

Mothers: Disciplers of the Next Generations

By Sally Michael



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It is a situation of tremendous responsibility to be a parent: for the manner in which you discharge the duties of this relation, you must give an account in that awful day when the secrets of all hearts shall be judged by Jesus Christ.

...It will not then be sufficient to plead the strength of your affection, nor the ceaseless efforts to which it gave rise; for if these efforts were not directed to a right end, if all your solicitude was lavished upon inferior objects, you will receive a rebuke of him that sitteth upon the throne.

Recognizing in your children beings placed in this world in a state of probation, and hastening to eternal happiness or torment, will you be contented to seek for them anything short of eternal salvation? Do you really believe in the ruin of the human race by sin, and their recovery by Christ? ...in the existence of such states as heaven and hell? ...in the necessity of a life of faith and holiness, in order to escape the one and secure the other?

Then act up to these solemn convictions, not only in reference to your own salvation, but to the salvation of your children. Let a supreme concern for their immortal interests be at the bottom of all your conduct, and interwoven with all your parental habits.¹

1. James, John Angell. *The Christian Father's Present to His Children*. (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 16-17.

Table of Contents

Preface	7
A Vision of the Great Work	9
A Biblical Vision of Mothering: Called to Be Ambassadors	11
We are God's Ambassadors	12
Given the Ministry of Reconciliation and Discipleship	17
Which We Labor for by Proclaiming Christ	22
With the Wisdom and Energy Given to Us by Him.	37
Conclusion	39
Appendices	41
A. How to Battle Spiritually	41
B. Excerpt from Counsels to Christian Mothers by Archibald Alexander.	45

Preface

I live in Minnesota, the land of eternal snow and cold. Brrrr! But I grew up in Virginia and Rhode Island, and in Ecuador. Norfolk, Virginia is a place of endless beaches, sun, and warmth. Quito, Ecuador is nicknamed the land of eternal spring. Let's forget about Rhode Island. I was a child then anyway.

I love warm weather. So here I am in Minnesota enduring the cold, waiting for winter to be over. Like a bear in its den, I hibernate in winter, piling on blankets, sitting in front of the fireplace, dreaming of warm spring days when I can emerge from hibernation. Though I have survived 36 Minnesota winters, I do not consider myself a Minnesotan or a lover of snow and cold weather. I endure winter.

Many native Minnesotans are not like me. They ski, ice skate, play ice hockey, and go snowmobiling and ice fishing. Minnesotans enjoy winter. One Minnesotan even remarked to me upon learning that I went to secondary school where it was spring year round, "Oh I would miss the seasons."

Miss the seasons? Miss winter? Miss snow and ice, snow banks and slippery roads, cars in the ditch, and frostbitten fingers? To me, this sounds like a piece of insanity.

So, what is the difference between me and native Minnesotans? Perspective. I see winter as something to endure. They see winter as opportunity—something to enjoy.

Perspective makes all the difference in how we navigate life and the challenges it brings. I must admit, to see winter as an opportunity brings more joy than seeing winter as a problem. It would serve me to have a change in perspective.

Perspective makes a profound influence on our mothering as well. How we look at our mothering will influence how we mother and, to some degree, the outcome of our mothering. Consider the perspective of these three mothers:

Three Mothers²

Once a woman came upon three mothers at work.

“What are you doing?” she asked of them.

“I’m doing the weekly washing,” answered the first.

“I’m doing a bit of household drudgery,” replied the second.

“I’m mothering three young children who someday will fill important and useful spheres in life, and wash-day is part of my grand task in caring for these souls who shall live forever,” replied the third. Only she had caught a vision of the great work she was doing.

Mothering is a great work; a God-given opportunity to influence the next generations to put their trust in God. Do we see it as such? Do we awake each day with the anticipation of the opportunity God has given us to impart the words of life, to nurture budding seeds of faith, to lead our little ones to the Savior?

My prayer is that this booklet will challenge you to look on your mothering with a biblical perspective, to seize the opportunities God gives you each day to encourage faith in your children, and to rely on Him as your Sin-bearer and Enabler to do the great work He has called you to do.

For His glory and the joy of the next generations,

Sally Michael

2. Beall, Elizabeth, and Ed Phillips. *Verses of Virtue: The Poetry and Prose of Christian Motherhood*. (San Antonio, Texas.:Vision Forum, 2002), 49-50.

A Vision of the Great Work

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Jesus had a vision—a vision of the redemption that would be bought by His finished work on the cross, a vision of the Father’s pleasure in Him, and a vision of sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. He recognized the great work He was called to and the future joy His accomplished work would bring. This vision of “the joy that was set before Him” sustained Jesus and enabled Him to endure the agony of the cross.

Motherhood involves a vision, too. It may be conscious or unconscious, well-articulated or haphazard, but the vision that drives us also shapes our attitudes, our actions, our influence and, to some degree, the outcome of our mothering. What is your vision of mothering? Is it shaped by the Word...or by the world?

We are so easily influenced by our culture that unless we step back and work at discovering a biblical vision of motherhood, we may default to unbiblical perspectives of mothering. We may miss the vision of the great work God has called us to do, the joy that is set before us as we anticipate the Father’s pleasure in us, and the dependency on Him that we need to finish the work He has entrusted to us.

A Biblical Vision of Mothering: Called to Be Ambassadors

There are many passages in the Bible we could turn to in order to gain a biblical vision of mothering, but two passages from Paul's letters will give us an ample vision of the great kingdom work we have been given. Paul gives us a solid vision for our mothering that can sustain us and enable us through the joys and sorrows, the challenges and blessings, and the short-term trials and long-term anticipations of mothering. One passage is from 2 Corinthians:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

To put Paul's vision in this passage in mothering terms, we are "birth coaches"—coaxing forth new birth, instructing, guiding, admonishing, encouraging, and appointing to the promised reward.

The other passage is from the first chapter of Colossians:

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1:28-29)

The ESV translation here is “toil” and “present,” but we could say “labor” and “deliver.” We are birth coaches in the business of labor and delivery. Or, to put it in biblical terms,

We are God’s ambassadors given the ministry of reconciliation and discipleship, which we labor for by proclaiming Christ with the wisdom and energy given to us by Him.

This is a magnificent calling and a beautiful vision of motherhood! To understand it more fully, let’s look at each phrase of that definition of motherhood.

We are God’s Ambassadors

As God’s ambassadors, we are always representing our King—imparting His words, utilizing His methods, reflecting His character, adopting His desires, and enforcing His policies. Our goal is to faithfully represent Him to our children as an authentic reflection of His heart and His character.

The first and most important step in representing someone else is to know him—his perspectives, thoughts, ways, desires, etc. To faithfully represent God to our children, we must know Him well, spending time in fellowship with him and drawing near to Him through His Word and prayer.

As mothers, it is tempting to be consumed with the busyness of life—getting meals, changing diapers, bringing children to school, doing laundry, attending to the myriad of necessary tasks to manage a household and family—at the neglect of our spiritual development. Not only is this personal spiritual suicide, but it is detrimental to our children. If we would nurture the faith of our children, we must first nurture our own growing relationship with the Living God. (See “How to Battle Spiritually” in the Appendix.)

We must be spiritually armed for the day, which means doing whatever we must do to preserve our time with God. We cannot be good ambassadors if we are not meeting with the King. In

order to fulfill the responsibilities given to parents in Deuteronomy 6, we must first feed our own souls. Then our love for God will flow naturally from our hearts to our children.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:5-9)

Our primary struggle in raising our children is not subduing their wills, knowing how to teach them the Bible, or even knowing how to pray for them. Our greatest struggle will be in striving to love and worship God above all else, so that we can overflow in imparting that love to our children. Because our hearts are prone to wander from the Lord, from the Creator to the things He has created—pride, money, possessions, image, children, control, popularity, the praise of men, and so on, we must fight a continual battle to keep our hearts from other idols.

