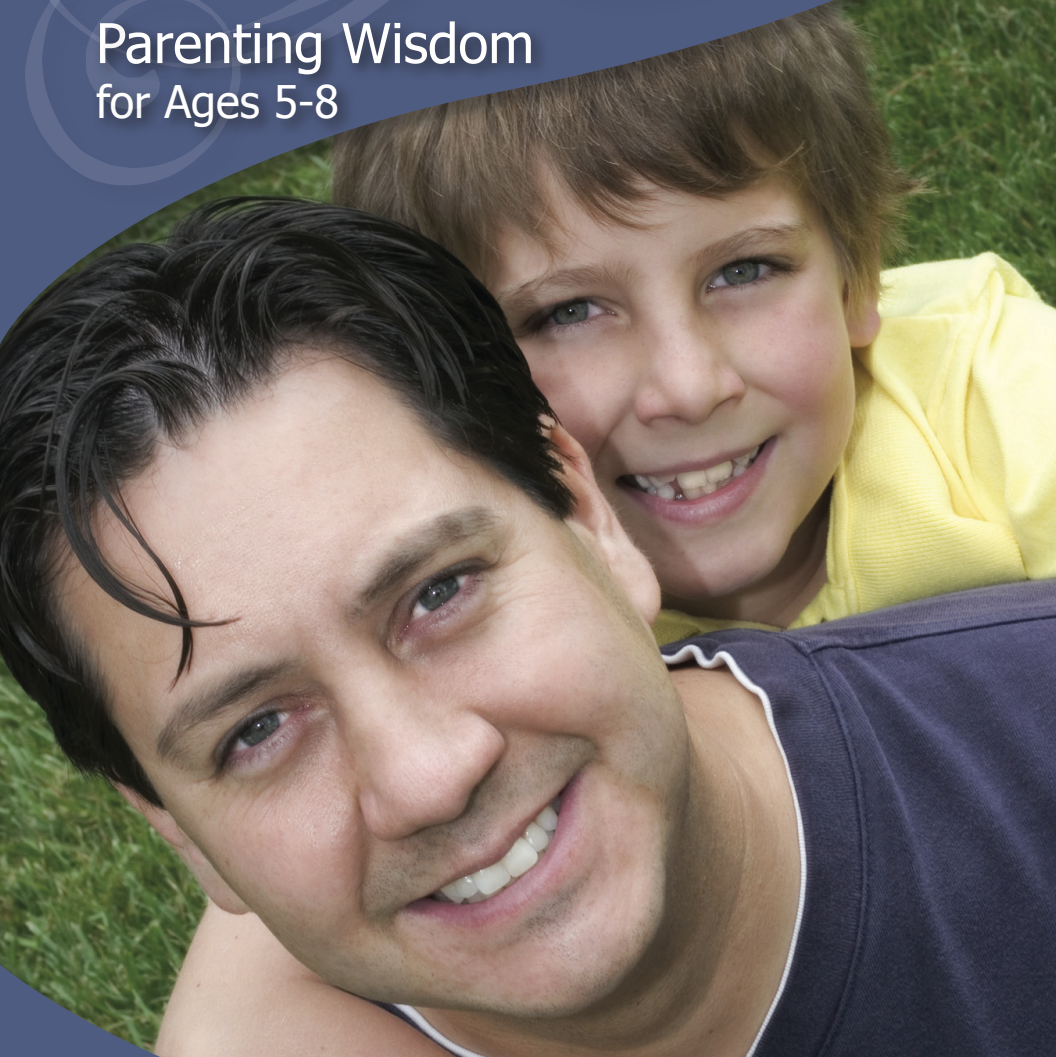


Elementary *Foundations*

Parenting Wisdom
for Ages 5-8



Dr. Scott Turansky
and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN
with Shannon Kulp



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To obtain a complete resource list or have Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller present their material live, you may contact the National Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136, (800) 771-8334 or visit the website at: www.biblicalparenting.org

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Introduction

Have you ever waited in line with much anticipation to ride a roller coaster? We're not talking about one of those roller coasters in "kiddie land" that move about five miles an hour. Think about the big ones. You know the type. Even the names given to these huge roller coasters are daunting: "Cyclone," "Beast," or "Megaphobia." These are the ones that put a lump in your throat as you're slowly dragged up the steep hill in preparation for the drop at such an intense speed that your stomach gets left behind.

Roller coasters do a great job at taking the rider through a variety of feelings and emotions, much like the job of parenting. Some moments provide thrills and excitement while others challenge us with discouragement and disappointment. As you encounter each day, your role as a parent can take a swift turn at any time. Sometimes, like the roller coaster, you can plan for what lies ahead and prepare yourself for how you'll deal with a particular situation. Yet there are other times in parenting when you feel as though you're being dropped from the top of the coaster, heading straight down at full speed with no warning at all.

Whether you have the time to plan for what lies ahead on your parenting journey or you're being thrust into a situation with no advance warning, the Lord promises to be right by your side. In fact, you'll likely experience many

of the emotions that the Israelites faced as they entered the Promised Land to conquer it. To prepare them for the task, Moses reminded them of God's presence with them always. He encouraged them with these words from Deuteronomy 31:8, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." The same promise given to those early pioneers is the one God gives to us as we face the ominous task of parenting. The Lord wants to walk alongside you as you parent each and every day. He wants to be there when you have the time to think through a particular situation and when you feel as though you're riding down the coaster at full speed.

This book is designed to help you understand and enjoy the ride. The elementary years are a fascinating time of learning and growing. Your child will develop intellectually, learning how to read, solve problems, and communicate ideas. Emotional development will require a plan for dealing with anger, disappointment, and sadness. Social skills open new doors for building significant relationships like never before. Physical growth builds coordination and strength, increasing opportunities for things like sports, chores, and helping out in meaningful ways. Spiritual eyes are opening with questions about God and the ability to experience personal faith. As you work with your elementary age child you're developing foundations for future growth and maturity. It's during these very important years that children learn the building blocks to be responsible members of society. Sure, they have lots more to learn, but the work you do during these years is essential.

During the next few months and years you'll make some very important parenting decisions. You'll decide

how you'll handle electronics in your home, how to integrate spirituality into daily life, what to do with all of the entertainment choices, how to develop good habits for work including homework and chores. Your child will learn more about money, other authorities, how to choose friends, and what it means to be responsible. So much will happen in the next few years, you may feel like you're bouncing to the left and right just like a roller coaster ride. You'll want to make sure that you are securely seated in the roller coaster in order to maximize your enjoyment of these years.

Strap yourself in with healthy doses of prayer, Bible study, and support from others who are trying to raise their children from a Christian worldview. This book will help you understand the developmental stage of the early elementary years. It will give you tools to use with your children to do the daily work of parenting. But most importantly, we trust that you'll develop a strong reliance on the Lord for his grace and mercy to meet your needs each day.

Every morning when you get up you'll want to start by inviting God to be actively involved in your life—training, leading, comforting, and guiding you. You might wake up in the morning and pray a prayer like this one.

Dear Lord,

As I try to be a good parent today, I know that you're right by my side every step of the way. I ask that you guide me through each and every circumstance that I encounter today. Help my words to be honoring to you even when I'm feeling overwhelmed. Please give me strength to take a stand when it's necessary, and to show mercy and grace when opportunities present themselves. Walk with me, as I so desire to raise my child to love you with all of his heart,

soul, mind, and strength. Amen.

Parenting is one of the greatest spiritual growth experiences you'll ever have. If you walk with the Lord each day, you'll learn how to rely on him, trust him, and watch small miracles take place in your child's heart. God will reveal himself to you in new ways as you search the scriptures, apply biblical principles in your home, and seek to love him fully.

God is good and he knows your weaknesses and limitations. He delights in working through your challenges with you. Don't be discouraged because of your own personal weaknesses. Give them to the Lord. It's very possible that he'll bring healing into your life and strength into your character as you raise your son or daughter.

After all, God uses the picture of the family to describe his church and to articulate what he wants our relationship with him to be like. He comes to us as a father. We can never be perfect parents, but we do know the perfect parent and we can go to him for guidance and counsel, love and comfort. Being close to the Father can make the ride feel a bit more safe. So, enjoy the roller coaster, invite God to be your travel partner, and take on the challenge. It's a big one but the rewards are great.



The Adventure of the Early Elementary Years

The early elementary years provide the foundation you'll build upon for years to come. When your child was younger, you spent a great deal of time teaching right from wrong, self-control, cooperation, and responsiveness to authority. As you walk through the next few years, you'll build on those principles to extend your child's maturity. You'll also identify weaknesses that need work, and now's the time to dig in and do the training necessary to develop responsibility in your child. You'll likely identify areas of weakness in your child, or feel as if you missed something earlier on. Don't be discouraged. It just means that you need to make a parenting shift and address that weakness now.

In fact, much of your work in the elementary years will focus on developing strengths, exploring interests, and identifying weaknesses that need attention. As you spend time praying for your child, God will reveal new areas to emphasize. You may see your child's budding interest in music and begin guitar lessons, or recognize some leadership gifts and enroll your child in a scouting program. You

may also discover that your child is developing a bad attitude whenever work is necessary and you'll make a plan to address that as well.

These are important years to look at a child's heart. The heart contains a person's passions. That's why it's commonly said, "Put your heart into it." The heart also contains interests, causing Jesus to observe in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The heart contains desires (Psalm 37:4), temptations (1 Kings 11:4), convictions (Deuteronomy 6:6), emotions (John 14:27), and beliefs (Romans 10:9-10). Much of your work during the next few years will focus on the heart of your child, encouraging internal strength and character.

After all, maturity is a heart issue. The child who is internally motivated to keep his room clean or turn in his homework is demonstrating responsibility. The child who can receive correction and apologize for an offense is practicing humility. And when your daughter graciously accepts no as an answer, she's learning to live within limits. The heart qualities your child develops now will produce significant growth that will extend into adulthood.

One way to help strengthen your child's heart is to look for adult solutions to the challenges your child currently faces, and then break those solutions down to a child's developmental level. You want your child to grow into mature answers to life's problems, rather than simply growing out of childish ones. For example, if your child has an anger problem, it's probably unwise to teach him to punch a pillow. Venting anger like that isn't an adult solution. It's better to teach your child self-control in ways that a five or six-year-old can understand. Then, as he grows up, he'll have tools to address the challenges anger presents.

Virtually all the problems that children experience have adult counterparts. We all know adults who whine and complain when they don't get their way. Grownups sometimes have trouble completing tasks without being reminded or procrastinate instead of getting things done. In the same way, it's not just children who have trouble living within limits. It's a challenge we all experience at times, illustrated by the difficulty of staying within a budget or on a diet. Your work with your child now is for the long term. You're helping your child during these next few years develop life skills to use both now and later in life.

Focusing on the heart means you think in terms of strategy. Look at the bigger picture and consider what you're trying to teach for the long term. Correction isn't simply to bring justice to a situation or to punish a child in order to balance the scales. You're teaching how to respond more effectively in life.

Remember that the goal of discipline is a changed heart. Discipline means to teach. It's different than punishing for some kind of offense. Discipline looks forward to the right solutions for next time. Punishment focuses on the past. Discipline focuses on the future. Punishment is negative. Discipline is positive. Punishment is often motivated out of anger. Discipline is motivated out of love. Maintaining the bigger perspective in child training can go a long way to see significant improvement in your child's progress.

Remember that your goal is to teach your child how to approach life. Be careful that you don't get so focused on the tasks that need to be done that you miss the way that those things are accomplished. For example, correcting your child's choice of mismatched clothes isn't just about getting the colors right. It's about how one responds to cor-

rection and advice. Talk about color coordination, but also discuss the attitude your child has when corrected. Both are important.

Or, when you ask your child to pick up the towel off the floor in the bathroom, don't just focus on the task's completion, look at how the job is done. Scrunching the towel in the rack isn't what you had in mind when you gave the instruction. Completing a task is important but so is the way that you do it. The first gets the job done. The second focuses on character.

Your child needs guidance throughout the early elementary years to understand many important principles about life. You'll likely teach those in a number of ways. Correction, giving instructions, and saying no to children provide plenty of opportunities to teach character development. As you focus on heart qualities in your child, new areas of maturity will develop in ways that bring joy to your heart.

Parenting is hard work. Kids don't tend to raise themselves. They need help. Some people believe that children are like flowers, and all they need is attention and nutrients to grow up to be mature, responsible adults. Unfortunately, that view of children doesn't take into account the fact that kids have a sin nature that's often selfish, looking for the easy way, not the best way. It's better to think of your child as a garden with a number of strengths in the form of flowers and plants but also several weaknesses in the form of weeds that need to be removed. Weeds can be stubborn as can the challenges some children face. But continued work in the heart, coupled with God's grace in that child's life, can produce the beautiful garden he intends.



What about Rewards and Punishment

Do you find yourself scrambling for new incentives to motivate your child to do the right thing? Gaining cooperation from your preschooler may have been simple compared to the challenges of the elementary years. A piece of candy or the promise of a walk outside doesn't motivate your child the way it once did.

One deceptive mistake parents make when trying to motivate change in a child is to rely too heavily on rewards and punishments. In fact, some parents are in such a habit of external motivation with their kids that they hardly instruct or correct their children without some form of behavior modification. "Clean your room and then you can go out and play," or "finish your homework and you can watch a video." It becomes such a routine that parents often don't realize the danger of what they're doing.

An overemphasis on reward and punishment appeals to the selfishness in a child. Kids then start asking the wrong questions in life. When children are motivated with too many behavior modification techniques they learn to ask the question, "What's in it for me?" or, "What am I going to

get out of this?" Children would do better to ask the question, "What's the right thing to do in this situation?" But that requires that they learn about convictions, values, and develop a strong work ethic. That happens when parents are intentional about the way they instruct and correct their kids. Parents often have to change the way they parent if children are going to change the way they live.

We're not saying that behavior modification is wrong. It's just incomplete. It was developed as a motivation system to change behavior with animals and made popular by Ivan Pavlov in the early 1900's. He observed that he could teach a dog to salivate by ringing a bell at the same time he gave food. Over time, just the ringing of the bell started the dogs salivating. He had taught them something using a trigger and a response.

It wasn't long before behavior modification was practiced on people and became a major method used to modify behavior. Smoking cessation programs and weight loss programs turned to behavior modification to achieve their success. Unfortunately, then teachers and parents began to rely on this external motivation system to train children. The problem is eventually revealed when behavior is changed but the heart remains the same.

Behavior modification is based on a humanistic model. Those who believe in creation recognize that God created people to be different than animals. Although people can change using behavior modification, it's an incomplete strategy. God created people with hearts, and that means that parents and teachers have a whole new bucket of resources for change.

The heart contains convictions, beliefs, emotions, and desires. Therefore, other parenting tools are necessary to

help children make lasting changes. Furthermore, the heart is where God chooses to live. Ephesians 3:16-17 says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." In the first verse we see that Christ makes his home in the heart and in the second we see that the Spirit of God is placed there as well.

Of course, some children haven't yet experienced salvation and personally invited the Lord into their lives. That decision is an important one that will further enhance their ability to mature and grow. But don't let the fact that they haven't made a personal commitment to God hinder your understanding of his work in their lives. Jesus described the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life who is not yet a believer when, in John 16:8, he says, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." God works in the heart of a person whether they have accepted him yet or not. Of course, having Christ in one's life allows the Spirit to work much more completely.

When you use a heart-based approach to parenting, you're working alongside the God of the universe to touch your child's heart. Understanding what God says about the heart provides many new tools for parenting. You'll be able to change what children believe and help them develop new tendencies when facing challenges. If you think in terms of the heart you'll be able to help your child develop integrity and character, not simply behavior change.

You'll want to use a heart-based approach and apply it in practical ways. Kids need to know exactly what to do to put principles and character into practice. Sometimes that means that you'll give them the exact words to say. Other times you'll help them wrestle with ideas and develop their own suggestions. It's amazing what children come up with when they're challenged.

This book contains many practical strategies for helping children change. As you look at the techniques, be sure to explain them to children in terms that reflect the heart. At this age your child can understand the concept of the heart, so it's time to talk about it. For example, when your son gets upset and starts yelling you might send him to take a Break with words such as, "Go take a Break, change your heart, settle down, and come back and see me when you're ready." Children then learn that yelling is a symptom of anger in the heart and the solution isn't simply to be quiet, but also to work on internal change.

Take some time and listen to yourself work with your children. If you tend to talk about the motivation for a child to complete a task by describing the next reward or activity, you might want to make some changes. The reality is that maturity is defined in part as doing something because it's the right thing to do, not just so that I can go play a video game or watch a movie.

When you use a heart-based approach with your child, you are developing a foundation to build upon, both now and in the next stages of childhood. You'll start to teach about convictions instead of just rules, taking initiative instead of waiting for someone to prompt you, and doing what's right even when parents aren't around. Those things, and many more, are learned when parents focus on the heart.



Raising a Leader

The early signs of a budding leader are often things like determination, resourcefulness, and persistence. Unfortunately, some children demonstrate these qualities in ways that create conflict and resistance. They often argue relentlessly, have their own agenda, are stubborn, and expect others to do what they want. Budding leaders are often known for their ability to see how others, including parents, should fit into their goals and objectives. Although those qualities will serve them well over time, the lack of maturity and character often makes these children difficult to work with.

Sometimes called “strong-willed” kids, these children must learn the basics of good leadership. For example, all good leaders need to learn how to follow. They also need to learn to consider the desires of the people they’d like to lead. Determined children benefit from strong-willed parents who can teach them important life skills. That doesn’t mean facing off with your child with anger. It means training your child to have the good qualities necessary to be a strong and thoughtful leader instead of a tyrant.

Trying to teach his disciples about good leadership,

Jesus told them in Matthew 20:25-26, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” Several qualities must be part of a child’s life in order for strong leadership to be a positive asset.

Give your child a vision for his strengths by discussing the leadership traits you see. You might say, “I can tell that you’re going to be a leader someday. You have courage and strength. Sometimes though, I see that you misuse those qualities and they appear more like stubbornness or defiance. I’m going to be looking for ways to help you bring some balance to your leadership so that you can be most effective as you grow and develop.”

Look for ways to make the boundaries clear. Leaders sometimes cross the line of what’s appropriate in order to get their way. You’ll realize this because you feel violated or angry. Don’t use your anger to solve the problem, but rather use it as an indicator that your child has strayed beyond what’s appropriate in relationships. In the same way that a car stays in the lane in order to be successful on the road, there are certain limits to a child’s initiative and determination. Violation of the relational “lane lines” often appears to other people as being overbearing, rude, inconsiderate, demanding, and stubborn.

When you see that your child has crossed the line and is being demanding, use the situation as a teaching opportunity. Children often don’t understand where the lines are and some are unskilled at picking up on social cues. Take time to teach your child where the line is.

For example, continuing to argue after you’ve said no is rude. Bossing another child around is demanding. Regu-

larly telling a parent to wait while he gets to the next level in the video game is self-centered. Each of these demonstrations of poor leadership needs firm boundaries and careful discussion to provide greater wisdom for the child. Setting up clear boundaries affords your strong-willed child the structure needed to learn how to use self-control and determination appropriately.

When you're dealing with a particular situation and correction is required, avoid getting into a yelling match with your child. It's not uncommon for children with a strong personality to grow frustrated and angry when things don't go their way. Don't allow yourself to jump into the battle. Children quickly learn how to push their parents' buttons, so it's important that you remain calm and don't engage in a conversation that's out of control.

Be willing to discipline even in awkward situations. One of the hardest times to deal with a discipline issue is out in public. Unfortunately, both strong-willed children and compliant children alike have a tendency to test the boundaries in public. Although it's usually inconvenient, it's often important to address the situation when your child has crossed the line, even if that means leaving the area or event.

Parenting a child with a strong will is challenging! It requires a great deal of commitment and intentionality. Setting up clear boundaries for your child will help create a sense of stability and training as you move through day-to-day routines. It's important to find situations where you can encourage your child's strengths. Remember that God can use your child's determination and strong will to do a mighty work in his kingdom, and he has chosen you to help mold your child's heart along the way.



Rise and Shine

The very words “Rise and Shine” can raise a parent's anxiety level. Keeping your child moving from the time she wakes up until the time you get out the door or start your day can be a huge task, especially when you have yourself to manage as well. But a few changes in the morning can provide you with a new opportunity to develop heart qualities in your child. Instead of relying on you to get her through the morning, she can learn how to manage herself. Seem unreasonable? We'll show you how. The fact that some children resist your morning routine or require parental prompts to get through their tasks is often an indication that some training is necessary.

The first step is to clarify reasonable expectations by defining the plan. The list of tasks to complete in the morning usually only has 5-10 things on it. You might even list them on a piece of paper so that your child can actually see the things she's responsible for. You can break the list into two groups, separated by breakfast. The first list might include get up, make your bed, get dressed, put pajamas away, and come down for breakfast. The after-breakfast list might include an additional five things such as put your

shoes on, comb your hair, brush your teeth, get all your day's things by the door such as backpack, coat, and lunch, and "the honor task" (to be discussed later).

The second step is to implement specific strategies to work the plan. These strategies differ for each child. Some children just need the task list and they can demonstrate responsibility on their own and simply report back that they're on track. Other children need a bit more structure. For the child who needs a lot of guidance in the mornings, start with a vision meeting that defines responsibility. You might say something like, "We've got a new plan for mornings that's going to reduce my nagging and increase your responsibility. This is going to be great. It's a way that we can work together as a team to get all of our jobs done in the morning. I created a list of tasks that you usually need to get done from the time you get up until the time we leave the house. Can you think of anything we need to add to that? I'm looking forward to partnering with you."

After a vision meeting, you'll want to give specific instructions such as, "Here's the list. Each time you complete one of the items on the chart, you report to me and I'll check it off." As children mature you may reduce the reporting back to two times, once before breakfast, and the other after the list is complete, but some children need a lot of accountability at first because they are easily distracted. It's the need to report back that increases the uncomfortable internal feeling that turns into responsibility.

Notice that the parent is still quite involved at this point by requiring the child to report back and keeping things moving. However, the child should be taking initiative to report back. If you have to go find your child or discover that your child is playing a game instead of staying on task,

you may have to increase the motivation level to build responsibility.

In that case, you might say something like, "In order to help you be internally motivated to move forward in the morning, I'm going to set up checkpoints. The first four things need to be done by 7:00 am and the other five things need to be done by 7:25 am. It's your job to report to me that they're done. If you meet the checkpoints then you'll have a bit of extra time to play before we leave at 7:30 am. However, if you don't check in at the checkpoints then you'll have to go to bed earlier so that you have more energy in the morning to do your work."

