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# FOUNDATIONS OF PARENTING

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# Foundations of Parenting

**Purpose of this seminar:** To discuss the essential heart and practice of the parents that results in pointing our children to their incomparable creator and redeemer God so that they might choose Him over any other “god.” Remember God only has prodigal children—except for one.

**Please read before the seminar:**

- [When Kids Won’t Bow To Your Idols](#) (pgs. 30-31 in the notes)

## Session #1—Our Purpose (pgs. 3-4)

- 1. You are to be God’s visible representative to your children. Knowing and living out your purpose in order to help your children understand their purpose**

## Session #2—Our Pleasures (pgs. 5-6)

- 2. Our primary issue and your children’s is a deceived heart. Know how your own deceived heart takes you away from God so you can understand and have compassion on your children’s issues**
- 3. Jesus is the greatest delight and no other delight satisfies**

## Session #3—Our Priorities (pgs. 8-10)

- 4. Growing in knowing and living out God’s answers for life (manhood, womanhood, marriage, emotions, relationships, sex, finances, work, church, service, etc.)**
- 5. Life is about relationships**

## Session #4—Our Path (pgs. 11-13)

- 6. Living a contagious “better way” that is evident and taught in every moment of life**
- 7. Discipline gives a taste of the end of the path**

## Our Prayer

- 8. Prayerful dependence— “Unless the Lord builds this house, those who build it labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1)**

# Session #1—Our Purpose

## Goal Discussion: Your Current Goals

**Discuss:** What are you wanting for your kids....

- Now?
- When they leave home?

**Discuss:** How might your current way of interacting with your children show what your functional goals are?

**Question to consider:** Would you want your children right now to emulate your Christianity? If your answer is no, what impact is this likely to have on your children's future love for Jesus and embrace of Christianity?

**Discuss:** What are the dangers if your goal/purpose in parenting is not clearly in mind?

## Goal Discussion: Knowing God's Goal for us

Tracing God's purpose for parents and their children	What humanity has chosen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen 1:26</li> <li>• Gen 12—the call of Abraham</li> <li>• Exodus 19:6</li> <li>• Isaiah 42:1-9</li> <li>• John 1:18, Hebrews 1:3</li> <li>• Romans 8:29</li> <li>• 1 Peter 2:9-12</li> </ul> <p>➤ <b>You are the visible representative of the Invisible God</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Christ was the perfect visible representative of the invisible God</li> </ul> <p>➤ <b>God through Christ is making believers into the image of His Son to represent God to the world (and to your children)</b></p> <p><b>Results:</b> Joy, Order, Harmony, Blessedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen 11— “Making a name for ourselves” results in confusion</li> <li>• (cf. James 3:16)</li> <li>• Story of Samson who grew up without knowing his purpose. He was given a set of behaviors, but the behaviors meant nothing to him without understanding his purpose.</li> </ul> <p>➤ <b>Humanity's purpose is “Let's make a name for me.”</b></p> <p><b>Results:</b> Despair, Confusion, Identity disorders</p>

**Discuss:** If I am going to represent God well what must I do? (Discussion on Exodus 19/20, Sermon on the mount).

**Discuss:** Since I am the “first” image of God that my children see, how should this impact me? What should I continue to point them to?

**Bottom Line:** *A parent must be fulfilling his/her creation/redemption purpose of representing God which includes knowing God more and living out His good way of life before he/she can facilitate a God knowledge and a purpose knowledge in a child.*

**Gospel Shout-Out:** How did Jesus Christ uniquely fulfill “Loving God and others?”

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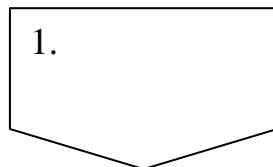
**Homework for Session 1:** Read the chapter on “Provocative Parents” on child-centered home (attached – pg. 32-44). For a parent living in these ways described, what might be the parent living for with each item? Circle the ones you are most prone to do.

# Session #2—Our Pleasures

Understanding Our Hearts and the Hearts of our Children (Gen 3, Matt 15:15ff, Luke 6:43-45, James 4:1-10)

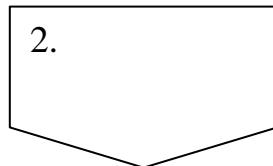
## The Path of Death

1. What was the source of the fall according to Gen 3:1; 3:13, 1 Tim 2:14?



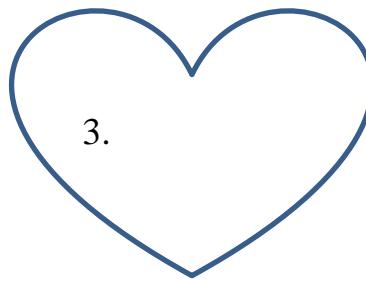
Discuss: What is the essence of deception? (cf. Rom 1:16ff)

2. When the serpent said “Did God really say...” what was he trying to do?



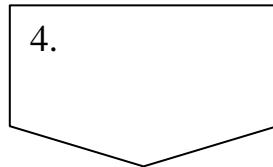
Discuss: What did Eve doubt?

3. What happened in their heart? (cf. 1 John 2:15-16)



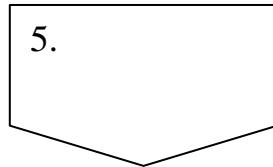
Discuss: What typically becomes our greatest desires in life/parenting?

4. What did the desire lead to at the end of 3:6?



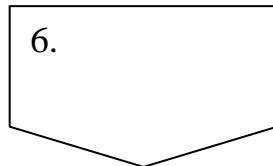
Discuss: From where does our behavior come? (cf. James 4:1; Matthew 15:15ff, Luke 6:43-45)

5. What did Adam and Eve then experience in verses 7, 8, 10?



Discuss: From where do our emotions come?

6. What did they do with that experience in verses 7, 8, 10, 12?

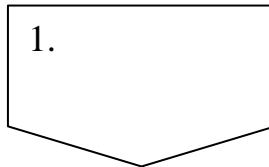


Discuss: What do we typically do with our innate sense of brokenness?

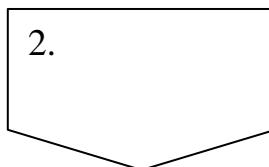
# Death

### The Path of Life

1. What is the opposite of deceit?

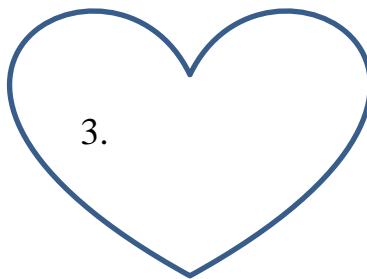


2. What is the opposite of doubt?



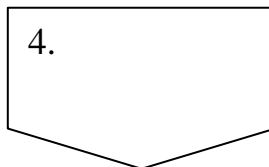
Discuss: What must we believe about God in comparison to the other “ways”/ “gods?”

3. What will we want when we see God is better?



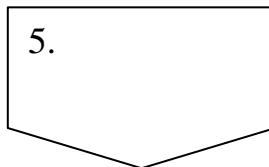
Discuss: How do we “see” God is better than anything else?

4. What follows from a heart that delights in God only?



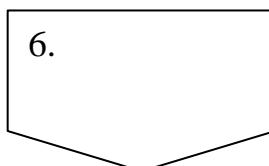
Discuss: From where does our behavior come? (cf. James 4:1; Matthew 15:15ff, Luke 6:43-45)

5. What do we “feel” when our heart delights in God and we love others?



Discuss: From where do our emotions come?

6. How can we walk in the light even with knowing that we are broken and sinful?



Discuss: How can we continually promote Christ’s righteous and not our own?

**Discuss:** Out of the various stages of the dynamic of the heart, which one do parents often focus on the most?

**Discuss:** In which step above can you bring influence?

**Discuss:** Where should our focus be?

**Discuss:** What will be the only compelling way to influence at this step?

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**Homework for Session 2:** Read the “From Pride to Humility” Article by Stuart Scott (pgs. 45-52) and mark the 2-3 ways you see pride in your life. If you have older children, compare your pride manifestations to your children’s.

# Session #3—Our Priorities

## God's Priorities as His Representatives

**Discuss:** If I am going to represent God well, delighting in Him, what must I do? (Discussion on Exodus 19/20, Sermon on the mount).



**Discuss:** Based on God's values what does your child need to see the most?

**Discuss:** If life is indeed about relationships, how does this inform your daily parenting of your child?

**Discuss:** How would this view of living for your purpose and priorities impact when and how you discuss sexual intimacy with your children? Why?

**Gospel Shout-Out:** How did Jesus Christ manifest uniquely a delight only in His Father?

## Man's Priorities (including yours and your children's natural inclinations)



**Discuss:** Give specific examples of how we as parents continue to model/demonstrate the wrong priorities to our kids.

**Gospel Shout-Out:** How did Jesus Christ uniquely fulfill “Loving God and others?”

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### Homework for Session 3:

- Watch Tim Keller's talk on Identity:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=N\\_178ASBg0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_178ASBg0)
- Write out in what you tend to find your identity.
- Write out in what you think your children find their identity/validation.

# Session #4—Our Path

[Understanding Wisdom in Proverbs \(See Andy Stanley's book \*The Principle of the Path\*\)](#)

If we parents do not understand how God has designed this world (wisdom) we cannot teach and model to our children how to navigate the world according to God's ways.

- Observe how many times, “way” and “path” are used in Proverbs 1-9
- See Extended Illustration in Proverbs 7

## **The Principle of the Path**

1. God has created this world so that life in general has a certain discernable order/regularity.
2. This order can metaphorically be pictured as a “path” or “way.”
3. The principles of “the path”:
  - a. Paths are obvious.
    - The path to financial debt is a well-worn path.
    - The path to sexual immorality is a well-worn path.
    - The path to bad marriages is a well-worn path.
    - The path to provoking your children is a well-worn path.

But also ...

- The path of nurturing your children is a well-worn path.
- The path to godly marriage is a well-worn path.
- The path to satisfying and joyous sexual intimacy in marriage is a well-worn path.
- The path to financial responsibility is a well-worn path.

- b. A path always leads to the same destination.
  - i. You can choose your path; you cannot choose the destination.
  - ii. The direction you are currently traveling, with your current ...
    1. relational choices determine your relation destination.
    2. financial choices determine your financial destination.
    3. spiritual choices determine your spiritual destination.

- iii. The principle of the path, like all principles is universal. It is not a respecter of men. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor, young or old, famous or unknown—nobody is immune to this principle...it levels the playing field.
- c. Destinations are obvious to:
  - i. the Creator of the path
  - ii. the experienced traveler (the wise/mature)
  - iii. those who by faith believe the Creator and the experienced traveler
- d. Words do not determine your destination your walk does.
- e. Changing paths always requires:
  - i. an honest look at your real intentions
  - ii. change in direction (repentance); getting on a different path
  - iii. time
  - iv. divine wisdom (guidance from God, divine GPS)
  - v. wisdom from individuals who are more experienced than you

**Wisdom is the insight to discern the paths and their ends and choose accordingly.**

**Discuss:** Why is the fear of the Lord the first step in wisdom?

**Gospel Shout-Out:** How is Jesus Christ connected to the way (John 14:7)?

**Discuss:** How do we model this for our children and teach this to our children?

**Discuss:** How does Deuteronomy 6:4-9 contribute to our understanding of how we should be representing God and teaching about the path?

**Discuss:** How does Deuteronomy 6:4-9 compare with your method of parenting? Why?

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Homework for Session 4: Watch “The Heart of Change”- [www.faithlafayette.org/heart](http://www.faithlafayette.org/heart)

# Foundations of Parenting—Conclusion

Parents who understand and are living for their gospel-redeemed purpose, in contrast to their former purpose (self—in their prideful, deceived idolatry walking a path toward destruction) will have the most compelling understanding of the gospel that changed them.

Gospel-changed parents will then minister the gospel to their children at each point in their child's prideful, deceived idolatry. While their children are walking a path toward destruction, the parent manifests gospel love and gospel humility in confessing sinful failures as parents.

The gospel is that God made a way in Christ to rescue us from our prideful, deceived idolatry as we were walking a path toward destruction. Sin must not be minimized to simply outward behavior.

