



AGE 17

The Branch Years



HOME
22.6

AGE 17

A Snapshot of Life

All teenagers develop differently, but some characteristics are the same. Below are some developmental changes that may be present during these years as your child grows physically, emotionally, and spiritually during the age of 17 to 19 years. This is not an exhaustive list, but it should give you some insight into what to expect.

Physical Development

Stress is a very real, physical struggle as 17–19-year-olds work, perform in school, and prepare for the future. Though they feel that their minds are fully developed, they often lack the experience to make necessary adult decisions.

Emotional Development

Teens at this age begin to become very sentimental as they anticipate the life changes ahead. They exhibit more impulsive behaviors.

Relational Development

Teens seek out friends who share similar beliefs, values, and interests. Parental relationships with their teens become more of a support system. Teens begin to feel more freedom to express themselves as individuals.

Spiritual Development

Teens continue planning and preparing for the future. They develop role models who inspire them either toward or away from faith. Teens also have a greater interest in serving others and in making a difference in the world. They begin to think more about the impact they have made on their peers, student ministry, school, and the world. This either spurs them on to do more or to give up and move on.

Parent Dedication

What is Parent Dedication?

Parent dedication is giving a strong spiritual legacy to your children. The Legacy Principle, the Likelihood Principle, and the Lenses Principle are crucial to your child's spiritual growth. In the parent dedication section you'll find tools to help you grow as a parent. **The Legacy Principle** states that the scriptures tell us that what we do today directly influences the multi-generational cycle of family traits, beliefs and actions – for good or bad (Exodus 20:5-6, Psalm 78:5-8). So passing a strong faith to our children begins by having a strong faith ourselves, modeling the gospel in our marriages and in how we relate to those closest to us. Some of us need to break negative cycles that may have started with our own upbringing in order to launch a new and improved legacy for the next generation. **The Likelihood Principle** states that the good news is this: in the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the values of their parents. Proverbs 22:6 tells us that when children learn right from wrong at home under the nurturing, loving training of parents, they tend to adopt mom and dad's beliefs. While there are no guarantees because every child has a free will, kids are far more likely to embrace their parent's faith if they enjoy their parent's company! That's a big part of the reason parents are warned not to "provoke your children to wrath" but rather "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Bottom line – a strong relationship with mom and dad is key to a strong Christian faith. **The Lenses Principle** says Jesus taught that our enemy's primary weapon is deception – getting us to believe and live according to lies rather than truth (John 8:44). And when someone is deceived, he or she does not know it! Our children are growing up in a culture that bombards them with lies. An hour or two per week at church is no match for the hundreds of hours spent with media, school, and friends. Nor can it compete with a child's fallen nature that often wants to rebel against what is good, true and beautiful. It is the job of parents to equip children with the corrective "lenses" of truth so they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

Parenting Tool: *Commission*

Well, the time has come. Your teenager will soon be leaving the nest. You should not be surprised. You have seen this coming. Your child likely has been more sentimental lately. Teens at this age are likely thinking about their futures and the legacies they will leave behind. They are itching to get out and make their own marks on the world.

Many tears will be shed and sighs of relief exhaled. You will look back and think, “Where has the time gone? Did I do enough? Did my child really listen when...?” Over the next few years, your child will make his/her own decisions based on what he/she has learned from the years you have spent educating, modeling, and disciplining.

It is during this time that we often slowly, and maybe even reluctantly, remove our hands from our children and release them into the wilds of colleges, careers, and youthful pursuits. Yet, consider this: what if, instead of releasing them with a hands-off/“you’re-an-adult now” approach, you commission your children to God’s plan for them? What if you commission your child to be Christ’s light in the business marketplace, public school system, or other career field? What if you commission your child to lead his or her future spouse and family spiritually? What if you commission your child to take the Gospel to the darkest corners of our planet, to people who have never heard of Jesus?

The word “commission” is often used in a missional context. Jesus sent out, charged, and commissioned the seventy-two to go into the surrounding villages and tell them about Jesus (Luke 10). He commissioned the disciples to go and commanded them to make disciples (Matthew 28:19–20). At the ascension, Christ offered yet another commission to His disciples, “And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Too often, we limit these commissioning Scriptures to those individuals and families who leave the comforts of home for the unknown overseas. Could it be that the message of these same Scriptures could be applied to the commissioning of your 17–19 year old? Consider the following Scriptures and thoughts to help prepare you and your child for his or her commissioning.