Does idolatry seem an odd topic to address in a booklet on mothering? Perhaps an example will help to clarify why this is so critical in parenting. In a parenting class my husband and I were teaching, a father commented that his children fought all the time. He recounted an occasion in which his wife went into a store while he waited in the car with the children, who promptly started fighting. His response to his children's behavior was to put his head against the window, close his eyes, and ignore their fighting.

What was he admitting? He was admitting that he loved “peace,” the absence of involvement in conflict, more than doing what is right by his children, more than obeying the biblical mandates to correct and guide his children. He was admitting that he cared more about his own comfort than about the souls of his children.

He was admitting that he valued the temporary pleasures of this world more than creating worshippers for the God he professed to love.

...He was admitting that he was an idolater.

Am I being too critical of this man? I think not. What was true for this man is true for all of us to one degree or another. There are idolatrous desires in all of us. We are all guilty. We are all in constant need of the cross.

Christ-centered parenting involves continually running to the cross for forgiveness; continually acknowledging our sin and pleading the blood of Christ for our failings. It means daily turning to Christ for the patience, wisdom, perseverance, strength, and desire to parent our children well. We are all sinners who must stand guard over our hearts, striving to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Although regenerate, we as Christians are people in need of change.

God has called us to be ambassadors to our children through our words, actions, and example...every moment, every day, all the time. Like Paul, we should be able to say to our disciples, our children:

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. (Philippians 3:17)

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

J.C. Ryle in *The Duties of Parents* reminds us of the following:³

Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear...What they see has a much stronger effect on their minds than what

3. Ryle, John Charles. *The Duties of Parents: Raising Children with Christ*. (Conrad, Mont.: Triangle Press, 1994), 31.

they are told...Think not your children will practice what they do not see you do.

All Christians are called to be imitators of Christ and to live a life of faith and faithfulness that is worthy of imitation. Yet we are sinners raising sinners and, because we are sinners, our influence is marred; our example is flawed. We struggle in our attempt to be a good example to our children. While telling them not to be selfish, we indulge ourselves; we instruct them to live in harmony with siblings, and then exchange angry words with our spouse; we encourage them to love the Word of God, and find ourselves putting off Bible reading with the false assurance that something else is more satisfying than the words of life.

Though our influence on our children is flawed due to our many failures, though we regret the sin in our lives and its effect on our children, the redeeming news is that we are called to be *authentic*, sincere examples, not *perfect* examples. A person who is an authentic example asks forgiveness when he has wronged another. When you are impatient with your children or lash out in frustration at their immaturity, are you quick to admit your failing? Do you say, “Mommy was wrong when I spoke to you so harshly. Will you forgive me?”

Authentic examples war against the sin in their own lives and take steps toward what is helpful to their spiritual growth. By God’s grace, we can be authentic examples, admitting our weaknesses, confessing our sins, striving against sin, and reflecting a humble spirit.

Modeling is setting an *overall positive pattern*. There are times when we will model negative attitudes and actions, but it is the overall patterns that comprise our influence on our children. God calls us to authenticity and humility—to practice what we preach, striving to be more like Christ while admitting our sins and weaknesses. The following truths are some that we should ask God to hide in our hearts:

- **Sin is Always Wrong**

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

We never have an excuse to sin...no matter how trying our children have been. Our circumstances do not cause us to sin. Following the evil inclination of our fallen nature is the cause of our sin.

Losing patience is never right. There may be times when it is understandable, but it is never right. Situations that push us to the limit of our patience—a fussy child, a poor night’s sleep, a monthly cycle—may challenge our desire to live godly lives, but they do not make us sin. Nor are they excuses for our sin. Rather, they are mirrors showing us what is really into our hearts; in a sense, they are windows into our souls.

- **God Will Forgive the Offenses of the Repentant**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Rather than excuse our sin, we need to confess our sin and thank God for showing us where we need to yield to His fatherly discipline. Then we should rejoice in the good news that we have a fresh chance to begin again!

- **Ask God for Help**

King Asa of Judah used the silver and gold from the treasuries of the temple to purchase the aid of Ben-Hadad, King of Aram, in fighting against King Baasha of Israel. Hanani reprimanded Asa for relying on the King of Aram

rather than on the Lord. God had delivered Judah from enemies with larger armies. He had proved faithful and mighty in the past, yet Asa turned to a weaker power than God (2 Chronicles 16:1-9).

We often do the same thing, turning to man/self rather than to God. Instead of depending on God's power and help, we think that our determination to improve will give us victory. Instead of facing the difficult moments of trying days with a prayer on our lips, humbly acknowledging our weakness before God, and pleading for His strength, we often attempt to battle through without calling on the Lord.

Yet, all of our good determinations are a weak substitute for the power of the Almighty God. Oh that we would realize that God is on our side and He is eager to help us. He is actively involved in working for our sanctification and blessing our children.

Given the Ministry of Reconciliation and Discipleship

The goal of parenting is to introduce our children to Jesus Christ, to participate in God's ministry of reconciling sinners to Himself. In short, our job is to prepare our children for the Day of Judgment.

Our calling is a serious calling with eternal outcomes. We dare not take it lightly. Though we are not responsible for the outcome, we are responsible for our influence. Like the watchman on the wall in Ezekiel, we must sound the alarm that judgment is coming.

May we be a mother like Charles Spurgeon had! This is what he said of her:

I cannot tell how much I owe to the solemn words of my good mother. It was the custom on Sunday evenings, while we were yet little children, for her to stay home with us, and then we sat round the table, and read verse by verse, and she explained the Scriptures to us.

After that was done, then came the time of pleading: there was a little piece of Alleine's Alarm, or of Baxter's Call to the Unconverted, and this was read with pointed observations made to each of us as we sat round the table; and the question was asked, how long it would be before we would think about our state, how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came a mother's prayer, and some of the words of that prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is grey. I remember on one occasion, her praying thus, "Now Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ." That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience, and stirred my heart.

My mother said to me once, after she had long prayed for me and had come to the conviction that I was hopeless "Ah" said she. "My son, if at the last great day you are condemned, remember your mother will say Amen to your condemnation. That stung me to the quick. Must the mother that brought me forth and that loved me say 'amen' to my being condemned at last?"⁴

How easy it is for us to be deceived about the condition of our children's souls. They look so innocent—especially when they are sleeping! But every child is a sinner from birth.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

This is the condition of the heart of a child. We must not forget that our children are spiritually stillborn, each one born dead in

4. Spurgeon, Rev. C.H. "The Chaff Driven Away." Sermon delivered on Sabbath Morning, October 23, 1859, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

his sin. Therefore, our children's greatest need is to be reconciled to God. The command to "be reconciled" to God indicates that we are all estranged from Him without the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit to remove the barrier our sin places between us and a holy God.

As Christian parents, we are rightly concerned about protecting children from the evil influences around us. But this must not be the main focus of our parenting. We must not lose sight of the fact that greatest danger to our children is the resident evil in their own hearts. This is the greater problem we must aggressively address. It is their own sin nature that leads them astray.

Our primary calling as Christian mothers is to be Christ's ambassadors to our children, speaking His truth, and reflecting His heart to them. Christ has given us a divine calling as ministers of reconciliation. All our other responsibilities pale in comparison to this one great charge. This is the priority we must keep uppermost in our minds and in our affections. While the tyranny of the ever-present influence of lesser things threatens to consume our time and efforts, we must keep foremost in our minds and hearts that our children will live eternally somewhere, either in heaven or in hell, and it is our job to prepare them for the Judgment Day.

