

Family Heart *moments*

True and
Inspiring
Stories



Dr. Scott Turansky • Joanne Miller, RN, BSN

Family
Heart
moments



True and Inspiring Stories



National Center for Biblical Parenting
76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136

FAMILY HEART MOMENTS
©2008 National Center for Biblical Parenting

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without written permission, except for brief quotations in books and critical reviews.

For information, write National Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136.

First Printing, 2008 National Center for Biblical Parenting
Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan.

All rights reserved.

Italics in Scripture have been placed by the author for emphasis.

All stories in this book have been used by permission.
Cover photo submitted by Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa.

Table of Contents



- Introduction – Let’s Get Started5
- 1 • Heart Moments that Knock Your Socks Off.....13
- 2 • Walking Through Life Together31
- 3 • Kids Have a Lot to Teach55
- 4 • When They Finally Get It73
- 5 • Passing It on to Others91
- 6 • Watching Kids Grow107
- 7 • The Conscience is a Treasure131
- 8 • Dads and Moms Have Heart Moments Too....147
- 9 • Setting the Stage165
- 10 • Being Close Warms the Heart181
- Conclusion – Searching for Treasure.....199

Introduction

Let's Get Started

- **F**or me (Scott) it was just a typical arrival
- home. Carrie and our five children would
- be there. As soon as I walked through the door my life would get busy as I heard reports about the day, gave out hugs, and reentered family life.

My family had other plans that I was not aware of. In fact, they had been talking for a couple of hours about how they would greet me in a special way to show that they loved me. They were all waiting in anticipation just inside the front door to tell me that I was special.

As I got out of my car I decided to go around the house and enter the back door. My arms were full and it seemed like the easiest way to get all the things where they needed to go. I had no idea I was interrupting my family's plans.

As soon as they saw that I was headed for the backyard, they all ran to get ready at the back door. When I opened the door they yelled, "Surprise!" Watching the shock on my face, they quickly explained that they just wanted to tell me that I am special. They took the things from my hands, gave me a nice cool drink




Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

along with lots of hugs and we enjoyed a special time together.

My family had created a heart moment. Interestingly enough, here it is about fifteen years later and I still remember that special day. I smile as I think about the joy we all shared together.



Heart moments are what parents long for. The fourteen-year-old who cleans up the kitchen just to see the delight on your face. The eight-year-old who cries that repentant cry when he truly realizes the seriousness of his disobedience. The four-year-old who gives you that big hug and says, “You’re the best mommy in the whole world!” All of these are heart moments and they not only remind you of the value of parenting, but also give you the encouragement to continue on.

-  *One of my (Joanne) most memorable heart moment stories comes from the filming of our first parenting video series. After months of memorizing, training, practicing, and rehearsing, the filming weekend finally came.*
-
-

It had been a hectic week traveling to Florida with our two families and then working with the production team and the set creation team. There was so much to manage...and so much to remember! Thursday was quite a day as the anticipation built. Dress rehearsal brought last minute changes from both the director and our drama coach. By Thursday evening I was at the end of my emotional rope. Too little sleep and too many details to think about all at once left me feeling rather frazzled. Add to this the fear that I would forget every line I had worked so hard to memorize.

Just at the point when I could no longer manage my emotions and tears began to fill my eyes, my fifteen-year-old son, Dave, (who had only recently grown so quickly that we could now face each other eye-to-eye) gave me the biggest, strongest hug. Softly he whispered in my ear, "You're gonna be great Mom, just relax. It's gonna be okay."

At that moment I felt all the boyish foolishness melt away and here was a sensitive and thoughtful young man trying to hold his poor mother together.



Photo submitted by
Shannon Hinkle, Irving, Texas



Yes, heart moments happen some times when we least expect them. All of a sudden the years of training come together and our kids just blow us away. We see something different in their eyes, and in their hearts. That's what this book is all about.

We've compiled these stories to encourage you and to help you find those heart moments in your family too.

This is a book of true stories. Each one takes place in a real family. Each parent tells the story of a heart moment experienced with a child. These stories may remind you of similar experi-

ences you've had in your own home. Of course, the heart moments that happen in your family are likely to be quite different from the ones you're reading here. After all, each child is unique, each parent is different, and each home is a blend of personalities that provides the catalyst for special heart moments to occur. But reading the stories of others has a way of revealing the important things that parents need to do. From these stories you may receive an inspiration or a desire to persevere that will help you this week with your own children.

All of the stories contained in this book were submitted during the 2007 Heart Moment Contest sponsored by the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Our office staff enjoyed reading the entries, and many a story brought tears to our eyes. Although we couldn't print them all, these were the ones that we believe will best help you find ways to create similar experiences in your own home.

Most parents wish that they would see more heart moments in their children. Likely it's the God-given desire to see your kids excel, do better than you did, or just have many of the benefits of life that you know are out there given the right choices. Don't give up. Heart moments often

come in seasons, requiring perseverance for long periods of time before seeing the desired result.

We hope this book will encourage you and that you'll gain some practical ideas of ways you might relate to your kids differently. The stories may even inspire you as they did us. But most importantly, we want this book to make you more aware of the heart moments that are happening right now in your home. Heart moments do happen, and if parents aren't careful they can miss them, and in so doing, miss great opportunities for growth, closeness, affirmation, or spiritual connectedness.

If you're touched by an illustration, just put the book down for a moment and ask yourself why. Maybe it reminds you of something that happened in your own family or that you wish would happen. You might want to share your thoughts or even the story with your child as an attempt to inspire or encourage. Stories have a way of passing on truth in language that both children and adults appreciate. It's to this end we share these special stories with you.

Chapter 1

Heart Moments that Knock Your Socks Off

Sometimes kids do things that make you so proud of them. In fact, their creativity, graciousness, or compassion so exceeds your own that a twinkle of admiration fills your heart. That's exactly what happened to Paul Vedder from Port Saint Lucie, Florida and he shared this special story with us. (This story won first place in our Heart Moment Contest.)



Photo submitted by
Laura Rizkallah, Painted Post, New York

•
•
• *We have four children. Our oldest son, Paul, was eighteen when we were in the process of adopting Lily from China. The Christmas before was a time when we were saving and pulling all available resources together in order to pay for the adoption. We gathered our children together and gave them the choice of either getting Christmas gifts or trying to go to China as a family to pick up their little sister. They all agreed to forgo Christmas gifts if that gave them a better chance of going on the trip.*

I didn't realize it, but that Christmas morning would certainly prove to be one of the most blessed Christmases of my life. Paul knew that Christmas would not be the same for his two younger brothers and younger sister without some gifts to open. Our video camera was also on its last legs. He had a plan.

My wife and I were awakened exactly in the same manner I had awakened the kids each Christmas morning previously. With his own money Paul had purchased a brand-new video camera.

He woke us up first and then proceeded to his siblings' rooms. He brought us all to the living room where he had placed gifts around what would otherwise have been an empty Christmas tree. My son had not only purchased all of the gifts for each of his brothers and sister, but he also hid them, wrapped them, and placed them under the tree, completely unbeknownst to any of us. My wife and I were absolutely blown away by the unselfishness and love he exhibited to our family, a true gift from his heart.



Teenagers have the ability to show unusual acts of compassion, courage, and ingenuity. Sometimes the work of raising them veils these heroic qualities. When your son or daughter makes an unselfish choice or demonstrates some form of godliness, be sure to take time to notice. Although these acts of kindness are motivated by an internal drive, praise provides an opportunity to draw your heart and your teen's heart just a little closer together.

These kinds of heart moments are a total surprise. Oh sure, you'd like to think that they

come from the years of teaching you've done, or the modeling that's taken place in your own life, but it's obvious that something bigger is happening. Yes, a good foundation can form the basis for great heart moments, but it seems that God is magnifying the opportunity into something much greater than you ever imagined.


What is a heart moment? It's a special connection that takes place inside of your child's heart, or in your own heart or both, that confirms a step of progress. Sometimes the heart moment just reminds you of the significance of your parenting role. Other times the heart moment helps you feel close to your child in a unique and powerful way. For some, a heart moment is when the lightbulb comes on in your child that says, "I finally get it, Dad."

Tears are often associated with heart moments, further revealing the extent of their importance to parents. Usually they bring tears of deep joy, but sometimes it's amazement, admiration, gratefulness, pride, or just the intense satisfaction of feeling close.

When a heart moment overwhelms you with emotion, take a moment and share the blessing. Tell family and friends, but most importantly express what you're feeling to your child. It's in

those times when children can often catch the significance of their choices, that they've made an important decision or action that has deeply touched Mom or Dad.

Sometimes a child comes up with something entirely on his or her own that just grabs you. This happened to Jan Stahl from Ellijay, Georgia, who shared this story.

-  *ur son Brian is mildly autistic and*
- *struggled to learn to speak. A few*
- *years after he was speaking and understanding very well, I was tucking him into bed and I said, "Where are you going to put your wife when you get married? You have too many stuffed animals."*

He looked up with his thoughtful blue eyes and said, "I don't need a wife, Mom, I have you."

I could have cried, and did when I went to my room.



Sometimes heart moments just happen, but many times they are the result of intentional effort on the part of hard-working parents. You do the daily work of parenting because you know

it's the right thing to do. Along the way you're trying to teach values and life lessons, but most of the time you're just trying to get the things done that have to be done today. Often kids don't appreciate the limits you set, or value your correction, or respond well to your instruction.

Some parents become numb as they go about doing the business of parenting, oblivious to the heart work going on inside the child. Other parents have longed for heart change for months or years and seem to have given up on any significant developments. Then a heart moment comes along to provide encouragement that yes, there is hope that this child may actually grow up someday.

Occasionally you can create heart moments and the results seem to flow out of your well-thought-out plans. However, most heart moments come unexpectedly and surprise you. They are often the result of your teaching, correction, and example, but then a catalyst comes along maybe days or weeks later that brings it all together. They may come while you're driving in the car, getting ready to go out the door, or in those quiet discussions right before bed. You never know when it could happen.

That's why you have to be on the lookout for them all the time.

Josh and Lisa Barrickman from West Chester, Pennsylvania, shared this story with us.

- *A few weeks ago we started doing a*
- *weekly allowance for our almost five-*
- *year-old daughter Ellie to give her a little bit of*

responsibility around the house. She looks forward to her fifty cents each Friday and loves to see something on the counter for her to take to the recycling bin (which is one of her special jobs).

After the first week I asked her what she had planned for the money she saves, and after a moment of thought she said, "I want to buy a toy for a little kid who doesn't have any toys."

Hearing that response was truly a moment of joy for me as a parent. I gave her a big hug and told her how proud I was. She had a great idea to share what she had with others. It was wonderful to see that at her tender age she already had such a giving, caring heart.



Generosity is one of those qualities that reveal unselfishness. It's an indicator that children are moving out of the me-first stages of life and into a place where they can bless others. Sometimes parents see these acts of kindness in their children, but often they hear reports from teachers, friends, and other leaders.

Parents are thrilled to get reports from other adults about their children's accomplishments, acts of responsibility, and kindness. In fact, if you want to make new friends, take care of their kids and then tell the parents some positive qualities you saw while the children were at your house. It's unfortunate that many parents must be the recipients of bad news about their children, including problems at school or meanness with the neighbors. It's a great encouragement to hear that kids actually do respectable things outside the home.

One of the components of the heart is motivation. Parents spend much of their time using external motivation to build the internal desire to do the right thing. When parents see an internal drive to do what's right without those external motivations, they beam with delight. It's like the child who has trouble learning to ride a bike

without training wheels. When he finally gets it, parents are just as pleased as the child.

Of course as kids get older, take on jobs, or involve themselves in some kind of leadership, parents sit back and say, “That’s my child.” Moms and Dads take great pride when their kids demonstrate some admirable internal qualities. Remember, though, that God is at work in the hearts of your kids. Many times the lessons you taught last week, last month, or last year will return in ways you don’t expect. Always be ready for God to work. After all, that’s the faith journey required of parents. You must continue on day after day, week after week, year after year, trusting God for the results and hoping that your child will eventually catch it.

You can tell that Judy Leslie from New Castle, Pennsylvania, is beaming as she tells this story of her daughter.

● **I** knew many years before she did, that my
● daughter would be God’s servant. Jamie
● said she wanted to work with kids and make a difference in this world, but what she did not know was that she was going to make a difference for eternity in the lives of some of her friends.

God has blessed her with empathy and she can often feel the pain of other people and has a desire to help them. When she was only sixteen years old, she came up with the idea that her friends needed a break from the world and all of its problems that, in many cases, were destroying their lives. Jamie planned a

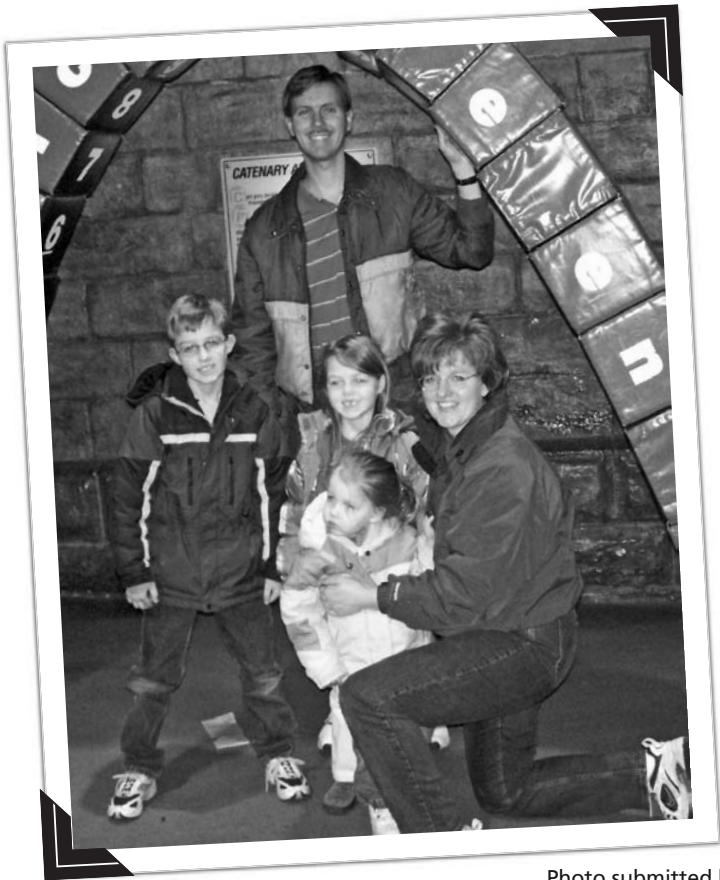


Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

weekend retreat at a camp. She invited a girl with eating problems who had just returned from a hospital stay where Jamie wrote to her weekly. She also invited two girls whose parents were divorcing, another who hated her parents, one who was cutting, and one with a new baby. Jamie typed out permission slips, medical forms, made meal plans, collected money, found drivers, reserved the camp, and even asked adults to go along.

At the time, I thought it was a great idea but believed Jamie was taking on more than she could handle. I was wrong! I asked to “teach” at the retreat. She told me she had taken care of all the “teaching time” and not to worry. I was the adult in charge, but my daughter was making an impact on these kids’ lives. She was prepared, and the kids played trust games, shared scary times, and prayed together. The retreat went so well that she continued it for two more years. I knew the minute Jamie said she could handle it that God was in charge of my daughter’s life. My little girl was now one of God’s servants and she knew it!



All parents wish they had children like Jamie, self-motivated and eager to change the world. But not all kids are the same. Each child, however, has the ability to excel or demonstrate godly qualities. It may be music, encouragement, social skills, or a love for a particular field, but the child takes those interests and abilities to a new level by using them with others.

One of the great things you can do as a parent is to help your children understand their own uniqueness and then develop a vision for making the world a better place. Too many of their peers view their primary job in life as having fun. Anything that gets in the way of having fun should be rejected at all costs.

When a child finally comes to the conclusion that fun is not the ultimate goal in life, things begin to change inside the heart. New values and goals begin to develop. New desires form the basis for decisions. Convictions drive them forward in spite of the obstacles they may face. In short, the heart is developing in some positive ways.

Of course, the greatest heart change happens when children see their God-given uniqueness as a gift from him and seek to weave their talents

and abilities into his plan for their lives. Parents spend a lot of time looking for ways to pass on their faith. It's certainly encouraging when you see your children integrating some of your teaching into their own hearts. It comes out in a prayer, or sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, or in some random act of kindness with a spiritual motivation.

Shannon Tisher is from Aurora, Colorado, and here's her story.

• *W*e moved last summer from a neighborhood filled with kids to one with a lot of elderly neighbors. The move wasn't easy for any of us, but we were eager to make new friends and move forward. Our new neighbor on the right side quickly built a relationship with us, but the other side was a different story. She wouldn't answer her door when we went to meet her, wouldn't say hello when we did, and would walk away when we approached her to start a conversation.

My husband and I prayed for our resistant neighbor, but were at a loss as to how to get to know her. We had never had a neighbor we couldn't get to know. We talked openly in our family about ways to win the neighbors and

make new friends. We shared the successes we had and the challenges we experienced.

One night at bedtime, our ten-year-old daughter showed us a piece of paper labeled “Operation Mean Old Lady.” At first I was surprised by the title because we certainly wouldn’t view our neighbor that way, but as I looked at the rest of the paper I was pleasantly surprised. It was a list of things our daughter wanted to do for our neighbor: shovel her sidewalk, make her cookies, cut flowers from our garden in the spring, and so on. When I asked her about the list, she just said, “You always tell me to love people like Jesus. And if she’s that mean, she really needs to know Jesus!”

Yes! That’s just the attitude we wanted her to have. I was so pleased by my daughter’s insight and willingness to push ahead as we serve the Lord in every area of our lives.



Heart moments happen in those situations because the child somehow goes above and beyond what might be expected for her age or stage of development. No doubt Shannon and her husband taught the kids regularly about the

Lord and told them Bible stories. But when you actually see kids applying the things you've taught, then you know that the truths are sinking in. They are going deep into the heart of your child.

Heart moments do different things inside a parent. Sometimes parents are convicted of their own weaknesses by a child's honest rebuke. Other times you may feel encouraged to grow in your own faith, or work on a particular area of your life because of a child's model. Remember that Jesus is the one who compared spiritual growth to childhood. In Matthew 18:3-4 he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Heart moments provide parents with much-needed perspective. They become reminders of what's important as you stop and enjoy relationship for a few minutes or ponder an offense that needs forgiveness. Parents are often reminded that teaching values is essential and that building good habits of daily spirituality is important.

In fact, sometimes the depth to which children apply spiritual truths is astounding. They can take the concepts much further than you as a parent had considered. Jenni Moreno from Apopka, Florida, tells a touching story of how this very thing happened in her family.

● *L*ast night we had an amazing time at the
● dinner table. Daddy wasn't home yet
● and so we had to eat without him. Judy, age four, said the table was lopsided because Daddy was missing.

"Yes, it's sad to eat without Daddy."

"But Mom, God is always with us, so that means he is sitting in Daddy's chair and we are not alone!"