# Resources

## Understanding your own heart issues:

- Heart of Change video series (free): [faithlafayette.org/heart](http://faithlafayette.org/heart)
- Blessed Self-Forgetfulness: Sermon link: <http://www.gospelinlife.com/blessed-self-forgetfulness-5271>. Book: [The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness](#) by Tim Keller
- [From Pride to Humility](#): Pgs. 45-52 in notes
- Tim Keller on Identity [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N\\_178ASBg0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_178ASBg0)
- Tim Keller on Idols of the Heart <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/removing-idols-of-the-heart-5596/>
- [Counterfeit Gods](#), Tim Keller
- [Gospel Treason](#), Brad Bigney

## Parenting:

- [Shepherding a Child's Heart](#) - Tedd Tripp
- Teenagers- [Age of Opportunity](#) - Paul Tripp
- [The Heart of Anger](#) - Lou Priolo
- Video series for parents: [Getting to the Heart of Parenting](#) - Paul Tripp
- [Parenting](#) – Paul Tripp
- [Give them Grace](#) - Elyse Fitzpatrick
- [The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to a Raising a](#) Family - Stuart Scott & Martha Peace
- [Teach Them Diligently](#) - Lou Priolo
- [Life Beyond Your Parents Mistakes](#) -Dave Powlison
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/when-kids-wont-bow-to-your-idols>

## Essential Points from these resources

- *A growing understanding and humility regarding your fundamental problem of pride should result in more clarity and compassion on your child's fundamental issues in life.*
- *Similarly, a growing understanding and embracing of GOD and His beautiful ways instead of your pride/idolatry will compel you to have the proper perspective to help your children in their fundamental problem.*
- *One of the biggest provocations to children is parents not acknowledging their sin—or, acknowledging their sin but never confessing and changing.*
- *And, in all of this, since we are not the perfect visible representation of God, we regularly need to be pointing them to THE PERFECT VISIBLE REPRESENTATION OF GOD, Jesus Christ.*

# Recommendation before going to your pastor:

- 1) Write a ½ page summary of what you have been doing specifically to implement 2-3 changes in you and your parenting since our seminar concluded.
- Write a 2-3 paragraph analysis of how pride manifests itself in your life based upon [From Pride to Humility](#) (Article 4 – attached)
- List your top 2-3 ways you provoke your children to anger from your reading of chapter 2 of [The Heart of Anger](#) - Lou Priolo (Article 3 - attached).
- 2) Write a 1-page summary of what you learned from **one** of the following resources (meaning you need to read one book/watch one DVD series before meeting).

## Understanding your own heart issues:

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# Foundations of Parenting: Practical Tips

## I. Routines to teach and model truth:

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- Financial planning – if you are living on a budget, be very open about that. You don't have to share your budget, though you might want to as they grow older, but you can allow them to see the freedom of living within a budget.
  - We used the Crown Financial Ministry money jar that has three sections: church, save, spend. We added to other jars that the kids decorated that were for giving to others and saving for gifts for each other.
  - We started out with the 10% tithe, 10% save and 80% spend. But since they had no expenses, 80% was way too much. We ended up with 10% church, 20% save, 10% giving to others, 10% family giving, 50% spend – and that was plenty!
  - We wanted them to have a way to earn money but chose not to pay for chores done. Instead we did an initiative chart that was put on their bedroom door. They had a list of tasks to do daily and if they did them well, without being asked, they got a check mark for initiative. At the end of the month, the check marks were turned into money that they then divided up.
- Teaching Sex to our children. Janet has a session she did for a MOPS group on talking to our children about sex if you'd like that material. The principle would be to help them see that God's plan is good, better than the world, and that this isn't an area that you avoid!
  - Start the conversation early – before they know they are supposed to be embarrassed!
  - Answer their questions as they have them
  - Consider this as any other topic – one that you'll discuss on many occasions
  - Work through your own issues with sexual intimacy so that you're able to discuss its beauty
  - We used books with illustrations, science and health books, to show them about their own bodies and answer questions
  - We chose to make it a special weekend the first time we went through all of it – Brent with Josh and later Janet with Karis. We went to a hotel for an overnight to read the books, talk about the joy of becoming a godly man or woman and enjoy time together. The kids only remember a little about that but it was a good memory and made it easier for them to continue to ask questions.
  - The resource center has a series of books from very small through puberty on this subject to read with your children.
  - Early on we taught them that God's purpose for their body was not for themselves but for whomever they would marry.
- Gospel oriented material
  - The Biggest Story by Kevin DeYoung
  - Gospel Story Bible by Marty Machowski
  - Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones
  - Leading your Child to Christ by Marty Machowski
  - The Ology by Marty Machowski for learning the character of God
- Bible study options/ideas
  - We had a morning routine that included time with God. Everyone's routine will be different but here is ours just for ideas. After they got up and got dressed and ate/brushed teeth, we sat on the couch for "Bible time." When they couldn't read, I read it to them. When they could read some, they read it out loud or while sitting next to me.
    - Ages 3-7: The Children's Discovery Bible Devotions
    - Early readers: Kay Arthur's Discover4Yourself Series

- *Bedtime routine ideas*
  - *We didn't do this EVERY night. Something is always better than nothing ☺!*
  - *As they get in bed allow them to tell you what they'd like and LISTEN! Not all or even most of our conversations were about the gospel but we desired to build an environment where they talked to us about whatever was on their mind, with the hope that they would continue to do that as they got older. And they did!*
  - *If I'm saturated by the gospel in my own thinking, more and more, I'll see opportunities as they share. As they tell me about something fun, we can thank God for giving them that sweet gift, etc.*
  - *Ask them one way they saw the goodness of God in their life that day.*
  - *Pray with them – you praying for them and them praying too.*
- *Rhythms:*
  - *Write out overarching goals for when they leave your home (begin with the end in mind). Annually we tried to get away, review them, reflect on each child over the past year and set out specific goals for each child on areas of weakness or strengths to grow, etc. This kept us focused as it's easy to drift!*
  - *Build serving into the regular schedule so it is a way of life. For a few years for us it was Meals on Wheels – some great memories and serving lessons learned here!*
  - *If you have extended family members with whom you could share your goals, enlist them in specific ways to help you. Some goals are specific skills that they might be able to teach them. The majority of ours were character related but also had life skills included.*
  - *Regular "date nights" can be a special time. Brent had a "secret" restaurant he took our daughter to – she loved that!*

### **Safety and abuse:**

- *We don't recommend requiring your child to show physical affection. That is definitely a family decision, but it can make it difficult for them to protect themselves.*
- *They should be required to be respectful to all and to trust you when you are with them and ask them to interact with an adult. But we would recommend giving them a way to be respectful without hugging someone if they desire. Maybe they can be taught they can shake someone's hand unless they are comfortable with a hug, etc. They can respectfully say, "No thank you, may I shake your hand?"*
- *You can let family know that you aren't requiring this so they understand why.*
- *It's not about not trusting that particular person but not building a habit or expectation in a child who won't know how to refuse in another situation.*
- *We talked about situations like this from an early age and even did role playing. "What if someone asked to touch you/touched you in a private area?" "What if they said that if you told you'd get in trouble?" "What if they said you need to keep a secret – any secret?" "What if they said that if you told, they would hurt your parents and it would be your fault?" Yes, we did this at a young age and they were able to communicate why that was wrong.*
- *We discussed our "job" given to us by God: it's to provide them guidance and to protect them. We can't do the job God gave us if they don't tell us something.*
- *We discussed God's "bigness". No one can hurt mommy or daddy unless God allowed it. It's always right to tell and let mommy and daddy decide what should be done. Their job before God is to tell us, our job is to make the rest of the decisions.*
- *ANYONE that said, don't tell mom or dad: they knew that then they were required to tell us – there is no decision for them to make – that is the right thing to do.*
- *Respect the fact that some adults make them uncomfortable – don't minimize it even if it's for silly reasons – make it easy for them to tell you and discuss together how to handle it respectfully.*

### **Respect/Listening/General obedience/:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- Training is the first step – ensure your child knows what is expected and how to do it. Practice, practice, practice! Make it a game to obey.
  - Put them somewhere in the room and practice saying, “Come here.” Praise when they obey, help them if they are struggling.
  - Teach them to touch your arm when they want your attention instead of interrupting...pretend to be on the phone and practice what they should do.
  - Discuss asking for a drink and not whining or demanding. Then – practice!
  - If their mind races and they struggle to focus – practice! Tell them you are going to ask them to do 3 things. Ask them to listen, see if they can remember them and see how fast they can do them.
  - If they don’t sit still well – practice! Show them a timer, give them a book and practice sitting quietly for 1 minute. They can see the timer moving so they know it WILL end! Then lengthen the time.
- We won’t be given the opportunity to teach until they are under our authority. That has to be first.
- If the heart attitude is control, there is a deceived belief that it is best for him to be in control. This will usually come up in a variety of areas, not just one (refusing to look at you when told, etc.). Be on the look out and have a predetermined plan for rooting out that deception.
- If a believer, discussing why it is better that God is in control (He knows all, He is all wise, He has promised that all that He allows works for gospel purposes in my life.) He loves us better than we love ourselves. We would destroy ourselves with our love. Review God’s plan for children to obey their parents – this is the child’s reason to obey – obeying their parents is obeying God and staying under His wise and good control.
- Be consistent in not allowing it. For example, if your child is told to look at you and doesn’t...allowing him to get away with it feeds the deception that he is in control and will lead to more control battles. Follow through with consequences.
- Defiance in the response will return you to the information on the need for first time obedience and the benefit of having consequences thought through in advance.
- In any area where change is needed for the child to be more like Jesus, start where they are, and take incremental steps. Help them grow slowly.
- Lack of first-time obedience actually means we didn’t follow through on consequences when they didn’t obey the first time.
  - We sang the song “I will obey the first time I’m told, I will obey right away. Never asking why; never with a sigh. I will obey right away.” If we began to him it, they knew what it meant!
  - It sneaks up on us. Janet remembers being on the phone with Brent expressing her frustration that she had to say something two or three times before they listened. Brent asked why she said it the second time!
  - What you allow, you teach is ok. If I allow less than first time obedience, I’m training them to wait and obey later. I encourage their disobedience and provoke myself to anger!
- Selfishness: the heart attitude appears to be that they are what’s most important. The deception is that they believe that living for their own pleasure, living for themselves, will be the most satisfying way.
  - Provide them with opportunities to put others above themselves and taste and see that God is good. Serve at Meals on Wheels, go to the hospital and sing for others, clean someone’s home who is sick, etc.
  - Use natural consequences where possible (i.e. if they rush to be first all of the time, when they do that, ensure that they are last, etc.)

- *Model the joy of living for others yourself!*
- *Visit someone whose children have a need and have them bring a toy to share.*
- *We set up a “store” with the kids’ toys before Christmas one year for a family going through a hard time. The kids helped set it up and the family was able to take whatever toys would be a blessing to their kids.*
- *Find fun ways to love others. Going on a “secret mission” to bless someone without them knowing it.*
- *Dealing with fear. Listen first to why they are afraid. Is there anything to it? Are they struggling to control their thinking?*
  - *Teach them how to take their thoughts captive. We gave them a list of things to do before calling out to us in the night*
    - *Pray*
    - *Read the scripture that they had drawn and put on their ceiling (using their flashlight ☺)*
    - *Think about 5 things that make them happy*
    - *Get up and go to the bathroom*
    - *If after that they were still afraid, they could call.*
  - *They liked the song from the Bible verse, “When I am afraid I will trust in You” from Hide Em in Your Heart. From that vignette, Josh started sleeping with his hand on his Bible to remind him that God was with him.*
  - *Help them face unreasonable fears early so it doesn’t grow. Josh went from afraid of big dogs, to all dogs, to dogs who were on leashes on the opposite side of the street!, to cats, etc. Brent took him to pet a cat while Brent was there and required that Josh trust his dad not to put him in danger and pet the cat.*
- *Food issues: Decide what is important to you and be consistent. If you want your child to eat healthier foods, only offer those.*
  - *Require all foods be tried a certain number of times.*
  - *Give only a bite or very small portion at first.*
  - *Refrain from making individualized meals based on kids’ preferences.*
- *Selective Listening ☺.*
  - *When you talk to your children, ask them to look at you and if it’s helpful, have them repeat back what you said.*
  - *If they have heard, do not repeat yourself. Decide ahead of time on appropriate consequences and follow through. Children tend to learn to listen better if they want to avoid the consequences. If you’re willing to repeat yourself, they’re willing to let you!*
- *Explaining why.*
  - *We didn’t want to provoke them to anger by asking things of them for no reason but also didn’t want to teach them that they could determine their obedience based on whether they understood or agreed with our explanation. They should obey their God given authorities regardless.*
  - *Therefore, if they asked “why” when asked to do something, we told them we’d be happy to explain that to them AFTER they obeyed. Interestingly, most of the time they didn’t bother asking again afterward.*
- *Rewards vs. expected chores.*
  - *God wants us to work hard and be productive and doesn’t always give us something materially as a result. And as members of our home, we wanted them to help maintain it as we also did. Therefore, we wanted our kids to help maintain the house without getting money or rewards for that.*
  - *On the other hand, we wanted them to be able to go above and beyond and to be rewarded for it to also learn to manage money.*
  - *Therefore, we made an initiative chart and put it on each bedroom door. Before they can read it can be in pictures. It had a list of daily chores that were just expected of them. If they performed them well without being asked to do them, they got a mark for initiative. If I had to ask them or remind them to do it, they still had to do it but didn’t get a checkmark. At the*