The Call

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now

separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” — Acts 13:2

Your children will make some of the biggest decisions of their lives during these next couple of years. There will be lots of voices out there battling for your children’s attention. Help them to discern, hear, and adhere to the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) above all of the other voices. As was the case with Barnabas and Paul, tough times can be the most important for hearing the call of God in our lives.

The Confirmation

“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” — Acts 13:3a

It can be tough during this stage to realize and accept that your child is really not your own. Your Father in heaven gave this child to you as a gift. If your children are walking closely with the Lord, it will be nearly impossible for them to not hear His voice and discern what He is calling them to do. John 10:27 tells us that as God’s sheep, we can recognize the Shepherd’s voice and follow Him. The closer we walk with Christ, the easier it becomes to recognize His voice and discern what He is calling us to do. However, it can be very easy to ignore or reject this call, whether to a certain school, career, or location. Help confirm the call that the Lord has placed on your child. Continually ask your child what he or she is hearing from the Lord and how he or she feels about it. At this point, try to listen more than you advise. Remember, this is God’s call for your children. They are His! We all hope that the aspirations we have for our children are the same ones that God has, but this is not always the case. This is the time to support and confirm God’s call on your child’s heart.

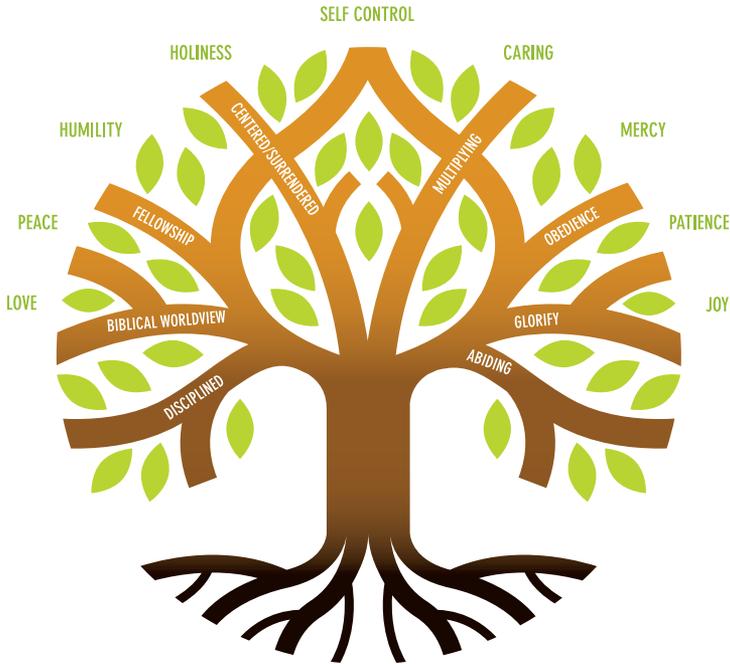
The Culmination

“...They sent them away” — Acts 13:3b

OK, so now is the really tough part. It’s time to let your children go! They are beyond old enough to be used by the One who gave them to you. However, be careful not to just wash your hands of them or cut all of the purse strings. Though your children may act like adults and are fully-grown physically, their brains are still in development.

Commission them back into the Lord’s hand. You have done, and will continue to do, a phenomenal job of caring for your child. Now is the time

to let God use your child for all He has planned, regardless of the what, when, where, how, or why.



John 10:27 tells us as that as God's sheep, we can recognize the Shepherd's voice and follow Him. The closer we walk with Christ, the easier it becomes to recognize His voice and discern what He is calling us to do.

Blessing Your Children

How do I bless my children?

There is power in a blessing. The Hebrew word for blessing is used over 640 times in the Old Testament alone. Do you know the very first thing God did after creating us? In Genesis 1:27–28 we read, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them...” We were made for blessing! Based on examples in the Bible, there are five basic elements that make up a biblical blessing:

1. Meaningful Touch Meaningful touch has many beneficial effects. The act of touch is a key to communicating warmth, personal acceptance, and affirmation—even physical health! For anyone who wishes to see the blessing grow and develop in a child, touch is an integral part of the blessing. As Mark 10:13–16 says, “Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.”