Then Elizabeth, our seven-year-old, had the idea of a new quiet game. Let's be really quiet and listen to what God says to our minds and hearts. So we were silent. Amazingly, they both were still and concentrated on what they would hear from God.

We then took turns sharing what we heard. Judy said she heard him say, "I love you, my child."

Elizabeth was reminded of him by a special book we have read together for many years

*called **Mama, Do You Love Me?** The best line in the book is the one that God brought to her mind, "I will love you forever and for always, because you are my dear one."*

I shared with them that God reminded me how special my children are and that they are gifts from him to be treasured. God reminded me how honored I am to be their mom and that I need to be the best mommy I can be.

Elizabeth then had the best idea of all. She said, "Mom, stand up and go over to the empty chair with us." So we all stood next to that chair. What happened next was one of the most precious mommy moments I have ever had.

Elizabeth said, "Let's give God a big hug!" We all leaned over and hugged God, and although you might say we hugged a chair, no chair has ever felt so warm, so loving, or so emotion-provoking before in my life. It was truly a magical moment in the midst of an average evening dinner.

After we sat back down to eat, I was at a loss for words. What my girls had just helped me experience was truly a gift. They went on eating and I choked my food down as I tried to hold my emotions together. Elizabeth ended up

switching seats because she wanted to sit in God's lap for dinner.

The innocence of children amazes me, but more than that, their faith astounds me. There was no doubt, no question, no analyzing the situation. God came to dinner that night and they welcomed him with open arms and taught their mom a thing or two in the process. Before I was a mom I knew that I would have a lot to teach my children, but I'm learning more every day how much they have to teach me.



Sometimes kids can do the most profound things that just bless your heart so much. It's in those moments that you just want to sing with praise and thank God for the privilege of watching little people grow up. Enjoy those moments. In some families they come more often than others, but whenever they do come, consider them gifts from God himself meant to encourage you in your role as a parent.

Although parenting may be the toughest job in the world, the little rewards are sweet treasures that you can enjoy forever.

Chapter 2

Walking Through Life Together

“**I**f you want to create heart moments... then go camping!” At least that’s what one dad said. He found that the trials and joys of camping helped bring his family closer together. Whether it’s camping, a family business, home-schooling, or even working through a family tragedy, challenges become the arenas where potential heart moments exist.

Here’s how it happens. Your family faces an obstacle like rain dripping into the tent in the middle of the night. Everyone works together to spread a tarp over the tent and tie it down... then you crawl back into your dry sleeping bags and just wait. Quietly you listen with anticipation. Did that solve the problem? Will rain run under the tent or come in through the sides? The challenge, loss of sleep, and subsequent stories become opportunities to draw everyone closer together.

Maybe your family chooses to work on a school project or take on a family business. You work hard and then you enjoy the benefits together, providing heart moments of closeness. Common experiences and struggles shared by family members have the potential to strengthen relationships.

Of course the way people respond to these experiences makes all the difference. If Dad gets angry during the rainy camping night, the result is distant relationships, not closeness. When a parent processes the pain of a lost grandparent alone instead of with the child, their independent grieving misses an opportunity for a connection between the two of them.

Bonding happens when two or more people go through an experience as comrades. Instead of the problem getting between them, both people work hard to keep the problem the enemy. Overcoming obstacles together results in a sense of accomplishment. Relationships are strengthened and closeness is the result.

Some of these bonding experiences can be planned; others just happen and you must respond. A family tragedy or an unexpected flat tire on the freeway can become stories and experiences that draw you closer together.

Peg Ehrlinger from South Euclid, Ohio, tells this story. She was a runner-up in the Heart Moment Contest.

-
-
-

*M*y 10-year-old daughter and I were in the middle of one of those outrageously fun and loud tickle/wrestling matches filled with the giggles, screams, and squeals.

Suddenly Luci's expression changed... the smile faded, her eyes filled with tears, and little sobs began. "What's wrong, Lu? Are you ok?"

She looked up at me with those sad eyes that just moments before were sparkling with laughter, and said, "Mommy, sometimes I look at your face, and I see how much you love me, and I know how much I love you, and I get sad because I've never seen my birth mom's face."

"Oh dear God, how do I reply to this?" In an instant, memories of the last eight years spent with Luci flashed before my mind's eye. You see, Luci was taken from the hospital where she was born, directly to the orphanage where she spent the first two years of her life.

As I reflected on my own life during these years, the thought came to me. "Honey," I said, "you were not able to be raised by your birth

mom, which is very sad. That has left a hole in your heart. I was not able to get pregnant which is very sad, and that has left a hole in my heart. God has put us together to fill each other's heart holes, and I am so thankful he did. You fill my heart hole, Luci."

Luci thought for a moment and then said, "Thank you, Mommy, for filling my heart hole." We shared that heart moment together.



Mom turned what her daughter perceived as a personal tragedy into a common experience that they could share together. It clicked, and Mom and daughter experienced a significant heart moment that day.

Your children go through emotionally challenging experiences every week. Some children seem to experience them every day. These upsetting challenges can be anything such as missing out on the soccer game because of the rain, an argument with a good friend at school, or the loss of the family pet. Of course, if one steps back and takes a look at the challenges objectively, some are more significant than others. Regardless, when your child experiences

any emotionally upsetting experience, you have the opportunity to enter into that world by exercising a skill called empathy.

Instead of lecturing a child on the insignificance of a particular loss or telling a child to stop crying like a baby, you can turn the situation into a bonding time by entering into the emotion with your child. Empathy builds understanding and closeness. That doesn't mean you can't teach your child something, but if the desire to teach takes second place to the desire to connect, you'll often get further. Children need to feel understood before they'll listen to advice.

Empathy is the activity of opening the heart. One of the common experiences parents can share with their children has to do with boy/girl relationships. These are significant moments in a child's life, and when moms and dads are close enough to have open dialogue with their kids about sex and relationships, good heart moments can happen.

Jacqueline Berroa from Nutley, New Jersey, showed empathy during a delicate conversation, resulting in a significant heart moment with her daughter.

• **I** experienced a significant moment of
• closeness between my ten-year-old
• daughter and me a couple of weeks ago when my daughter asked me if it was a sin to be in love. I answered, “Not at all.” I told her that I remember the age when I first started to like boys. The conversation started when she was lying down on her bed for the evening. I was sitting across from her. I felt so encouraged to see that my little girl was growing up; she was so pensive, looking straight at me, as if I were her closest friend, no sign of shame whatsoever.

She told me the name of the boy she liked and explained that she liked him because he was different from the boys at school. He is eleven years old and goes to the same church we attend. I explained to her that it is normal to like a boy, but that God wanted her to treat him just as a friend. She then confided in me that she had some weird dreams involving him. I encouraged her to tell me about them and she said, “You know, if we end up getting married, we would do some of the stuff we read about in that book on the shelf.” The book she referred to is **Before I Was Born (God’s Design for Sex)**.

She made it clear to me that she understood that intimate relationships are a gift from God for married people. I asked her why she thought married people have intimate relationships. She looked at me and answered, "Well, you know, Mami, I would like to have babies in the future!"

I explained to her that it does feel good to be close to someone that is special to us, but we need to wait until the time when God says we are ready to receive that gift. We finished the conversation and I thanked her for treating



Photo submitted by
Sue Mika, Ewing, New Jersey

me as her friend and for sharing her thoughts with me. I thanked her again the next morning.



Some parents would panic with such a dialogue, quickly coming down with some firm rules about relationships. But Jacqueline's calm approach and willingness to have an open conversation set her daughter at ease. Imagining yourself in the predicament of your child can increase empathy and build closeness as you help work through problems or give advice.

Of course, some children make open dialogue difficult. It's as if they close off their hearts or become resistant to any significant conversation. Especially as children enter early adolescence, some parents have to work extra hard to get even small interaction besides grunts or hi's and good-byes. During those times it can become especially tempting to give up, but that's when strategic pursuit can be even more important to keep the lines of communication open.

Penny Lau from Lynnwood, Washington, describes this kind of challenge she had with her own daughter.

• **I** am a mother of four beautiful daughters. It
• has been God's sense of humor to give me
• daughters, because I grew up with four
brothers and no sisters. I was ready to raise
sons. What do I know about girls? I was a
tomboy and didn't seem to experience the
emotional ups and downs that girls often do.
I truly appreciate my brothers and I wouldn't
trade my upbringing for anything, but I have
often thought about how nice it must be to
have sisters. I am now in the position to raise
sisters/daughters in a special way.

It's been an ongoing learning experience
trying to understand preteen girl behavior,
especially in my eldest who is now eleven.
In times of disappointment or frustration she
would often comment, "You just wouldn't
understand, Mom," and cut me off.

I think I'm improving my response as I try to
hold back my irritation, thinking, "Well, you're
not making it easy for me." It was just a week
after my daughter turned eleven that we had a
conversation about what was bothering her.
Once again, out of frustration she commented,
"You just wouldn't understand."

I dropped the subject so that I could cool off.
Later that evening, an opportune time came

and I was able to comment about our previous interaction. In a loving and calm manner, as only the Holy Spirit could have inspired, I was able to respond, “I’m not able to understand if I’m not given a chance.”

God’s timing is amazing! Surprisingly, it was at that moment of closeness that my daughter understood that Mom really cared and was trying to understand. She opened a bit and we had an honest conversation.



One of the things to remember is that anger, criticism, and personal attacks extinguish heart moments. What could have become a bonding experience turns into an uncomfortable wall in the relationship. Unfortunately, children like Penny Lau’s daughter provide opportunity to lash out and express frustration. Like Penny, you must often bite your tongue and commit to silence until you have a plan. Then you wait for the right time to put your plan into action.

Instead of expressing anger, look for ways to approach the disappointment, tragedy, or challenge with grace, sorrow, and a positive attitude. Your response can open the heart and provide

you with opportunities for closeness to develop.

Of course, you might respond quite well, but your child seems bent on closing the relationship. You're ready and eager to share a heart moment with your child, but he isn't interested. Everything you try is met with resistance. When it's the children who respond poorly, look for ways to help them turn the situation around. Sometimes you have to move into a correction mode, or you'll just have to let it go and pray for a more opportune time.

If children act out and treat you and everyone else unkindly because they're having a bad day or trying to recover from a disappointment, you may have to intervene. You become the coach, reminding your child about what's important and how to look at the situation in a positive light. Sometimes it means that you must take firm action, separating your child from the activity momentarily and requiring a new attitude before returning.

At the National Center for Biblical Parenting, we encourage parents to use a Break instead of Time Out. This can mean all the difference between heart change and simply putting in time as a sentence for misbehavior. One of the key

elements of a Break is that the child must settle down and initiate to return, ready for a debriefing. This places the responsibility for change on the child and requires responsiveness in order to move forward in life.

Nate and Jana Peterson from Meridian, Idaho, shared a story that further describes the value of the Break in a child's life.

• *W*e've been working on changing the consequences our children experience for their various actions and have benefited from having our children take a Break from time to time. Our oldest daughter, age six, recently spent the weekend with another family from church. When she returned home, she shared one of her observations, "Mama, in that family, they don't take a Break. They have Time Outs. Time Outs are easier than taking a Break because with a Time Out, all you have to do is wait."

• • •

At that moment the correction times in family life became the common experience shared. Their

daughter was learning something about differences in families. Children often have a way of comparing your family to the neighbors or their friends. And the reality is that all families do it differently. Even when children resist correction or limits, they still get the message that they are part of the family. Although they may not realize it, the privilege of belonging to a family has deep ramifications for their lives.

Sometimes parents want to use the lecture method to teach their children about life. Although a good speech occasionally can do wonders, most of the time children learn through experience. And when you and your child go through that experience together, it has the potential to become a heart moment. Working on a project for school, taking a teen to a job fair, visiting a nursing home, or opening the Bible to learn a new concept, all have the potential to be connecting points on a heart level.

Always keep in mind that one of the greatest things you can give to your kids is yourself. It takes a little extra time but will pay off in huge ways. Angie Whiteman from Wichita, Kansas, describes her heart moment this way.

• *M*y daughter, Lauren, was a few weeks away from being four when I gave birth to Clarissa. At eleven days old, and two days before Lauren's fourth birthday, Clarissa passed away due to a rare genetic disorder. Lauren processed that loss at a four-year-old level then, and at age six began to have a new perspective of death and the loss of her sister.

I have my own struggles dealing with the loss of my precious daughter and usually choose not to deal with it so as not to have to experience that emotional roller coaster. At six



Photo submitted by
Angie Whiteman, Wichita, Kansas

years old, Lauren began to cry and mourn the loss of Clarissa a few times a week. I tried my best to help her work through her emotions but her dad handled it better than I did, having the ability to discuss it more in-depth with her. I held my emotions back and tried to just get through the moment.

One day Lauren was crying and expressing her sorrow over losing her sister. She looked at me with eyes that said, "I need you to go here with me, Mom." I had to allow her to see my pain. So we both sat in the rocking chair and cried while holding each other. It was such a relief to her to see my tears, and we got into a deep discussion concerning her sister's life and death.

Lauren needed to know that I had pain too. It was a precious moment we shared together, and I believe it helped her work through her loss. Lauren still has a picture in her room of her holding and kissing Clarissa and she talks about her occasionally, but she's been able to journey through the mourning process and know Jesus is taking perfect care of Clarissa. Lauren knows that when the Lord calls her home, then she'll get to spend eternity with her sister.



Kids have to go through tough times just like everyone else. Although parents often like to head off the troubles and protect their kids from pain, invariably kids get hurt. When they do, parents can walk through that experience with them, not only coaching them through the pain but also building closeness at the same time. In the tough times, children learn to rely on their parents' faith, see the bigger issues of life, and recognize what's really important.

God knew that struggles in life would bring people closer together. That's why in Romans 12:15 the Bible says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn," and Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Shared experiences not only help others but also produce heart moments of closeness.

Kristin Wall from Chelan, Washington, shared a special story of recovery with us.

• **T**his picture is our precious four-year-old,
• Ethan. It was taken as we were on a
• walk in the orchard. The reason this picture is so meaningful to me is that our family had been dealing with a severe bout of whooping

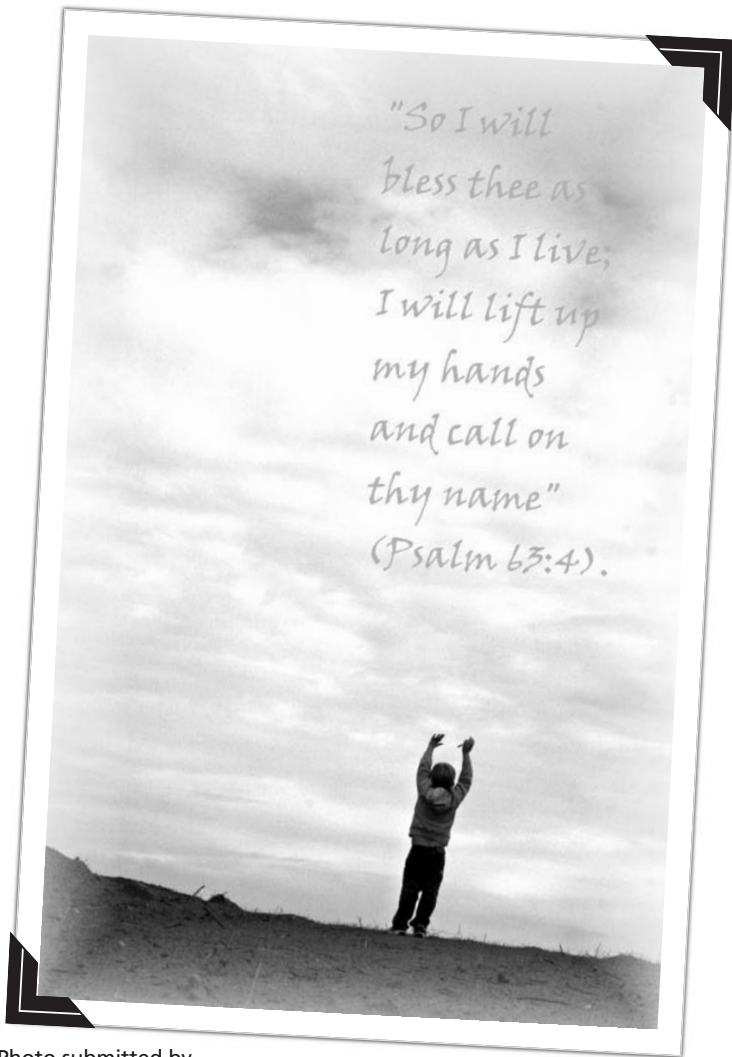


Photo submitted by
Kristin Wall, Chelan, Washington

cough for over fifty days and had been house-bound.

This was our first venture out of the house, not only because we were contagious, but also from sheer lack of strength. I was following Ethan up a hill, and as he crested the hill, he

lifted his hands and said, "Praise Jesus." It touched me in a way that it wouldn't have two months earlier. We are praising Jesus that we have overcome this horrible sickness and are regaining our strength.

I'm also praising him that after all that Ethan has gone through, he is able to realize that it is truly Jesus who deserves our praise. When we got home and I downloaded the pictures, the verse came to me "So I will bless thee as long as I live, I will lift up my hands and call on thy name" (Psalm 63:4 RSV).

We never know when our last breath will be, but as long as we have breath, we need to praise him, bless him, lift our hands to him and call upon his name. I pray that when Ethan is older, I will be able to share this picture with him and talk about how we watched him struggle to breathe days before this picture was taken, and that as a four-year-old, he realized even then, that it is God alone who deserves all our praise.



Of course, sometimes it's not the child's pain that brings the family together as much as that

of a parent. Kids often view their parents as invincible and that they'll live forever. At some point though, a parent's mortality brings reality into the child's mind. Those heart moments are precious as both parents and children learn more about life.

Lainie Grant from Douglasville, Georgia, told us about how her own health challenge taught her and her kids some valuable lessons.

● **I** have been reading through your book *Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes, in You and Your Kids* and I realized that I had trained my children to wait for me to yell before they responded. A few weeks ago we had a discussion and I told them that I was going to truly work to quit yelling at them. I told them I also wanted them to make an effort to respond the first time.

The very next day I went in for thyroid surgery and when I got out, I had lost my voice. Damage to the vocal cord nerves caused me to sound like I had a very bad case of laryngitis. I would need speech therapy to regain vocal ability. God has a sense of humor; he helped me keep my promise.

Seriously though, my kids truly are learning

to listen better (they have to!), and we are all yelling less. Interestingly enough, I have learned that yelling is a matter of the heart, not the voice. You don't have to have volume to yell. I'm learning more about the way I communicate, and my kids have been great about listening carefully and not interrupting or talking over me. It's been amazing! Life has taught us an important lesson and as we continue to experience this challenge we are growing closer together.



You never know how life situations will produce opportunities for heart moments. Lainie's loss of her voice took her whole family on a journey to learn about communication. When parents are on the lookout for life-lessons or connecting opportunities, good things can come out of even the most irritating or mundane times of life.