*end of the month we added up the marks and they earned money – I think it was a dime for each checkmark. Some earn treats or dessert out or something instead.*

- *As they mature, it's appropriate to let them know that certain things that were considered “above and beyond” are now expected. With increased freedom (as happens as they mature) comes increased responsibility.*
- *Interrupting.*
  - *Since we are frequently doing other things, it is important that our kids have a way of appropriately getting our attention. Otherwise, they'll continue to say our names over and over and interrupt.*
  - *Certainly, teach first that interrupting is not respectful.*
  - *Then teach them an appropriate way to let you know they'd like your attention.*
  - *We told them they could walk up to us and put their hand on our arm. We would then put our hand on top of theirs so they know we're aware. Then they needed to wait patiently until we were in a position to break our conversation and see what they wanted.*
  - *We also created our own hand signal that meant, “be quiet” so they would know to stop talking at that point and wait for us.*
- *Constant reminders.*
  - *Praise them for their willingness to obey when reminded and then teach that they now need to work to remember to do this without being reminded.*
  - *Let them know that either if they do this task without reminders, there will be a reward or let them know that if they do not remember, there will be a consequence. Not necessarily something disciplinary, but a natural consequence. For instance, with the dinner table illustration, possibly start with: Now what am I going to remind you of tonight? And let the child tell you. Then let them know that the next night you're not going to remind them and they need to remember on their own. If they do, reward them with maybe staying up a few minutes later or praise or a check mark on their initiative chart! If they forget, they can lose the checkmark – a natural consequence (I maybe even have another checkmark taken away) to help him remember.*
- *Time management.*
  - *Recognize that as they are growing up, they aren't very good at thinking long term so immediate pleasure is their priority.*
  - *Are we modeling long term thinking in our own pleasures? Are we teaching why we should limit the time on electronics, etc.?*
  - *Provide them opportunities to taste and see that God's way is better. By forcing them to limit their time, they will experience other things and begin to learn that it is more satisfying. They may not see that for a long time, but in the meantime, you're establishing good habits.*
- *Provide opportunities for high energy kids to expend a lot of energy!! Race around the house, etc.*
- *If sitting still is hard, start small, set the timer for 1 minute where he can see, sit on the couch next to him and “practice.” Praise successes and help him build that up.*

### Aggression/Anger:

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- Outbursts of Anger, i.e. yelling at the table – possibly wanting control, wanting attention
  - Ensure you have taught first. Model the behavior you expect. Talk quietly to him and mimic how he should talk, how he should ask for food, etc.
  - Yelling cannot get him what he wants or I have taught him to yell. If he is yelling for food, no food is given until he asks in the right way with the right tone of voice. He may end up going a meal without food.
  - Once he's been taught and knows what to do, yelling at the table might mean he is taken to another room while everyone else finishes dinner and he has lost the opportunity to eat.
  - See overriding principles under general obedience heading.
- Review chapter 2 in the Heart of Anger book by Lou Priolo for ways that you may be provoking your child to anger.

### Parent's anger/sinful parenting/parental responsibility:

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- You cannot deal biblically with your child's behavior if you are not consistently confessing and repenting of your own sin.
- As your children see you taking seriously your own desire to grow and learn more, you're modeling that for them. It's ok to not understand it all – how do they see you work to understand more and to obey what you do understand?
- Time must first be spent acknowledging your own pride and humbly working on growth personally. Then you will have more compassion on the sins of your child – they are more like us than we'd like to admit.
- I must repent of my wrong goals: ease, efficiency. I don't want to have to repeat myself – I'm lazy, I don't want to go through the discipline process right now – I have a right to a little "me" time – I deserve to be obeyed and respected, etc. These idols show me that I'm actually very like my child!
- Remember my goal is parenting is to image God to my child. God didn't make a mistake in allowing their sinful heart to surface right now at this time. I must not fight what God has allowed and be willing to deal with the behavior regardless of its impact on my time.
- I must be intentional in how I parent – not doing what comes naturally – but basing my thoughts and actions on biblical principles. This takes work and many of us don't want to work hard at parenting.
- If the goal is to image God, it isn't to conform to society's expectations or to protect my reputation. I will leave that in God's hands.
- Having a predetermined plan for how to respond to disobedience will help you not to be provoked to anger.

#### Practical tips for "in the moment":

- Put your child somewhere safe – if small, a play pen, if older, send to room – while you get alone with God to confess your anger. Think through what is going on in your heart – what are you wanting more than you want to image God in this moment? Respect? Peace? Efficiency?
- Deal with child after getting the log out of your own eye. If you sinned against him, humble yourself and confess that.
- Still responsible to discipline your child.

## **Perseverance:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

You said it: **PRACTICE!**

- Your focus must be on living for God and not your schedule. If you are working daily to orient your life around honoring the Lord, you will more quickly see that God is allowing this, at this time, and will be able to ask Him for help to respond biblically and lovingly.
- When I'm living vertically – for God – I can be discouraged with the horizontal but will continue to have hope that God has promised that He is FOR me and that all of the trials He allows must bow to gospel purposes in my life. Their purpose is to conform me more and more to Jesus. Living this way is the best gift you can give your children!

## **Coming together as a couple:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- Study your roles as parents and the different roles for fathers and mothers according to the Scripture. The Bible must be your source of truth, not what you are used to or what makes sense to you.
  - Throughout Scripture we see that the head of the family is the husband/father. In Eph 6:4 it is fathers who are told not to exasperate but to teach. Fathers will give a unique account for the direction and management of their families. Mothers have been given the unique role of carrying out the father's direction and representing the father in his absence.
  - Children are commanded to obey their parents, not just their fathers.
  - Fathers will be held accountable for setting the direction but both are authority figures to their children.
  - When a father is home, he should be overseeing and leading in discipline and obedience.
- Pray for each other and help each other. Be a safe place for the other's weaknesses to be exposed. If you see your spouse being impatient, don't judge, but help! You're on the same team with the same goal!
- Seek counsel and determine together from biblical principles, what issues will be non-negotiables in your family. This takes time. Parenting is not a sprint but a marathon!
- Talk about your spouse in a way that encourages your children to love, respect and build relationships with them.
- To build better relationships and conversations takes time and looking for ways to enter their worlds and do what they enjoy – even if it's silly to you.

## Discipline:

“How do you balance discipline and grace in parenting?”

Falsehood: Discipline is punitive and not corrective.

Truth: Biblical discipline is lovingly corrective to God’s beautiful ways and is grace.

- Imaging God means valuing what He values and he values grace-filled training discipline. God’s discipline is a part of His grace and an evidence of His love (Hebrews 12). My discipline should be filled with grace.
- False dichotomy between grace and discipline
- Biblical discipline IS grace
- Anything less confuses and tempts to disobedience
- Am I tempted to call it “grace” when I don’t want to discipline or when I don’t want to upset my child?

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- To image God in this area, we can see how God parents us: His expectations are clear, He has taught us what He wants from us, He has promised us rewards as a result of our obedience, He has told us up front the consequences of our disobedience. He is faithful and consistent. He keeps His word.
  - Ensure you have taught the behavior/attitude you expect.
  - Ensure he is capable of obeying (not asking a 2-year-old to tie his shoes)
  - Praise obedience
  - Consistently enforce the consequences for disobedience, every time!
- Decide on the consequences for disobedience ahead of time and then when it happens, **you aren’t as prone to sinful anger**; you just follow through.
- Suggested corporal discipline for
  - Direct disobedience (pick your battles—do not give a command unless you believe it is important and you are willing to follow through with discipline)
  - Hitting another
  - Lying
- Every other form of discipline should be creatively appropriate for the offense
- Choosing battles based upon what are the most important character qualities you desire to see in your child. The first one should be obedience to authority—since we are all under God’s authority, the second one should be love/serving others, then working hard...diligence...etc.
- You can discipline while grieving their sinful choice and without being sinfully angry yourself.
- Discipline is a great opportunity to share the gospel again and pray for God to help them understand and commit their lives to Jesus and have His help to obey.
- The end of discipline should be a very sweet, warm time.
- Discipline until a submissive heart
- Discipline is not a substitute for obedience. After disciplining, he still needs to obey or for some children, they’d rather be spanked than obey. The bottom line is, after being disciplined, he still needs to obey.
- As he ages, longer term discipline may be more effective – allow natural consequences as much as possible (if leave the bike out in the rain, it is ruined, he has to buy a new one himself or just forego having one, etc.)
- There is no specific age for discontinuing spanking but as a child gets older, other methods will be more effective.

- If the behavior isn't changing, assess if you are disciplining biblically: consistently, without sinful anger, fully. If so, remember the goal isn't to change your child but to consistently teach and enforce consequences and don't give up! Certainly, also look for creative ways to help him to see that the direction he is heading is destruction.
- If discipline isn't done thoroughly – it can provoke more anger.
- Discipline can include a variety of things: corporal, removal of privileges, removal of toys or items, natural consequences – if he won't eat, he misses dinner, etc.
- The younger the child, the less effective long-term discipline is, as he cannot remember that long. Spanking is right away and is also over right away allowing the relationship to stay strong.

Disciplining in public:

- In public or with company, faithfully imaging God means that what is acceptable doesn't change. Standards don't lessen or grow higher depending on who is around.
- Delay carrying out of discipline until you are in a private place. If the child is old enough to understand you, you can let them know that you'll have to deal with this when you get home. And remind them frequently on the ride home if they're small!
- Be willing to be inconvenienced and go home if it's necessary to faithfully parent. Leave the groceries behind; leave the restaurant, leave the room with company in it, etc. if possible.
- If a child learns that the rules can be broken with others around, it will be harder to help them learn the joy of obedience.

### **Extra activities:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

To help us think through these areas, we made a “philosophy” statement about our goals for our children. We answered the questions: What do we want them to be like when they leave our home? What character? What skills and abilities do we believe are important for them to fulfill their roles as God’s representative? This helped us think through how we wanted to spend our time. In our case, Janet took them to a teacher’s store that taught art when they were little to expose them to it and each was involved in a sport in elementary school but the focus was on serving opportunities. We wrote down our goals and saw that it was the highest priority that they grow to love God and others. Therefore, this had to be true in how we spent our time as well. Serving and learning at church would not be sacrificed for lower priorities.

### **Work/Life/Marriage Balance:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

Falsehood: My child needs constant relationship stimulation. My child really doesn't need my relationship.

Truth: God's way of life is inherently designed to contain both time alone and time with people in relationships. Our training must help them be productive in both. But life is about relationships.

- I can't always be there for my kids – a great opportunity to help them see the superiority of God, who is always there
- I should value what God values and love what He loves. Therefore, I examine: are the outside tasks being done for the benefit or hindrance of my family? If the hindrance, seek help to realign. If the benefit – explain those benefits where possible and thank God for honoring your efforts.
- Have children do work alongside you where possible – teach them the value of doing something productive and how to image God themselves
- Show that your family is centered on what pleases God, not child centered or parent centered or world centered!

- *There will be times when it is best to do other things and your child can be disappointed. And that's ok.*
- *If your rhythm of life doesn't allow you to parent your children, seek God's wisdom and the counsel of others as we know that God will not put you in a position where you are unable to please Him!*

### **Loving children in difficult circumstances:**

Overarching goal: Goal is to faithfully image God to my child, which includes providing an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way

- *When we are asked to love to our own hurt, that is when we have the opportunity to be the most like Jesus. And it's certainly supernatural!*
- *This will require time honestly confessing the idols that prevent me from loving when it's hard and it requires time rehearsing and meditating on the gospel to remember how I have been loved and continue to be loved even while I'm struggling with this!*
- *Being a safe place for your children to talk about their hurts, without taking it personally, will be important. Seek out support for yourself to help you be able to respond to them without becoming defensive.*
- *For a new sibling – share with them the joys of being a big brother/sister, the responsibility of it and how they can be a help to you.*
- *Loving our children doesn't mean agreeing with them but it does mean that we are so aware of our own sin and need for a savior that we can relate to them with compassion and love.*
- *If they are in your home, and living a sinful lifestyle, this requires a lot of wisdom and individual situations will require different responses. Please seek counsel from your pastor and others who can help you biblically in your specific situation.*
- *While we can't, and shouldn't, remove all influences from our children, the rhythm of our home should show them a better way.*
  - *Materialism and selfishness. You can provide that regardless of what others are doing. Instead of trying to get other family members to cut back, teach your kids to give. We set up a store in our basement one Christmas season and set out, with their help, many of their toys for a family whose house had burned down. The parents "shopped" in our basement for Christmas and took whatever they wanted. It was rough that they took the cool Fisher Price play set, but so good! The kids got to give to their own hurt and see that it satisfied. We set aside stuffed animals to take to the hospital when their dad made hospital visits to kids. You could sell them at a garage sale and give the proceeds to a ministry. Give them a taste for generosity – and your family members who are giving the toys are helping you 😊.*
    - *As children get older, they can understand. Our son called his grandfather "the gravy train" because he gave them so much! But they knew that wasn't typical at home and we had the rest of the year to teach them a better way while being grateful for grandparents who loved them and wanted to give them things.*
    - *Sexuality. Teaching them the purpose of their sexuality from an early age is very important. And, as in many areas, understanding that those who do not know God or understand His ways, are confused in many areas including this one.*

### **Miscellaneous:**

How do you intentionally find those people who will pour out into our children's lives?

