with mud on their pants. But often the real motivation behind the parents’ concern is neither the clothes, nor the actions of the child, but rather anxiety regarding how the appearance of a child might reflect on them. Sometimes we accept these sorts of cultural norms without even asking questions, or seeking the guidance of the infallible

Spirit. But those who are willing to see and do His will, know that the Lord will always show us the things that feed and strengthen the wrong nature, both in ourselves and our children.

In a home where physical appearance is given little notice or importance, and where inward virtues are highly valued and esteemed, it is common for children to follow the example of their parents. But if given access to social media, or to superficial friendships that highly regard physical appearance, most children will very naturally develop desires for what they see valued around them.

## **Modesty**

The bodies of our children are created by God, and intended to be a holy temple for a heavenly Spirit. They are also perfectly designed to live and function in this world, and even granted a measure of our Creator's beauty. But this beauty is not given to be uncovered and exhibited to all the world, or employed to incite the lust of our fellow man. There is a right and a wrong way to use all of God's gifts. He teaches us to be careful stewards of our bodies, only giving their beauty to a life-long partner in the covenant of marriage.

For this reason, as our children grow up, modesty should be exemplified and encouraged by both parents, and children should be taught to dress appropriately and conservatively, not following the patterns of this world. Christians are called to express the light and nature of the Holy Spirit that is within us, and there is no way to be a light in this world if what we exhibit is no different than the darkness that surrounds us. Consider 2 Cor. 6:14-16: "What communion has light with darkness? And what

accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.” If there is no communion between darkness and light, between the children of the world and the children of God, and if the pure Spirit of God truly dwells within us, then why should we look the same as the world? Should we, as Christians, follow the norms and fashions of a world that is always trying to call attention to itself?

We are called to be an expression of Christ in this world, the “fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” And though this calling certainly applies to both sexes, allow me to speak candidly to women for a moment, as they often feel far more pressure to display their beauty to the world. 1 Tim. 2:9-10 says: “In like manner also, let women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.” Here women are exhorted to adorn themselves, not with those things which draw attention to themselves, but with such works as both come from God, and draw attention to Him. And the only way to clothe ourselves with works that are truly good, is by continually turning our hearts to the Source of all good, granting Him freedom to “work in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Php. 2:13). Adorning ourselves with good works requires complete dependence and submission to the Lord.

I encourage all women—mothers, young women and little girls—to consider the Lord in everything, even in how you cover your bodies. Don’t allow yourself to be swayed by what is fashionable, attractive, or even what is comfortable. Simply consider what is good, right, and

pleasing to the Lord, according to what you have seen and experienced of His truth. The world is continually saying to us, “It is your body, do with it what you want!” But the Lord tells us, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The truth is that we do not belong to ourselves; both our bodies and souls were purchased by our Savior. And those who are willing to surrender to Him, are taught by His Spirit to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psa. 29:2).

We are called to be pilgrims and strangers during our time in these bodies, learning how to be in this world without being of it. I ask every woman who reads these lines to prayerfully consider them. Let the Lord search deep in your heart, your motives, your assumptions, and the accepted norms of your culture. And remember that as mothers, we have a God-given responsibility to protect our children in this regard. It is so easy to conform to what is conventional, or to pass wrong things down to our children that we have learned from our own parents and culture. But if we will allow Him, God will teach us, awaken us, lead us, and purify us, and we will then be able to guide the lives of the little ones who depend on us and who are constantly watching and learning to follow in our footsteps.



## Chapter 9

# Media and Entertainment

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.—Philippians 4:8*

Sin has had the same source, nature, and effect in the heart of man since the very beginning. It has always hardened his heart, blinded his eyes, deceived his desires, and separated his soul from a God who is all righteousness, life, and love. But though sin has not changed, and God has not changed, what *has* changed in our day (more than in any other generation) is the *access* that man has to the innumerable evils that are in the world. Never before in history has the general population had the world at its fingertips (literally!), on a rectangular device that is never further away than our pocket. Never has man been able, so quickly and easily, to satisfy every curiosity, indulge every lust, and feed the mind so fully and constantly with every form of entertainment and information, every

possible sight, sound, and pleasure. Every idea is public, every opinion is considered acceptable, and every conceivable interest of man has a channel on YouTube. There is now a video, a club, a forum, a newsfeed, a website, an app, and a game for absolutely everything that has ever entered the heart of man. Truly, these are unprecedented times!

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children of today are spending an average of *seven hours a day on entertainment media*<sup>11</sup>—on televisions, computers, phones and other electronic devices—not to mention the time they spend on devices for school and other activities. In other words, our children spend far more time interacting with the world through channels of media than they do with us! What are they seeing and hearing all day long? And what effect is it having on their mind, heart, and will? My sincere conviction is that giving our children regular access to these things is the greatest mistake that parents are making in our generation.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” Jesus says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36) What is more important or valuable than the heart, or soul, of our children? The soul is the immortal part, the part of man that was created to receive, enjoy, and overflow with the life, righteousness, and goodness of God. And Scripture makes clear that, very much like the body, the soul is always eating and drinking. Of course it doesn’t eat with a physical mouth, but it continually takes into itself the things

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11 Media and Children, <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/>



that are around it. It draws in and consumes the things it hears and sees and feels from its environment, and what it eats, it slowly becomes. The old saying, “We are what we eat” is true in more ways than one.

In Isaiah 55, we find the following words:

*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.*

It is a great error for parents to believe that the hours invested in television, internet, and other forms of media are not greatly affecting the hearts of our children. All we need to do is observe what they do and say, how they respond to us, and what they talk about with their friends, to see the effect that media is having upon them, and to verify the truth of Christ’s words, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mat. 12:34). I am certainly not trying to suggest that *all* online activities or screen time is wrong, or that there are no good and useful ways to use these devices. But I am suggesting that, until our children are mature and wise enough to guard their own hearts, and to “eat what is good,” it is our responsibility as parents to protect their hearts from dangerous and corrupting influences.

If your children are already accustomed to spending considerable time entertaining themselves on televisions, computers, phones and other electronic devices, I encourage you to take some time and humbly consider the reasons why you allow them to do so. Is it because you

truly think it is good for them? Do you believe it encourages the qualities, morals, and habits that you hope will characterize their lives? If not, what are the other motivations involved? Have you just not given it the consideration it deserves? Are you being carried along in the current of our culture? Do you allow it because of pressure from family, friends, or neighbors? Do you like that it keeps your children quiet, or distracts them so that you can talk with friends or have some time to yourself? Or is the principle reason that you allow these things simply that you dread how your child would respond if you forbid them?

I am aware that the views expressed here may be considered radical by some, but for those who profess to be Christians, I ask you to allow me to reason with you for a moment, in the very same way that the Lord has had to reason with me on this issue.

Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). But will anyone deny that, in the time that is given to media and entertainment, the glory of God is generally the furthest thing from our mind? Are we not, in those moments, far more captivated with the glory of man, with his greatness, his beauty, his possessions, aspirations, desires, ambitions, appetites, and pursuits? Do not games and other forms of entertainment lead our minds out from the fear of God and the love of truth, and set them upon every form of vanity, humor, passion, desire, and violence? Instead of "fixing our minds on things above," are we not rather fixing them intentionally on things that are below, and willingly (indeed, eagerly!) filling our hearts with fictitious stories, imaginary plots, notions of heroes, romances, villains, battles, comedy, dramas, and the like?

Paul tells us, “The time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess” (1 Cor. 7:29-30). But with a great many forms of entertainment and media, man is literally *inventing* ways to waste precious time, to invest the heart and mind in things that are at best meaningless, and more often distracting, addicting, and inwardly corrupting. How many hours are spent by young people on social media platforms observing the lives, possessions, activities, and bodies of random people around the globe? How many young minds are riveted and addicted to video games or online role-playing games, throwing away every spare moment they have? How much time is dedicated to movies, TV shows, YouTube videos, and the like, for no better reason than to amuse our desires and stimulate our senses?

We read in Scripture that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Pro. 9:10). Peter admonishes us “to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17). But what do most forms of media and entertainment have to do with the fear of the Lord, or with the eternal purpose of God for your child? Do they not rather abound with levity, jokes, sarcasm, and humorous put-downs, drawing all thoughts away from what is true and eternal? Jesus tells us that, “for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Mat. 12:36). But is there anything *besides* idle words in most of these forms of media and entertainment?

I want to say again, I am not anti-technology, nor am I suggesting that all screen time is corrupting and wrong. I am only desiring, on one hand, to convey the great

caution, thoughtfulness, and personal involvement that a parent must have in their child's access to screens; and on the other hand, to suggest that the most common forms of entertainment and amusement do indeed contradict, dishonor, and war against the purpose of God for the immortal souls of our children. Raising a child is a serious responsibility. It is the temporary stewardship of an immortal soul. And every aspect of our parenting—and none more than this one—should be submitted to the loving scrutiny of the One who sees everything, and who knows and desires what is best for His children.

### ***Practical Advice for Screen Time***

#### **Television**

I have to admit that I was the one who allowed my children's desire for television to grow in the first place, and I well remember the various excuses I used to justify it. For one thing, I noticed they would eat their dinner much better in front of the TV. Or when it was getting close to nap time or bedtime, I would sometimes use the television to settle them down and prepare them for sleep. I grew up watching all the classic cartoons, and when I became a mom I remember wanting to pass on my fondness for the same cartoons to my children. In a similar way, my husband desired to pass on his passion for soccer. He and the kids began watching more and more games together, and we couldn't help but notice their affection for sports grow stronger and stronger.