Galatians 6:2-5 presents an interesting principle about life that can be applied to the family. Verse 5 says, "Each one should carry his own load." Verse 2 says, "Carry each other's burdens." Morning is an excellent time to teach this concept. At the end of your child's list you might include one undefined task called "the honor task." This task requires a child to look for something extra to do that helps others out. It might be to load the dishwasher, help a younger child, or take out the trash. If your child can't think of something, he can always come to you, but the goal is to teach children to take initiative to help others and carry someone else's burden, not just their own.

Some families find that doing some evening preparation for morning is helpful. Setting clothes out, packing lunches, or preparing the backpack for the next day can all make the work of morning run more smoothly. Planning ahead is part of organization and is a great life skill taught at home.

Be sure to plan a bit of margin into the schedule to accommodate those unexpected challenges. Finding a lost

shoe, cleaning up a mess, and just getting a bit behind are common, and a little extra time planned to address these surprises is helpful. You might schedule the last check-point to be completed five minutes before you're to leave the house. If everyone accomplishes their jobs by five minutes early, it gives you a few minutes of affirmation time to celebrate your success as a team. It's great to send children off on their day with a positive note and an encouraging smile.

As with any new routine, work diligently over time to develop healthy patterns. Character development often takes work and your investment will not only bring sunshine into your morning, but it will also build significant responsibility in your child.



The Value of Fun, Humor, and Games

Parenting takes work, but in the midst of all of the challenges, save some energy to have fun. Playing with your kids not only strengthens relationships, but it also teaches children valuable things like how to win, how to lose, how to show mercy, and how to take turns. Kids learn through play, and your gift of time for play, now and then, can have a significant effect on your child's development.

Through games, children can explore different interests. Putting together a puzzle requires thinking and problem-solving skills, drama and charades require communication, and board games often utilize strategy. Playing games strengthens particular parts of the brain and also provides opportunities to practice character development. This is the time in your child's life when he's beginning to discover who God made him to be. Your child will learn what types of activities come naturally and what areas require a little more work. These years provide an amazing opportunity for you, as a parent, to help mold and develop your child's gifts and abilities. Invite fun into your family and take advantage of this time in your child's life to dis-

cover, build, and grow your relationship together.

Playfulness itself is a good quality. Laughing, teasing, and telling jokes together are a fun way to strengthen relationship. Furthermore, they teach children that humor has its limits and that if you carry it on too much, then people become irritated or hurt. This is a major area of maturity in which most children need help. Teasing, for example, is usually fun for a time but can easily cross the line to become hurtful if one isn't careful. Telling jokes makes people laugh, but when the joke makes fun of a person, then it's dishonoring and damages relationship. Humor is a way to get attention, but when it becomes mean or annoying, then one's reputation is weakened.

These early elementary years are a good time to teach about the limits of humor. For example, there are some things we don't laugh about even if they're funny, because of the seriousness of the situation. Humor about bodily functions or toilet talk is inappropriate, and it's unwise to make light of sin or to laugh at evil. Proverbs calls the person who laughs at sin a "mocker." Proverbs 9:12 says, "If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer." Laughing at sin is not only unwise but the mocker suffers in the end. It's also dangerous to tease or joke when someone's upset. Kids can learn the limits of humor, and now is a great time to start the lessons.

Games and activities are a helpful way to introduce children to different skills and to explore new interests. A pick-up game of basketball, tennis, or jump rope can provide children with a wider base of experience and increase confidence in new situations. Children learn how to take risks, try new things, fail, laugh at themselves, and try again.

Some games involve competition, trying to win, accomplish the goal faster, or better. Keep in mind that children between the ages of five and eight often have a hard time with competition. Because they think concretely, they look to the here and now, and winning and losing often lack perspective. That's why some children overreact to a loss, take it personally, and get so upset. You may need a lot of extra time to teach these children how to think and, in the end, may choose to move to more cooperative games until they grow into the next developmental stage.

Competition can be good for some kids. It can help them develop healthy attitudes about winning and losing and learning how to deal with disappointment. Competition can encourage growth and push a child to excel. It helps kids set goals, develop strategies, and increase competence. Being competitive often involves quick decision-making, self-control, discipline, and maturity. It's a very strong motivator at times and can stimulate kids to do their best.

However, losing is serious business for the child who wants to win. Some children compromise values like honesty, kindness, or integrity to get ahead. Thus games become a helpful way to teach valuable lessons about life. Don't bend the rules to create a winner. Although you might allow a child to win when playing a game, don't allow your child to win by lying or cheating. Ethics are learned by sticking to the rules even when you fail.

In the same way, boasting is inappropriate. Learning humility by saying, "You did a good job too," or "Thank you for playing with me," are good suggestions for the child who tends to magnify his own success without thinking of the other person's feelings.

Non-competitive games can foster a sense of commu-

nity and cooperation. Of course, some children even turn cooperative games into a competition because they tend to make winning an evaluation of their self-worth. The problem comes when children begin to define their worth by comparing themselves with others. "I can run faster than Rudy," or "I'm smarter than Caitlin." Children need to learn that one's identity isn't determined through competition and comparison with others. Adults even have this problem sometimes. That's why it's so important to establish good thinking patterns about competition early.

Team games and activities focus on working together. If you sense that competition is getting carried away in your home, you might want to emphasize the value of competing with oneself instead of competing with siblings or friends, or focusing on the fact that, when we all work together, then we're all winners.

To help kids work as a team you might encourage their use of the term "we" instead of "I" and complimenting others who work hard as well. Children can learn to rejoice in the group's success and point out the strengths of others who participated.

Fun, humor, and games contain rich opportunities for developmentally appropriate teaching. Having fun as a family doesn't have to take a lot of time out of your regular weekly routine or cost a lot of money. Relationships grow stronger, lessons come to life, and children develop confidence when they're taught to play games well. Games aren't just entertainment, but they also provide a huge opportunity to enhance a child's character development. Enjoy your family and look for ways to teach in the process.



What to Expect in the Early Elementary Years

“Is this normal?” That’s a common question we hear over and over from parents. It’s often helpful to step back and look at typical developmental expectations, recognizing however that typical may not be best. Even “developmentally appropriate” must leave room for setting goals for growth and maturity. Understanding common milestones can allow you to breathe a sigh of relief when you sense a concern and then recognize that what you’re experiencing isn’t unusual. However, don’t allow “normal” to mean that you can let things go. Although some children have “normal” problems, it’s important to acknowledge that work on those areas is still necessary. Rarely do children grow out of bad habits without significant guidance. In fact, many children grow into problems if they aren’t addressed.

Here are some guidelines that are generally true for early elementary age children:

Physical Growth. Because your child can now run, climb, kick, and throw, coordination is developing in ways that open new doors of opportunity including playing ball games, swimming, riding a bike, and doing chores, such as

raking leaves or shoveling snow. Fine muscle development allows for writing, painting, and manipulating small pieces in games and activities. Kids in the early elementary years often vary greatly in their requirement for food. Quantity needed ranges from eating several times a day when advancing through a growth spurt, to only bites at a meal to keep them going. Children who are five to eight years of age usually need ten to twelve hours of sleep each night.

Intellectual Development. Children usually learn to read between five and eight years of age, opening up new opportunities to work independently and learn on one's own. The skill of reading comes later for some children, and girls tend to pick up on reading earlier than many boys. Attention span increases and a greater understanding of time and space allows them to use a calendar and clock. Problem-solving skills and vocabulary continue to develop, increasing understanding so that these children can play more complex games and interact in dialogue with more logic. During the early elementary years, kids can often remember more than one instruction at a time, contributing to a sense of responsibility when following instructions.

Abstract thinking usually begins to develop in the next stage, so early elementary children may have a hard time comprehending ideas such as justice, strategy, or organization. Rather, the five- to eight-year-old child tends to think about the here and now, living in the present, and understanding things that are seen and touched. Imagination is on the rise, making way for more creative play, but may result in increased fears since this child is now grasping how big and diverse the world really is. Academic pressure increases during these years, providing parents with more opportunities to help children develop strong learning and

organizational skills.

Social Interaction. Because kids are developing the ability to see themselves as part of a group instead of as the center of the universe, they are more adept at building friendships. They will likely enjoy having one good friend and then learn to embrace two or three others without threatening the initial relationship. Identity is developing in relationships so these children often use competition and comparison to mark their own perceptions of themselves, but can now learn that their self-concept has more to do with their individual strengths and how they interact with others. They often like being the center of attention and need guidance to allow others to lead and to learn to listen to others.

Problems like meanness, frustration, and selfishness are being replaced with kindness, self-control, and cooperation. Supervision of activities allows parents to help guide play, teach life lessons, and mold more mature thinking. Kids who like to be in control are often more comfortable with leading and therefore must also learn to follow, while those who are content to watch, may need to develop more confidence to speak up and step out on their own.

Emotional Development. Some children have a larger scoop of emotion than others. They react with strong anger, sadness, or disappointment when things don't go the way they had hoped. Feelings can get hurt easily and events are often taken personally. Although the development of abstract thinking at eight or nine years of age will help a child gain perspective in life's disappointing situations, these children now learn very important lessons such as the need to think of others, the need to trust, and a recognition that life goes on after disappointment. These

emotional children can also experience strong positive emotions, and find themselves overreacting with excitement, happiness, and enthusiasm. Of course the benefit of having an emotional child, is the ease with which they connect with others. Emotional kids tend to enjoy care through touch, cuddling, dialogue, and special times with Dad and Mom.

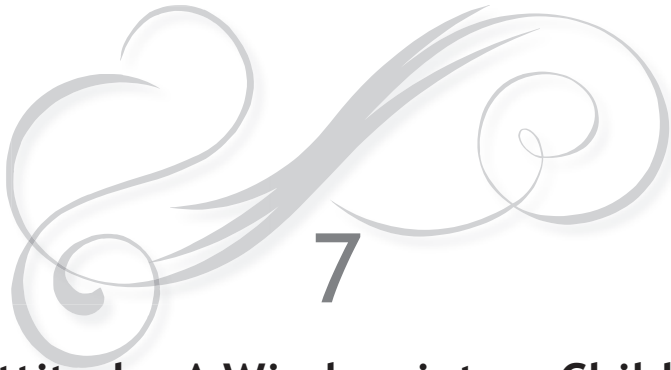
Spiritual Understanding and Practice. During the early elementary years, kids are becoming more aware of the world and often want to know why things happen and how things work. They begin to put cause and effect together and want to know what happens to Grandpa when he dies or why we go to church. They can often engage in spiritual practices such as prayer, reading the Bible, and serving God, and are beginning to realize that life has a purpose. Between the ages of five and eight, children are learning more about the difference between right and wrong in practical ways. For example, there's a difference between being honest and being blunt. Sometimes saying the truth can be hurtful and inappropriate, but that isn't an excuse to lie. Many adults don't understand that idea, but children in this stage are ready to begin to develop more discernment about such things. Bible knowledge is increasing and children are more able to apply Scripture to life, particularly historical stories that involve real people and situations as opposed to the epistles that teach general concepts. This is a great stage for Scripture memory since early elementary children have an amazing ability to memorize.

It's during the early elementary years that kids need a lot of training to handle life situations, knowledge to broaden their intellectual base, and a variety of experiences to practice new skills and discover interests. Encourage

broad exploration of life, guiding your child by teaching values and spiritual perspective. As you do, you're forming a significant developmental foundation upon which your child will build future decision-making and problem-solving abilities.

Parenting provides opportunities for growth and change through each stage of development. These early elementary years are filled with excitement as you watch your child grow physically, spiritually, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. It doesn't take long before you begin to see their character taking shape as they begin to build on their strengths and grow through their weaknesses. Isaiah 40:29-31 says, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

The elementary years are an opportunity for spiritual growth spurts in parents as well as their children. You need the Lord with you today and you will need him with you tomorrow. Look to the Lord for wisdom, strength, and courage. Savor every moment as you help lead and guide your child through each area as you'll soon realize they grow up too fast!



Attitude: A Window into a Child's Heart

Getting a job done is important, but how that job is done is also significant. A job completed with a bad attitude is an indication of a heart problem. Sometimes parents excuse a bad attitude by saying, “At least he did what I asked.” Others use excuses such as, “He’s a boy,” or “She’s tired,” or “He’s only eight” and ignore the attitudes they see. Even when behavior is moving along in the right direction, if the heart is in the wrong place, a crisis is just around the corner. Kids need to learn how to respond well to the challenges of life, how to do things they don’t want to do, and respond positively even though they don’t feel like it.

An attitude is more than just a behavior issue. It contains emotions such as frustration, disappointment, or anger. Emotions are experienced in the heart and children need help processing them. Otherwise, feelings such as anger, jealousy, and discouragement are likely to reveal themselves inappropriately. Furthermore, bad attitudes are also caused by thinking errors. For example, children sometimes believe that just because they’re unhappy they

have the right to display that misery to those around them. Or, some kids believe that the workload they have is unreasonable even though you know they have hardly any chores at all.

Part of your parenting job is to help children respond appropriately to emotions and to change what they believe about life. One of the ways you'll do that is by challenging bad attitudes, since bad attitudes are a flag, indicating a heart problem. Some parents make the mistake of using their own emotions to overpower their kids, believing that, because this child is wrong, then the anger is warranted. In that case, the parent's own attitude is revealed, requiring some adjustments in emotional management and a change in thinking. The reality is that emotional intensity hinders closeness and, just because you're right in addressing a bad attitude, that doesn't mean that your anger is a good strategy for dealing with it.

Instead, be firm. You might say, "Wait a minute. Stop right there. Don't take the trash out. I'd like you to sit down and think about your attitude. I know you have other things to do in life, and you're disappointed that I asked you to help out here, but you need to be willing to contribute to the family. So think about it and come back and talk to me when you're ready." In this way you challenge a child's thinking and you check the emotional reaction to raise awareness of a poor response.

Of course, changing attitudes takes much time and work, so don't give up. It's usually best to sit down with a child at a non-discipline time to talk about attitudes and how they affect the relational atmosphere in a home. When you begin to open dialogue with a child about attitudes, you might point out that attitudes make a statement

even though they don't usually have words. Attitudes are revealed in tone of voice, posture, grunts, sighs, and unkind looks. An attitude often gives a message that says, "I'm angry with you," or "It isn't fair that I have to do so much work," or "How dare you interrupt me before I get to the next level on my video game."

After a child has settled down from a bad attitude, it's often helpful to discuss the message the child was communicating. "Son, you were obviously unhappy when I was trying to help you with your homework. What was going on there?" Even if a child can't form feelings into words at the moment, your brainstorming session often raises the awareness of non-verbal communication, helping your child to think about how to better communicate next time.

If you regularly talk to your child about attitudes and reflect on poor emotional responses by debriefing, then your child will begin to choose different responses. You might even discuss scriptures together about people who had good attitudes compared to those who had bad attitudes. For example, Cain had a bad attitude toward correction so God confronted him in Genesis 4:6-7 by saying, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

The same thing is true with all children when they allow their anger to fester. A bad attitude sets a child up to make a poor choice, hurt others, or think selfishly about a situation. When a child responds poorly to a limit you set, an instruction you give, or to correction, then sin is waiting to pounce. The battle within is an important one for children to understand. Some kids have no idea that they're

wrestling with desires inside. They just freely express their disappointment and many times do it in hurtful ways. The reality is that mature and healthy people put limits on their reactions and choose to do what's right instead.

Be careful that you don't just discipline for a bad attitude but also look for ways to encourage a positive one. Offer praise for a good attitude under pressure by describing internal strength, not simply right actions. It's not hard to show joy or excitement when things are going well, but it's a sign of maturity for a child to demonstrate contentment or cooperation in the face of a challenging situation. As you work with your child in the attitude department, you'll be training and equipping your child for life.



Moving Beyond Our Borders

During the early elementary years, children usually begin to develop interests and attend activities outside the home. The circle of leadership in your child's life will broaden as you enroll your child in sports, music, and other programs. In these situations your child will learn to respond to different cues, limits, and forms of correction from other leaders and authorities. One of the tasks of childhood is to learn to respond to authority in general. It starts with a healthy responsiveness to parents, grandparents, and other family members, but now broadens to others outside the family.

Most children need help knowing how to respond to various adults because every adult gives instructions differently or corrects in a way that the child may not completely understand or be comfortable with. One of your jobs as a parent is to interpret the cues for your child to help him understand that another adult may communicate differently but expect the same thing. For example, when the coach says, "I could use some help gathering the balls," it may sound like an idea or suggestion to your child. When the coach then gets angry because of a lack of response, a

child may be surprised, not recognizing that the comment was the coach's way of saying, "I want you to go get the balls and bring them over here."

All leaders direct, correct, and say no in different ways. When seven-year-old James brings home a report card that says "lacks cooperation," how can James demonstrate cooperation in the classroom more effectively? The way he functions at home may differ from the way he needs to act at school. With a bit of coaching, James can learn what cooperation looks like in a new situation, broadening his understanding, and giving him the tools he needs to handle life in various arenas.

One mom said, "We have a very nice babysitter, but when she tells our son to go to bed she asks a question. She asks, 'Are you ready to go to bed now?' My son, hearing the question, continues to say, 'No.' I had to teach him that when she asks that question, then he needs to hear it as if it were me saying 'It's time to go to bed now.' " The cues are different but the expectation to go to bed is the same.

Other authorities often lead differently. Whether it's a babysitter who isn't clear with an instruction or a coach who raises his voice more than you'd like, outside adults give us opportunities to teach children how to respond to authority. Some parents make the mistake of always trying to change the leader by explaining to the leader how best to relate to the child. It's as if they're saying, "If you would give instructions or correct like I do, then my child would understand." Although this kind of information is often helpful for leaders, it's also wise to teach children to be more versatile in their ability to listen and follow instructions in a variety of contexts.

You might say to your daughter, “Let me help you understand what your teacher is trying to communicate,” or “Here’s what you can do to meet your coach’s expectations.” Kids benefit from exposure to other leaders, and it’s often other authorities in their lives that are able to say the very same thing you’ve been saying for a while and your child finally gets it. It’s nice to have someone else telling your child to pick up his mess and think about others.

Be strategic as you choose what activities and what leaders to expose your child to. The child who lacks self-control may benefit from a martial arts program. The child who needs to develop more confidence may find encouragement from an art class. The child with poor social skills may gain some ideas from a scouting program. It’s often helpful to have a private conversation with the leader and explain that you’re hoping your child will learn more than the face value of the class. You’re interested in character development. Furthermore, when coaches or instructors know that you’re going to support their leadership, they’re often more willing to go the extra mile to address issues instead of letting them go.

Keep in mind that God often speaks to children when they’re out of your home and in other situations. It was young Samuel who went to live in the home of the priest. It must have been hard for his parents to allow him to leave the protective covering of their own home, but it was in the midst of that experience, living under Eli’s leadership, that God began to speak in personal ways. When Samuel couldn’t sleep because he thought that Eli was calling him in the night, Eli realized that God was working and told Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:9, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ ” Sam-

uel learned in that situation to listen to the Lord's voice.

As you pray about your child's activity choices, also take time to pray for the leaders that will work with your child. It's often through other leaders and authorities that God speaks. In fact, it's interesting to see how God often uses a coach or teacher to say the very same thing you've been saying to your child, but in a little different way, so that your child responds.

Other leaders and authorities in a child's life provide a great opportunity for a child to grow, and you can often help your child receive the messages and learn new relational patterns effectively.



Invest in Relationship

When your child was in the toddler and preschool stages of development, you probably experienced times of feeling overwhelmed or extreme exhaustion. There's no doubt that the first several years of a child's life can be physically and emotionally draining for parents. It's not uncommon for parents in those stages to look forward to the early elementary years. They often perceive these years as ones that will bring much more "freedom" than the younger years of a child's life. The elementary age child is often able to work or play independently for longer periods of time and is frequently involved in school, sports, or clubs, freeing you from intense oversight responsibilities. You still are very much involved in their lives but now it comes more in sessions of time here and there. It's important during these years then that you identify significant ways of connecting and building relationship and you make the most of your time and energy with your child.

There's a strong correlation between parental involvement in a child's life and the social, emotional, and academic success of that child. Parents who take the time to get involved in their child's educational experience have

children who tend to earn better grades, get higher test scores, are more motivated, have a stronger self-concept, and have less of a chance of becoming involved in drugs and alcohol later in life. Whether you're a stay-at-home parent, or work full or part time, make the commitment to be involved in your child's day-to-day experience.

A significant way that you can influence your child is through education. Whether you homeschool or your child attends public or private school, you'll have many opportunities to get involved in the process. Even if you're a working parent, there are many ways that you can participate in your child's daily school routine. It's typical for both public and private schools to offer a back-to-school night at the beginning of each year. This is a great opportunity for you to meet your child's teacher, get a feel for your child's daily classroom routine, learn the academic expectations, and ask questions. Carving out the time at the beginning of each year to gain as much information as possible is a great way to jumpstart your involvement in your child's school experience.

As the school year progresses, take advantage of special events to support what's happening at your child's school. Attend parent-teacher conferences where you can express your support and learn more about your child's strengths and weaknesses. Look for ways to get involved in the school by helping in the classroom or volunteering on campus. You'll observe what's going on, and the things you learn will facilitate important conversations at home. Participating in the education process not only makes a statement about the importance of education, but it also communicates the fact that you care about your child.

Ask your child regularly about the day, what she

learned, and who the important people are in the classroom or social circles. Some children benefit from open-ended questions such as, “How was your day?” or “What did you learn today?” However, many children don’t know how to answer those kinds of questions or they give a grunt or an “I don’t know.” That means you’ll want to move to more specific questions such as, “Where do you sit in the classroom?” “What subject do you usually start with in the morning?” “Do you like science or history better and why?” It’s often helpful to ask a child, “What is something I can pray for regarding your school day?”

Education provides plenty of ways to connect with your child but so do sports, church activities, and discussions in the car. Life provides many opportunities for sharing values and convictions with your child. Proverbs 22:6 states, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” This verse is a great reminder to think about the way that God has so uniquely created your son or daughter. Take time to encourage kids in ways that recognize how God has created them uniquely.

As you determine your child’s interests, look for ways to explore and enjoy them with your child. Many children get involved in sports, but that’s not for every child. Music, drama, art, and community programs that bring children together around interests such as caring for animals or working with younger children are often helpful in fostering a child’s unique giftedness. Cheer your child on. Talk about the activity together. Offer praise for hard work. Listen to your child talk, and look for opportunities to encourage growth to become the person God created your child to be.

A significant way to build relationship with your child

is through games and activities. Plan for fun times that are more about enjoying one another than about teaching, instructing, or correcting. Having a regular family game night, ongoing read-aloud evenings, and planning outings where the whole family is spending time together, are great ways to enjoy closeness and make memories. Traditions are important to build family connectedness. Going out to dinner together on the first day of school, celebrating birthdays in a special way, or having a family bike ride when spring comes can all build special memories.