2. A Spoken Message Words have an incredible power to build us up or tear us down emotionally. This is particularly true when those words are coming from our parents. Therefore, the blessing hinges on a spoken message. Your child desperately needs to hear a spoken blessing from you. As parents, we must be keenly aware of the power of the spoken word and also be aware of how powerful the absence of spoken words can be. Both people and relationships suffer in the absence of words of blessing, or those spoken words of love, encouragement, and support. Proverbs 16:24 reminds us, “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones...”

3. Expression of High Value To “value” something means to attach great importance to it. This is at the very heart of the concept of blessing. Anytime we bless someone, we are attaching high value to him or her. Our children need to hear that they are someone who has great worth apart from his or her performance. As Ephesians 4:29 reminds us, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

4. Picture of a Special Future Communicating a special future to a child is another important part of giving the blessing. Children are filled with the potential to be all God intends them to be. Picturing a special future for your children can help bring out the best in their lives. It gives them a positive direction to strive toward and surrounds them with hope. When a child feels in his or her heart that the future is hopeful and something to look forward to, it can greatly affect his or her attitude toward life. We can see this very thing in our relationship with the Lord. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.’”

5. An Active Commitment The first four elements listed above are the building blocks of the blessing, but the mortar that holds them together is an active commitment—the fifth element. This element of the blessing describes the responsibility that goes with the blessing. Parents need to rely on the Lord to give them the strength and staying power to confirm their children’s blessing. You have God’s Word through the Scriptures as a guide, plus the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Words alone cannot communicate the blessing; they need to be backed with a commitment to do everything possible to help the one blessed to be successful. Isaiah 40:31 encourages us, “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

For more information on the biblical blessing, see *The Gift of the Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent, PhD.

Bless Your Child's Full Devotion to Christ

*"Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!"—Psalm 119:2*

1. In what ways is my child already displaying wholehearted devotion to Christ?

Tell your child...

(Child's Name), I am so encouraged in your wholehearted devotion to Christ by _____.

2. In what ways do I hope my child will continue to show his or her full devotion to Christ?

Tell your child...

(Child's Name), in the future, you will find it more difficult to be fully devoted to Christ. I hope that you will continue to be wholeheartedly devoted to Christ even though things like _____ will try to distract you and get you to _____.

3. What challenge will my child likely face this year regarding full devotion to Christ?

4. How will I commit to helping my child face this challenge?

5. When will be the best time to give my child this blessing?

6. Is there a "meaningful marker" that I can give my child to make this blessing memorable?



Family Time

What is Family Time?

The idea of family worship is both attractive and intimidating. The thought of beginning a new pattern of worship in the home can be overwhelming for those just beginning. This guide includes answers to basic questions that we hope will equip you to lead your family in worship.

What does the Bible say about growing together in Christ as a family?

The importance of the family in discipleship is prominent throughout the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:5-7; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15). Husbands are primarily responsible for the spiritual leadership of their wives (Ephesians 5:22-33). Parents, especially fathers, are primarily responsible for the spiritual growth of their children (Ephesians 6:1-3). These are huge responsibilities, but God has promised to provide everything we need to lead our families well, according to His design. As leaders in our home, the critical thing to remember is that God's Word must be written upon our hearts. Our faith in Christ and reliance on His Word should be authentic, tangible, and transparent.

What are the benefits of family worship?

- Family worship brings glory to God. It is a visible reminder for all in the home that God is worthy of our time, attention, and affection.
- Family worship produces joy in the home. Jesus will bring joy to families who worship and grow together. The love of Christ will be more evident in a family where worship is central.
- Family worship effects change in the world. As families read, pray, study, sing, and grow together, they join from their homes in what God is doing across the nations, while influencing each other's lives for generations to come.

What should we do during family worship?

