

# IT'S APPARENT

PLAIN TALK ABOUT RAISING KIDS WHO LOVE GOD

RON AND CATHRYN JONES

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*Something Good Publishing*

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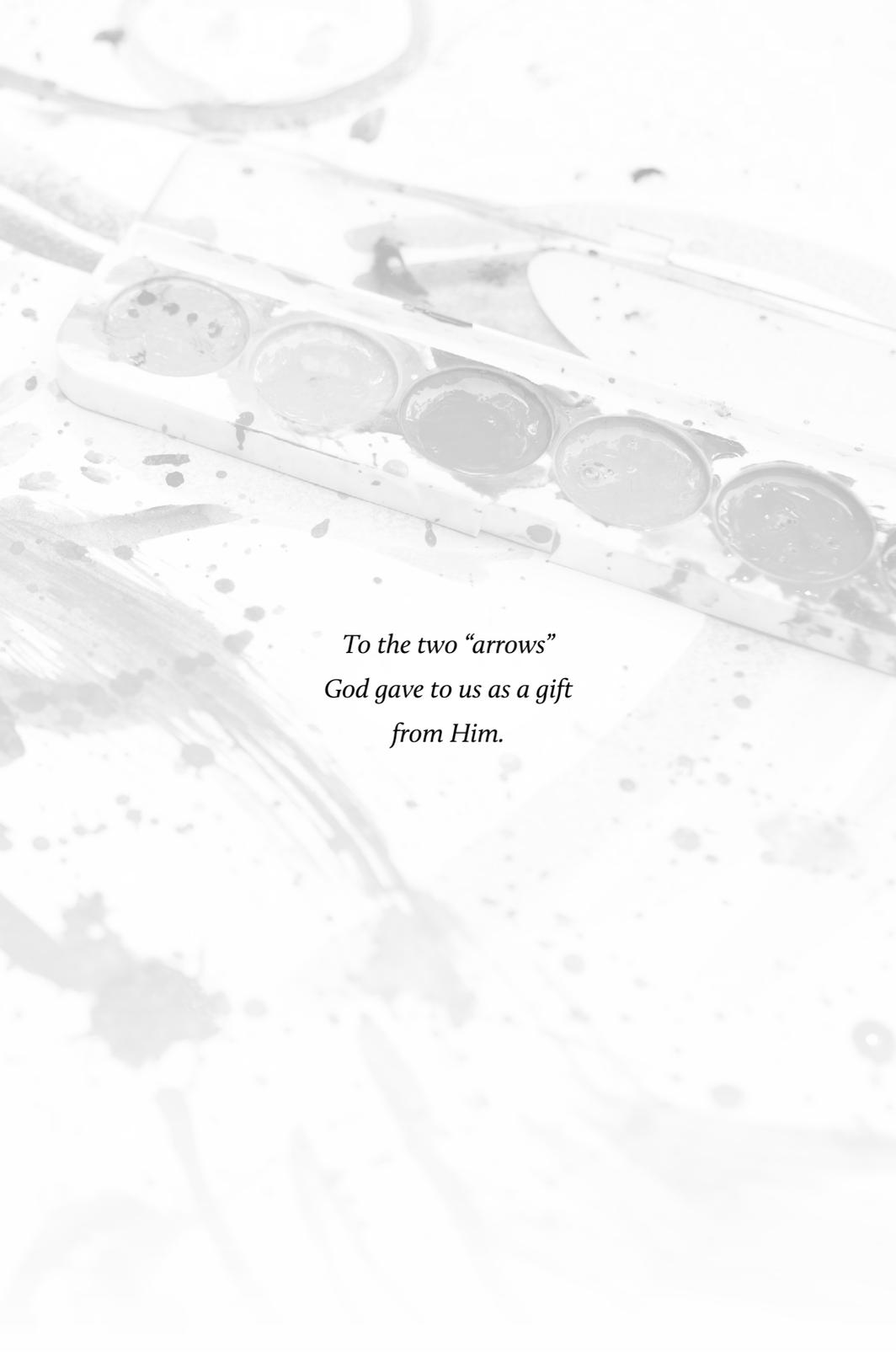
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A watercolor palette with six wells of paint in various shades of brown, tan, and grey. A brush is resting on the palette. The background is a light, textured surface with numerous watercolor splatters and brush strokes in similar colors, creating a soft, artistic atmosphere.

*To the two “arrows”  
God gave to us as a gift  
from Him.*

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# Introduction

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*We never know the love of a parent  
until we become parents ourselves.*

HENRY WARD BEECHER

---

**R**ecently, we bought a new coffee maker and it came with an instruction booklet for which we were grateful. It is no secret in the Jones family that I (Ron) am missing the gene in my DNA that would make it easy for me to work mechanical equipment. Even something simple like how to program a coffee maker to automatically brew the caffeinated nectar at a predetermined time in the early morning hours presents challenges for me. Therefore, reading the instruction booklet is as essential as coffee itself.

Buy a coffee maker and you get an instruction booklet. Buy a car and you get an owner's manual. Purchase a computer and it comes with a Help Desk plus twenty-four-hour tech support if you choose to pay for it. A lot of parents we know wish their children also came with an owner's manual, or at least somebody they could talk to day or night when chaos breaks out in their family. For sure,

it is not always apparent what a parent or grandparent should do when troubles arise with their children or grandchildren.

Comedians often have some of the best perspectives when it comes to everyday life, especially as it relates to parenting. Milton Berle once said, "If evolution is true, how come mothers only have two hands?" Phyllis Diller said, "Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing up is like shoveling the sidewalk before it stops snowing." Jerry Seinfeld says, "A two-year old is kind of like having a blender, but you don't have a top for it." Our favorite perspective on parenting, though, comes from actor and comedian Ray Romano. He says, "Having children is like living in a frat house. Nobody sleeps, everything's broken, and there's a lot of throwing up." There is too much truth in Romano's words.