We must soberly warn our children of the reality of sin, separation from God, and the horror of hell, while rejoicing in the glories of grace, the reconciliation through Christ, and the joy of heaven. Do our priorities reflect this as the principal focus in our mothering? How easy it is to cram their lives with everything that this dark world has to offer them, everything that this world says they must have...and not prepare them for the next world. We cannot lose sight of the fact that our primary calling is to impart the truth and walk in it with our children. We must be careful not to trade the greater things for lesser things.

British pastor John Angell James has this challenging perspective to offer us:

What then, my children, are all worldly acquirements and possessions without piety?...Original genius, a vigorous understanding, a well-stored mind, and all this adorned by the most amiable temper and most insinuating address, will neither comfort under trials of life nor save their lovely possessor from the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. O! no: they may qualify for earth but not qualify for heaven.⁵

But how it would embitter our last moments, and plant our dying pillow with thorns, to leave you on earth in an unconverted state; following us to the grave, but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, how could we sustain the dreadful thought...that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions, you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation? And when you had departed under such circumstances, what could heal our wounds or dry our tears.⁶

Though our calling is a serious calling which we must work at faithfully, we must remember that our diligent efforts will not save our children; they may be the means God uses to save our children, but we do not have the power to change their hearts.

One day I happened upon my younger daughter, Kristi, at 4 or 5 years old, sitting on the floor of her room, reading her Bible to her baby doll. Kristi was making very diligent efforts, yet her doll was completely incapable of responding. This is a picture of our children. They are incapable of responding in faith to God unless God opens blind eyes and softens hard hearts.

So the call to be a parent is a call to persistent prayer, in addition to the call to persistent effort in teaching, training, and modeling. Our interactions with our children should be persistently infused with spontaneous prayer as God reveals to us their spiritual

5. James, John Angell. *The Christian Father's Present to His Children*. (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 41.

6. *Ibid.*, 38.

needs. Our efforts to reach their hearts will fall on hard soil unless the Holy Spirit breaks up the clumps of resistance to the Gospel of Christ.

In addition, God calls us to consistent, disciplined prayer for our children. In the midst of our efforts, Satan aims his fiery darts of distractions. Do you sit down to pray like I sometimes do... and find that soon I am wondering what I am going to make for dinner? How the enemy dissuades us from focusing on persistent prayer! Because of the weakness of our flesh, it is helpful to have some kind of prayer guide.⁷

The greatest guide God has given us in praying for our children is His Word. As you read the Bible, use Scripture as a springboard for your prayers. For example, using Psalm 1:1-2 might look like this:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

“Lord, help my children not to listen to the advice of ungodly friends, or to participate in mocking what is true, good, and right. Instead, help them to love the truth, treasure your Word, and stand up for what is right. May Your Word be their guide, and not the opinions of others...”

Just take each phrase and pray what it stirs up in your heart and mind. In so doing, you are praying Scripture-soaked truths into your children’s lives. Though we are not guaranteed the results we want or the means by which God answers our prayers, God, the Giver of prayer, often puts on our hearts that which He ordains.

7. One such guide is *Praying for the Next Generation*, published by Children Desiring God. www.childrendesiringGOD.org

Which We Labor for by Proclaiming Christ

Paul does not give us any illusions that calling sinners into the kingdom is not hard work: “for this I toil, struggling...”
(Colossians 1:29)

Toil...struggling...This is not a picture of leisurely, off-handed conversation, but of earnest engagement. Many eighteenth and nineteenth century authors like John Angell James understood the seriousness of this engagement. Again, his words are challenging:

My subject is religion—my object is the soul—my aim is salvation...I look beyond the painted and gaudy scene of earth’s fading vanities, to the everlasting ages through which you must exist in torment or bliss; and, God helping me, it shall not be my fault if you do not live in comfort, die in peace, and inherit salvation!⁸

Upon a right understanding of this subject is suspended your happiness for eternity. Ponder that word eternity, and think of the millions of millions of ages, passing comprehension, it includes; all to be filled with torment or bliss, according as you understand and practice, or mistake the nature and neglect the claims of true religion.

Should not this awaken solicitude of the deepest kind?⁹

Labor to Proclaim the Testimony of the Lord

God has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation, and this should awaken “solicitude of the deepest kind.” In ordaining the influence of parents on the next generation as a primary means of drawing His children to faith, God has placed on us a great calling to be faithfully executed.

8. James, John Angell. *Female Piety*. (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria Pub., 1999), 2.

9. *Ibid.*, 85-86.

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! ²I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, ³things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. ⁴We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; ⁸and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.
(Psalm 78:1-8)

We have been entrusted with a testimony of the deeds of the Lord and the imparting of His commands. Scripture gives very clear instruction regarding our responsibility to convey this teaching to those who come after us.

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)

My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. ²¹Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. ²²When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. ²³For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.
(Proverbs 6:20-23)

How then do we instruct our children in the truth? Paul gives us a picture of the influence of Timothy's mother's and grandmother's instruction.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
(2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Here we see the authentic example of the character and sincere faith of these godly women. He commends their diligent teaching of Timothy “from childhood.” It is never too early to instruct a child in the Word of God. Starting with simple statements of truth such as, “God is good; God can do anything; God made everything,” we gradually add to that understanding.

This is the same process by which young children learn all things. Little children don’t understand that a chair is something with four legs that holds you up when you sit on it. But we start to instruct them by labeling that object as a “chair.” The child experiments with getting up on the chair while we continue repeating that it is a chair. He learns through experience that when he sits on it, it supports him. To that knowledge we add that the chair has four legs. Eventually, he can count the four legs.

This is the same process we use to impart biblical truth to our children. A child eats a cracker and enjoys it. We direct that emotion God-ward, “The cracker is good! Yummm! God gives us crackers. God is good!”

Eventually, a child will understand that our good God gives us crackers and milk, and trees and flowers, and mommies and daddies...all good things. And he in time learns that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17a).

By the working of the Holy Spirit, our teaching can birth faith in the hearts of our children. But the Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He works through the Word of God taught by God’s people to the next generation. What a fire He can start with the tiny embers of truth we sow!

When our younger daughter, Kristi, was in preschool she learned in Sunday school that God made the trees and grass, flowers and

birds; God made everything! One day during that period, as I was backing the car out of the driveway with Kristi and her 6-year-old sister Amy accompanying me, Kristi pointed to the house across the street and said, “God made the house.”

Her older sister...being so much wiser...disagreed with her, “A man made the house.” They debated this for awhile, and then I intervened, “You are both right. A man took a hammer and nails and some boards, and pounded the boards together and made a house. But Who gave the man the tree that gave him the wood? And Who gave the man the hands to hold the hammer? And Who gave the man the mind to think of how to make a house?”

Kristi immediately replied, “Every good and perfect gift is from above.” And then simultaneously Amy and Kristi started singing, “God is so good; God is so good; God is so good; He’s so good to me.” That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of children who have been acquainted with the words of life from the Giver of all good things.

Labor to Impart a God-Centered Focus

With your children, turn to the Word daily. Teach them to look for God in every passage and in every story they hear or read in the Bible. Teach them to ask and answer the question, “What does this say about God?” Show your children that God is the main character in the Bible and at the center of all of life. He is the sun around which all things orbit. So, in teaching our children, we must make sure that we maintain the *correct focus*.