- *Make this a matter of prayer regularly.*
- *As you build relationships, encourage your children to spend time with older people and find ways to do that by serving, etc.*
- *We gave a college girl a gift card to take our daughter out and talk with her about certain areas they had in common.*
- *Submit to God that what He doesn't allow is for our good as well. He doesn't make mistakes and if I am appropriately seeking that input and God has chosen not to provide it, that is what is best for now!*

What are the most important things to talk through as a couple before having kids?

- *Discuss how each of you were disciplined and then discuss together what you see in the Scriptures.*
- *Find a couple in the church you respect and ask them to help you think through issues that you might not think of.*
- *Determine now that you will follow biblical principles, not each of your experiences.*
- *Determine now to show each other a lot of grace and believe the best of each other as you learn to parent together!!*
- *Think through the practical implications of the biblical roles of father and mother – not just the traditional views – and how you will apply those in your home.*
- *Most of all, be growing in humility personally!*

Method of education (homeschool, public, private).

*Overarching thought process: Goal is to faithfully image God to my kids*

*Parenting goal is to provide an environment that is conducive to my child understanding the superiority of God and His ways and making it easy for him to choose that way.*

- *Write out an educational philosophy document. Not anything fancy, just write out your goals for education – what do you want to accomplish?*
- *Write out what you want your child to look like when he leaves your home – spiritually, practical skills, academics*
- *List your child's strengths and weaknesses*
- *List pros and cons of each educational option – they ALL have pros and cons!*
- *Prayerfully consider what is best for your family, for this particular child, for this year.*
- *Make a decision, realizing that at any point that it doesn't appear to be the best one, it can be changed. What a blessing!*

### **About Brent and Janet:**

How old are your children?

*Josh is 21 and Karis is 19.*

*Both are in college now and we have a semi-empty nest!*

What has been your favorite stage to parent (infant, toddler, child, adolescent, young adult, etc.)?

*As we've been in each stage it has seemed to be the best one! Each has different challenges though. Younger children are physically demanding, older children are mentally demanding. All of them are demanding ☺! And relating to them now as adults is such a blessing! There is grace for all of our mistakes – we are grateful!*

*Our advice:*

*Be quick to own your sin. Your children don't expect you to be perfect. But especially when you use the Bible to parent them and expect things from them, if you don't ask their forgiveness regularly and work on your own sin...you lose all credibility and you provoke them to anger against you and God.*

*Model for them how a believer confesses, repents and works at changing!*

Updated April 2019

# Article 1: Suggested Steps When Spanking

Remember: Play much; pray much; praise much; use cause and effect where possible; everything is not a major issue. Instruct a lot. Determine together what offenses are “spanking offenses.” When spanking, do it thoroughly so that you don’t have to do it as often.

Brent and Janet spanked for the following

- Direct disobedience (attempting to carefully choose our battles)
- Lying
- Hitting

In everything else we attempted to use “cause and effect”

1. Give clear expectations ahead of time. Have them repeat them back to you to ensure understanding where possible.
2. You may give a warning the first time, as part of initial teaching, but do not repeatedly give warnings. Once the teaching is clear, warnings encourage delayed obedience and disobedience.
3. Determine if an offense has been committed. This includes verifying facts, ensuring your understanding of what happened is accurate.
4. When guilt is established, proceed to a private setting. On the way, check your self-control, your heart, review discipline plan and pray. If you are sinfully angry, put your child in their room and go and take care of your sin privately first (removing the log from your own eye).
5. Once in a private place, review with your child: What was the expected behavior/attitude? What did you do? What should you/could you have done? What does the Bible call what you did? Who chose to do wrong? What does the Bible tell Daddy to do when you disobey?
6. Have the child assume a proper position. For the smaller child across the lap is appropriate, for the larger child leaning over a bed is safe. For a child who is out of control, restraint by the parent may be necessary until control is achieved. The child should willingly submit to the spanking by staying in the position.
7. Slowly, lovingly, prayerfully and thoughtfully proceed with the spanking. Use an instrument that will sting, such as a rubber spatula or a paint stick. These provide a sting without causing injury. Spank either on the bottom (not through a diaper) or upper thigh near the bottom if necessary. Predetermine the number of spanks ahead of time. Remember that the goal is correction, not punishment.
8. Stop and give the child an opportunity to regain composure with much compassion and comfort. Discuss how the child handled submission to the spanking: You did a good job standing still or You did not stand still.

9. Review the questions from #5 with the child once again. If he is still rebellious, angry, disrespectful, belligerent and without evidence of repentance (a change of direction), discuss that the facial expressions, tones, words or actions are not showing the fruit of repentance and another spanking will be necessary. Repeat the spanking.

10. If repentance is evidenced, discuss plans for forgiveness and restoration, pray for forgiveness and give thanks. Each disciplinary moment is an opportunity to share the gospel with our children. Our inability to obey is why Jesus came!

**11. *Wherever possible, give the child an opportunity to obey in the same situation right away. Recreate the original situation if possible. Spanking is not a way to avoid obedience, but after a spanking, obedience is still required. [This is often a missing step.]***

12. If repentance is still not evident, pray that God will bring conviction and that the child will be protected even from himself. Leave the child in his room and give him time to think through the results he is experiencing because of disobedience and encourage him to choose to please God by obeying.

13. When your child asks forgiveness, you must grant it and be careful not to bring up the disobedience again in a wrong way to his hurt. That doesn't mean it can't be brought up out of concern for a pattern that is developing but it will not be brought up to harm or punish him.

14. End with loving your child and having a tender moment if at all possible. Remind him of the purpose of discipline.

## Reminders for the parent when disciplining:

1. Avoid disciplining out of anger. James 1:20
2. Your tone should be serious and consistent with the situation but avoid words and tones that attack the person instead of the problem. Eph 4:29
3. Ensure your child is capable of what is expected. Give help where needed.
4. Teach by your own actions and your own responses throughout the day.
5. You will not have the privilege of teaching your child until he is under your authority.
6. Encourage a right attitude about discipline:

*Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

*Proverbs 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.*

*Hebrews 12:7-8 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline: But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

*Hebrews 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

# Article 2: When Kids Won't Bow to Your Idols

The Gospel Coalition - SEPTEMBER 5, 2017

**JENNIFER PHILLIPS**

## Still Worth It?

The most profound parenting quote I've ever heard is from Dan Allender: "One of the biggest sources of conflict between you and your kids is when they refuse to bow down to your idols." I dare you to cross-stitch that and give it to a friend at her baby shower.

## Angry Mommy

When I had my first child, I was determined to knock this parenting thing out of the park. I read all the books. "If you do these things," they promised, "your child will be on a predictable schedule and will sleep through the night by the time you come home from the hospital." Or something like that. Except my son wouldn't cooperate. He cried endlessly. He had trouble feeding and wouldn't nap for longer than 20 minutes.

Do you know what my predominant emotion was in the midst of all of this? Anger. At an infant. I threw pillows in the middle of the night and yelled at my husband and said not-so-kind words. *To my infant*. Now, I'm sure that hormones and sleep deprivation played a role in my response, but more than anything I was upset because I had faithfully followed A and B and I wasn't getting C. I deserved a child who would cooperate. All the books told me he would if I did my part, and *I did my part*. I was worshiping at the altars of control, success, convenience, and let's just say it—reputation. But my son refused to bow down. And I was furious.

He turned 1 and became an easier child. I parented out of pride: "We're such amazing parents! If only people would follow our lead." I continued to bow down to my idols: Control. Reputation. Success. Convenience.

Then God gave me exactly what I needed: a second child who refused to do a thing we said. We disciplined. He laughed, and then did it again. He was an enigma, breakdancing to the beat of his own drum, daring anyone to try and tell him what to do.

My predominant emotion? Can you guess? Anger. *How dare he*. I had created a system of order I loved, and he pummeled through it every single day. So I controlled even more, commanding him to bow to my idol of a compliant, respectful child.

He wouldn't bow. And I was angry.

## Identify Your Idols

In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller says, "An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, 'If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure.'" Idols are the things that rattle us when they're threatened.

How can you identify your idols? Here are four ways.

### **1. Pay attention to your negative emotional responses to your kids.**

Think of the times you get the most frustrated with your child. More often than not, it's not their behavior that's causing your response—it's that one of your idols is being threatened. Trace your feelings back to the source. What's in jeopardy? Your picture of how your child should behave? Your reputation? Your comfort?

Our reaction to our kids' behavior often has little to do with brokenness over their sin and a lot to do with how irritated we are that they're threatening our own desires. Take the time to follow those strong responses back to the source, and repent.

## 2. Identify what you put your hope in when things go well.

When your child obeys, whom or what do you credit? Your new behavior chart? That book you just read? Your faithfulness? If it's anything other than the grace of God, you could be worshiping an idol.

## 3. Watch the comparison trap.

The root of comparison is idolatry. You might feel like a failure because you worship performance and reputation, and you're devastated you don't measure up. Or perhaps you feel superior because you worship performance and reputation, and you think you're scoring an A+ compared to those around you. When you catch yourself comparing yourself to other parents—and your child to other children—take note of what you're putting your hope in other than Jesus.



## 4. Name the good things you've turned into ultimate things.

What good desires have morphed into demands, to the extent you either try to force them or are greatly affected when you don't get them? Is it your baby being on a schedule? Your kids speaking respectfully to you? Your child's academic or athletic success? When good things become ultimate things, you're in idol territory.

### Why This Matters

It's so important to identify your idols—not in order to feel bad about yourself ("I'm so sinful") or good about yourself ("I'm so spiritual"), but to discover how to replace them with grace and truth. Discerning your idols accomplishes at least three things.

#### 1. It brings humility to your parenting.

One of the greatest gifts God gave me was a child who wouldn't play by the rules, because God used him to reveal and smash my idols. When I see how prone I am to worship things other than Jesus, I'm much more gentle in my discipline—not slack or irresponsible, but gentle. Empathetic. "How could you?" becomes "Forgive me . . . the same affection for sin that's in your heart is in mine, too. We're in the battle together, on the same side."

One of the most important parenting skills is knowing how to repent. Humble yourself—your kids will remember your repentance as much as any family devotional you led.

#### 2. It helps you teach your kids to identify their own idols.

Our behavior is driven by what we worship. If you can work to identify what you're worshiping besides God, then you can help your kids see what they're worshiping, too. This leads to deeper repentance and, hopefully, true heart change.

#### 3. It changes your parenting goals.

I no longer want well-behaved kids. That's not the end goal for me. I want Christ-worshippers who know how to love and repent. Who run to him when they fail. Only God can make this happen in their hearts—I can't force it. But because this is the goal, I don't sweat the small stuff as much anymore.

### God Is Parenting You

In his book [Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family](#) [interview | workshop], Paul Tripp observes, "As we seek to parent our children, the heavenly Father is parenting everyone in the room." As you parent your children, God is parenting *you*. And he's committed to doing so for a lifetime.

So when you're in that bedtime standoff with your child and you want to scream because all you want is a bowl of ice cream and Netflix, God is there to parent you through it. He's there to show you your selfishness, your idolatry—and to meet you with his love and grace. You have a perfect Father who doesn't tire of you when you return to broken cisterns. He draws you back and changes you, little by little, to be more like him. He parents you with grace so you can parent your own children with grace.

If that's not the best news you'll hear all day, I don't know what is.

# Article 3: Excerpt: The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children

by Lou Priolo (Calvary Press, 1996)

[https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Anger-Practical-Prevention-Children/dp/1930133731/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?dchild=1&qid=1600274152&refinements=p\\_27%3ALou+Priolo&s=books&sr=1-6&text=Lou+Priolo](https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Anger-Practical-Prevention-Children/dp/1930133731/ref=sr_1_6?dchild=1&qid=1600274152&refinements=p_27%3ALou+Priolo&s=books&sr=1-6&text=Lou+Priolo)

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## ***Chapter 2: Provocative Parents***

I had tentatively diagnosed Joshua as possessing characterological anger. He qualified, in other words, for the dubious distinction of being an angry man. I asked Jim and Linda another question. “Can you think of a verse in the Bible that talks about angry children?”

“Yes, ‘Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,’ ” Jim said, as the expression on his face changed from confidence that he knew the right answer, to dismay that he and Linda might somehow be culpable of provoking Joshua.