We will never forget the days our kids were born. Both arrived on time at Women's Hospital in Houston, Texas. Our first child entered this world during an ice storm. Yes, an ice storm in south Texas! We barely made it to the Medical Center. Our second child arrived fifteen months later. Both were a bit of a miracle. For some time we had struggled to start a family, at times wondering whether God would ever bless us with a child. When He finally did, we gave thanks and rejoiced in the way that many parents do. We posted a blue sign in the front yard of our house that read, "It's a boy!" and later a pink one that read, "It's a girl!" However, over the years we have mused about the need for another sign that reads, "It's a parent!" We didn't know what to do any more than anybody else did. The fact that I had grown up in a broken home made the prospects of parenting even more ominous for me. My parents were good people, but their marriage did not survive. Now a dad myself, I really didn't know what to do. And nobody sent us home with any instructions other than to feed the baby when he cries.

The first sound of a baby's cry produces all kinds of emotions in us. For a visionary like me, hearing that first cry immediately sent me into planning mode—time was of the essence. I quickly imagined the day we would send our child off to college eighteen years later. While Cathryn was more in the moment by thinking about diapers, pacifiers, feedings, nurturing and naptime, I was opening a 529 college fund for the little guy. Either way, our dream had come true. A child had arrived. The clock was ticking. We were

now parents.

But this was a new role for us. We knew we needed help in raising wise, godly, responsible kids. We found such help through our community, our church, the example of family and friends, and a few resources, but mostly we just figured it out along the way by God's grace. Those experiences, and the lessons we learned in the process, are the reasons we have decided to write this book. With the wisdom of hindsight, we humbly share what we learned by opening the Bible, talking plainly, telling some personal stories of failure and success, and making God's plan for rearing children and grandchildren more apparent to parents and grandparents.

As we get started, a disclaimer is necessary. Perhaps like you, I suppose the only thing that qualifies me to speak on the subject of parenting is that I have been one for more than two decades. I am merely a person before God, partner to my wife, parent to my kids, and pastor to my church family. What I have learned about parenting kids who love God happened in partnership with the real reason our two kids might have turned out well. I am referring, of course, to the powerful influence of Cathryn, my wife and the kids' mother. Without the grace of God flowing through her, I am not sure who our kids would have become.

Still, we often look at each other and wonder how our kids developed so well. Although the job of a parent never ends, the kids are now old enough (ages twenty-two and twenty) to make many of their own choices in life, and we realize things could turn badly in a moment. We did not raise perfect kids, and we are certainly not perfect parents, but we are grateful to God that our children own their own faith and chase after Jesus every day.

We can't take credit for the success of our kids, but we can point to a few factors that may have contributed to their thriving lives in Jesus. Over the years, we drank from the endless supply of wisdom in God's holy Word and, in turn, did our best to pour the B-I-B-L-E into our kids, formally by remaining connected to a local church family and informally through everyday conversations about life and God (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). We believe the Bible is the closest thing we have to an owner's manual for raising children. Thankfully, Scripture is chockfull of divine counsel that is applicable in every generation and to every situation parents and grandparents face in family life. Every parent quickly learns what

the Bible affirms: children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). Furthermore, each child is unique and requires a customized approach (Proverbs 22:6). A child that is created in the image of God is certainly not mass-produced from a divine assembly line.

Children held a special place in Jesus's heart, even though He never married nor started an earthly family. The Savior's tender touch with children drew many people to Him. For example, Luke 18 describes a scene in which parents brought their babies to Jesus. The disciples saw this happening and rebuked the parents for bothering Him. Can you imagine? But in response, Jesus chastised His disciples, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:15-17). Jesus never treated children like a nuisance. Instead, He cherished them and quickly pointed out their unique capacity to exercise faith. He also delivered a stern warning to those that would harm a child. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

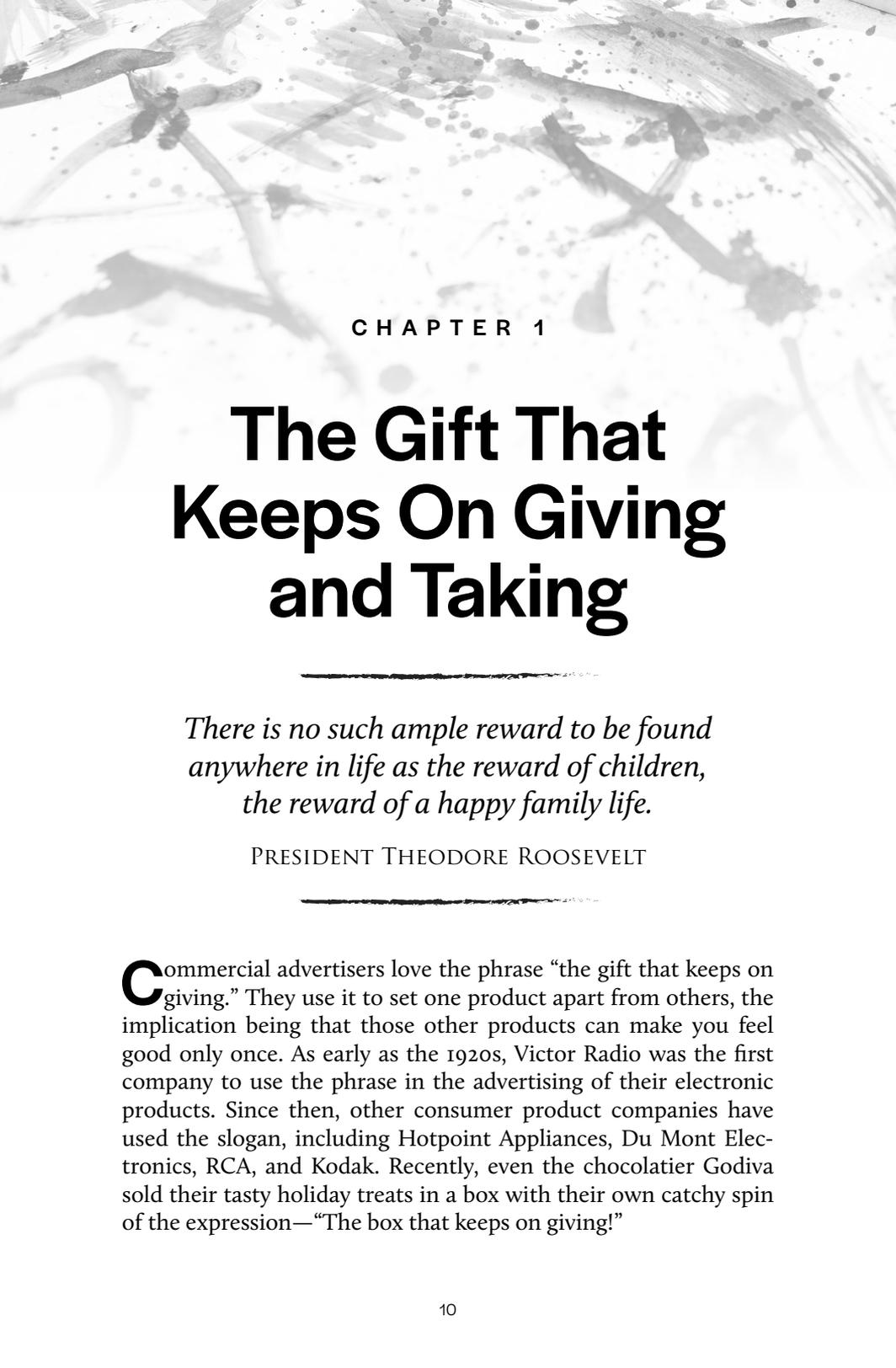
Since we raised our two children together and by the grace of God, Cathryn and I co-author this book. Cathryn's distinct contribution to *It's Apparent* appears in the form of her journal entries sprinkled throughout. Look for them called "From a Mother's Heart." They alone are worth the price of the book. However, I (Ron) choose to write in the first person to make it easier for you to read, inserting "we" where appropriate.

