Encouragement for Parents

This special edition of Our Daily Bread is designed for parents with children of any age. The articles, stories, meditations and Scripture readings will encourage you in the ups and downs, and help you to model your parenting style on our heavenly Father!

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ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

Reflections From

Our Daily Bread

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Since baby’s first cry, life has never been the same. Sleepless nights, screaming hunger, the first cold, colic, the relentless routine, the second cold, more screaming to decipher, shopping trips becoming military operations . . . Then they start crawling; and suddenly they no longer stay where you put them! Before you know it, baby is not a baby any more. Baby has become a child.

While the physical needs lessen as they learn to feed, clothe and toilet themselves, the intensity of their emotional and social needs really crank up. How do you stop them hitting? Why won’t they
share? Why won’t they play nicely? Why won’t they stay in a room without me for longer than thirty seconds?

Parenting and guiding children is hard. Really hard. It takes up all your energy and headspace—and you’ll still ask yourself *Could I have done that better?* at the end of most days. That’s why we’ve created this special edition of *Our Daily Bread*—to encourage you as you tackle parenting head on. God, as our heavenly Father, gives us a model for parenting in how He shepherds, guides and corrects us, His children. It is from His example that we want to help you think about parenting your own little ones (even if they’re becoming big ones!). It is our prayer that these reflections will give you some down-to-earth advice, while encouraging you to walk each day in God’s strength.

Your friends at Our Daily Bread Ministries
1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is shortsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Notes
Encouragement for Parents

SHOWING GOD’S CHARACTER

Promises, Promises

My youngest daughter and I have a game we call “Pinchers”. When she goes up the stairs, I’ll chase her and try to give her a little pinch. The rules are that I can only pinch her (gently, of course!) when she’s on the stairs. Once she’s at the top, she’s safe. Sometimes, though, she’s not in the mood to play. And if I follow her up the stairs, she’ll sternly say, “No pinchers!” I’ll respond, “No pinchers. I promise.”

Now, that promise may seem a little thing. But when I do what I say, my daughter begins to understand something of my character. She experiences my consistency. She knows my word is good, that she can trust me. It’s a little thing, keeping such a promise. But promises—or, keeping them, I should say—are the glue of relationships. They lay a foundation of love and trust.

I think that’s what Peter meant when he wrote that God’s promises enable us to “participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). When we take God at His Word, trusting what He says about Himself and about us, we encounter His heart towards us. It gives Him an opportunity to reveal His faithfulness as we rest in what He says is true. I’m thankful Scripture brims with His promises, these concrete reminders that “his compassions never fail. They are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Lord, thank You so much for Your “great and precious promises”. Help us to recognise and to rest in what You say is true, that we might show the same example to our children.

God’s Word to us reveals His heart towards us.
1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 

(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 

3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 

26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 

27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 

28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 

29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” 

33 The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. 

34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 

35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”
Seasons of Motherhood

As a pastor, I’ve ministered to many women during their seasons of motherhood. I have called on mothers in the hospital and rejoiced with them for their precious babies. I’ve counselled anxious mothers and tried to assure them that God was watching over their rebellious teenagers. I’ve stood with mothers at the bedside of an injured or ill child and felt their pain. And I’ve cried with them in their grief when their son or daughter died.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, also experienced these times of joy and sorrow. What joy when the Christ-child was born! (LUKE 2:7). What excitement when the shepherds and later the wise men came to worship Him! (VV.8-20; MATTHEW 2:1-12). What uneasiness when Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul! (LUKE 2:35). And what heart-wrenching grief as Mary watched her Son dying on the cross! (JOHN 19:25-30). But her seasons of motherhood didn’t end with that terrible scene. She rejoiced that He rose from the grave. And because she trusted Him as her Saviour, she is now in heaven with Him.

A mother experiences great joys and intense sorrows. But if she submits her life to God, every season of her motherhood serves His eternal purposes. ☬

Ecclesiastes 3:1
There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Motherhood is a sacred partnership with God.
I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Notes
Leandra is three years old.” She has bright brown eyes and a very good mind. One day I was babysitting her, and she was watching her brother Max play games on my computer. Suddenly she announced that she was going to get a snack. “I do it myself!” she said emphatically.

“I’ll help you,” I said, and began to follow her. She repeated firmly, “I do it myself!” I watched her walk down the stairs. She turned, saw me and said, “You stay upstairs, Grandpa. Keep an eye on Max.” I tried not to laugh. At the bottom of the stairs she turned back, put one hand on her hip and said, “I mean it, Grandpa!” I backed out of sight and roared with laughter. Later I checked on her. She had opened the refrigerator, found some pudding and got a spoon, but she needed me to open the container for her.

I thought later that there’s a lot of that spirit of independence in me. I too want to “do it myself” when it comes to growing and serving as a believer in Jesus Christ. Yet I need to realise that even though I may think I don’t need His help, I really do. Without it, I am unable to produce the kind of spiritual fruit Jesus talked about in John 15.

We must remember the words of our Lord, who said, “apart from me you can do nothing” (JOHN 15:5).

John 15:5
If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

You can depend on the Lord. Can the Lord depend on you?
24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Notes
The colourful folder I received through the mail advertised a series of books describing “the most fascinating study of man’s origin ever published”. The slick advertisement suggests that through eons of time primitive matter evolved into living creatures that eventually became modern man. From this pseudoscientific presentation I can only conclude that my existence and the existence of my children is the result of a chemical accident, and that my life has no real purpose. We are pathetic animals indeed!