“That’s right”, I explained, “Ephesians 6:4 says that rather than provoking your children, you should bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In a parallel passage, Colossians 3:21, Paul uses a different word to express the same idea, ‘Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart (or be discouraged).’ ”

## **Who's To Blame?**

At this point, I had to remind Jim and Linda that I was not a Freudian psychologist interested in blaming them for their child’s problems. “You two are big sinners. Joshua is a little sinner. As a sinner, he is 100% responsible before God for his anger problem, and must assume that responsibility. God expects him not to be sinfully angry, regardless of how his parents provoke him. God expects him to change whether you choose to or not. But the two of you are responsible before God, not to contribute to Joshua’s anger problem. To the degree that you are provoking him to anger, you must stop. To whatever degree you stop provoking him, you can make it easier for Joshua to correct his anger problem. The child-centered home in which Joshua lives, a situation which you are responsible for allowing to come to pass, is likely one of a number of parental provocations that must be addressed if you truly want to help him repent from his frequent episodes of being angry.”

The rest of the first counseling session (with corresponding homework assignments), as well as the next two sessions, were devoted to identifying and removing those parental provocations that were likely affecting Joshua’s behavior. By the time I did have my first session with Josh, his behavior had already begun to improve even though I had spent the first three sessions counseling only his parents. There has even been a time or two in my ministry to hurting parents that counseling the child was really not necessary. This was because, in such cases, the provocations were few and the parents were willing to thoroughly restructure their lives according to biblical priorities.

Although not exhaustive, the following twenty-five conditions or behaviors represent some of the most common ways that parents tend to provoke their children to anger.

## **25 Ways That Parents Provoke Their Children to Anger**

### **1. Lack of Marital Harmony**

*“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).*

*“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled” (Heb. 12:15).*

Perhaps the greatest provocation of anger in children is parents who do not live with each other in the harmony that the Scriptures prescribe. The verse above, containing the term “one flesh,” appears a total of five times in the Bible. If a husband and wife do not develop the “one flesh” intimacy intended by God, then over time various other problems will develop. Of these, one of the most common is that each spouse is tempted to develop a deeper level of intimacy with something or someone else, rather than with their spouse. Typically, the husband develops closer ties with people at work or play (or with the job or recreation itself). The wife, characteristically, develops a spiritually unbalanced relationship with the children. Once this occurs, it is usually just a matter of time before the home becomes child-centered.

Another correlation between lack of marital harmony and angry children is the defiling effect that bitterness has on others. As the child observes the resentment that results from his parents’ lack of harmony, he becomes more susceptible to acquiring those bitter thoughts, motives, attitudes, and actions that he has seen modeled by them. Look again at Hebrews 12:15. “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” The “many” most likely to be defiled when Mom and Dad are bitter at each other are the children. Remember also, that bitterness is one of the links in the developmental chain of anger to rebellion. If you can keep your children from developing bitterness, you will have gone a long way in preventing them from developing characterological anger and rebellion.

### **2. Establishing and Maintaining a Child-Centered Home**

*“The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).*

Allow me to make one additional point about a child-centered home. When parents do not establish a home that is clearly Christ-centered (one in which each member understands his biblical role in the family and is committed to please Christ more than self), it is likely that the home will be child-centered. If the husband and wife do not work at being closer to each other than to the child, the child may view himself as equal to, rather than as a subordinate to them. In such “democratic” households, children tend to become angry when their desires do not get placed on equal status with the desires of their parents.

### **3. Modeling Sinful Anger**

*“Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself” (Prov. 22:24, 25).*

Have your children been snared by learning (picking up) any of your angry ways? When you or your spouse model sinful anger, you may inadvertently teach your children that the only way to solve problems is to win. Children who regularly observe such poor examples of communication often grow up without having the necessary biblical resources with which to resolve conflicts and to solve people-problems. If you or your spouse habitually are given to inappropriate manifestations of anger, you would do well to read this book twice: once focusing on correcting your own anger problem, then focusing on helping your child correct his anger.

## 4. Habitually Disciplining While Angry

*“O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath; and chasten me not in Thy burning anger” (Ps. 38:1).*

When you are angry, it is easier for you to over-discipline. Your anger may be perceived by your child as a personal attack. If he views your discipline as such, he will likely suspect that your motive for the discipline is vindictive rather than corrective. If he concludes that this is your motive (thus violating 1 Cor. 4:5), he will find it difficult not to get angry. The emphasis of your thinking and of your subsequent discipline should be on what the child has done *by sinning against God, not on how his action has caused you some personal discomfort, trouble, or embarrassment.*

*“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (Eph. 4:26, 27).*

*“Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19, 20).*

If you do find yourself more upset because your child has sinned against you than you are because he sinned against God, you must quickly and prayerfully get your heart in such a state that personal desires are temporarily set aside. You must be willing to lay aside your personal rights and forgive your child's offense against you so that you may focus on fulfilling your parental obligations to him. Only then can you discipline your child with the assurance that your passion is not unholy anger.

## 5. Scolding

*“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such (a word) as is good for edification according to the need (of the moment), that it may give grace to those who bear” (Eph. 4:29).*

*“And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining (at the table), there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; (and) she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly (remarking) to one another, ‘Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and (the money) given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her” (Mark 14:3–5).*

One of the Greek words from which the term scolding (in the above text) was derived, means “to snort with anger.” It was used to describe the snorting of horses. In his book, *Hints on Child Training*, first published in 1891, H. Clay Trumbull, considered by many to be the founder of Sunday school, explains:

“To ‘scold’ is to assail or revile with boisterous speech. The word itself seems to have a primary meaning akin to that of barking or howling.

Scolding is always an expression of a bad spirit and of a loss of temper ... the essence of the scolding is in the multiplication of hot words in expression of strong feelings that, while eminently natural, ought to be held in better control.

If a child has done wrong, a child needs talking to; but no parent ought to talk to a child while that parent is unable to talk in a natural tone of voice, and with carefully measured words. If the parent is tempted to speak rapidly, or to multiply words without stopping to weigh them, or to show an excited state

of feeling, the parent's first duty is to gain entire self-control. Until that control is secured, there is no use of the parent's trying to attempt any measure of child training. The loss of self-control is for the time being an utter loss of power for the control of others.

In giving commands or in giving censure to a child, the fewer and the more calmly spoken words the better. A child soon learns that scolding means less than quiet talking; and he even comes to find a certain satisfaction in waiting silently until the scolder has blown off the surplus feeling which vents itself in this way. There are times, indeed, when words may be multiplied to advantage in explaining to a child the nature and consequences of his offense, and the reasons why he should do differently in the future; but such words should always be spoken in gentleness, and in self-controlled earnestness. Scolding—rapidly spoken censure and protest, in the exhibit of strong feeling—is never in order as a means of training and directing a child."

## 6. Being Inconsistent with Discipline

*"Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no" (2 Cor. 1:17, 18).*

*"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11).*

Parents commonly discipline inconsistently in two ways. The first is by having different parental standards of discipline. For example, Father spanks and Mother talks. Father believes that a certain behavior is wrong. Mother sees nothing wrong with that same behavior. As a rule, it is better for one parent to tighten up a bit and the other to loosen up a little to unify their approach to discipline. Otherwise, children may become confused by their parents' different philosophies or methodologies of child rearing. The time, effort, and thought it will take for parents biblically to fine tune their parenting to the same specifics will be a valuable (and necessary) investment that should save hours of frustrating and ineffective discipline in years to come.

The second way that parents discipline inconsistently is by vacillating from day to day on either what is or what is not punishable behavior, and / or on how severe the chastisement will be. Children ought to know that their parents "yes" means "yes" and their "no" means "no." They should know that each offense will be treated justly and equitably regardless of their parents' emotional, spiritual, or physical condition at the time of discipline.

## 7. Having Double Standards

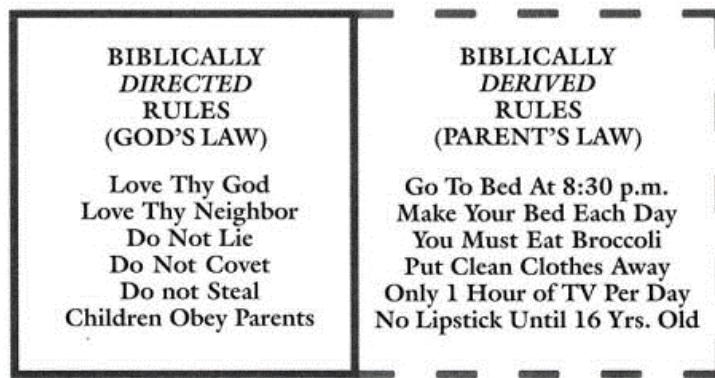
*"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9).*

A parent who uses the Bible to teach, reprove, correct, and instruct his children in righteousness, but is not willing to practice that same biblical righteousness in his own life, is not only a hypocrite but a provoker of his children. "Do as I say, not as I do" is communicated more often by actions (or lack of them) than by words. Regardless of how this message is communicated, when children see their parents (their spiritual leaders) using double standards, that encourages their anger, much like the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees (the spiritual leaders of His day) rightly angered Christ.

## 8. Being Legalistic

The legalism I am referring to is that strain which elevates man-made rules to the same level of culpability as those commands which God has given in Scripture. God has given each set of Christian parents the responsibility to develop from Scripture a biblically based economy or "law of the house" for their children to abide by. This collection of house rules contains two basic sections:

## The Law of The House



*Biblically directed rules* are those which all men are obligated to obey because God commands them in His Word. Some obvious examples would be: Love Your God, Love Your Neighbor as Yourself, Do not lie, Do not covet, Do not steal, etc. On the other hand, *biblically derived rules* are those which are based on biblical principles; but which I am obligated to obey only as long as I am under God-ordained authority, in this case the authority of parents over their children. Examples might be: Do not stay up past 8:30 p.m. on school nights, Do not leave the table without asking to be excused, Eat all of your broccoli, You can only watch one hour of television per day and that only after your homework is finished.

Parents *must* develop temporal rules particular to their household in order to promote unity in a household of sinners. This necessity, however, can turn into neglect if the distinction between these man made temporary rules and God's eternal ones are not clearly delineated. This negligence often produces children who misunderstand, and consequently reject true Christianity. They can grow up with an overall impression which leads them to conclude that "Christianity" is an antiquated, stale, rigid, and nitpicking religion, having never experienced it's power to transform lives.

Christ often contended with this same kind of legalism with the religious leaders of His day. The scribes and the Pharisees held to, propagated, and esteemed the oral tradition, the Talmud, to such an extent that it became for them as legal and binding as the Scriptures. It may not have been wrong for them to follow their own man-made applications of Scripture ("He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God." Rom. 14:6), but as soon as they imposed their man-made traditions on others, teaching these rules as though they were as obligatory as God's Law, they became bound up in legalism. It was to these leaders, who did not distinguish man-made rules from God-breathed commandments, that Christ, after calling them hypocrites, reiterated the words of Isaiah:

***"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:8-9).***

If this kind of legalism provoked righteous indignation in the Lord Jesus, this kind of legalism can provoke anger in your child.

There is an important distinction that parents must make between these two sections of "The Law of the House." Whereas God's Law may never be appealed, parental laws are appealable. You may not say dogmatically (without being legalistic), "It's God's will for all children not to wear lipstick until they are sixteen years old." You may however say (if you're so inclined), "These are our house rules. If you would like to make a respectful appeal based on extenuating circumstances, we will consider it. When you are an adult, you will have your own house rules for your children. In the meantime, it is your responsibility to obey the house rules we have established based on biblical principles. If you decide to let your children wear lipstick at an earlier age, we will not interfere or tell you your decision is wrong." You cannot make a promise like that to your child when he or she violates a clear command of Scripture. To do so would mean you are promising not to obey the clear command in Matthew 18:15 yourself.

## 9. Not Admitting You're Wrong and Not Asking For Forgiveness

*"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23, 24).*

*"Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..." (James 5:16).*

A parent's failure to acknowledge offenses committed against his children (and others whom they know you've offended) often discourages the children from practicing open biblical communication. When children perceive such insensitivity and pride in their parents, they may wrongly conclude, "It's no use trying to talk to him, he'll never admit to doing anything wrong." Of course, the criteria for such communication should not be whether or not Dad will hear him, but rather, whether or not the offense is of such a nature that it cannot be overlooked (Prov. 19:11) or covered in love (Prov. 10:12; 17:9). In other words, your children should be taught to follow Matthew 18:15–17 as a necessary aspect in the relationship with you their parents, regardless of your parental response. In order to avoid provoking your children to anger in matters of offenses, I urge you to observe figure 5. for a four-step biblical approach to seeking forgiveness when you offend your child (or anyone else for that matter), and to read Appendix A., "What Does It Mean to Forgive?", page 179, for more on this subject vital to proper biblical parenting.