Parenting is simultaneously one of the greatest joys and challenges of life. God who is our heavenly Father gave us the thrill of rearing children that He created in His own image, and He did not leave us without instructions on how to do that well. So, grab your Bible and a good cup of automatically brewed java (we can show you how the coffee maker works). Find a quiet place. Relax. Finally, enjoy the plain talk on the pages that follow.

**Ron and Cathryn Jones**

*Virginia Beach, Virginia*

*December 2018*



CHAPTER 1

# The Gift That Keeps On Giving and Taking

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*There is no such ample reward to be found  
anywhere in life as the reward of children,  
the reward of a happy family life.*

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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**C**ommercial advertisers love the phrase “the gift that keeps on giving.” They use it to set one product apart from others, the implication being that those other products can make you feel good only once. As early as the 1920s, Victor Radio was the first company to use the phrase in the advertising of their electronic products. Since then, other consumer product companies have used the slogan, including Hotpoint Appliances, Du Mont Electronics, RCA, and Kodak. Recently, even the chocolatier Godiva sold their tasty holiday treats in a box with their own catchy spin of the expression—“The box that keeps on giving!”

As far as we know, the phrase “the gift that keeps on giving” has never been applied to children—until now. Even if it has, our coinage is slightly different: we say children are the gift that keeps on giving and taking. Our idea for this chapter’s title comes from personal experience and from Psalm 127:3, which reads, “Children are a heritage from the Lord.” The New American Standard Bible translation uses the word “gift” to describe children, and what a gift they are! Do you agree?

Raising kids who love God starts with receiving your children as the gift they are from our heavenly Father. Sadly, some parents describe their children as “surprises” or “mistakes.” You might not have been expecting a child at this time in your life, but that child is not a mistake. God gave you an unexpected blessing. We met parents who actually named their daughter A’Blessen for that very reason. Even in the worst of situations, a child is a life and life is a gift from God. Maybe you do not feel prepared to take care of a child. But through adoption you can always give the gift of a child to someone else who is ready and willing to receive that child into their family.

Children are the gift that keeps on giving. They give to us in ways that enrich our lives deeply. Life would be very lonely without relationships, especially the family relationships that children and grandchildren provide. But kids are also the gift that keeps on taking. We don’t mean that in a bad way. We are simply acknowledging that parenting is the hardest, most time-consuming, and expensive work we will ever do. Plus, the job of parenting never ends! Raising children is thus simultaneously the most challenging and rewarding experience life offers.

As we say that, we don’t mean to be insensitive to married couples who desire children but are physically unable to produce them. Before our first child was born, we experienced a season of infertility. We understand the emotional pain of wanting a child and having to wait on God to give the gift. For some couples, the gift never arrives biologically. But there are other ways to enjoy the gift of a child. As we mentioned earlier, adoption is always an option. Some couples choose to become Foster parents. Adults can also volunteer to serve in a ministry to children at their church or through a social outreach like Big Brothers or Big Sisters. The point is to find a way to experience the gift of children that works

for you.

Now, let's get personal. In what ways are your children a gift from God? Psalm 127 reveals at least two ways. First, your children are your legacy. The word translated "heritage" in verse 3 suggests this. It refers to the children that God gives to you by way of birth. How will you be remembered when you are gone from this earth? Does that thought ever cross your mind? Better to be remembered for what you did in and for your kids than for the time you spent working for your employer, right? Nobody comes to the end of his life and wishes he had spent more time at the office.

Children are also a gift from God because they are your best defense. The psalmist continues in verses 4 and 5 by saying, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate." Some people mistakenly interpret the "arrow" metaphor by saying parents should launch their kids out into the world. That is not a wrong idea, in and of itself. However, when applied to the arrows in a man's quiver, it fails to take into consideration the culture in which this psalm was written.

In ancient times, the size and quality of a man's family or "quiver" brought him security and status. This was especially true if he had many sons who, like warriors, could help protect and defend the family against military or legal attacks. Also, at the time this psalm was written, families lived within close proximity of each other. Only a foolish father sent his kids far away like a flying arrow. But we live in a different time and place today. Many families now live the flight of an arrow's distance or more from each other. And yet, regardless of distance, an adult child is still responsible to honor, protect, and defend his or her parents (Matthew 15:1-9; 1 Timothy 5:8).

Psalm chapter 127 envisions a home to build, a city to guard, plus a battle to fight and win. Make no mistake about it, the battle belongs to the Lord, but our children are like ammunition God gives us to fight the spiritual battles of our day. These "arrows" must be carefully prepared and then released into the world. We must aim them in the right direction and toward the right target.