Sometimes kids have a way of initiating heart moments and if parents can just be spontaneous, the initiative becomes a reality. These moments often turn into stories that are told over and over again, but they start with an experience that draws the participants closer together.

Victoria Francola from Marietta, Georgia, tells a fun story.

• **T**his week I sent my three kids off to school. The oldest is a freshman, then I have a second-grader, and finally my beloved youngest is in kindergarten. On the day I dropped them all off, several people asked me if I cried after sending my last one off to kindergarten. My answer was, “No, I skipped back to my car with a big smile on my face.” I wasn’t being sarcastic! I went straight to Target and enjoyed walking around the store with no kid saying “I want!”

Three hours later I picked up my youngest and headed home. As we were approaching an intersection with a McDonald’s he said, “Mom, if you take me to McDonald’s for lunch, I will tell you that I love you AND that I like your dog.” With tears in my eyes, I pulled into McDonald’s. He can melt my heart!



Sometimes it’s laughing together or just having fun that creates that memorable time. Other times it’s some kind of tragedy that you all process together. And, of course, there are many

other stages in between. The key is to be ready for the unexpected and then willing to be vulnerable with your own emotions. Sharing your feelings of anger, frustration, sorrow, or joy can help initiate a special time of closeness between you and your child.

Paul Dziadul, Sr., from Macon, Georgia, was hurting and the comfort he needed came from an unexpected source, his son.

● **I** had just walked in from work and the
● phone rang. It was my mom calling to tell
● me that her mom just went home to be with the Lord. My wife noticed my reaction and knew something was wrong. I shared the news with her and she suggested that I sit down with our son Paul Jr. and explain it to him. He was just four years old. We had recently visited Grandma so he would remember her.

After dinner, I took him to my study and sat him on my lap. I took a deep breath and whispered a prayer for wisdom. I told him that my Grandma went to be with Jesus tonight and that she was in heaven now. Just hearing myself say those words caused the reality to hit home and I couldn't hold back the tears.

When I regained my composure, I noticed he had a somewhat confused look on his face. "Daddy," he asked, "is your Grandma hugging Jesus right now?"

"Yes, Son, I suppose she is."

"Well," he continued, "if heaven's such a happy place then why are you so sad?"

I pulled him in for a big hug, and after a few more tears of joy I thanked him for helping me understand that death is just a door to eternal life.

Later that evening I wrote a song about our conversation entitled "Is Grandma hugging Jesus?" By God's grace I was able to sing it at her funeral. Out of the mouth of babes comes the wisdom of sages. It is amazing what I learned from my young son that night.



Experiences, good or bad, can become the basis for heart moments. It all has to do with how the individuals respond to them. Even when you feel like you're in a losing battle over a child's heart, remember that a challenging experience may be just around the corner, and in that experience is yet another opportunity for closeness. Always be ready.

Chapter 3

Kids Have a Lot to Teach

It seems that God puts children in families who can teach just the right lessons to their parents. For many moms and dads, patience and anger control are at the top of the list. One dad said, “I never had a problem with anger until I had kids. Don’t get me wrong. I love them dearly. It’s just that I didn’t know that they would be so irritating. And it seems like everything I try to do is a tug of war. I’m learning more than I ever thought possible.”

Most parents can say something like that. Kids have a great way of teaching valuable things about life. Some of those lessons are learned over time, and others are quick and powerful courses in emotional control, self-management, or trust in God. Kids can provide the reminders to show compassion, do the right thing, or correct a wrong with a good attitude. It could happen through an example of selflessness or just a

word spoken at the right time. When those incidents happen, God uses them in a parent's life to prompt a need for change.

Billie Tate from Bossier City, Louisiana, tells a story of a time that her son taught her a valuable lesson. This story was a runner-up in our Heart Moment Contest.

Before turning in the erasers and chalkboards to become a Children's Director, I was an elementary school teacher for twenty



Photo submitted by
Lyn King, Campbell, California

years. An experience I'll never forget happened when my son was in the first grade. His classroom was just down the stairs from mine. The school was very, very old and had visible pipes inside the rooms. When there was a problem or the teacher downstairs needed me, she would tap on the pipes and I would come running or respond in some way.

This particular day when she banged on the pipes, I ran down the stairs to find that my son, Clay, had a burn across his right cheek. A child in the room who was actually supposed to be in the third grade had pulled the wire from his spiral notebook, rubbed it across his tennis shoe until the wire became hot, and then stuck it on my son's face.

After the face was healed and the incident forgotten, that same little guy stole my son's bicycle. Our home was across the street from the school. For a short time no one knew who had stolen the bike, but one day we found out who had it when the boy bragged to some friends. The bike was never returned to Clay.

The school decided that this child was much too old to be in a classroom with first graders and promoted him to the second grade in the middle of the year. I prayed that Donnie

would not be put in my classroom. I just didn't think I could teach him without being angry for what he had done to my son. Guess which second-grade teacher received this student... Me.

It was then that I had to learn a lesson in forgiveness. Donnie was a challenge, but I enjoyed watching him learn. His eyes lit up when he discovered something new.

One afternoon in early spring, all the teachers were called to the office area and given the news that a child had been killed. It was Donnie, my new student. We were told that the accident happened as he was coming over a steep hill riding his shiny, new bike not far from his home. Yes, the bike that Donnie was riding was Clay's bike.

That night I sat beside my son to tell him about the accident and that Donnie was riding his bike at the time. I thought Clay's response might be, "Well, he shouldn't have stolen my bike" or "That's what he gets for stealing my bike!" Tears came down his face as he thought about what had taken place. My son's response was one of compassion and forgiveness. He looked up at me and said,

“Mom, I’m glad that Donnie had a bike to ride these last couple of months and that my bike made him so happy.”

To become like Christ, we must become like a child. To forgive like Christ, we must forgive like a child.



The family is a place where all are learning and growing, both children and their parents. Most often parents view themselves as the teachers and their children as students, but the realities of life often turn the tables. One dad said, “I used to think I was a pretty righteous guy. Then I had kids and now I can’t believe how much selfishness I actually have. My children have helped me grow in my character more than I ever expected I would.”

Sometimes the principles learned are taught through children who don’t realize the significance of what they do or say. Pam Walker from Ralph, Alabama, told us a story of a lesson she learned from her one-year-old.



***M**y husband and I pray at the dinner table and always include our kids (even when they were just born). I like to hold*

hands when we pray and we always bow our heads. One day my husband was gone and my 16-month-old son and I were the only ones at home. We had made dinner and sat down at the table to say the blessing when my husband called. He said that if we hurry and eat, we could meet him out in a field with tractors.

I knew my son would love the opportunity so I moved into hurry mode. I started eating and my son just looked at me. I thought there was something wrong with his leg because he grabbed my hand and looked down at his leg. I kept asking what was wrong (he wasn't able to talk very well at that age).

Finally, I figured it out when he took his other hand and put it on his head and bowed for prayer. It really touched my heart that my one-year-old son reminded me to slow down, pray, and give God thanks.



It's often those gentle reminders provided by kids that keep parents on track. In fact, many of the same lessons parents teach their children are adult lessons that any person would need to learn, such as not whining, learning to accept no

as an answer, having a good attitude, being helpful, and so on. When you look at some adults, you have to wonder why they didn't learn the basics when they were kids!

Nonetheless, even adults need reminders sometimes. God is our Heavenly Father and communicates his correction and teaching in all kinds of ways. One of the tools he uses is children. When God speaks through our kids, we have to be sensitive enough to listen. Here's an example of this very truth sent in by Bria Slaughter from Gallatin, Tennessee.

• *L*ast year my then four-year-old daughter
• was having trouble with her words. She
• was saying unkind things and wasn't listening or abiding by the rules of our home. After many tries at creative discipline, I turned to scripture and prayed for something to guide me as a mom in this "phase" she was going through.

I found the Bible verse Psalm 19:14 that reads, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you." (NLT) I wrote it in big letters on a bright piece of paper and taped it on her door. We discussed the meaning of the verse, and when she would say something unkind or in a harsh tone, we



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa


would go read the verse together and I would make her tell me what it meant—in hopes she might care a little more about pleasing Jesus than her parents.

A few days later I was on the phone in a heated discussion with someone over what had been an ongoing issue. After slamming down the phone, I headed back to our bedroom and there was the sign, on MY door. I asked my daughter why she had placed it there. Her reply? “Because, Mom I heard you on the phone and thought you could use mine until you can make your own!”



Whew! Children are a blessing from the Lord in more ways than one, and sometimes when God uses them to correct us, we need humility to accept the rebuke. One of the hard parts of parenting is that you're on duty all the time. Kids see you in the best and worst of moments. There's no "letting-down" from godliness. You can't be good for a while and then go back to indulging in selfishness while no one is watching. They're always watching.

The constant work required of parents increases the pressure, and often true character is revealed. Many times weaknesses take center stage and need to be addressed. Other times there's the reminder to continue to do what's right and hang in there even if you're tired. Little eyes and ears are open and learning all the time. Andrea Prang from Barboursville, Virginia, was reminded about this in her life.

-  *On Tuesdays I drop my older two*
- *children off at our homeschool co-op*
- *and run the week's errands with my three-year-old daughter, Liberty. She is my "helper" and we usually have a picnic at one of the*

many parks or playgrounds along the way. Liberty pushes the cart in the grocery store, helps select the produce, and asks many, many questions. It's our time together, but it is also a long day for me to accomplish all the errands while training this young lady, and ensuring I am back to co-op within a few hours.

One particular day Liberty was having trouble returning to the car and getting promptly into her car seat after each errand. She preferred to run around the car, get into her sibling's car seat, get in the trunk to "help" put the groceries in, and many other creative forms of disobeying Mommy's instruction to "get in your car seat and buckle up." Each time she disobeyed, she was corrected, and I reminded her that God wanted her to obey "right away, all the way, the happy way."

As I was getting Liberty into the car after our very last errand, I said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Liberty, get in your car seat quickly, Mommy has lost her patience."

Liberty responded, "Oh, Mommy. I'm sorry." I smiled and kissed her on the head as I buckled her into her car seat, grateful that I had not spoken in an angry tone. As we were driving to

pick up her siblings, I heard an excited voice from the back seat, "Mommy, I found some patience! You can have mine!" My little girl had no idea what patience was! I was so blessed by this connection and by God's grace that I didn't lose my patience. Furthermore, I was able to enjoy the blessing of my daughter even though she didn't fully realize the meaning of her words.



It's not just a rebuke that gets our attention. Kids have a way of speaking words of encouragement that create heart moments in a parent that are bigger than those children ever imagined. And God knows that we need that support. Parenting is hard work, and hope is a cherished commodity that keeps parents moving forward when they feel like things are falling apart either in them or their kids. Ginger Wayde from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, shares a story of encouragement that we can all benefit from.

● **I** am a mother of three children: Joel, age
● five, Asher, age three, and Molly, just
● seven months. As one might imagine, our days are very busy. The boys are active and their

little sister promises to follow right in their footsteps—she’s already trying to walk. Parenting has always been a great challenge for me. I want to do a good job, and being a perfectionist, I’m tough on myself.

This past Sunday, on our drive to Memmie and Pawpaw’s house after church, my husband and I were discussing the sermon, and once again I was wondering out loud if I was doing “enough.” Am I doing the job Jesus has called me to do? Am I doing it well? I said that I didn’t want to be standing in front of Jesus one day and have him say, “Well, I can’t say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ to you!”

Joel, bless his heart, was listening and said, “Mommy, he won’t say that. He’ll say you did a really good job!” It was such a blessing to me that it perked me right up, put a smile on my face, and filled my heart with joy!



Children have an uncanny way of sensing truth and proclaiming it. Maybe that’s why God likens our own spiritual growth to be like a child growing up. Even though parents are always learning and growing, understanding God’s grace

in its various forms is a challenge for even the most mature person. God uses hardship and trials to develop the character in a person's life. Romans 5:3-4 says, "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." The struggles parents face within themselves and with their children are part of God's refining process.

Many times family and friends become mirrors to help us see areas that need some touching up. Other times God uses children to provide gentle reminders to do what's right. Susan Hagan from Annandale, New Jersey, shared a story of encouragement from her son.

• **I** had a wonderful heart moment with my
• youngest son, Timothy, who was only four
• years old at the time. On this particular day, my nine-year-old Benjamin was putting up a big resistance to getting out of the car and going into the school. We were sitting in the parking lot and I was literally fighting with Benjamin to get him going.

Timothy asked for his Bible, so I gave it to him and told him to read me some scripture (he was just learning how to read). He asked where the book of John was, so I showed

him. He then handed me the Bible, pointed to John 14:1, and told me to read it. It said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." (NKJV) My heart was truly troubled as I fought with my son to get him into school, and I was taken aback a moment and encouraged. It wasn't just the scripture but the way that the scripture was shared with me that provided a settling in my spirit that day.

Timothy hugged me and said, "It's all right, Mommy. God will get you through this." With this, I started to cry, and thanked God for my little inspiration.



God has many ways of sending messages of hope to parents. They sometimes come through a scripture passage or a pastor's message. A husband or wife can be a great source of encouragement in family life, but there's something about God's use of a child that has the ability to go straight to your heart. It's those moments that parents can look back on and cherish during the difficult times.

Children also have the ability to turn the things parents teach them into lessons for others, including you. On the one hand, it's

quite encouraging to see that your child is getting it, but on the other hand, it can be difficult to receive a rebuke from your child. But kids still do it and often come up with creative ways of communicating truth.

Manni Lee from New York City, New York, experienced a lesson from God taught through her own children.

- **I** often teach my five-year-old daughter,
- Tobi, and three-year-old son, Seth, that
- Jesus lives in our hearts. For Tobi, it makes sense to her when she faces problems, challenges, and things that are hard for her to handle. She'll say to herself that Jesus is in her heart and that she'll be fine whatever the situation brings.

One Saturday morning I was running late, and, as a result, I was venting on them, hurrying them along. In my rushed pace I didn't find time to calm down or hardly take a moment to breathe. Instead, I kept scolding Seth because he has the tendency to find ways to get himself in trouble effortlessly. He didn't walk alongside of me, he kept running ahead, and he fell many times. And whatever he was doing, it just did not seem right in my eyes that

morning. But the reality is that he is usually hyper and out of control, so this particular Saturday was not different from any other day when we're outside.

It was me who didn't have control over my anger and frustration. I was mad at myself, but venting on my son by scolding him for being normal. Eventually, I caught myself and told both of them that I needed to remain quiet for a while. By then Seth had become very sad over my scolding, feeling accused and upset. So Tobi, putting on her "all-wise-loving-sister-attempting-to-win-Mommy-points" hat, told Seth that he should know that Jesus is in his heart and that everything will be okay, that Jesus will help him listen to Mommy.

In his quick response Seth said, "No, Jesus is not! He is covering his ears!"

I had to stop at that moment and ask Seth what he meant. He said, "Jesus is covering his ears because Mommy is too loud. All the yelling and scolding is not going to be heard."

And right then and there I had a moment of revelation. It was a good rebuke for me that touched my own heart. I told him that what he said was probably true. It isn't that God

doesn't listen to us, but he's likely to cover his ears when all we do is yell, scream, and scold!

What a moment of wisdom God provided and it came from my little three-year-old.



Heart moments come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Furthermore, they sometimes happen in your kids and sometimes in you. When they do happen, though, they make a difference.




Photo submitted by
Josh and Melinda Turansky, Kapaa, Hawaii

Chapter 4

When They Finally Get It

Every once in a while you get to see a lightbulb come on in your child's head, and heart. "Oh, I get it," he seems to say. Or, "That makes sense. I'll start living differently now that I understand what you're teaching me." Of course, those moments often come after many correction times and repeated instructions. In fact, it's often someone else, like a youth leader or grandma, that says the very same things you've been saying for years, and your child finally gets it. Other times it's some kind of crisis or event that becomes the catalyst for a child to accept what you've been teaching.

Christy Parker from Savannah, Georgia, would have preferred the lesson be learned differently, but here's how it happened.

● ur heart moment occurred at a Starbucks, inside Target. My four-and-a-half-year-old McKenzie was sitting on the windowsill. He had been watching the rain and singing. I finished feeding our youngest son and placed him back in his infant seat. I've been working with McKenzie on doing things the first time, but on this day he wasn't listening. I told him to get down because it was time to go, but McKenzie continued to lie on the windowsill. After being told three times, he got off. However, he hit the tile floor head-first in the process.

The thunk made my heart sink. He was crying and I scooped him up and held him close. A bruise and a knot had already begun to form. He immediately began apologizing for not obeying. He kept saying, "Mommy, I am so sorry I didn't listen and obey." He wanted to go home and was very embarrassed. He knew he should have listened.

Over the next 48 hours the bruise spread down his face. He ended up with two black eyes. He looked like a baseball player who put black marks under his eyes. When McKenzie looked in the mirror, he said, "Mommy, my

head blowed up,” and then he feared everybody would laugh at him and think he put on makeup.

The following Sunday my mom and I had the privilege of substitute teaching in McKenzie’s Sunday School class. The lesson was on making good choices. McKenzie agreed to become the illustration of what happens when you don’t make a good choice. He shared with the class how he didn’t listen to his mommy and fell down. That morning when it was his turn to pray, he asked for forgiveness and prayed that God would help him make good choices.

This little boy loves the Lord and knows that God will heal his external boo-boo. Little did he know, though, that God was already working on his heart as well! What a blessing my son is in my life!



Sometimes parents work hard to see change in their children but experience a lot of resistance instead. It can be discouraging to see your hopes dashed when you have so many desires for your kids, but their foolishness and stubbornness get in the way. In those cases keep

doing the hard work, don't give up, and remember to pray a lot.

Also remember that other experiences in life will likely reinforce the same lessons you're trying to teach. Life can be a brutal teacher sometimes and often provides experiences that bring home truth in powerful ways. Other times kids begin to see that the very same things that parents repeat regularly are the lessons that life itself is teaching. Events take on more meaning and kids walk away with changed hearts.

Fern Bishop from Wilmington, Delaware, tells how her son began to learn a valuable lesson and make some changes in his life.

● **I** have a twelve-year-old son, Korey. I'm
● always looking for teachable moments to
● share God's Word through everyday life experiences. For about a year Korey had been struggling with rebellion and lack of submission to authority. It was a pull and tug to get things done around the house without being challenged by, "Just five more minutes, Mom."

I continued to pray for and with Korey, and we have a routine of reading the book of Proverbs together. A few events took place that all contributed to a significant change in him.

First, his father was due to leave for Iraq and just before he left, he came from Texas to visit Korey. They got to spend a week together and they had a wonderful time.

Then within the next two weeks I got sick and came down with a really bad cold. I mentioned to Korey that he was growing up and that he needed to be more responsible and talk to me with respect. I told him that he needed to think about how he talked to me and that I would not be with him always.

The conversation along with the life experiences struck a chord in his heart. They all worked together to make him think. Ever since then he has been helping around the house and has not been disrespectful. He's even been a loving person to be around. Who knows where we'll go from here, but I'm grateful for the heart change I've seen in my son.