The Bible declares that all of us are brought into being by a special act of the Creator Himself, who breathed into us “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). He was made in the image of God that he might live for Him and enjoy Him forever.

If we believe we are the products of chance, however, without meaning or destiny, our behaviour will merely reflect a concern for ‘the next banana’ and we will simply teach our children to do the same. But because we are made in the likeness of God, our lives have significance. We are to manifest in thought, word and deed the eternal glory and purpose of our Designer—the One who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ!

Recognising that you are created in God’s image and are not just an animal, how will you live today? What will you teach your children about how important they are to Him?

MART DEHAAN

Psalm 139:14
I will praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

All of creation bears God’s autograph.
1 Blessed are all who fear the L ORD, who walk in obedience to him.
2 You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours.
3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots round your table.
4 Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the L ORD.

5 May the L ORD bless you from Zion; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.
6 May you live to see your children’s children—peace be on Israel.

Notes
Parents’ 10 Commands

Children come without guarantees. No matter how well we take care of them, they don’t always perform as we think they should. They’re hard to steer. Or they may lose their ‘brakes’. But this doesn’t mean we as parents are without responsibility. We must help our children grow into godly people. Author David Wilkerson said, “Good parents do not always produce good children, but devoted, dedicated, hardworking mothers and fathers can weigh the balance in favour of decency and moral character.”

To assist in your quest to be good parents, here are ten commandments for guiding children.

1. Teach them, using God’s Word (DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9).
2. Tell them what’s right and wrong (1 KINGS 1:6).
3. See them as gifts from God (PSALM 127:3).
5. Discipline them (PROVERBS 29:17).
7. Do not provoke them to wrath (EPHESIANS 6:4).
8. Earn their respect by example (1 TIMOTHY 3:4).
9. Provide for their physical needs (1 TIMOTHY 5:8).
10. Pass your faith along to them (2 TIMOTHY 1:5).

There are no guarantees. But we can have an edge in trying to “weigh the balance”. 😊

Dave Branon

The character of your children tomorrow may depend on what you teach them today.
AS PARENTS, it’s natural to wonder about the future. We may find ourselves wishing that God had assured us of predictable results.

It is actually more loving, however, to parent our children without such a confidence. By looking at the way our heavenly Father has loved us, we’ll see that parenting is worth the effort—not because our children always make the right choices but because we’ve had the opportunity and privilege and peace of loving them the way our heavenly Father has loved us.

Accepting a Limited Guarantee

Good parenting doesn’t guarantee good children. It only assures that our children will have the tremendous advantage of having had a good parent. Think about the God of the Bible. He was a perfect parent. But look at His children. Adam and Eve were raised in the best of environments. Yet they threw it all away and gave birth to a murderer.

Then came Israel, a dearly loved nation who repeatedly and chronically became the incorrigible, rebellious child. Then came the church, who time after time has given her
Father a bad name all over the earth.

It’s regrettable when parents experience false guilt because they believe that if they do the right things their children will always turn out well. The truth is that if we do well, our children will be blessed with a good foundation. But there are no guarantees.

Learning How to Play the Game

Tennis can be played two ways. It can be played with the kind of sportsmanship that is gracious in winning and gracious in losing. Or tennis can be played merely for the win and the money. The latter is the legacy of some of the pros who have marred the dignity of the game with court-side tantrums, profanity and bitter excuses.

Parents have similar options. They can concentrate on developing their own self-control, skill and reactions. Or they can try to divert attention from their own weaknesses by blaming others for their problems.

Our first parents started rolling the ball of blame. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the snake. The devil-snake undoubtedly blamed God. But God held Adam responsible for his choices. He made Eve accountable for what she decided to do. The snake didn’t get off the hook either.

Today we may say that our parenting problems are the result of our own parents’ mistakes. There may be a lot of truth to that. But a long time ago, the Lord taught His people
not to blame others for their own choices. He objected to a proverb used to diminish a sense of personal responsibility for people’s own actions: “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (EZEKIEL 18:2).

Scripture also shows, however, that being under the influence of our own parents does not suspend responsibility for how we choose to respond to that influence. It is up to us to choose whether we will unconsciously follow the example of our parents, consciously aspire to it or deliberately choose another path.

An immature adolescent may push us to the limits. An alcoholic father or neurotic mother may hover in our memories. But none of them gives us an excuse to be angry, argumentative or abusive in our own behaviour.

Going Back to School

JUST ABOUT THE TIME we think we have our education behind us, along comes a strong-willed, growing toddler who quickly pushes us to our wits’ end. Suddenly we find ourselves back in ‘school’ again. We begin to realise that parenting isn’t just a matter of slowly dumping our accumulated knowledge into fresh, receptive, mouldable, hungry minds. Once again we begin looking for more answers.

As we pick up the dry-erase marker of parental wisdom, we find that the whiteboard has become greasy and unaccepting of our enthusiastic desire to write and teach something wonderful. This resistance to our teaching will last for as long as we have our children. We will find that with few exceptions they learn best when we are looking the other way.
This isn’t the way we want it. We think a child should be a fresh and empty document onto which we can transfer all of the knowledge we wish we had taken to heart when we were their age.

Yet learning is occurring whether we realise it or not. We are learning something about the heart of God, which overflows with love for the little ones bearing His name and likeness. We are learning something about His joy. We are learning about the pain He feels when He sees His children turn away from His loving correction (Isaiah 1:2).