One of the benefits of involvement with your kids in the elementary ages is that it strengthens the relational foundation necessary for harder aspects of parenting. Conflict happens. You'll need to address significant challenges. Your family may experience pressure of one kind or another. Relationship provides the strength you'll need to face those experiences. You and your child can enjoy life now as you laugh, play, work, and talk together. But always remember that your involvement with your child during these years is providing significant building blocks for the future.



The Family is a Team

One of the tasks during the early elementary years is helping kids move from viewing themselves as the center of their world, to seeing that they're part of a bigger community. Developmentally, your child is now more capable of working in groups, learning to collaborate, share ideas, and understand a group goal. A family is a group, and some children need work to move their thinking from viewing the family as an entity designed to simply meet their needs, to a team where all members work together to accomplish a goal.

The family has tasks to complete. Getting clothes in the hamper, put in the wash, moved to the dryer, folded, and back in the drawers is part of the work of family life. Managing the food in a household by grocery shopping, putting the food away, planning meals, preparing the food, putting the meal on the table, and cleaning it all up, is a family task. Driving kids from here to there, making sure the house is clean and tidy, caring for pets, and taking the trash out, are the kinds of tasks every family has to manage. Often children develop the belief that all those jobs belong to Mom and that the job of childhood is to have fun.

If that's the case in your family, then you have some work to do.

Learning how to work in a group starts in the family, but eventually takes place in God's family, the church, as well. 1 Corinthians 12:12 says, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." In the same way that a strong church relies on the contributions of many people, a family is strongest when everyone is participating. Now is the time to teach children about their skills and abilities and what it means to be a servant in the common tasks of life. As you do, you're preparing your children to live in a spiritual community as well. Even now, you'll have opportunity to serve at church, allow your children to serve with you, and teach them what it means to contribute to a bigger mission.

It's during the early elementary years that children begin to understand what it means to work as a team and contribute toward the group's goal. The way you work on daily tasks in your home communicates to your kids that their part is important. Some children have a hard time helping out and contributing to the team approach. Those children often struggle with selfishness and need some remedial work to bring them up to where they should be. That means that you'll likely experience resistance, so be ready for it. Participating in family responsibilities is not an option. In fact, you'll want to communicate an important principle about family life to your kids, that you can't enjoy the benefits of this family unless you're willing to contribute to the tasks that make this family work. Kids who aren't contributing to family life may need to lose the privilege of watching TV, playing with video games, or en-

joying toys. Work and play are two sides of responsibility. You can't have one without the other, and the sooner children learn that the better.

How you communicate the tasks can build vision and help children understand that the jobs are "we" jobs and not just a parent's responsibility. It's often best to lay out the tasks in a way that demonstrates a sense of teamwork. Instead of just barking out orders as if you're the sergeant and your kids are servants, you might say, "Here's what we have to do today. We need to clean up the kitchen, vacuum the house, and wash the clothes. You'll have some free time in the midst of that but we need to work together to get things done." You may even ask a child for input on the day's schedule or how the jobs might be allocated.

By previewing the tasks ahead, you're communicating an important message about who's responsible for the jobs around the house. Everyone must participate in the family tasks and the sooner a young child takes ownership for those responsibilities the better. You might even teach children to take initiative by saying, "I'm going to work on dinner. Would you please go into the living room and see what's out of place and take care of it. Report back to me when you're done." Now the child is doing more than just following instructions. She has to look around and see what needs to be done and take care of it. This kind of approach teaches children to be observant about messes and demonstrates responsibility in practical terms.

Elementary age children can help around the house in a number of ways. Certainly they can do their own personal care and clean up their own belongings, but they should also contribute to the household responsibilities. Emptying waste baskets, cleaning up the bathroom, loading the dish-

washer, clearing the table, feeding the dog, sweeping the porch, and straightening up the living room are all chores that even a five-year-old can participate in.

You might have a team meeting regularly and ask kids two questions, “What would you like to enjoy in our family today?” and “How are you going to contribute to the family today?” to help kids think rightly about their roles. You might want to have regular lists of jobs that a child must accomplish, but on the written list it’s often helpful to add an item you might call “the honor task” referring to one extra thing that the child can do by looking around the home and taking initiative. Teach your children to look for things that need to be done instead of just waiting to be told.

If you view your family as the first “group experience” for your child, then you’ll use it to prepare your child to handle groups outside the home as well. Kids who understand how to work as a team do much better at school, in sports, and at church. In fact, you’re giving them a gift they will use for the rest of their lives.



Thinking of Others

Your child has now reached a stage where she can think more about the needs and feelings of others and not just about herself. Words like empathy and compassion can have real meaning as your child thinks about the desires and concerns of friends, siblings, and parents. Of course, some children seem to be stuck in more immature thinking and tend to focus on themselves more than is helpful. In that case you'll want to do some training in order to raise your child's ability to empathize with others.

When Paul wrote to the early church he said in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Those are not only helpful words for the church. They're also helpful for the family. Your child is at a point where he can learn what Godly humility looks like in practical terms. Humility is not only the ability to see yourself in proper perspective, but it also means that you consider others as valuable. That means that you think of someone else's interests, not just your own.

Sharing, listening, and allowing others to lead are all part of this important life skill. In fact, you want to teach your child that she has an obligation to consider someone else's interests. Many children want to be understood, get others to follow their lead, and seek to be first or best. Now is a great time to teach children what it means to be a servant and help others to feel good, considering their desires and needs as well.

If your child is stuck in some selfish patterns, then you'll want to require acts of kindness. You might say, "Sharing is not optional. If you're having trouble sharing, then you can sit by yourself while your sister plays with the toys. When you're ready to make her happy and not just think about yourself, you can play again." That's tough for some kids who want all the pieces for themselves. Those children have goals and desires that are quite strong, and thinking about others is low on their priority list. Play is therapy for kids and they learn important lessons about life through taking turns, sharing, and letting others lead.

Although there should be some times when a child is allowed to play without having to share, it's important that kids learn to think of others as well. Sometimes children develop an attitude of entitlement that hinders their ability to consider the needs or interests of others. If your daughter has a play date but refuses to share any of her toys, then that play date isn't going to go very well. You might have to pull her aside and say, "Having your friend over is a privilege. In order to make it successful, you need to share some of your toys. Think of what you'd like to share and let's talk about it. That's part of what it means to be a friend." Requiring your child to share may be necessary to break down some of the natural selfishness in the child's

heart.

One of the ways you might teach your child to think about others is to send him on a mission of thoughtfulness. "I'd like you to go into the other room and play with your brother for a few minutes and look for some ways to make him smile. That's your mission. I'll be watching to see if it works. When it does, then come back and see me." In order to get another child to smile you have to think about that child and what he likes. Kids who practice thinking of others learn to cooperate and get along with siblings, friends, and even adults more effectively.

Teaching children to consider the feelings of others may take some work. Asking your child the question, "Was your sister sad, mad, or glad when that happened?" can challenge new ways of thinking. You may even ask a follow-up question, "How did you know?" and "What did you do about it?" to teach children to evaluate and respond to the feelings and needs of others.

Meanness is a sign of weakness. When a child is deliberately mean to another, then it's time to take some action. Unkindness is a flag that indicates that a child doesn't have what it takes to consider the needs and feelings of someone else. Meanness often finds pleasure in harming others. If you see your child acting out in this way, you'll want to provide discipline. That not only involves some form of rebuke or consequence, but also requires training to do what's right. Some children need kindness training in order to build new habits and patterns.

The ability of a child to consider others is also exercised when she relates to you as a parent. The child who complains or argues when given a no answer is thinking only about herself and expressing personal misery at an-

other person's expense. Philippians 2 continues by talking about having a good attitude in verse 5 and then gives the example of Christ's servant attitude in verses 6-11. Verse 12 starts with the word "therefore," providing practical examples of ways to do what's right. Verse 14 then says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing," an important instruction for anyone, and necessary for children to learn at home.

It's important to break the cycle of selfishness in a child's heart. Most sin is selfishness in one form or another. It's during the early elementary years that children become more able to think about others, but many of them need help to make it happen effectively in their own hearts. That means practice, teaching, modeling, and prayer. When you pray regularly with your child, take time to pray for others and their needs. That again helps children do that important work of thinking of others.



The Privilege of Friendships

“**M**om... I don’t have any friends! How come nobody likes me?” Those are tough words for a mom to hear. On the other hand, some kids have lots of friends and you may have some concerns about their influence on your child. So what can you do to help support the development of friendships in your child’s life? Plenty. But before we get to the how to’s, let’s make sure we understand a couple of key truths.

Developmentally, children between the ages of five and eight are beginning to learn what it means to enjoy friendship. Kids seek out play dates and want to spend time with other children more and more. Early friendships have a lot to do with being accepted by others and enjoying play together. As children grow older they’ll spend a great deal of time with others and learn more about deeply caring for another person. Good patterns are important as children are developing relationships and learning to choose wisely. Friendships can make or break a child’s heart.

One of the challenges of friendships is peer pressure. Friends can have a significant influence in a child’s life. So who your child spends time with can be life changing,

a little bit every day. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.”

Children often choose friendships based on something they want to reinforce in themselves. If a child values humor, she'll enjoy being with someone who is funny. If your child values high moral character, he'll seek out friends that encourage that. However, if your son has a desire to be more sneaky or dishonest, he'll tend to find others who act that way. Or, if he's interested in thrills and excitement, it's not surprising that he gravitates toward friends that enjoy the same thing. So it's important to talk to kids about their choices of friendships. Some children simply act based on their feelings. Their attraction supersedes better judgment. Discussions about the importance of right choices in the area of friendships are essential to provide children with guidance and direction.

Building friendships is another matter. Many children lack the social grace to naturally initiate and foster good relationships. Here are a few ideas to help your child build healthy friendships. Practice at these can go a long way.

Teach your child to smile so that others will see friendliness. A pleasant smile is an invitation to more relationship and naturally attracts others. In the same way, a pleasant greeting and using the person's name sets people at ease and offers the opportunity to open a door to relationship. Children can also learn to ask good questions. People like to talk about themselves and when someone takes a personal interest, it makes a difference.

It's important for children also to learn how to answer questions. One way you might teach your son or daughter to be a part of dialogue is by using the tennis ball game. “When I ask you a question I toss you the tennis ball. By

answering it, you are receiving the ball, but you don't just want to take the ball, you want to give it back by making a second statement or asking another question."

For example, toss the ball to Bill and say "Hi Bill. How's it going?" Bill catches the ball and responds "Fine." Then Bill tosses the ball back and says, "I like your backpack." The conversation can develop as long as the ball continues to go back and forth. With children who have a hard time with dialogue, playing the game with an actual ball can communicate the idea visually.

Making friends is a give-and-take proposition. Let your kids know that, in order to have a good friend, they should learn to be one. Encourage them to take the first step in reaching out to another child... one who might even be feeling inadequate in the relationship area. Teaching your son or daughter how to choose good friends and how to be a good friend is of utmost importance in these early elementary years.

Use this stage of development as an opportunity to invest in helping your child think and talk about how to facilitate healthy friendships. Talk about the character qualities to look for in a friend. Point out examples of honesty, kindness, thoughtfulness, hard working, and generosity that you see in other children. Talk about what qualities make a good friend and why. Below are some verses you can read together as you begin leading your child in facilitating healthy relationships.

Proverbs 12:26. A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 16:28. A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.

Proverbs 17:17. A friend loves at all times, and a brother

is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 22:11. He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend.

Proverbs 22:24. Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered.

You can model friendship as you relate to your child. As you think about the qualities of a good friend, you might talk about those and use your own relationship with your child as the example. But be careful. Some of the pitfalls of poor relationships can creep into family dynamics as well. Are you gossiping? Are you honest? Are you kind? Children learn about relationships outside the family by practicing them within the family.

Investing the time and energy to help teach your child how to facilitate healthy friendships is definitely time well spent. Using the influence you have at this stage in your child's life to help walk them through making wise choices will be of great value as your son or daughter moves into the "tween" and adolescent stages of development.



Successful Sibling Relationships

If you have more than one child in your home, then you know how challenging it can be for everyone to get along. Any time you merge several personalities under one roof for an extended amount of time, conflict is sure to happen. Although it's completely normal for siblings to argue from time to time, normal doesn't mean we just look the other way and accept it. Sibling conflict is a child's first class in relationship school. It's among brothers and sisters that children learn to get along with others. Cultivating successful sibling relationships takes time, patience, and dedication. Stay on the course and look to God's Word as you strive to teach your children how to have good relationships with one another.

The Bible is the perfect parenting resource when you begin thinking about ways to teach your children how to relate well to each other. Many verses speak specifically about how to treat people. The fact is that, if you tell your children that they should treat people outside of your home with love and respect, then the same should be true for the people in your home. Here are just a few passages to consider.

John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

Romans 12:10, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

1 John 2:10, “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.”

1 John 3:18, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

If one of your goals for your child is to have successful relationships with others, then it's imperative that you teach about how God calls us to live. Talk to your child about treating others with honor, extending grace to one another, showing kindness, and loving one another.

Be sure to model these behaviors in the relationships that you have in your own life. Ask yourself some of these questions. Are you patient with people? How do you treat those who are unkind to you? How do you talk to your children when you're upset? If you feel like you struggle with some of these things, then pray for God to help you demonstrate more love and kindness to others so that your children can grow in their relationships with others as well. Use every opportunity during these early elementary years to teach your children that God's Word is relevant to their lives right now. Principles from the Bible are the building blocks your children will need to rely on as they grow in their development, especially as they move into adolescence.

Developing healthy relating patterns takes time but it also takes a good plan. Here are some suggestions to help you do the training necessary for healthy sibling interaction.

1. Make sure children respect one another's words. For

example, when Jack is playing a teasing game with Jim, it may be fun for a while, but at some point Jim wants it to end. You might develop a Stop Rule in your family that ends the play when one person says “Stop.” Clearly identify that word “Stop” as the indicator that the game is over. If Jack doesn’t stop, then you, as the parent, need to step in to enforce the rule.

2. Talk to your kids regularly about relationships and make sure they understand what’s expected of them in regards to relating to one another. What’s your family’s plan for borrowing from one another? What’s the procedure when one child finds another doing the wrong thing? How do we manage sharing family items like the TV, the computer, and seating arrangements in the van? Clarifying family rules and procedures can go a long way to promote harmony in a family.

3. When you hear your children creating conflict or mismanaging themselves in relationships, stop and take the time to deal with it. You don’t have to talk to all the kids involved. You might take turns and talk with just one child at a time. For example, if your son and daughter are getting intense, you might just pull your son out of the playroom, debrief with him, and send him back in. If things continue, you might pull your daughter out and do the same thing. Determine what was wrong and teach your children how they should treat each other differently next time.

4. Monitor children more closely for a period of time if you sense a problem brewing. As parents, you’ll want to listen carefully to what your children are saying to each other so that you can help walk them through what is appropriate and what is not. As children spend time outside your home at school or in the neighborhood, they may

pick up vocabulary or relating styles that are unacceptable in your home. Be ready to catch these problems early and extinguish them quickly to avoid bad habits and unhealthy relating styles from developing.

5. Teach children how to deal with disagreements. Conflict between siblings will happen. It's inevitable, but when it does occur, it's critical that you're committed to taking the time to walk your children toward resolution. This often requires an apology. Instead of saying, "I'm sorry," it might be better to say, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" Children need to learn conflict management skills, so take the opportunity to teach about negotiation, compromise, humility, forgiveness, and offering grace.

Talk children through conflict and teach them how to work toward a resolution together. When stubbornness arises, give both parties some time to think and then bring them back together to work it out. When you communicate the importance of resolving conflict with one another, then you're teaching your children how to work things out and not just allow distance and bitterness to grow. You're protecting your children from long-term heartaches when you teach them that the relationships God puts in their lives are important. Resolving conflict is difficult even for many adults. By taking the time to teach your children how to resolve conflict during these early elementary years, you're teaching them a skill that they'll use for the rest of their lives.

It's the hope of many parents to watch their children grow up and have close relationships with each other. If you have a sibling that you're close to, then you know how much work it takes. There's no doubt that sometimes it seems easier to move on and not put in the effort required

for a successful relationship. However, the benefits far outweigh the work necessary. And once children learn to work out problems with each other, they also possess the tools necessary to deal with relationships outside the home as well.

A decorative graphic featuring the number 14 in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The number is centered and surrounded by elegant, flowing, light-gray scrollwork and swirls that extend across the top and sides of the page.

14

Building a Strong Spiritual Foundation

Building a strong spiritual foundation in your home can provide stability and direction for your whole family. In the early elementary years, a strong spiritual foundation offers your child the necessary building blocks for moving into the next stages of development. But maybe you wonder, “How do I teach my child how to live a Christian life when I’m just figuring it out on my own?” or “How do I know where to start?” or “What if I don’t know the Bible myself?” or “Isn’t taking my kids to church enough?” Although these are all great questions, nowhere in the Bible does it say that you need to understand all there is to know about God before you share it with someone else. Remember that God loves you and he loves your child. Just like an infant learns to walk one step at a time, you can begin building a strong spiritual foundation in your home, one baby step at a time.

The first layer in building a strong spiritual foundation is for you to be spiritually transparent so that your family will get to know God more. That simply means that you look for ways to talk about the Lord and share spiritually

with others. Sometimes that's a prayer here, or a reference to the Bible there, but often it's just talking about God as a normal part of your daily life.

It's important to know and remember that God's ultimate desire is to build a relationship with you and your child. One of his deepest desires is to spend time with you. James 4:8 says, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." You can do that every day as you drive kids around, take care of household chores, or simply engage your kids in dialogue. Keep God a part of the conversation.

Relationships take energy, time, and commitment. As you get to know a friend, your relationship begins to grow. The same is true of your relationship with the Lord. Spend time as a family talking about God's goodness, who he is, and how much he loves each member of your family. Even if someone living in your home doesn't know God personally, that shouldn't stop you from sharing. After all, your relationship with God is part of who you are.

As your child navigates through these early elementary years, rough days will come along. If a hill seems too high for your child to climb, pray together. Ask God to give your child the strength needed to get through the rough patch. Now's a good time to teach your child to pray out loud if you haven't started that already. When your child does well on a test, praise God for it together! At bedtime read a devotion or a passage in the Bible. You don't need to have a seminary degree to help your child develop a strong relationship with the Lord. Begin building a strong spiritual foundation for your kids by taking the time and making the commitment to be more transparent with your own spiritual life.

Some parents spend time growing spiritually on their

own but don't share their spirituality with their kids. Sure, they pray before meals and bedtime, and take their kids to church, but the daily integration of their faith isn't there. It's as if spirituality is a private matter. Deuteronomy 11:18-20 says, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 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. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." There's something about walking with God in family life that provides a vehicle for the transfer of values and truths, and also helps kids understand practically what it means to have a relationship with God.

Personal faith is important, but even if every member of the family has a personal faith, there's something about sharing that faith with each other that draws you closer as a family. The old adage "the family that prays together stays together" has a lot of merit because a strong spiritual foundation in a home produces a depth of relationship that exceeds any other thing that you can do in family life.

Remember that building a strong spiritual foundation takes time. You'll never be at a place where you have all of the answers. It's God's desire that you will be constantly reaching out to grow closer to him. Continue to draw near to him and allow him to walk you and your family through each and every day as you strive to teach your child more about him.



Spiritual Needs in the Early Elementary Years

Kids have important questions running around in their hearts. Many times they don't even know how to phrase them. By understanding what they're thinking and posing biblical answers to the most important questions of life, you strengthen their hearts, build confidence, and encourage their faith.

Who am I and why am I here? A person's view of self is very important because it guides much of the decision-making of daily life. As you help your son recognize that he's a creation of God, designed uniquely, empowered specifically, and endowed with gifts unlike others, you contribute to a sense of inner peace, confidence, and identity. Teaching children about God's plans, desires, and creation gives kids a sense of security. They begin to trust that God is always available to help, that he's in control, and that his Word is true.

Another question has to do with where I belong and how I fit in. Helping children recognize their uniqueness, talents, abilities, and gifts is important. The elementary years are often a time of exploration into various new in-

terests. As kids are allowed to explore areas of personal creativity, they begin to see that they have something to offer. They recognize more how they fit into God's bigger picture of life. It's helpful for children to be serving God at church and other places.

Paul describes an important lesson that your child would benefit from. He says in 1 Corinthians 12:14-18, "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

This isn't a passage that's just for grownups. Your child now can recognize her part in God's kingdom program. It often starts with service in his church. You might look for ways to serve in the children's ministry or help with setup and take down, or provide refreshments. All of that is serving the Lord and kids can learn how to do it early.

Spiritual development takes place as children learn more about trust, that God forgives, and that mistakes are okay because they're often learning experiences. During the elementary years, kids often realize that they belong to God and that he created them and appreciates them for who they are, not just for what they do. However, what they do is important to God, and he empowers people to do important things for him.

It's often helpful to talk about the many stories in the

Bible that involve children to demonstrate the value of spiritual commitment now, not just when you grow up. Jesus used a boy's lunch to feed 5,000 people (John 6:9), Josiah was a boy king who brought spiritual reform to Israel (2 Chronicles 34:1), Samuel began to listen to the voice of the Lord as a child (1 Samuel 3:11), David was just a shepherd boy when God called him to be king and when he fought Goliath (1 Samuel 16:13). God starts young when calling his heroes. It's important for children to listen to the voice of God now, and he often speaks through parents to get his message across.

It's during the elementary years that children begin to form their picture of God and who he is. Not only is he the creator, judge, and Sovereign King, but also Jesus teaches us that he wants to know us as Father. That means discipline, comfort, and providing hope. It means coaching, caring, and offering directions. The things you share about the Bible or ways that you talk about God are important because they communicate a father that wants a personal relationship. Be sure to describe God in ways that make that personal relationship desirable. If you primarily use the Bible in correction or only emphasize the fact that God hates sin, for example, kids might not understand how a close relationship with God is possible. Take time to emphasize the fact that God is compassionate, desires our best, leads us, and empowers us to do what's right.

Spiritual development in a child impacts many other areas of life. So, take time to think about how your child might need some particular teaching to help bring other areas into perspective. Integrating spirituality into life is important for healthy development of the heart and for comprehensive and holistic growth in a child's life. The

child who struggles with fears needs to understand what trust is in practical terms. When conflict in relationships is a challenge, God has solutions. When children lack confidence or are arrogant, a clear understanding of God's perspective is important.