It's one thing for kids to hear the same rebuke or correction over and over again. It's yet another for that truth to sink into the heart and reveal itself in a changed lifestyle. Sometimes parents think that they've done their job when they give



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

instructions over and over again, but when the heart isn't changed more work may be necessary.

For example, your son may know that he should be kind to his sister. He can repeat it to you when you ask him because you've been teaching him that for years. He's got the truth in his head. But when his sister takes his CD player without asking, the operating principle in his heart says "revenge."

It's the belief system in one's heart that determines how that person will act in a challenging situation. Head knowledge can only go so far. We need the truth to penetrate the child's heart

before we'll see real change take place. The heart is where the significant work is done.

Parents who only focus on behavior miss the heart. It's so exciting to see a change of heart in a child. You know that the kind word or the gentle response comes from the hours and hours of training you've done over the years and from the grace of God at work on a deeper level.

Jennifer McDonnell from Canal Winchester, Ohio, tells this story of how her daughter started to finally get the lesson she was trying to teach.

• **T**he McDonnell family has been practicing
• the use of “right thinking” words in
• various situations, and we have been using this approach heavily with whining. We have four children six and under, so whining has always been an issue in our home. As soon as one child learns whining isn't acceptable, there is another just behind her using whining to get his way. Whining then can spread like wildfire, affecting everyone in its path, both those who had supposedly “grown out of” whining and those who hadn't quite mastered their form of it yet.

It wasn't an unusual scene to see me (the mom) standing in the kitchen surrounded by

four despairing children who all had very unique and extremely annoying techniques of whining. One child would have a high-pitched, mach speed run-on sentence that would cause my eyes to practically pop out of their sockets as I stared in disbelief. Another would do a sputter-choke-sputter sob that would melt any sweet grandmother's heart.

One day, however, I knew we had turned a corner with our five-year-old (the sputter-choke-sputter child), because she used her "right thinking" words on her own without any coaching or redirection. I remember that moment vividly.

It happened in a parking lot. All the kids had gotten lollipops as a reward for behaving at the doctor's office, and this child dropped hers in the dirt on the way to the car. Normally, this would cause her to have a whining episode that would ruin everyone else's joy. But on this particular day (and often since), she was able to turn to me with a smile on her face and say, "Mommy, I was going to whine, but then I said to myself, 'It's okay. It's only a lollipop.'" "

My heart absolutely melted and soared at the same time. A miracle had occurred. My

daughter's thinking was changing, and her heart was reaping the benefits!



Kids have a way of learning things parents never thought possible. At times you wonder if your persistence will ever pay off. Will these kids ever get it? Other times they seem to pick up new truths faster than you could have hoped. Take this example from Lyn King of Campbell, California.

T*o preface this story you need to know that I had just been reading Rick Warren's book **The Purpose Driven Life**. I was still trying to grasp the first sentence in the book, "Life is not about me," wondering what that meant and looked like in my own personal life.*

It had been a particularly trying day with my three-year-old daughter. At one point, after what felt like a half-dozen correction times in an hour, she was sitting down with her chin in her hands and pouting. She had that look on her face that said, "Mommy, why do you correct me all the time? Why don't you let me do what I want?"

Not expecting her to “get it” but for lack of a better answer, I said, “Honey, I think it’s important for you to learn that life is not about you.”

I was shocked at the look of surprise and disbelief on her face as her mouth dropped open and she said, “It’s not about me? Well then what’s it about, Mom?”

I wasn’t exactly prepared for that response from a three-year-old but I said, “It’s about loving Jesus and helping other people know and love him.”

She thought for a minute and then said, “Oh. Okay, thanks, Mom!”

I know now that it was a heart moment, because to this day (she’s seven now) I can say to her when she’s upset about not getting her way, “What’s life about, Honey?” And she will say something like, “Oh yeah, Mom. I almost forgot. It’s about Jesus and loving him.”



It is true that one of the ways you tell that children are “getting it” is that they actually change the way they act. Jesus referred to a person’s behavior as coming from the heart when

he said in Luke 6:45, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” Actions are a measuring stick of what’s happening in the heart. That’s why parents get excited when their children do something positive. It’s an indication that a heart change may be taking place.

The heart contains the operating principles of a person. You can tell what kinds of things are in the heart by the tendencies children have. How does a child handle growing frustration, a no answer, or being corrected? You can learn a lot about a person’s heart by watching how he responds under pressure. Those typical patterns come from the heart, and, if change is going to take place, will require work on a number of levels.

Take anger for example. A child who has a pattern of continually reacting to life with outbursts of anger, needs a multifaceted approach to change. Helping children change what they believe about life, being firm and correcting regularly, and talking about anger and alternative solutions all contribute to a

deeper work in a child's heart. A change in a pattern of angry responses takes time and a lot of work from parents as God puts it all together on a deeper level.

Sandy Keller from Flintstone, Georgia, shares a story of how her son began to make some changes in the way he responds to disappointment.

- **A**ndrew absolutely loves building with
- Legos, Lincoln Logs, and wooden
- blocks, but just as passionately, he hates to have his buildings fall down.

Last Thanksgiving Day he had a masterpiece built and was ready to show it to his grandparents. Shortly thereafter I accidentally knocked a couple of pieces down while my mom was getting Andrew changed into his pajamas. I tried to put the pieces back, but Andrew was sure I wasn't doing it the correct way. He was so furious that he leaped stark naked across the room to show me how it was done.

While we were talking to him about his anger and trying to keep from laughing at the spectacle he was making of himself, my mom

finished putting his pajamas on him. Then, in childlike clumsiness, he unwittingly rolled right into the building himself, and completely flattened it. At this point he had a total meltdown, so my husband took him out of the room to “work with him.”

In the meantime, my dad tried to rebuild the house, but when Andrew came back he was certain that his grandfather was doing it all wrong. In fact, he was so totally enraged that



Photo submitted by
Christa Nyce, Reading, Pennsylvania

he scooted across the room on all fours, and smashed the entire building.

To make a long and difficult story short, I will just say that we determined Andrew was too angry and needed to stop playing until he could calm down, so the building materials were put away.

The next day was Andrew's fourth birthday. My dad, whom we all affectionately call Grumpy, decided that he would teach Andrew how to build a firm foundation so that his buildings would not fall down as easily. My dad spent a lot of time constructing and then, in what looked like an accidental way, he would knock his own work down. His comment would always be, "Oh well, we can build it again." He would then proceed to calmly rebuild the structures.

Andrew seemed to get the idea after the third time, but I knew the real test would come on a day when his little brother, Timothy, would knock down one of Andrew's prized castles.

Sure enough that happened. As it came tumbling to the ground, I heard Andrew exclaim, "I sure am glad Grumpy taught me that 'Oh well, I can build it again.'" Then he

proceeded to calmly rebuild the castle and even let Timothy help him by handing him pieces.

I know his heart has truly been changed, because overall he handles structural break-downs much better. He even reminds me, when I've messed something up, that I can "always build it again." Truly the lesson from those two days is one for which Andrew and I will always be thankful.



Sometimes heart moments come in a flash. Other times they develop over a series of events. When they do happen, though, parents feel a mix of emotions. Sometimes it's a sigh of relief or a feeling that says, "It's about time." Or maybe there's doubt that the change is for real. Occasionally a parent is so touched by the child's response that tears begin to flow. That's what makes heart moments so special.

Ruthann Smith from SW Ranches, Florida, tells this touching story.

● **I** have always wanted my children to value
● this life, but to "run this race" because of
● what lies ahead, knowing that this earthly life

isn't all there is. When my kids were very young, I was never quite sure how much they internalized or understood.

One day we were visiting my in-laws' farm, and my six-year-old son and I were biking together out in the country. When we came to a small, overgrown cemetery, he wanted to stop and check it out. As we walked among the old tombstones—some of them being from the early 1900's—he asked me all sorts of “young boy” questions. “Mom, what's under there now? Are the bones all gone? How soon do they turn to dust? Did the people who died go to heaven? Why did that baby die?” And so on.

I answered all his questions to the best of my ability, and after a little while he was ready to resume our bike ride. As we hauled our bikes through the tall grass and back onto the gravel road, he made a statement that I will never forget. “You know, Mom, this life is real, and it seems really real now, but when we get to heaven, that will be a lot more realer than this is.”

I could only agree with him as he rode in front of me, and I rode behind him with my

throat slightly tighter, and a misty sting of tears clearing the dust from my eyes. He got it!



Yes, he got it. And every parent knows that feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment when their kids get it. Of course, a lot more lessons are waiting to be learned. But that's what parenting is all about. The job is never over. Kids need to learn a lot. That's one of the reasons God gave parents to children. Be patient. Do a lot of praying, and look for creative ways to pass on the truths your kids need to learn.

Chapter 5

Passing It on to Others

It blesses a parent's heart when a child takes a lesson taught in family life and passes it on to others. It's then that you know the truth not only went into the ears but also somehow got processed internally, at least enough to share it with someone else. The heart is the place where people work things out, process life, incorporate values and convictions, and then determine what's important.

Applying those conclusions reveals what's actually happened on a heart level. When a child can take the principles received from parents and teachers and pass them on to others, significant heart work has taken place. Smiles of satisfaction then form on the faces of parents who might otherwise wonder if their continual work has had any effect.

Amy Eng from Renton, Washington, tells a story from her family that illustrates this truth.

• *E*very night my four-year-old son Terrick
• *and I have been memorizing scripture*
• *verses. One verse that stood out to him the*
most was Psalm 55:16. "I call to God and the
Lord saves me." That verse has been coming in
handy, especially on nights when it rains. You
see, Terrick is afraid of the rain (and it rains a

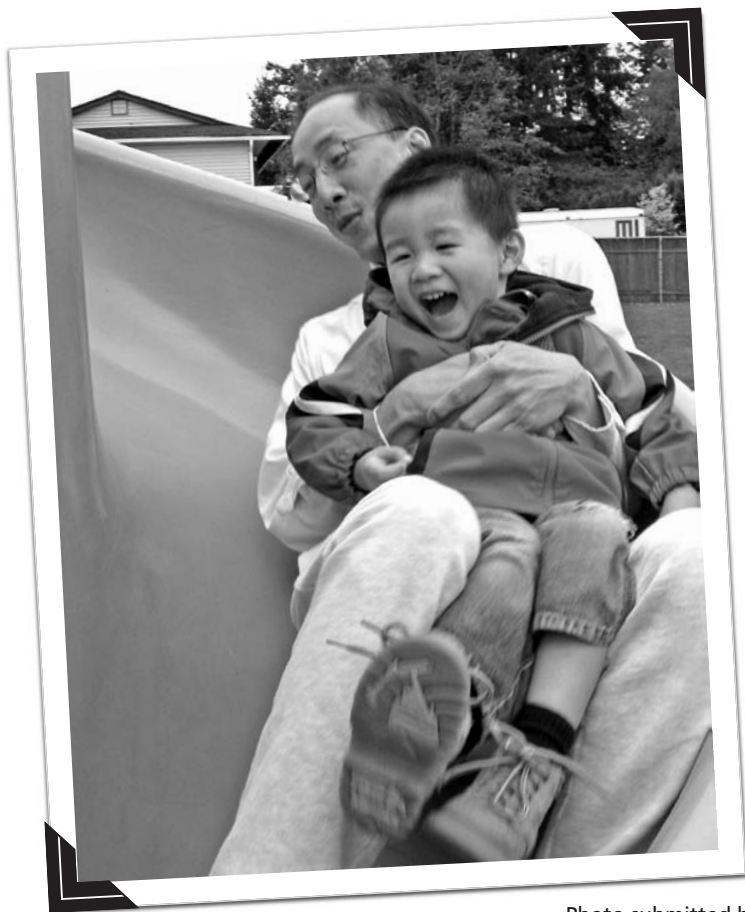


Photo submitted by
Amy Eng, Renton, Washington

lot since we live in the Seattle area). He gets anxious and cries. For some reason, he just doesn't like the sound of the rain. We tell him that when he gets scared he should "Cry out to the Lord and the Lord will save you." In his terms, we encourage him to tell God how he feels, and God will listen and keep him safe.

His little brother, Trevon, who will be turning two, sleeps very well, although lately he has been waking up and crying in the morning. When Trevon got out of his bed one day, we asked him why he was crying. Since he doesn't speak very well, he couldn't answer. His brother Terrick who was next to him gave his brother some sound advice. As the boys were standing next to each other, Terrick said to him, "Trevon, you need to pray to God and he will save you."




Mom and Dad were encouraged that their son could take this important scripture verse and apply it to his brother.

At times it seems that parents have to repeat the same truths over and over again, and discipline for the same offense without seeing any progress. In those moments parents must realize

that their hard work does pay off. You may not see the immediate change you're looking for, but children do internalize the things you teach, and lessons are being learned in your home. It's encouraging, however, to occasionally get a glimpse of that deeper work. When you do, it's called a heart moment and it makes all that hard work worthwhile.

Amy Woody from St. Joseph, Michigan tells this story.

-  *One Sunday I was working in the*
- *nursery at my church. We had a little*
- *boy who was screaming at the top of his lungs. It was of no fault of his own; he had just never been there before the last couple of weeks. My three-year-old Emery was helping me in the nursery on this particular week. He's our middle child and is afraid of loud noises. He tends to be right on top of me when I am in the nursery.*

This particular Sunday we had been discussing the love of Jesus, and how he is always with us. I am so proud of him for trying to understand the concept. Our little friend (the screaming boy) was stressed and I could not

get him to calm down at all, so my little Emery went up to him and said, “Don’t worry. Jesus is with you always and loves you this much.” Emery stretched out his arms as far as he could. I cried for hours.



One of the reasons that parents are so touched by events like this is because they’ve lived with a struggling child for so long. It may be fear, rebellion, social awkwardness, or a host of other long-term challenges that leaves a parent longing for some small sign of progress. So, just a comment that indicates that a child is moving in the right direction can bring on significant emotion.

One of the areas of concern for parents has to do with boy/girl relationships. The heart can easily get carried away by romance, and this could happen at any age. Parents are often setting firm limits or establishing rules to protect their children from danger. Internal convictions keep kids on track, preventing emotion from leading their decision-making. One of the goals parents have is to use rules and external guidelines to develop internal convictions to do the right thing.

Denise Burdett from Hanford, California, shares a little insight into her family.

- *Our youngest daughter Abby is six and*
- *is subject to the boy-crazed, hormone-*
- *driven lives of her three much older sisters. One evening at the dinner table, Meghan and Kayla, the two older girls, were talking about boys. At one point they turned to Abby and asked her who her boyfriend for the week was. She surprised us with an answer that knocked the socks off her father and left my heart swelling with joy. "I am waiting for the perfect man, the one man that God has already chosen for me. When that day comes, I will let you all know!"*

We thanked the Lord for showing himself to us that night through the words and the heart of a six-year-old.



Sibling conflict is an area where parents experience a tremendous amount of grief. The continual fighting, bickering, and meanness in some families is not only annoying for parents, but it's also downright discouraging. Parents want their children to love each other and to

grow up to be friends. When partnership replaces putdowns and camaraderie takes the place of competition, parents beam with delight. Ann Voskamp from Gowanstown, Ontario, shared this story.

● *M*y son came running in because his
● *M*older brother Caleb had hurt him. I
● *M*went out to find Caleb and try to turn things
around. “What could you do to bring some
benefit into this situation?” I asked.

His hands searched long and deep into his pockets. “Well... I don’t know. Maybe I could serve the little kids a picnic out in the grove?” I nodded, smiling.

Caleb dashed off full of plans and hope. Later, I carried out a tray of fruit to contribute to the in-progress picnic Caleb was hosting for his younger siblings. I frowned as I stepped over soggy garbage strewn across the lawn.

From near the sandbox, six-year-old Levi offered an explanation. “Baby Shalom did it.”

“Hmmm.” I juggled the tray. “Hope, might you scoop this all back up, please?”

Eight-year-old Hope sighed and prepared to launch into a litany of reasons why she shouldn’t have to. Caleb piped up from his task

of serving the picnickers, “It’s okay, Hope. After I’m done serving here, I can do it for you.”

Our eyes caught, and I shared an approving smile. As he raced by me for a new garbage bag, I said, “You are quite the hero, Son.”

From the top of the old stone stairs, he stopped and turned. “It’s funny, Mom, I always thought heroes saved people out of burning building or rescued somebody from drowning. Something big. But it’s actually about all this little stuff.”

Exactly, my boy, all this little stuff. This is the stuff heroes are made of: honoring, sacrificing, and giving. The boy who bags up the garbage and me here handing out banana slices to thankful siblings. Caleb and I are getting it; we are finding our way as everyday heroes in the sacrificial little stuff.



This mom turned a routine discipline time into a learning experience and ultimately into a heart moment. Keeping your cool and staying calm, but at the same time being firm, can help, but Ann had a focus on making the situation better, not just punishing for a wrong committed.

That's the difference between punishment and discipline. Punishment focuses on past misdeeds; discipline's focus is on future good deeds. Punishment is often motivated out of anger; discipline is motivated out of love. Punishment is based on justice—you did that, so you get this; discipline places an emphasis on teaching. Heart moments rarely happen through punishment but often come through discipline.

As children get older and everyone gets busier, the relationships in family life sometimes take a back seat. Family members must work overtime in the relationship department in order to maintain closeness and not grow apart. Busyness provides a major challenge to family closeness.

Here's how Kate Dolan from Catonsville, Maryland, tried to handle the busyness in her home.

● **M** y son started middle school this year,
● so he's up and out an hour earlier, with
● hardly an eye open and breakfast packed to eat on the bus. We don't have time to talk in the morning.

In the afternoon, he's got baseball practice, homework, and Boy Scouts while I'm trying to

get my work done, check on his sisters, get dinner, and make sure uniforms are clean. We don't have time to talk in the afternoon. In fact, we don't have time to talk much at all.

So I started leaving notes and stories out on the kitchen counter, hoping the kids might read them while passing through. I didn't think it was working. The first item I left out, an article about a girl's life in the Dominican Republic, quickly got covered up with junk. Eventually I called the kids together and talked about how the chores we did for fun on our camping trip like carrying water and cooking over an open fire were chores that some kids had to do every day. My kids dutifully listened and then went back to their computer games.

I left a magazine out a couple of weeks later. This was a list of Christmas gifts you could "give" someone by donating money in their honor. I left it open to the page where you could donate soccer balls to children who didn't have money for recreational items. I figured I'd manage to make time to discuss it sometime in the two months before Christmas. The next morning when I came into the kitchen, there was a twenty-dollar bill lying on the counter.

*“Does anyone know whose money this is?”
I asked my son, guessing that it was
misplaced Girl Scout cookie money.*

*“You know,” he said, nodding toward the
magazine. “It’s for them. For the kids who
don’t have as much as we do.” He had not
only read what I left out, but he had taken
immediate action and donated a month’s worth
of his allowance. “I think chickens are a good
gift,” he continued. “Because you can eat the
eggs, grow more chickens, and have some to
share.”*

*Wow. He’d even taken time to think about
it, even on a school morning.*



Kate’s creativity contributed to a heart
moment in her son in the midst of their busy
schedules.