Keep it simple. Consider the following elements as you worship together:

READ—Read a portion of the Bible together. Don't worry if you've already read it in your time alone with God. Reading a chapter a second time will only reinforce what God is teaching you. If children are present and able to read, allow them to do so. Of course, you'll want to explain difficult words and concepts (but don't worry too much if you can't explain everything!).

DISCUSS—After reading the Bible together, work through a simple process of examining what has been read, much like you do in your own time alone with God. Give everyone a chance to discuss the passage and consider how it applies to everyday life. Ideally, you will lead by example and share with your family what you learned in your time alone with God and the difference it has made.

PRAY—Consider praying through the key points of the Bible passage that you have just read and discussed. Ask God to change your hearts, minds, lives, and family accordingly. This specific prayer can lead to a more general time of prayer that uses the letters P-R-A-Y as a guide:

Praise—Worship God for who He is.

Repent—Confess your sin to God and acknowledge your need for Jesus.

Ask—Intercede for particular needs in your life and other's lives.

Yield—Surrender your life to following Jesus wherever He leads you.

Try to include everyone as you pray, even if this is on a rotating basis. Additionally, you may want to keep a prayer journal that enables you to keep track of prayer requests and God's answers to those requests.

SING—Sing or listen to music together as a family. If someone in the family has musical gifts, that person may lead some simple songs. If no one in your family is musical, you can sing along with music from a CD or DVD and discuss what the songs mean.

MEMORIZE—Choose key verses or passages to memorize. You may want to work on a verse or passage for a week or a month. Either way, be sure to work together, taking time to understand what you are memorizing. Periodically, set aside time to review verses over the course of the year.

Frequently Asked Questions About Family Worship

1. What if a father or mother is not a Christian?

The commands regarding family discipleship in the Bible assume believing parents. Of course, this is not always the case. In those instances where the father is not a follower of Christ, the mother will need to take the initiative for leading family worship in a non-offensive and non-threatening way. In the case of a mother not being a follower of Christ, the father should lead with compassion and sensitivity.

2. What about a single parent family?

In this case, the responsibility falls to the single parent. This, along with the many other duties that single parents have, may present a significant challenge. However, God will supply great grace and everything we need to raise and strengthen our children in the faith.

3. What about children?

The dynamic of family worship will vary considerably depending upon the ages of the children involved. The goal for every child in the family is not the same. With young children, focus on the importance of knowing God, respecting the Bible, and worshiping as a family. With older children, dig into Scripture more, ask good questions, and discuss how the Bible relates to life and how a relationship with Christ changes us every day.

4. How do I keep things interesting if the ages of my children vary widely?

Regardless of age, include children in planning, reading, singing, teaching, and praying as much as possible and as much as maturity will allow. Make sure to keep things simple, and don't be afraid to keep it short; listen well, and be aware of what is happening in each child's heart and life.

5. What time of day is best for family worship?

Timing is far less important than consistency. Some families prefer to worship as the day begins. For others, evening may work best. Many families prefer to adjoin family worship to the evening meal since everyone may be present at that time.



Deuteronomy 6:7 says,
“You shall teach [God’s words] 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 up.”

Concentrated time in family worship
can serve as a catalyst and support for
“as you go, as you sit, as you walk”
conversations and applications of God’s
Word within our families. Encouraging
and challenging our spouses and children
in Christian faith happens best in the
context of real, everyday life. Family
worship builds consistency into our family
routines and opens up many opportunities
and possibilities within our family
relationships.



A Family Time from 2 Samuel & Psalm 2

READ

o Saul's rule as king ended tragically because he failed to obey God's Word. Thereafter, David ascended to the throne, and his official reign as king of Israel began. After David returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, God established His covenant with him. Throughout salvation history, we see God's plan unfold for His people to dwell in His place, under His rule. This is the threefold promise made to Abraham in Gen. 12 and provides the plotline for the entire Bible. In 2 Samuel 7:1-17, God decrees He will fulfill this promise through the royal lineage of David.

o 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 2

o God intended to rule His people through a righteous king. However, a truly righteous king would not be found in Israel for many years to come. As great a king as David was, he exposed his unrighteousness by coveting Uriah's wife and conspiring to kill him (2 Sam. 11). He needed to repent and seek God's forgiveness (Ps. 51:4). Although his son, Solomon, later built the Temple, he too failed to be a truly righteous king. Yet, neither David nor Solomon's disobedience deterred God's decree. Due to His steadfast love, He eventually sat a righteous king on David's throne.