Nearly all the world watches TV, but even many unbelievers confess that it is generally a waste of time. Few attempt to come up with any sort of justification for the

countless hours invested. Apart from perhaps being carefully used for educational purposes, is there any true benefit derived from television and movies, either for children or adults? If your answer to that question is no, then why continue? Why live contrary to what you really believe to be true? Because, apart from consuming precious time, it is evident that the things our children see over and over become normal and acceptable to them. And how can we expect them to live or behave in a way that is contrary to what we allow them to see every day?

As parents, we have the ability to provide our children with a path that is free from unnecessary attachments and allurements. But we can also lay countless hindrances before their hearts, the very place where the tender Seed of God is seeking to grow. I am thankful to the Lord that my husband and I began to see the serious mistake that we were making in this regard when our children were still young. We came to see clearly that, in some ways, the television was influencing them far more than we were. And what is worse, the Lord helped us realize that we were feeding the very things in them that He was trying to protect them from.

Instead of attempting to limit the time your children spend in front of the television, consider ending your relationship with TV once and for all. I believe this was one of the wisest decisions we made for our children, and looking back, I see nothing but positive results from taking this step. Of course we met with resistance from them at first, but they quickly lost interest in their shows and movies, and developed new interests in more wholesome activities. And if you ask them now, they will all candidly tell you that they are glad we made the decision, and they will happily acknowledge that they were better off without it.

## **Video games**

Of course the same thing applies to video games. Kids who play video games grow up to become adults who play video games, and it has been a painful trial for many women to find that they are married to a gaming addict. Gaming is a sad waste of valuable time that has been lent to us from the Lord—time that can never be made up, redeemed or regained. Please don't allow your children to start down the path of gaming, and if you already have, then quickly retreat. Like with all other forms of screen time, there will be some initial complaining and resistance, but your children will adapt. And if they grow up to be followers of Christ, they will one day thank you for protecting them from giving so much of their time and heart to a false reality.

## **Computers**

Computers can certainly be a useful tool for education and communication, especially for older kids, but parents should be well-informed and prepared before placing one into their children's hands. The internet is a portal to every form of evil and immorality that the world can dream up. And I will say again, being careless with such things is perhaps the greatest mistake that parents are making with their children in this generation.

According to the BBC, as many as 37% of all websites on the internet are pornography.<sup>12</sup> That is almost 800 million pornography sites, and that number rises daily. This is a sobering reality that we cannot ignore, or wait

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12 Web porn: Just how much is there? 2013 Jul 1. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-23030090>.

until it is too late to acknowledge. The majority of mothers are not aware of the gravity or the prevalence of this problem, and they often naively assume that their child either does not have access, or would not be interested. Fathers generally better understand the issue, but sometimes due to their own struggles, embarrassment, or past experiences, they shy away from discussing the issue openly with their wife, or implementing the necessary precautions for their children. It is all too easy to turn a blind eye, ignorantly trusting that everything will be okay. But without parents who are diligent and ready to tackle the issue head on, sacrificing their time and energy to take the necessary precautions to protect their children, everything will likely *not be okay*. Children who are not carefully protected almost universally end up encountering pornographic images and videos at a very young age. There are many shocking statistics about the frequency of children's exposure to such things. These encounters stimulate curiosity, feed lusts, and of course lead to the grievous addictions that have become all too common in the day and age we live in.

The computers that our children have access to should always be used under adult supervision, either the physical supervision of a parent (who is actually present and attentive), or through the use of a competent internet blocker. And when the computer is not in use, it needs to be locked down with a secure passcode that is frequently changed. There are a variety of different programs available for filtering and blocking the internet, and some are better than others.<sup>13</sup> I heartily recommend finding one

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13 In the opinion of the authors of this book, the best parental control software for Mac computers is called *Gertrude*. Visit <https://gertrude.app/>

that allows “whitelisting,” which is the ability for parents to allow their children to *only* have access to certain sites that they need for school or other approved uses, instead of trying to only block particularly bad sites or categories. This latter form of filtering (called “blacklisting”) will block some of the worst things online, but it inevitably leaves open a huge amount of unblocked websites and images that your child can easily stumble across.

### **Smartphones and Tablets**

Phones and tablets pose perhaps the greatest risk to children, and yet many parents put these devices into their little ones’ hands at an early age, often with little or no restrictions. One could make a strong argument that adults need smartphones in order to function in today’s society, but this is not true of children. When teenagers begin to drive, or work, or spend large amounts of time away from the house, a smartphone may be appropriate, but still they should be safely blocked and monitored by parents until they are adults.

The importance of blocking access to the internet (and the app store) on a teenager’s phone cannot be overstated. Apple iPhones and iPads have a very helpful function called *Screen Time* that allows parents to turn off internet access, block most apps, and also monitor a child’s activity on their device. It may take a little effort to familiarize yourself with how it works, but this will be well worth your time and effort. Android phones have parental controls as well, though they are not quite as powerful as Apple’s Screen Time. There are other third-party apps that can be downloaded onto Android Phones (i.e. Qustodio or Bark) which may work better for you than



built-in parental controls. Take the time to find a good solution and to learn how to use it well. Unfortunately, setting up restrictions and monitoring children's phones is often not a simple or straightforward task, but in the world we live in, *this inconvenience must be considered a necessary and unavoidable part of raising children.* Parents will usually go to any extreme to protect a child from sickness or injury. But please consider that there is no greater injury that a child can sustain than the darkening and corrupting of their immortal soul.

## **Social Media**

Do your children a huge favor and do not allow them to have access to social media. Save them from the barrage of exposure to the world, and the enormous temptation of wanting to conform to all that they see in it. Some parents claim they have a lot of trust and confidence in their children, and believe that they are only using social media for innocent interactions with friends. This may be true, for now. But social media platforms offer a link to the whole world, and what starts off small and innocent almost invariably grows into something bigger and more influential in their lives. It's hard not to notice the widespread tendency among young people to be almost continually staring at and typing on their phones. This is largely due to social media involvement, where kids are constantly sharing with each other pictures and comments about their lives, opinions, bodies, etc., or passing around links, pictures, and videos from the internet. To avoid redundancy, I will only say that such things are rarely harmless, and almost never good or helpful. Your children will do much better growing up in

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an environment where you are in a position to influence their development and their worldview more than other peers or strangers.

## Chapter 10

# Then How Do They Spend Their Time?

*He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.*

—*Proverbs 12:11*

If our children do not watch television and play video games, then what do they do with their time? I remember when one young mother asked me, “Are they supposed to just play with wooden blocks all day?” This was said mostly in jest, but it was a fair question. Kids have to do something. How are they supposed to spend their time?

One could argue that it is easier to allow children to entertain themselves in front of a screen, where at least they stay in one place, and their physical bodies are safe. But the truth is that there are far better ways for children to pass their time—ways that are healthier for their mind, body, and soul. Young children are inquisitive and creative by nature. If given time and opportunity, they will come up with all sorts of ingenious things to do.

Many studies have shown that, besides contributing to other emotional and developmental problems, TV and

video games can shorten a child's attention span and create a need for constant stimulation and entertainment. When left without a screen, many children find themselves fidgety, agitated, and at a loss to know what to do with themselves. Everything else seems boring in comparison to a hilarious movie or a fast-paced video game. But when children are raised without a dependence upon screens, it is truly amazing what their resourceful young minds can create and do.

### **Wholesome Activities**

I remember one particular time when my children came to tell me they were bored, and I gently tried to explain to them that it is not necessarily a bad thing to feel that way. Parents should not consider it their responsibility to make sure their kids are having fun all the time. In fact, being constantly entertained is not good for their minds or their hearts. In young children, times of boredom often stir up creativity, prompting them to write, to invent new games, or to sit down to read a good book. Or even better, moments when kids are not being outwardly stimulated are sometimes used by them to inwardly reflect, to pray, or to commune in their hearts with the Lord, especially if parents regularly encourage such practices.

Unfortunately, the world we live in is designed to constantly entertain. We are often strangers to our own hearts because we keep ourselves continually distracted and stimulated by things outside of us. Living this way quite naturally keeps us far away from seeing or understanding what's really going on inside of us. Parents who live like this pass along to their children (through word

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and example) the idea that our senses should be continually excited, or that time is wasted unless we are doing something fun. It is not uncommon for parents to fill a child's entire school vacation with entertaining activities so that they never feel bored. But we should be very careful in this, not only for spiritual reasons, but because being continually plugged into the diversions of this world prevents children from discovering the gifts and abilities that God has given them.

Over the years I have watched creativity grow in my children. I have seen them invent multitudes of games with their own elaborate drawings, or act out the stories they have heard in history lessons. I've watched them rifle through the recycling bin for building materials to make cardboard houses, milk carton trucks, and many other creations of their own imagination. On sunny days, they have drawn whole cities with chalk on the driveway, gotten out their toy cars, and played for hours. They have built Lego submarines, submerging them in buckets of water with great delight. A small ball is sometimes all they need to invent a brand new game with complex rules and a clever system of scoring. I have watched them pretend they are explorers, sneaking around the yard with their magnifying glasses, investigating every insect or interesting object they find in the garden. Truly, they have blessed me with their creativity, and touched my heart with their innocence. And I know perfectly well that things would be very different had they sought their entertainment in television, YouTube, or video games.

**Some of our favorite activities for children include:**

*Building projects.* Any kind of constructive play that

involves moving and manipulating objects to build and create something new is both highly entertaining for kids, and also beneficial for cognitive development, problem solving, and for inspiring creativity. What begins in a young child as playing with wooden blocks or Legos, can easily develop into more complicated woodworking or building projects in preteens or teenage children.