We are learning a lot about ourselves. We find that these little ones are bringing out the best in us, and the worst. But even the worst isn’t all bad. Our frayed nerves, anxiety and anger can do the same thing for us as a headache or a fever. The temptation to shout and scream, or throw around our parental authority (“Because I said so, that’s why!”) are symptoms that must not be ignored.

These reactions tell us that we still have much to learn about what God can do in us. We need to grow in His insight, His self-control, His ability to move us with dignity through the challenges of leading a little ‘centre of the universe’ to maturity. In the knowledge that this is good for us, there is peace.

We need to grow in His insight, His self-control.
Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Notes
Grow!

Whenever children visit relatives, they often hear this kind of greeting: “My, haven’t you grown!” This embarrasses them, but inside they’re glad they’ve outgrown babyhood. Not that babyhood is bad. How else can life begin? But it is sad when we see children failing to grow in their maturity.

Sometimes mature Christians, eager to keep new converts from stagnating in their growth, make them feel guilty for being babies and rush them down the road to maturity before they are ready.

In 1 Peter 2, the apostle affirmed that spiritual babyhood is normal. Instead of forcing newborns to run before they can walk, he encouraged them to crave the wholesome milk of Christ’s basic teaching. He knew that as they continued to take in milk, in time they would move on to solid food and maturity (HEBREWS 5:14). What a joy to see that happen!

Several years ago I received a phone call from a friend, a former drug addict and now a Christian. “Hi, Chris,” I responded cheerily. “How are you doing?” A long, worrisome pause made me wonder, Has he slipped back? Then came words that uplifted my heart: “Growing, Joanie, growing!” That said it all.

I hope you can say the same. As we help our children grow, let’s remember to rely on God for this parenting journey. After all, in Christ, we’re not done growing either! JOANIE YODER

The Christian life is more like climbing a mountain than riding an elevator.
8 Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How are we robbing you?” “In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. 12 “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.
Fearless Giving

When my son Xavier was six years old, a friend brought her toddler to visit and Xavier wanted to give him a few toys. I delighted in our little giver’s generosity, until he offered a stuffed animal my husband had searched several shops in different cities to find. Recognising the high-demand toy, my friend tried to politely decline. Still, Xavier placed his gift into her son’s hands and said, “My daddy gives me lots of toys to share.”

Though I’d like to say Xavier learned his confident giving from me, I’ve often withheld my resources from God and others. But when I remember that my heavenly Father gives me everything I have and need, it’s easier to share.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to trust Him by giving a portion of all He had supplied to the Levite priests, who would in turn help others in need. When the people refused, the prophet Malachi said they were robbing the Lord (MALACHI 3:8–9). But if they gave willingly, showing they trusted the Lord’s promised provision and protection (VV. 10–11), others would recognise them as God’s blessed people (V. 12).

Whether we’re opening our homes to others, giving gifts or just making time for people, giving can be an act of worship and a great witness to our children. Giving freely and fearlessly can show our confidence in the care of our loving Father—the ultimate generous Giver.

XOCHITL DIXON

Lord, please help us live with full confidence in Your faithful provision, so we can give freely and fearlessly to You and others.

Fearless giving to God and others reveals our trust in the Lord’s promises and provision.
18 David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

2 Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“At your service,” he replied.

3 The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”

Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”

4 “Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honour.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

7 “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

Notes
Greatly Valued

A factory worker and his wife were excited when, after many years of marriage, they discovered they were going to have their first child. According to author Jill Briscoe, who told this true story, the man eagerly relayed the good news to his fellow workers. He told them God had answered his prayers. But they made fun of him for asking God for a child.

When the baby was born, he was diagnosed as having Down’s syndrome. As the father made his way to work for the first time after the birth, he wondered how to face his co-workers. “God, please give me wisdom,” he prayed. Just as he feared, some said mockingly, “So, God gave you this child!” The new father stood for a long time, silently asking God for help. At last he said, “I’m glad the Lord gave this child to me and not to you.”

As this man accepted his disabled son as God’s gift to him, so David was pleased to show kindness to Saul’s grandson who was “lame in both feet” (2 Samuel 9:3). Some may have rejected Mephibosheth because he was lame, but David’s action showed that he valued him greatly.

In God’s eyes, every person is important. He sent His only Son to die for us. May we remember with gratitude how much He values each human life.

Dave Branon

Everyone is valuable to God.
1 “At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.”

2 This is what the LORD says:

“The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel.”

3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

4 I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.

5 Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.

6 There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim, ‘Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’ ”

Notes
“Lovable!”

That exclamation came from my daughter as she got ready one morning. I didn’t know what she meant. Then she tapped her shirt, a hand-me-down from a cousin. Across the front was that word: “Lovable”. I gave her a big hug, and she smiled with pure joy. “You are lovable!” I echoed. Her smile grew even bigger, if that was possible, as she skipped away, repeating the word over and over again.

I’m hardly a perfect father. But that moment was perfect. In that spontaneous, beautiful interaction, I glimpsed in my girl’s radiant face what receiving unconditional love looked like: it was a portrait of delight. She knew the word on her shirt corresponded completely with how her daddy felt about her.

How many of us know in our hearts that we are loved by a Father whose affection for us is limitless? Sometimes we struggle with this truth. The Israelites did. They wondered if their trials meant God no longer loved them. But in Jeremiah 31:3, the prophet reminds them of what God said in the past: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” We too long for such unconditional love. Yet the wounds, disappointments and mistakes we experience can make us feel anything but lovable. But God opens His arms—the arms of a perfect Father—and invites us to experience and rest in His love.