Kids don't just need a Bible verse, however, to solve their problems. What they need is to actually reframe their thinking in the challenges that they face. Some would call it a Biblical worldview. Essentially, children need to understand what the Bible says and then learn how to apply it to their lives in ways that change their thinking and their approach. That takes work. In fact, many adults find it a challenge, but if you can start early with your child in this approach to life, they will do much better at developing habits and tendencies of thinking and acting that will benefit them far into the future.

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, swirling lines in shades of gray, creating a sense of movement and elegance. The number 16 is centered within this graphic.

16

Moral Development and Spiritual Sensitivity

As your child grows and develops, you'll want to encourage wise personal decision-making. In its simplest form, God wants us to make wise choices. Your kids make many decisions every day. Some of those are quite significant. Do they do what their friends do even when it's not wise? Will they cheat on a test if it means a better grade? Will they lie if doing so can avoid getting into trouble?

Healthy moral development takes place as children become more sensitive to right and wrong. As they're faced with opportunity to choose between good and bad, wise or foolish, and right and wrong, they build patterns that help them as they experience greater temptations in life. Being strong in the face of temptation isn't easy, and some children may need remedial work to bring them up to an appropriate level in their moral development.

Talking to your kids daily about choices will help them learn to listen to the voice of God in their own hearts. They'll learn that sometimes the hard choice is better because it's actually God's will for their life. Ask your child

detailed questions about the day so that you hear about opportunities for good decision-making. When your child makes the wise choice, talk about why it was wise. In fact, when a child is doing well, a great question to ask is “What is your secret to success in this area?” Children say things and do things every day that have lasting ramifications.

Mom was working with Karen on her relationship with her younger brother. Karen often got angry with him and reacted to his teasing. But this day was different. She seemed more able to relate to Jimmy in the van without getting upset. Mom said, “Karen, I appreciate the way you handled Jimmy today in the car. What’s your secret to success?”

Karen thought for a moment and said, “I realized that I don’t want to allow him to get me upset. It’s just not worth it, so I ignored him and he seemed to leave me alone.” Mom then had opportunity to affirm Karen’s thinking and her approach.

If your child doesn’t make the right choice, take time to talk about why, and then talk about how he could make a better choice next time. In most cases making wise choices doesn’t happen overnight. The reality is that most children experience the same temptations over and over again. They need plans for the next times of life. So don’t simply focus on what the child did wrong, but instead talk about what better choice to make next time.

In order for children to know right from wrong they need a standard. That’s one of the reasons that regularly reading God’s Word is so important. God makes it clear that there is a right and a wrong, and a discussion of Bible stories often makes a strong impact. Another way to help children comprehend right from wrong is with firmness,

rules, and clear expectations. When a child is doing the right thing, he can feel good about it. When he's doing the wrong thing, parents can step in and take firm action. Giving a consequence or taking a stand when your child has done wrong teaches kids about the line between good and evil.

As children grow in their ability to discern right from wrong, the conscience begins to develop into a useful tool. In addition, children can learn to listen to the voice of God in their hearts. As you study stories from the Bible, talk about how people made decisions to do the right thing even when it was hard. David chose to fight Goliath because he realized that Goliath was doing the wrong thing by talking bad about God and his people. Daniel decided to pray because it was the right thing to do even though the king created an order against it.

Psalms 119:9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." Children develop moral integrity when they exercise a strong conscience, get God's Word into their hearts, and learn to listen to the voice of God. Parents are often the hands and feet that help children develop convictions and a deeper understanding of what's right and what's wrong.

Closely aligned with moral development is spiritual sensitivity. God guides and directs us every day. That's not just a truth for adults. It's also important for children to learn to listen to the voice of the Lord in their lives. Regular times of prayer, reading God's Word, and talking about applying spiritual truths to everyday life often produce a spiritual sensitivity. However, one of the greatest tools for helping children listen to the Lord is your own spiritual transparency. Talk about what God is saying to you and

how he prompts you in your own decisions. Kids often need to see spirituality lived out in the lives of adults in order to grasp it for their own lives.

Affirm God's work in your child's heart. When God speaks to you through your child, take a moment and share what happened. One dad said, "I told my son that his thoughtfulness with his sister was so kind that it prompted me to think about my own need to work on kindness. God used him in my life to give me a gentle nudge, and I wanted to listen to the Lord working in me through my son. My son beamed as I affirmed him, and I'm convinced he got a glimpse of God working." It's that kind of interaction that often helps children catch a vision for developing a personal, interactive relationship with God for themselves.



Spiritual Milestones

One of the greatest gifts parents can give to their kids to prepare them to be successful in life is an active, realistic, and relevant faith. It starts when children are young and it grows as they get older. One of the keys is to help kids realize that God wants a personal relationship with them now, not just when they get older. Does your child believe that the Bible is relevant now or does she believe that the Bible will be relevant when she gets to be an adult? Does your son believe that he has a spiritual gift and can be used by God to serve now or does he believe that he has to be older to serve the Lord?

By engaging children in an active faith early in their lives, you give them a spiritual lens through which they'll integrate much of their understanding. You might point out to your child that adults have spiritual things to learn from kids. Jesus said in Matthew 18:2-3, "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' " And Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example

for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” Clearly, faith is for those who are young as well as those who are older.

It’s valuable to encourage a child to invite Christ into his life early on and to remind children that everyone must make that choice independently. Even if your child has not made a profession of faith, you can still do a lot of teaching about walking with Christ and even model what that looks like as a family. Some parents wait to teach spiritual growth until kids make a commitment to Christ. It’s often better to treat children as if they’re believers, show them what it means to be Christians, and practice daily spirituality with them while at the same time inviting them to make that personal commitment for themselves.

For example, children can practice praying and learn to pray no matter where they are in their walk with God. You might ask your child to pray for you as you go to work for an important meeting. Furthermore, you might ask your child to share with you something learned from the Bible, recognizing that God speaks to children and, when he does, he might reveal something important to pass on to you as well. To avoid the appearance of hypocrisy, by encouraging spiritual activity before a child has made a formal commitment to Christ, you might just ask the question occasionally about your child’s decision to follow Jesus. Some children who grow up in a Christian home don’t point to a specific day or time of conversion but see it as having developed over time because of the spiritual nurture of loving parents.

God works in a person’s life in a number of ways. Those ways are personal and specific. What is your child’s spiritual gift? How is God speaking to your child through the

Bible? What passions or convictions is God placing on your child's heart? As you get to know your child in this way, you demonstrate an appreciation and respect for God's individual work.

It's often helpful to talk about and encourage baptism and communion during the elementary years. Some parents choose to postpone baptism and communion until the early teens and view those as events to look forward to. Others encourage participation in the Lord's Table and baptism earlier and then teach children what it looks like to live a godly life as a result of those external commitments. Either of those is fine and both approaches require discussion and teaching about those spiritual milestones. Each developmental stage requires that children come to a new appreciation of their faith. Some children may have a tendency to think they're growing out of their faith if they see it too closely associated with an earlier developmental stage. Your ongoing discussion and application of faith to the current stage helps your child grow into faith instead of growing out of it.

Thus, each developmental stage often benefits from a spiritual milestone. During the elementary years, baptism and communion are often those milestones that continue to mark the path of spiritual growth in a child's life. You might do a children's Bible study on baptism and communion to help children gain a greater appreciation of these personal expressions of their faith.

During the early elementary years children learn how to read and they love to have books read aloud to them. Be sure to take time and read the Bible and even have your child read the Bible for herself. To make this most effective, find a children's Bible that helps kids see that the

scriptures are relevant and practical for them right now. There are many good children's Bibles. The National Center for Biblical Parenting has chosen several Bibles that are appropriate for children at various developmental stages. You might even teach children how to highlight their own Bible and choose specific verses to memorize.

You don't need to know all of the answers to build a strong spiritual foundation for your family. Take small steps and mark out spiritual milestones for your child. Remember that God's ultimate desire is to have a relationship with you. Make the time and commit to recognize Christ as part of your everyday life. Talk to your child about how God influences the choices you make. Walk the journey of the spiritual life together. Your kids will learn what it means to follow Christ in practical ways because of your example.



The Importance of Heroes

God has placed within the human heart a desire for justice, a sensitivity to right and wrong, and a compassion for others. That's one of the reasons people are attracted to stories where the good guy wins, the bad guy loses, and the damsel is rescued from her distress. At the center of it all is the hero, who has the respect of others and the integrity to do what's right even under pressure.

The love for heroes is the natural response of an internal growth of the conscience inside of a child. The conscience is an important tool for maneuvering through the challenges of life. In fact, Paul instructs young Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:18-19 to fight the good fight, "holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith."

During the elementary years several developmental paths converge to allow children to understand and enhance conscience development. A greater perception of right and wrong allows children to choose right and avoid wrong, not just for fear of punishment, but because it's the right thing to do. Some children choose to do what's right simply to avoid getting in trouble. It's helpful for these chil-

dren to read what God says in Romans 13:5, "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience."

According to the Bible, the conscience prompts us in four areas. Interestingly enough, those four things are the same things that make heroes so attractive. They do what's right, deal with wrongs, are honest, and they care about others. When Paul was called before the Sanhedrin to account for his activities he said to them in Acts 23:1, "I have fulfilled my duty before God in all good conscience to this day." Paul was saying that his conscience prompted him to do what's right.

In the same way, you can help your child become internally motivated by talking about the conscience and teaching children to pay attention to its promptings. The reality is that a child's greatest reward isn't more video time or a piece of candy for doing what Mom asks. The best reward is the internal knowledge that you've done the right thing. Conversely, when you've done the wrong thing, it's important to deal with it so that you don't have to live with a guilty conscience. The reality is that God forgives us for sin and the daily discipline of parents as they work with their children may give a consequence, but also must end with a positive conclusion so that the child can move forward, putting the past behind and receiving the forgiveness for the offense. In many ways, parents model God's role in a child's life as they carry out discipline, addressing wrongs, encouraging what's right, caring about others, and demonstrating honesty and integrity.

Of course, some children feel perfectly comfortable doing something that's wrong. Their consciences may be at peace getting revenge, telling a lie, or playing the villain

instead of the hero. That's the sign of a weak conscience that needs training. After all, the conscience isn't the ultimate authority in a person's life. The scriptures are. The conscience looks for a standard and needs convictions and values to mold its effectiveness. That's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:4, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me." The conscience is most valuable when it's trained by the convictions of God's Word.

At points you will see the conscience in action in your child. When your son goes over to comfort the baby without being asked, that's internal motivation coming from the conscience. It's an internal obligation to help others in need, to care for someone who needs help. When your daughter comes to confess that she accidentally broke the ornament in the living room, that's the conscience at work, dealing with a wrong.

When you see evidence of a sensitive conscience then take time to talk about it. Affirm the internal motivation and talk about the fact that God made your child with a conscience that's growing more sensitive every day.

Remember that the primary purpose of the conscience is to point us to God and our need for salvation. It's quite common for children to be receptive to the gospel message during the ages of five to eight because of the active work of the conscience in their lives. They recognize their need for a hero to come and rescue them from the damage that sin causes and to empower them to do what's right. That hero God calls a savior, and children can understand that Jesus is more than simply a good teacher or a man who does miracles. He is a personal savior for all of those who are sensitive enough to receive him into their lives.

You'll have plenty of opportunity to talk about the conscience with your child as life unfolds around you. Movies have heroes that overcome evil with good. Newspaper stories often feature good Samaritans who step out of their comfort zone to help others. And friends make choices that are right or wrong depending on the strength of the conscience. As you help your child understand the intricate ways that God has built a person, you'll empower your child to not only do what's right, but also to draw closer to God who desires to help your child become a hero in life as well.

Heroes start small in the simple things of life. Remembering to feed the dog, or taking initiative to clean up the living room, are initial signs of heroic qualities. Teach your child what it means to be a hero in the small things of life and he'll be ready when God asks him to be a hero in things that are much bigger.

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19

Helping Your Child Be a Strong Student

Several key ingredients encourage success in education. Once children leave kindergarten, the expectations quickly grow from sitting quietly in circle time to spending the day moving from one subject to the next at a fairly rapid pace. While children were once applauded for their ability to recognize colors and shapes, they're now expected to read and do more complex educational tasks. Some children make the adjustments well, but others have a harder time, and it doesn't necessarily have to do with intelligence. Some very bright children do poorly at school because they're bored, stressed in other areas, or simply aren't motivated.

Whether your schooling choice is public school, home-school, or private school, you'll want to think about your child's heart development as a priority. It's not so much a child's IQ that increases ability to succeed in school, but CQ (Character Quotient) that helps a child do well. The good news is that you can use the school experience as exercise for the heart to help your child build the internal structures to do well.

Three things that help children do well in school are organizational skills, character, and a love for learning. Organizational skills help a child keep track of assignments and ensure that they're turned in. Character, such as respect for authority, attentiveness, diligence, and self-control, is essential. And a love for learning propels a child forward with an internal motivation to do well and increase knowledge, skills, and understanding. Most school problems can be traced back to a lack of one of these things, resulting in discouragement on the part of the child and then a spiral into a lack of hope.

The good news is that you can work on all of those heart qualities at home and view school as a place to practice. Even children with differences in learning styles, brain development issues, and emotional challenges can be successful. You'll likely focus on reading, math facts, spelling words, and science concepts but those are all secondary to the heart qualities necessary for achievement.

Character enables kids to hang in there even when they don't feel like it. At home, you can practice completing a task as if on a special mission, providing work and chores that must be completed before playtime or entertainment, and coaching your child to stay on a task longer. Too much pressure can cause discouragement, but pushing a child to new levels of determination will provide the stretching necessary for growth.

Some children just don't know how or don't want to work hard. Their desire to be comfortable, be entertained, and be happy is greater than the feeling of responsibility and the desire to complete a job well. The solution is often more work. There's nothing like hard work to develop an ability to work hard. That may mean that you work with

your child to rake leaves, clean floors, or straighten the house. It's often easier to do it yourself, but remember that requiring your child to participate, exercises heart muscles necessary for success.

Organizational skills keep things in order and set up systems for remembering to complete jobs. Even young children can learn to remember to feed the dog, make a bed, or water plants. The key is setting up some kind of mental system, and it's important that the child participate in the development of the plan. You likely have a lot of ideas for organization and those are helpful to share, but then ask, "What ideas are you going to use to keep yourself organized?" Parents who assume that kids can't remember, often do the work of parental organization and the child may or may not absorb the heart quality necessary. Children then overly rely on parents to keep them moving and kids don't learn how to manage themselves. The reality is that organization takes extra time and thoughtfulness, two things children often skip. When it comes to schoolwork, help your child develop a good system for keeping track of assignments and turning them in, and then you can just oversee the plan and provide accountability.

A love for learning is a gift you'll give your child that will last a lifetime. Sometimes that comes with the thrill of discovery or learning new and interesting things. Other times it comes with the internal satisfaction of mastery, being able to remember math facts, spelling words, or answers to a quiz. Take time to celebrate the victories by talking about the internal satisfaction that comes from applying oneself. It's more motivating to a child to receive praise for accomplishment than criticism for not measuring up. So, look for ways to highlight progress when you

see it.

Encourage curiosity. The structure of academics is necessary but the fun of learning often comes with spontaneous exploration. Allow your kids the opportunity to explore and experiment and empower their internal curiosity to lead.

When it comes to academics, kids must master some basic fundamentals in order to do well in other areas. Reading and math facts are high on the list. If your daughter can't read, it would be a wise investment of your time to read to, and with, her. Kids need practice in order to gain mastery. You don't have to be a reading teacher. Just practice reading a couple of times a day in order to exercise the mind and build the necessary skills to read.

Even in an age of computers and calculators, kids need to memorize math facts. Having these facts in memory gives kids confidence in their schoolwork and will be practical later in life as well. The best way to memorize math facts is with small steps of practice. You might take two math facts, such as $3 + 2$ and $5 + 4$, and go over them several times during one day. The next day take two new ones. The solution isn't to use your fingers to add up the numbers. It's best to simply remember the solution. "When I say $5 + 4$, what do you say?" If you take two math facts a day and practice with your child, you'll see significant retention over time. Of course, you'll have to review and revisit the ones you've learned, but that's how memory is strengthened.

Close connection with the school and your child's teacher will give you helpful indications of things to work on at home. Catching a deficiency early is easier to address than a problem that develops over a long period of

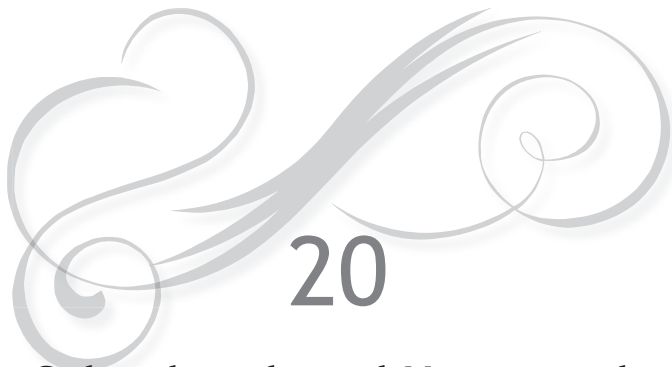
time. Although children all learn a bit differently, they can also develop skills to help them succeed in a classroom environment that isn't exactly equipped to teach according to their preferred style. Adaptation is part of success and often requires the development of new skills. Identifying those skills and practicing them at home better equips a child for the classroom.

Some children have a hard time processing auditory instructions and need work to learn how to listen, not just pay attention. Others find it challenging to decode words when reading or recalling sight words, maybe indicating that your child has more trouble with visual processing. You may want to practice with flashcards or writing instead of speaking instructions at home for your child. Some children have a hard time with material that's timed. They have a slower processing speed than others and feel overwhelmed under pressure. You might practice with exercises at home to increase a child's ability to take in information and then use it quickly.

Once you have a better understanding of your child's specific needs, then you can begin to research and practice ways to strengthen those areas. For some children, all they need is a little extra help to give them a boost. Other children will need continual help as they move through elementary school and may require some further testing or supplemental assistance.

Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." If God has blessed you with a child that struggles in school, teach him to run with perseverance as he works through each task. Perseverance is the ability to hang in there when you feel like quitting. The truth is, regardless of whether or not your child is a straight

'A' student or has to work hard in every subject just to earn a passing grade, God has a purpose and a plan for your child and you can use every victory and every struggle to help your child learn of God's love.



Schoolwork and Homework Routines

Once your child has entered the elementary years, it doesn't take long before schoolwork becomes part of the daily routine. Whether your child is homeschooled, or in public or private school, working on subjects at home is a reality. Homework is one of those things that can quickly take over your life if you're not careful. It doesn't matter if your child does well in school or struggles academically, schoolwork can often bring a great deal of stress to the home environment. One thing you can count on is that working on schoolwork will be a regular part of family life, so it's best to establish and maintain good work habits.

Develop clear guidelines so your child knows what you expect in regards to homework. Be consistent and hang in there! Your diligence to develop a strong homework routine in this early elementary stage of development can provide many of the skills necessary for the future.

One of the scripture verses that applies directly to homework and schoolwork is Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive

an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." Even elementary age children can view their work at school as a part of their relationship and commitment to Christ. It's not just about getting the job done as fast as possible. It's also about the way the job looks when it's done and the process of how the work is accomplished. All of those things make a successful homework time.

Remember that working on homework is more than just getting the tasks done. It's teaching character. Kids learn how to organize their time, how to be thorough with their work, how to keep track of their assignments and turn them in, and how to solve problems and communicate the answers. Your continual effort on homework actually teaches your child life skills that will be used well into adulthood. Here are some practical ideas for you as you help your child prepare for success in this area.

Set aside a space for homework. Choose an area free of distractions. Possibly have your child help you select a place each day or have the same, set area. If you have several kids at home, be thoughtful about what arrangement would be most productive. All together at one table, in separate areas of the house, or in their individual rooms are choices to consider. In these early elementary years, your child will usually be more successful if you're close by to give assistance when needed. However, be careful not to do too much for your child because you also want to encourage independent thinking.

You'll want to establish a designated time for homework. Decide when your child is going to do homework each day. Children are much more successful when they know what's expected in the scheduling department. One

suggestion would be to allow your child to come home from school, have a quick snack, and then get started on homework. You'll have to determine whether a brief playtime is necessary to expend energy before starting homework, or whether homework must be completed before playtime.

As your child moves to first and second grade, homework can become a bit more challenging and take more time to complete. Often kids at this age will grow upset when the homework is taking too long or is difficult. Be encouraging! Your child can do it! In fact, it's in these moments, when children resist or complain, that character can grow. Be firm but don't be harsh. Don't allow your frustration to dominate the homework time. Children often need parental control in order to build the self-control necessary for success in their studies.

Guide the use of breaks. Sometimes short breaks can relieve tension. However, homework can quickly grow to be an all-night event if breaks get out of hand. You might just encourage your child to take a deep breath and continue.

Talk about expectations for homework. In fact, your expectations may exceed those of the teacher. Require homework to be done completely and neatly. Always encourage your child to do his or her best. Once homework is complete, make sure all the materials are put away and the work is packed up and ready to go for the next day.

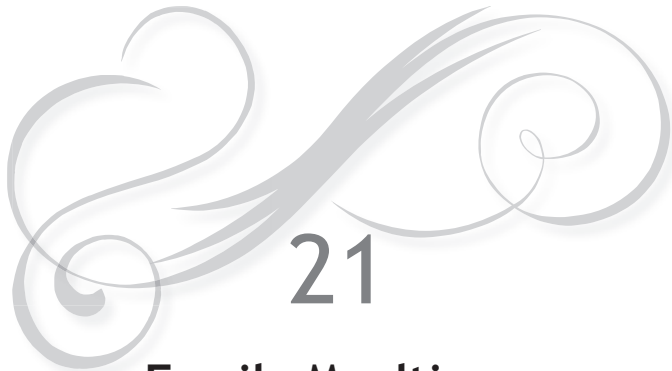
If your child goes to a sitter or afterschool program before coming home, then check to see if there's a homework room available. Make sure your child's a part of that, and then take time to go over the homework together when you get home.

If you find yourself constantly running after school

from one event to the next, you might want to equip your car with the necessary materials so that homework can begin as you wait for the game or practice to start.

If homework is taking too long, evaluate your routine. Is the homework routine efficient and free of distractions? Look around. Is the television on? Is your child getting up and down to sharpen a pencil or grab a snack? If you still feel that homework is taking too long, keep a journal for a few days and see if you can identify the problems. You might have a pep talk to identify study skills. Maybe your child needs to develop some character in the area of determination and thoroughness. Schoolwork and homework are the therapy your child needs to build lasting strength. If things still aren't going well, take advantage of the resources at the school and talk to the teacher or counselors for more specific advice.