This is not the way many Bible stories present the Word. For example, you might read the story “A Brave Queen Saves Her People.” It is not atypical for the story of the preservation of the Jews in Persia to be told in this manner:

Brave Esther went to the king to plead for the lives of her people. The king listened to beautiful, brave Esther, so the Jews were protected.

To teach this story in this manner conceals the “glorious deeds of the Lord” from our children. The story of the preservation of the Jews is not primarily a story of how a brave queen saved her people. It is the story of how a faithful, covenant-keeping God delivered His people from the evil schemes of man. Esther’s involvement was the direct act of God’s faithful attentive care of His children. God was the One who placed Esther in a strategic position in the king’s court. God was the One who gave Esther favor with the king. And God was the One who turned the king’s heart toward the Jews.

God chose to work through Esther, but deliverance could have risen for the Jews “from another place” (Esther 4:14). God can use anyone and anything to accomplish His purposes. He is the sovereign ruler of this world who is always actively involved in the affairs of His people.

What a joy we have to reveal to our children the glorious deeds of the Lord, His unparalleled character, and His wise commands! We dare not conceal the beauty of this God and His ways from our children. What a tragedy it is when we settle for trite, man-centered renditions of the acts of God! May God spare us from reducing the story of the feeding of the 5,000 to the moral platitudes of a little boy who shared his lunch. What an affront it is to the goodness and greatness of God to tell this story in such a manner.

Labor to Impart Correct Doctrine

Can you imagine the difference it makes in the heart of a child when he is acquainted with the truth about God? The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is not a story of a little boy who shared his lunch. It is the “glorious deed” of Jesus, the Son of God who, having compassion on the crowd, seeing both their physical and spiritual need, took what He had, gave thanks to His Father in heaven for it, and multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000, because He is the Son of God who is able to satisfy all of man’s longings! What a great and glorious God we have! Let’s share the truth about this awesome God with our children.

As we share the Bible with our children, let's be diligent to impart *correct doctrine* to them. Jesus did not call the disciples because He *needed* helpers.

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:24-25)

Let's present to our children an accurate picture of God, the One who needs nothing and from Whom all things are created. As you read Bible stories to your children, insert truth statements about God's character to your children—statements such as, "Nothing is too hard for God. God can do anything. God is good. God always keeps His promises. God is faithful." In so doing, you will begin to teach them true doctrine and build a theological foundation under them.

Labor to Establish a Habit of Bible Reading and Memorization

Childhood provides us with an opportunity to establish for our children a habit of Bible reading or "devotional time." Habits started in childhood can last a lifetime. Here are a few suggestions to consider in starting your children on this important habit:

- Establish a regular time (e.g., right after breakfast every day).
- Establish a routine. Help your child to know what to do during his Bible time.
 - » Encourage readers to read a portion of the Bible and think about it. Monitor where your child is reading and provide him with a reading plan.¹⁰
 - » Encourage your child to write about his observations, questions, conclusions, and prayers. Provide a journal or notebook, and show your child how to mark his Bible

10. One such plan can be found at the back of the ESV Children's Bible (Crossway Publishing).

with underlining, writing in the margins, etc. Instruct him in how to treat God's Word with respect, writing carefully and thoughtfully in the Bible and personalizing his Bible.

- Encourage your child to spend time in prayer, and provide tools to help him pray (e.g., prayer notebook, prayer guide).
- Monitor your child's schedule. Overscheduling your child's time will minimize time spent in spiritual conversation, Bible teaching, and Bible reading.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is a storehouse of memorized verses. How easily children memorize! Memorized verses give our children an ever-present counselor to navigate life. It encourages them not just to read the Word, but to mediate on it. It gives them ready answers when presented with untruth. The verses memorized in childhood very possibly may serve your child for his lifetime.¹¹

Labor to Make Life Application

In teaching our children the Bible, we need to remember that we are not aiming only at intellectual understanding. We must lead our children to the Lord. In order for that to happen, our children must step out and embrace what they are learning and interact with the living God. They must actively participate in testing the Word of God and see that God is who He says He is.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! (Psalm 34:8)

Our children need to "taste" and "see" for themselves that God is God, and He is good. Every day we have the opportunity to relate what they read in the Word and what we teach them to the daily circumstances of life.

I remember a day when driving in the car with my older daughter,

11. One good resource for Bible memory is the Foundation Verses and Fighter Verse memory programs, published by Children Desiring God: www.childrendesiringGOD.org

Amy, who was a preschooler at the time. We were cruising along and “happened to be” talking about how God rescued Daniel from the den of lions, when the car sputtered. Sure enough, it was out of gas, but in light of relishing the great story of God’s rescue of Daniel, the fact that we were nowhere near any kind of help took a back seat to the assured sense we had that God would also take care of us. So we bowed our heads and asked for His help.

As we opened our eyes at the end of our prayer, I glanced in the rear view mirror and was surprised to see a State Patrol officer pull up. Here was God’s provision for us! The officer even had a can of gas in his trunk, so it was only a matter of a few minutes before we were on our way...rejoicing that God never changes. He always cares for His people. In that moment, the true story of God’s rescue of Daniel became our story. God took care of us as surely as He took care of Daniel. The truths of the living Bible applied to our lives. We, too, were part of the story of God’s dealing with His people. He was not just an ancient God who did miracles long ago; He was and is our God who still faithfully works His miracles of grace.

How easy it is to read the Bible, close the cover, and walk away without realizing that it is God’s Word for us today. We must show our children that this God revealed through His Word is speaking to us today. His character remains unchanged, His laws will guide us through our everyday circumstances, His Gospel solves our sin problem, and His precepts can be trusted—today, for real.

Children don’t often transfer what they learn to life experiences without some help. The Holy Spirit gives countless opportunities for the truth that has been taught to sink into the heart and the will, but the Holy Spirit works through diligent parents who have their radars on to these opportunities and are prepared with the knowledge of what their children are learning in the Word; parents who love God and His Word and seek to bring God into every situation.

Every day the Holy Spirit brings into your child's life those instances where you can bring the truth to bear on a situation and your child can see God at work. But unless you seize those moments, your child may miss the opportunity to see that God is real, His Word is relevant, and he can trust God.

Labor to Relate All of Life to God

While there is a formal course of Bible teaching and learning to engage in with our children, if we love the Word of God it should weave itself naturally into our everyday conversation. It should ooze out of us. Or, as Pastor John Piper says:

When pricked you should bleed Bible.

All of life relates to God; everything centers on Him. So, all of life is an opportunity for us to point our children to God.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (Deuteronomy 6:7-8)

If we love God and His Word, it should flow naturally from our hearts as part of everyday conversation, instruction, and the solutions to problems. Perhaps the following illustration will serve as a picture of God-infused conversation and God-focused instruction to our children.

Suppose your daughter is nervous about playing in a piano recital and mentions to you that she is nervous about playing in front of the audience and afraid that she will forget her piece. There are two kinds of responses you can make. The first is this:

Susie, you have practiced very hard and you really play your piece well. You might be nervous, but when you get up there, your fingers will remember what to do. Just concentrate on playing the piano and forget about the people. I know you will do just fine.

This may be reassuring, but it does not impart the words of life. Even more importantly, it does not point the child God-ward, but points her to herself. Consider this alternative response.¹²

Susie, I know that you are nervous, and I am going to give you a verse to hang onto—Psalm 125:1-2—“Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.”

Do you know what that verse means? You can go up to that piano and trust in your ability and in how much you have practiced—and that is all you will have to trust in. Or you can go up to that piano trusting in the God of the whole universe.

You can walk up to that piano and say, “Jesus, I am trusting in you. I am in your hands. Place my hands in your hands today.” And you can play that piano piece knowing that God is on your side.