Jeremiah 31:3
I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

Lord, hard things in our lives can tempt us to believe we are unlovable. But You say otherwise. Please help us to rest in Your love for us and to show it to our children.

No one loves us like our Father.
1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.
2 Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.
3 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.
4 Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honour and life.
5 In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them.
6 Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Notes
A young mother made an unusual request of a workman who was smoothing out the freshly poured concrete of a new pavement. She asked if she could press her baby’s feet onto the concrete. When the man said yes, she stood the child on the wet cement and pointed his toes in the direction of a nearby church. Although we don’t know what prompted that mother to do this, she apparently wanted to make a permanent impression that would influence the future direction of her little boy’s life.

This unusual expression of concern and commitment should reflect the desire of all Christian parents for the spiritual welfare of their children. We must position our young ones on the right way and recognise the importance of the church in their lives. Our children’s spiritual training must begin at an early age. We have the responsibility to encourage them to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour as soon as they are old enough to understand the meaning of salvation. If we do that, we will cultivate in them a respect for the church and instil in their hearts a love for God and His Word.

By our teaching, our example and our prayers, let’s set our children’s feet in the right direction. 

Proverbs 22:6

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

RICHARD DEHAAN

Our children may go wrong if we don’t start them right.
Learning from the Family Pet

What does it take to teach a dog to sit up and beg? While you might be able to keep your dog off the couch with a few swats of a newspaper, the tactic would fail to get him to sit up, roll over or bring your slippers to you. Even a dog won’t learn new tricks unless you give him a treat, a hug or warm approval.

Training a child is similar. Laying down the law by saying, “Because I said so, that’s why!” only works for a while. After that, all the threats in the world are not apt to make your child mind.

Children cannot be forced to be good—not indefinitely. In time they will begin doing what they want to do whether you like it or not. The key is to help them want to do the right thing so as to adhere to God’s standards and also to meet their own needs. Begin by helping them to feel really cared for. Encourage them. Spend time with them. Do what they enjoy doing. Hold them. Hug them. Do things that will show them that they are in your heart for their good.

Don’t just give them love. Give them boundaries designed to protect their freedom. Show them what happens
to people who refuse to live under the wise and loving rule of God. Find creative ways of showing them that the counsel of the Word of God has been given to us to meet our deepest needs and wants.

Help them to discover the wisdom of the Proverbs, which show over and over again in many different ways that while God could just appeal to His authority, He doesn’t. He gives us insight and incentive.

As a parent, you will avoid much frustration by realising the importance of giving your children good reasons and incentives for right choices. They need to see how these reasons and incentives fit their need for pleasure, importance, freedom and appreciation. To withhold them is to “exasperate your children” (EPHESIANS 6:4) and to lose your own peace of mind.

Living by a Contract

Wise parents try not to make their children behave. They realise that they cannot force their children to be good any more than a horse can be forced to drink water. You can lead your children to be good, but you can’t make them. That’s the power of the human spirit. Children who are sitting down on the outside can still be standing up on the inside.

This is not to say that you don’t have to make children do things they don’t want to do. There are exceptions, especially in the early years.
One of the most important lessons to be learned as a parent is mirrored in the way God deals with His children. He is a contract-making God. He tells us what will happen if we do what He tells us to do. Then He tells us what will happen if we refuse. He helps us make good choices if we ask Him for wisdom and readily offers to help us do anything that we cannot do on our own.

Put this in a parenting relationship. The best we can do is to show them clearly what we expect, and within what period of time. Tell them what will happen if they obey. Tell them what will happen if they don’t. Then let them choose the consequences. If they end up grounded, if they lose television privileges, if they are not allowed to use the car—it’s their choice.

Teaching our children to choose their own path, and then letting them experience the pleasurable or painful results of their own choices, is one of the most important things we can do—not only for them but also for our own peace of mind.

To the extent that we do this, we can stop yelling, threatening and repeating ourselves. We can stop nagging to pick up the pile of clothes in their room. We can lower our voice and be civilised about our expectations. It is to say, “From now on, you choose how it will be with you. As God fathers us, so we will parent you. We’re here for you, but on these terms. It’s your move.”

**Bringing Our Children to Tears**

*We live in a day* of rampant child abuse. So we have been rightly sensitised to the dangers of hitting a child in anger or using any instrument, including the hand, which might cause
serious physical injury. It’s just as important to realise that as our children grow older, they can be corrected by the use of previously stated consequences of their own choosing.

But a wise and loving parent will not be afraid to bring their child to tears when necessary. The timeless wisdom of Scripture is clear:

• “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (PROVERBS 13:24).
• “Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.” (PROVERBS 19:18).
• “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away” (PROVERBS 22:15).
• “A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother” (PROVERBS 29:15).
• “Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire” (PROVERBS 29:17).
• “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (HEBREWS 12:11).

These can be hard words to hear. In the short run, it is much easier to indulge our children than to put up with the fury of their tears and complaints. But in the long run, loving and timely correction is necessary both for our child’s wellbeing and for our own peace of mind.
7 Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

42 The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 “The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

Notes
We Know

My son Steve knows his floppy hat is reserved for life’s most informal times. This hat, which would look good on a fisherman by the lake, is not to be worn to church or school. So, when he grabbed it one morning on his way out of the house to catch the school bus, he knew he was breaking a rule.

Parents understand these kinds of battles. We recognise that our children will test our rules, and we are not surprised when they challenge us. They know they aren’t supposed to watch certain TV programmes or stay out too late or use a disrespectful tone of voice or fight with a sibling. Yet they still do.