Mitt Romney ran for President of the United States in 2012. He lost to the incumbent Barack Obama. Politics aside, we were

impressed with Romney's family. He and his wife, Ann, have five adult children and numerous grandchildren. Many of them served in their father's campaign. As anybody knows, a political campaign is a fight for power and a war of ideas. Romney rallied many supporters and defenders of his character and policies, but none were greater warriors than his own children. As parents, Mitt and Ann had sharpened them over the years, and they were prepared to fight in what their family believed was a battle for our nation.

As our children grow into young adults, we are watching them emerge as sharpened arrows in our ministry quiver. Presently, our son Reagan is pursuing his vocational ministry calling and our daughter Caroline is a leader in an on-campus ministry to college athletes. She is also preparing for a career in finance. It is exciting to see how God is already using them for His glory.

## PRIORITIZING FAMILY WORSHIP

Psalm 127 is among the Songs of Ascent, which includes fifteen songs found in Psalms 120-134. Thousands of years ago when Jewish pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem for the annual religious festivals, they ascended Mount Zion (about 3,000 feet above sea level) using this section of Scripture as their songbook. It should not surprise us that family life is at the center of one of these psalms because families made the journey together to worship the Lord at the Temple in the ancient Holy City. Psalm 127, among other things, points us to the priority of family worship.

As simple as it sounds, raising kids who love God starts with a commitment to family worship. As he led the next generation of families into the Promised Land, Joshua echoed this idea by declaring, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Can that be said of your household? Parents and grandparents must set the example by making it a priority to be in church on Sunday; they must also set the expectation by saying, "As for me and my house, we will be in church on Sunday!"

We can already hear some parents saying, "But my kids don't want to go to church. They think it's boring, and we don't want to force religion on them." Okay, but such reasoning crumbles like the walls of Jericho when applied to your kid's education. Do you

really think your children would get up at the crack of dawn and go to school every day of the week if you did not require them to do so? If you answer yes to that question, your kids are academic superheroes. For good and obvious reasons, the federal government makes education compulsory for all children up to a certain age. Truancy laws are meant to deter any child from skipping school, and parents from letting it happen. However, the only support you will get from the United States government to get your child to church on Sunday is the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of religion. The rest is up to parents!

This reminds us of a story we heard about a mother that went into her child's room to wake him and tell him it was time to go to church. The son replied, "I don't want to go to church!" The mother asked why. "I'll give you two reasons," the son replied. "One, they don't like me and, two, I don't like them!" The boy's mother thought for a moment and then replied, "I'll give you two good reasons you must go to church. One, you're fifty-four years old and, two, you're the pastor!"

All kidding aside, it was never a choice in the Jones family whether we went to church or not. Maybe you think family worship is easier to establish in a pastor's home. Actually, we found it could be harder because a pastor's family lives in a glass house. Some pastor's kids can come up with plenty of reasons for not going to church. Furthermore, we found it difficult to prioritize family worship in our household due to the same changes happening in our culture that affect your family. What we observed is that most people no longer consider Sunday, the Lord's day, a sacred time set aside for family worship and rest. Retail stores are wide open for business on Sundays. Kid's travel sports competitions happen throughout the weekend. Even doctors are now seeing patients on the weekends. The church no longer owns the exclusive rights to Sunday morning, and this makes prioritizing family worship more difficult for Christian parents. But if the Joneses can make it work, you can too!

When establishing our family norms, we remembered Hebrews 10:24-25, which reads, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and

all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The “Day” the writer of Hebrews refers to at the end of verse 25 is the awesome Day of the Lord when Jesus Christ returns at the end of the age. As we see that Day in Bible prophecy approaching, Christian parents must make an all-important decision. Will we raise our kids in a child-or-parent-centered home? Better yet, will we raise our children in a God-centered home? Allow us to explain the differences.

Child-centered parenting is all the rage today. As a philosophy, child-centered parenting assumes children are “little adults” who have the same rights, more-or-less, as adults.<sup>1</sup> Child-centered parents desire to foster their child’s autonomy, initiative, and creativity. While this approach to parenting may be born of good intentions, more often than not it produces entitled, narcissistic kids who become entitled, narcissistic adults.

An autonomous child can easily become a rebellious teenager and a rebellious teenager an unruly, unproductive member of society. Josh McDowell famously said to parents, “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.” It is also true that having a relationship with your kids (like being their best friend) without defined rules may lead to an adolescent form of anarchy.

Submission to God’s will is what a child must learn, not autonomy. Children first learn this by submitting to the authority of their parents whom God has placed over them for a season of time. This does not mean that the parents put their will first (as in a parent-centered home), but that they put the will of God at the forefront, and then act as instruments of His grace to carry out that will. In God-centered homes, for example, parents make biblical choices that enrich the whole of family life. That includes the decision for all members of the family to participate in the life-giving community of a local church. For that reason alone, it’s time for parents to take back control of the home while balancing high expectations with loving and supportive care.

### “UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE”

Times have changed but truth has not. That is why a psalm written nearly three thousand years ago has so much to say to parents today. Psalm 127 begins with these familiar words, “Unless the Lord

builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” God is the general contractor and parents are the laborers who partner with the Almighty in building a spiritual and relational community called a family. The family is the basic unit of society and God’s plan for the formation of healthy souls. But *how* we build is as important as *what* we build.

When our kids were young, “Bob the Builder” was a popular cartoon and toy set. Bob and his friends were always ready to fix the town of Fixam. “Grab your tool set,” came the daily mantra. “It’s time to go to the construction site. Bob the Builder. Can he build it? Yes he can!” Applied to my life, this tune might sound slightly different—“Ron the Builder. Can he build it? No he can’t!” Honestly, I am not good at building things with my hands. There is nothing refined about my fine motor skills. Place a screw and a screwdriver in my hands and suddenly I have six thumbs. Still, I once attempted to assemble an outdoor basketball hoop for my kids. After returning from the sports store, I opened the box and reached for the instructions. I was looking for pictorial clues that made it easy to assemble. Nobody told me that “Made in China” meant the directions were in Mandarin Chinese. *Ugh*. I knew I was in trouble when I finished the project and still had unused parts lying around. I should have paid the extra fifty dollars to have the store assemble it.