And no matter what happens, no matter how you play that piece, if you are trusting in God, you will not be moved—you will stand strong and firm. And the loving arms of God will be all around you just like the mountains surround Jerusalem. He will be in front of you and behind you, and on your right side and on your left side. He will surround you with His love as you play that piano.

So, when you play that piano, you play it for Him—not to show off your ability or to entertain the audience, but as a way to say, “Thank you Jesus for being with me.”

If we want our children to think biblically, then we must think biblically. If we want our children to be saturated with the Bible,

12. While we want to seize every opportunity to point our children to God, we must not fall into the error of being overbearing or offensive in our biblical instruction. Our tone in instructing our children should be winsome, gentle, and gracious.

then we must be saturated with the Bible. If we want our children to trust in God and not rely on themselves, then we must face every mothering opportunity with a prayer on our lips and faith in our hearts, asking the God of the universe to make that situation a “God moment” with our children. We must ask God to make us effective ambassadors of reconciliation, pointing our children to the one eternal God and imploring them on behalf of Christ to trust in Him.

Our daily influence is fueled by our daily passions. What is your daily passion?

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Labor to Encourage Worship

As we share our heart for God with our children, it should naturally incline us to encourage our children to worship our awesome God. Lead your child to spontaneously rejoice in who God is. Worship is just seeing Him for who He is, and reflecting our heart’s admiration and awe of His character, His position, and His love.

When I was growing up, I knew a boy with Down Syndrome. His name was Mikey, and he loved Jesus. One day Mikey was watching a storm, and he heard a clap of thunder and saw a flash of lightning. His response was, “Great show, God!” That’s worship. It is being in awe of who God is, rejoicing in His power, marveling at His control of all things, and seeing His grandeur on display.

Mikey’s response was fueled by the teaching he had received about God. In order for our children to worship God, they must first be taught about God so they can respond to God.

Ambassadors of reconciliation sow seeds of truth which, by God's grace, take root and bring fruit through the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit doesn't normally work apart from the sowing of the seed of the Word of God, which is why our mothering is such a high calling. We are present with our children and can turn ordinary moments into God moments by relating all of life to God.

Our daughter Amy was adopted from Ecuador and became an American citizen at three years of age. When she was "sworn in," she was given a small American flag. This happened just before Easter, and on Palm Sunday she came home from Sunday School with a palm branch. The following day she was dancing around the house waving her palm branch, singing a praise song when she stopped mid-song and exclaimed, "If I would be happy about Jesus dying on the cross for us, I would wave a flag...an American flag...and I would sing, 'Hosanna, hosanna to the *real* King!'"

Jesus is the real King and we, His ambassadors, are given the privilege of pointing our children to Him. It is our highest calling in our mothering. So I stooped down, and said to Amy, "I know just what you mean. Sometimes I just want to sing, 'Hosanna to the real King,' too." And together we sang to the real King.

Labor to Encourage Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to "pray without ceasing." Training our children to pray about everything and at all times, not just at mealtimes or bedtime, builds a habit of prayer into their lives. To turn to God in all circumstances through prayer encourages them to build fellowship with the Lord and to recognize their dependency on God. It also provides them with a constant source of wisdom and strength. Continual communion with God throughout the day helps them see that God is accessible and personal. He walks with them through difficulty, comforts them in sadness, and enlightens them in confusion.

If we give our children a model of praying the thoughts of Scripture, and if we dialogue with them about what to pray for,

their prayers can progress beyond, “Thank you for the nice day” and “Thank you for our food.” A simple system of understanding the multiple facets of prayer is to teach our children the kinds of prayers to pray:

- I love you prayers (adoration)
- I’m sorry prayers (confession)
- Thank you prayers (thanksgiving)
- Please prayers (supplication)

Often children pray bold and faith-filled prayers. However, regrettably sometimes adults view prayer more skeptically. But God loves to answer the prayers of children to build their faith. Though it is wise for us to guide our children in prayer, we must not hinder our children from stepping out in prayer. God is well able to take care of His reputation, to defend Himself as God.

Once in coming back from vacation, we were pulling a trailer behind our station wagon—the kind with the “wing” windows in the back. Our grade school-age daughters were playing with their dolls in the back seat when suddenly Kristi exclaimed, “Where’s my doll coat?” Upon questioning her, we determined that she had hung it on the corner of the open wing window. It was obvious that the coat had been sucked out the window. When we explained this, her immediate response was to request that we go back and get it.

You can imagine the difficulty of explaining to a young girl that we were traveling on a divided highway at 55 miles per hour, we had no idea when or where the coat was sucked out of the window, it was dusk, and it would be miles before we could get off the highway to turn around. None of this computed to her. All she knew was that her favorite doll coat was gone, and she wanted it back.

Within a few minutes, a little voice from the back seat said, “Would it help to pray?” What should her father, “the pastor,” say? It was unrealistic that God would make the doll coat suddenly

appear. There was no way we could turn around and find the coat. Perhaps this was an opportunity for her to learn to bend her will. Would she accept God's answer? How would her still untested faith navigate the answer?

Her father simply replied, "Kristi, it always helps to pray." We all joined her in prayer as her little quivering voice asked God to bring back her doll coat, expressing such a simple, trusting faith in her big God. It warmed our hearts, even as we doubted that it would be answered in the way she expected.

A few minutes later, David pulled to the shoulder and stepped on the brakes. "Kristi," he exclaimed, "God just answered your prayer!" In his rear view mirror, he had been seeing something flapping on the back of the trailer. Sure enough, there caught on the very end of the trailer was the doll coat. Our gracious God chose to answer a little girl's earnest prayer for her doll coat to build her faith in Him.

We don't know how God will answer the prayers of our children, but we do know that He will answer their prayers. Our job is to teach our children to turn to Him in prayer, without ceasing, in all circumstances, and to thank Him for His answers.

Labor to Discipline

Susanna Wesley must have been a remarkable mother. She bore 19 children, nine of whom died in infancy. She was a strong spiritual influence in the lives of the surviving 10 children, including her sons Charles and John Wesley. She prayed two hours a day, and spent one hour a week with each child individually. Surely this mother must have some good counsel for us!

... religion is nothing else than the doing the will of God and not our own; that the one grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness being this self will, no indulgences of it can be trivial, no denial unprofitable. Heaven or hell depends on this alone. So

that the parent who studies to subdue it in his child works together with God in renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child forever.¹³

When the will of a child is totally subdued, and it is brought to revere and stand in awe of the parents, then a great many childish follies...may be passed by....I insist on the conquering of the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education...when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by reason and piety.¹⁴

Susanna was correct in understanding the importance of subduing our children's wills. Without this training, it is more difficult for a child to learn to respect God's authority over him and submit to His commands. So, in teaching our children to respect our authority, we are preparing their hearts for the Gospel.

However, the manner in which we subdue the wills of our children is also critical. Susanna Wesley believed in "strength guided by kindness." Our tone and demeanor in dealing with our children must be one of grace, warmth, and kindness. As God's ambassadors, we must reflect the way in which He deals with His children. God expects obedience and respect. He disciplines His children when they rebel and defy His boundaries. Yet He does this with grace, "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14).

Note Paul's tone in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

13. Wheeler, Noelle. *Daughters of Destiny*. (Bulverde, Texas,: Mantle Ministries, 2000), p.148-149.

14. Parker, Percy Livingstone, ed. *The Heart of Wesley's Journal*. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Inc., 1903), 96.