This is not unlike the attitude we sometimes take with our heavenly Father. We know what is right and wrong (James 4:17). We’ve read the Bible. We’ve sensed in our hearts the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We know. Yet we test God.

We know it’s wrong to speak disparagingly of others. We know it’s not right to neglect those in need. We know we should witness to our neighbour. We know we should pray. We know that when the Lord returns we should be faithfully serving and obeying Him (Luke 12:42-43). We know!

How it pleases God when we act on what we already know! 

Dave Branon

One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it.

Oswald Chambers
1 You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. 2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

6 Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Notes
The Choice

A career woman who decided to be a stay-at-home mum was being interviewed on radio. “I used to tell my mother I was never going to be like her,” she said. “Staying at home with children was easy and unexciting, I thought. I was going to have a fulfilling career when I grew up. I have apologised to my mother many times for saying things like that.”

Some societies make women feel second-rate if they don’t pursue a career. God, however, gives motherhood great dignity. His plan for young mothers is stated in today’s Scripture reading (Titus 2:4-5). It’s a job description as challenging, demanding and potentially rewarding as any career in the world.

A mother was busily preparing for a craft fair, painting small wooden houses, when her three year old son wanted her full attention. With child-like insight, he said, “I wish I had two mummies—one to paint and one to sit on the couch with me.”

Divorce, the death of a mate or money pressures may force a woman into the workforce. Some mothers choose the extremely difficult course of balancing family priorities with a career. But selfishness and a greedy desire for more things should never cause a woman to try to be “two mummies”. Motherhood must be priority number one. Dennis Dehaan

Titus 2:4

Urge the younger women to love their husbands and children.

The mother’s heart is the child’s schoolroom. Beecher
3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!

10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Notes
Leonard Pitts grew up with a father he describes as physically present but emotionally absent. In his first book on parenting, Pitts openly chronicles his struggle to come to terms with his alcoholic father and the climate of fear he had created in their home. Pitts challenges all men to resolve the resentment towards their absent or abusive fathers instead of passing it on to the next generation.

There’s a passage in Hebrews 12 that applies to all Christians, but it has special relevance to dads. It reads: “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Vv.14-15).

Think of what could happen in our families if we emptied our hearts of bitterness and made peaceful relationships our goal! If we have been blessed with a wise and loving father, we should be grateful and follow his example. But if our father has failed us, we must rely on God’s grace, resolve our anger towards him and strive to be the kind of dad we never had. It won’t be easy, but with our heavenly Father as a perfect example, we can learn to be good dads.

DAVID MCCASLAND

A good father reflects the love of the heavenly Father.
28 Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.
14 Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” 15 When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

Notes
Parents Who Pray

A young mother sent these words to a magazine: “I wish I could wrap my children in bubble wrap to protect them from the big, bad world outside.”

Author Stormie Omartian understands how that mother feels. In her book *The Power of a Praying Parent*, she writes, “One day I cried out to God, saying, ‘Lord, this is too much for me. I can’t keep a moment-by-moment watch on my son every day. How can I ever have peace?’ ”

God responded by leading Stormie and her husband to become praying parents. They began to intercede for their son daily, mentioning the details of his life in prayer.

The desire to wrap our children in bubble wrap to protect them is rooted in fear, a common tendency for all parents, no matter how old our children are. Wrapping them in prayer, as Jesus did (Matthew 19:13-15), is a powerful alternative. He cares more about our children than we do, so we can release them into His hands by praying for them. He doesn’t promise us that nothing bad will happen to them. But as we pray, He will give us the peace we long for (Philippians 4:6-7).

This challenge is for all parents—even those whose children have grown up: don’t ever stop wrapping your children in prayer! 🙏

*Every child needs a praying parent.*
1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—
3 “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”
4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Notes
It’s Sally!

Benjamin West was just trying to be a good babysitter for his little sister Sally. While his mother was out, Benjamin found some bottles of coloured ink and proceeded to paint Sally’s portrait. But by the time Mrs. West returned, ink blots stained the table, chairs and floor. Benjamin’s mother surveyed the mess without a word until she saw the picture. Picking it up she exclaimed, “Why, it’s Sally!” And she bent down and kissed her young son.

In 1763, when he was twenty-five years old, Benjamin West was selected as history painter to King George III. He became one of the most celebrated artists of his day. Commenting on his start as an artist, he said, “My mother’s kiss made me a painter.” Her encouragement did far more than a rebuke ever could have done.

The apostle Paul instructed parents: “do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (EPHESIANS 6:4).

It’s easy to notice the wrong in a child, but difficult to look beyond an innocent offence to see an act of creativity and love. What a challenge to raise our children according to God’s standards, knowing when to say, “It’s a mess!” and when to say, “Why, it’s Sally!”

Correction does much; encouragement does more.

DAVID MCCASLAND
Working Like a Farmer

Parenting is more like farming than cooking. Good meals can be prepared in a couple of hours. And by following a recipe, you can be fairly certain of the outcome. But formulas don’t work very well with children.

To get a model for child-rearing, you need to track the bread and beef all the way back to the farm where they came from. Parenting is ploughing and digging and raking and planting. It’s weeding and cultivating and irrigating, and then waiting on the heavens until harvest time.

That’s not to say that farming is just a game of chance. Farming can be very scientific. A good farmer is a hard worker who knows what to do with the specific crops or animals he’s raising. He doesn’t raise chickens like turkeys, nor corn like alfalfa. Above all, you don’t see him trying quick-recipe formulas with a casual attitude. A good farmer is a humble man. He knows his cash crop, but he doesn’t presume upon the outcome. All he knows is what his responsibility is at each step of the way. If he gets a bumper crop, it’s because he did the right things that were under his control, and also because the things that weren’t under his control fell in line.