Remember that not all families are on the same schedule, nor do they have the same routine. The key is to have a plan and then work your plan. Your organization and consistency at this stage in your child's life will be a huge benefit as your child grows and develops.



Family Mealtimes

If you do it well, sitting down as a family to eat a meal has an amazingly positive effect on family life. Unfortunately, some parents view the primary purpose of eating together as a time to teach kids about healthy food choices. Others see mealtimes as the opportunity to teach manners and proper etiquette. Although these goals are important, eating together provides an opportunity for building strong, significant relationships in your family, and that is the best priority for your family mealtime. Even if not everyone can make it to every meal, sitting down together provides a great opportunity for developing closeness.

So where do you begin? Let's take a look at some realistic goals and ideas that can move your family mealtime from "meat and potatoes" to a focus on relationships. First, you'll have to figure out how to plan so that your family can sit down and eat together. Daily routines and crazy schedules can make a common mealtime a challenge.

If you're a parent who works full-time, consider scheduling specific nights where you'll sit down together to eat, talk, and pray. This often requires advance planning. The key is to not get discouraged if you can't eat together every

night. Do the best you can. Talk to some other working parents and get meal ideas, use a crockpot, or consider looking up quick meal planning tips online. If you have a child who's involved in outside activities after school, then take some time over the weekend to look at the week ahead and plan time for your family to make mealtimes happen. Remember that mealtime does not need to be fancy. There's nothing wrong with having a hot dog night or a pizza party. The goal is spending time together.

Make the meal a time when electronics are not invited. The TV distracts from meaningful interaction and headphones isolate the individuals. Cell phone activity via texting or phone calls should be left to a minimum. If it's too tempting, then maybe everyone should check their electronics at the door to further emphasize the importance of the family together time.

Think about the seating arrangement strategically. Instead of Mom and Dad sitting together at one end, it might be helpful to put one parent between kids that tend to bicker or move Dad or Mom more toward the center of the table to help encourage the dialogue.

Plan the social component of the meal, not just the menu. You might read a passage of scripture such as one of the parables. The "Parable of the Sower" in Matthew 13:3-9 is a great story that shares the importance of having a soft heart toward God's Word. You might then share with your family how the Lord is working in your life. Talk about how he's working in your child's life and praise him together for how he's operating in your family. What an amazing opportunity for you to have with your kids.

Not all conversation needs to be spiritual in nature. Just talking about the day, what people are learning, and

telling stories that might be interesting to others, strengthens your family identity. This time in your child's life will be gone before you know it. Make the most of every moment with your kids. Laugh and enjoy life together as you sit around the table.

Look for ways to make mealtime fun. Here are some simple ideas and conversation starters you can use to build strong relationships as you eat together. Take turns going around the table and sharing one thing that the Lord has done that day. This is a great way to place your family focus on the Lord, giving him credit for the events of the day.

Have each person go around the table and share one "high" and one "low" from his or her day. Often when kids are asked, "How was your day?" they give a one-word answer. Be specific with your questions so you don't allow for a one-word response. Or, go around and share one thing you appreciate about someone else at the table.

The good news is that you don't need to be a good chef to have a great mealtime with your family. Remember that the goal of eating together as a family is not the meal itself but rather the time it provides your family to sit down together and talk. In some families everyone inhales their food and leaves as quickly as possible. If this is your story, then your planning to make the social time a bit more interesting and enjoyable will pay off. Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Take small steps to try and encourage your family to communicate and share together. Set a small goal to have just a bit of fun or engage people in dialogue a little bit more than usual. Building a strong relational family unit that moves beyond food takes time. Pray for God's help and

wisdom as you look for new ways to impact mealtimes in your home.

Helping Children to Develop a Healthy and Active Lifestyle

Developing a healthy lifestyle starts in childhood. Good exercise and diet increases a positive attitude, reduces stress, helps address weight issues, and generally contributes to good overall health. Teaching your child healthy eating habits and encouraging an active lifestyle at a young age is a key element in your child's overall development.

Opportunities for organized sports and recreational activities abound for children. Enrolling your child in a team sport is a great way to encourage exercise. For those who are less interested in soccer or baseball, then martial arts, swimming, gymnastics, or dance may be a good alternative. Practicing those activities then at home gives further opportunity to exercise muscles and get outdoors. Limiting electronics and allowing children to have outdoor play equipment can further motivate them to be active.

One of the side benefits of a sports hobby for your child is the opportunity for you to get out and work on your own fitness. Kicking the soccer ball or playing catch is an excuse for good adult exercise as well. You might also

encourage family activity by taking a walk after dinner, visiting a park, running some races at a local track, or taking a family hike. Doing these types of activities together not only helps to encourage active living, but they also provide your family with valuable time together.

Another part of developing a healthy, active lifestyle is to encourage good eating habits in your home. Sometimes parents feel overwhelmed by the thought of having to find ways to prepare healthy meals and snacks for their families, especially when children resist or refuse to eat the things you make for them. Be careful about ruining a mealtime by overemphasizing healthy eating. The primary goal of the mealtime is the social interaction, so keep things light and fun as much as possible.

The best way to get kids to eat healthy is to eliminate unhealthy options. If you get rid of the cookies, chips, crackers, ice cream, and candy as regular parts of the diet, then children are left with fruits, vegetables, yogurt, nuts, and granola bars for snacks. It's amazing what children will eat when they're hungry and there aren't any other alternatives. If you remove soft drinks from the options and offer milk or water, then you can simply say, "We don't have any soft drinks" instead of battling with them over the choices. Look for ways to avoid fat, processed foods, and too much sugar. Great cookbooks are available that encourage healthy eating for kids. Developing a healthy food program is good for the whole family, and children adjust when they don't have a stash of sweets to snack on between meals.

Breakfast is often considered to be the most important meal of the day, because it helps jumpstart digestion and metabolism. Adding eggs or other protein can help children

have the necessary energy to get through their morning.

Some children have food allergies that add irritations to their lives. With so many food choices available today, it's important to provide kids with good alternatives. As they learn to focus on what they can eat instead of what creates problems for them, they'll enjoy eating more.

Talk about health and nutrition. It's not just about rules. It's about fuel for your body, maximizing its potential, and keeping it well-tuned. Those who invest in good health often enjoy life more and experience great benefits such as balanced energy, better sleep, and strong muscles.

When children make healthy eating and exercise a regular part of their lives, they not only reap the benefits of a leaner body, stronger bones and muscles, improved posture, and better coordination, but they find it easier to concentrate in school and tend to have a better outlook on life. You don't have to put your child through a rigorous workout routine. The point is to make sure that your child is living a balanced life that includes exercise and healthy eating habits in addition to enjoying some of the other more sedentary activities that are readily available.

It's okay for your family to enjoy ice cream or have a couple of cookies every once in a while. It's best, however, if those are occasional treats and not readily available in the cupboard on a daily basis. If your child tends to be a bit overweight, you don't have to emphasize the weight, but instead emphasize a healthy lifestyle. The best way to lose weight is to change the way you live. Those who focus on the scale tend to lose weight and then gain it back. Those who live a healthy lifestyle are far more effective at keeping the weight off because they've made healthy shifts in the way they live every day.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us that God is concerned about our bodies. He says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." Living a healthy lifestyle is a spiritual discipline that requires adults and children to be deliberate in the choices they make. Take the time necessary during these early elementary years to develop strong patterns in your family that will build good habits for the future.

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23

Framing Your Child's Perception

Jonathan was a young boy who was quite small for his age. He went through his early elementary years having many people tell him “how cute” he was. He’d often hear people say to his mom and dad, “How old is he?” or comment, “He’s so little.” As he moved through kindergarten and first grade it was not uncommon for Jonathan to be picked up by his peers, something they considered fun. Jonathan began to ask why he was so small and sometimes felt discouraged. Mom and Dad would remind him that some of the best things come in small packages and they were certain that God had big plans for him. This was a conversation that occurred often with Jonathan as he moved through kindergarten and first grade.

As Jonathan began second grade his size didn’t change much, but his heart sure did. The little boy began to grow in his confidence and seemed to be proud of the “little guy” God had made. Jonathan began to see that he could do a lot of things that others could not because of his size. Jonathan, having turned eight years old, developed the tendency to think “outside the box.” It was this year that he asked for a pair of stilts and a unicycle for his birthday. Be-

lieve it or not, with much perseverance he mastered both skills and became the thrill of his neighborhood friends when he came out to practice. Jonathan continues to find new and exciting ways to live life, and is now talking of his dream to open a candy shop like no other when he gets older.

Jonathan's parents helped him view his uniqueness as a gift from God and equipped him to think about how God might use him in special ways. It's never too early to begin encouraging your child to become all that God has created him to be. No one is really sure if Jonathan will open up a candy shop, but there's no doubt that he knows that God can use him in a mighty way.

Psalm 139:13-16 says, "You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." God does not make mistakes. He has carefully and thoughtfully created the child that he has placed in your life. Your child is part of God's unique design and his hope and desire is that she will grow to follow him with all of her heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Look for ways to see weaknesses in your child as strengths that need some molding and care. For example, the child who tends to get angry easily often has more emotional sensitivity than others, allowing him to pick up on emotional cues in situations as well. That's a gift, and recognizing emotional sensitivity as a good thing may be just what your child needs to get a handle on the anger

management.

Or, the child who tends to have a messy bedroom may be flexible and easy going, a great quality when one must adjust to a fast-paced schedule or interruptions to the routine. On the other hand, the child who likes order and neatness may have a harder time when interruptions require a quick change in plans. In either case, children can see their gifts and uniqueness as strengths that need complementing heart qualities in order to be successful.

It doesn't take long before the personality of a child becomes clear. As a parent, you quickly discover that your child is outgoing, shy, quiet, loud, funny, or serious. The Bible says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." (Jeremiah 1:5) Your child can honor God no matter what personality traits God has given. As you walk through these early elementary years with your child, look for ways to guide personality to glorify the Lord. You might say, "I can tell you work hard. That's going to help you be a good employee when you get older." Or, "I enjoy watching you look out for the dog. I see that you have the qualities that will make a good dad someday."

This kind of framing is so helpful for children because it gives them a positive vision for their lives. Children during these years tend to think more concretely about the here-and-now. They don't have enough life experience to realize that things will get better with their frustration level, or that they'll stop making so many mistakes. Your words can do a lot to help them envision a positive future. The reality is that God is at work in your child's life and the daily interactions in a family are part of a bigger plan.

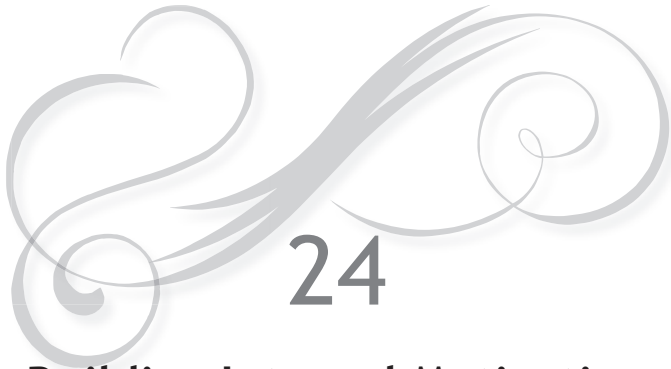
You'll want to avoid several mistakes parents make

out of frustration. Comparing your child to others inside and outside the family is rarely helpful. Focusing on your child's problem without talking about the solution is often the cause for discouragement. Showing irritation and anger at a child's lack of progress and making unkind comments can do more damage than parents realize.

Your child relies on your perception of life and your words of encouragement to gain an inner sense of God's work and a greater confidence that life is moving forward in a positive way. You might take time to study your child, asking questions that not only give you answers, but that also guide your child's thinking about internal giftedness and uniqueness.

In the story of Jonathan we saw his heart grow discouraged as he compared himself to those around him until his parents helped him catch a vision for a different way of looking at life. Whether your child is smaller or bigger than his peers, the smartest one in the class or the student who finishes last, your child needs you every step of the way to let him know that you're proud of him and excited to see how God is going to use him in life.

Pray that God will help you encourage and influence your child to be the person that God wants him to be, so as your child grows, he'll have the ability to understand how his uniqueness fits into God's plan for his life.



Building Internal Motivation

Parents often tire of prodding kids to start moving. They ask the question, “How can I get my child to do things on his own without me having to push him along?” The answer is to build internal motivation, but that can be complicated, especially when a child is weak in this area. Some parents just try to get through the day, hoping that their child will grow up someday.

Adulthood, in part, is about being responsible enough to clean up messes, get work done, and be where you need to be on time. Unfortunately, we all know adults who are irresponsible and who lack internal motivation. The work we do in the elementary years can strengthen the heart and prepare children with the tools they need to be responsible, internally-motivated adults someday. It starts with the way we work with children on a daily basis.

Much of the building of internal motivation starts with the words of the parent. In many ways, the words of parents form the scripts that children say to themselves. As you consider why a task should be done, think about the internal rewards. You might say, “Finish your homework. You can then feel good about being responsible.” Or,

“Cleaning up your mess helps build the quality of neatness in your life.”

“That’s not going to work on my son,” said one mom. “He’s still not going to do what I asked him to do. I need some kind of motivation to get him to complete the task.” And that’s true for most children. But if your goal is to help kids do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do, then you’ll want to be careful about an “external motivation” approach. You still might offer a privilege when a child is responsible, but be sure to talk about internal motivation in the process. “You finished cleaning your room. Great. Yes, you can go out and play. Doesn’t it feel good to have a clean room? Look how nice it looks. You’re growing up.”

It’s not necessary to avoid all external motivation, but use it to build internal motivation in your child. Internal motivation makes a child feel uncomfortable on the inside when a task isn’t finished or a job needs to be done. It helps children take initiative by seeing what needs to be done and doing it. Most children don’t naturally develop internal motivation. It comes through training.

Another way to build internal motivation is to transfer responsibility to the child. Many parents continue their prompting far beyond what is developmentally appropriate. If your child is struggling in this area of internal motivation, you might want to try a different approach by asking the child to develop the plan for remembering to put his homework in his backpack or clean his room a little at a time.

You might say, “Putting your homework in your backpack is the last step of completing the task. What’s your plan to remember to do that?” You can then evaluate the

child's plan. He might decide to put his backpack by the door as a demonstration that all is complete. Allowing him to develop the plan gives your son ownership of the plan and allows you to hold him accountable to that plan. Instead of saying, "Did you put your homework in your backpack?" you may move a step toward internal motivation by saying, "Did you work your plan?"

Keep in mind that internal motivation often takes place through accountability and new patterns. It also takes place through vision. Children often change when they get a vision for living a new way or when they feel uncomfortable living the old way. For example, your daughter may choose to put her shoes at the foot of her bed each day because she has a vision for being more neat or she may choose to do the same thing because she gets tired of losing those shoes and having to hunt all over the house for them. Either way, your daughter has made an internal choice to live differently.

Parents can help by instilling vision and by making life uncomfortable sometimes. As you make those decisions, think strategically about building internal motivation. You might say something like, "One of the signs of maturity is that you do things right away instead of putting them off. When you put your shoes at the foot of your bed even though it's inconvenient, you're demonstrating self-discipline, one of the traits of growing up." Then, the next time your daughter takes off her shoes you might say, "Think about maturity," or "Time to practice self-discipline." The way you remind your child then focuses on internal motivation instead of teaching your child to always rely on you.

Kids who lack self-control often need more parental control, so don't fall into the trap of saying something like,

“Fine, he can just live in a pig pen until he gets sick of it.” Unmotivated kids often develop beliefs that they are just messy people, or failures at school, or don’t have what it takes to be successful. Your efforts teach children that they do have what it takes but developing character requires work.

The book of Nehemiah is about a job that needs to get done, building the wall around Jerusalem. Chapter 4, verse 6 describes the internal motivation of the workers. It says, “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.” That’s the same kind of internal motivation we want to develop in our kids. Telling them that Bible story may be a helpful illustration for their growing maturity.

A decorative graphic featuring the number 25 in a bold, dark font. The number is centered within a large, light gray, stylized flourish that consists of several overlapping, swirling lines that create a sense of movement and elegance. The flourish is set against a plain white background.

25

How Kids Learn Responsibility

Each developmental stage of a child's life opens the door for building new character. As you care for an infant, you focus on trust and security. With preschoolers, you focus on responsiveness to authority and self-control. In the elementary years, children are ready for the heart quality of responsibility.

Responsibility involves getting a job done without being reminded. It implies doing a job well without being nagged and prodded along. Responsibility enables a child to see what needs to be done and take initiative to solve a problem or make the situation better.

The elementary years are the time to help children understand what responsibility is in practical terms. Their development now brings together communication and cognitive skills in such a way that they can do a job thoroughly, on their own, and report back when it's done. But those life skills require training. And areas of family life such as chores, homework, and getting ready in the morning are often the arenas where that training takes place.

First, identify tasks that you feel your child should be able to handle already, but, at present, isn't doing indepen-

dently. It may be making his bed in the morning before coming to breakfast, remembering to gather up her things for school and putting them in her backpack, or feeding the dog. If your child has become accustomed to relying on parental reminders to get things done, then now is the time to pass the baton by transferring responsibility to your child.

Start with a “vision meeting” in order to present the new plan. You might say, “I’m excited that you’re six years old now. You’ve really grown up since you were three and four. I’m looking forward to treating you more like a big kid. One of the things we’re going to work on is helping you take charge of yourself instead of relying on me to tell you what to do. The bathroom is a great place to start. When you leave it, I want you to do a “responsibility check.” Before you walk out of the bathroom, turn around and look to see if everything is in its place. Make sure the toilet is flushed, check the towel to see if it’s hanging nicely, and turn off the light when you leave. But that’s not all. I’d also like you to take on the responsibility of keeping the toilet paper stocked. If we’re running low, it’s your job to get more from the hall closet so there’s always plenty in the bathroom. I’m grateful that you’re becoming more of a partner with me around here. Together we can keep this house in good shape.”

Your presentation is important. Give your child a vision for why this task is valuable and share it in a way that shows your affirmation, appreciation, and acknowledgment that your child is maturing and growing up.

Once you give a job to your child, it’s helpful to build a new routine for managing it. Since you’re trying to move away from parental reminders, you’ll want to help your child develop his own plan. You might say, “I know that it’s

easy to just walk out of your room for breakfast and forget about what you need to do. What's your plan for remembering to make your bed in the morning?" Now you're not only transferring responsibility to the child for the task, but you're also teaching your child how to manage it. That's where the responsibility kicks in. You can make some suggestions but let your child pick the solution. For example, you might say, "One thing you might do every morning when you walk through the doorway of your room, is to stop, turn around, and look. That's what I do. I ask myself 'Did I forget anything?' Passing through the doorway is a good reminder."

Kids need cues just like parents do that trigger the reminder of what needs to be done. Once you establish that a child is going to feed the dog before playing the video game in the morning, or put the backpack by the door after completing homework, then you can move to the next step of coaching your child to success.

To help your child develop personal responsibility, you'll likely have to provide reminders, but when you do, focus on the cue, not on the task. You might say, "I see you playing your video game. That means you must have been responsible." Or, "You're leaving your room, did you ask the question?" In this way you're not telling your child specifically to put the backpack by the door or make the bed. You're focusing on the cue and allowing your child to make the connection. These kinds of reminders are an investment in your child's character development. If your child remembers on her own, then take time to point out the growth and maturity you're seeing. "You're growing up. I'm sure it feels good to do what's right."

You might share a scripture passage with your child

such as Galatians 6:4-5 which says, "Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load." The scriptures are relevant to each family member no matter what the age. You might talk about how that verse applies to you in your responsibilities and how it might apply to your child as well.

Notice that this whole process of teaching a child responsibility can happen without an external reward system. That's because your goal is to develop internal motivation, and external motivation often gets in the way. You don't want your child to believe that she should get some kind of reward for remembering to do a task. The internal satisfaction of doing well is all the reward necessary. If she's trained with little rewards for each step of progress, she learns to ask the question, "What do I get for doing it?" instead of "What's the right thing to do?"

Sometimes children start strong but then slack off when the newness wears off. You know your child is capable of doing what's right and remembering to do it, but the responsibility isn't sticking. It's at this point, that you may have to do some more extensive training. You might have to say to your daughter, "I've noticed that you're forgetting to feed the dog. Can you make some changes so that you remember, or do I need to set up some kind of discipline plan?" The child who has a hard time being responsible sometimes needs more work in order to practice getting jobs done.

You might choose a consequence that involves additional chores, in order to practice working hard. This builds the necessary character to become more responsible and hard-working. You could say, "Since you're having trouble

remembering to do the tasks that you've been assigned, it appears that you need more jobs to strengthen your ability to work hard. So, I want you to know that if you forget to feed the dog in the morning, then I'm going to give you two more chores in the afternoon when you come home from school, things like vacuuming, cleaning the bathroom, and emptying some of the trash around the house."

Accountability is important. Teach your child to report back before starting to play. Reporting back is part of the job and keeps kids moving forward until the task is done. Gentle reminders like "I'm waiting for you to report back" build internal motivation as well.

It's often easier to do the task yourself, but building responsibility in children is time well spent. Training children to be responsible takes work. Your investment of imparting vision, clarifying expectations, and holding your child accountable will empower him to complete tasks with a sense of accomplishment. Remember that being responsible ultimately feels good, so teach your children to recognize that internal peace and satisfaction that comes from a job well done.

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26

The Question of Allowance

Since a primary focus of the elementary years is to teach responsibility, helping children understand the value and use of money is strategic. It doesn't take long for a child to see the power that money has. Kids see things and want them. Understanding a price tag and then the need to work and save to earn that money, teaches kids a host of valuable qualities. Furthermore, picking between options with limited resources is a challenge for anyone and buying regrets are part of the learning experience.

One common question parents ask has to do with allowance. Although it's a way to provide children with money, some are afraid that kids will develop an attitude of entitlement and that if they start young they'll be doling out money for the rest of their lives. Remember, you'll be making parenting shifts throughout the years. Giving a child an allowance now doesn't mean that you'll be doing the same thing when he's twenty years old. By then you'll have moved into some different lessons about finances.

You can tie an allowance to specific responsibilities if you feel that's helpful. Either way, children need to realize that there are benefits and responsibilities associated

with being a part of your family. For example, all people in a family must take care of their own messes, make their own beds, and clean their own rooms. In addition, children are expected to add to the family by taking on family tasks such as setting and clearing the table, cleaning the bathroom, or straightening up and vacuuming the family room. Even if you didn't make the mess, we live in a family and we all contribute to the work required.

Benefits of living in this family include things like having a place to sleep, food to eat, love and care from other family members, and an allowance. With this kind of approach, you're communicating an important message about what it means to live in a family, both contributions and privileges.