Sometimes it’s other people who contribute
to the heart moments our children experience.
It’s helpful when those outside the family
communicate values and convictions. Many
children find that they can receive a truth from
another respected person when they couldn’t
accept the message at home. Don’t forget,
though, that it’s often the continual teaching,

modeling, correcting, and challenging of children in an area that sets the stage for someone else to confirm what a child has already been taught.

Kelly Burnett from Cypress, Texas, was pleased to see a lesson learned in her own family.

- *One summer afternoon I was taking my*
- *daughter over to a friend's house for a*
- *play date. My son Brock, age nine, and*
daughter Brynne, age six, were with me in the
car. For no rational reason, Brynne became
enraged about something ridiculous; she
wanted her brother's Nintendo game and she
wanted it now! Of course, a fight started
between the two of them, and I must confess
my daughter's actions were not pretty.

I tried my best to stay out of the argument to see if they could resolve the conflict on their own. As Brynne was becoming more and more nasty and just before I was about to step in, Brock gave in and let her have his game. I was amazed as she certainly did not deserve his loving response. This wasn't typical for my nine-year-old who was often self-centered. Brynne managed to pull herself together, apologize, and get a new attitude by the time we



Photo submitted by
Victoria Francola, Marietta, Georgia

arrived for her play date...go figure!

We dropped Brynne off at her friend's house. She hugged her brother and ran off on her merry way as little ones do. As we pulled out of the driveway, I complimented my son on his gracious act. I explained that I was proud of him for loving her enough to do something nice for her, even though her actions were not deserving of his kindness. He was gazing out his window as he thanked me for noticing.

A little further down the road, Brock said, "Mom, Nathan (his counselor from Frontier Christian Camp) was right about what he taught me at camp. He helped me see what

Dad and you have been telling me. When you let Jesus in your heart, it isn't enough to just let him in. You have to let him fill your whole heart up. When you do, it's easy to do the right thing. In fact, you WANT to do the right thing. Jesus helps you make better decisions than you can make on your own. And Mom, it feels good!"

Brock got it! Of course, there have been more silly fights between them, but in that moment, I saw the heart of my little boy...and in it was Jesus shining through...and it was good, so, so good! I praised God right then and there and pulled the car over so Brock and I could pray together. I still wonder if Nathan will ever know what an impact he made on my son this summer. I don't know how to reach Nathan, but I do know the King of Kings does and he will reward Nathan's efforts, for he helped us reach the heart of our child. And for that heart moment, I am eternally grateful.



On behalf of all parents, we want to thank all the Nathans in the world who take an interest in our children. Sometimes our kids don't look like they're listening. They often resist leadership,

goof around, or seem easily distracted, but your work is valuable. Kids do listen to what you say as teachers, counselors, coaches, and friends. Thank you for helping us to parent our kids. Thank you for influencing the hearts of these children.

Sometimes children will even listen to their siblings. As you try to reach the hearts of your kids, take time to entreat siblings to encourage each other to do what's right, hold onto convictions, and apply God's truth to their lives. Kids have a way of saying it to other kids that helps the message to stick. Christa Nyce from Reading, Pennsylvania, tells how this happened in her family.

● **I** am a homeschooling mom of four. My
● oldest two, Ty and Kalyn, have both
● accepted Christ as Savior, and we've been earnestly praying for Micah's and Drew's salvation. We have regular discussions about sin, God's love, and what this means for Micah, age three, especially. My husband and I are excited to see evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in his life and convicting him of his need for Jesus.

Yesterday during Bible class with the three oldest children we had a lesson on Adam and Eve. I talked about how Eve chose to obey the serpent (Satan) instead of God and the results of that decision. Micah especially was wide-eyed, listening intently, and piping in answers to my questions.

A little later in the day I was training our one-year-old Drew, who was testing his limits with me. Micah, noticing what was going on, came over and asked Drew in a stern voice, "Do you want to obey Jesus or the DEBIL?"

I was a little amused yet thankful that a new biblical truth had settled into his heart.



God uses all kinds of ways to reach the hearts of children. Furthermore, your kids may be the vehicle God uses to pass important messages on to others. When that happens, take time to encourage your own kids for their growth and maturity. Share the special moment with them. Remind them that they are treasures not only to you but also to God. You never know when the most important words of the day might come out of your child's mouth.

Chapter 6

Watching Kids Grow

One of the greatest opportunities parents have is to introduce their children to God as their own personal Heavenly Father and to Jesus as their own Lord and Savior. In addition, children learn spiritual truths about God's Word and lessons about living the Christian life. It's a blessing to see kids grasp a personal faith and to own their own relationship with God. It happens at all ages.

In fact, many parents report that their children open their hearts to Jesus at a very young age. It's with great excitement that parents see their child choose to become one of God's children. Some question the validity of a decision made at a young age, but never underestimate the importance of a childhood conversion experience. God often nurtures that step of faith over the years into more and more choices to follow Christ. Spiritual sensitivity starts when children are young and grows stronger as they get older.

Marla Rausch from Pickens, South Carolina, tells how her daughter showed evidence of understanding God's plan.

• **I** have been working on letters and sounds
• with my young daughter and made her a
• notebook with a blank page for each letter. We were going to try to find pictures in magazines that began with the sound on each page—picture of a baby for the “b” page, etc. Some aspects of learning didn’t seem to “take” with her, and we ended up setting the notebook project aside for a while.

We continued having her sit and listen during family devotions in the morning, even though we questioned what she was understanding and/or retaining. Last week she dug out the notebook from her stash of “treasured items” that looks more like a junk heap to me. I thought she was just looking through it, and I hadn’t realized she was coloring her own pictures for each page.

She came to me and wanted to “read” her notebook to me, and after masking my disappointment about her “messing up” the pages with her coloring, I sat down with her to listen.

I was impressed until we reached the “s” page and I could clearly make out a large fire. I racked my brain to come up with a plausible word related to fire that started with the “s” sound. Finally I just had to ask.

“Oh, that’s hell, Mommy,” said Heather. “I thought this was the ‘sss’ page,” I replied. “It is. Sin starts with ‘sss’ and sin causes people to go to hell,” she answered simply.

What could I do but hug her?

It was soon thereafter that she came to me, and with tears said she wanted Jesus to come into her heart because she couldn’t be good by herself and didn’t want to go to hell. We went over the salvation plan, and after concluding that she had indeed understood, I prayed with her.

I really believe her heart was reached after we took the time to listen to her and let her know we enjoyed her presence. When we took the pressure to “succeed” by man’s standards off and decided to cooperate with God’s timetable in her “academic maturation,” we were able to express our love instead of our frustration. This opened her up and allowed her to express her love for us in many different

ways and I believe allowed her to see or understand a bit better her Heavenly Father's love.



Of course, simply relying a childhood prayer isn't all there is to spiritual nurture in a family. Marla continues to nurture that faith, but those early seeds are treasures for any parent. As



Photo submitted by
Shannon Hinkle, Irving, Texas

children grow, they often make subsequent commitments in their hearts to follow Jesus. In fact, that's what the Christian life is all about. We learn more about who God is, and we then give more and more of ourselves to Jesus.

A careful balance of teaching and encouraging allows children to make decisions for themselves about their personal faith. Sometimes you'll expect each person in the family to say a prayer whether they want to or not. Other times you may invite all those to pray who would like to. Both stimulate spiritual growth. Of course parents love to see children initiate spiritually. It's a treasure to have a child suggest praying, serving, or reading the scriptures. A child's initiative reveals that some important work is going on in the heart.

Kimberly Trautman from Garner, North Carolina, tells of the surprise that came from her son.

● **A** true heart moment came last Sunday
● with our second child, William. We
● have six kids. My husband and I have always
taught about salvation at a young age. Our
second, William, was saved at the age of
four. He was misbehaving and I had to pull

him out of the church service. I took him into a room and we had a “discussion.” In the midst of our discipline, I presented the gospel to him and his heart was ready. He accepted the Lord as his personal Savior that very night.

My husband was deployed overseas in Kuwait with the army at the time. You can imagine the tears on the phone when I shared the news. For the next couple of years we talked about baptism with William. I didn’t want to be one of those mothers who pushed their kids to get baptized. I made sure they knew what it was all about, but I wanted the decision to be theirs.

This past Sunday I needed to stay after church and talk to our pastor. My husband and I were in the midst of our conversation when William ran up and interrupted us. He blurted out, “Pastor David, I just want you to know that I want to be baptized.”

My husband and I looked at each other and our pastor looked at each of us. We had not been expecting it. I knew then that this was his true heart’s desire to follow the Lord in believer’s baptism. What joy filled my heart.

It’s moments like last Sunday that encourage me to continue to teach my children

about the Lord and how good he is. As a parent it was one of those moments you just want to remember forever.



Many of the spiritual disciplines parents do, like reading the Bible, praying, and going to church, are modeled to children over many years. Kids must come to that personal decision, though, to make faith their own, not just something that belongs to their parents. When signs of spiritual independence become evident in a child, parents rejoice on the inside and occasionally that joy then spills out to encourage the kids as well.

Amy Fogarty from Clarksburg, New Jersey, shared with us a glimpse into her family.

● **I**n an effort to encourage our oldest
● daughter and to share how God answers
● prayer, my husband was explaining to our children how he had prayed for a responsible first child who would help care for her younger brothers and sisters. Tom then announced that God gave us a wonderful daughter as an answer to our prayer.

Not long afterwards, our son Jackson, age

six, came home from school with a story. While at school someone had written on the teacher's desk. His teacher asked the children who had done the writing, but no one was willing to confess. She then told the class that they would not have recess until the person who did the writing came forward. Recess is our son's favorite part of the day, so this was a devastating punishment!

Jackson prayed that whoever did it would come forward. The teacher gave everyone a piece of paper to confidentially write down whether they had written on the desk. Still no one came forward. The teacher told them to put their heads down and think about it. Jackson said, "I know I'm not supposed to pray in school, but when I put my head down I prayed again that whoever did the writing would come forward."

Not long after that, the child who did the writing confessed and the class was able to go out for recess. My son said, "See, Dad. God answered my prayer just like he answered your prayer for a responsible first child."



No doubt Dad prays regularly with and for his children, and as he does he makes a valuable statement about God and his work in our personal lives. God answers prayer. As part of your lifestyle, pray regularly with and for your kids.

One mom told us that she didn't like to pray out loud. She preferred to pray quietly and even felt embarrassed with prayer at mealtimes. She shared her feelings with her pastor, who made a lasting impression on her by saying, "You don't really have a choice with this one. You just need to get over it. Whatever is hindering your freedom to pray will go away when you practice praying out loud. Your children need to hear you pray."

That mom responded to the challenge and realized that she needed to stop making excuses and just act in faith. And she did. Her family benefited greatly.

Prayer is a tool for connecting with God. Parents certainly need to use it often. But children can also find comfort, encouragement, and guidance through prayer. Rachel Miller from Kingwood, Texas, tells how it happened in her family.

● **A**t the end of a long vacation my five-year-old son, Jake, had become accustomed to sleeping in the same room with someone. Once we returned home he was fearful of being in his bedroom by himself. We spent several nights explaining to him why there was no need to fear, and each evening ended with one of us lying down with him.

Several nights into this process, God helped us pull a book off our story shelf that we had not read in a long time. It was **Solomon and Friends Learn About Trusting God**. Our son really identified this particular story with his need to trust God at bedtime.

The verse used in the story was Psalm 56:3, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you.” Jake started asking for this story to be read to him every night. We always prayed for his fear before we left his room, but he would ask that we please sit just outside his door and continue praying.

After a few evenings I made the suggestion to Jake that he pray for himself. I explained that although my prayers would reach God, it would be much more meaningful if he was asking God himself for help. He did. As loud

as he could he repeated the words, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you,” over and over. And each night before we left his room we would remind him to trust God.

Finally after about three weeks we were back to our normal routine of being able to leave him to fall asleep on his own. The impression that this event had on our son’s faith was priceless. Although Jake had previously been shy about praying out loud with anyone, he now willingly prays with us, for himself, and for others. I am almost brought to tears at his very open and intimate prayers. And he still asks God that he won’t be afraid in his bedroom.



Jake learned that God is real and that praying is one of the ways of connecting with his Heavenly Father. Parents like Rachel are tickled when children recognize that God is actively working in their own lives, not just in the lives of their parents.

Melanie Dickerson from Harvest, Alabama, tells this story.

• *M*y oldest daughter has always had a
• strong belief in God and Jesus. She is
• convinced that God is real. My youngest has
been another story. At times she would ask
me, “How can he be real? I can’t see him.”

One Wednesday evening after church, I gathered my two girls, ages five and eight, to go home. My oldest showed me the three balloons her teacher had given her. I eyed my five-year-old, fearing at any moment that she would begin to demand loudly that her sister give her one of the balloons. But she simply stared at the brightly colored balloons as we all headed out to the car. From the back seat, she asked me, “Why didn’t I get any balloons?”

“I don’t know. Your sister’s teacher gave them to her and her classmates.”

Again I waited for her to demand that I force her older sister to give her one of her balloons. Instead, she was unusually quiet in the back seat with her sister and the balloons. Finally, halfway home, she said in a calm voice, “Okay, God, I’ll tell her.”

My curiosity was piqued. I listened as she turned to her big sister. “God said you should give me one of those balloons.” I couldn’t help

laughing at her creative way of trying to get what she wanted. But I also believe that, at some point, my youngest daughter had gotten the message that God is real.



Over time this little girl will experience more and more opportunities to see that God is real. By the time you've been a parent for a while, you realize not only that God is real but also that trusting him is an integral part of raising kids. The older they get, the more clear that truth becomes.

Sometimes when kids are young, parents imagine that they are the only ones responsible for a child's growth and development. As kids get older, their own decisions and individuality reveal the importance of a parent's prayers and trust in God. Having teenagers can do wonders to inspire your prayer life.

In fact, parents often pray that God will work out circumstances to protect, change, or grow a child. One mom had a son who was easily tempted to do the wrong thing. She told him that she prayed regularly that God would reveal his actions and that he would get caught and not get away with doing wrong. It was amazing to see

how many times and ways God revealed problems to her. Our God is in control and can lead and guide our kids through life every day. Sometimes that leadership comes through Bible reading and prayer. Other times it comes through the voice of an authority like a parent. And then sometimes God just teaches lessons through life, as he did in the family of Rocio Davila from Houston, Texas.

• *S*ometimes parenting teens can be a tough job. You talk to them and you're not sure if they're listening. We have a fourteen-year-old daughter and a ten-year-old son. Our daughter was going through some tough times with a certain someone of the opposite sex. Despite her age, she is a very responsible young lady, so for her fourteenth birthday we gave her a cell phone with a number of "guidelines" attached.

She was very responsible with it and obedient to all the rules. However, as mentioned, there was a certain someone that was bothering her. We explained to her that this wasn't the time for relationships with boys other than just being friends with them, with no strings attached.

Although she agreed, we could see that he was stirring up some feelings in her young heart. We continued to pray. Somehow he got hold of her cell number. We continued to talk to her, and although she denied it, we could see the danger this person was becoming to her.

One day we ran a quick errand to Family Dollar and then to the grocery store. When we arrived at the grocery store, she said, "I don't have my phone."

We almost dismantled the car looking for it! We went back to Family Dollar, searched up and down the aisles, but found no phone. I couldn't believe it, because the phone was almost never out of her sight. Despite her young age she was not careless with it. And being the perfectionist that she is, it always had to be in its case on her waist or charging in its place in her room.

We dialed the phone a couple of times, but no response, so we canceled it to avoid anyone using it and running up our bill. When we got home, she was feeling down and we explained to her that we had insurance on it, but she would have to pay any necessary fees with her allowance to replace it. She agreed and ended up with no allowance for a month.

A week later she came up to me and said, "I realize why I lost my cell phone."

"Tell me."

"God allows things to happen to us for a purpose. I think I lost my cell phone so that if that guy called he'd get a message that my phone was no longer in service, so he'd stop bothering me. I guess God had to do what he had to do to protect me. It cost me my allowance, but it was worth it."

Her words were very true. It was an answer to our prayers because that boy never bothered her again.

I learned an important lesson that day. I had only seen the loss of the phone and the cost of replacing it. I had not seen what God had revealed to my daughter. I also realized that she had heard our advice, and most importantly she had heard God's voice speak to her heart.

Parents, don't give up. In the midst of kids' silence and sometimes indifference, they're listening. And our loving God does listen to our prayers and he will answer them in his time. It's amazing how we underestimate our kids sometimes and how sensitive they can be to God's voice!

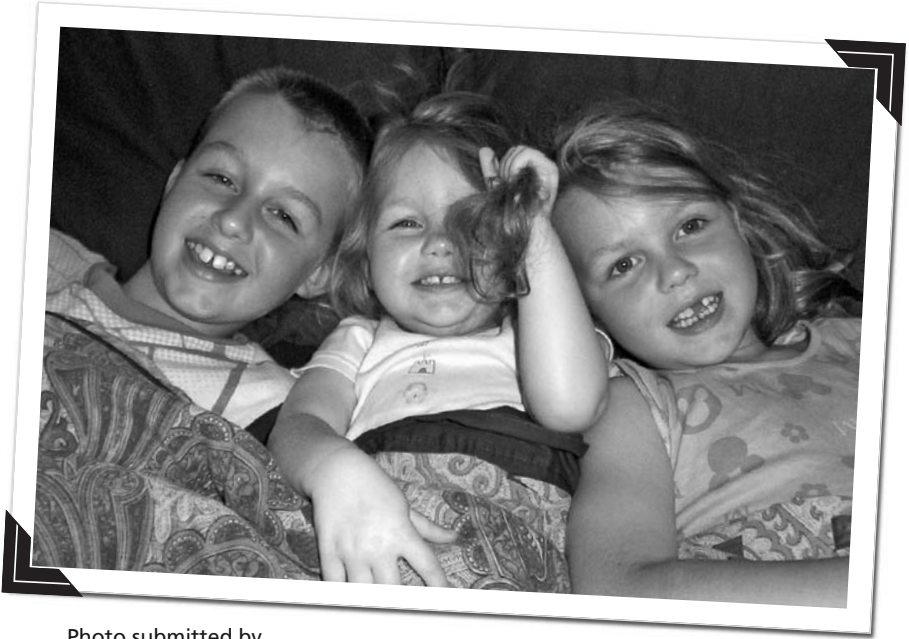


Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa



Sharing the scriptures with kids is a great way to reach the heart. In fact, God says that the Bible is like a double-edged sword, “it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) With older children you may study a passage of scripture and talk about how it relates to family, school, or social life. With younger children you might tell Bible stories and draw out the application about God, who he is, and how he works in people’s lives. Mindy Goodall from Charlottesville, Virginia, saw how one Bible story became real in her son’s life.