o Matthew 1:1-17 – note verses 1, 6, 16-17

o Matthew traces the line of Abraham through the line of David to the birth of Jesus Christ. He proceeds to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the highly anticipated and much needed descendant of David. Unlike Saul, David, and Solomon, Jesus Christ would be able to rescue all who take refuge in Him from the wrath of God (Ps. 2:12).

o 2 Samuel 7:18-29

o The only way David's house could be blessed forever was if his descendant could do what he could not – obey God's Word with perfect righteousness. All who "kiss the Son" benefit from the Son of David's obedience (Rom. 5:19).

The Bottom Line: Through His obedience, King Jesus ensures the fulfillment of God's eternal promises.

Questions:

- How would you describe God's desire to fulfill His promises?
- How does realizing that you benefit from someone else's obedience affect you and your relationship with God?
- What areas of your life do not reflect allegiance to King Jesus? How might you surrender fully to Him?

PRAY

o Confession is our personal acknowledgement of the sin in our lives. God tells us in His word to confess our sin to Him and turn from it. Confession is vital in the life of every believer as they seek to be more like Christ. If you desire to read some passages from scripture about this, some are listed below.

Biblical Basis for Confession:

Proverbs 28:13; Romans 10:10; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9

Take an opportunity for those gathered with you in worship to spend time in silent confession to God.

- o Pray for the nation of Ethiopia
 - Ethiopia has been ravaged by six major droughts in the past two decades. Pray for those who have disease and have lost loved ones due to the lack of water.
 - Pray for God's church to take the Gospel to the thousands of refugees there from Sudan and Somalia.
 - Pray for God to strengthen His church in Ethiopia to withstand false teaching and persecution from Muslims and the Orthodox Church while being able share the true message of salvation by faith in Christ alone.
 - Pray for the 120 people groups in Ethiopia that are considered unreached.

Source: Operation World by Johnstone and Mandryk

MEMORIZE

o 2 Samuel 7:22 "Therefore you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears."

SUGGESTIONS

These suggestions are intended to help parents facilitate God-centered discussions with their children. Parents should prayerfully use these suggestions to help their children discover the truths of God's Word and worship Him together.

Preschool (Birth-Kindergarten)

o Begin by asking your preschooler this question: Do you know what a promise is? A promise is when someone tells you they will do something. (Ex. If mommy says, "I will get you a special snack," that is a promise.) Have your child tell you a promise that someone has made to them.

o The Bible tells us about God's promises. Now have your child tell you promises God has made to them and kept (these may be: friends, protection, loving them, etc.). God always keeps His promises! God's plan is always perfect! We can trust Him to keep His promises!

o God made a very important promise in the Bible. He promised to send His son, Jesus. Years and years before Jesus was born, God promised His people that He would send them someone to help them. God is so good and He will never give up on you or me, just like He didn't give up on Solomon or David. He loves us so much He sent His son Jesus to rescue us. What a good and great God!

Children (Grades 1-5)

o Praying Scripture:

What a great example David gives us in how to pray. God speaks by His Word and we pray it back to Him. David tells God that he understands that he was a Shepherd boy and now part of this everlasting promise. David prays and tells God that he understands God is in control and is doing these things for His own name and glory.

o Let's pray our memory verse, 2 Samuel 7:22. "Dear Lord, You are great! You are the One True God and nothing is greater than You. We have heard in Your Word (use the things your family pointed out) that You are in control of all things and You have plans for our lives that bring You glory. You planned for Jesus to be born out of the house of David and You planned for Him to reign forever. Thank you for Jesus the King of Kings."