*Art.* It is important for children to learn how to create things that are uniquely their own, using their own God-given inspiration. Art teaches kids to look for beauty around them, and to try to interpret and replicate it. It also provides an opportunity for rest and stillness, giving kids an important break from busyness and noise.

*Gardening.* What could be more down to earth than gardening? There are innumerable lessons to be learned from working in the soil, including a multitude of pictures of the work that God does in the soil of our own hearts. The miracle of planting a seed, watering it, tending to it, and watching it grow, is something that every child should experience. And gardening is also a great way of helping to teach responsibility, patience, and the rewards of hard labor.

*Reading.* A good, wholesome book is a wonderful way to engage, teach, and shape a child's mind, introducing thoughts and ideas that extend beyond the small sphere in which they live. See chapter 7 for help on selecting the right books for your children.

*Physical Activity.* Getting outside and engaging in physical activity can be a fun and healthy way to spend time together. Walking, biking, swimming, catching bugs, climbing trees, etc. can keep kids healthy and active, allowing them to burn off extra energy while enjoying God's creation.

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*Jigsaw puzzles, brain teasers, mazes, & logic puzzles.* Puzzles are fun exercises for the brain, and also help to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills.

*And last, but certainly not least...pets!* There are many benefits that result from growing up with pets. For one, owning a pet can help kids learn responsibility. Pets require food, clean water, and other kinds of regular care, and even little children can assist their parents in these daily chores. Caring for a pet can also awaken a sense of nurture and empathy in a child. Learning to recognize when an animal wants to play, when it needs to rest, when it is hurting or ready to be fed, can foster sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others. Moreover, children who grow up with a pet, especially with a dog, are often more physically active than those who do not. Most dogs require regular exercise, and so can make perfect playmates for kids who have boundless energy.

## **Appreciating God through Nature**

*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.—Psalm 19:1*

When we learn to lift our eyes up to the Lord (and take them off of ourselves), He enlarges our heart to see and appreciate His beauty in creation, and how He has testified of Himself in the things that He has made. Everything was designed with a purpose, and every created thing declares the work of His hands. Even unbelievers feel an unexplainable attraction to the beauty of a sunset, the seaside, or the powerful wind blowing through the leaves of trees. They may not comprehend the Source of its beauty, but something of God's power, wisdom, and goodness calls to them through creation.

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We catch a glimpse of God's love and care while watching a mother bird brood over her nest of fragile eggs. The face of a flower turned to the sun, soaking in warmth and light, speaks to us of our own need to turn continually to the light of Christ. A young seedling pushing its way up through the dry earth gives hope that new life can emerge out of barrenness and death. And with the early morning dew that never fails to water the earth each and every day, we are reminded of the Lord's unceasing faithfulness to the children of men. Understanding that all these things were made by Him and for Him, we can use the beauty of creation to point our children to the glory and goodness of the Lord.

If given the opportunity to spend time outdoors, children invariably feel drawn to plants, animals and the marvels of nature. Their inquisitive minds are delighted by the wild diversity of insects and animals with their incredible shapes, colors, abilities, their amusing antics and mind-boggling instincts. A line of marching ants can provide an afternoon of entertainment to a curious 4-year-old who wonders where they're all going, what they're carrying, and why.

If there is limited access to woods, fields, or ponds where you live, take some time each week to find a place where your children can spend several hours walking, exploring, and interacting with nature. The fresh air, the exercise, and spontaneous discoveries that come from spending time outside will do your children an abundance of good. And don't be afraid to let them get dirty! Of course there is a time for kids to be clean and presentable, but there should also be plenty of time to touch, explore, and make messes, while investigating firsthand the tiny creatures that live in a mud puddle. Your child's health



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will benefit from spending time outdoors. Their creativity will be cultivated through their own interest and curiosity about what they observe. And most importantly, they will have an opportunity to grow in appreciation for the One who created it all.

**Some of our family's favorite ways to interact with nature include:**

*Birdwatching.* In our home, we have developed an appreciation for birds, and try to identify their species and even recognize their songs. Having learned all of the common birds in our area, our kids are especially excited whenever they see or hear an unusual bird visit our yard.

*Going for a walk after a rainstorm.* When my children were little, they used to put on their rubber boots, and we would go for a walk and jump in every puddle they saw along the way.

*Nature journaling.* My kids began journaling their experiences with nature when they were four or five years old, taking a pencil and a journal outside with them to draw or write about things that caught their attention. It was often a tiny little insect, leaf, or flower that they focused on, observing fascinating details that adults would likely never notice.

*Nature hikes and creek walks.* There were few activities that gave my children greater joy when young than turning over the rocks in woods and creeks to find what might be living underneath. The shouts, smiles, and exclamations after finding a wiggly salamander, a baby crayfish, or a colorful darter fish, manifested beyond any doubt the natural intrigue and enjoyment that kids feel towards the wonders of God's creation.

*Leaf collecting and tree identification.* Many children love to collect leaves. Gathering as many different kinds as you can and then matching them to pictures in a tree identification book is a fun way to learn about the different kinds of trees that live in your area.

These kinds of simple activities are not only fun, innocent, and educational, but they provide precious opportunities to spend hours with your children, talking about the wonders of creation and the wisdom and power of the Creator.

## **Time to Work**

Teens and preteens often have a lot of free time on their hands, and it is not uncommon for much of this time to be wasted. Helping your son or daughter find meaningful ways to spend their time can both build character and also keep them from developing unhealthy habits. In our experience, as kids approach adolescence they usually benefit from having more to do, more responsibilities, and more purpose for their days. Too much free time is sometimes a detriment to their development at this age. Hours spent alone in their rooms, ruminating or obsessing about emotions, relationships, desires, and self-image, can be a breeding ground for the development of undesirable behaviors.

When our daughter was twelve years old, my husband sat down with her and talked about some possible ways that she could take on more responsibility. She was a creative child, with plenty of ideas and an incredible amount of energy. After talking over a few possibilities and doing a little bit of research with her dad, she decided to attempt a small poultry business. My husband and

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oldest son made improvements to an old barn we had on our property, and our daughter used money she had saved to buy 50 chicks, with the intention of raising and caring for them, and then selling their eggs to neighbors and friends. She also ordered 100 quail eggs to hatch in an incubator, intending to sell their eggs as well. She very quickly had plenty of work cut out for her! There were early mornings out in the barn, feeding hens, cleaning coops, and gathering eggs. She was busy repairing fences, doctoring minor illnesses and injuries, packaging eggs, and walking to neighbors' houses for deliveries. Though her little business never made a lot of profit, she definitely made back the money she had invested, and far more importantly, she learned all sorts of valuable lessons from the hard work. Caring for those animals and running her small business gave more purpose to her days, and helped her take important steps towards being a responsible adult. She kept up the egg-selling business for about three years, and even afterwards never stopped raising chickens, rabbits, and plenty of other animals until she moved out and got married.

When it comes time for children to find work outside of the home, a safe work environment is crucial. Though we certainly want to foster a good work ethic and a sense of responsibility in our children, we must be careful that we don't send them off into settings or into relationships with coworkers that will have a corrupting influence. Their heart is always the most important thing to look after, and more harm than good can come from the wrong work environment.

All of our children were blessed with the opportunity to work for a landscaping company that was owned and run by a close Christian friend of ours, a man who worked

hard to create an environment that was spiritually clean and safe for young people to work in. When they got to be fourteen years old, each of our children worked full-time during their summer breaks from school, mowing grass, pulling weeds, spreading mulch, planting trees, and building patios. This was a physically demanding job, and all of them struggled at first with the long hours and the self-discipline required. But they all quickly learned the value of hard work, and the importance of persevering without complaining.

Most countries have a minimum working age of either 14 or 15, and though that may be a good time for your teen to look for their first job, it is not always possible to find a safe environment for them to work in. There are many valuable skills to be learned through working outside of the home, but it is important to use caution when searching for a job. These are very vulnerable years for them, and it would not be wise for them to take on a job where their hearts are influenced by bad company. If a good and trustworthy workplace cannot be found, consider some alternatives: like spending one day a week at a grandparent's house doing housework or yard-work, volunteering with you at a local park or farm, or starting up their own small business, like the egg business mentioned above. It is not the money that is important at this age, but the values and habits that are learned through hard work.

Chapter 11

## Creating a Peaceful Home Environment

*A home is happy just in the degree that God is loved and obeyed in it.—Elizabeth Prentiss*

We all desire our homes to be a place where our children feel safe and loved. We want to provide them an environment where they are comfortable, at peace, and not troubled with thoughts of fitting in or wearing masks as they slowly grow into the person God created them to be. Achieving this kind of environment is not easy, and it takes years of consistent love, discipline, and pointing them again and again to the Lord. The truth is, a peaceful home is simply a home where Christ is the Head, and where every member of the family is seeking to bring their lives into submission to Him. This is obviously not something that happens overnight, and there will be many mistakes to learn from along the way. But if the real goal of your family is to live before and unto Christ in all things—allowing everything else to bow and yield to this one great objective—then, to some measure at least, you will be able to testify to the truth of these words, “Lord, You

will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us” (Isa. 26:12).

A peaceful home is one where the fruits of the Spirit are increasingly evident, where family members prefer one another over themselves, where they come together for meals and take the time to listen to each other. It is a place where both parents and children are careful with their words, not raising their voices in anger or frustration, and not saying things they will later regret; where children are encouraged to spend time with their family, and not hide all day behind closed doors; where deep heart-matters can be talked about openly and honestly, without embarrassment or insecurity, and where members of the family feel secure in God’s love and unfettered from the need to protect self.