● *My son Grant, age five, has been into David and Goliath for the past few months. We act out the story regularly and talk about all the major points that God teaches us through it. Grant loves to talk about how little guys can do big things when God helps them.*

Three weeks ago Grant wanted to take the training wheels off his bike. He rode away with Dad running next to him, and he got it on the first try! Grant put his feet down with a big smile on his face, and I said, “You did it!”

Without missing a beat Grant replied, “Yep, but I didn’t do it by myself. I did it with God’s help!”



It would be great if we could all learn that lesson! God speaks through his Word, and children often hear the message. In fact, God talks about the value of parents passing on his message to the next generation. One passage that makes this very clear is Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

It's been said that the teacher learns more than the students, and that happens in family life as well. When parents teach spiritual truths to their kids, they too learn more about God and his grace. But sometimes it's the children who become the teachers when they take the Bible story and show parents how it can be applied in life. Lesli Richards from Alpharetta, Georgia, tells how this happened for her.

● **I** had a sweet heart moment with my ten-year-old daughter a few days ago. We were reading about Egypt and about daily life in ancient times. We learned how living on the Nile made life fairly easy for the Egyptians, much more so than for other cultures. We tasted many of the delicious foods they had available to them and made a model Nile River in a baby pool. We even grew grass by flooding the Nile.

My daughter began to remember other Bible stories about Egypt and the Israelites. We talked for a while about how we could understand the Israelites grumbling and complaining as they wandered the barren desert. My daughter commented that because

of the grumbling and complaining, they never saw the Promised Land.

Suddenly, she took a deep breath and looked stricken. She said, “Mom, do you think there are blessings that God has for us that we’ll never see because we complain about little things all the time?”

She and I both knew the answer. We sat in silence and really contemplated the results of our complaining. Echoes filled our heads of the phrases that all too often fill our home... “I hate these pants!” “I’m bored!” “I’m tired of telling you to pick up your toys!” “I hate picking up your dirty laundry!” “So-and-so got a bigger piece than me!” and on and on.

Ouch. I’m afraid I felt especially guilty. I’m probably the chief complainer in our home. What blessings lay unclaimed? We have both resolved to do better and now have a secret code to warn each other to repent from grumbling. We don’t want to miss out on God’s blessings!



Spiritual sensitivity is important in parenting. We’ve all heard of the dad who’s too busy reading the paper to hear about his son’s problem, or the

mom who is rushing around the house to get everyone out the door, only to find out that she missed an important moment with her daughter who needed her that morning. None of us want to be in that place. We make vows that say we'll be different.

Flexibility and spontaneity are often needed to capture heart moments. Remember that the schedule, telephone, and the clock are only tools. In fact, they are servants and not masters. If you're having a significant conversation with your child, it might be best to let the phone go and catch the message instead of missing the moment with your child.

Tammy Brookins from Monticello, Florida, shared a story of a heart moment she almost missed.

• **T**wo weeks ago my kids and I had to go to the Dollar General to buy candles before going to a friend's house for a craft day. My oldest daughter, Alexandra, age eleven, asked if she could go outside to check on a cardinal she saw limping about. I said, "Sure."

A few minutes later she came back. "Something is wrong and he can't get away. Can we save him?"

I'm thinking to myself, "This is ridiculous. We're going to be late." But as I'm driving out of the parking lot, I let my daughter call the vet and ask him what could be done. The vet said that if we catch the bird, he would take him to the wildlife rescue center.

My silent thoughts continued. "Great. Now we're going to be really late and how bad of a mother would I be if I don't turn around." So we turned around, and sure enough the cardinal was right where we had left him. I went back into the Dollar General and bought a child's butterfly net, gave it to Alexandra, and she caught the bird in it. She then put the bird in a box that I also acquired at the store.

This time as we drove out of the parking lot, my daughter was so proud of herself. She was happy and excited. And here's where the story took an amazing turn right into my heart. She told me that while she was watching the bird and waiting for me the first time, she was sure I wouldn't let her go check on it. So she prayed.

Then when she got back in the car and I let her call the vet, she was sure I wouldn't turn around. So she prayed.

Then when I turned around and she was waiting to catch the bird, she was sure she wasn't going to be able to pick him up and put him in the box. So she prayed.

After we delivered the cardinal to the vet's office, we drove to Craft Day. On the way, we were talking about all that just happened. She said that God answering all those prayers about this bird made his presence in her life so real.

She was beginning to understand that he is her God and not just something I tell her about. Her faith was bolstered by this experience. The twenty minutes we were late for Craft Day and the twenty-seven cents it cost for the net are very small prices to pay for the eternal gift of her greater faith.



It's been said that one of the few things you can take with you to Heaven is your children. Of course, each child must make a commitment to Christ personally, but the reality is that many children catch a vision for knowing God from their parents. This is a great motivation for a

parent's own spiritual growth. As you continue to grow spiritually, model it for your family and be spiritually transparent about what God is teaching you. Your openness will contribute greatly to your child's heart for the Lord.

Chapter 7

The Conscience is a Treasure

Honesty and integrity are foundational to all relationships. Parents are encouraged when their children demonstrate these qualities, especially when faced with temptation to do otherwise. God has equipped each person with a conscience as part of the heart. A strong conscience enables a child to take a stand for what's right. Sometimes that determination is revealed through interaction with friends or siblings, and sometimes it happens when the desire to go outside the established boundaries becomes intense.

Often the solutions for a child who lies, cheats, or steals come slowly. It takes a lot of work and prayer to help children build a strong conscience and learn to rely on it. Parents are on the lookout for small steps of progress and rejoice with their children over indications of



Photo submitted by
Amy Woody, St Joseph, Michigan

growth. Jennifer Foley from Prescott Valley, Arizona, shared this story of encouragement with us.

• We recently adopted two children from Haiti. Our ten-year-old daughter was having some attachment issues—nothing too serious, but enough that it was causing problems. The other day, after being home about seven months, she snuck some food into the bathroom to eat it. My husband and I sat down and shared some scripture verses with her, one being, “He who robs his father or

mother and says, 'It's not wrong' — he is partner to him who destroys." (Proverbs 28:24)

We talked to her about how sneaking is the same as stealing. She was surprised to learn that God looks at that just the same as other "more serious" sins. The other verse stated that if she does what's right, she can shout for joy (Proverbs 29:6). We told her to come to us when she is tempted and we will help her do the right thing.

A few nights later, she was tempted to sneak some of my husband's soda. She put her cup right next to it, but instead of sneaking it, she went to her dad, told him what she wanted to do, and asked him to help her. They prayed together, talked about it, and then, because she was honest, he shared some soda with her.

I was out of town, so she called me to tell me, and we shouted for joy together. When I reminded her that Jesus was also shouting for joy, she screamed for joy! We were so proud of her for coming to us instead of giving in to temptation. We were just thrilled that the Lord spoke to her heart and helped her do the right thing!



Children are sneaky, deceptive, or dishonest for a number of reasons. Sometimes they want to get out of trouble or avoid some negative experience like work. Other times children want something they normally wouldn't be able to get. Still other kids like to gain attention by exaggerating or sensationalizing a story.

As the conscience grows and develops, children learn to do the right thing not just for fear that they might get caught but because they don't want to violate their consciences. When children choose to take the hard road for the sake of a clear conscience, parents enjoy the growth as described by Christi McIntosh from Waverly Hall, Georgia.

● *M* y daughter Casiee is seven years old.
● Her school uses the red, yellow, and
● green card system when disciplining kids. You always want to be on green! Yellow is the warning card and red says you are in big trouble.

Her first grade teacher this year has added something to this system. She uses a form that the children have to fill out when they've done something that required them to "pull their

card” from green to yellow. The form says, “Today I was doing _____, when I was supposed to be doing _____.” They keep this form on their desk to help them remember to do the right thing. The form goes home with the child at the end of the day to be signed by the parents.

The other day Casiee got off the bus with a very sad look on her face. She told me as soon as she got in the car that she got a yellow at school; she knew I would be disappointed. Casiee said that she had been thinking all day what she would say to me. She was going to lie, but knew that God wanted her to tell the truth, so she did.

She told me that she was the door holder and was trying to guide a classmate into the room. She pushed the girl a little too hard. The girl bumped into another child, who in turn pushed the girl back and the girl knocked into the door and got hurt. Casiee said she told the girl she was sorry and that she told the teacher the truth and apologized to her too. I was so proud of all this truth telling!

Then when we got home I looked in her book bag and found the behavior form she had to fill out at school. On the form she had

written “instead of listening I was talking.” At first I was a little upset and confused, until I realized that the Holy Spirit had been convicting her all day long for telling a lie. It made the truth that she told so much more special, knowing that she had planned on lying and chose instead to be honest.

God can and does convict even a seven-year-old! I hugged Casiee and told her how proud I was of her for being honest, and we then erased the lie on the form and I helped her write in the truth.



The conscience has several parts. Sometimes it motivates a person to avoid what’s wrong. Other times it motivates a person to do something that’s right. Honesty is a choice prompted by the conscience. Another aspect of the conscience has to do with kindness, compassion, and making the world a better place to be. A child may pick up a piece of trash on the ground without being told to do so, just because he knows that it needs to be done. Or another child may see someone hurt and want to help.

Parents can encourage their children to develop this kind of social conscience in many

ways. Visiting a nursing home, sponsoring a needy child, or giving to the needs of a missionary can contribute to the strengthening of the conscience. Then there are those times within family life where parents try to help children be kind to one another or develop compassion when feelings are hurt. That is conscience work.

How children treat others is important and can reveal areas of a growing conscience. Parents approach meanness and other sibling conflict issues with many different strategies, but one of the most deeply rooted solutions is to appeal to the conscience. Lynelle McDonald from Franklin, Tennessee, tells how this unfolded in her family.

● **A**s far as I was concerned, it was a normal day at preschool for my five-year-old son Hayden. It wasn't until I talked to the preschool director that I realized that it most certainly was not normal. The director stopped me after school, stating that Hayden had some trouble on the playground with another boy.

He had hit this other child and then told him not to tell on him. But that was not all. I really wasn't too surprised until she mentioned

that the other child was then expressing to his mother that he was afraid of Hayden. He was adopted and his background was not known.

The director even asked me to explore racial issues with Hayden to find out if Hayden was actually picking on this child because of his adoption and race. We got home that afternoon and talked about the problem. Hayden, after moving past his fear of getting in trouble, confessed that he had told his classmate that he thought his parents were dumb for adopting him and that he was also dumb.

We talked more and Hayden's heart began to reveal itself. He told me that he was picking on this child because he was "adopted, weaker, and a different color." I was in tears explaining to him that adoption was the clearest picture of God's grace that we have. God has taken the "unwanted" and made us his own, just like this little boy's parents have done. I explained that heaven is a real place and will be full of people from every race, color, tongue, and people group. We are to defend the weak, not pick on them.

Hayden began to understand the gravity of the situation and was in tears by the end of our conversation. The most amazing thing

happened when we discussed the apology. Before we called this family, I asked Hayden what he wanted his apology to do. He, in between some broken sobs, said, "I want Eli to be my friend." It was a profound statement of repentance and reconciliation from a five-year-old's faith in Jesus.



In 1 Timothy 1:18-19 Paul tells Timothy to “fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.” That advice is important for adults and children alike. Another aspect of the conscience has to do with abiding by family values when no one is watching. When children think they can get away with something because no one is around, a significant test of the conscience takes place. In fact, the conscience accompanies children wherever they go, providing internal reminders to do what’s right at all times, even when alone.

The Holy Spirit sometimes speaks through the conscience to convict of sin or indicate what’s right. It’s always a joy when a child begins to rely on the Lord, independent of parental control, as Tabitha Knight from Winnabow, North Carolina, describes.

• *R*ecently, my son, daughter, and I were
• picking up a meal at McDonald's. We
• always evaluate the Happy Meal toys. Are the
dolls dressed in a "lady-like" manner or are
they showing their bodies? Do the toys have
evil faces? And so on.

This particular day, I saw that the toy for Cameron was an evil-looking toy. I felt a gentle nudge from the Holy Spirit to be still and see how Cameron would respond on his own. I watched in the rearview mirror as he unwrapped it and looked it over, never saying a word to me.

We pulled up to drop food off at my 97-year-old grandma's house, and he requested to be left alone in the car for a moment. As I was getting my four-year-old out of the car seat, I heard him talking to Jesus, holding the toy. He said, "I know this does not honor you. You want me to throw it in the trash can, don't you?"

I shut the door and went inside. In a few minutes Cameron came inside with tears in his eyes and said, "Mommy, obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings punishment. I know that Jesus didn't want me to keep that

toy so I was obedient and threw it away. I think he will bless me for obeying him.”

Later that day, Dad came home and said, “Kids, we need to run some errands, wanna ride?” The kids loaded up and went with Dad.

A couple hours later, in walks Cameron with a smile from ear to ear. He was holding



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

the GI Joe that he had wanted for months. The first thing he said was, “Mom, God blessed me. Daddy said he just wanted to buy me something special.” Not knowing anything of the McDonald’s incident, he bought Cameron the GI Joe. Cameron kept saying, “Mommy, I can’t believe it...it really is true...obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings punishment.”

It was a sweet moment watching God grow my son in the area of trusting him and trusting his parents. I explained that today he received the blessing from his Heavenly Father and his earthly father. On this day it happened pretty quickly, but it doesn’t always happen that fast. The main thing though was that he saw the blessing and learned to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading. It was a moment of blessing for Mommy too!




Children who act dishonestly often need a firm approach from their parents, but how that firmness is demonstrated can mean the difference between a focus on behavior and touching the heart. Just restricting a child’s freedom or removing privileges can backfire, motivating kids

to look for ways to get around parental guidance and use dishonesty as one of their tools.

A heart-based approach is important when dealing with the conscience of a child. It may look different with one child than another. It's often wise to use dialogue, scripture, and tight boundaries with a child who struggles with dishonesty.

In addition, be sure to pray for and with your kids. God wants to work in your child's heart, and listening to God is a very important element in the conscience-building process. When Katrina Bingaman from Vacaville, California, faced lying in her home, she knew it was a heart issue and looked to spiritual tools to help her in her parenting.

-  ur son, who has always had some
- trouble staying organized, was honest
- with us, and got decent grades until seventh grade. Then things changed. For the life of us we couldn't figure out what was going on. He would forget to do his assignments, choose not to do his work, and when he did do his class work, he would forget to turn it in.

I spoke with teacher after teacher, trying to find out how to help him. They would tell me

they didn't know what to say. He would lie about having his work done. He would lie about turning it in when he hadn't. And he would lie about talking with his teachers. At parent-teacher conferences I would often pull out his picture and ask if this was the child that came into their room or if it was someone else they were talking about. My son would never lie to me.

I was at a point of great concern when God reminded me of some of the teaching I had received from the National Center for Biblical Parenting; this was a matter of the heart. My son was deep in sin, and nothing we were doing seemed to make any difference.

We decided that the best answer was for our son to learn how God felt about his laziness and dishonesty. We removed video games, TV, and friends. I printed eight pages of scripture to help him learn how God felt about his actions. I didn't know if this would work, but I knew God could put it together for him.

My son spent two days memorizing scripture and, in the end, he came to us and said that he was sorry for hurting not only us, but also he learned that he had hurt God too.

What a difference getting to the heart of the matter made. Here we are three years later and we're grateful that he's trying to make wise choices, knowing that his actions make a difference to God, a much higher power than Mom and Dad.



Helping children develop the conscience is one of the jobs of parenting. For some children this is easier than for others. Whether it's doing the right thing, correcting wrongs, being honest, or caring about others, the conscience can be a great tool in a person's life. It's part of the heart.

Chapter 8

Dads and Moms Have Heart Moments Too

One kind of heart moment takes place in parents when parents simply realize the significance of having a child. Sometimes a child will say something that brings tears to a mom's eyes. Those special reminders of the privileges of parenting are a treasure.

Richard and Karen Orlemann from Allentown, Pennsylvania, don't have to be reminded that kids are valuable. They are eternally grateful for their family.

The first thing you need to know is that my husband and I endured in-vitro fertilization thirty times, attempting pregnancy. Before gasping at the math of this expensive procedure, the physician, who was a friend of ours, graciously worked without payment. Nonetheless, it never worked.



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

During those years we adopted three teenagers who have since grown to adulthood, blessing us with, at current count, five grandchildren. When the first grandchild was conceived in 2001, we had been married 21 years with no babies of our own. Bitterness dissolved as I cried myself to sleep the night we heard the news. This, to me, closed the “Babies” chapter in my life. “Grandparenthood” appeared on the next page and that was okay.

Two weeks later, we received news that the daughter of our dear friends had conceived. Her baby’s father, however, could not fathom

fatherhood. While she waited and hoped for a proposal of marriage, his proposal of abortion was out of the question to her. She asked if we wanted to adopt her baby.

Visions of Abraham and Sarah flashed in my subconscious. Would it be crazier to say “yes” or crazier to say “no”?

Crazy or not, we couldn’t say no to this miracle. Today, I am fifty and this son of our “old age,” Benjamin, is five.

Two months ago, we were driving along, having a conversation regarding the soon-to-be-born fifth grandchild, when Benjamin asked, “Mommy, when are you going to have a baby?” I gulped. “Sweetheart, Mommy’s body wasn’t able to have babies so everyone in our family is adopted. Some children are born into families. Some children are adopted into families.”

Silence. Silence. What was he thinking? What should I say next? He knows everyone is adopted, but how much does he actually understand?

Benjamin finally spoke. “Mommy, when I was in heaven getting made, I missed you.”

God, couldn’t I please replay those words every day for the rest of my life? Any comment

to that amazing statement would be lame. Choking out, "I missed you nearly all my life, precious child," I grabbed my cell phone to share the golden words with my husband. I asked him to write them down, verbatim, so I'd always remember.

Benjamin, beaming over this unexpected attention, proudly chimed in, "Tell Daddy I missed him too."



Although the task may seem overwhelming at times, children are a treasure. Many a parent has watched a child grow up and move on to adulthood and now misses having children around. Sure, raising kids is a lot of work, but children often have a way of blessing you when you most need it. Happy Von Dohlen from San Antonio, Texas, tells this story.

● **I** am a busy mother of six children, all
● under the age of nine. This summer I had
● one of those days where I was feeling low as a mom. All of my children were challenging me in unique ways. Each child also needed me, and I didn't feel like I was adequately fulfilling my role, or giving the time that each one deserved.

Feeling like a child myself, I decided to call my father, who always reminds me of what I am capable of accomplishing. After the phone call, and some tears, I decided to pack up the children and go visit my folks for the evening. The kids tumbled into the car, each yelling with excitement and angst about the outing and, of course, arguing about who would sit where in the vehicle.

My seven-year-old ended up in the front seat. My kids had no idea that I was feeling low. To them it was probably just a normal visit to Grandberry's house. Driving, I continued to feel the weight of my worries.

As I was lost in prayer and self-doubt, my seven-year-old, a gorgeous and most challenging young man (who has stopped showing me affection in public), reached out and took hold of my hand. He never looked at me. He never said a word. He just held my hand, the whole trip. He didn't have a clue how much that healed my heart. I felt like God was holding my hand that day.