Students (Grades 6-12)

o What comes to mind when you're in class and hear the words "group

project?" Have you ever been put in that group where only one or two people contributed to the work, yet everyone received a passing grade? Was that frustrating? Why? Have you ever been the one who didn't contribute much, or anything at all?

o This idea of benefiting from another's performance and obedience shouldn't be foreign to us. Our salvation is totally dependant upon Christ's performance of obedience for us. If we know that Christ's perfect obedience will always be deemed sufficient for our salvation, why do we try to do works to gain God's acceptance?

o What if you walked in a class and the teacher's first words were, "Before we begin our study, I want you to know that you will definitely have an 'A' at the end of this course. Now lets begin!" How would you respond? Would you lose interest and simply stop coming because you knew you had already made the grade, or would you desire to learn and grow even more because the weight of performing had been lifted?

o This is the same crossroads at which we find ourselves when we benefit from Christ's perfect obedience. We realize we can't do anything to gain God's acceptance, but because of Christ's obedience we are free and empowered to live in a way that brings Him great glory.

Church Community

What is Church Community?

With so many young people leaving the church after they are under the leadership of their parents, it is important that we teach the necessity of the church. Scripture says that the church is the Bride of Christ and He has given the church these four responsibilities: worship God, connect with others, grow in God's Word, and go tell the world about Christ. It is important that our children understand the heart behind what the church is meant to be and that our children allow Christ to transform their hearts to serve Him through His church.

We go to church to worship our God who has saved each of us and given us a personal relationship with Him. We go to church to come together to celebrate our Heavenly Father by giving Him our worship. Our children should see families living their lives side-by-side, sharing experiences, caring for each other, being open with one another, and praying together. Our children should know that the church is a place where they can grow in their faith and gain the knowledge that will help them grow closer to the Lord and live a more abundant life. In other words, our children should know the church is a place where we can be transformed. Finally, the church leads us to the point where we must open our eyes and our hearts to step out and follow the nudging of the Holy Spirit to reach the world around us.



How Do I Help My Son/Daughter Find a Church After High School?

Listen close. Do you hear it? You know that humming of the air conditioner, the ambient buzzing noise of the TV. That is the sound of less noise or maybe even silence around the house now that your child is off to college. That's right, your child really is gone. Sadly, during the college years, many of our teenagers not only leave the home where they grew up, but also the church. How do you help your child find a church after high school?

Encourage your child to look for the following things in a church body:

Look for a church that speaks Truth instead of "tickles ears"

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."—2 Timothy 4:3

When helping your now adult child look for a church, encourage him or her to keep the main thing the main thing. Help your child see that if the truth of God's Word is not being preached or taught, then it is very likely that God's inerrant, infallible Word is not central to the DNA of that church. All the bells and whistles might be nice, but bells and whistles without the truth are meaningless. Yes, your child may hear what he or she wants to hear—or "have his or her ears tickled"—but the truth is what we all need to hear and adhere to. Be sure that your child is looking for a church where the entirety of God's truth is honored, revered, taught, and preached, not a church that only preaches messages that are pleasant or easy to listen to.

Look for a church that promotes community instead of comfort

Admit it. Unless you stayed at home during college or owned your own place, college life was not very comfortable. Dorm room beds are nothing compared to your own bed back home. Though your child may have once yelled and moaned about having to wait for an open shower at home, this is nothing compared to competing for one shower with suitemates.

In the midst of a likely less-than-comfortable living environment, your child is going to gravitate toward things that remind or connect him or her to the comforts of home. In the same way that it is natural for us to seek the comforts of home when we go off to college, it can be natural for us to seek comfort in the church we attend. The longing to find comfort in a church is not necessarily a bad thing (the feeling of comfort often comes from finding our place and using our gifts in community), but comfort can become an idol and stunt our ability to grow and serve, if we seek it exclusively.

Help your child see that when searching for a church, it is important to seek community more than comfort. There are many churches out there that have similarities to your child's home church, but lack in community. Encourage your child to join the likes of Daniel (Daniel 6), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3), David (1 Samuel), and Jesus (the Gospels), who willingly sacrificed their own comfort for community with God and other believers.

Look for a church that is Kingdom-focused instead of inward-focused

Thom Rainer writes,

"Any healthy church must have some level of inward focus. Those in the church should be disciplined. Hurting members need genuine concern and ministry. Healthy fellowship among the members is a good sign for a congregation. But churches can lose their outward focus and become preoccupied with the perceived needs and desires of the members. The dollars spent and the time expended can quickly become focused on the demands of those inside the congregation. When that takes place, the church has become inwardly obsessed."