### How to Ask For Forgiveness

#### 1. Acknowledge that you have sinned:

"I was wrong," or "God has convinced me that I was wrong..."

#### 2. Identify the specific sin by its biblical name:

"What I did was selfish," or "What I did was dishonest."

#### 3. Identify a biblical behavior to demonstrate your resolve to repent:

"I should have clarified what you meant before I jumped to that hasty conclusion."

"The next time I will tell the truth no matter how afraid I might be of the consequences."

#### 4. Ask for forgiveness:

"Will you forgive me?"

## 10. Constantly Finding Fault

*"Elihu's anger ... burned against Job ... And his anger burned against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job" (Job 32:2, 3).*

Elihu became righteously indignant as he observed Job's three friends condemn him without accurately pinpointing exactly what he had done wrong. What I am addressing here is not the parental responsibility to point out sinful behavior and character deficiencies in the child, but rather the critical, condemning, accusing, judgmental attitude that so often accompanies legitimate attempts at reproof. I am

referring to the kind of “spirit” that leads a child to believe that his parents are never or rarely pleased with him.

When the Lord Jesus was reproving the Ephesian church for losing her first love, He began with a list of those behaviors that pleased Him (Rev. 2). Perhaps the most effective safeguard against this provocation is for parents to purpose to praise, commend, and acknowledge biblical achievement with greater frequency than they reprove. This is not to imply a reduction in the number of reproofs, but rather to suggest an increase in the number of commendations. If you are a parent who has a tendency to nitpick about everything, I suggest that you memorize and meditate upon the following:

***“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression”***  
***(Proverbs 19:11).***

Remember that although you have the responsibility to identify character flaws in your children for the purpose of training and correction, it is not always necessary to turn every non-characterological (habitual) sin into a mini-sermon.

## 11. Parents Reversing God-Given Roles

***“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything”*** (Ephesians 5:22-24).

When God’s order in the home is violated, various consequences tend to be set in motion. These consequences create a home environment that promotes frustration. Wives tend to become embittered over husbands not managing their homes as the Bible directs. Husbands tend to become embittered and lose respect for wives who are not fulfilling their God given roles.

Both husband and wife may struggle with the guilt that so often occurs whenever biblical roles are reversed. Children who know what the Bible teaches about such things tend to view their parents’ relationship as a double standard. They may even resent their mother for usurping her husband’s authority, or their father for not managing his home well—or both. In addition, children may be uncertain and confused about their own gender roles. They may not want to model their parents behavior but have no other first-hand examples to follow. All of these consequences can frustrate children and provoke them to anger.

## 12. Not Listening to Your Child’s Opinion or Taking His or Her “Side of the Story” Seriously

***“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him”*** (Prov. 18:3).

***“The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him”*** (Prov. 18:17).

You may not always agree with your child’s reasoning, conclusions and opinions, but if you are going to lead him into the truth, you will need to understand his perspective. Moreover, by not attempting to understand his perspective, you may communicate such sinful attitudes as arrogance, impatience, apathy, or lack of love. People of all ages are inclined to translate rejection of their ideas as rejection of their persons. Naturally, children should be taught how to receive reproof biblically and learn not to equate rejection of one’s ideas as personal rejection. When, however, there is a constant barrage of parental insensitivity in this area, children quickly conclude that Mom and Dad, like the proverbial fool, are not interested in anything but their own opinions.

## 13. Comparing Them to Others

*“For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding” (2 Cor. 10:12).*

God gives every child unique gifts and talents. Adam gave every child (through the transmission of sin Rom. 5:16–19) a heart that is disposed to all manner of evil thoughts and intents. A child should learn at an early age “not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

Parents, on the other hand should take Paul’s warning in 2 Corinthians 10:12 to heart and avoid comparing their children (favorably or unfavorably) to other children. Proper biblical comparisons may be made in the following two directions:

*Forward* looking—by comparing where the child is today to the biblical standard of maturity as demonstrated in Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13–15; 2 Cor. 3:18), or—

*Backward* looking—by comparing the child’s spiritual maturity today to his own spiritual maturity at various points in the past (2 Peter 1:3–12; Rev. 2:2–5).

## 14. Not Making Time “Just to Talk”

*“Be quick to listen, slow to speak” (James 1:19).*

*“There is a time to keep silent, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7).*

Relationships are impossible to build without communication. To the degree (and only to the degree) that God has revealed Himself to us in the Bible, can we have a relationship with Him. As parents and children alike reveal themselves to each other through various communication forms, their relationships with each other are strengthened. Revelation of oneself is a biblical prerequisite for effective relationships.

When Mom and Dad allow the pressures and pleasures of life to keep them from spending enough time in the revelation/communication process, strong parent/child relationships are not established. In addition to provoking children to wrath, this weakening of the parent/child relationship motivates children to build closer relationships with friends instead of parents.

## 15. Not Praising or Encouraging Your Child

*“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them (to be) false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. But I have (this) against you, that you have left your first love” (Rev 2:2–4).*

It is significant that the Lord Jesus Christ, when He reproved the church at Ephesus, began with praise. When a Christian evaluates himself (as every person does continually), it is important for him to evaluate himself accurately. An accurate self-perception involves a clear understanding not only of what is wrong and needs to be corrected, but also of what is right and pleasing to God. Too often parents focus only on the wrong, and consequently, their children tend to evaluate themselves inaccurately. Their self-perceptions become distorted rather than sober (Rom. 12:3) and true (Phil. 4:8). I suggest to parents that they learn to keep their children regularly bathed in a solution of praise so that when reproof and correction are administered, these measures will be perceived as one more element of balanced biblical love.

## 16. Failing to Keep Your Promises

*“But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil” (Matt. 5:37).*

*“He swears to his own hurt and does not change (his promise)... He who does these things will never be shaken” (Ps. 15:4–5).*

*“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices” (Col. 3:9).*

Promises and commitments are usually made with every intention of keeping them and no intent to deceive. However, when promises and commitments consistently are not kept, regardless of the reason, and an attempt is not made to break the contract biblically (see Prov. 6:1–5) or forgiveness is not sought from a child for breach of contract, his disappointment turns into anger. As the string of broken promises gets longer and longer, and the child increasingly views his parents as undependable, unreliable, and deceitful, his anger may intensify proportionately.

Many responses may occur in the heart of a child whose hopes have been dashed by broken promises. Unless children are taught appropriate biblical responses, they may struggle with some of the following emotions:

- ***Disappointment and discouragement***
- ***Suspicion and cynicism—unwillingness to trust***
- ***Rejection—hurt feelings***
- ***Bitterness and resentment***
- ***Loss of respect or contempt for parents***
- ***Thoughts of being unloved***

Any of these, if not dealt with biblically, can easily lead to anger and then to rebellion.

## 17. Chastening in Front of Others

*“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matt. 18:15).*

Why do so many Christian parents overlook one of the most foundational discipline passages in the Bible? Perhaps it is because when we read the word “brother,” we immediately think of some church member with whom we have had or are currently involved in a conflict. Regardless of the reason, our Lord’s instruction in Matthew 18:15–20, when properly applied to the family conflict, will safeguard each member from abuse and will prevent sinful actions from becoming sinful habits. Remember, your believing son or daughter is primarily and permanently your brother. He is secondarily, and temporarily your child.

The disciplinary principle derived from this verse is that the circle of confession and correction should only be as large as the circle of offense. If your child sins in the presence of others, he may in certain cases be verbally rebuked (but not physically chastised) in their presence. If the sin however is not public, the disciplinary process should be handled between the parent and child. To violate the clear instruction of Christ by disciplining a child in front of others for sins he has committed in private is to sin against God and the child.

## 18. Not Allowing Enough Freedom

*“The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable (easy to be entreated), full of mercy...” (James 3:17).*

**“And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom is entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:48).**

Children, rather than expecting their parents to simply hand them freedom on a silver platter, ought to be willing to earn freedom by demonstrating that they are faithful. Faithfulness involves demonstrating to God and others that you can be trusted with increasing freedom based on at least two things: the successful fulfillment of specific responsibilities and the successive competence to make biblically wise decisions.

When children start demonstrating such faithfulness and parents do not reward them with the freedom and the trust commensurate with their achievement, they can become exasperated, discouraged, and even give up. Common reasons why parents do not give their children enough freedom include: overprotectiveness, insecurity, fear, unbiblical standards based on tradition rather than Scripture, inordinate desires to have perfect children, and inordinate concern for what others might think. By not rewarding faithfulness with requisite freedom, parents may hinder a form of motivation that is inherently biblical—the desire to earn trust.

## 19. Allowing Too Much Freedom

*“The rod and reproof give wisdom but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).*

**“...But he (the child) is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father” (Gal. 4:1, 2).**

When children are allowed to (1) habitually practice any sinful behavior, or (2) participate in non-sinful activities before demonstrating the appropriate levels of responsibility and maturity (i.e. having the freedom to dispose of great sums of money without knowing how to live by a biblically balanced budget), or (3) live an undisciplined life, being allowed to do almost anything their heart desires with instant gratification, other problems develop. Children must be taught how to repent of sin, how to be responsible, and how to live a self-disciplined life. Parents will suffer along with their children if they neglect these disciplinary responsibilities.

Children can soon come to know the truth that God equates discipline with love:

**“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you endure: God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore we had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?” (Heb. 12:6–9).**

Children who grow up in homes with too much freedom and not enough discipline may quickly conclude that they are not truly loved by their parents.

## 20. Mocking Your Child

*“My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me. Surely mockers are with me, and my eye gazes on their provocation” (Job 17:1-2).*

*“And the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’” (Exodus 4:11).*

Parents should never ridicule or mock. I am especially concerned about two categories of teasing. First, you should not make fun of inadequacies about which the child can do nothing. Parents should never ridicule a child for things that have nothing to do with pleasing God. Examples from this category include a child’s intelligence, athletic abilities, physical features, and motor coordination. These are personal characteristics that are not sinful. According to Exodus 4:11 and Psalm 139:13–16, God takes responsibility for prescribing these traits in each person before birth.

The second thing you should not do is make fun of things that are sinful. Should Christians make fun of things that God sent His Son to die for? Sin isn’t a laughing matter. Sinful behavior in children, especially those that are habitual, should be addressed with sobriety not with frivolity.

## 21. Abusing Them Physically

*“A bishop (overseer), then must be ... not violent..., but gentle” (1 Tim. 3:3 NKJV, my translation in parenthesis).*

*“When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?’ Then Balaam said to the donkey, ‘Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now’” (Num. 22:27–29).*

When Balaam became angry at his donkey for not meeting his expectations, he struck the beast with a stick. Balaam went on to say that if he had a sword he would have killed the donkey. Children, of course, are not beasts. Angry parents, however, may be guilty of treating them as such when their anger is out of control. Several parallels can be made between Balaam’s sinful anger and a parent out of control. I will mention three:

1. Balaam struck the donkey in haste, before he had collected all of the relevant data. Before we as parents jump to hasty and unfounded conclusions and discipline our children for the wrong reason, we must be certain we have all the facts.
2. Balaam struck the donkey because the donkey embarrassed him. We should be certain that our motivation for discipline is biblical, and not selfish. For us to discipline our children for selfish reasons, such as embarrassment or unfulfilled expectations, rather than for sin, is vindictive and abusive.
3. Balaam was out of control. (He would have killed his faithful donkey if he had the means to do it!) We parents should discipline our children only when we have gotten our anger under control and are not likely to harm our children.

## 22. Ridiculing or Name Calling

*“Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29).*

You may think: “Now wait a minute. Jesus called people names, so did Paul, as well as many of the biblical authors. Why can’t I call my children names?” Well, I suppose you can, provided your name calling meets biblical criteria. The only names you ought to be using to describe your children (or any other

person for that matter) are names that the Bible uses to describe categories of people. Even legitimate biblical name-calling should only be used when there is enough evidence to suggest the category.

Categories such as slothful, foolish, double-minded, deceitful, self-centered, and idolatrous are names that God uses to identify those individuals who have given themselves over to a particular sin that their life is dominated and characterized by that sin. Names like Idiot, Moron, Dummy, Meathead, Dingbat, Fatty, Shorty, and Pinhead don't fit biblical criteria.

Additionally, using biblical names to describe sinful behavior should be employed only when a child's life displays a particular sin to such a degree that the sin is obviously affecting various areas of his life (home, school, church, social, health, etc.) When it is necessary to show a child that his life is taking on unacceptable characteristics, the biblical name should be used as a didactic tool, not as a weapon. As a tool the name serves to motivate the child to change. As a weapon, the name embarrasses, shames, or antagonizes the child and is primarily punitive in nature. Punitive name calling provokes anger in children.