Having children is different than having friends. In fact, even though you may have a

best friend or a close buddy, kids can get even further into your heart. Sometimes kids provide a sense of warmth that goes further than any other earthly relationship. In fact, it's almost as if God himself is touching your heart through your child. That closeness may happen on a rare occasion or it may happen regularly. In fact, sometimes parents and children develop little ways of communicating their love to each other.

A special greeting, a wink, or a creative note can express love in just the right way. One dad said, "When we're holding hands we squeeze three times to represent the words 'I love you,' and we all know that we've just passed a secret message to each other."

Anna Michelle Faulkner from Haines City, Florida, knows how those special communications can remind children and parents of their closeness.

• *J*
• *uly 20, 1997, I fell to my knees asking for*
• *God to show me something in my life worth*
living for. Running out of the bathroom were my
two daughters, then ages five and six. They
were soaking wet, wrapped in one towel,
laughing, giggling, and full of warmth and joy.
At that moment I knew that I wanted to live for

the Lord and for my daughters. God showed me my reason for living. Here we are ten years later and I just celebrated being born again and was baptized. My life is new. I am really alive for the first time and it feels amazing.

During that time I met a wonderful man of God who has adopted both my girls. We were married on September 18, 1999, and our daughters have a mommy and a daddy. I feel so blessed.

When my daughters really need love or a special word from me we call it “a heart to heart.” My sixteen-year-old says, “B&D, Momma, B&D.” That means Beavers and Ducks, our special term of endearment to one another. My seventeen-year-old says, “Worms and Lizards, Momma, Worms and Lizards.”

I know it sounds crazy, but that is our special heart to heart and that is when I know my girls need me most.



One of the challenges to closeness in family life is the constant work that needs to get done. Laundry, food shopping and preparation, transporting children from here to there and back here again, all require that children and parents

work together. It seems that the busyness of family life can take its toll on the relationships between parents and children. To counter the drain in family life, it's important for children and parents alike to add energy back into the relationships.

Part of the work of parenting is keeping the house orderly. Each family develops their own tolerance for messes, but it's usually the mom or dad who establishes the standard for neatness in a home. In fact, sometimes it may feel like a tug-of-war, with parents pulling for neatness and kids working against any form of order.

Although neatness is important, many parents find that they have to sacrifice some of their need for orderliness in order to enjoy their kids. Proverbs shares an interesting verse that applies in this situation. Proverbs 14:4 says, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest." Now we're not trying to compare kids to oxen, but the point of the proverb is clear. If you're going to take advantage of the strength of the ox, you'd better be prepared for a messy manger.

The same is true with children. Although parents have a responsibility to teach kids how

to live in clean rooms and a picked-up house, being demanding in this area may be an indication of unreasonable expectations and thus set the stage for distance to grow in relationships.

Nan McKenzie Kosowan from Uxbridge, Ontario, shares a heart moment that took place in the midst of the busyness of life.

● **I** was grumbling, but trying not to sound
● like it, even to myself. I do love having the
● children's friends over to our home. It means I know where my own kids are and that everything is all right, but it can still be a challenge at times.

On this particular day I was trying to sort out why I was feeling annoyed. Recognizing that I was irritated was a start. And with that recognition I found myself remembering the sight of little Andy from down the street walking down my hallway after playing in my back yard. He was trailing his fingers along my wall on either side as he made his way to my bathroom. As much as I love having the kids here, I don't love scrubbing grubby little finger marks off the wall every time they leave!

"Which would you rather have," asked the

Holy Spirit gently, “the grubby little finger marks or the little fingers that made them?” “Oh,” I smiled, “that’s easy! The little fingers, of course!” A pause, as the thought sifted down. “The grubby little finger marks come with the little fingers.” Another lesson for life from the Maker of little fingers. I laughed and went back to scrubbing the wall.



Although it may seem like it at times, cleaning up is not the only job of parenting, but straightening, washing, cleaning, and putting away do take an inordinate amount of family time. Often it’s possible to have children help out, even though it can take more work to get them involved than to do it yourself. But part of the goal is developing character, so you hang in there, hoping children will gain an internal desire to live in a clean room or neat house.

Although family life can feel like a tug-of-war at times, kids have a way of surprising you that goes straight to the heart. You come into the kitchen to find that your son emptied the dishwasher or, while you were in the shower your daughter made your bed. When children delight their parents in those ways, moments of

closeness, gratefulness, and love fill your heart. Of course, most parents wish for more of that kind of initiative from their kids, but maybe it's that longing that makes those moments most special. Shannon Hinkle from Irving, Texas, tells how her son stepped up to help her in a time of need.

● **I** am a single mom, work full-time, and have
● primary custody of my three-year-old. A
● few weeks ago my son and I came home after a long day of work/school. I was in the middle of a very busy season of my life and had mentioned to my son that I was feeling pretty tired.

As we sat on the couch, I said, "Well, Max, I guess I'll get up and cook some dinner."

He looked at me and with a very compassionate look on his face said, "No, Mommy. I'll cook dinner. You always take care of me, so this time I'll take care of you."

Blown away by his suggestion and very curious as to what he actually had in mind, I said, "Okay, I'd love for you to cook!"

He proceeded to go into our kitchen, open the fridge, grab all the supplies, and pile them on the counter. Then he went to the table,

wrestled a chair to the counter, and climbed up. He pulled down two plates and a table knife. Ten minutes later, after working intently like a scientist in his lab, Max came around the corner carrying a plate full of food.

He served me a beautiful PB&J sandwich, fruit cup, pretzels, and a napkin. Being too short to reach the drinking cups high in our cupboard, Max marched to the bathroom and emerged with two Dixie cups overflowing with water from the bathroom sink. We sat down and ate together and watched a little of our favorite TV show.

When we were finished, Max took my plate and proceeded to clean up the kitchen. Although my little three-year-old left the kitchen looking untouched, he forever touched me with his sweet, thoughtful gesture.



Some children are more prone to show love than others. Sometimes in family life conflict is more prevalent than demonstrations of love. In homes with multiple children, there's often one child that seems to experience more conflict with a parent than the rest. This can happen for a number of reasons, but no matter what the



Photo submitted by
Lesli Richards from Alpharetta, Georgia

cause, an emphasis on building relationship is crucial.

Parents must guide and direct children. That's part of the work. Keep in mind, though, that kids can only take as much pressure as the relationship will allow. If you're having a tough time with a child, be sure to look for positive ways to build relationship as well. Of course each child is different and how kids like to be loved

varies by the individual. Some children like touching or cuddling. Others like to be listened to intently. Still others like to do activities together. Look for ways to enhance relationship with your children. It will help to offset much of what might otherwise be frustrating interaction.

One of the ways to build relationship is to play games. In fact, children learn all kinds of things when parents play games with them. They learn how to win, how to lose, and how to take turns. But they also learn how to encourage someone who is behind, show mercy, or handle a win without being rude or putting someone else down. Games are great ways to build relationship and closeness in a family.

Sharen Martin from Conifer, Colorado, saw how a simple game could provide a much-needed breakthrough in her relationship with her daughter.

- *M* y heart moment involves my now four-
- *year-old daughter. To say we struggle*
- *with our mother/daughter relationship would be an understatement. It's a daily challenge for each of us to understand what it is the other one wants, needs, or requires. I can't count*

how many times I have heard her say she wants a different mommy or Mommy needs to go away.

A few months ago we were working together with pattern cards and links. She was having fun trying to figure out the puzzle. I enjoyed her excitement as she figured out each one. I said to her, "High Five!"

Out of the blue she jumped up, threw herself into me, wrapped her tiny arms around me, and burst out, "I like you, Mommy!"

I probably held her a little longer and tighter than she would have liked. In that moment it felt as if we had never struggled. All the built-up sadness and frustration of previous days was completely dissolved. I even started to cry.

That brief moment of light taught me a little lesson, too. I will remember and treasure that moment every day, especially on the tough days when I fail to see any heart moments!



Kids have that great way of bringing hope and joy into your heart. Just when you think

that things are really tough, you get that small glimpse of progress, or that little glimmer of hope that drives you forward.

One of the things that children bring to family life is laughter. Whether that child is just one year old playing peek-a-boo or is eighteen years old and telling you a funny story from school, laughter brings joy to the heart. Sometimes it's just the smile on a child's face that creates a heart moment in a parent. Proverbs 15:30 says, "A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones." That is certainly true in parenting. Dads and moms love to see their kids happy and often rearrange their schedule, time, and even finances to get that little smile or expression of delight.

Rachel Lee from Buckley, Washington, tells this story.

● **I** *t was a busy Friday afternoon. My four*
● *kids and I had been running errands a*
● *good half of the day, and we were all tired and*
a bit irritable. I turned on the car radio to help
pass the time as we made our way to our next
destination when, from the back seat, my four-
year-old son spoke up to ask me a question.
"Mom?"

“Yes, Son,” I answered with a sigh. Fatigue was beginning to wear on me, and the silence had been a nice reprieve.

“How does God talk to you?”

Humbled, I turned down the music in order to give him my full attention. “Well,” I began, “God talks to us in many different ways. He can talk to us through his Word, through people, even through the Holy Spirit.”

“Yes,” he said, “but how can you hear him?”

Amused by his sudden interest in this subject, I began my reply. “Sometimes, God chooses to talk to us in a still, small voice. So, if we quiet our minds, and listen very closely, we can often hear him speak.”

“Oh,” my son said, seemingly satisfied by this new information.

After a moment of silence, I felt sure that his curiosity had waned, so I reached for the volume knob once again.

A minute later, I heard him say excitedly, “Mom, God just talked to me!”

“He did?” I said, my curiosity piqued.

“What did he say to you?”

“He said you should take me to McDonald’s.”

The car erupted with laughter. What a way to end an otherwise exhausting day! And in case you're wondering, yes, we did eat at McDonald's that day. After all, who would want to disobey the voice of God?



Parenting provides many opportunities for joy. Families are a place where values are passed on, character is developed, and a spiritual view of life is taught. In the midst of all of that, parents occasionally receive a gift from their children of perspective, hope, or just love. In those heart moments a parent can feel like even the dreariest winter day is like a nice warm spring morning. It's in those times you're thankful for your kids but also to God for providing you with the privilege of parenting.

Chapter 9

Setting the Stage

Most heart moments happen spontaneously. That's not to say that they don't come from good parenting. They do. It's just that they often come at times when you least expect them. In fact, sometimes you work on something for weeks or months before you see the results.

Occasionally, however, you see an opportunity in life for a heart moment and you do some things to set the stage for it to unfold. It may be correction or the sharing of some important news. It could be a special event or just a significant conversation. Sometimes you see the results instantly and other times there's a delayed reaction or none at all, at least on the spot.

Here are some examples of parents who invested a little extra thought and effort and it paid off with the heart moment they had hoped for, or in some cases, more than they had expected as Monica Grow from Norristown, Pennsylvania, experienced.

• **M**y six-year-old son, Drew, is kind,
• caring, and hysterically funny. But it
• seems he complains or whines about every-
thing I ask him to do. This morning he
complained about the coat he was going to
wear to school. I was frustrated and I told him
that things were going to change when he
came home. After I dropped him off at school,
I went home and collected all his toys and put
them in boxes in the basement.

After school Drew walked into the house
and asked, "Where's my toy box?"

"It's in the basement."

He was confused. After he finished his
homework we went into his room. He asked,
"Where are all my toys?"

"They're in the basement too."

He looked under his bed and under his
chair.

"I got them all."

He was quiet and surprisingly cheerful.
I asked him to sit on his bed with me so we
could talk about it. I explained that his
complaining and arguing will no longer be
acceptable and that he would have to earn his
toys back. I told him that if he didn't argue or

complain until bedtime, then he could have one of the toys back.

After he read for a little bit he came downstairs and said, "You know, there are other ways to have fun without my toys." He was so excited! When his daddy came home he said, "Dad, come and see how clean my room is!"

We were shocked by his reaction. The Lord truly changed his heart. He didn't argue or complain for the rest of the day. When we put him to bed, I told him how proud of him we were. I then told him that he could have one toy back. He asked for his favorite little stuffed



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

black dog, Luke. When we said our prayers, we thanked the Lord for the changes we had seen. I am so thankful for this heart moment with my son. It has been a turning point in our relationship. Praise God!



As Monica experienced, correction often provides opportunities for heart moments. Children learn that they can't continue to live as they have been living. They need to make adjustments. Of course, the way a child is corrected can make all the difference. Too many parents engage in reactive parenting, just blowing off steam when they see something they don't like. Rarely do children grow from those kinds of reactions. In fact, many kids develop defensive tendencies and resist change.

Furthermore, when parents use anger to correct kids, children get angry. Correction times become battles of intensity, and what could have been a heart moment has now turned into a relationship struggle.

Effective correction often requires a little planning. Add to that a dose of creativity and you have the ingredients for a heart moment. Of course, all children are unique. Just because a

technique worked somewhere else doesn't mean it will work in your home. But a little creativity applied to correction can mean the difference between a child just enduring a punishment and a significant lesson learned. Dan Fierro from Dayton, Nevada, thought of an idea to teach a valuable lesson during one of his recent correction times, and it worked!

- *One of our best heart moments happened*
- *about two years ago. I had come home*
- *from work and my wife told me that my six-year-old daughter had been playing her radio after her mother had asked her to turn it off. She repeatedly defied my wife and found herself in the “wait until your father gets home” position.*

I remember sitting down on my bed with her, with my wife in the room, and we started discussing disobedience, and that her sin was against both her mother and God. While I was going through this with her, a thought popped into my head. This was an opportunity to teach my daughter about repentance and atonement for sin, which only Jesus can provide.

My wife and I had agreed that she would be grounded from her radio for three days.

After discussing her disobedience I told her what her punishment would be, three days without her radio.

Then I told her that she could listen to her radio as much as she wanted! She was confused. I explained to her that Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross. I went on to say that I would absorb the punishment she deserved. For three days I would not listen to the radio at all.

This helped her to understand what repentance and atonement is in her spiritual life, and it also taught me to be disciplined as I had to remain faithful to my commitment, which I did. No radio at all! Not in the car, not at work, nothing. Her attitude toward my wife improved over those days. This was a great heart moment for all of us.



Not all the great ideas parents have actually hit home. But, you never know when today might be the day that your correction will have the desired effect. The heart isn't like a computer where the expected results come from the input received. Rather, the heart is a living part of a person that is affected by so many factors. It's

usually the combination of many approaches that provides the life lessons children need. It is true that many of the common experiences of family life illustrate spiritual lessons, as Dan demonstrated in the previous story.

After all, God gives instruction, correction, and limits to his children much the same way parents do with their own kids. That means that life lessons can be taught in the everyday interaction between parents and children. The child who complains and argues when he's six or seven years old needs to deal with it now so that he doesn't become an adult who complains and argues.

It's these kinds of life lessons that make up heart moments. When you ask bigger questions about the annoying and irritating behaviors in family life, you're able to develop longer lasting solutions. Sandy Keller from Flintstone, Georgia, realized her son needed a heart change and now was the time to make a point of it.

● *M* *y Canadian heritage of enjoying hot tea*
● *has passed down to both of my young*
● *sons, Andrew and Timothy. One day at church*
Andrew, my four-year-old, spied some tea bag
samples called "Timothy's Tea." In honor of his



Photo submitted by
Scott and Carrie Turansky, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

little brother, he wanted to take a couple of bags home to share with his Grammie when she came to visit.

The day that my mom came over, however, Andrew wondered if we could get more Timothy's Tea if we used up what we had. I told him that I'd never seen it in stores and didn't know where to buy it. This caused him to erupt like a volcano with selfish desires and crocodile tears. He became very adamant that he would not share with his much-loved Grammie.

I assured him that I would search online and make some phone calls to find out where

more could be purchased, but even if we never got any more, he needed to use this opportunity to stop being selfish and to share. After much discipline and discussion, he finally blurted out, “You can’t make me change my heart and stop being selfish!”

“You’re absolutely right, no one can change your heart but God. We need to pray.” We prayed, but he still was not changed. I was at my wit’s end, not knowing what to do. Eventually my mom came into his room where he was supposed to be taking a Break, but he was really crying out of control. She sang a song, “I’ll love you anyway and always,” based on a book by that name written by Bryan Chapell and Tim Jonke.

Andrew calmed down but still was not ready to share the tea. I knew his heart would not be changed if I forced the issue, so I told him he needed to give the tea bags to Grammie to take home with her. When he was ready to share, even if we never got any more Timothy’s Tea, he needed to call her and ask her to bring them back. A few days later, all on his own, he asked to call Grammie and told her he was sorry for being selfish and now he was ready to share.

What a happy cup of tea we all had together. Andrew even laughed at himself as he reminded us how he had acted the week before. This was truly a work of God on Andrew's heart.



Selfishness works against family life, and everyone in a family needs to deal with it. After all, it's not just the kids that exhibit selfishness. Even parents want their own way or become demanding at times. The family can become a laboratory for growth as each person must address issues of the heart.

Every once in a while, however, children create a crisis that goes beyond the normal frustrations of discipline. In those moments you know that you need to choose a response carefully, because everyone is going to remember this event for the rest of their lives. It may be a visit from the police or a trip to the emergency room or some other upsetting experience.

The emotions of those events can be overwhelming for all. As a parent you may feel like yelling, "What were you thinking? Do you realize how serious this is?" Although no parent can fully prepare for major catastrophes in family life,

you certainly can make some basic plans now. For example, when some major disaster happens it's always best to find out if your child is okay first before you ask questions about the things that are broken or damaged. Then do what you can to get all the facts before you make proclamations about consequences. And of course, take time to settle your own emotions before you make any drastic statements.

No matter how much you try to think ahead, the shock of some disaster your child creates can be very upsetting. Try to remain calm and recognize that a crisis can often be the beginning of a heart moment. Laura Rizkallah from Painted Post, New York, shared the challenge of an upsetting experience and how, by God's grace, she was able to turn it into something productive.

-
-
-

*M*y six-year-old son decided that his aunt's car simulated a chalkboard and a rock was his chalk. The scratches were horrible and the discovery was too. There, on my sister's new 2007 PT Cruiser, was etched the name of our church. Free advertising? Hardly. This was going to cost us dearly!

The ride home from my sister's house was

spent in prayer and under-toned parental conversations. We knew this one mattered. It had to mark his heart. God had a big lesson to etch on all of our hearts that night. Isaac had just had his sixth birthday a few days before and had received a \$50 Star Wars Lego Set. Isaac's father explained to him that he was going to have to return the gift in order to help pay for the damages. His daddy continued to explain that \$50 would not cover the cost; his parents would have to make up the difference.

The Holy Spirit gave us the words we needed over the next twenty minutes to show Isaac the real lesson that awaited him that evening. Jesus paid the difference for our sins, even the ones we do not mean to do. Isaac's tears turned from sobbing to repentant weeping as he understood the cost of his sin and the worth of forgiveness. He looked up through tears and said, "Here, take my Lego set. I wish I could give more but it is all I have. Thank you, Daddy and Mommy, for loving me and helping me even when I have done wrong."