I am far from suggesting that our home was a mature expression of all of these things, but as we sought the continual guidance and correction of the Lord, and walked in this direction, we saw that if you “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things shall be added to you” (Mat. 6:33).

### **Sharing Together as a Family**

True Christians know very well that the Lord is not found in outward rituals and practices, but that His living Word is very near, even “in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom. 10:8). Even so, there are some kinds of outward activities, such as setting aside a specific time to seek the Lord as a family, that can be very beneficial for children.

In our family, we have found it helpful and rewarding to set aside time every day in order to “seek the Lord while he may be found” (Isa. 55:6), and to share His truth with

our children. One of the ways we do this is by reading the Bible or a Christian book aloud to them. This not only presents true principles and testimonies before their ears and hearts for their frequent consideration, but it also almost always provokes interesting questions and meaningful conversations.

During these times, we also try to share openly with our kids about our own experiences, what the Lord has taught us, and even our struggles. Everything that the Lord allows in our daily lives, even trials and difficulties, can be of great benefit to us, and talking about these things openly with our children helps them to understand what it means to take up our cross, and to die to our own carnal will, expectations, plans, and hopes. Again, these kinds of outward activities or family meetings are not the substance of Christianity, and they do not guarantee spiritual results. But what they do is allow our children to hear what is real and important to their parents, to see their zeal for the Lord and His gospel, with the hope that they may one day declare with their own hearts and lives, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Some families are blessed to know other like-minded families with whom they can walk together in the Lord and unite in these sorts of activities. Many others, however, are not so fortunate. For those of you who feel like you are mostly walking this journey alone, take courage, and remember that the Lord is with you. He will be your Teacher and your Guide. If you feel that you have no true fellowship and that your children are mostly without friends, don’t despair; the Lord has ways to make up for whatever you lack. Seek Him first, and He will not leave you desolate. Even if your family is small—just three

or four people—remember His promise: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mat. 18:20). Let your home be your church. Seek the Lord as a family, worship Him in Spirit and truth, and in time (with faithfulness) the Lord will likely add to your number those who will join hands with you on His narrow path.

### **A Time for Silence**

*Pray much, and speak little. Oh let me particularly recommend to you that sacred, gentle, and peaceful silence, which God and all his saints love so much!*

—Gerhard Tersteegen

The wise King David said, “Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still” (Psa. 4:4). This counsel, no doubt spoken from David’s own experience of this practice, can be a great help both to parents and children. Setting aside specific times to silence all external and internal activity of the flesh is extremely important if we want to become familiar with the voice of the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Some people hastily assume that they know what it means to follow Christ simply because they believe in Him. But we should humbly and sincerely ask ourselves—do we really know His voice? Have we truly learned to recognize His gentle leading and guidance, His quick warnings and kind corrections? If we still struggle to differentiate His voice from the many other voices and feelings in our hearts, then “let us meditate within our hearts and learn to be still,” giving the Lord plenty of time and freedom to teach us.



The following excerpt from *A Guide to True Peace*, gives some insight on how to listen carefully to His voice:

*We must listen with an attentive ear, for His is a still, small voice. Indeed, it is not a voice uttered in words as when a man speaks to his friend; but it is an inward perception infused by the secret operations and influences of the Divine Spirit, drawing and empowering us to obedience, patience, meekness, humility, and all the other Christian virtues, in a language perfectly intelligible to the attentive soul.*<sup>14</sup>

What a wonderful source of help and comfort it is when children (like little Samuel in 1 Sam. 3:7) learn the voice of their Shepherd at a young age. It is usually necessary for parents to encourage them to take time to be still and listen to the Lord, as this is not something they are likely to do on their own. Children are naturally fidgety and active (both inwardly and outwardly) and will need encouragement from us to calm their bodies and focus their minds and hearts. But with the help of our words and our example, even children can learn to appreciate regular times of silence, and in it become familiar with the One who speaks with a “still, small voice” (1 Kin. 19:12).

What might this look like in your family? It could simply be a time set aside each day when children are told to find a quiet place (a bedroom, a corner of the family room, or outside under a tree, etc.) in order to be still for

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14 *A Guide to True Peace, Selections from the Writings of Francis Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray, Jeanne Guyon, and Michael de Molinos.* Compiled by William Backhouse & James Janson. Published by Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

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the space of 10 or 15 minutes, with the purpose of turning their hearts and listening for the Lord. Or it may be something you do as a family when you come together for your evening devotions. In our family, we often spent the first 5 or 10 minutes of these times in silence, with our eyes closed, and everyone attempting to give the Lord their undivided attention.

## Chapter 12

### Prayer

*True prayer is the breathing of the child to the Father which begat it, from the true sense of its needs, for the supply of those needs.—Isaac Penington*

Some thoughts arise now in my heart about prayer, and how important it is for parents to continually call out to God for His wisdom and assistance. I cannot sufficiently express how beneficial it is, upon waking up every morning, to present our hearts before the Lord, and to whole-heartedly seek to know Him as the true life of our soul and the light to our path.

I sincerely encourage all parents to daily ask Him what He desires to do in you, what needs to be purified, corrected and redeemed. Bring your words, thoughts, and deeds to the Light of Christ, so that in His light you can see light, and learn both what to do and what to leave undone. Make this your regular practice, your daily food, and you will never cease growing in wisdom. Regularly seek His perspective and guidance in this momentous task of parenting. Do not assume that you can handle it yourself, or forge your own way. Rely heavily upon the Lord, looking to Him for patience with your children, for calmness and discernment in making decisions, and for

answers to the difficult questions that your children bring to you. Let Him be the Rock that grounds you, the One you run to when things are hard or confusing, the One whose perspective you continually and desperately need.

Prayer is not difficult or complicated. It is simply the breathing of the heart towards God. It is the heart or will of man reaching for God while it submits to Him. God desires to make us “partakers of His divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world” (2 Pet. 1:4), and this is a work of His Spirit in us as we keep our eyes fixed on Him throughout the day, always seeking, yearning, and longing to live in His presence. Make it a habit to bring every aspect of parenting before Him, not following the norms and patterns of this corrupt world, but seeking His perspective and guidance in all things. Let the desire of your heart breathe unto Him all day long—either with words or without words. In this way you will learn to live before Him, and feel more and more deeply how much you depend upon His life and light.

And after you have done everything you know to do as a parent, and have walked in obedience to the Lord’s requireing, carefully following the Spirit’s convictions, then it is time to patiently wait. There may be times when you see little or no fruit, or when your child’s heart appears cold or distant or uninterested in eternal things. Be patient. Pray for them. It is true that parents can protect their kids from many evils, speak truth to them, and point them in the right direction; but they cannot soften their hearts or make them love the Lord. Christ Himself will knock on their hearts, and they must be the ones who open to Him. Wait then, and pray without ceasing that their hearts will hear, turn, and yield at His appearing.

## Chapter 13

### **As for Me and My House**

*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.—Joshua 24:15*

This is a well-known and often-quoted Scripture in Christian homes. But what does it really mean to have a house that “serves the Lord”? It is easy to say that we want these things—that we want Christ to be the Lord of our lives, and the Lord of our families. But I have found (through many merciful corrections) that, beyond good intentions, the Lord requires *a good environment* both within our hearts and within our homes, where His Spirit is free to do all that He desires without resistance or interference.

Creating the right kind of environment, the right soil for the Seed to grow, is probably the most important thing the Lord has taught us throughout our years as parents, and it is perhaps the main point of everything written in this book. Being a good parent, and raising truly good

children, has everything to do with *creating an environment where God is at liberty to teach, correct, change, and form His own life in the hearts of our sons and daughters. Godly parenting is a careful cooperation with the grace of Christ, in such a way that evil and deception are detected and withstood, and the movements and workings of God's Spirit are welcomed by obedience.* When the environment of our home is worldly, vain, quarrelsome, wild, or careless, or when children give their time and their heart to diversions and activities that war against God's purpose for their soul, then the Spirit is grieved and His work is obstructed. But where parents are careful, prayerful, and watchful stewards over the eternal souls of their children, seeking God's wisdom to both protect from what is harmful and to lead them to the one Fountain of living waters, then God's work goes on unhindered and His power can overcome even the greatest obstacles.

It is easier than most people think to "grieve" (Eph. 4:30), "quench" (1 Thes. 5:19), or "resist" (Acts 7:51) the Spirit's work in our hearts and our families. All we have to do is continue living our own lives, in our own will, following the current and pattern of this fallen world. *Nobody* is a good person or a good parent without the Spirit of the Lord, and that is why everything depends upon our careful and watchful submission to Him, and our denial of everything that works against Him. This humble, watchful, and submissive heart is the good soil that receives His Seed and allows its increase, 30, 60, and 100 fold. Offering our homes to the Lord as an environment where He has unobstructed access and perfect liberty to reign is a huge part of what it means for us and our house to serve Him. And when we serve Him in this

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way, then His kingdom comes, His will is done, and everything else in our lives falls into its proper place.





## Chapter 14

### Letters

The following collection of letters offers a tiny peek into some of the teaching moments that have taken place in our home. As teenagers, our kids encountered the same struggles and temptations that other teenagers face. We made an effort to walk through those struggles and temptations with our children by talking openly about them, and the Lord very mercifully preserved their souls from falling into many of the snares that young people are prone to. At times they were willing to talk with us about their struggles, but at other times they were more receptive to letters from us, and so that became a common way for us to help encourage, exhort, and steer them through the many twists and turns of adolescence.

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#### **[To one of our sons]**

I believe you have tasted a bit of the Lord's life and power, and I trust you will experience more. The Lord will not force you to know His power, but He will always provide enough of it for you to escape whatever temptation you are in, and over time, with growth, you will find

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that your temptations become less and less, until they are almost entirely gone.