The word “implore” suggests a tone. Other words that could be used for this appeal are “beseech,” “plead,” or “entreat.” This is not the tone of demanding, commanding, or forcing. Nor is it the tone of suggesting, mentioning, or hoping. It suggests a tone of gentleness and love, and yet is directive. As God’s ambassador to us, Paul is warning and teaching with wisdom, and modeling to us the appropriate demeanor of God’s ambassadors.

The way we present our message to our children greatly influences the way the message is received. Our message is one of good news! We must winsomely present it as such.

Our tone in revealing the Word of God to our children must be one of conviction, joy, and warmth. We must soberly warn them of the reality of sin, separation from God, and hell, while revealing the glories of grace, the reconciliation through Christ, and the joy of heaven.

Are our wills subdued? How do we respond to teaching and rebuke? By our godly example and attitude toward instruction and correction given to us, we can encourage our children to have a positive attitude toward instruction.

With the Wisdom and Energy Given to Us by Him

Ministering to our families as a new creation in Christ gives us a new identity. Yes, we are sinners, but we are also saints. We are saints with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, helping us to deny our own self-centered desires as we depend on Him. We are saints with the mind of Christ as we tackle the challenge of training our children, the dilemma of disciplining, and the goal of reaching their hearts. We are saints with all the resources of heaven on our side as we live in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In order to parent faithfully and appropriately, we must orient our lives on Christ. He is the source, the sustainer, and the goal of our mothering.

For from him [source] and through him [sustainer] and to him [goal] are all things [including our children]. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him [source] and for him [goal]. (Colossians 1:16)

So, as we navigate our days as God's ambassadors, let us look to Jesus, the "founder and perfecter" of our faith. He is eager to help us as our guide and our strength as we orient on Him each day:

- **Recognize that our mothering is done in Christ's name, for the glory of God.**

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

- **Recognize that our mothering is done in the strength Christ supplies.**

...whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

- **Recognize that Christ is our only hope.**

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:10)

Only as we are united to Christ can we truly fulfill our calling as mothers. So our vision for mothering is first to be lovers of Jesus. Of all the mothering responsibilities we have, our first and foremost is to grow as Christians. If we are good Christians, we will be good mothers.

Conclusion

We are God's ambassadors given the ministry of reconciliation and discipleship, which we labor for by proclaiming Christ with the wisdom and energy given to us by Him. Mothering as God's ambassadors is a high calling, worthy of our best efforts, our unwavering devotion, and our deepest prayers.

Thoroughly understand and remember what it is we are now considering; it is not merely religious education—but earnestness in this momentous duty. It is not whether you are paying some attention to the salvation of your children—but whether you are paying such attention as this great subject requires—whether you are so devoting yourself to the pious education of your children, as that a visitor on leaving your house shall bear this testimony concerning your parental solicitude, “That father and mother are really concerned for their children’s salvation—it is seen in all their conduct.” This is the question, whether you are so pursuing this object as that your children themselves shall say, “My father and mother are truly in earnest about my soul!”

This is the question, I repeat, whether godliness is the great thing, the one thing, you are pursuing for them? Does it gather up into itself your chief solicitude and control your general plans? What I mean by earnestness in domestic religion will be obvious from the following considerations. Yes, those children are something more than living domestic play-things; something more than animated household ornaments, who by their elegant accomplishments, and graceful manners, shall adorn the habitation, and be their father's pride, their

mother's boast—they are the next inhabitants of our country, and the next race of friends or enemies to the cause of God on earth. The family then, I repeat, is the mold where the members of both the state and the church are cast and formed, and this ought never for a single day to be forgotten.”¹⁵

—John Angell James

May you joyfully embrace your calling as God's ambassador, depending on the Author and Perfecter of your faith to accomplish His purposes through you to the next generations.

15. James, John Angell. *The Church in Earnest*. (Boston: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln, 1848), 114.

Appendix A

How to Battle Spiritually

Be in the Word Daily

- Find a **time and place** to meet with God. Consistently building into our schedule our times with God is a key to turning good intentions into practical reality.
- Have a **plan**—any plan. A plan keeps us on track, helps us to be diligent, keeps us from wandering aimlessly, and holds us accountable.
- **Bible memory**—Have a specific plan of Bible memory, such as the Fighter Verses from Children Desiring God.¹⁶ The following system of memorizing is a helpful tool:

Memory Suggestions

Sunday: Read this week’s memory passage with surrounding verses so you can see it in context. Ask the Lord to help you commit this passage to memory, apply it to your life, and use it to bless others.

Monday: Read this week’s passage (with the reference) aloud **10 times**. Cover the passage and try to say it aloud (with its reference) **10 more times**, peeking if necessary. Say each memorized passages from previous weeks one time (aloud with references).

Tuesday: Cover this week’s passage and try to say the verse aloud (with its reference) 10 more times, peeking if necessary. Say each memorized passage from previous weeks **one time** (aloud with references).

Wednesday-Saturday: Say this week’s passage and each memorized passage from previous weeks **one time** (aloud with references).

16. See www.childrendesiringGOD.org, under “Resources” and “Bible Memory.”

More Memory Suggestions¹⁷

- Repeat memorized passages once daily for at least 50 days; after that once every week or two.
- Pray daily, asking the Lord to help His Word remain in you, using it to feed your soul and minister to others.
- Take advantage of passing “idle” moments during the day to call this week’s passage to mind.
- Additional help for Bible memory: www.biblememory.us

Meditate on the Word

We must resist just feeding the words of Scripture through our minds, but instead, discipline ourselves to ponder the text, ask questions of the text, wrestle with understanding, and make application to our own lives. Like Charles Spurgeon, we must discover the “soaking power” of the Word:

Some people like to read so many chapters every day. I would not dissuade them from the practice, but I would rather lay my soul asoak in half a dozen verses all day than rinse my hand in several chapters. Oh, to be bathed in a text of scripture, and to let it be sucked up into your very soul, till it saturates your heart! Set your heart upon God’s Word! Let your whole nature be plunged into it as cloth into a dye.¹⁸

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

17. These suggestions are based on a Bible memory method developed by Dr. Andrew Davis in his booklet *An Approach to the Extended Memorization of Scripture*, published by First Baptist Church of Durham, North Carolina (www.fbcdurham.org).

18. Spurgeon, Charles. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Taught That We May Teach, Volume 27*. (London: Metropolitan Tabernacle Penny Pulpit, 1881), 42.

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.
(Psalm 119:97)

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. (Psalm 119:99)

Read with a Pencil or Pen and Notebook

There are eyes in pencils and pens.—John Piper¹⁹

Having to write something down about what we are reading forces us to slow down and to meditate on the text.

Pray the Word of God

Take a verse or passage and pray through the truths in it for you and your family. (Examples of this can be found in *Praying for the Next Generation*.²⁰)

Fill Your Mind and Heart with That Which Would Nurture Your Soul

- Read books about the Bible and the Christian life—books of depth.
- Seek Christian fellowship.
- Listen to the preached Word.
- Attend a Bible study.

Guard Your Heart

Stop in situations, look at your heart and address the attitudes and feelings, and the sin within.

19. Piper, John. *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 123.

20. Michael, Sally. *Praying for the Next Generation*. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Children Desiring God, 2006).

Make Confession a Part of Your Daily Routine

Keep short accounts with the Lord. Every day our hearts lead us astray; we have attitudes that must be checked, desires that need to be reigned in, and actions that do not honor God. We must constantly stop to examine our heart, discover the roots of our emotions, confess any exposed sin, and pray for God's help.

Wean Yourself from the World

What we expose ourselves to will either nurture our souls or damage our souls.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

We need to make the best choices of how to spend our time. What influences will we allow in our lives, and which appetites will we feed?