The apostle Paul alluded to this farming model in his first New Testament letter to the Corinthians: “What, after all, is
Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow . . . The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour . . . We work hard with our own hands . . . I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (3:5-6,8; 4:12,14-16).

Paul was thinking of spiritual parenting, which is different from raising your own children. But there are strong parallels. In both cases you must do the right thing, work hard, wait on God for the harvest and realise that you will be rewarded—not for the results but for the loving nurturing you have given.

Accepting the Role of a Priest

The Old Testament priest Eli raised a child who was not his own (1 Samuel 1:24-2:21). For several years, Eli acted as a parent to a young boy named Samuel. But Samuel was only a trust placed in Eli’s care.

In a sense, we have a similar relationship to our children. They are like everything else we have in our possession; they are not our own. Our children have been placed in our care temporarily by the Lord to be raised for Him.

In some ways, that thought isn’t very comforting. On the other hand, realising that our children are the Lord’s is very
liberating. It means that the children’s rightful owner will make sure that I have all the resources I need to care for them on His behalf.

Parents are also like Eli in that they are like priests. In Hebrews 5:1-4 we are shown that a priest intercedes in behalf of his people, and that he does so in the awareness of his own weakness. Because he knows his own problems, he can be sympathetic and compassionate in dealing with those who come to him for help. The author of Hebrews wrote this about the high priest: “He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 5:2-3). The same author also said of Christ: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (4:15). The New Testament now calls the children of God a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:5,9).

Think of the implications for a parent. It doesn’t make sense for us to expect our children to be better than we were. We might long for them to make good choices. But we haven’t always been wise and wonderful. We’ve been where our children now are. We’ve been just as foolish, just as short-sighted, just as naive. What we have to offer them is not a perfect example, but sympathetic, compassionate hearts that continually go out to them in love and to God their heavenly Father—and rightful owner—on their behalf.

Growing like Grapes on a Vine

The secret of the fruit is in the branch and root. Good parenting is the fruit of good character that is rooted and
growing in God Himself. The Bible calls this character the fruit of the Spirit. That is to say that it comes from the Holy Spirit of God rather than from our own natural ability or energy.

Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote, and think about how it assures good parenting: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (GALATIANS 5:22-25).

The reason Paul’s words are so important for parents is that they not only reflect the qualities that assure good parenting, but they also point to resources of the Spirit we don’t have to find in ourselves or in our own experience. If Paul is right, then our own sense of inadequacy and our own history in dysfunctional relationships can actually be put to work for us. Those can be the needs that drive us to find in the Spirit of our heavenly Father the parenting qualities that are not natural to us. When we are in agreement with Christ and His Word (JOHN 15:1-14), then we will be growing in our experience of the fruit of the Spirit:

- supernatural love vs. sheer effort and fatigue
- good sense of humour (joy) vs. pessimism
- calm spirit vs. anxiety
- patient attitude vs. quick anger
- kindness vs. meanness
- good motives and intentions vs. selfishness
- promise keeping vs. breaking your word
- gentleness vs. harshness
- self-control vs. addictive behaviour
14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Notes
Of Spiders and God’s Presence

Spiders. I don’t know any kid who likes them. At least not in their rooms . . . at bedtime. But as she was getting ready for bed, my daughter spied one dangerously close to her bed. “Daaaad!!!!! Spiiiderrrr!!!!!” she hollered. Despite my determination, I couldn’t find the eight-legged invader. “He’s not going to hurt you,” I reassured her. She wasn’t convinced. It wasn’t until I told her I’d stay next to her top bunk and stand guard that she agreed to get in bed.

As my daughter settled in, I held her hand. I told her, “I love you so much. I’m right here. But you know what? God loves you even more than Daddy and Mummy. And He’s very close. You can always pray to Him when you’re scared.” That seemed to comfort her, and peaceful sleep came quickly.

Scripture repeatedly reassures us God is always near (PSALM 145:18; ROMANS 8:38–39; JAMES 4:7–8), but sometimes we struggle to believe it. Perhaps that’s why Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus to have strength and power to grasp that truth (EPHESIANS 3:16). He knew that when we’re frightened, we can lose track of God’s closeness. But just as I lovingly held my daughter as she went to sleep that night, so our loving heavenly Father is always as close to us as a prayer.

Lord, thank You for always being close by. Please give us strength and power in our hearts to remember You are near, You love us deeply and we can always call out to You.

God is always near in spite of our fears.

ADAM HOLZ
1 In that day you will say:

“I will praise you, L ORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.

2 Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The L ORD, the L ORD himself, is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation.”

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

4 In that day you will say:

“Give praise to the L ORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 Sing to the L ORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

Notes
Two year old Max was securely buckled in his seat in Grandpa’s car. He was waiting for Dad and Grandpa to stop talking so he could go for a ride. His mother poked her head in the car and said, “Where are you going, Max?” “Not know,” he replied, raising his little arms.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“Not know!”

“Do you want to come back in the house with me?” she asked.

“No!” came the quick reply as he settled himself more firmly, waiting to begin his adventure.

His mother Sheryl told me later, “That little boy taught me a lesson I needed right then.” She was soon to give birth to another baby, and she had reason to be unsure of what was ahead. “He didn’t know where he was going or what he was going to do, but he trusted Grandpa completely. Max’s confidence in Grandpa is the kind of trust I need in my heavenly Father.”