It is important for you to begin to seek and develop your own inward, personal, relationship with the Lord. You cannot defeat your enemies or overcome sin by using my relationship with God, or your mom's. You need to begin to grow in your own seeking, finding, and following of the Lord. You need to cry out to Him, turning away from all the sins that He makes manifest to you, and turn to Him, pray to Him, read His words, and choose the Lord for yourself. My advice or example is not going to be enough for you. You need to know my God for yourself. You need to feel His joy, feel His righteousness, love His truth. These things may seem far away right now, but they are actually very close to you. They are in your heart in the form of a Seed. And as you turn to Him, and seek Him, He will let Himself be found by you. And there you will find all of the power that you need. Growing in Him, you will have victory over all thoughts and temptations. And your heart will be changed. It will no longer just be you trying to be and do what you should. It will be the Lord working in your heart, transforming you into His own image.

The Lord has set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse. Choose life! Take the Lord for your portion and reward. He is far better than any worldly pleasure. The way that you choose Him is by seeking Him, turning to Him, and obeying the light and grace that flow from Him. The enemy is strong, but if you resist him, he will flee from you, and you will experience power over him.

Decide that you are going to seek the Lord and choose life. Decide that, when temptation comes, you are going to look to the source of all goodness and strength, and receive from Him the ability to turn from evil. "No temp-

tation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

I love you so much. You can always tell me about your struggles, and count on me for encouragement. Seek the Lord, and I will walk with you on the narrow path.

Dad

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### **[To one of our sons]**

I just wanted to tell you how much I love and appreciate you. You've been changing a lot recently, and I'm always watching and noticing little things. I see you becoming wiser, more responsible, more faithful, more hardworking, and more respectful. I also see that there is a sweetness and tenderness in your heart that is always there, even when you hide it. You have been much kinder to your siblings, and even more mature with your friends. I love you so much, and hope you will keep trying to seek the Lord with all your heart, learning to bear His yoke in your youth.

Your biggest fan,  
Dad

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### **[To one of our daughters]**

I love you a whole lot, and it is only because I love and care for you that I am writing this email, not just because I need your help around the house. Being asked to help out

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more around the house has brought out some pretty poor reactions in you, which I am sure you are aware of.

We can often think that we are doing okay, but when confronted with something we really do not want to do, suddenly a whole other nature arises in us. The Lord allows situations and circumstances that cross our will because He loves us and wants to refine us. Those situations and circumstances are opportunities to die to our flesh. I know you know this, and it is something you could easily say to a friend going through a similar struggle, but it is a whole lot harder to accept it for yourself.

You should be striving all the time to give your will up to the Lord, desiring Him to change your heart and make you more willing to serve. This is possible, and it will make you much happier.

I love you so much, and I know the Lord is working in you. Keep submitting to Him, not just in the things you want to, but in the things you do not want to do as well.

Love,  
Mom

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**[To one of our sons]**

I appreciate what you said about wanting to follow the Lord, and your honesty with me. The Lord is extremely kind, loving, good, sweet, and tender. People who don't know Him well always think that He is harsh, demanding, angry, and difficult. It is true that He is righteous and pure, and does not mix with evil in any way, but His nature and heart are actually filled with love and goodness towards you, and every action of His Spirit towards you is a desire to do good to you, to help and save you, to protect

and guide you, and to bring you out of deception and darkness. All of His laws and requirements are only given to us for our own good, like a parent who takes away a sharp knife from a toddler. Take a look at these verses:

*Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! (Deut. 5:29).*

*For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).*

*Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel,’ says the LORD; ‘I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,’ says the LORD; ‘I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, That you have transgressed against the LORD your God, And have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the LORD. ‘Return, O backsliding children,’ says the LORD; ‘for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion’ (Jer. 3:12-14).*

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Mat. 23:37).*

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In these, and so many other verses, you can see that God is longing to be gracious to us, but our own blindness and rebellion is what forfeits our blessings. He is not the one trying to keep good things from us. No, that is what we do to ourselves! He is the one that is trying to give us all good things, and to remove from us all that is deadly and evil. It is true that following the Lord involves giving up our will. But it doesn't take very long to find that losing our own will is the greatest thing that could happen to us. Our will is fallen, perverted, darkened, and deceived. And when we start to see and feel His will working in us, then we wonder why we waited so long to surrender our own. He pours out spiritual blessings (which are the greatest kind by far) and also gives all natural, earthly blessings in their right way and time.

Consider these things before the Lord, and don't be afraid to reach out to Him and pray to Him. He knows your every thought, sees everything you do, and loves you more than I do.

Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

I often find myself thinking about you these days, wanting to help and encourage you in the "highway of holiness," the perfect path of wisdom that I believe the Lord has shown you in measure. But there are some things that I believe have been standing in the way of your growth.

When your mom or I try to talk to you about something serious, there is often something that you allow to rise up in you which blocks your heart from truly receiving

our advice. Do you know what it is? It is *self-pity*. Instead of meekly receiving our words, self-pity starts to rage and roar in your heart, and make you feel and say things like, "All you want to do is criticize me!" "You don't accept me the way I am!" "You don't love me!" "It's not fair!" These kinds of thoughts and accusations come from self-pity, which is just one of the many faces of pride. Self-pity (and all pride) lies to your heart, and makes it hard and easily offended, so that it cannot receive love and truth from your parents, or from the Lord. The truth is, my dear daughter, that we love you more than we could ever explain, and our words to you are words of experience, words of wisdom, and words of real love. And if you would bow your heart down real low, and humble yourself to receive our advice, I believe you would be very glad that you did. Job 5:17 says, "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty."

It is because of my great love for you that I write these things. And because I know that the Lord has visited you with His light, to call you to Himself. He is kind and long-suffering, but His Spirit is also offended and grieved by our sins. "He stands far off from the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). More than anything, I want you to live your life on the highway of holiness, which is a narrow path indeed. There is no pride on that path, and the more you walk in it, the more you will find pride and self-pity being crucified in your heart.

Please consider my words, and know that they come from a father who loves you dearly.

Dad

**[To all four of our children]**

I feel I would be unfaithful to my duty as your loving parent if I didn't express a few things to you.

I truly love your friends, and am glad that you have them. I often feel very grateful to the Lord that you have some friends who are walking the same path that I believe you are walking, or desiring to walk. I like having them around, and feel a real care and concern for them.

However, for the most part, your relationships with them don't seem to be maturing, which is often the case when people grow up together. When you are together, you still act as silly, immature, and childish as you did several years ago.

Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). It's time for you to learn self-control, to be watchful, to be careful not to grieve the Spirit. You are all teenagers now, and the time has come for you to **SEEK** the Lord for yourselves, **FOLLOW** Him because of your own desire, **LOVE** Him because He is good, **TRUST** Him because He knows what is best, **OBEY** Him because He is the righteous judge of all the earth. These should no longer be things you just hear me and other adults talking about. These must be things that you begin to pursue in your own hearts, and for your own sakes.

If you truly began to change in these ways, I am almost certain you would find that 1) your heart would find much more rest and joy, 2) your friends would actually respect it, and appreciate you more, 3) some of them would follow your example, and 4) your relationships with them would be incredibly more rich, meaningful, and real.



But if you don't put away childish things, then you will grow up (like so many others) to be an adult child, a grown-up fool, living and acting and joking and laughing like a child, in the blindness, coldness, and deadness of the first birth, until the Day of the Lord at last comes like a thief in the night.

I love you so much. My time with you in my house is short. In the words of Samuel Fothergill, "Life is short, its business arduous, the prize immortal glory, the failure eternal misery."

Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

I'm sorry that you've been feeling anxious the last few days. I know very well how hard that can be, and how scary and horrible it feels. This season of panic attacks will pass soon. They never last forever (although they seem like they will!). Just remember, that the way to true, lasting freedom is to keep turning to the Lord and seeking Him in the midst of your trials. Reach for Him, cry out to Him, surrender yourself to Him. The enemy will try to make you turn to SELF in your pain, and make you always be self-conscious, self-absorbed, self-concerned, always thinking about how YOU are doing, what is wrong with you, and what other people are thinking about you. But all of that is the wrong path, and it leads to a dead end. Instead, try to keep turning AWAY from self, and TO the Lord. Think of how to please Him, and how to serve others, and show kindness to them. The more you can turn away from self and towards the Lord, the less freedom the enemy will have to bother you.

I love you very much,  
Dad

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**[To one of our sons]**

I really appreciate how you receive correction. It gives me great hope that you will do well, both in spiritual and natural things. Being humble in the face of correction is a very important quality, and it is also very rare. And if you will continue to stay low and small before the voice of wisdom (whether you hear it from your parents, the Bible, or from the Holy Spirit), then the Lord will always find room in your heart for His light and life.

And if you truly follow Christ, you are eventually going to find yourself in a lot of situations (even among Christians) where you will be the only one saying “no” to things. Or perhaps you will just be the *first one* who says “no” to things, and others will follow you. I know it’s probably hard and awkward to say “no” to your friends, but if you will be strong in the truth, holding tightly to righteousness, hopefully you will be an example to them that they will want to follow.

Love you,  
Dad

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**[To one of our sons]**

For the last several years I have noticed that you have a tendency to talk about, draw pictures, and play with things that have to do with fighting, swords, guns, killing, war, etc. I know that this is a “normal” thing for kids your

age to do, but I wanted to ask you to honestly and humbly bring it to the Lord, to seek His perspective on it. Ask Him if it is right or wrong, and if it is really something that you should do to entertain yourself.