Children often have the misunderstanding that the money they receive is all available to purchase toys or buy things for themselves. At some point it's often best to help children divide up their money, only allowing a portion to be spent on their own desires. One dad said, "We set up an envelope system. Whenever our son received any money, we helped him divide it into six parts. One part went to savings. One part went to our church for him to put in the offering, and another part went into an envelope to give away to someone in need or to a missionary or something else of his discretion. That money often grew for several weeks or months before he would discover a need. The remaining three portions were for his own use, to purchase things he was saving up for or wanted."

Learning how to work, save, give, and spend are all byproducts of having money. Proverbs 21:5 says, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." With limited resources, children learn to plan

instead of just randomly spend. The beginning stages of financial responsibility start in the early elementary years as parents provide strategic plans for the use of money with their kids.

Whether you choose to give an allowance or not, you'll likely want to provide your children opportunity to earn a bit of extra money through additional work. Raking leaves, washing the car, cleaning out a closet, or babysitting a sibling, each provide an opportunity to entrust responsibility, require completion, measure the quality of the work, and offer payment. Even young children can catch the idea that hard work produces financial benefit and that the quality of that work builds a strong reputation.

Giving is not optional, and organizing one's finances means self-discipline to have money to give to others and to God's work. Good habits of financial stewardship even at a young age produce positive results long-term. Most children don't understand the spiritual discipline of giving and its personal benefits. Giving money away reduces selfishness, increases compassion, and allows a person to be part of something much bigger than self. Taking money to church and putting it in the offering, and learning about missionaries around the world and giving to their needs, is helpful for developing spiritual maturity at a young age.

Of course, one of the things you'll want to teach in this whole area of money is the value of contentment. Kids tend to think they "need" this or that. One grandpa made a wise statement when he said, "Tell me what you need and I'll tell you how you can get along without it." It's not that we never buy things, but many of the things we buy we don't really need. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have." As

you work with your child in this area of money, you'll have opportunity to touch on many areas of spirituality.

Over the years you'll likely change up your plan for working with money. For a while you may use an allowance and then in a few years drop the allowance and move to required chores for pay, and eventually you'll encourage your child to work for others or get a job. The early work you do now will provide a foundation for money management that will last well into the future.

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27

Building Self-Confidence in Problem Solving

While pouring himself a cup of milk from the carton, Luke, age six, slipped and spilled milk all over the table. Mom, reading her email on the computer nearby, gasped and jumped up to grab the paper towels and clean up the mess. She said, “I told you to be careful. Otherwise you make a big mess that I have to clean up.” What do you think Luke learned in that situation? It might be better to teach Luke how to clean up his own mess and, in so doing, encourage his confidence in handling mistakes.

Equipping children to solve their own problems and try new things helps them develop confidence to be independent in life. They learn how to face obstacles, look for alternatives, and have the boldness to try new things and test out ideas. Some children can be quite persistent when faced with an obstacle but lack the grace or creativity to find a good solution. Other kids lack the confidence to try something new or take the risks necessary to step out of their comfort zone. Still others seem content to live with problems instead of trying to find solutions.

One of the great motivators of change is frustration, the

inner discontent with the current situation. When faced with a frustrating situation, many children bring their problem to parents, providing you with a great opportunity to teach them skills that they'll use for years to come. When Jake can't find his shoe, Luke wants a drink of milk, or Hope feels mistreated by her brother, how do they each respond? Here are a few ideas for how you can help your children handle problems and build skills and confidence to face these and bigger challenges in life.

First, children need to know how to bring problems to parents. Some kids whine and complain to signal they're unhappy. Whining and complaining are victim responses to life, the belief that I don't have control over the solution. You might challenge that kind of thinking by saying something such as, "Are you a whiner or a solver? Solvers think about solutions. Whiners think about problems." It's not wrong for children to bring problems to parents, but the way they bring those problems to you is important and simply focusing on the problem is not the best way to do it.

As a parent, use the child's frustration as a motivator to help develop solutions. Some parents want to quickly relieve the frustration, and, in doing so, may miss an opportunity to teach. For example, when Jake can't find his shoe, it might be wise to sit him down and talk to him about how you solve problems like that. You first ask questions such as, "Where did you find the other shoe?" because you know that shoes tend to be together. You also ask, "Where did you take it off?" because you know that remembering that information may provide another lead. You also know how to systematically go through a room or house looking until you find it. Children don't instantly understand your process of finding a shoe, but they can learn, if you're

willing to be the teacher. Next time, before you go shoe hunting, you might ask Jake to sit down and tell you the steps first or even try them out.

Life is a great teacher, but when it dishes out its lessons, be careful how you respond. If your daughter adds too much salt to her food, making it untasty, you don't have to move into lecture mode. Rather, a simple question such as, "What are you going to do next time?" might suffice. When your son is silly on the skateboard and falls off and gets hurt, you don't have to say, "I told you not to be silly," but instead offer comfort. Remember that if life teaches a lesson, then you have the opportunity to be the counselor or coach.

Another important lesson children can learn is to respond well to failure. Taking risks always provides the possibility that things won't work out as planned. Some children don't want to take risks because they're afraid to fail. But failure is often the first step toward success. Encourage your daughter when she tries something new and it doesn't work. It's people who are willing to try, who eventually build new inventions, overcome obstacles, and find new ways to accomplish tasks.

Look for ways to adjust your parenting so that your kids become problem solvers. When your son starts playing in a way that seems a bit risky, what words come out of your mouth? If those words are often "Be careful," you might want to evaluate the messages you're giving. The parent who continually says, "Be careful" to a child may be communicating that safety is the most important thing. Some children definitely need that message, but others need to know that trying new things is good, even if there are risks involved.

Jesus was a master at letting people learn from life. He sent the disciples on a mission in Mark 6:7-12 and told them not to take any provisions with them. He wanted them to learn that the message of the kingdom itself had significant power. When the disciples couldn't heal the boy with seizures in Mark 9:28-29, they came back to Jesus who taught them an important lesson about prayer. When Peter asked to come out and walk on the water in Matthew 14:28, Jesus just said one word, "Come." Then when Peter failed, Jesus walked him back to the boat and taught him a little more about faith.

As you go through the day, look for ways to help your children solve their own problems. It will take longer and will likely be messier, but the investment is well worth the extra effort. Kids who pour milk from the carton usually spill in the process. Is that okay in your house? When your son spills the milk and looks at you to see your response, it might be best to glance up and say something like, "Oops, looks like you have a bit of a mess to clean up," and go back to your reading. That kind of response teaches children not to panic, and it also implies that you have confidence that they're very capable of solving their own problems. That kind of parenting goes a long way to help children develop the inner confidence to face challenges and learn from life.

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28

Changing What Children Say in Their Hearts

Children talk to themselves in their hearts. Some of the things they say are helpful and others are not. As parents, we can help write the script by the words we choose to say to them. Psalm 19:14 says, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.” The verse says that meditation takes place in our hearts. Some children meditate on the wrong things.

One strategic way to impact the life of your child is to choose words that focus on solutions instead of problems. Sometimes that means simply affirming your child more, recognizing the importance of praise and encouragement. Let's go a bit further to discuss the value of your words in other areas as well.

Karla spent a lot of time thinking about her rights. She was just eight years old but she knew when someone was taking advantage of her. She didn't like being teased by her brother or interrupted by her mother to do a task. She believed that she had the right to her own time and owned the privilege to decide to help when she wanted and to

keep reading her book when she didn't. Karla had some things to learn.

Mom used a number of strategies to help Karla make changes. She disciplined her, talked to her, and gave her consequences when necessary. But the most effective thing she did had to do with her words. Here's what she said.

"I decided to create a list of things that Karla needed to be saying to herself, such as, 'My job is to help others,' 'Successful people think about ways to add to the lives of others,' 'I need to think of ways to contribute,' 'I'll feel better about myself when I give up my rights for others.' Then, whenever she needed discipline, redirection, or encouragement, I would use those statements. I realized that they were more powerful than what I used to say. I had gotten into the habit of saying things that focused on the problem instead of the solution, such as, 'That's selfish,' 'You're only thinking about yourself,' 'You're so frustrating,' 'People aren't going to like you.' My change in vocabulary had a marked impact on her life. I think she began to say those positive things to herself."

The words of parents affect the hearts of children. Just look back on the things your own parents said to you, both good and bad. They ring inside our heads for years to come. Most parents, when they take time to think about it for a moment, realize that their words tend to focus on problems instead of solutions. It's no wonder, then, that our kids often have a hard time moving from the problem to the solution.

If you can get into the habit of speaking strategically with your child, good things happen. It doesn't mean you

won't have to discipline, correct, or challenge your kids, but it does mean that you can do it more effectively. Furthermore, choosing when to speak increases the power of your words. It may not be best to bombard your child when she walks in the door from school, "You forgot to clean your room this morning." Instead, allowing time to get settled, get a snack, and debrief for a bit, may set the stage for you to more effectively challenge her about her room.

The key is to not just think about what you're going to say, but also to think about how you're going to say it. Communicating a message to your children is much more about the method than it is about the message.

One of the greatest ways that you can increase your communication effectiveness is to pray each morning. That time alone with God, praying for each of your children and their needs, can help you prepare for the day's challenges. But don't just ask God to fix the problems. Ask him to help you gain a vision for the solution and to be wise about what you say in every situation. When you think about Rudy's problem of being mean to his brother, God may impress upon your heart words that he needs to be saying to himself such as "Putting up with my brother without being mean is a sign of strength. Meanness is a sign of weakness." Or, maybe the Lord will reveal to you a need to spend a bit more time with Rudy or to meet with him alone and talk about how to relate more effectively to his annoying brother. Or, maybe Rudy needs a much more firm approach for a while to teach him that we can't live this way anymore. God has an amazing way of giving us wisdom when we ask him for it.

One way to change what you say is to ask yourself the question, "What does my son need to work on?" Or, "What

heart quality will help my daughter be successful in this area?" Those questions not only get to the heart, but also help us, as parents, to focus on long-term solutions. Then you can identify statements that a person says to himself when developing that quality. Children often need to work on things like responsiveness to authority, responsibility, kindness, honor, and integrity. As we think about those positive goals, then the daily words we use tend to fall in line.

Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." In order to have those kinds of words in family life, most of us need a bit of planning and retraining. And there's nothing like a family to provide the opportunities for parents to grow along with their kids.

The Most Important Words

Here's how Amy recounts her family history. "My parents divorced when I was very young. As long as I can remember, my dad invested in me. I didn't grow up in an ideal situation, but I knew that my dad was always there by my side, even when times were hard."

Building a relationship with your child doesn't require that you be perfect. Rather, it takes a commitment to persevere alongside your child no matter what the circumstances. If you want to have a great relationship with your child, commit to taking the time necessary to build it every step of the way. To help you do that, here are some valuable words to have in your daily vocabulary.

The most important five words you can say are "I'm sorry. Please forgive me." As you work towards building a strong relationship with your child, there are several statements your child needs to hear often from you. "I'm sorry. Please forgive me," have to be at the top of the list. Being a good parent doesn't require perfection, but it does require humility. You're going to make mistakes. Romans 3:23 reminds us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." By humbling yourself in such a way that your child

can hear you admit when you make a mistake, say you're sorry, and ask for forgiveness, you're not only helping to build your relationship stronger, but also teaching your child how to relate to others.

The most important four words you can say are "I believe in you." Another way to say that is "You can do it." The power that comes from hearing you say those four little words will help your child soar in ways never imagined otherwise. When you let your son know how much you believe in him, you're helping to strengthen his confidence. As your daughter moves through her early elementary years she's going to be faced with many different comments from teachers and peers. Sometimes those comments will be helpful and other times they may be discouraging. She needs to know that you believe in her. Kids need parents to be there to cheer them on when things are great and help them through when things are challenging. Take the time to say the words, "I believe in you!"

The most important three words you can say are "I love you." Make them a part of your everyday routine. Your child can't hear those three words too much. Maybe it's before school or before bed. Say them spontaneously as you pass in the kitchen too. Those words describe a commitment that runs deep, even in the midst of the challenges of life. Although problems and frustrations may come into family life, your underlying love provides the strength to face it all together.

The most important two words you can say are "Thank you." Showing appreciation raises the expressed value of your child. Sometimes parents develop an attitude that says, "Why should I thank my son. He's supposed to do that." Although it's true that kids need to learn to obey and

follow instructions, saying thank you acknowledges their willingness to do so and your appreciation of their efforts. It's like adding oil to the machine, removing much of the friction. Saying thank you to a child recognizes effort and willingness to cooperate. It's all part of strengthening the relationship.

The most important one word you can say is "Yes." You'd be surprised at how often you could say yes to a child even when you must set a limit or postpone the request. "Yes, you can have a cookie but you have to have lunch first." Or, "Yes, you can call your friend, but not until you finish your homework."

The word "No" isn't a bad word. In fact, children learn valuable lessons when parents say no. We're not encouraging an overly permissive attitude, but the vocabulary you use to say no communicates an important message. Using "Yes" more often speaks positively into a child's life and expresses possibilities instead of prohibitions. Yes, implies partnership. How can we make this work? It just takes a bit of retraining to say yes more often to a child's requests but it can have lasting results for your relationship.

Trust is at the heart of any strong relationship. Can you be trusted? When you tell your child you're going to do something, do it. If you tell your child you'll be at school at 1:00 pm, make sure you're there. If you're taking a trip to the mall and you say that you'll take your child to the toy store, make sure you go to the toy store.

It's rarely helpful, though, to make promises. As adults we know that the unexpected happens and sometimes plans need to change. If you committed by saying "We'll try to do that," or "If it all works out," then kids will more likely understand if you have to change the plan. If you

don't promise, then you can't break your promise. Teach children that you make plans and try to stick to them, but when the unexpected happens, you need to be flexible and adjust. That's a reality of life.

If your son knows he can trust you and count on you no matter what the circumstance, he'll be more willing to share his thoughts and feelings with you. Sometimes a relationship built on trust will require you to say "no" to your child. Be a parent your child can trust. Be prepared to say no and willing to talk about the reasons why "no" is the answer. It may require that you spend some extra time talking through your "no" response to ensure that your child has a clear understanding, even though agreement may not be possible at the time. Trust builds confidence. Commit to being a parent your child can count on no matter what.

As your child moves through these early elementary years, commit with all of your heart to building a strong relationship. Even if your family experiences hard times as in Amy's story above, you can still have a strong relationship with your kids. It takes time and extra energy. Pray daily for God's guidance as you strive to build this relationship. Investing now will pay off for a lifetime.



Teaching a Heart of Service

If your child is having a problem being thoughtful of others, then learning servanthood is the solution. It's actually God's idea. The Bible has a lot to say about the value of a servant heart. In fact, Jesus made teaching servanthood one of his top priorities as he was training his disciples. Jesus washed the disciples' feet to model responsiveness toward one another. He often stopped to help a person in need or to care for children in ways that surprised his disciples. At one point, when two of his disciples came to Jesus to ask for the best seat in the kingdom, he replied in Mark 10:43 by saying, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."

The move from self-centeredness to thinking about others requires that several pieces come together. Children who haven't developed in this area are often viewed as selfish. Sometimes selfishness is demonstrated with siblings when a child continually wants to be first, puts down others with unkind comments, or tattles. Other times selfishness is demonstrated by resistance when asked to help out or by anger episodes when given a no answer. Some children talk too much, won't share their toys, or generally

have a “me first” attitude. No matter what the symptoms look like, the solution is the same: servant training.

To start, you might want to have a positive conversation with your child that focuses on the benefits of thinking about others and include a plan that describes your new course of action. A bit of visioning along with a new plan can set the stage for you to do some significant work in this area. You might say, “Maria, you’re seven now and I’ve got some new things I want to teach you that will help you to be successful for the rest of your life. One of the things that makes the difference between someone who really does well in life and someone who doesn’t, is a heart that puts others first. It’s actually God’s idea that he describes in Philippians 2:4, ‘Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.’ I’m trying to work on that in my life and I’m going to be looking for ways to help you work on it too, now that you’re growing up. One of the areas that we can practice is when I give you an instruction. I find that sometimes I get resistance from you instead of you looking for ways to help.”

Describe in practical terms what it means to receive instructions as a servant. One idea is to do the job, right away, without being reminded. Another idea is to do more than what’s expected. Both of those suggestions, developed as a habit in life, contribute to a person’s future success in relationships. If the arena where selfishness is dominant in your son’s life is in sibling conflict, then you might talk about the importance of thinking of someone else’s feelings, or looking for ways to help others feel like winners.

Then comes the practice. This isn’t just a good idea or a suggestion. It’s the beginning of a new way of living for your child. Just because you communicate it in a positive,

upbeat way, doesn't mean that it's optional. The reality is that you're about to begin a systematic training program to help your child develop a heart of service. You'll introduce a plan and set up a system of accountability that requires heart change.

You might, for example, require that your daughter practice following instructions three times in the afternoon with a good attitude before playing with her toys. Or, you might send her on an assignment to look for things that need to be done and do them, and then report back about what she did. You might require that your son do three kind things for his brother before he's free to go, or send him in to make his brother laugh and report back.

Children need to understand what servanthood looks like in practical terms. They also need accountability. Your positive yet firm approach changes how children think and how they live. If you experience significant opposition to your new plan you may have to move into some correction strategies, but most of the time, resistance is an indication that your child needs more positive practice to develop the new habits and patterns. Either way, the message you present to your child is, "This new routine is nutritious, it's good for you, and it's not optional."

As Jesus taught his disciples about having a servant attitude, he didn't just talk about the importance of having a heart for others. He modeled it. As your children grow and mature, they'll watch how you handle life. You might look for opportunities to discuss challenges you face and how a servant approach often wins the day.

Another powerful way to communicate a servant attitude is to talk about caring for others as part of your family's identity. You might choose several times a year when you

can serve and meet needs in tangible ways. Helping the neighbor rake her leaves, making cookies for friends, or participating in a church activity to help care for others, are all ways to get kids thinking about servanthood in practical ways.

Teaching a heart for service can be one of the most challenging, yet most rewarding things you pass along to your children. On the one hand, serving is inconvenient. It takes time and energy. Serving also takes a commitment to look to the needs and cares of others and often requires the focus to shift from you to someone else. On the other hand, there's no greater joy or blessing than what comes from serving someone in need. When you model the heart and joyful attitude that comes from serving others, carrying one another's burdens, and putting others first, then you pass on a legacy that teaches your children how to live Christ-like lives.

Understanding Sleep Needs

Challenges happen in family life in two main areas when it comes to sleeping: getting kids into bed and then teaching them to stay there all night. Both of these skills foster a sense of independence and are important for children to learn. And typically they both take parental initiative and firmness in order to develop healthy habits. Here are some suggestions to help you.

Good sleep habits are important. Sleep is essential for healthy brain development, as well as physical and emotional health. Children who get enough sleep are not only more pleasant to be around, but also do better in their schoolwork, and have a general sense of well-being.

Choose a bedtime that's appropriate for your child. Although all children are different, kids between the ages of five and eight usually need between ten and twelve hours of sleep. So, you might start by identifying when your child needs to be up and ready in the morning and work backwards. Many kids at this stage go to bed between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm. A regular bedtime makes falling asleep easier. Once you set a bedtime then you'll want to enlist an ally for enforcing it: the clock.

Even the child who doesn't know how to tell time can understand some basic things about a clock. Sensitivity to time keeps people on track, propels things forward, and helps gauge progress toward a goal. Many children rely on parents to be the "clock" for them. It's time to help children learn how the clock helps keep things moving in the evenings.

You might want to think through the various tasks that need to be accomplished in order for your child to get to bed at the determined time. What time does your family eat dinner? What time have you established as homework time? Are baths or showers taken in the evening? Sometimes it's helpful to actually write out an evening schedule so that your child knows what to expect and you can do your best to stay on task as you begin to facilitate your new routine. As you use the clock in your evening prompting, it helps children see that the promptings aren't based on parental whim. They are an attempt to keep a schedule.

In order to help children prepare for bed it's often best to get their pajamas on and bathroom tasks completed in time for them to return to have some final time with you. It's motivating to get those things accomplished when there's one more chapter to read in the book or an opportunity to finish the game. Then, when bedtime comes, you can focus on relationship instead of the business of getting into bed. When kids are in bed then you can take time to pray, talk for a few minutes, and give a final hug.

You might even repeat a favorite nighttime Bible verse to guide your child's thinking before sleep. For example, Psalm 4:8 says, "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety." And Psalm 62:1-2 says, "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation

comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken." Praying with children before bed is a great way to end the time before they go to sleep. You might pray about specific needs or events and then end by saying something such as, "And Lord I ask that you would bless my son with a good night's sleep and good dreams. Amen."

When you're done with your bedtime ritual, then comes the training. At this point it's best to just use one statement, although you may have to say it multiple times, "It's time for bed. You need to lie quietly." Limiting your words will prevent you from engaging in dialogue and teaches your child exactly what's expected.

If your child has a tendency to get out of bed or turn the lights on to play, then you'll likely need to position yourself in the doorway or just outside the door to enforce the bedtime routine for a while. A couple of weeks of training often teaches a child that going to bed means lying quietly until you fall asleep without getting out of bed. Be firm and just use your one statement as many times as necessary to teach this important lesson. With practice your child will learn the new routine.

But getting kids into the bed is only half the battle. Some kids wake up in the night and want to join you in your bed. If you've decided that sleeping in your bed is not an option, then you'll want to take your child back to his bed as soon as you realize he's come into your room, even if that means that you wake up and find him in your bed. You'll also want to look for ways to give your child a vision for staying in bed all night.

You might say, "You're seven years old now. You're growing in your independence, the ability to do things on

your own. Remember when I had to dress you and feed you and remind you to do all kinds of things? Now you're growing up. Another area where we'll see some maturity is at night as you're able to go back to sleep in your own bed. Most people wake up at night. I sometimes do too. But I put myself back to sleep in my own bed. You can learn to do that as well. I'd like you to think about that. When you wake up, let's talk about some things you can say to yourself that will help you stay in bed and go back to sleep without coming into my room."

Your firmness, visioning, and teaching will bring about change as your child grows in the ability to respond more independently at night. Furthermore, good patterns established in childhood and then practiced throughout adolescence build strong habits for adulthood. Those patterns aren't just about the schedule. They're also about how to think as one goes to sleep or wakes up in the night. Good patterns provide great tools for future success.