Appendix B

Thoughts on Religious Experience: Counsels to Christian Mothers

By Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D.

Ask almost any young Virginian, where he will look for the brightest examples of moral excellence, and his thoughts will turn at once to the character of pious females, and perhaps to his own mother, if she happens to be pious.

I recollect a young gentleman: who, although he had an uncommonly pious mother, broke over all the restraints of his education, and became a professed infidel, and the advocate of licentiousness in its vilest forms; but a gracious God heard the unceasing prayers of his mother, and by means somewhat unusual, he was converted from the error of his ways. In speaking of his former career—which he evidently did with shame and humility—he said, “I could get over all arguments in defence of religion but one, and that I never could obviate, which was the pious example and conversation of my mother. When I had fortified myself against the truth, by the aid of Bolingbroke, Hume, and Voltaire; yet, whenever I thought of my mother, I had the secret conviction which nothing could remove, that there was a reality in religion.”

I could soon fill my paper with salutary precepts for mothers; but this is not exactly what is wanted. Knowledge as to maternal duty, is widely diffused. The theory of education, as it falls under the direction of mothers, is perhaps sufficiently understood by most. What I aim at, is “to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance,” or in other words, to arouse them to the consideration of the importance of the station which they occupy, and to persuade them to exert that influence which they possess. I have often heard pious females complain that they had little or nothing in their power, and they felt as if they were almost useless members of society. This is an egregious miscalculation. Their influence is silent and spreads imperceptibly, but it is real and effective.

Piety is like light, which cannot be hid. The more it seeks concealment, and retires from public notice, the more brightly it shines. Female influence only ceases, or operates unfavourably, when women depart from their own proper sphere; or when they endeavour to obtrude themselves upon the notice and admiration of the public. As we are shocked with infidelity in a female, so female ambition is odious. Let the devoted mother exert herself in her own proper sphere, which is in the retirement of the domestic circle, and in constant and devout attendance on the worship of God. Let her look well to the affairs of her household. Let her manifest her benignity and forbearance in the steady government of her children and servants. Let her set an example of order, neatness, industry, and hospitality, and she will have enough to do. Every hour, and almost every minute, will furnish opportunity for the exercise of some virtue; and that Eye which goes every where, will graciously notice and bring to light too, those acts which are cheerfully and conscientiously performed. A mother cannot be placed in a more interesting field of labour, than in the midst of a large circle of children. Here is her appropriate sphere of action. Here she has work enough to occupy her heart and hands.

But some will be ready to think this is a narrow field in which to labour. They wish to act on a larger scale, and do something which will *tell* on the destinies of men—something more intimately connected with the conversion of the world. Some few women, by the possession of peculiar talents, and by being placed in peculiar circumstances, have been able to accomplish so much that the world has been filled with their fame. Such was the brilliant course of Mrs. Hannah More, who by her benevolent exertions, and by her writings, became the benefactress of the human race. And such is now the luminous orbit in which Mrs. Fry moves. But it falls to the lot of very few of either sex to do good on what may be called a national scale. And if all should aim at such achievements, very little would be done. Much the larger part of the female sex must be contented to cultivate the small garden which providence has committed to them.

But as the mothers in ancient Israel were solicitous to bear sons, in hope that they might enjoy the honour and unspeakable pleasure of giving birth to the promised Messiah, so mothers *now* may cherish the pleasing hope that of the first fruit of their womb, God will raise up men of renown, eminent ministers, devoted missionaries, distinguished philanthropists, wise statesmen, or even men of humble, exemplary piety in retired life. Hannah waited with God for her Samuel; and no doubt before the child was born, she consecrated him to God, from whom she received him; and when she embraced him in her arms, and nursed him at her breast, she continually darted up petitions for God's blessing upon his own precious gift. And O! how richly was she rewarded!

I have read or heard that some one asked an uncommonly devout woman, how it happened that all her children became pious at an age so early. The good woman modestly disclaimed all merit or agency in the affair; but said she, "as many children as I have nursed, I never took one of them to my breast, to afford it the necessary nourishment, but at the same time I lifted up my heart in prayer to God for his blessing on the dear little infant." Would not this be a good rule for mothers universally to observe? Who can tell what the effect would be on the next generation?

The question is often asked, "By whom shall Jacob arise?" One answers one thing, and one another; but if I may be permitted to give a partial answer, though I believe a true one, I would say, by pious mothers. Yes, as a woman had the unspeakable blessing of being the mother of our Lord and Savior; so woman, collectively, shall be the mother of the church. Ten thousand Loises and Eunices will, at the same time, be training their little Timothys on the knee, and with sweet and persuasive speech, instilling into their opening minds, the words of those "Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

A genuine and thorough reformation must commence in the family, which is the foundation of all social institutions, civil and religious. Here is the root, whence springs the whole tree with all its spreading and towering branches. And if true religion,

to be general, must begin in the domestic circle, to whom will belong the chief agency and the most distinguished honour? Undoubtedly to pious mothers. Theirs must be the hands which plant the precious seed—theirs the prayers and tears which water the growing plant—theirs the kind, seasonable, and well adapted instructions, which distil into the tender, susceptible mind like the gentle rain on the tender grass, or the more imperceptible dew upon the thirsty plant. Those are not the most important lectures which are, with solemn pomp, delivered in the schools; but those which flow sweetly from the affectionate lips of mothers to their docile and interested group of little ones, gathered around their knees. No eloquence equals that of a sensible and pious mother, because no impressions made by human speech are so deep and indelible. These lessons, whether she knows it or not, she is engraving on fleshly tablets, from which the inscription can never wholly be obliterated. Impression after impression may be made on the same, but these have the advantage of being first and deepest; and when all the others are gone, these will be left.

In visiting a family, belonging to my charge in Philadelphia, I observed a very brisk but old woman bringing chips into the house in her apron. I asked the lady of the house who it was. “It is my mother,” said she, “but she no longer knows me.” Upon inquiry, I found that she had forgotten every thing except what had occurred in her early life. And though she had left Switzerland when a girl of fourteen, and had not spoken the German language since that time, yet she now repeats her German prayers aloud every night...

But I must not indulge myself in speaking in a strain too laudatory of Christian mothers. Some have great weaknesses, the effects of which upon the character and destinies of their children are very unhappy. I recollect to have once been acquainted with a Virginia planter, of the best old stamp. He was rich, hospitable, kind hearted, and better than all, truly pious. When he heard the gospel, his whole soul seemed to be laid open to the impression of the truth; and so susceptible was he, that often while the man of God described the love of a Saviour, the large, and not unmanly tear, would trickle down his cheek. He was a man

without guile; and you always might know where to find him. But I was grieved and surprised to find that his sons were all profligates. By drinking and gambling and other vices, they soon ruined their reputation, wasted their estates, injured their health, and shortened their lives.

In searching for the cause of this wide departure from the example of a good and affectionate father, I traced it to the injudicious indulgence of a fond mother. Not that she wished her sons to become dissipated; but when they did wrong, she carefully concealed their conduct from their father, connived at their vices, and afforded them facilities of gratifying their corrupt propensities, by plentifully supplying them with money. And with such care were their vices concealed from the unsuspecting father, that the first knowledge which he obtained was, when his sons' ruin was completed, and their habits so fixed, that all regard to decorum was laid aside, and even the displeasure of a father could be braved.