If you are in one of those periods of life when you don’t know what lies ahead, or you don’t know what to do about some critical issue, it might help to think about it that way. God wants you to have the confidence in Him to say, “I will trust and not be afraid” (Isaiah 12:2).

Dave Egner

We don’t know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.
1 Remember the days of old; 
consider the generations long past. 
Ask your father and he will tell you, 
your elders, and they will explain to you.

8 When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, 
when he divided all mankind, 
he set up boundaries for the peoples 
according to the number of the sons of Israel.

9 For the LORD’s portion is his people, 
Jacob his allotted inheritance.

10 In a desert land he found him, 
in a barren and howling waste. 
He shielded him and cared for him; 
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,

11 like an eagle that stirs up its nest 
and hovers over its young, 
that spreads its wings to catch them 
and carries them on its pinions.

12 The LORD alone led him; 
no foreign god was with him.
Betty’s daughter arrived home from an overseas trip, feeling unwell. When her pain became unbearable, Betty and her husband took her to the emergency room. The doctors and nurses set to work, and after a few hours one of the nurses said to Betty, “She’s going to be okay! We’re going to take good care of her and get her healed up.” In that moment, Betty felt peace and love flood over her. She realised that while she hovered over her daughter anxiously, the Lord is the perfect parent who nurtures His children, comforting us in difficult times.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord reminded His people how, when they were wandering in the desert, He cared for them as a loving parent who hovers over its young. He never left them, but was like an eagle “that spreads its wings” to catch its children and “carries them aloft” (32:11). He wanted them to remember that although they experienced hardship and strife in the desert, He didn’t abandon them.

We too may face challenges of many kinds with our children, but we can take comfort and courage in this reminder that our God will never leave us. When we feel that we are falling, the Lord like an eagle will spread His wings to catch us (V. 11) as He brings us peace. 🕊

Father God, Your love as a parent is greater than anything I can imagine. May my confidence rest in You, and may I share Your love with my children.

Our God hovers over us with love.
10 The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. 11 So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. 12 In his distress he sought the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. 13 And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.

14 Afterwards he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.

15 He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. 16 Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowships offerings and thank-offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.
Changed!

During his reign as king, Manasseh sacrificed his own children to idols, ruthlessly killed people and did all kinds of evil. But after he repented and began to worship God, his conduct was radically altered.

Manasseh’s life illustrates the truth that what we believe deep within us has a profound effect on our behaviour. That’s why the lawlessness and violence of our day should not surprise us. What can we expect from people when they have been taught that belief in God and absolute standards are mere superstitions? It’s no wonder that cheating in our schools and teen pregnancy are national scandals. No wonder vicious crimes make the news every day.

The only real solution to this problem is a return to belief in God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. Manasseh’s life was dramatically changed, and the lives of people today are also transformed when they hear the truths of the Bible and respond in obedient faith.

Since what we believe is vital, we not only need the truths of God’s Word that can save us from a Christ-less eternity, but we also need the truths that can prevent us from making tragic mistakes in this life. We need to keep fresh in our minds the beliefs that changed our lives.

He sought the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors.

Stand on the Word of God and you won’t fall into error.
8 Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; 
may your mercy come quickly to meet us, 
for we are in desperate need.

9 Help us, God our Saviour, 
for the glory of your name; 
deliver us and forgive our sins 
for your name’s sake.

10 Why should the nations say, 
“Where is their God?” 
Before our eyes, make known among the nations 
that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.

11 May the groans of the prisoners come before you; 
with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.

12 Pay back into the laps of our neighbours seven times 
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.

13 Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, 
will praise you for ever; 
from generation to generation 
we will proclaim your praise.

Notes
My phone beeped, showing an incoming text. My daughter wanted my grandmother’s recipe for Peppermint Ice Cream Pie. As I thumbed through the yellowed cards in my aged recipe box, my eyes spotted the unique handwriting of my grandmother—and several jotted notes in the small cursive of my mother. It occurred to me that with my daughter’s request, Peppermint Ice Cream Pie would make its entrance into a fourth generation within my family.

I wondered, What other family heirlooms might be handed down generation to generation? What about choices regarding faith? Besides the pie, would the faith of my grandmother—and my own—play out in the lives of my daughter and her offspring?

In Psalm 79 the psalmist bemoans a wayward Israel, which has lost its faith moorings. He begs God to rescue His people from the ungodly and to restore Jerusalem to safety. This done, he promises a restored—and ongoing—commitment to God’s ways. “Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise” (V. 13).

I eagerly shared the recipe, knowing my grandmother’s dessert legacy would enjoy a new layer in our family. And I prayed sincerely for the most lasting hand-me-down of all: the influence of our family’s faith on one generation to the next.  

Dear God, make us mindful of how we can leave Your legacy in our days.

What is your family passing down to the next generation?
HOW CAN A PARENT FIND PEACE OF MIND?

Looking for Teachable Moments

In the Old Testament, God taught His people to build rock piles so that their children would one day ask why the stones were there. When the children asked, the parents were to be ready to tell the story of how the Lord God of Israel had met their needs in that place.

The secret was in being ready for the teachable moments. “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground’” (Joshua 4:21-22).

The parent-teachers of Israel were not to be boring. They were to do things that would encourage their children to ask, “Dad, Mum, why do we do this? Why do we always have an empty place at our table?” (See also Deuteronomy 6:6-9,20-25).