My neighbor came by for a curious look. With a kind grin on his face, he told me that I had built the hoop backwards. *Sigh*. Thankfully, he stayed around to help reverse my mistakes and we had the hoop upright in a short time. The next sound we heard was *swish* as a basketball left my son’s hands, flew through the air, and landed perfectly inside the orange cylinder. Two points.

We might think we are better at building a family than a basketball hoop, but Psalm 127 says otherwise. “Unless the Lord builds the house ...” You get the idea. “God the Builder. Can He do it? Yes, He can!” Building a family is complex, painstaking work, and unless God guides our labor, we simply will not succeed.

Are you still not convinced you need the Lord’s help to build your family? Perhaps another example of a failed building project will help sink the truth even deeper into your heart.

One of the first and most famous building projects in human history was the Tower of Babel. Genesis chapter 11 says the people

of the earth migrated east and gathered on a plain in the land of Shinar. At that time, one language united them. Using the best technology and materials of their day — brick, stone, and bitumen mortar — they began building a city with a tower that reached into the heavens. Their stated purpose was to “make a name for ourselves” and for all of the inhabitants of the earth to gather in one place (Genesis 11:4). For sure, City Hall celebrated, but God frowned upon their vainglorious building project. Meaningless was the monument they built to their own esteem. Why? For starters, the filling of the earth would never take place the way the Creator intended if they all lived in one master planned community — a community they envisioned without the help of the Master (Genesis 1:28). So God came down from heaven, confused their language, and then dispersed earth’s population.

About the Tower of Babel, pastor and author Eugene Peterson says, “The greatest work project in the ancient world is a story of disaster. The unexcelled organization and enormous energy that were concentrated in building the Tower of Babel resulted in such a shattered community and garbled communication that civilization is still trying to recover.”<sup>2</sup>

Is your family in recovery? The best way to make sure the building of your family is not another story of disaster is to depend on the Lord alone to build your house. Make Him your chief architect and builder. This happens by prioritizing God, His word, and prayer in family life. About such priorities, Jesus said this: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). We take that to mean that if we put God first in our family, He will take care of the many things that worry a parent’s heart. The Lord is always faithful to His promise.

## PRO-FAMILY PUBLIC POLICY

At the risk of sounding political (that is not our intention), the fourth way to raise kids who love God is to support pro-family public policies. The phrase “unless the Lord” appears twice in Psalm 127. The second half of verse one repeats, “Unless the Lord

watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” What is the connection between your family and the city? Why is it equally important that the Lord builds your house and watches over the city at the same time?

In ancient times, city walls protected citizens from dangerous people and invading armies. All day and night, watchmen were positioned on the walls to look for any signs of impending danger. Call it their version of homeland security. When they spotted an approaching threat, they sounded the alarm. People who worked the land outside the city would then run to safety inside the walls. The watchman’s job was critical to everyone’s safety.

What was true in ancient times is also true today. “Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” In other words, the best homeland security is the city, state, or nation that fears God. The reverse is also true. The more our nation drifts away from our Judea-Christian roots, the greater peril befalls the family. Why, then, do so many of our civic leaders and elected officials reject God and the influence of religion in public life? During one of his Tonight Show monologues, comedian Jay Leno raised the same question with a twinge of humor by asking, “With all of the earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters happening today, do we really think now is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?”<sup>3</sup>

The government can make it harder or easier for parents to do their job. We are not advocating for state control over how parents raise their kids. However, we are for the kind of public policies that strengthen families. For starters, how about introducing pro-family tax laws that eliminate penalties and disincentives for married couples, especially in lower incomes? Currently, the federal government levies the highest marginal tax rates on married households in which both spouses work. Paid family leave and childcare is important for working single mothers, too. Neither of us is running for office, but these are good places to begin for those who are.

Benjamin Franklin said wisely, “I have lived for a long time (81 years), and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the

sacred writings, that 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel." 4

Nobody is more pro-family than God. He created the family as the basic unit of a healthy community; parenting is His idea, too. Jesus even taught us to pray to "our Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).

May we never forget that the many blessings we enjoy as American citizens come from God, as well as the gift that keeps on giving and taking.



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*From a Mother's Heart*  
GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The great expectation of my heart was to be a mom. There is nothing wrong or unusual about that. I believe God wired women with the desire to nurture. Some women might consider that idea offensive, but I consider it an honor. Although I had a successful career in the corporate world before Ron and I married, I used to joke with him that my highest aspiration was to drive carpool. However, after we married and tried to start a family, my body did not cooperate. The prospects of infertility filled my heart with fear. But with the help of Dr. Bob, my kind-hearted OBGYN, and a strong faith in God, we went down that dark and lonely road.