## 23. Unrealistic Expectations

*“When I was a child I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child” (1 Cor. 13:11).*

The Bible acknowledges that children think, speak and reason differently from adults. The process whereby children grow and develop takes time. Additionally, children grow at different rates. These factors need to be considered by parents as they establish expectations for their children.

Parents should not impose standards or expectations upon their children that their children are developmentally incapable of performing. Appropriate standards and expectations are clearly delineated in Scripture. Our emphasis should be on character not achievement. For example, godly character is shown in doing your best for God's glory, not by getting straight A's in school. Factored into the equation should also be the reality that children are sinners and are therefore going to sin. Hence, it should not be surprising to parents when even children with agreeable dispositions occasionally show their sinful hearts.

## 24. Practicing Favoritism

*“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and (began) inquiring what these things might be. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and (began) entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and (yet) you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him’” (Luke 15:25–30; emphasis added).*

When the prodigal's elder brother perceived (wrongly) that his father was showing favoritism toward his younger brother, he became angry. Since siblings are different, they should be treated as individuals. The standard, however, by which each child is evaluated and by which parents respond to each child *should be identical*, a point the elder brother did not understand and so he misinterpreted his father's motive.

Consider a thermometer as an illustration.—When placed in a refrigerator, it may read 38 degrees F°, when placed on the kitchen table—72 degrees, when placed in an oven however, it may read 400 degrees! Did the thermometer ever change? Did it ever stop faithfully measuring temperature? Did it ever stop being a thermometer and become a wrist watch? Of course not! What changed is not the thermometer, but rather its environment or circumstances. Likewise, when a child observes a certain parental treatment a sibling is receiving while in a different set of circumstances than himself, he needs to be assured that he or she will be treated in a similar manner (with justice) by his parent(s) should he find himself in the same

or a similar set of circumstances.

## 25. Child Training with Worldly Methodologies Inconsistent with God's Word

*“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4; emphasis added).*

Did you notice the word “but” in Ephesians 6:4? Two ways are being contrasted. Raising your child properly in the discipline and instruction of the Lord will not provoke him to anger, but employing the counsel and instruction of man-made pop psychology almost certainly will. The use of behavior modification and cognitive therapy techniques that were designed to replace Christ and the Scriptures with human wisdom (Prov. 16:25) cannot produce in an angry child the fruit of the Spirit. That is what is necessary to displace his characterological anger. Make certain that all means and methods of child training you use can be Scripturally validated. Only then will you avoid provoking your child to anger and truly bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Well, how did you do? How many ways have you and your spouse been provoking your children to anger? Remember, the anger is your child’s sin, but you are 100% responsible before God for the sins which provoked him to that anger. If you recognize that you have exasperated and provoked your children, I urge you to immediately take the following steps (see figure 6. below) to begin creating a home environment that will help them to replace anger with the love, kindness, gentleness, and forgiveness of Christ.

### Repenting from Provoking Children To Anger

1. **Identify** the specific ways you have been provoking your child to anger: Read Eph. 6:4.
2. **Confess** these sins to God: Read 1 John 1:9.
3. **Ask** your child’s forgiveness for your sins against him: Read Acts 24:16; Review point #9 of this chapter.
4. **Develop** a plan with your child’s assistance to replace those sinful behaviors with their biblical alternatives: Read Proverbs 28:13.
5. **Consider** specific ways you can provoke your children to love and good works: Read Hebrews 10:24.

# Article 4: From Pride to Humility: Pursue the Servant's Mindset – Stuart Scott, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*

When we counsel, we often encounter an underlying attitude to one degree or another. At times our counselees are defensive, resistant, stubborn, or disrespectful. Some debate whether or not they will obey God. Others grow poorly or not at all. Those we counsel display anger, impatience, fear, anxiety, and depression. All these are symptomatic of pride.

The fact is, we also face pride on the *other* side of the desk. As counselors, pastors, and disciplers, we often convey a neo-gnostic attitude, as if we're the experts or the professionals. Some of us talk down to those to whom we minister, rather than coming alongside of them. We may say things like, "I can't understand why you believe that!" "I can't believe you do such a thing!" or "I can't believe you think like that!" Some in ministry give the excuse, "I'm just not the compassionate type." Such counselors are not like Christ: He is full of compassion. We, too, need to exercise kindness and gentleness in ministering to others.

Some of us may believe or act as if we are the local Apostle, that everyone in the whole city with problems should call us. That's pride! We can be so critical that we act more like a guard dog than a shepherd. We know exactly what we're against, but people don't know we're *for them*. Some counselors emphasize doctrine and the exegesis of God's word as if they could stand alone, divorced from life. That's pride: knowledge by itself puffs up. Others of us may emphasize practical application to life without careful study of how God's word must undergird practice, thus offering mere morality without a vital connection to life in Christ. With such an epidemic of pride, the virtue of humility is perennially on the endangered list.

Consider Philippians 1:27-2:11: Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel... Do nothing from selfishness—the word meant someone who didn't want to work, but just wanted the money—or empty conceit, literally, empty praise. With humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself...Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus...who humbled Himself. The church in Philippi was near and dear to the apostle Paul's heart. He pleads for unity, and he teaches that unity can only be based on humility. The servant's mindset puts off the epidemic vice, pride, and puts on Christ's virtue, humility.

C.S. Lewis says, "Well, now, we have come to the center. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, grief, drunkenness and all that are mere flea bites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every vice. It is a complete anti-God state of mind."<sup>1</sup>

We know from 2 Timothy 3 that in the last time we will see people who are lovers of self, boastful, and arrogant. If pride *characterizes* your life, you can't be saved: only the poor in spirit are able to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3). God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Chrysostom said, "Pride is the mother of hell." More recently it has been said that the world's smallest package is a man wrapped up in himself. Pride is a root issue, deeply planted as the innermost layer of an onion. Many problems in life are just symptoms of the root issue, pride.

### Scriptural references to pride abound:

- The temptation to Eve and Adam was, “Take this, disobey, and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5).
- “In his pride the wicked does not seek God; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (Ps. 10:4).
- “To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (Prov. 8:13).
- “The Lord detests all the proud in heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished” (Prov. 16:5).
- “Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils; of what account is he?” (Isa. 2:22).

Illustration after illustration of pride appears in Scripture. Uzziah served God for many years, growing prosperous, famous, and strong: “but when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly” (2 Chron. 26:16). Nebuchadnezzar’s arrogance ruined his life, until he humbled himself before the Most High, praising the One who “is able to humble those who walk in pride” (Dan. 4:37). Belshazzar failed to learn his father’s lesson, exalting himself, not God, and was destroyed for his pride (Dan. 5:18-30). The Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14 ended up praying only to himself because he considered himself so superior and righteous. The danger is always in thinking too highly of yourself. We never find the Scriptures saying, “You’re thinking too poorly of yourself.”

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says, “What do you have that you did not receive?” So why do we boast of our achievements and abilities? Why do we rely on ourselves? In Ephesians 4:2, Paul tells us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, in humility, gentleness, patience, and long-suffering. So why are we proud, hard, impatient, and irritable? In 1 Timothy 3 we are warned not to bring new converts into leadership too quickly lest they become conceited, boastful and proud. James and Peter both say God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

Interestingly, six different Hebrew words are used for pride. All of them convey the lifting up of self, to be high, majestic, presumptuous, or rebellious. In the Greek, the words for pride occur in two different categories. One particular word group suggests the meaning of “strains the neck,” “being held up high because of what one thinks he has made of himself or accomplished,” “to magnify,” or “haughty.” The other word group in the Greek conveys a blindness, “to envelop with smoke.” Throughout the Scriptures, in both languages, we find people portrayed as having a high view of themselves. While they’re up there (on high) in their own thinking, they’re blind. Biblical synonyms are vainglory, conceit, boasting, arrogance, sloppiness, presumption, haughtiness, being puffed up, high-mindedness, scoffing.

What’s the definition of pride? If we could sum it up, it’s the mindset of self, the pursuit of self-exaltation, a focus on the desire to control all things for self. In exalting himself, the person actually believes, “I am valuable and worthy. I am the source of anything good or wise or successful. I deserve the credit for whatever I achieve or acquire. I deserve love, admiration, and respect. All good things are *from* me, *through* me and *to* me. All honor and glory should go to me for my enjoyment and pleasure.” Our instinct is to say, as Nebuchadnezzar did when he walked on the rooftop overlooking Babylon, “Isn’t this Babylon that I have built by the power of my hands and for my glory?” Most people don’t say those things out loud, but that is what they are thinking and how they are living.

That describes the arrogant. But what about those who are caught up in self-pity, who are self-absorbed with a sense of failure? Well, they are just on the flip side: they *want* to be good in and of themselves. They *want* to do things in and by their own power and might. They *want* everyone to serve them, like them, and approve of them. Both the haves and the have-nots are eaten up with pride. The whole self-esteem movement consists of have-nots hoping to be the haves. “Low self-esteem” is pride failing to get what it wants. The lustful cravings are still simply pride. Many, if they have God in mind at all, say He is here for them as a cosmic genie. They seek to domesticate God to their ends, or they just invent a totally different god of their own making.

Pride can be labeled as “practical atheism.” Thomas Watson in *Body of Divinity* says that every man is a would-be God. Pride amounts to seeking to ungod God. What man doesn’t realize is that there is no vacancy in the Trinity.

**It's hard to put on humility if you don't think you have pride. The characteristics of pride can be understood as follows:**

- (1) **Being blind, unable to see pride.** Pride envelops itself in smoke unless you’re in the mirror of God’s word and God, by His grace, allows you to see your sin and its magnitude. Many people see the logs in other people’s eyes and maybe the speck in their own. They may even say “I’m proud” and then move right on as if it were insignificant.
- (2) **Being unthankful.** Proud people think they deserve only what is good. The result is, why should they be thankful? As a matter of fact, they may even complain because they think they deserve better. They tend to be critical and complainers. One of our professors at the seminary sized up a student, saying, “This person is a walking minus sign!” They may grumble, be discontent, see the downside of everything, be quarrelsome and divisive. No one is safe around this type of person.
- (3) **Outbursts of anger, withdrawing, pouting, being moody or impatient because one's rights or schedules aren't being met.**
- (4) **Perfectionistic-type persons who want to be the best at everything are also proud.** Why? Because it’s self-serving. They brag and talk about themselves all the time. It reminds me of a cartoon of Garfield talking to Odie, the dog. He says, “Odie, I’m tired of talking about me. You talk about me for awhile.” Some have an inflated view of their own importance, abilities, and talents.
- (5) **Seeking independence.** Some proud people find it extremely difficult to work under someone else, to submit. They have to be their own boss. They say, “I don’t need anyone. I don’t need accountability for my faith and doctrine.” Others cut themselves down with comments, but inwardly they crave self-sufficiency.
- (6) **Monopolizing conversations, being rigid, stubborn, headstrong, and intimidating, saying, “It's my way or the highway.”**
- (7) **Being consumed with what others might think of them, being man-pleasers or man-fearers.**
- (8) **Being devastated by criticism.**
- (9) **Not listening very well.** They compose what they are going to say while you’re speaking.
- (10) **Being unteachable.** They know it all. They’re superior. They can’t learn anything.
- (11) **Being sarcastic, hurtful, jesting,** saying, “That’s just the way I am. That’s my personality. I’m A-type. I’m dominant, choleric, lion, beaver, mule,” whatever else you want to call them!
- (12) **Wanting to be praised or to be coaxed to serve.** Unwillingness to initiate or commit to the right thing simply to please God. I like Jay Adams’ answer to people who leave churches and say, “That was a cold place.” He says, “Go warm it up!” Such people are just consumed with themselves, jealous, envious, not glad for others’ successes, deceitful, covering up faults, rarely seeking help, fake, and hypocritical.
- (13) **Being defensive:** “It can’t be *my* fault!” Then they attack one another. Revenge, trivializing their sin, rationalizing it, justifying it, judging others by their own self-made standards. Often proud people rarely admit their sin or ask for forgiveness.
- (14) **Lacking in biblical prayer, in service to other people, and in sacrificial deeds of love.** (Thomas Watson said, “We should pray without ceasing because beggars beg.”) Instead, being touchy, irritable, or ultrasensitive.
- (15) **Resisting authority, being disrespectful.** We say he or she has a submission problem. No, they have a pride problem. It’s displaying itself that way. This person is rarely concerned about the welfare of someone else. They view and judge others in terms of how others support them and *their* concerns, *their* ministry. They voice their preferences at times, even when not asked. When they do voice them, it’s without compassion or consideration for others. They convey an unapproachableness. Even when someone points out a flaw, there’s always a quick retort, minimizing it and moving on.

Isn't it clear that proud people are useless for God's kingdom? They are unfruitful. They tend not to learn through trials and afflictions, instead always saying, "Why me? Why is this happening to me?" Throughout the Scriptures you see the pride of position, ability, achievement, wealth and possessions, knowledge and learning, spiritual attainment, and even pride of spiritual experiences. It's like spiritual drunkenness that flies up like wine into the brain and intoxicates. It's idolatry. A proud man is a self-worshiper. G. K. Chesterton said we are like the donkey who thinks the shouts and the palms are for him when they really were for the Christ whom he carried.