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32

Take Time to Pray

One of the gifts God has given you is the ability to come into his presence at any time for any reason to pour out your heart and share your struggles with a heavenly Father who cares. But even if you don't have something pressing that's forcing you to the prayer closet, a regular prayer time for your child can keep you focused in the right direction. It's often best to make a commitment before God that you are going to regularly talk to him about your child. You might create a journal and trace your child's hand on the first page. Then each morning, or during your quiet time, you could place your hand over your child's as you pray for specific needs. Your child will grow from year to year and the handprint will remind you not only of the physical growth, but also of the spiritual growth you're seeing in your child.

When you pray, you might want to think beyond the "here and now." Although praying for your child's current situation is important, keep the future in mind as well. What are the physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional goals that you desire for your child as a young adult? By focusing on the future you'll see present struggles and

challenges in proper perspective. Most importantly, God can help mold your heart in a way that complements his heart for your child. 1 John 5:14-15 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” Here are a few ideas to help guide you as you sit down to pray for your child.

Pray for the friends in your child’s life, both now and in the future. The elementary years are the time when children learn to develop significant friendships. Although in most cases these friendships will not last for life, this is the time when kids begin to learn what it means to choose good friends and how they themselves can be good friends to others. The friends in your child’s life will have a great deal of influence as your child moves to adolescence. Praying for these friends in advance is important and telling your child about your decision to pray for his choice of friendships is often helpful.

Pray for your child’s future spouse. You may think the very idea of praying for the future spouse of your child at the age of 6 or 7 is crazy. The truth is, however, that relationships take a lot of hard work and all of us need the Lord right by our side to help guide us in choosing the right mate. So what do you hope for in the future spouse of your son or daughter? Pray specifically for those qualities. The day when they meet may be here before you know it! Likely your child’s spouse is alive somewhere and growing up too. Pray for that child’s heart, and family, and experiences. Pray that your child’s future spouse will come to know the Lord at an early age and make wise choices in the coming years.

Pray for your child's relationship with the Lord. Pray that your child will make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and for spiritual growth and maturity. Pray that your kids will know that they can go to the Lord in any and all circumstances, and pray that they will be strong enough to stand firm in the path that the Lord has for them.

Pray for your relationship with your child. As your child moves through the elementary years, you'll have many opportunities and challenges along the way. Pray that God will give you the wisdom and the courage to guide your child in the way that he would desire and that, through it all, your family would have relationships that are deep and close. At opportune times, share with your child the fact that you're praying. Having a praying parent has an impact on a child in personal and spiritual ways.

Often when we sit down to pray, our minds can be distracted by the many tasks of the day or how tired we are. In that case it may help to write down your prayers. Having a journal with you as you sit down to pray helps to keep your heart and mind focused on what you specifically want to pray for. Writing down your prayers is also a great way to reflect back on what you've prayed for and actually see how God has responded. It can grow frustrating when you feel as though you have prayed feverishly for something specific and you do not see the Lord working in your life. When you write down your thoughts and prayers, you not only have a better chance of remembering what you prayed for, but you can see firsthand what has already been answered and what you may want to continue praying for.

The Bible is very clear when it comes to prayer. 1 Thesalonians 5:17 says, "Pray continually." Whether you write your prayers and requests down in a journal, trace your

child's hand as you sit down to pray for your son or daughter, kneel down by your bed, or do a combination of all of these things, the Bible is clear that God wants us to pray. Prayer changes us and makes us more ready to be used by God. When you take the time to come before God, you're taking the focus off of what's happening in front of you and placing your eyes on the Lord. Every time you make the decision in your life to look up instead of look out, you'll find a comfort and joy that can come only from the Lord. Parenting is hard work! Take time to pray.

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33

Handling Disappointment

“**T**he answer is no.” How does your child respond to that statement? Handling disappointment is part of life and knowing how to respond well to limits is part of maturity. But some children have a difficult time when they don’t get what they want. They pout, throw temper tantrums, cry, or simply get overwhelmed by their emotions.

Learning how to accept no as an answer is a heart issue. Not only can children learn to live within limits, but they can also learn flexibility and contentment, two heart qualities that help them address the challenges they may face internally.

Furthermore, children who learn to accept no as an answer are more likely to respond well to limits when they get older. The character needed by a teenager to say no to the many temptations, comes from the ability to live within limits. Much of the work needed to be successful handling disappointment and temptation later in life, is developed right now in the early elementary years as kids learn to do what’s right when they don’t get what they want.

To help your child most effectively in this area, first

identify tendencies your child has when faced with some kind of limit. Some kids become so overwhelmed with disappointment that they throw themselves on the ground in despair and sadness, while others become vicious with anger-filled revenge. Others stay calm but view their parents as obstacles to their goal and pursue with badgering or arguing. Still others simply whine and complain, making others miserable because they don't get what they want.

It's not wrong to change your mind, but be careful that you don't encourage a negative pattern of demandingness in your child simply because you want to keep the peace. Kids who whine, badger, or argue usually do it because it works. In those cases you might use a strategy to help your child recognize the line separating socially appropriate dialogue from rudeness. To do that you'll want to leave the issue and move to the process. The process is the way the child is treating you in the situation.

Some parents encourage the arguing because they like the drive they see in their child. Although that's a good quality, those children often don't understand the difference between determination and demandingness. When you move to the process you're addressing how a child is responding to you. You might say, "I've said no but you're continuing on. That's not right and can be perceived as rudeness. You need to stop asking and arguing and find something else to talk about."

Some parents encourage unhelpful patterns by engaging their children in debates. They stay on the issue too long, discussing reasons, providing logic, or giving evidence. It's not wrong to dialogue with your kids. In fact, in most cases it's wise to engage your children in discus-

sions about life. However, when a child uses dialogue as a manipulation, you've left helpful conversation and have begun to encourage a negative pattern. Moving to the process stops the dialogue and teaches the child that a line has been crossed and what he's doing is wrong.

The child who gets overwhelmed with anger or sadness needs to learn to stop the escalation. It's important that you, as a parent, don't contribute to the intensity with your own emotional response. You want to keep the problem the child's problem. If you start yelling at your child or having your own temper tantrum, then you're no longer handling the situation as a heart problem in your child. Now, you've moved the situation to something completely different. Instead of helping your child deal with the heart problem of demandingness, you are now engaged in conflict and need a whole different plan that involves conflict management training. Try to keep the problem the child's problem by remaining firm and calm.

The child who's overwhelmed needs to take a break and disengage from life until she's able to settle down and reestablish emotional control. If the issue happens in public, you may need to leave the situation, but most importantly, you'll want to make a mental note of the problem, recognizing that your child needs help in this area. Setting boundaries at home and offering more no answers may be necessary to practice a better response.

Children who get upset or resort to demanding techniques need firmness but they also need training. Be sure to work with your child to develop a plan for the next time he's disappointed. Disappointment is a common emotion and kids need a number of strategies for dealing with it. Likely the plan will match your child's uniqueness. For

some children, the solution is to walk away. For others, it's to be quiet for a moment. Some children benefit from saying things to themselves such as, "Okay, maybe next time," or "I'm disappointed but it isn't worth it to get upset."

Coaching your child through the process of responding well to a no answer takes time. Make the plan clear and continually talk about it and adjust as necessary. You may need to give a consequence to motivate your child to work on the problem. Your firmness over time teaches that the demandingness doesn't work and actually hinders progress toward the goal.

Paul gave some valuable advice in Philippians 4:11-12 when he said, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

The very next verse is an important one for a child who struggles in this area. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The reality is that you can live without wearing that shirt today or without having a milkshake with your lunch. It takes work, but contentment and handling disappointment are qualities that a child needs to develop, and now is the best time to work on it.

When Correction is Needed

Children learn in a variety of ways. They can learn from a teacher, from a book, from a video, from a coach, and from experience. One of the teaching methods they'll continually face, however, comes in the form of correction. Yet many children have a poor response to correction, reacting with defensiveness, blaming, justification, and anger. One of the greatest gifts you can give to your children is to teach them how to handle correction in a positive way. Proverbs 6:23 says, "The corrections of discipline are the way to life." Truly, someone who knows how to get the most from a correction experience will advance more quickly in life. Good patterns can start early.

If you want to teach your child to have a good response to correction, then it's important for you to come to the correction process in the most helpful way possible. Don't be caught off guard when it's time to correct. Correcting children is part of your job description, although most parents find it a challenge. You don't want to react to the situation out of your emotion. You need to develop a plan. Embracing a few principles can make all the difference in your approach and in your child's subsequent response.

One of the best ways to ensure a better response to correction from your child is for you to approach the task with your anger under control. Children often view anger as a form of attack and quickly move into a defensive posture or react with their own anger to meet the challenge. Notice, we're not suggesting that you aren't angry, because most of the time, when you're involved in correction, something is wrong and that something can easily spark anger inside of you. There's a difference between experiencing anger and displaying anger. You don't want to use anger to solve the problem, because that's when the actual relationship is challenged. Keep your volume level down and your intensity under control.

Next, it's often best to separate the child from the situation or call the child away from others. This is not only a demonstration of respect, but it gives you and your child an extra moment to prepare for the correction experience. In some cases, you may want to choose the timing carefully and discipline thirty minutes or an hour later when emotions have subsided. Although waiting isn't always possible or wise, it may be helpful in some situations in order to contribute to a successful outcome. Disciplining on the spot may be efficient but isn't always the wisest course of action.

When it comes to correction tools, it's best to have a toolbox of options. Starting with words is always the best. In fact, you may even say something like, "I'm going to use words to correct you. Is that going to work? Or, do I need to move to something else?" The Bible uses the terms "rebuke" and "warning" in the book of Proverbs to describe the use of words in the correction or discipline process.

If words don't work, then other tools will be necessary.

quences on a heart level is to have a debriefing after the consequence that talks about what went wrong and to develop a better plan for next time.

If children are stuck in a pattern where these strategies don't seem to be having an effect, you might want to employ the strongest consequence of all: practicing doing the right thing. True repentance isn't just stopping one activity. It's changing one's mind and doing something different instead. You might want to have your child practice kindness with his sister, following instructions with Dad, or role-play a better response to a no answer from Mom.

For example, Will reacts poorly when asked to stop the video game. After seeing this as a pattern, Mom might say, "Will, I'll know if you're old enough to play a video game if you can stop when I call you to do something. So, we're going to practice. I'm going to allow you to play the video game for the next hour but I'm going to interrupt you a couple of times to see if you can respond well to me." The practice of stopping the video game and responding to Mom's request may be just what Will needs to make significant changes that are long-lasting.

Correction is an important tool for growth in a child's life. Most kids have areas that need a concentrated effort to see change take place. Firmness is important. Planning and strategizing for heart change are also essential. You can adjust your approach, be creative with consequences, and use a number of strategies to get to the heart. Bringing thought and preparation to the process produces significant results over time.

Teaching Your Child About Sex

A healthy understanding of sexuality and gender identity is developed during the early elementary years. By now children know some of the obvious physical differences between boys and girls, can use correct names for body parts, and have developed an awareness of privacy. They usually like to have the bathroom door closed and often prefer to get dressed in private. They also know that boys grow up to be men, husbands, and fathers, and girls grow up to be women, wives, and mothers.

If your child is privileged to have a baby brother or sister you may have had opportunity to discuss the biological facts of childbirth. If not, you'll want to get a good book or have some significant conversations with kids to teach them about how a baby grows inside the mommy's uterus and is birthed through the birth canal and out of the mother's vagina.

Understanding pregnancy and childbirth is fascinating and children likely have a lot of questions. Most of their questions you can just answer at face value. You can do additional teaching about how the baby eats through the placenta and why a mom has to be careful about things like

smoking, drinking, and eating because it affects the baby. Birth is a miracle and children can understand not only human birth but also that of animals to give them greater understanding of the biology of life.

It's also important to talk about appropriate touching. Children need to understand that it's inappropriate for anyone to touch their private parts, in fun or otherwise. If something happens along those lines, kids need to know that they should report the incident immediately to you. Some children are more curious than others when it comes to sexuality and may initiate exploration with a friend. If that happens, you'll want to make it clear that those areas are private and not to be shared. An incident like that is also a warning to you, as a parent, to monitor play and inform other parents to be on guard during play dates.

Some children develop a habit of touching or rubbing their private areas. Although this early form of self-stimulation isn't wrong, it can become an unhelpful habit. It's best to discourage it gently, limiting time alone, getting lots of exercise, and looking for other ways to find comfort or deal with stress.

Sometimes parents are hesitant to teach about sex or have conversations about childbirth because they're afraid that a child might ask a question that they don't feel equipped to answer such as, "How did that baby get in there in the first place?" Or, "What does a Dad do to make a baby?" Those are good and normal questions and are best addressed simply, giving the child only the information needed for their developmental stage. You might say something like, "God designed conception in a very special way. When a man and a woman are married, they love each other. And they enjoy hugging and kissing each other.

God designed it so that when a husband and a wife are lying together that there is a way for the sperm from the man to get together with the egg from the woman. When those two things come together then a baby is conceived and starts to grow.”

You don't have to elaborate on every question a child asks. You can feel comfortable with a question that seems to ask for more information than you think is helpful, by saying something such as, “There's a lot involved in becoming a dad or a mom. Some of those things are complicated and you'll learn more about them as you get older.”

Sometimes parents are concerned that sharing information about sexuality will prompt children to talk about it inappropriately with others. That's a valid concern. One of the things that must be taught in this whole area is about how this subject is special, private, and not to be laughed at, or generally discussed with others. It's part of your teaching and when a child makes a mistake by talking inappropriately, you'll want to reinforce the importance of staying within proper boundaries. The same is true when they come home with some bad words. Many children don't understand what those bad words really mean. It may be appropriate to explain what they really refer to and that people who use those words don't have a healthy respect for this important area of life.

Sex isn't something to joke about or laugh about. Your child will likely hear others talk about sex in unhealthy ways. Part of your training is to help kids understand that dishonoring talk or joking about sexuality is wrong and inappropriate, usually a sign that the other child doesn't have parents who are proactive in teaching about this area of life. Also, don't allow silly talk about getting married

or being boyfriend and girlfriend at this young age. Teach your children now how to treat the opposite sex with honor and to value friendships with both boys and girls, but to understand that exclusive relationships are for adults.

As you teach your children about childbirth, gender differences, and sexuality, take time to place it in the context of God's design. The Bible says in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Children develop their own identity in a number of ways. One of those has to do with gender. By reinforcing God's design, you can help your child gain a greater appreciation for God's work in the past and in the future.

Encourage your children to start praying now for the person who might eventually become their mate. Pray that God would be preparing that person to be loving, kind, obedient, and responsible. All of the interaction you have about relationships can further help your children see that God is very concerned about sexuality and when the time is right, God will bring the best person into their lives. Until then, it's best to wait and allow God to work it all out in his timing. You'll use these early conversations about sexuality as a foundation upon which to have more significant dialogue later. Your openness and willingness to talk about sensitive and private matters will be an asset as you continue to teach and train your child.

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36

Equipping a Child Socially

God designed life so that children learn honor at home, but honor isn't just for kids. Romans 12:10 says to all, "Honor one another above yourselves." It's a quality that all people benefit from developing in their lives because it recognizes the value of other people and treats them with respect.

Although honor is much more than manners, certain social graces are helpful for children to learn because they are outward demonstrations of an inward attitude. Those who show common courtesies to others, not only demonstrate their respect for others, but also give a good impression and enhance their reputation.

Manners differ from one place to another. In the southeastern part of the United States, for example, "Yes Sir" and "Yes Ma'am" are indications of respect. In many places children are expected to call adults Mr. and Mrs. instead of using their first names. Likely you have some specific habits that you'd like to see your children incorporate as a demonstration of their respect for others. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Greeting other people is the first step in developing

friendships and keeping them. Saying “Good morning” and “Good night” around the home are a good way to start. Common greetings in family life are important because they demonstrate a sense of value to each person. Before you teach children to greet people outside the home, it’s often easier to start within your own family.

You might want to practice introductions. When you say to someone, “This is my son, James,” then James can learn how to respond. It’s a cue that usually means you’re going to look at the other person and say hi and maybe even put out your hand to give a handshake. That social grace only happens through teaching and practice.

Looking at someone in the eyes while they’re talking is respectful at least in the United States and other western cultures. In several African countries it’s a sign of disrespect and looking into an adult’s eyes is an indication of defiance. But most of the people reading this book will do so in the US so it’s helpful to teach kids how to use their eyes as a way of demonstrating respect. Some children need a lot of practice to develop this habit because of shyness or a lack of confidence. That’s all the more reason to work on it, starting in the home. You might practice it when the child is motivated by something. For example, your son may want to watch a video, eat a snack, or go out and play. You might say, “The answer is yes, but first I’d like you to look at me while I talk to you for a moment.” Choosing this time to practice may be just the motivation necessary to build a good pattern.

Good manners take practice. Saying “please” and “thank you” and learning how to interrupt graciously are learned through continual experience over time. If your child has a habit of interrupting, you might say something like this.

“When you want to talk to me, you first need to come into the room where I am and not yell to me from the other part of the house. That’s because I may be doing something and you’ll need to interrupt me graciously. When you do come into the room, stop and look before you start talking. If I’m already doing something, then you’ll need to interrupt me by saying ‘Excuse me.’ If I’m talking to someone else or on the phone, you’ll need to wait until I have a break. If you want to interrupt me in that kind of situation then just moving close to me tells me that you’d like my attention, and I’ll try to find a place to pause my conversation and talk to you.”

Some children, particularly those who have Attention Deficit Disorder, seem to lack maturity in the ability to pick up on social cues. They may get in your face, exceeding spatial norms, or they may talk too much, become bossy or overbearing, or engage in annoying behavior without recognizing how it makes others feel. In those cases, social skills training is all the more important. Try pulling back and saying something like, “I’m feeling uncomfortable that you’re so close to my face (or pulling on my arm, or running into the room and talking).” You don’t have to portray anger or disgust. Simply point out the problem. You might even require that the child start over and try again. These children often need lots of practice over a long period of time in order to be successful.

With all children, the development of manners is a learning experience and doesn’t happen unless practice sessions take place. You might even have a special evening to go out, or eat in where manners are at the forefront in a fun and playful way. This is a form of role-play and simply raises the awareness level a bit for kids. You might say to

the server at a restaurant when he introduces himself, “Hi, I’m Jim and this is my son, Erik.” That’s the cue for Erik to say, “Hi, nice to meet you.” When the meal comes to the table, each person at the table can respond with a “Thank you.”

Manners are an external indicator of an inward quality of honor, and honor enhances relationships. God has hidden within honor the secret ingredients for success in relationships. You’ll likely find other ways to develop honor in your family, but manners is also a helpful way to teach it.

A decorative graphic featuring the number 37 in a large, bold, black font. The number is centered within a complex, light gray, swirling design that resembles a stylized infinity symbol or a calligraphic flourish. The design has a soft, glowing effect around the edges.

37

Developing Honesty

Lying and dishonesty are shortcuts because the person doesn't have the tools and character necessary to do the hard work involved in telling the truth. It's like a person who sees the sign that says, "Please Keep Off the Grass," yet cuts across the grass instead of going around the sidewalk. The person who lies, cuts across the conscience and damages relationship instead of doing the harder work of solving the problem with honesty.

A multi-faceted approach is usually required to address dishonesty and it requires intentional hard work on the part of parents over a significant period of time. As a parent, you can do a number of things to enhance a sense of integrity in your child. The first is to articulate a standard of right and wrong. It's wrong to lie, cheat, steal, or be mischievous. It's wrong because it violates God's standard and damages relationship with others. It's wrong because it's unfair and unkind. Children who have a strong sense of right and wrong in life are less apt to succumb to temptation. Regular discussions about right and wrong, telling stories from the Bible, and talking about how all of that is applied to life are significant in helping children under-

stand the line between good and evil, black and white, and right and wrong.

The formation of the conscience is critical during the elementary years. Dishonesty is a blatant disregard for what's right in order to achieve something. Kids lie to avoid punishment or to look good in front of others, they steal to get something they want, or cheat to move ahead instead of losing or failing. One of the ways to help children recognize the internal battle going on is to talk about honesty under pressure. Dishonesty always takes place under pressure and when those pressures to be liked, well thought of, or win are articulated, then children often understand the challenge more clearly. Furthermore, many children don't have the ability to tell the truth under pressure because they lack the internal character necessary for integrity.

You might ask your child some success questions to help communicate a vision for being honest. "What do you say to yourself when you make a mistake and are tempted to lie so that others don't know?" "How can a person be successful when they're tempted to steal something that they really want?" "When a person is tempted to cheat in a game in order to win, what would he do or say to himself to do the right thing?" Those kinds of questions help children wrestle with the reality of dishonesty in their hearts in hypothetical stories but produce patterns of helpful thinking that may be used at later times when the real temptations are present.

Being honest requires that children have humility, self-control, and the ability to work hard. In fact, some children, because of their laziness, take the easy way, even though they know that it's the wrong way. That's why children who lie often benefit from more chores and learning

how to do difficult tasks. Often they lack the confidence that they can actually do what it takes to tell the truth, and there's nothing like hard work for building a sense of competence, perseverance, and self-confidence.

When children lie to get out of trouble, it's often because they associate mistakes and sin with their identity, believing that if people find out that they made a mistake, then they aren't a valuable person. Furthermore, some children exaggerate stories to make themselves look better. These uses of dishonesty are an indication that some work is needed in the area of self-concept. The reality is that the humble person can admit weakness and the strong person listens to others. The courageous person doesn't have to prove inner strength by lying but can admit a mistake and take responsibility for it. Those lessons are important for anyone and the child who lies to others is lying to himself. Your work to correct the internal lies is helpful for integrity to develop.

If your child has a habit of lying, then there'll be some times when you don't know if she did it or not. In those moments you might simply express disapproval by saying something like, "It's sad when someone breaks something and then doesn't admit it." But other times you know that your child is lying, and at that time it's important to take firm action. You might say, "I just saw you take it. You need to sit down and think about it. All life stops for you until you can admit that you lied." One of the hardest things for a child who lies to say is "I lied." Typically, kids who lie make up more stories to cover up their lie or claim that their lie was unintentional or an accident. "No, the reality is that you chose to lie and that's a weakness you have that you need to address."

Confession is the first step in God's solution for sin. Requiring a confession may be difficult, but it forces the child to do some inner wrestling. That heart work is very important because it points out the need for the humility necessary for change to take place. With lots of teaching, hard work, confrontation, and prayer, a child can overcome a habit of lying. Much parental guidance in this area can produce significant results.

Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that the Lord hates. "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." It's interesting to see how many of the things in that list have to do with integrity and honesty. If you're going to talk about those verses with your young elementary age child, make it clear that God loves the person, but hates the lying. In fact, God loves each of us so much that he wants us to value honesty because he sees how damaging dishonesty is to ourselves and to others. God wants us to be successful in life and honesty is one of the necessary qualities.