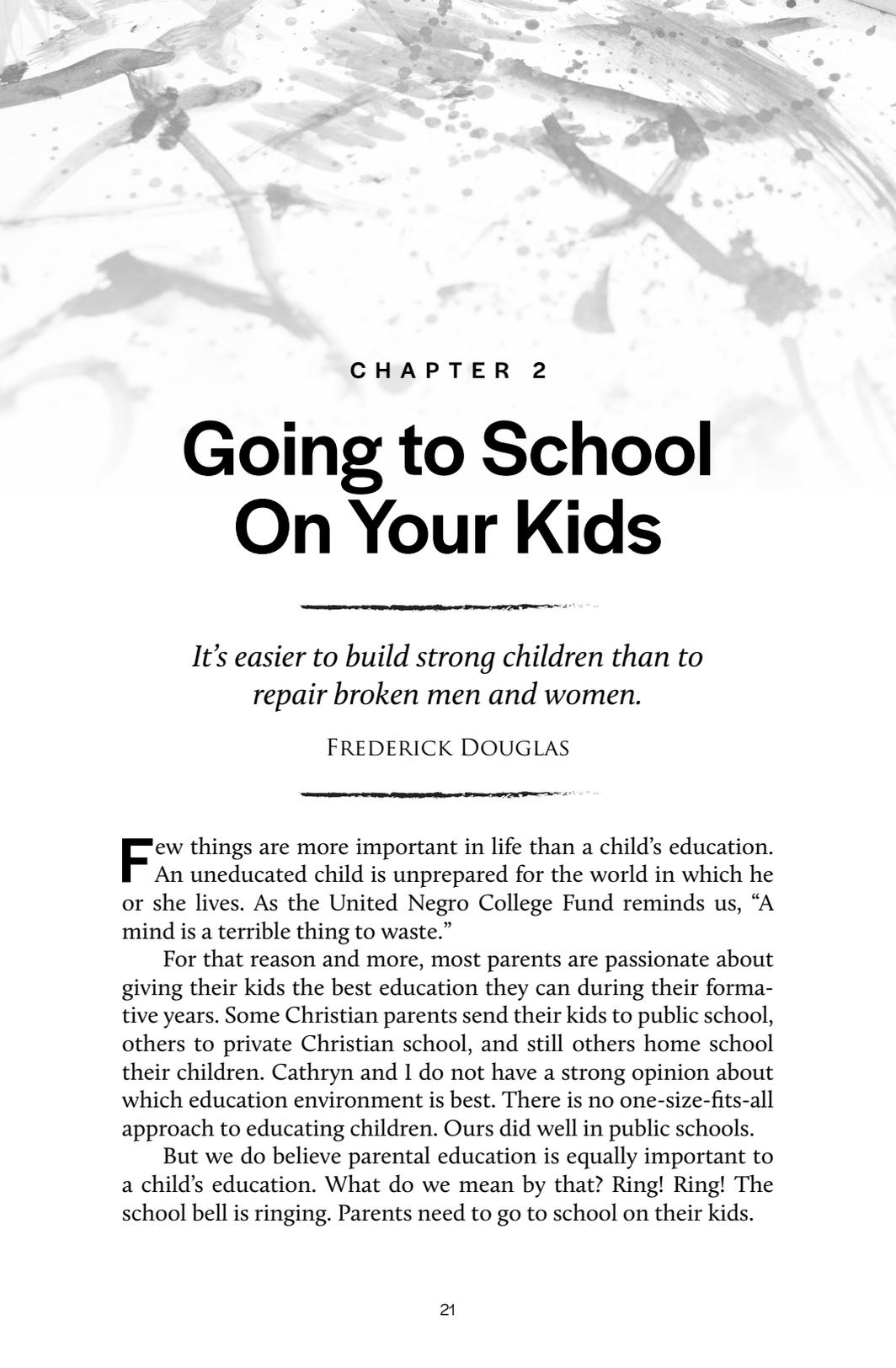
Between medical procedures, I took comfort in the stories of women in the Bible who also experienced infertility. They did not call it that back then. The Bible, for example, says that Elizabeth, Zachariah's wife, was "barren" and "advanced in years" before she became pregnant with John the Baptizer (Luke 1:7). I am not sure which word is more difficult to embrace, barren or infertile. Either way, I did learn that the Bible contains a long list of women who walked by faith, waiting patiently on God to open their womb. After leaving a comfortable retirement in Ur based on God's prom-

ise, Sarah, Abraham's wife, waited another twenty-five years until Isaac arrived. Twenty years passed before Rachel, Jacob's wife, gave birth to Joseph. Her infertility caused such stress in their marriage that the two lovebirds even argued about her closed womb. Sound familiar? My wait did not last as long as theirs (a little more than a year). But when you don't know if or when the day will come when you will get pregnant, and when the pregnancy test turns negative again and again, one day can feel like one thousand years.

During this season of waiting, Hannah in the Old Testament was one of my go-to girls (1 Samuel 1). She prayed year after year after year for children. With deep groans that only a childless woman can understand, she poured out her grief before the Lord to the point that she could not eat. Elkanah, her husband, did the best he could to comfort her. Give him an "A" for effort. Eli the priest, on the other hand, mistook her for a drunken woman because her lips moved but her voice was not heard. Hannah respectfully corrected the man of God. At times, I too felt my pain was misunderstood.

When I could not find the words to express the anguish of my heart, I let Hannah speak for me. When I did not know how to pray, I let Hannah's prayer become my prayer. Hannah's story also became my story. "In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked for him from the Lord'" (1 Samuel 1:20). In due time, God gave me a son named Reagan. Like Samuel, Reagan plans to serve the Lord all the days of his life in vocational ministry. He is a reminder to me of God's faithfulness.

I am not suggesting that all cases of infertility will end as mine did. But I can say that regardless of the eventual outcome, God cares. He hears the cry of a woman's heart and His timing is perfect.



## CHAPTER 2

# Going to School On Your Kids

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*It's easier to build strong children than to  
repair broken men and women.*

FREDERICK DOUGLAS

---

**F**ew things are more important in life than a child's education. An uneducated child is unprepared for the world in which he or she lives. As the United Negro College Fund reminds us, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

For that reason and more, most parents are passionate about giving their kids the best education they can during their formative years. Some Christian parents send their kids to public school, others to private Christian school, and still others home school their children. Cathryn and I do not have a strong opinion about which education environment is best. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to educating children. Ours did well in public schools.

But we do believe parental education is equally important to a child's education. What do we mean by that? Ring! Ring! The school bell is ringing. Parents need to go to school on their kids.

Perhaps one of the reasons children do not come with an owner's manual or study guide, despite our fervent wishes, is because each child is unique. Have you noticed how different your children are from each other, let alone from other kids? What worked for someone else's kids might not work for yours, and vice versa. It is your responsibility as parents to know your children and to write, as it were, their study guide. In other words, go to school on your children. Study hard. Learn all you can about what makes them go tick-tock. It's always good to seek wise counsel, but don't let a Ph.D. tell you how to raise your kids. Instead, become the parents who earn the Ph.D. by studying your own children.

Because we mostly write the study guide on our kids as we raise them, parenting has an on-the-job-training aspect to it, and we only get one chance to raise our children. We might get better at the task of parenting with the second, third, or fourth child. But God bless the first child! Our first is usually the child on whom we experiment with all of our theories about parenting, theories that we often cast aside later. Did you hear about the parents who boasted of their six theories about parenting before they had kids? Now they have six kids and no theories.

When Cathryn was pregnant with our first child, she had visions of gathering with other moms in the neighborhood for playgroup. She saw herself sitting on the floor with other moms and their two-year-olds, all sipping coffee or chai tea with their children quietly cooing on their laps. I remember the first time she came home from playgroup. Tears flowed down her face like Niagara Falls. "All of the moms could sit there with their child on their lap except me," she said between heaves and sobs. "What's wrong with me? What's wrong with our child!"