I used to talk and play with those kinds of things too when I was a kid. But in the last several years, I've come to a strong conviction that wars and fighting are nothing more than the work of the enemy, manifesting itself through men's selfish desires for power, greatness, and gain. James 4:1-2 says,

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.”

People are attracted to heroism, power, battle, and victory, and they begin to glorify these things when they are very young, telling war stories, acting out battles, pretend fighting, reading about great “conquerors,” etc. But all of this is very deceptive. Have you ever noticed that if someone kills one person he is called a murderer, and is put in jail; but if he kills a million people he is called a conqueror, and becomes the subject of legends and songs and history books? If you and your brother fight, you know it is wrong. You know it is nothing but selfishness and pride and anger. But if two nations battle with weapons, people accept it as a normal part of life, and even excitedly enlist to “fight for their country.”

Jesus taught us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate and persecute us, to turn the other cheek when somebody strikes us, to let people do evil to us rather than to return evil for evil, and to forgive every kind of insult and injury. How does any of this line up with wars and battles, tanks and guns?

*That They Might Know Him*

Jesus had all of the power in the universe at His command, and could have destroyed His enemies in the blink of an eye. But He let sinners spit in His face, punch Him, rip out His beard, beat Him with rods, mock Him, and then nail Him to a cross. There was nothing in this fallen world that Jesus wanted, except to save the souls of those who were rebelling against God. But we fight and kill to gain the temporary things of this world, even while we ignore the love of God that is trying to save us.

I love you so much, and I believe that you will take these things to the Lord, to feel directly from Him what is right and what is wrong in this matter. He is always there, always watching, and always willing to instruct you in His perfect way.

Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

I was thinking and praying about you this morning and felt like I should write you an email. I love you very much (more than you know!) and I am always desiring your growth in the best things, and your freedom from everything harmful.

I know you are going through a difficult time in life, and I'm concerned for you. Adolescence is hard for everybody in some ways; there are so many new things, so many changes and strange emotions. But I see you living your life in a way that is very much OUT from under the yoke of Christ, and it worries and saddens me. What I mean is, I see you hurriedly and impulsively following your own will, your own thoughts, your own desires, speaking your own words, doing your own things, without

any care or caution to be governed by the Spirit of Truth. You often speak and act without any consideration of what is right, or good, or kind, or appropriate. You run ahead of your Guide, and make selfish choices, without any restraint or wisdom. These things are only happening because SELF is still reigning in your heart, going on its way unchecked and unrestrained by the Spirit. And this continues because you have not been turning to the Spirit, or bringing your words and deeds to the Light, but rather running out *ahead* of the Spirit in the will and way of your flesh.

This fleshy self-life reigns in everybody who does not submit to the cross of Christ (which is the power of God that works in you against your sinful nature). The more we ignore the Lord and run out in our own will, the harder it is to hear and feel the restraint of the Spirit. In time, our hearts become harder and colder. We lose true perspective and peace. And then our lives are filled with darkness, confusion, insecurity, false hopes, false pleasures, and empty dreams. Everything is superficial and vain, all because we try to break free from the bonds of God's righteous law, and throw away His loving restraints. Consider Psalm 2:2-6:

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, *‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces, and cast away Their cords from us.’* He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure, saying: ‘But as for Me, I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.’”

Our only true joy, peace, and freedom are found in willingly submitting to this King, who God has set on the

hill of your heart. I encourage you to consider these things prayerfully, and to learn to bring all of your words, deeds, and ways to the light of Christ. He will both show you your evil, and free you from it as you submit to the cross of Christ.

I love you so much,  
Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

I just want to remind you to think about your life as a constant battle or warfare for your eternal soul. Natural life is short and vain, but it is INCREDIBLY important. It is a time to follow the Lord out of spiritual Egypt, a time to receive daily spiritual food and drink, a time to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Every single minute of every day (in one way or another) is part of this battle. And the only way for us to “win,” to experience victory, and be found on the right side, is to take the Lord’s side against ourselves. I mean, we need to seek His judgments, to unite with His truth in our hearts, to love His correction, to resign ourselves to His wisdom and power and direction. If we are not doing this, we may THINK we are not in a battle, but this is only because we have stopped fighting, and are losing ground every day. Be careful how you walk each day, what you let your mind into, what you turn to and turn from. Be careful what you let yourself dream about, think about, talk about, and imagine. Be careful that your heart is always bent towards Truth, because when it is not, you are resisting your own good.

You have a lot of gifts and abilities, but don’t let any of them pull your heart out of a constant yielding to Truth.

The Lord can and likely will use your giftings. But if you try to use them apart from Him, you will only bring a veil over your eyes and trouble into your life.

Just some thoughts in love,  
Dad

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**[To one of our sons]**

My advice is to go slowly and carefully in this relationship, with your eye toward the Lord. There is no hurry. You are both still very young, and you could have a long future together if the Lord wills. Let the Lord show you both WHO and WHAT He desires you to be first. Let Him teach you what life is, what is real, what is true, what is pure, and THEN let your natural relationship with her be formed around that, and rooted in that. Don't try to grow the natural part of this relationship really fast right now. I know it's hard. Emotions, passions, and cultural norms are always seeking to rush you into new and more exciting natural experiences as a couple. There are whispers that say, "You are missing out!" or, "You could be enjoying this or that!" Don't listen to those voices. Stay back to your Guide. The truth is, you can't even really love each other (truly) without the cross first cutting down the tyrant called SELF.

Love you,  
Dad

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**[To both of our daughters]**

My desire is that you would both be an example to

those around you (and to the rest of the world) of modesty, and how you should present yourselves to other people. If you will honestly, humbly, and meekly turn to the Lord and ask Him to examine your motives for how you dress, and for any preoccupation you may have with your physical appearance, I think you will find that Truth will give you clear discernment in all of these things.

If you try to be like the rest of the world, you will attract the worst kind of people, and repel the best. Any young man who has any sense of godliness and truth, will much prefer you to be modest, humble, discreet, pure, quiet, and reserved. These are truly attractive qualities. Girls that seek to show off their beauty to be seen by others only prove themselves to be proud, shameless, forward, vain, superficial, and without the fear of the Lord.

Consider Proverbs 11:22, “As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.”

I love you both very much, and write these things from a deep desire for you to do well.

Dad

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### **[To one of our sons]**

I really appreciate how you have changed and matured recently in so many obvious ways. I just want to also encourage you (as I hopefully always will, in one way or another) to make sure that the Lord has possession of your HEART. Our love for the Lord is something that has to be cultivated. I mean, it’s like a plant that grows, and needs water and light and protection. It indeed has a life of its own, and when it gets big it starts to constrain you



by its own power. But when it's small, then you are always in danger of giving its place to something else. To grow in love for God you need to give Him your time and attention. You won't feel Him, experience Him, know His dealings, movings, convictions, teachings, power or presence if you don't regularly give Him your time and attention, with a desire to really love Him. This takes a little determination and discipline on your part, especially at first. A time will come when you can't imagine starting a day without finding your bearings and your strength in the Lord. But if that day hasn't come yet, then I think it would be really wise for you to set aside some particular times during each day to step away from everything else and give the Lord all of your attention and all of your heart. Make time every day to read, pray, wait, and seek, so that living Truth will grow larger in your heart, and you will grow up in Him.

We always give our time to what we love the most. And often people say they believe in Christ and love God, but their time and attention tell a very different story. I guess I'm just wanting to suggest to you again, that you be watchful and careful with your time and attention, and that you always seek to cultivate love in your heart for the Lord. If you consider this your number one priority every day, you'll know exactly how much you can and should give yourself to other things.

The thing is, if we are disciples of Christ, we don't really have something called "free time." We just have our lives, which were bought at a price, and so belong to the Lord to be used and spent according to His will (which is also our greatest good). There are lots of natural pleasures and joys that the Lord grants us. And there are also wonderful aspects of His creation that we can use and

enjoy while walking in submission to His will. The Lord does not want us to be miserable and bored. But He does want our pleasures and activities to be done in and unto Him, with a heart that is turned, a will that is subjected, and a carefulness not to follow our inclinations in any way that takes us away from the love and fear of God. When we do things, pursue things, or relate to things or people in ways that frequently take our heart out of this continual, inward love, submission, and worship of God, then we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will never let us have real peace in these things. But if natural activities, relationships, pursuits, and jobs can be done in a way that does not compete with, contradict, or distract from this inward communion with God, then I think you can safely continue in them, and thank God for them.

Time is only wisely employed when it is used to live in, under, and for, that which time cannot take from us. Time is poorly employed when it is given to things, activities or relationships that take our heart and our attention away from the one reason why time was given to us.

Love you so much,  
Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

It may feel awkward to talk to us about your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_, but I've always found that open and clear communication (in love) is a wise and helpful thing. And having made a lot of mistakes in my life, fallen flat, been severely reproved by the Lord, repented, and found a measure of real Light, I find myself wanting to help people I love avoid familiar pitfalls, and also find the path of

peace.

The main thing I want to try to communicate to you is the great importance of keeping your eyes turned to the Lord as you try to sort out the nature of your relationship. The Lord knows EXACTLY what is good and right for both of you, and will definitely lead you into it, if you love His guidance more than your own fleshly will, and pay attention when Truth tugs at your heart.

The only way to safely navigate these things is to be slow to act, slow to speak about all that you think and feel, slow to believe your emotions, and then to give plenty of time and space in your heart to feel the leading and guiding of the Lord. He won't steer you in the wrong direction, and if this relationship has a future, you will be led safely, wisely, and purely into something wonderful. But, if this relationship is not the Lord's best plan for you, and if there is another person who would be far better suited for each of you to be with as a partner in life, then you will be SO happy that you were slow, watchful, and careful right now.