The hug that followed melted our hearts together. I was grateful for those car scratches

and the real etchings the situation left on our hearts!



Whew! That's tough. It's in those moments that parents are often grateful for others they can rely on, talk to, and brainstorm with. In fact, God uses more than just parents to help a child grow up. Often other leaders and authorities play a significant role in a child's development and maturity. Youth leaders, counselors, teachers, grandparents, and adult friends are just a few of those extra influences that contribute their parts.

Sometimes parents have a hard time releasing their children to other leaders and authorities because others correct or teach differently, or because parents don't like to see their children frustrated. Yet many times it's those other significant adults that provide the life lessons children will remember forever.

Trusting the Lord in those times can become a walk of faith for parents. In fact, your role as a parent changes when other leaders and authorities are working with your child. You become the counselor or coach. Now someone else is delivering the consequences or the pressure. You can help your child meet the challenges.

One dad said, “Having my sixteen-year-old son get a job was great. Now someone else is telling him to do the same things we’ve been saying for years. ‘Be here on time.’ ‘Do a thorough job.’ ‘Clean up your mess.’ I love it. I just listen to my son talk about the strict boss and encourage him onward. I appreciate the new role I have with my son, and I’m grateful for the boss who is having an impact on my son’s character.”

Allowing children to experience discipline from other adults can be challenging, as Laura Halcomb-Brannon from New Whiteland, Indiana, reveals.

- *M* *y middle child has always had severe*
- *violent outrages, often hurting her*
- *sisters and our family pets. In January of 2007*
she was holding clothes over her little sister’s
face so she couldn’t breathe. Her counselor
suggested I admit her to Valle Vista Hospital. It
was the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.
It about tore my heart out that I had to put her
there and leave her there, and was only able to
talk to her ten minutes a night, and see her one
day a week.

While she was there, however, she and I got really close and she learned a lot. The few days seemed like an eternity until she was finally able to come home. She is still in counseling and on a small dosage of medicine, but we are closer than we've ever been. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done, but for my daughter's sake, maybe the best thing. She was ten years old at the time; she is now eleven. She hasn't hurt her sisters since then.



Not all of the planned heart moments happen at correction times. Some just happen because of traditions you develop in your family or relational patterns that make your family unique and special. A special hug, a family song, a weekly family night, or even an evening prayer time can all contribute to heart moments in children's lives. Parents sometimes don't realize how the small things can often have a large impact on what children believe and how they think.

Robin Downs from Ewing, New Jersey, shares a fun interaction with her son that reminds them of their closeness with each other.

● ● ●
One way my son and I connect is through verbal affirmation. I began when the children were very small by saying things like, “Do you know what I think about you? You’re cute and sweet and cuddly and smart and helpful.”

My son Luke, age five, has begun to respond in kind by saying, “You know, Mom, there’s this thing that really makes me wonder, not some of the time, but all of the time. Why are you the best mom ever?”

Often our little affirming exchanges are accompanied by a song and dance as well. It always makes me laugh and feel good about our relationship. It’s a way of connecting our hearts.

● ● ●

Even though many heart moments are spontaneous, there are significant ways that you can set up family life, or respond to your children, that contribute to a deeper work that God wants to do in their hearts. Be on the lookout for opportunities where you can respond to a situation or a challenge in a way that could have an eternal impact.

Chapter 10


Being Close Warms the Heart

Parents want to be close to their kids, and many work hard to provide opportunities for that sense of unity to develop. Several challenges, however, compete with the move toward unity. Different personality styles, the busyness of family life, and the constant correction and limit-setting required by many children, make closeness elusive at times.

That's why the special kind of heart moment addressed in this chapter is so important. It's those fun times when both parent and child take part in and enjoy their relationship together. For those brief moments the heart connection overshadows the challenges of being in a family. It's in those times that parents are again reminded that all the work is worth it. Hope peeks through and a deep satisfaction permeates a parent's heart.

Children too need heart moments that communicate closeness. They provide a sense of belonging and love. When children have their love needs met, they seem able to take on many of the challenges of life more smoothly. Encouragement replaces despair, and hope is rekindled in the heart.

Susan McMillan from Raleigh, North Carolina, describes a time when her daughter provided just the closeness that they both needed.

- ur daughter, Sarah Catherine, started
- kindergarten in August of 2006. She
- had been with me (mom) at the Christian preschool where I work since she was two years old, so this was a very emotional transition for me.

*Her preschool teachers, Mrs. Tami and Mrs. Alana, had given the children the book, **The Kissing Hand**. This is a story about a little raccoon ready to start school. He talks about his fears to his mother, fears that most children have before beginning school. His mother comes up with a wonderful solution of the “kissing hand” to help her little raccoon remember that she loves him and is thinking about him, even when she isn’t with him.*

Sarah and I read it most every night during that summer before kindergarten. She reminded my husband and me often, both through words and actions, that she loves us and she'll be fine. On this particular momentous day, it would be no different.

The "big day" came and Sarah was excited. My husband held me as we watched our small child board the bus to head off to a place where I wouldn't see her every day in the classroom. As she and her big brother, Daniel, got onto the bus that morning to head off to school, I began to cry.

I'm sure my son must have been a wee bit embarrassed. However, Sarah saw me crying and responded. The bus driver so kindly said, "Mom, Sarah wants you."

Her little face was stuck to the window of the bus and she said, "Mom, look. Remember the kissing hand?" She had stuck her hand to the window after kissing it. "I'll be fine and I love you," she continued.

I caught the kiss in my palm and held it up to my cheek. She smiled and said, "I'll see you this afternoon." So, instead of me helping Sarah know that I loved her and was thinking about her even when she wasn't with me, it

was Sarah who knew Mom needed something special that morning.

To this day, we always do the kissing hand when she heads out of the door. I smile and know that God will take care of her, and she knows that little act of love helps me with my day until she comes home.



Bonding moments are special. When children are young these moments seem easier to come by. As children grow older they often prefer spending time with friends to hanging out with family. Still, parents, recognizing the value of family time, require mealtimes together, plan spiritual training in the home, and look for ways to enjoy relationship. Sometimes children are reluctant to give up their activities or friends to join into family activities, but when they do, positive family times usually come about.

Because children have so many choices of ways to use their time, when they choose to spend it with you, it's a treat. Tara Trevillian from El Paso, Texas, was reminded of this by her daughter.

• **F**or the longest time I've been trying to get
• my seven-year-old to go to "children's
• church" while daddy and I go to "big"
church. She was never interested—and when
she did try, she always came back to our
worship service.

Finally, one day we were on our way to
church and I asked her, "Honey, why don't you
want to go into children's church with your
sister?" I thought that something must have
happened along the way, and I hoped that she
would tell me about it and then we could work
on it together. I wasn't prepared for her
answer.

"Because I want to learn about Jesus with
you, Momma."

My heart swelled and my eyes welled up
with tears. Thank you Lord, for that sweet,
sweet moment.



Sometimes children communicate their love
in such a special way that it moves a parent's
heart. A big hug, a thank-you, and a kind
gesture are all welcome signs. After all, parents
are people too. They like to enjoy relationship,

experience hope, and find encouragement to keep doing the hard work of parenting. Children can be a tremendous source of joy to their parents and, as Sheryl Watts from Lithonia, Georgia, reveals, sometimes they don't even realize what they said or did that brings a little tear to a parent's eye.

• *G*rowing up, I thought my grandmother
• was the greatest woman on earth.
• She always encouraged her grandchildren to get an education and explore life outside their neighborhood. I was so fond of her that at night in my prayers, I'd ask God to let her live to be 100 years old. She was 96 years old when she passed away.

I have been married for seven years, but my husband has been overseas for the last four. We have two boys, ages six and three. In essence, I am a single parent. In addition to working full-time, I also manage our family's small business. Although I have very little time to myself, my favorite full-time-around-the-clock job is being a mother.

I truly enjoy exposing our boys to different things. Every weekend we try to embark on a

new adventure. Sometimes, though, we just stay home and enjoy entertaining ourselves around the house. Recently, while horse-playing with the boys, I experienced a heart moment. In the midst of our ruckus, my oldest son stopped and looked at me and said, “Mommy, I love you—I want you to live to be 100 years old.”

Just then, I had a flashback to the deep feelings of love and adoration that I felt for my grandmother when I was a child. I loved her so much that I never wanted her to leave me. At that moment, I thought to myself, “Wow, my children have that same sense of love and adoration for me that I had for my grandmother—I must be doing something right!”



What a special moment Sheryl enjoyed with her sons. Playful teasing, wrestling, and kidding around can set the scene for relationships to grow closer. At other times it's the quiet conversations that seem to meander into significant topics that do the trick. Most children benefit from one-on-one time with Dad or Mom, and partnering together to complete a task or help others can increase feelings of closeness.



Photo submitted by
Angie Whiteman, Wichita, Kansas

Companionship takes place when two people feel something in common and enjoy it together. Because of differences in personalities and desires between parents and children, many dads and moms go out of their way to learn a new skill or take an interest in a sport or hobby. Those parents are building a sense of companionship with their children. Even going through a common experience together can put parent and child on the same team. Time spent working together to complete a school project or buying Christmas presents to surprise other family

members can provide opportunities for heart connection.

Pat Trembley from Reading, Pennsylvania, describes a partnership that she and her daughter experienced.

• **T**he heart moment I'd like to share just happened yesterday. My eight-year-old daughter, Faith, and I were discussing the new **High School Musical 2** movie that's scheduled to air on TV tonight. We were invited to a party for the kids to watch it. One of the girls who would be there is obsessed with this film and sings a song from the first movie all the time.

I told Faith that I knew she and her sister really weren't that excited to see the movie, but it would be fun to see and play with their friends. Faith replied, "I know Gracie is a big fan of **High School Musical**, but I'm a fan of Jesus."


Wow, did that touch my heart. I've been praying about them developing such a strong love for God that they will want to be obedient because they know it pleases him. That sure was a nice answer to prayer.



Pat and Faith shared a common experience together in more ways than one. Not only would they go to the party, but also they shared a deeper value, a love for the Lord. One of the greatest ways to extend closeness between family members is to enjoy the Lord together. When you see God at work in your family, be sure to share it with your kids. They will learn to see God at work in life, and more importantly, you're sharing a common bond of unity that comes through the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples began to see people come to Christ in the early church, they all met regularly together to share their spiritual growth. The Bible says in Acts 4:32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind." That oneness in heart can happen in a lot of different ways, but grows strongest when people share spiritually together.

Tim and Susan Eckert from Davenport, Iowa, live out their faith publicly and their children see spirituality as an integral part of their lives.

●  *n October 22, 2004, I was driving our*
● *son home from school. It began to rain*
● *as we made our way on the wet roads. A car*

from a side street pulled out in front of us. I was close enough to see that the driver was looking right. I was coming from the left on the main road and had the right-of-way. The driver never looked left and continued to proceed. I immediately swerved out into the opposite lane and stepped on the gas.

When I looked in my rearview mirror, it appeared the other driver never stopped. All I could repeat was, "Thank you, Jesus!"

After we got home, the kids and I were going about our normal business when my four-year-old daughter said, "We prayed for you, Mommy."

My husband confirmed that at the exact moment the car incident took place, our daughter, noticing the weather, said she and Daddy should pray for us coming home from school. They did.

I truly believe this was not a random coincidence. God grows our faith in wonderful ways. God kept our daughter's spirit tender and soft enough that she would be concerned about her mom and brother driving home in a drizzle, and quiet enough that she could hear his prompting to pray. Children seem to see things

so clearly sometimes. The best heart moments are when God ties hearts together in love for each other.



The Eckerts will remember that story for a long time. In fact, it will become part of their spiritual heritage. God designed the family as the arena where spiritual training takes place, and he instructs parents to incorporate this teaching into everyday life. Deuteronomy 11:19 says, “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

The daily integration of faith into life allows children to experience it firsthand. When kids see answers to prayer, the reality of God’s ways being true, and the benefits of being part of God’s family, they not only grow closer to God, they grow closer to their parents as well.

One of the many values parents try to pass on to their children is gratefulness. In fact, many parents spend quite a bit of time teaching children to say “thank you” in various settings. It seems that some children grow to expect others to do things for them and get used to

having so much stuff that gratefulness takes a back seat. Sometimes parents have to pull back from giving in order to redevelop the gratefulness in their children's lives.

Every once in a while, though, a child will come out with a "thank you" or a grateful hug that just makes you want to give more. Giving is



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

a privilege because the giver gets to see the delight on the person's face. When the gift is truly appreciated, it means all the more to the parent who sacrifices and goes out of her way to bring joy into a child's life. Stacy Mummau from Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, recounts enjoying the delight on her son's face.

• **E**ver since our six-year-old son, Clark,
• was a preschooler he has loved to hear
• Bible stories and then act them out. This summer our family went to see a performance at the Sight and Sound Theater in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This would be Clark's first show and we knew he'd love it.

In the program, there was an offer for a sound recording of another production. Clark wanted us to get the **Psalms of David CD**, so we did. Once it arrived at our house, it and he were inseparable. Each afternoon, as soon as his homework was finished, he'd run into his room and play the CD.

I must admit that the rest of the family got a little tired of hearing it day after day, but as the weeks went by I started to realize that he had memorized the words to many of the

songs. Eventually, he put on a performance for the family of the song/acting segment about David and Goliath.

As my husband and I sat on the couch, we were touched not by his talent, but by how he had put his whole heart into this. So I looked into attending the Psalms of David production. I got tickets to attend a show for Clark, his sister, and myself, but we kept it a secret from Clark. When we arrived his eyes sparkled and his grin was so genuine. I felt like I could see straight into his heart. While we waited in line to enter the auditorium, Clark just snuggled up to me and said, "I love you, Mommy."

That's when I knew that this was a heart moment. I had connected with my son's heart.



Gratefulness has a way of joining two people together. As you teach your children to express thanks, they will see others feeling appreciated. It's a blessing. Another quality that enhances the heart moments in family life is admiration. Gratefulness focuses on what the other person did. Admiration draws attention to who the person is. Both are great ways to enhance closeness in a family.

When children demonstrate unusual acts of kindness, heroism, or maturity, parents have an opportunity to genuinely admire them. Children can sometimes model spiritual qualities in ways that touch a parent's heart. The reality is that it's not just the kids who are growing. Parents also have a lot to learn about life. When parents express admiration to their children, kids feel special. Closeness grows between the parent and child.

Stephanie Hanouw from Aurora, Colorado, shared a time when she genuinely admired her daughter.

● **I** was lying in bed with my daughter, then
● **I** nine years old, while praying for her at
● **I** bedtime. It had been a rather harrowing day
and she had gotten the brunt of my frustration
in a way that now seemed too harsh. I wanted
her to know that my love extended beyond the
disappointment I had conveyed earlier in the
day.

I asked for her forgiveness for being unnecessarily harsh. She was quick to forgive and instantly warmed up. I was so genuinely impressed that I said, "Do you know one of the things I like about you?"

“No,” she answered pensively.

“I like the way that you are able to forgive so easily. How do you do it?”

She seemed to swell with joy (and relief)—like a thirsty flower drinking in precious life-giving moisture. She then casually replied, “Oh, I just say, ‘I forgive you,’ and I’m not mad anymore.”

“I’m going to try to do that more often,” I replied, with a kiss on her nose. “Thank you.” It was a heart moment because her little heart seemed relieved knowing that she had worth in my eyes after a day that had made her feel not very worthwhile.

She learned she had a trait that I considered very valuable—the ability to forgive. It drew us closer together that night and gave me insight into how words can result in chasms or bridges. My own heart swelled with thankfulness to think that God would allow me to experience this precious flow of his love.



Be on the lookout for opportunities for closeness. They happen, but often require some action from the parent to turn a comment or

inadvertent action into a heart moment. Watch for them. Tune your heart to the heart of your child and you'll be amazed at how much closeness can develop in your relationship.

Conclusion

Searching for Treasure

One dad said, “I can live a whole week on a good heart moment.” That is certainly true for most parents. The daily work of parenting can be challenging at times, but a glimpse of growth or closeness can go a long way.

Have you ever wondered what keeps people going through hard times? Maybe you’re at a point of despair today because you long to live the stories you read about in this book, but the dream seems rather unobtainable. Certainly our relationship with the Lord can give us energy and direction when we feel like quitting. Perseverance and faith are both essential components for the long road of parenting.

We’ve all heard stories of the California Gold Rush, a time when people from all walks of life left the familiar to venture off in search of treasure. Did you know that there are still gold seekers out there today digging up legends and hoping they’ll be the one to rediscover the lost mine?

The individuals who truly believe in a particular legend, spend the greater portion of their lives collecting data and facts about the lost mine they so eagerly seek. They build files that contain details, bits and pieces of a legend so old and peculiar, but they can't rest until the mystery is solved. They keep hoping that one day soon, they will be the lucky ones who discover the long-lost mine, the one that has been sought after for years by others with a similar faith.

Parents too are like gold seekers. What is it that keeps the gold prospectors going, driving them into some of the most dangerous and desolate lands in search of gold? The desire for gold can be so great that it motivates men to endure unbelievable hardships including starvation, dehydration, and death.

Although parents don't usually have to starve or die for their kids, sometimes it feels that way as we're waiting to see some glimmer of hope in their hearts. The gold prospectors keep going because they believe so strongly in what they're doing. The hope of gold spurs them on. Parents too are often looking for gold in some pretty desolate places.

Once you start looking for heart moments. though, it changes the way you think about



Photo submitted by
Sue Mika, Ewing, New Jersey

family life and about raising children. You're watching for different things. Now you realize it's not just about behavior change. It's about something deeper.

The pursuit itself can be inspiring because you no longer need to get bogged down with each episode of behavior problems. Your eyes are on the heart. You're waiting and watching for the sparkle of gold.

We hope the stories you have read in this book will motivate you to continue on. These stories are like the legends of old. They say, "Yes, there's gold out there, so keep looking." Pray for yourself as you pray for your kids. We too are

praying that this book will inspire you to see heart moments and celebrate them with your children.

Family Heart moments

True and Inspiring Stories



Dr. Scott Turansky



Joanne Miller,
RN, BSN

Seventy true stories of heart moments woven together by authors, Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN. This hopeful and encouraging book will inspire you to look for heart moments in your own family as well. The stories included were submitted from parents all over the country as entries to the Heart Moment Contest sponsored by the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Enjoy the stories. They are touching, yes, but they can also give you some ideas for making heart moments happen in your family too.

“Heart moments are a treasure. Parents want them. Kids need them. This book will show you how to capture them in your family.”

~ Dr. Scott Turansky

“My heart was touched as I read these true stories of heart moments in the lives of real families. Many of them brought tears to my eyes and motivated me to want to look for opportunities to touch hearts in my own family as well.”

~ Joanne Miller, RN, BSN



76 Hopatcong Dr., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
(800) 771-8334

parent@biblicalparenting.org
www.biblicalparenting.org