The church is not Kingdom-focused. When helping your child look for a church during college, research the church's local and global missions focus. Does the church simply fund mission endeavors or does it participate itself? How often does it serve the local community? Why does it serve the community? Do the members of the church often share "God stories" of their own encounters with the lost or unchurched?

Now that you have some things to look for, consider these first steps to helping your child find a church.

1. Make it a priority

Just as a college meal plan or Ramen noodles are essential for keeping

your child fed in college, likewise, finding a church is essential to your child becoming more and more like Jesus. Finding a local church should be as important as your child doing anything else in college.

2. Make a plan

Finding a church will not come naturally to most. The college years can be some of the worldliest years of your child's life. Unless your child is planning to attend church on a given Sunday and has set an alarm clock with multiple backups, the likelihood of your child finding a church or even attending a church is slim-to-none. Help your child make a plan to go visit churches. Make a plan to talk to your child about those visits.

3. Plug in

Work hard to help your children find their place in the church and fill the void. Encourage your child to be an active participant, not a mere member.

4. Remember no church is perfect, but there is a perfect church for your child

If your child seeks to find perfection in a church, be ready for major disappointment. However, there is a perfect church for your child. The perfect church is one where your child is challenged, expected to grow, given opportunity to serve, and equipped to make disciples.

5. Go all in!

Dorothy got it right in the Wizard of Oz...there is no place like home. Many college students loosely commit to a local church because they want to stay connected to the church they grew up in, mostly for the sake of nostalgia. Encourage your children to go all in with the local church that God is calling them to be a part of. That new church may not be like their home church, but they can make a new home of the church that God has placed them in locally.

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Discipling As You Go

What is Discipling As You Go?

Deuteronomy 6 is clear in its instructions to parents: constantly, as you live your life, be an example and train your children to follow the Lord. As parents, it is important for us to live a consistent life of faith in front of our children. As things happen in life, we should use those events to train our children, not only in right and wrong, but also in how to make decisions to live the abundant life that Christ has for us. We should model and explain how God's truth should be the standard of how we live our lives. In other words, even from the beginning, we should teach wisdom rather than the facts of "do's and don'ts." Faith is much easier caught than taught. Parents should always help their children see life's decisions through the lenses of our faith.



Parenting Tools: *Helping Your Child Deal with Temptation*

Temptation has been around, well...since forever! Not too long after the creation of man did the great deceiver, Satan, attempt to distract mankind from the purpose that the Father had set before them (Genesis 3). No human has ever been able to hide from temptation. Even the Son of God—God Incarnate—who was fully God and fully man, experienced and overcame temptation (Matthew 4). It is through Jesus, that the Holy Creator God reveals that He is not a God who intends to keep His Creation at an arm's length, but the only God who desires to sympathize with His creation, as Jesus did through experiencing temptation. God alone has the power, the smarts, and the patience to overcome temptation, and He freely gives that to us through Jesus Christ. The great theologian and reformer Martin Luther once said, "You can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair."

Before we look into some practical ways to help your child overcome temptation, let's take a look at some of the realities of temptation. Andy Stanley preached a sermon series a few years ago on dealing with temptation. In that sermon series, Stanley continually returns to what he sees are the core realities of temptation:

1. There is always something more at stake than what we think
2. Temptation forces us to ask the question: Can God be trusted?

Things to remember about temptation...

- **Temptation itself is not a sin, but it quickly leads there.**

Jesus Christ is the sinless Savior of humanity. Though He was tempted, He never sinned. The purpose of temptation is to get us to choose another plan or another option than the one God has set for us.

- **Temptation does not come from God.**

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."

—James 1:13

There are numerous places throughout God's Word where God does test

mankind, but never does He tempt them. Testing affirms belief and faith in God and His plan. Temptation strives to question God and His plan.