Another class of mothers, happily not numerous, injure their children by a discipline too rigorous. They expect by external restraints and confinements to preserve them from temptation. The general principle is good, but may be pushed too far. A gradual exposure to such temptations as must be encountered in the world, is safer than for a son to be suddenly subjected to the whole influence of the world at once. If children dislike the severity of the discipline under which they are placed, they will be ingenious in finding opportunities of evading a yoke which they do not like to bear. And when they get free from parental restraint, they will be apt to run to greater excess than others.

While sober, consistent piety in mothers has a powerful and lasting effect on children, fanaticism has a contrary tendency. The children of parents who indulge in extravagant expressions of religious feeling, and whose religion comes on in violent paroxysms, are, in most cases, devoid of reverence for sacred things, and often show a disregard of moral principle.

It is exceedingly important in the education and discipline of children, not to confound their notions of right and wrong by treating little matters with the same seriousness and severity as great. Our instructions and conduct towards children, should be such as to present to their minds, virtues and vices, according to a just graduation. If we pursue a peccadillo with as much severity as a great crime, the danger is, that a great crime will be committed with as little sense of its evil as a fault of the minor class. It is also dangerous to proclaim a crusade against some one vice, and magnify its evil beyond all comparison, while other vices equally or more malignant, pass unnoticed. So one virtue or duty may be held up so continually, and placed in such bold relief, that other virtues, equally important and valuable, are left concealed in the background. As in the Christian character, symmetry or a due proportion of every grace, is essential to perfection; so in teaching morality, a strict regard should be had to the magnitude and proportion of every part of the system Let all vice be treated as vice; but let not all vices be treated as equal; so let every virtue occupy its proper place, and fill its due space.

It is a good rule, even in the government of children, not to legislate too much. Vex them not with trivial and unnecessary rules. Train them to govern themselves as much as possible. That child who is obedient only when the eye of the parent is on it, has not been properly managed. Allow children liberty in such things as are innocent, and to which they are inclined by the instinct of nature. It is a poor, short-sighted plan to keep children moping all day over their books; they learn far more that is valuable while sporting in the fields, than we can teach them by such a process in the house. It is wonderful how much they learn without effort, both of words and things.

We may even exceed the mark by inculcating religion upon their tender minds too incessantly. Mothers should watch the favourable moment for instilling religious instruction. One sentence at the favourable moment is better than a long lecture at an unseasonable time. Holiness cannot be rendered pleasing to the natural heart, but religious instruction may be made interesting.

Indirect methods of reaching the conscience are often better than the more direct. Occasional remarks not seeming to be intended for them, are often noticed and remembered; especially conversation with respectable strangers in their presence, has a wonderful effect. Let your children come early into company, that they may hear—that is, if the conversation be edifying. By eliciting remarks on certain subjects from ministers and other respectable persons in the hearing of children, you will be likely to produce greater effect, than if the same things were addressed directly to them by their parents.

Family slander is an evil against which mothers cannot too sedulously guard. There are some families who are extremely cautious about speaking evil of their neighbours out of their own houses; but there they feel privileged; and in the presence of their children, allow themselves great liberties in traducing the character of those with whom they are living, ostensibly, in the habits of friendly fellowship. This is not only an evil habit, and readily contracted by children—but it is the most effectual method of teaching them to play the hypocrite, by constantly assuming the appearance of friendship, and using the language of kindness—when a contrary feeling is habitually cherished. It is impossible to entertain sentiments of true friendship towards those whom we are in the practice of maligning every day. O mothers, guard your children against this common vice, so freely indulged, and so little censured by many.

Akin to this—but less malignant, is the practice of ridiculing the foibles, and caricaturing the imperfections or personal defects of our friends. In some whole families there exists a talent for mimicry: they can so exactly imitate the tones, gestures, attitudes and manners of others, that the exercise of this faculty becomes a source of much amusement at the expense of their neighbors; especially when the quality or action imitated is a little exaggerated or distorted. This propensity should be carefully and resolutely repressed in young people. It is very apt to occasion a separation or alienation of affection among friends: for who among us is willing to be laughed at for the entertainment of others?

There is no one thing on which mothers should insist more uniformly and peremptorily, than that their children should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Lying above all other things may be said to be the vice of children. “We go astray from the womb, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58:3) Children soon learn that others cannot look into their hearts: they will often therefore say what they know is not true, from the confidence that they cannot be detected. Keep a vigilant eye on this matter, and pass not slightly over an offence of this kind. Many worthy parents, I have observed, seem to know little or care little about the habit of fibbing in their children. Manifest by every proper means your utter detestation of lying, in all its kinds and degrees.

I would also caution mothers against the foolish ambition of trying to make prodigies of their children, and against the vanity of so exaggerating their smart speeches and exploits as to make them appear to be prodigies. I would not be so rigid as to prohibit mothers from speaking of their own dear offspring, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak—but I may advise you not to make your children the everlasting theme of your conversation, morning, noon, and night. Rest assured that other people do not take as much interest in the subject as you do. And while I would commend those mothers who are diligent in the instruction of their children, I would respectfully say, be thankful that they are not idiots, nor deformed, nor destitute of the common sense of human nature; but be not anxious that they should be thought prodigies. Children may be so trained as to perform wonders—but what good can come of it? Do we not see pigs trained in the same way?

Exercise a salutary discipline towards your children, even with the rod, when it is necessary—but let this species of discipline be the last resort, and used rather seldom. It is far better than isolating them in a dark room, or depriving them of necessary food—or anything which keeps the child a long time in a bad humor. But carefully avoid chastisement in the heat of passion, for this will do your children more harm than good.

Keep your children as long as you can in your own house.
Domestic feeling is a sacred tie which should be preserved fresh

and strong—as long as possible. Often, mothers lose all their influence over sons by their being sent abroad to school. Have as much of your children’s education, therefore, conducted at home, as is practicable. Be assured that no place is so favorable to the good feelings and morals of the young as the family circle, unless the family be destitute of religion and virtue; and for such I do not now write.

Boarding schools for girls may be useful—but I would advise you to keep your daughters at home, under your own eye, and when they go to school in the day, let them come home by night. You may possibly find a better school by sending them abroad—but the sacrifice is too great; and the risk of evil habits and evil sentiments is not small. And as to your sons, if they must go abroad, place them in the family of some pious man, and under the maternal care of some pious woman, where they may find a substitute for parental attention. While absent, let them return home as frequently as may be, that what I have called the “domestic” feeling may be preserved. If your sons must be put to a trade, or become clerks in a store or counting-house, be very particular as to the character and conscientious fidelity of their master. It is lamentable to see, how youth in these circumstances are neglected; and how they are exposed to temptations, from which it is hardly possible they should escape without guilt and contamination.

I would earnestly recommend it to mothers to keep up a correspondence, by letter, with their children when removed from the domestic roof: a single word of admonition and warning, from a mother, might be the means of reclaiming a beloved son from the verge of a precipice. But whatever else you neglect, omit not to follow your children, when absent, with your daily prayers. Very often, this is the only thing which is left to mothers. Their children are either removed far from them; or, if near, they have lost their influence over them. But there is ONE, who is near to them, and who can influence them. O mothers! plead for your dear offspring at the throne of grace, travail in birth for them, a second time. God is gracious. God will regard the fervent, importunate cry of Christian mothers. Bespeak also the prayers of friends. Get them

to unite with you in social prayer. This leads me to speak of those societies, called “Maternal Associations.” If prudently and humbly conducted, they are calculated to be eminently useful. Let all parade and ostentation be avoided, and mothers may meet and pray for their dear children, as often as they are disposed.

Excerpted from a publication titled Thoughts on Religious Experience, Third Edition, the section titled “Counsels to Christian Mothers, published in 1884 by the Presbyterian Board of Education in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, pages 375-379, 381-386.

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