Perhaps you have heard this illustration before. If one person calls you a mule, you might dispute it. If two call you a mule, start looking seriously for hoof prints. If three call you a mule, get a saddle. For the proud person, it doesn't matter how many times different people say the same thing: nothing happens. Proud people minimize and rationalize. In the Bible, Satan, King Saul, King Uzziah, Nebuchadnezzar, the Pharisee (Luke 18), King Herod (Acts 12), and Diotrephe (3 John) are all examples of proud men.

I was talking to someone who helps people in Christian circles reconcile their differences and divisions. He told me one of the biggest issues among God's people is pride: pride lies behind strife and prevents peacemaking.

We have examined the epidemic vice of pride. Let's look now at the endangered virtue of humility. In 1 Peter 5:5,6, Peter says, "Clothe yourselves with humility" (literally translated "tie a knot"). Some suggest that Peter is alluding to when Jesus put on an apron and bowed down to wash the disciples' feet. He knelt down and tied a knot. We also are to tie a knot of humility about ourselves. It is an exhortation, which means God's grace can enable us to do it. It is a work of God's Spirit within, not a personality thing or something you stick on the outside. It's not "be like Jesus" outwardly only. It is produced with the life of Christ inside, the work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us. But we have to work at it as well. Philippians 2 says it is an attitude. "Have this mindset."

Spurgeon said about humility, "The longer I live, and I think it is so with most Christians, the more I feel that everything must be of grace from the first to the last if I am to be saved. Grace chose us and grace redeemed us; grace calls us and grace renews us; grace preserves and grace must perfect us or else nothing will come of all our hope and desires. Our religion will be a flash in the pan, a disappointment at the last, and a failure forever."

Three hundred years ago Thomas Brooks wrote, "Ah, young men, young men, had others a window to look into your chests and did your hearts stand where your faces do, you would even be afraid of yourselves. You would loathe and abhor yourselves. Ah, young men, young men, as you would have God keep house with you, as you would enter His mind and secrets made known to you, as you would have Christ to delight in you and the spirit to dwell in you, as you would be honored among the saints and attended and guarded by angels, get humble and keep humble."

We need that message today, don't we? It is, in fact, possible to walk humbly. I remember growing up hearing, "If you think you're walking humbly, you're not!" But that's not true! We're commanded to love, so I think it's possible to say, "As a pattern of my life, I'm seeking to be loving." It's the same thing with humility. As a pattern of your life, you can walk humbly before God. It is a motive and mindset that you display.

References to humility occur throughout Scripture. God says, "I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another" (Isa. 42:8). God is great; we are small. God says, "For thus says the high and exalted one, who lives forever, whose name is holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa. 57:15). God comes to humble people.

You see the Lord Jesus displaying and describing Himself this way: "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29). Later, He bows low to wash the feet of His disciples (John 13:3-17). He tells us to do the same. So does Ephesians 4:1-3: "Walk in this manner; put on humility." And Colossians 3:12: "And so as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

The terms used in Hebrew and Greek for this character of humility all refer to bowing low, crouching. Bowing low used to be a sign of oppression and affliction in the Old Testament, an attitude of mind of one who bends down. It's an attitude of heart, the real you. It means to bring low, to yield, to give way to God's way. Humility is the pursuit to magnify Christ by bowing low in complete adoration and obedience. It's the pursuit of magnifying Christ, not self, realizing that all goodness, honor, and glory comes from God and needs to go to God. It confesses that anything good, wise, or helpful comes from Him and is done by Him or through Him, and the goal is for Him. Such a mind is what Christ displayed when He was here.

So how should we view others through the eyeglasses of humility? We should worship God by loving and serving others. The eyeglasses of pride look instead for opportunities to manipulate and use people. With pride, all is conditional. Not so with humility. Humility is sacrificially giving what is best for others. If others are unsaved, it's presenting the gospel to them. If they are believers, it's asking how we can help them in their sanctification. How can we help them be more like Jesus Christ? That's humility. That's the mindset of the servant, Jesus Christ.

I encourage anyone who is meditating on how to replace pride with humility to study the life of Christ in the Gospels. Jesus says He's meek and lowly of heart, so watch Him in action. Whatever Jesus said and did for our good was directed totally by the Father. In John 8:28 Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I am He. I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me. He who sent me is with me, and He has not left me alone. I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." It's what Paul recognized when he looked at God and man, and what God had done for man. He said, "From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (Rom. 11:36). Again, it's inwardly designed. It's a work of God in the heart of man. You can't put this on externally. It is God who produces it in you in relationship with Him. When someone cries out, "Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner," like the publican did, the Lord takes mercy and showers grace upon that individual. It is to be beggar-like in our minds. It's a daily mindset: from God and through God and to God belong all things. There's no personal authority for what I want. There's only delegated authority to accomplish God's will.

### Here are ten different ways to display humility:

- (1) **Focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the author and perfecter of our faith.** In the short epistle to the Philippians, you'll find the word Jesus, Savior, Christ, or Lord in 51 out of 104 verses. Paul was consumed with Christ. For Him, to live was Christ and to die was gain. His ambition, whether absent or present, was to please God. It should be your ambition as well. He yearned after knowing Christ. He focused on Christ.
- (2) **Be overwhelmed by God's goodness.** A humble Christian will be thankful. Unthankfulness characterizes the unsaved (Rom. 1:21). Grumbling is a capital crime (1 Cor. 10:10). Thankfulness characterizes the humble believer. "Give thanks in all things, for this is the will of God" (1 Thess. 5:18).
- (3) **Commune with God.** Be extremely dependent upon God in prayer. As I mentioned earlier, beggars beg. You will pray without ceasing. You can't help it. We *need* God. We need His grace. We'll be dependent on Him in prayer.
- (4) **Serve others.** Actively minister to other people. A humble Christian wants to be useful and fruitful. That's why we're here, to prefer others to ourselves, to share Christ with the unsaved, to help those who are saved to be built up in Christ. The humble looks for ways to serve. We won't wait to be asked, and no task will be too menial.

(5) **Obey God's revealed will in all things.** Romans 12 tells us that a believer is to be a living sacrifice with a mind renewed by the Spirit and word of God. Humble Christians won't be mystical and subjective but will apply God's word, both direct statements and indirect implications. They will seek His principles: "What saith the Lord?"

(6) **Learn from others.** Humble Christians are teachable. They know how little they know, so they're eager to learn. They're team players.

(7) **Encourage others.** Jesus always encouraged His disciples and those around Him. Paul did the same in the churches as he wrote to them. We need encouragement, reminding, comfort, and guidance every day, more and more as the day approaches for Christ's return (Heb. 3:12ff). Hebrews 10:24 says what fellowship is all about: "Encourage one another. Stir one another up to love and good deeds."

(8) **Pursue integrity in private as well as public life.** If it's not in your private life, you have no business exporting what you don't have. The humble life is an honest life that seeks to be blameless.

(9) **Deny self by assuming no rights, living unto Christ, buffeting the body, keeping it under subjection, exercising yourself unto godliness, mortifying sins and the deeds of the flesh.** The humble Christian accepts none of the "protect my boundaries" attitude that the proud person insists on in order to get what he wants.

(10) **Think rightly or soberly about yourself while bowing low before God and others.** John Bradford looked from his window upon the road to the gallows at Tyebourne. Day after day he saw poor, condemned prisoners being carried in a cart to die. He was known to say, "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God."

Examples of humility in Scripture abound. Abraham gave Lot first choice when they parted company and divided the land (Gen. 13). Moses was said to be "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). John the Baptist acknowledged that he was not worthy to untie Christ's sandals (Luke 3:16). Mary, the mother of Jesus, submitted herself completely to God's will: "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46). The tax collector beat his breast and prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears" (Acts 20:19). Jesus is the standard for His people.

Consider how Jesus Himself replaces the following types of pride with His own humility.

- Birth and rank? "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55)
- Wealth? "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20).
- Respectability? "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46)
- Personal appearance? "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him" (Isa. 53:2).
- Reputation? "Here is...a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19).
- Learning? "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15)
- Superiority? "But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).
- Success? "For even His own brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).
- Ability? "For He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4).
- Self-will? "For I have come down from Heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38).
- Intellect? "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28).
- Honorable death? "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed" (Luke 23:32).

Aren't Jesus' characteristics just the opposite of what is valued today? Without humility there can be no true repentance, no true faith, no true love and obedience. In counseling and ministry, if there is no replacement of pride with humility, no growing in lowly dependency and submission, then a person will not exercise true godliness. John Owens said, "There is indeed no better frame of heart to be attained in this life and whereby it is to the Word as the wax to the seal." That should be the state of our hearts. As wax is to the seal, so our heart needs to be impressed with the Word of God.

We can help our counselees learn to apply these principles of humility by appealing to four areas: instruction, reproof, correction, and training (2 Tim. 3:16).

First, how can you instruct counselees? Encourage them to study God and read about His character. The sight of glory humbles, doesn't it? Watson said, "The moon has no cause to be proud of her light when she borrows it from the sun." Study Christ (Phil. 2:5). Focus on the life of Christ in the Gospels. By revealing God's glory and grace, the Bible teaches people what is right.

Second, reproof teaches what is wrong. The Bible teaches us to see our pride for what it is: sin! "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked is sin" (Prov. 21:4). The life of Job illustrates the *process* of reproof. God presses Job with questions that lower Job and exalt God in Job's mind and eyes (Job 38-41). Interestingly, halfway through, Job says, "I think I'll be quiet" (Job 40:4f). At that point we might think, "Good, you got the message. Now we'll move on to the rest of the story." We need instead to linger, fully exposing and convicting pride in our own lives. The Lord says, "I'm not through with you yet. I have a few more questions for you." He goes on for two more chapters. By the end, Job doesn't say, "I'll be quiet." He says, "I repent" (Job 42:6).

Don't we tend to take too quick a look at the pride that shows up in our lives? Aren't we too slow to admit we need humility instead? We need to see and acknowledge pride for what it is: an awful, wicked abomination. It amounts to us saying, "From me and through me and to me belong all things!" How insidious! Acknowledge it as sin. Confess it. Say the same thing that God says about it and repent.

Third, correction teaches us how to proceed to make things right at the level of motives, thoughts, speech, and actions. This is not something external only. The change process does not bypass the heart. You don't break habits; you replace them by moving with God's Spirit. He touches and humbles the proud heart at the root of its motivations. If I just try to put on new thoughts and new actions alone, without replacing who I'm living for and what I want, I'm missing something great: the Lord! Paul says, "So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (2 Cor. 5:9). We must come to a point where we are able to admit, "Lord, I've been thinking about *me* and what *I* want! I repent of that, at the level of motives. I love *you*!" God's word searches straight down into the heart. There's nothing deeper in the heart than thoughts and motives (Heb. 4:12). Motives and beliefs are transformed and replaced as we take to heart the word of God, with God's Spirit and other people helping us. We begin to consider how we can be useful and fruitful. It's an act of the will by the help of the Spirit of God "who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Correction comes from inside the heart and results in Christlike fruit.

Finally, after instruction, reproof and correction, comes training in righteousness. The process continues as you *learn* humility. Enlist the help of people around you. Ask them to bring to your attention any evidence of pride in your life. Desire to walk humbly—not proudly—before God, to be useful and fruitful for the Master. Consider this illustration of what our orientation needs to be. Two men sat in the back of a church one morning after the message was given. When the pastor said "Amen," one man looked at the other and said, "Boy! I'm glad that sermon is over!" The other replied, "Actually, it's just beginning!" Pride does not die once and is done; it dies daily.

Meditate on how God wants to implant the truths of Philippians 2:1-16 in every heart. Humility makes us shine with God's glory. May our focus remain not on ourselves but turn instead to our Lord Jesus Christ if we are to love and serve others well.

Let's pray to Him now.

*Lord, there's going to be a day when thousands and thousands will say in unison, "Worthy art Thou, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power for Thou hast created all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created. To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Lord, may we do here on earth what we will do in heaven: bowing low and lifting You high.*

*Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

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The Journal of Biblical Counseling • Volume 17 • Number 3 • Spring 1999

## The Heart of Change

8. What should I do now to repent to love God and love others (**good fruit**)?

7. What should be my greatest delight (**heart**)?

6. What does the Word of God say about God, me, and my situation? (**good soil**)



5. How does the Gospel show me that Jesus is the greatest delight (**cross**)?

2. What are my emotional and behavioral responses (**bad fruit**)?

3. What am I loving/desiring most in the situation (**heart**)?

4. What do I believe will make me happy (deceit) and how am I doubting God? (**bad soil**)