- **Temptation is rooted inside of fallen man.**

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” —James 1:14

- **Temptation can be overcome.**

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” —1 Corinthians 10:13

We often read the passage above and our egos begin to swell. We start to feel a lot better about ourselves. We start to look at the temptation that we are surrounded by and look to this passage as a reminder that God will not allow us to experience anything that we cannot handle. This is an incorrect interpretation of this verse. Paul is saying that we will not be tempted beyond our ability, but that is not because we have the ability ourselves. It is through Jesus, who experienced and overcame temptation, that we now have the ability to overcome temptation. Without a relationship with Jesus, we do not have the ability to overcome temptation.

So, what can you as a parent do to help your child deal with temptation?

- 1. Help your child prepare for temptation.**

Begin helping your child prepare now. Do not wait until the temptations get so strong that your child feels almost helpless in overcoming them. Now is the time to help your child recognize and shore up his or her weaknesses. Our enemy, the Devil, is constantly looking for the smallest little chink in the armor for him to get a foot or even a toe into.

- 2. Set boundaries and stick to them.**

After your child has come to grips with his or her weaknesses, set boundaries to help prepare him or her for the onslaught of temptation to come. Be sure to set realistic boundaries. Some parents often react to temptation in extreme ways rather than realistic ones. For example, if your child has an issue with sexual sin particularly through computers or technology, set boundaries that might include rigorous web filters, weekly text message reporting, and limited social media usage, etc. with the

understanding that if these initial boundaries do not help, then more extreme boundaries may need to be set. Be fluid and firm.

3. Foster an atmosphere of transparency and openness .

One of the greatest hurdles your child will have to pass is that of admitting that he or she is struggling with temptation. Be intentional about creating an atmosphere at home where your child can be transparent and open about struggles. Your child will diligently search out a safe place or safe person in which to confide. Strive to be that person and have your home or car be that safe place. Be slow to judge and quick to listen.

4. When your child falls into temptation, show grace AND mercy.

Remember grace is receiving something that we do not deserve, while mercy is not receiving something that we do deserve. Be sure to teach and model these truths before, during, and after your child's slip into temptation. Remember that you yourself desire to know and experience grace and mercy as well. Allow your child to experience the consequences of his or her decision. Too often, we jump into rescue mode; however, when we do this, we are rescuing our children from consequences of temptation rather than the temptation itself. It is sometimes just as merciful to allow your child to experience some of the consequences of his or her actions, while waiting on deck to extend grace in abundance.

5. Pray God's Word over your child.

The author of Hebrews writes,

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

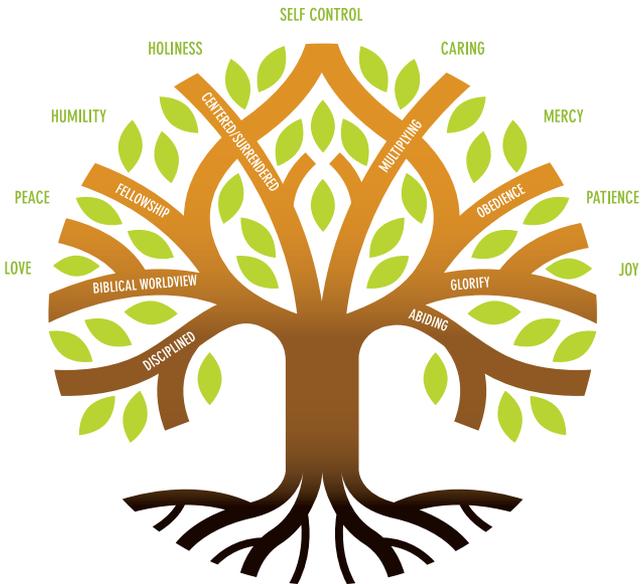
—Hebrews 4:12–13

The Word of God is not just a storybook of God's amazing works or a map for life. The Bible is living and active, powerful enough to handle anything that the world throws at it; able to withstand any questions that are asked of it. A number of years ago, Beth Moore wrote a book called *Praying God's Word*. This book was revolutionary, yet old school at the same time. The teachings of this book are new to us today but were standard in the

Jewish and early church cultures, who viewed the Word of God not just as something to read, memorize, and apply, but as a source of prayers as well. Have you prayed God’s Word over your child?

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”—Philippians 4:8–9

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” —1 Peter 5:8–11



**Testing affirms belief and faith in God and His plan.
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