Our son Reagan was a real twister. The wiggly little boy with a strong will was into everything. He defined the "terrible twos" and was not the least bit interested in his mom's tea party. Yet Reagan's rebelliousness was actually a blessing to us from the Lord, one that forced us to humbly look to Him. If God had given us our daughter first, Cathryn's vision would have become reality and we would have thought we were the perfect parents. We think Caroline was the most compliant two-year-old God ever created. Her strong will only began to reveal itself during her high school years.

## PLAIN TALK FROM PROVERBS

This is a good time to draw from the endless supply of biblical wisdom on child rearing. Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 6 is probably the single most popular place in the Bible to which parents go for hope and encouragement. It says famously, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Proverbs 22:6 is simultaneously one of the most familiar and misunderstood verses in the Bible. Based on this ancient axiom, many God-fearing parents take their kids to church and Sunday school, teach them the Ten Commandments, help them memorize Bible verses, sing hymns and say prayers with them, send them to summer camp, and, if possible, give them a Christian school education. They have been taught to believe that if they do these things, a child might rebel, but when he is old and gray he will return to the Lord. Sadly, we can introduce you to a many disappointed and disillusioned Christian parents who say it has not worked that way in their family. That’s because this verse does not promise the result they anticipated.

Years ago, I learned in a seminary class called Hermeneutics and Bible Study Methods that a proverb is not a promise. Hermeneutics is the science of biblical interpretation. Bad science produces a bad result whether you are dealing with theology or nuclear fusion. Good hermeneutics as it relates to Proverbs 22:6 begins with the understanding that a proverb in the Bible is, by nature, a general principle of godly wisdom that yields general results. Overall, the book of Proverbs says this: “More often than not, this is the way life works. You are wise to follow this godly path. Only a fool believes he is the exception to the rule.”

It is generally true that most children who are raised in Christian homes respect and follow the positive influence of two godly parents who teach and live God’s word authentically. However, there are exceptions to the general rule. And, even in the finest of Christian homes, there are seasons when kids test the boundaries set by their parents and the word of God. I am a classic example of this. I wandered far away from God while in college. I joined a fraternity and served as both the social chairman and rush chairman. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with fraternities. However, my behavior in the one I joined was not godly. I do not say this proudly, but I know how to plan a frat party! By the grace of God,

today I serve as the lead pastor of a thriving local church.

The phrase “when he is old” in Proverbs 22:6 is important to consider. The final chapter of your child’s life has not been written until God writes it. Until then, pray for your child and relax in God’s grace. If you have done your best to raise your kids in a Christian home, stop blaming yourself for their mistakes. And even if you admit to your own parenting mistakes, at some point your child is responsible for his or her choices in life. You can lead a child to the cross of Christ, but you cannot make him take up his cross daily and follow hard after Jesus.

That said, how can this proverb guide you as you strive to lead your child closer to the heart of God?

## TRAINING UP YOUR CHILD

Proverbs 22:6 contains twenty-one words when translated into the English language. The Hebrew poet uses colorful and intricate word-pictures. Pastor and author Charles Swindoll says, “This simple couplet drips with poetic allusion and metaphor, conveying practical, comforting wisdom that no parent can afford to miss.”<sup>5</sup> Two key Hebrew terms unlock its meaning. The first is translated “train up.” What does it really mean to train up your child?

The Hebrew verb (*hanakh*) translated “train up” occurs four times in the Bible. On three occasions, it refers to dedicating a home or building (Deuteronomy 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63, and 2 Chronicles 7:5). The verb refers to rearing a child once. Thus, in the same way we might dedicate a building to a specific purpose and for the glory of God, parents should actively commit their children to a holy course of action and devote themselves to their children’s aid along the way.

Closely related to the word translated “train up” is an Arabic word that refers to the roof or lower part of the mouth. This use of the word pictures the actions of a midwife dipping her finger into a bowl of crushed dates and then massaging the newborn’s palate and gums. She does this to stimulate the sucking instinct the infant must learn for breastfeeding. In other words, the midwife simply encourages the kind of learned behavior that comes naturally to the child.

In other closely related Semitic languages, another picture emerges from the world of horse training that is related to *hanakh*. Imagine a horse with a rope and bit in its mouth. The trainer uses a bridle to bring the powerful, spirited animal under control. Got the pictures?

Now let's talk about the phrase "in the way he should go." The first question is whose way, the parent's way or the child's? Clearly, this proverb is talking about the child's way. However, this is not an argument for child-centered parenting, which we debunked earlier. Nor is this couplet saying that parents should encourage a child to follow an unholy way that seems natural to his sinful nature. That is the last thing parents should do.

Every child is born with a sin nature and a bent toward evil. It doesn't take long to figure that out. Temper tantrums emerge as early as the terrible twos, if not before. It becomes even more obvious as a child gets older and especially as they enter the teenage years. Proverbs bluntly says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (22:15). This Old Testament wisdom literature also points out that youth lack the kind of sense needed to make wise moral choices (Proverbs 7:7). Should a child go in God's way? Absolutely! Parents should always encourage wise, godly behavior, especially when the child insists his foolish, sinful behavior is the most natural way for him to live.

More likely, though, the verse under consideration in Proverbs encourages parents to train up their child in a way that takes into consideration his natural strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. Some children are athletic, others are artistic, and still others are academic. The rare child is all three. Your child has a unique personality and temperament. Some are quiet; others are outgoing. Some are real go-getters; others are more passive, letting others take the lead. Spiritual gifts and natural talents come into play, too. Likewise, when training up your children in the Lord, some need a firm hand and lots of rules sprinkled with love; others need the encouragement to step out of their comfort zone and to take risks. The point is to go to school on your kids. Study their tendencies – their likes, dislikes, successes, and failures – so that you can encourage them to go in the natural way God made them. Celebrate your child's strengths, help strengthen their weaknesses, and

accept their limitations.