I know you may have strong feelings for each other, but because of your age and current station in life there isn't an appropriate place right now for much verbal or physical expression of your feelings. If the Lord leads you over time into a permanent commitment and covenant with each other, then there will be plenty of time for all of that to be experienced or expressed, when it is safe, good, and pure. For now, I think it is really wise for you to focus on knowing and establishing a true foundation for your relationship, to seek depth and reality, and not feelings and affections. Seek the Lord with all your hearts, draw near to Him (both alone and together), share and talk about things that are eternal, spiritual, righteous, pure,

innocent, and true. Know the Spirit of God to be the true “place” where you unite, and the thing that draws you together. And keep the Lord as your Leader and your Guide every step of the way.

I hope you’ll consider these things with a sincere heart. I write them in love.

Dad

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**[To one of our daughters]**

Thank you for your email. I truly appreciate what you are allowing the Lord to do in your heart these days, and I have definitely noticed some of the fruits and changes that are springing up from a greater submission to Him. I'm glad that you are realizing with increasing clarity that EVERYTHING outside of the will of God only brings into greater bondage, disappointment and death, and that even the most exciting relationships can (and will) be ruined to whatever degree we pursue them apart from His light. I trust Him to show you both exactly how to relate to each other, in whatever season He has you. If you let Him fill your hearts, then He will make your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ exactly what it’s supposed to be, both for your good, and His glory.

I think you've seen that your own independent will is just another name for “the path of destruction.” But submission to the Lord in all things is truly the path of peace. I have found it to be so (in my measure), and I hope and pray that you will continue to “strive to enter through the narrow gate.” If this is the path you choose, then the Spirit of God will put all things in order, and all trials,

difficulties, confusion, and pain will only work together for good.

Dad

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**[To one of our sons]**

I've been really, really happy about the way that you seem to be turning your heart to the Lord, and learning to follow Him, taking up the cross, and often seem serious and sincere in your desire to know and obey Him. That means more to me than I can say. And I want to just encourage you to keep surrendering your will to the Lord, in all of the ways that He shows you are necessary. The things we call "little things" that we don't want to give up can be the most important, because our will is still choosing them, and our heart (in some measure) is in them. I think you're doing really well, and I hope and pray that you will continue to grow in grace and truth, and be a man of God in your generation (probably one of very few).

Love you so much, and am truly proud of you.

Dad

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**[To one of our sons]**

Marriage is an incredible gift that will affect every aspect of your life, but it also requires a lot of self-sacrifice, humility, and prayer. I'd like to share a few thoughts about it that the Lord has taught me along the way.

First, marriage is a lifetime commitment that must never be broken. You hear this at weddings, and everyone seems to agree with it when they are newly enamored with

each other. But you must determine that no matter how hard things get, you will never consider divorce. Divorce preserves self, and self is the thing that must die. And if you have children, divorce can permanently damage their lives.

Pray for your spouse. I have been amazed at the Lord's condescension to me in listening to and directly answering my feeble prayers for your Dad, again and again.

Do not try to change your spouse. It is not your job and it never works. Leave them to the Lord and pray for Him to change their hearts and habits, and in the meantime, love them in their weaknesses.

Guard your heart, your thoughts, and your eyes! The enemy will seek to lead you astray through unfaithfulness. There will be plenty of temptations, but if you do not give in—even the littlest bit—your way will be so much easier.

Communicate openly and frequently. Do not keep secrets from one another. Express your struggles and confess your sins. Share freely about what the Lord is doing in your heart. All of this will draw you closer to one another. But be careful not to talk about others in a way that is not helpful or necessary. Just because you are married does not mean you are free to gossip.

Be honest and forthright in the way you communicate with each other. Do not manipulate or craft what you say in an attempt to underhandedly get something that you want. Be “artless”!

Do not remain upset. If there is conflict, do all that you can to solve it quickly. Be the one to humble yourself first, confessing where you have been wrong, even if the other person is at greater fault.

Avoid going to sleep angry, hurt, or upset. Seek reso-

lution quickly and sincerely. The longer you mull over the “injustice” that was done to you, the more bitter you will grow, and will find your conflict harder to resolve. Be quick to apologize, quick to admit your wrong, and if at all possible, do it before you go to sleep so that you can both wake up with a clean conscience and a new start.

Greet each other every morning with kind words and a hug.

Always remember that God’s main purpose in marriage is that you would be a helpmate to one another in your pursuit of the Lord. Let that goal be the thing that governs what you say, and what you do not say, what you do, and what you do not do.

Real unity between a husband and wife doesn’t come from being in agreement with each other or seeing things the same way; it comes from both husband and wife being in agreement with God, being found in Him, and sharing His perspective. That’s where unity exists and that’s the only place where unity can be maintained.

If you seek the Lord with all your hearts and let Him teach you to selflessly serve one another, your marriage will be an incredible blessing to you and to others!

Love,  
Mom





Appendix

**To All Parents of Children upon the  
Face of the Whole Earth<sup>15</sup>**

*by Humphrey Smith*  
1660

To All Parents of Children Upon the face of the Whole Earth:

In order that you may better train up your your children in the right Way that they should go, something of the True Way itself is here discovered, that iniquity may not be received by tradition from parents to children, and so from one generation to another; but rather that your children may come to Christ, and be children of God, and so be a comfort unto you. This is therefore sent among you everywhere in love to your children and to you.

This I do know, that in many tender babes and young children, there is a meek, innocent, harmless Seed from God, who wills not the death of any; and they have a light from Christ that “enlightens every man that comes into the world,”<sup>16</sup> which light is in them. He said, “Let the little

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15 An excerpt from *Barclay's Anecdotes*, Friends Library Publishing, [www.friendslibrary.com](http://www.friendslibrary.com)

16 John 1:9

children come unto Me, and forbid them not,<sup>17</sup> for of such who come unto Him that is meek and low in heart “is the kingdom of God.” Therefore parents, you should allow them to come unto and keep unto the One who is meek and low in their heart; “for that which may be known of God is manifest in them.”<sup>18</sup> Christ, the Light, had a love to little children, and said, “He that will enter the kingdom of God must become as a little child.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore as you love your children’s good, both of soul and body, see that you bring them, and in all things keep them to God’s Witness within them, and that will judge and reprove them for any evil they have done, and will keep them more out of all evil than you by any other reproof can do. And it will show them that your chastising them for any evil is just, when done in true moderation, not exceeding the offense committed, nor proceeding from the least motion of the wrathful nature in you.

And that you may the more consider my words, and come into moderation and into the wisdom of God, to walk exemplarily before your children, and to be to them patterns of gravity, meekness, and sobriety, therefore shall I set before your eyes some plain and simple truths from my own experience when I was a child.

My heart was much affected with tenderness, and tears were as my food and drink night and day; and often my heart was refreshed with love from God, when I came unto that gift in me which came from Christ, the Man of sorrows. But many despised my tears, and vilified my mournful state, not knowing (as they said) what was the matter with me; and much provocation was used to get

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17 Matthew 19:14

18 Romans 1:19

19 Luke 18:17

me out of that condition; and as I grew up, much was done to hurry me into the earth. And by the violent, fierce, wrathful nature that ruled in others, my quietness was disturbed, which also begat wrath and anger in me again towards them. Let this be a warning to you. Yet there was something of God in me that was not wholly overcome.

The first words according to Scripture that pierced my heart, and remained with me, were, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away:”<sup>20</sup> which words remained as a thing printed and sealed in my heart.

The love of God was exceedingly prevalent upon my little tender heart; and so much the greater was my grief, when by the earthly-mindedness and wrathful hasty nature in parents and others, I was even forced out of it, and provoked to wrath, grief, and discontent, and so not permitted to come to, nor keep within to Christ, who says, “I am the Light;” which light I felt to be gentle and lowly in the heart. Therefore my trouble was great many times, and wrath and hastiness began to have an entrance in me. And becoming sensible of this, and finding a love towards God to be much more precious than anything of the world, and having a hope towards Him when I was but a little child, I would often pray to God, even earnestly did I pray with tears, and my heart was opened with His love. I would also sometimes pour out my heart to Him in secret upon my knees, when I could get into such a place that none could see me, nor come to know it. And sometimes as I went along my way, when it came into my heart, I would even beg and cry with many tears, and I had boldness towards God, as towards a familiar friend, though much in submission and fear, as one unworthy, because I

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20 Luke 1:53

had sinned against Him. And for these things I had no man to be my example, from whom I could learn it; and not knowing of any that did the like, I dared not let any know of it, nor why I so often wept, whenever anyone saw me; for I found none that did not despise that condition, when they were made aware of my state.

And thus, not having any that were sensible of that tender Seed of God in me, to teach me to cherish it, or to help me to abide in it, the evil earthly thing that was begotten in me was nursed up by that nature my leaders were in. And as I grew in years, that evil nature was permitted to grow in me, (my father being more eager than most men in laboring and caring for earthly things,) and so the tender Seed of God in me was veiled from me, and I became for some years as a child of wrath, disobedient to God.

And this I write to be an example unto you, and a warning, that you may not bring your children into the like alienation, torment, and condemnation, which I was brought into, especially because few after a beginning like this return to God with all their hearts, and enter in at the narrow gate. So train them up in the fear of the living God, that you may have comfort in them in the end, and that they may grow up in the wisdom of God, learning to rule in Him over such outward earthly things as the Lord or you may commit to their hands.