The father who wrote the Proverbs for his son realised the power of a word spoken at just the right moment (Proverbs 15:23; 25:11). He came from a tradition that used creative ways to open the hearts of children to life-changing perspectives. The Jews used education by rock piles, by riddles, by object lessons, by drama and by seeing children, over all, as being willing and active participants in their own learning.

Such child-ready object lessons are different from the kind of family devotions that are forced, ritualistic and academic. These seldom have the desired spiritual effect. Unless our words come at teachable moments, they are not
likely to draw our children’s hearts towards their God. About all forced devotions do is help parents feel less guilty about something that they feel they should do.

Planning for and taking advantage of teachable moments is far better. Tender discussions about life while enjoying an afternoon in a fishing boat, a walk along a wooded field, a drive through the countryside, a spontaneous discussion during mealtime or a family Bible story and prayer at bedtime are usually far better received (DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9) and more effective.

The challenge is that you can’t teach children this way without a lot of involvement and creative time spent with them.

Now, I’m not saying that we should not have mealtime devotions with our children. If it is working well and doing what you hoped it would do, then continue. But if all you are doing is trying to force your children to learn something, chances are they may be learning to resent not only Bible reading and prayer, but also you and your Lord.

**Dying a Thousand Deaths**

*The most effective parents* die a thousand deaths. Sometimes it is the result of being embarrassed by the actions of their children. Sometimes it is the result of utter frustration and fatigue. Sometimes it is over the deep concern of a son or daughter’s short-sighted and self-destructive choices. But often these parents voluntarily die to their own desires just because this is what it takes to bring children into the world.

No one said that bringing children to maturity would be easy. It’s hard for a mother to go through the contractions of labour. It’s hard for her to give years of her life to infants and toddlers who constantly demand attention. It’s hard for a wife and husband to give up the freedoms they enjoyed before children. It’s hard for a father
to put aside his strong will and give his son the space he needs to make his own decisions.

It’s hard to give your children more and more freedom with less and less control so that they can begin to feel the responsibilities of maturity. It’s hard not to jump in and rescue them when they get themselves in trouble. It’s hard to remain firm in providing reasonable boundaries and controls so that they are not left entirely on their own. It would be easier, sometimes, to give in and get them off your back.

It’s hard to continually help them to see that the real issue is not what you want them to do but what they are going to choose and with what consequences. It’s hard not to jump in and take control. It’s hard to be patient enough to give them as much time as they need to grow up. It’s like dying to let them go out into the cold, cruel world.

It’s hard to pray for them daily. It’s harder yet to pray in a way that reflects our surrender to God. It’s hard to say to the Lord, “Do whatever it takes to bring my children to You and to maturity of faith and love. Lord, do whatever it takes.”

Ironically, we are inclined to think that taking an easier path will result in less pain and more joy. Good parenting, however, is the result of Christ-like character. And unless we follow Christ’s lead and that of the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:1-12), we will never see the difference Christ’s Spirit can make in us. Only when we die to ourselves do our children get the benefit of Christ parenting through us.

Preventing for an Empty Nest

Empty-nest syndrome has established itself as a real dimension of mid-life crisis. Life after children is now recognised as another threat to marriages that have survived earlier tests. Parents who have lived all their lives for their
children suddenly find themselves rattling around in an empty house. They become restless, unsatisfied and irritable. Anxiety, anger and depression can come in slowly like a fog. If empty-nest syndrome marks yet another test for parents and their marriage, it should also be seen as the mark of success and hope for the child.

Children are not born to be children. The highest good is not to be protected and directed by a hovering, smothering parent. From the day a baby is born, their parents should understand that their mission is to prepare this child to fly. Maturity is better than immaturity, independence is better than dependence, and the day of departure is better than the day of arrival.

It is interesting to note the way God parents His children. In Old and New Testament times, the heavenly Father temporarily nurtured His children with a heavy provision of miraculous signs and wonders to assure them of His presence. In time, He withdrew the obvious presence of the miraculous and forced His children to sink or swim in the disciplines of faith.

God has made man and woman to leave their parents and cleave to a new mate of their own. It is in this new sphere of independent living that a person is the freest to learn to love God, parents, mate, children and friends. It is here that we can find the peace of mind God provides.
Does the Bible Promise Good Results?

One of the most quoted parenting principles of the Bible is found in Proverbs 22:6. There Solomon, the wise King of Israel, said, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” In the Hebrew language this literally says that if you train up (initiate, imbue, consecrate or dedicate) children in their own way (with regard for their own temperament and individual needs at each stage of growth or development), when they are old (from a word that meant “bearded” or “mature”) they will not depart from it.

Some take this as a promise. Others believe it is a general rule of wisdom that expresses the amount of influence a parent has on an impressionable child. There is some truth in each view. At the very least, this proverb reflects that if you give children a good beginning by training them in a manner appropriate to their own distinct needs, then the positive influence of this early training will remain with them until the day they die.

Overall, the Bible shows that a mature approach to parenting will follow the example of our heavenly Father. He loved as no other parent has ever loved, while also giving His children enough room to make their own choices and mistakes.

Adapted from the Discovery Series booklet
*How Can A Parent Find Peace Of Mind? (Q0804)*
At the Lord’s command Moses recorded the stages in their journey.

Numbers 33:2

Numbers 33 is a chapter in the Bible we might pass by without reflection. It appears to be nothing more than a long list of places tracing Israel’s pilgrimage from Rameses in Egypt to their arrival in the plains of Moab. But it must be important because it’s the only section in Numbers that follows with the words: “At the Lord’s command Moses recorded . . .” (v. 2).
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