When Anger Gets Out of Control

All children experience anger. It can get in the way of family dynamics and hurt relationships. Most children can learn to address their anger when parents are calm, refuse to escalate the problem, and are firm about what's acceptable and what's not. However, some children develop intense emotional reactions, resulting in kicking, hitting, throwing, yelling, and screaming. When that's the case, more strategic and intentional work is necessary.

Emotions exist in the heart. Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:27, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." And, when the king saw that Nehemiah was upset he said to him in Nehemiah 2:2, "This can be nothing but sadness of heart." A heart-based solution to emotional management is quite effective in helping children cope with their intense feelings. A three-pronged approach is most beneficial.

First, strengthen the relational bonds between you and your child. Working on relationship helps fill your child's emotional tank and prepares him for the pressure you're going to be adding to address the emotional outbursts. Kids can only take as much pressure as the relationship will

allow. Discussions about anger, affirmation of your love, and common experiences build relationship. Laughing together, working together, or solving problems together all help strengthen emotional connectedness.

You might make the observation, "It looks like God has given you an extra scoop of emotion. That's an asset. After all, with more emotional sensitivity you'll be able to help others who are hurting and connect with people in special ways." Children who are emotionally sensitive not only demonstrate that negatively with outbursts, but they also are often the life of the party and get excited about life in very positive ways. By taking this kind of approach with your child, you put the anger outbursts into proper perspective. After all, it's not the angry feelings that are necessarily wrong. It's what you do with them that hurts others and yourself.

Second, help your child develop a plan. You might say to your son, "I realize that I can't give you a plan for anger management. You need a specific plan for you. In fact, we'll call it the Ben Plan." Then brainstorm ideas about how he and others might handle emotionally overwhelming situations and write them down. Now ask him to look at the list and identify five things he'll say to himself or do that will help him handle the situations successfully. You might ask him for ideas of ways he keeps himself calm already and prevents the eruption. Those ideas can be added to the plan.

It's often helpful to think in terms of arenas or areas where the temptation to react with rage is most prominent. That might be when his brother is teasing or annoying him, or when asked to do something he doesn't want to do, or when he receives a no answer, or when he is corrected.

Each of those areas represents an arena of temptation where the emotion becomes so overpowering that a reaction occurs. It may be necessary to tweak the plan for each arena.

This approach transfers responsibility to the child, a very important part of heart work. You might then say, "That's great. It looks like you have a plan to implement when you start to feel overwhelmed with your emotions. How would you like me to coach you when I see that you're starting to lose it?" Part of the plan must include your involvement, and your child may have a specific idea about how he wants to be coached in those intense moments.

Thirdly, put pressure on in order to work the plan. Encourage the successful implementation of the plan but when he loses control, take charge and calmly, but firmly, set boundaries. Require that he sit down, and tell him that all life stops until he not only regains control, but that he also debrief about how he might have handled the situation differently. If restraining is needed, then do so without hurting the child and with as few words as possible. And when you're done, the child must sit down quietly and come back to you for a debriefing.

Firmness is important, but must be done in conjunction with the first two elements as well. Strong relational bonds and a plan are important to reduce a feeling of failure or a lack of hope. As you meet with your son, you might tell him that you're trying to help him reduce three things: the frequency of anger episodes, their intensity, and the recovery time to return back to normal. With concentrated effort, you'll see your child make significant improvement in the ability to handle emotional experiences.

To implement your plan, you may find that your child

needs some additional care. Problems such as bipolar disorder or excessive stress in the child's life may require professional help. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that your child will simply grow out of temper tantrums. Kids only grow out of them when a good plan for handling anger is in place. Parents who do nothing and wait for kids to grow out of anger episodes are often disappointed. The reality is that kids often grow into bad habits of reacting poorly to emotions unless intervention and training take place.

Anger isn't just a childhood problem, so your work at this will help your son or daughter develop significant solutions to use for years to come. Be careful about relying on venting solutions that send your child to scream into a pillow or punch a punching bag. Those suggestions are common but not biblical. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Self-control is the solution and often requires a specific plan that caters to the unique needs of each child.

What to Do About Fears

The early elementary years are often a time when fears surface. Some children develop a fear of the dark, others fear opening a closet door, or going to the upstairs, or downstairs of the house alone. Other children fear strangers, the ocean, certain animals, or thunder. The number of things that spark fear is countless. The reality is at this stage children are beginning to understand just how big and complex and unpredictable the world is, and this truth makes them feel very much out of control.

Although fears are common, there's much a parent can do to help a child move through this stage with grace. Fears are overcome by trust. Trust is built with practice. It's often developed through experience. Helping children take small steps of risk met with success will help them develop the courage and confidence to leave their fears behind.

As a parent you'll want to guard your child from too much exposure to frightening information. One mom reported that her daughter was terribly fearful of tornadoes, to the point of wanting to go to heaven to avoid the possibility. A parent can't promise there'll be no tornadoes, but you can protect your child from seeing too much devastation

on TV. News programs on television can captivate one's attention to a point beyond what's helpful. Sometimes parents forget the impact on young ears and hearts.

When children are afraid, you want to validate the emotion and help the child develop a plan. If the fear is realistic, like fear of a tornado or fire, then understanding where comfort comes from is important. You can help a child realize that, although there are things in this world we don't like and can't control, God is good and he's in control. He may not stop tornadoes, but he loves the people who are affected by them and he teaches them and helps them. You don't want to offer unfounded reassurance such as, "Oh, you'll never see a tornado." Or, "I'll always protect you." You don't know what the future holds, but teaching your child now about a real faith that holds up under pressure will go a long way to build life-long patterns of trust in God.

Parents can also help children to have a plan for tough times. Do you live in an area that is threatened by tornadoes? If yes, tell your child the plan. What will you do? Be honest about what to expect. We live in a time when many disasters are predictable. We receive warnings from people who watch out for these things. Educate your child about the positive so she sees that life is not as random and scary as seen on TV.

And, of course, you'll want to protect her eyes and mind from unnecessary violence. Turn off the news when necessary. Kids nowadays see too much disaster right in their own living rooms. God gives people the grace to deal with the hardships that come their way, but he doesn't necessarily give grace to those who are watching. Too much information about people's pain is overwhelming for any

of us, so work to protect your child's tender heart.

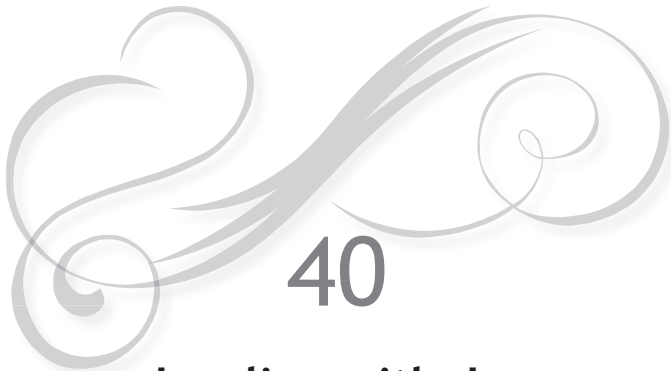
Fears are overcome by trust and positive experiences over time. Talk about how God takes care of us through every day. Whatever happens, he's not surprised or overwhelmed. That's a grown-up truth that even six-year-olds can understand when demonstrated in daily life. Affirm your child's honesty and begin to build patterns of trust in God.

When the fears are a result of immaturity, like fearing monsters under the bed or being afraid to go into the hallway alone, use life as therapy to teach character. You can choose a character quality like independence or courage and develop a plan for your child to grow in that quality. Define the quality in practical terms that are specific for your child. Courage is going upstairs alone to get ready for bed, or courage is petting the neighbor's dog. Introduce the term with excitement and anticipation. "Now that you're seven, you can help Mommy by taking these clothes upstairs and putting them away by yourself. That's being independent. You're getting so grown up." To add to the fun, you may want to place a small piece of candy in the clothes drawer, or a special sticker, something your child will delight in finding. You can also practice independence when greeting adults by looking at their eyes and shaking their hands. Your child can practice independence by paying for his own ice cream at the store. Look for lots of opportunities for small but fun successes. Remember that small steps of success build confidence and overcome these kinds of immature fears.

Pray with your child about developing courage. Prayer is an important link to God that kids can use for a number of reasons. One of those has to do with their fears and the

uncertainty of life. You might also encourage your child to memorize Bible verses about courage and trusting God. Joshua 1:9 says, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

In the end, you'll want to develop a lifestyle of trust in God. As you work on this area with your child, allow God to work in your heart too. After all, parenting can be pretty scary. You'll want to develop patterns of trusting your heavenly Father. The modeling you do will help your child see the benefit of trusting God in very real and personal ways every day.



Juggling with Joy

Family life can grow extremely busy as your son or daughter begins to get involved in different activities. It doesn't take long for life to become consumed by the weekly practice schedules, music lessons, daily homework, or weekend games. If you have more than one child, juggling compounds exponentially. Before you know it, you realize that you're spending more time in your car driving from one event to the next and less time at home as a family.

Most parents would agree that it's important to expose children to a variety of different activities so they can grow and discover what they're good at and what they enjoy. There's also great value that comes from being part of a team and learning how to work together. So how do you do it? How do you find the balance between making sure that you have plenty of family time with your children while still involving them in activities outside the home? Here are a few thoughts and ideas that may be helpful as you decide the path for your family.

First of all, keep the important things the important things. Take time to establish the goals you have for your

family early so that you can lean on those goals when you make decisions. It may be helpful to post your family goals in a prominent place in your home so that you can refer to them often. Determining priorities and goals in advance will help you weigh out all the options that present themselves. Lack of planning leaves you susceptible to the reality that there are just too many good options. In the end, too many good things can become the enemy of what's best for your family.

When you begin making your family goals, ask yourself, "How many activities will we allow our son or daughter to be involved in each year?" "How many nights per week do we want to sit down and have a family dinner?" "When will we schedule time for family devotions or family time activities to intentionally pass the faith on to our kids?" By establishing family goals you provide your family with a "barometer" with which to measure decisions. For example, Pete, age six, had an awesome season. The coach is so impressed he invites Pete to be part of a travel soccer team, a commitment that involves more time and money each week. Before saying yes to this great opportunity, Dad and Mom spend some time evaluating their family goals to decide whether or not this is a wise choice for their family.

Remember, it's easy to get caught up in what others are doing and feeling. For example, some parents are influenced by the idea that if you do not take advantage of an opportunity, your child will somehow miss out on reaching his full potential. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, he reminded them of influences in the world that tend to direct human behavior. He warned them in Romans 12:2 by saying, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The reality is that the world has a

way of putting pressure on individuals and families that is often contrary to what is best. Paul continues that verse by talking about decision-making and understanding what God's will might be in a given situation. He says, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." The rest of Romans 12 provides a number of practical ways to keep perspective in life. Without goals, perspective, and pre-planning, you may become victim to impulse decisions and find yourself in over your head faster than you realize.

The danger in many families today is to overcommit themselves. There seems to be this belief that if there's a good opportunity out there, then we have an obligation to take advantage of it. Signing your child up for activities can be great! Helping them to discover their strengths and work on their weaknesses has tremendous value. The early elementary years are ideal for exposing your child to a variety of experiences, as these are the years when your son or daughter will begin forming passions, gifts, and abilities.

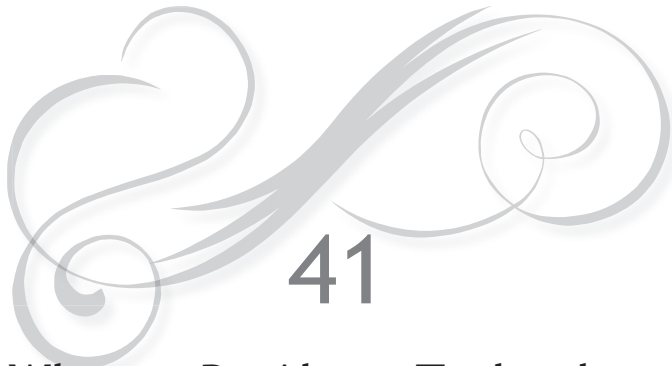
Keep in mind, however, that providing your child with key experiences throughout life is different than signing up for several options at one time or placing children in activities that require a great deal of time away from home. Children can become overcommitted, resulting in an addiction to activity, lending to a continual focus on self.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians about decision-making he says, "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. " 'Everything is permissible'—but not everything is constructive." (1 Corinthians 10:23) That same principle applies to schedule choices in a family.

Children also learn valuable lessons from participat-

ing in family interaction, resting together, taking on chores or family responsibility, and growing spiritually. It can be tempting to allow good activities to squeeze out other important things that are essential for a child's maturity and growth.

Be prayerful about your decision-making. Although it's good for kids to be busy and active, you may find that the opportunities exceed what's best for your child. Learning to make wise decisions about your family's time takes intentionality. That doesn't come without a conscious effort to place God in the center of your daily lives. Before making any decisions that affect your family, take time to pray. Don't just tell God about your options, take time to listen to him as well. Ask God to speak to you in regards to your child. By doing so you're inviting God to speak clearly to you about the choices and priorities that are best for your family. He knows how crazy life can get, and he wants to lead and guide you to make wise decisions so that you can create a balanced home and juggle with joy.



What to Do About Technology

There's no doubt that there are many benefits that come from our technological world. Information can be accessed at the press of a button. Game systems can keep kids entertained both at home and in the car, and texting can speed up communication. Technology is all around us and is ready to serve our every need. The challenge is that technology can become a boss, not just a servant, determining our schedule, capturing our time, and limiting our ability to get involved in other beneficial activities. As with many good things in life, balance is the key. But teaching balance to a child is always a challenge. It means setting limits, and kids often resist.

As children grow through the early elementary years, they need a variety of experiences to form a foundation for further learning. Television provides information and entertainment, but kids benefit from other options as well. They learn confidence through hands-on problem-solving and gain communication skills through practice.

The typical elementary child today has computers in the classroom and a number of electronic toys at home. Many schools have students now using computers as part

of their reading program, in addition to exposing children to the different writing and presentation advantages that the computer can provide. Then, when children come home they spend even more time with technology as they jump onto their favorite game system or take a seat on the couch for some time watching television, leaving many parents wondering if all this technology is really best for their kids.

When your children use electronics, be sure to set up appropriate filters and protective software. Internet safety is essential. Even though you may teach your child to not give out personal information or to stick to approved sites, kids invariably stumble into danger when computers aren't protected.

Limiting technological entertainment choices forces kids into other creative alternatives and helps them develop in several ways. Reading a book engages the brain actively whereas television is a more passive way to learn. Getting involved in an art project requires a child to think creatively instead of simply picking up a video game. Some children can't wait a few minutes without some form of electronic stimulation, revealing the weakness of not being able to entertain themselves.

Developing strategies to limit the use of computers, television, and gaming systems is a place to start. Check the parental control options, both to limit inappropriate information and also to set limits on time. Of course, one form of parental control is to say to a child, "Find a place to save your work in the next five minutes before I come over there and turn it off." However, it's often helpful to allow the software limits to be the bad guy when possible. Many programs allow parental controls that limit the number of

minutes or hours a child plays or the time of day that the system works.

There's no set guideline for the amount of time a child should be allowed to play with electronics. Some suggest limiting technological entertainment to one or two hours a day. Others limit that form of entertainment to weekends, and still others don't allow electronics after dinner. All of these limits are designed to prompt children to engage in other forms of activity. You'll have to decide what's best for your family, but as you set limits, be sure to provide other alternatives to guide your child into healthy choices.

It's often helpful to encourage afterschool activities. If your son shows an interest in music, for example, you might help him get into guitar or piano lessons. Scouting, art classes, martial arts, gymnastics, and swimming all provide children with good opportunities to round out their character and develop skills at the same time.

Enjoy the great outdoors. After homework is completed you might go to the park or encourage your child to play in the backyard, providing exercise and fresh air. It's amazing what ideas and activities come up when kids go outside.

You might want to make dinner together. Boys and girls alike often enjoy helping to prepare a meal. You might allow your child to choose one meal each week to be your assistant. Planning, reading the instructions, and thinking about the finished product often help children gain a greater appreciation for the work involved. If you have more than one child, you might give each child separate jobs so that the family is working together.

It's often wise to create a cabinet or drawer of art supplies. Find a convenient location in your home that you can fill with a variety of art supplies. This doesn't need to

be fancy. Ask your child what types of supplies he would like to have (e.g. markers, feathers, felt, scissors, glue, colored paper). Fill the space together. Art is a great activity to do after homework is done or when waiting for dinner to be ready. It's also relaxing to do in the evening after bath time.

Playing games with kids is rich with entertainment, interaction, and learning. Board games are a great alternative to gaming systems and television. Board games give you and your child an opportunity to interact together. They teach the art of winning and losing and they're a lot of fun. Encourage play dates with friends when time allows and have a shelf or closet of games children can play together.

One family created a list of six things you can do when you're bored since their kids had a hard time getting involved in non-electronic activities. They were encapsulated into six words: creativity, reading, relationships, exploring, outside, and service. Each category had a subset of ideas.

Of course, sometimes kids don't want to do any of the choices. They're just miserable because they can't watch television or play on the computer. At that point you might require that the child go sit in the hall until she can think of an idea from the list. It's surprising to see how quickly children learn to find alternatives to electronics when parents are firm and there are no other choices.

One of the heart qualities children learn when parents set limits is contentment. In helping Timothy to be a strong and wise pastor, Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." Sometimes it takes firm limits to develop strong character in children.

Remember, technology does have its advantages. You don't need to throw away your child's Playstation or dis-

connect the computer. The key is to have a plan to keep those gadgets in proper perspective to gain the most from technology while helping your child grow and develop in other ways as well.

Offering Hope to Help Kids Move Forward

Kids need hope. It drives them forward and a lack of hope leads to stagnation and discouragement. Nate works hard and saves money because of the hope he has to purchase a remote control car he wants. Ashley wants her friend to like her and is more willing to listen to Mom's suggestions about her annoying behavior. Ron works hard on his homework with the hope of doing well or getting a good grade. All of these examples of hope propel children forward.

Kids who lack hope often give up and resort to negative behavior to get attention. They've somehow developed a belief that they don't have what it takes to move forward in a positive way, so why try? Why should I work on my spelling, math, or science? I'm not a good student. Or, what good is it to try to please my parents? I can't ever seem to get it right.

Children easily get discouraged because they see life in the moment. They don't have enough life experience to see that change is possible, growth provides new resources, and that hard work pays off in the end. That's one of the

reasons kids need parents who can frame life for them and keep hope positioned carefully out front.

God's prescription for hope is found in Romans 5:3-4. "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Many children don't have the character necessary to persevere. Parents come alongside their children and offer parent discipline in order to build self-discipline, and parental motivation to build self-motivation. Children learn that they can finish a task, that they can get a B instead of a D on a project, that they can find a shoe, or that they can wait instead of having what they want immediately.

Parents are like jello molds. As kids are growing and developing, they need structure, guidance, and firmness to help them develop the character they'll need for success. Eventually you'll be able to take off the mold and your child will handle life situations with confidence. The work you do now to incorporate hope in your parenting helps children believe that things are possible.

You might regularly spend time envisioning a positive future for your child. "I can see that your ability to work hard is going to help you accomplish great things." Or, "The way you care about people is a gift and I'm sure God is going to use that in a special way." Or, "The way you showed kindness was inspiring."

You want your daughter to know that you believe in her. You're her biggest fan and you see signs of greatness happening right now. That's easier with some children than it is for others. But even the child who struggles in several areas has strengths that are admirable. When parents believe in their kids and communicate their pleasure, kids rise to the occasion. They begin to believe things about themselves, that with God's grace, they can succeed.

Communicating hope doesn't mean that your positive attitude diminishes your standards or weakens your firmness. On the contrary, strong discipline accompanied by good parental coaching empowers children toward success. Some parents overemphasize praise and encouragement so much that they water down expectations resulting in weak kids. Hold the standard high, expect big things, while at the same time communicating a sense of hope, and you'll see your kids move further faster.

Raising children is a huge responsibility. One mom said it well, "I can't believe God entrusted a child to me. I can hardly manage myself, let alone someone else." Remember that raising children is a sanctifying experience. God often uses children to teach parents how to be more godly. He's in the business of changing people at any age. He'll use you to help mold the character of your child while at the same time building and strengthening you in positive ways.

As you continue to move forward in this huge job of parenting, remember that God loves you, believes in you, and empowers you with his grace to do the tasks he's given to you. Hope isn't just for kids. We all need it. In moments of discouragement, go to the Lord and ask him for an extra helping of his grace. Stand under the spigot of his love, and allow his hope to pour into your heart. You need it and so does your child.

Remember the beautiful words of Jeremiah the prophet as he was trying to encourage Israel during a tough time in their lives. Things hadn't worked out the way they had hoped. They didn't quite know what to do with themselves. They were searching for direction and were discouraged. God spoke through the prophet in Jeremiah 29:11-12 and

said, “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’ ” May those same words encourage your heart and give you hope today.

Parenting is Heart Work

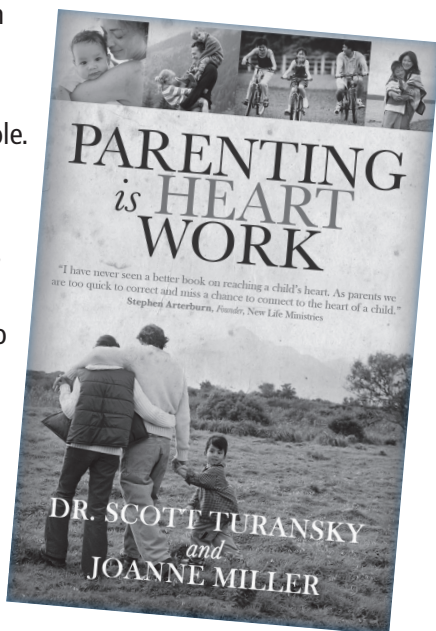
Learn what it means to touch a child's heart. This practical, biblical resource will change the way parents view their role. You'll learn how to help children make long-term changes. Many times parents have to change the way they parent in order for children to change the way they live.

Offering a new way to look at parenting,

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN share the results of their

study of over 750 times the

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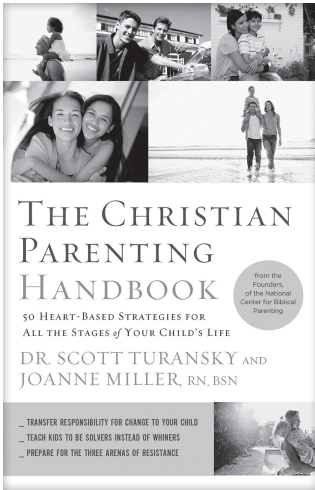
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