Therefore, that it may go well with them and you, and that God may do them good at their latter end, let all your children everywhere be trained in the way they should go, which way is Christ, and He says, "I am the Light." His light in them will let them see that they should not lie, nor speak wicked words, nor do any violence one to another. It is in this light that they come to know God and hear His

voice, for God speaks by the One who is Light. God called Samuel, being yet a child, and Eli bid the child answer the call of the Lord. And the child who answered the call of the Lord reproved old Eli the priest. Those sons of Eli were sons of Belial, and knew not God, and it is remarkable that they were the first priests that ever took tithes by force, and they came to an untimely death under the judgments of God, as did their father, who did not restrain them.

And take heed how you cause or allow your children to babble many vain words, with a delight to hear them prattle when there is no need; for thereby afterward the tongue becomes an unruly member, set on fire by hell, as I indeed found, and so bore the fierce indignation of the Lord for it. Their words, and yours as parents, should be few, seasoned with salt, that they may minister grace to the hearers; for to God an account must be given for every idle word. Many little children would not come to speak so many vain and evil words, which corrupt good manners, if they were not so much provoked thereto, and if they did not see people delight to hear them speak such clever and witty words. Some indeed send their children from home to have them educated in cleverness and wit, learning how to be too hard for others to argue against. Then they say of their children, “Now they can live by their wits and fend for themselves,” often times by deceiving others. Yet some of these feel something so plain, honest, and simple in their hearts, that they cannot be brought into this quickness of tongue, even if they themselves have much endeavored to attain it. Indeed, these sometimes cannot defend their own cause, even when it is just, but will be argued down by others who have more of the serpent’s subtlety. Yes, these have remained plain and simple, but

the Lord preserves the simple. In this also I have had much experience.

For when very young I saw clearly into the vanity of needless words, and was for a long time very slow in speaking, and because in this and some other things I much differed from other children, many thought I would grow up to be “a fool” (as they call it who despise “the foolishness of God”). And therefore oftentimes many means were used to compel me to speak, with many provocations, over and over, and yet all this could not make me speak a word, for I saw that it was needless. Nor could I ask a man “How are you?”—when I already saw that he was well; nor could I answer such needless questions. And when I was a little grown up, and was sent upon any small errand, I would deliver my message in very few words, so that people thought I should never become like a man.

At about ten years of age, my father in the flesh would sometimes send me to market, and it was long before he and all the others could make me ask any more than the price he allowed me to sell at. And if my father did not give me a certain price, then I would resolve on a price in my mind according as I saw the market, and so I often sold the cheapest, being unwilling to take too much, and therefore was often esteemed and called a fool and a dunce. But now I see that it would have been easier for me if I had never been drawn out of that state wherein I was taught by God to do unto others as I would be done unto.

I was also fearful to strike anyone, but rather gave way to them that struck me, and so was by many of my equals abused. And it was very hard for me to take away the life of any creature, and I pleaded much against it with my father and mother, when they commanded me to do it.

Oh the life in me was grieved to do it, and I was forced much to harden my heart before I could do any such thing, though commanded by my parents. This may be a warning to all parents, that they be not the cause of hardening their children's hearts, and then say of them, "Now they are hardy lads!" For that which hardens the heart separates the heart from God who is love, and from Christ who came to save life, and so the sacrifice of God is not known, which is found in the broken heart; but the Lord is with the humble and the broken-hearted. Take heed also of provoking your children to disquietude, neither disturb them when they are disposed to be quiet; for many are not content to see their children sober and quiet, but provoke them to lightness and vain pleasures, when they would rather be sober, like lambs. For it is written, "In quietness and rest shall ye be saved,"<sup>21</sup> and, "Aspire to lead a quiet life,"<sup>22</sup> and, "Commune with your own hearts, and be still."<sup>23</sup>

When a child, I would often sit or stand quiet for long periods, pondering many things in my mind, and as I grew up, if I were not disturbed, for an hour or some hours I would sit quietly, either waiting on the Lord for counsel, or searching to know which motion in me I should be guided by. And when I have been riding along my way, whenever I have found that the right thing in me did not lead me, I have turned back and not continued that journey. And my silent sitting like a fool, my father has often called "contemplating," and has often sharply reproved me for it, saying, by way of reproach, I would surely contemplate to become some great preacher. And

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21 Isaiah 30:15

22 1 Thessalonians 4:11

23 Psalm 4:4

my mother has come to me, it is likely hundreds of times, both when a child and a young man, and in pity laid her hands upon me and bid me not sit contemplating so, for surely I would make myself into a fool; she not knowing what my condition was. And being so often disturbed and grieved, sometimes on first days, or whenever I could, I would go out into some woods or a place so private that none could find me, and there I would wait in quietness three or four hours. And sometimes the love of God would break through to me, and His Word would make my heart soft, and I felt the same thing then which now has become my life; for now I know that those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength; and though it is written, "The Lord was weary of the people's sacrifices, and with their words," yet it was never written that the Lord was weary of those who waited upon Him.

Therefore you should allow your children to wait upon God, or at least to be quiet, for "that which may be known of God is manifest in them."<sup>24</sup> And the Lord has not left Himself without a witness in every conscience; for Christ is given as a Witness, and His light shines in their hearts. And He says, "Come unto Me," and "Learn of Me;"<sup>25</sup> for He is the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, who "teaches all to profit."<sup>26</sup> And He is that true Prophet of whom Moses spoke, which whosoever will not hear, his soul will be cut off. And certainly my soul was cut off from His life when I was forced away from hearing His voice in me, who is a Man of sorrows, and like a silent lamb. Therefore take heed of provoking your children to hearken to a stranger, or to another teacher besides He who is a

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24 Romans 1:19

25 Matthew 11:28-29

26 Isaiah 48:17



living minister within the veil. For the veil is over the heart, and in the heart I have found the Teacher that shall never be removed;<sup>27</sup> but all outward teachers may be removed, and priests and men may die, but this Teacher abides as a priest forever, being made so by the power of an endless life.

So now, all who will come to know the gift of God in them, must also learn to sit in silence and quietness, to receive instruction from God. This is no new thing invented by the will of man, or learned one from another, but is the same by which the prophets were guided, and it was also in my heart from God even when a child. And I now do affirm, that I would never have returned out of that degenerate state, into which I was hurried, if I had not learned to wait in, and be obedient unto the light of Christ which was in me from a child. And you may all see the same, namely, that all along there has been something in you which has reprov'd you in secret for sin, and let you see the sins of your youth. This is the light of Christ, the Son of God, who, so loved the world, that He gave His Son a Light into the world. And this light is also in the conscience of a child, and will testify against him after he has done anything evil, and his countenance will fall like Cain's. But before a child has done evil they are not ashamed, as Adam was unashamed, being innocent.

This was my teacher when I knew no other, and before I knew what it was. This is that gift which comes from God, and is not given to children by men or human learning, though men by their eloquent speeches and vain deceit may easily lead children out from it, away from the Seed that is in them, and so break the command of Christ,

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27 Isaiah 30:20

who said, "Do not go out."<sup>28</sup> And when they are led out after the "Lo here's" and "Lo there's," away from the Rock which is Christ, and away from the sure foundation which God has laid (and no man can lay another), then they despise this precious Cornerstone, refusing the light which shines in their hearts to give the knowledge of God, and so are liable to follow any devised fables, imaginations, sects and opinions, and to be scattered upon every dry, barren, and dark mountain, as the Lord knows I long was, not knowing where to find rest.

For having been led out from my true Guide, His tender motions in me were quenched, whereby at first I could pray with the Spirit, as the Spirit within me helped in my weakness with sighs and tears. But as I grew up, I was taught to say prayers that were learned out of books, and this they laid upon me to say every night; but I found it was as a dry shrub, instead of a honey comb. And so being taught to use forms, and to look after outward things and teachers, the light within me grew dark, as also my understanding of the Son of God's love shed abroad in my heart.

And being sometimes sensible of this, I began when very young to seek after priests and sermons, and thought to have found the living Truth among them. But alas, these did me more harm than all the rest, and led me further from my Teacher than ever before, and from a sensible feeling after God in order to find Him near me. And this begot in me an abundance of the serpent's subtlety—the more so because I, being sensible of a great lack in me, received their fair speeches with much eagerness and earnest desires, believing them that this was the way to peace. And so I grew much in that knowledge

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28 Matthew 24:26

which puffs up, and this did indeed increase my sorrow. Thus by them I was deceived, the Lord God knows I lie not, but speak the truth in plainness, having no resentment towards any of their persons. And this is the very truth of my heart: that it was harder for me to leave, deny, and experience redemption out of that which I learned from the priests, than it was for me to leave the fruits of all the sin that I ever ran into because of temptations.

Therefore I say, let the Lord God be the teacher of your children, who has given them life and being, for a better teacher you cannot provide for them, nor direct them unto. Let Him lead them and guide them in His fear; for thus they will also see that they should be faithful and diligent unto you in all things. And you need not require of them many other things, lest you grieve them, but rather be examples of righteousness unto them in all your words and actions. And if you are not able to send them to school to learn to read, yet they have the light from Christ in them already, and that will show them plainly of the Father, “for the way-faring man, though a fool, cannot err in this path.”<sup>29</sup> And though you send them to school ever so long to read and write, and learn to search the scriptures, which is good, yet still they must come to Christ the Light that they may have life. Yes, they must be taught by Him to follow Him, so as to know Him to be their hope of glory, and their way out of sin unto the Father, obeying Him in all of the manifestations of His will. Then it will surely go well with them, and they will receive a blessing from God, and be a blessing to their parents who fear Him, and in the end lie down in peace and rest in God’s everlasting covenant.

—Humphrey Smith

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29 Isaiah 35:8