In the movie *The Blind Side*, actor Sandra Bullock plays Leigh Anne Tuohy, the strong but compassionate woman who adopted a young, directionless boy named Michael Oher, the future offensive tackle for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens. One day, Michael's high school football coach was having a difficult time getting Michael to understand the game of football. As an offensive lineman, he was supposed to protect the quarterback. But Michael was new to the game and it just wasn't happening on the field.

That is when Michael's mother, Mrs. Tuohy, walked onto the football field, interrupted practice, and had a conversation with "Big Mike." During the next set of plays, Michael protected his teammates like a seasoned pro. Perplexed and embarrassed, Michael's coach walked over to his mother and asked, "Okay, what did you say to him?"

"You don't get Michael!" she said pointedly to the coach. "On his entrance exams, he scored over ninety percent in protective instincts. Had you known that about him, you would coach him differently."

How would you parent, coach, or mentor your child if you knew him or her better?

Combining all pictures and concepts, we can loosely paraphrase Proverbs 22:6 this way: "Go to school on your child until you understand the unique way God made him, and then encourage him in that way. When your child learns and accepts the most natural way for him to live, he will not depart from it."

Living in harmony with God's design for you is one of the greatest discoveries of life. A good parent invests time, effort, and money to help his or her child make that discovery. It may take years and a lot of trial and error to get there, not to mention some tears, but that is part of life and family life.

Ring! Ring! Do you hear the school bell ringing? It's time to get up and go to school on your kids.



*From a Mother's Heart*  
THE FAMILY MEAL

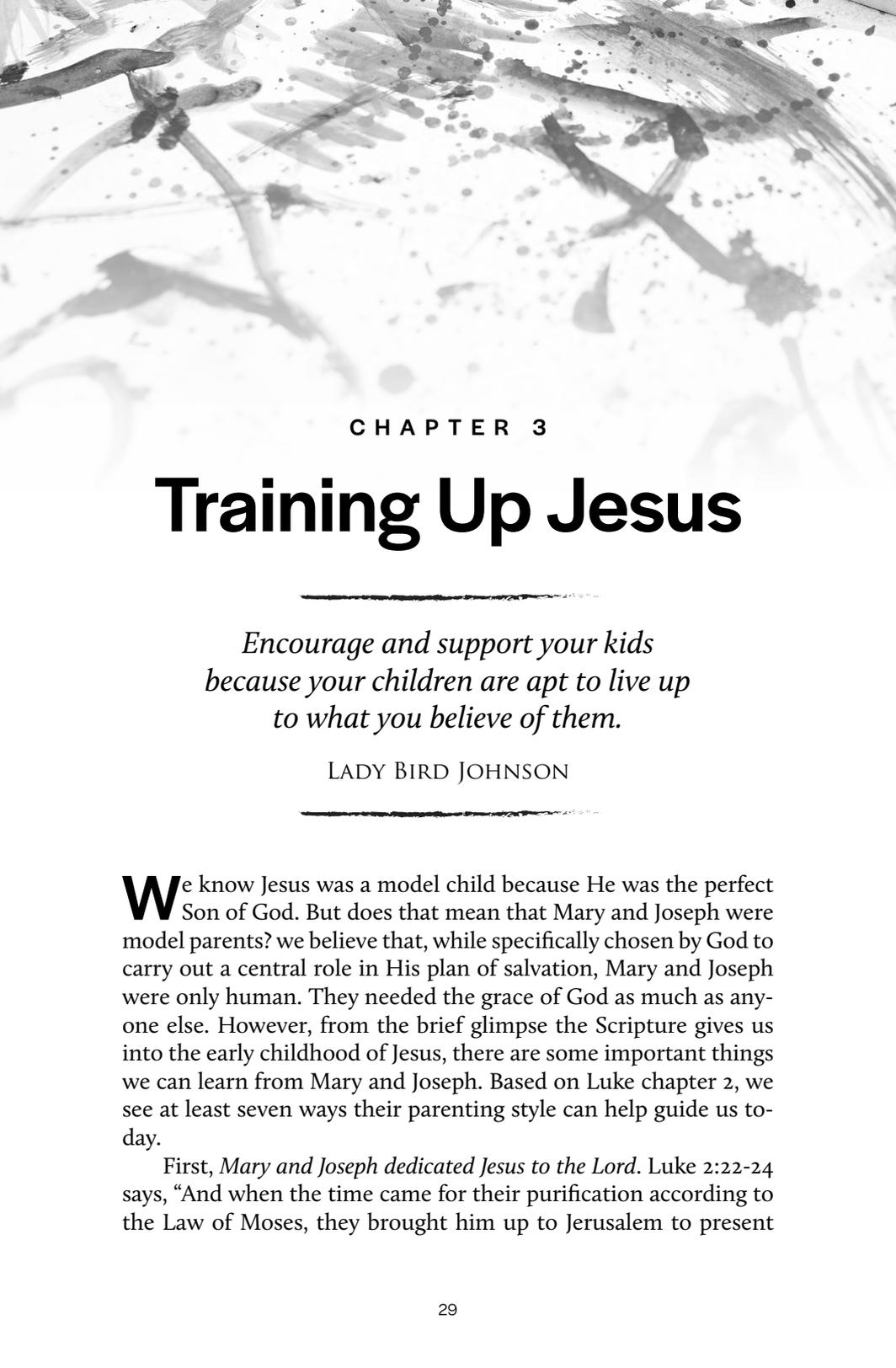
Whatever happened to the family meal? According to the Food Marketing Institute, only 40 percent of families eat together, and when they do, only two to three times per week.<sup>6</sup> This rings true in our experience with people over the years. Ron and I once met a busy family that told us they did not have time for a regular family meal, so they did what they called “grazing,” which for them meant grabbing something to eat in the kitchen while on the run. If there was any family interaction around a meal, it was an accident and it usually happened standing up. There was always plenty of food in the refrigerator. But there was no time for sitting down and having a real conversation around a prepared meal.

Ron and I both grew up in homes where the family meal was important and valued. We carried that custom forward in our family. I cook. Ron cleans up. That works best for us. He also serves as the grill master. The dinner table was and is the place we connect as a family, laugh, listen, and tell each other about our day. On special occasions, we even pull out the red plate that says, “You are special today!” We always made it a big deal to have someone’s meal served on the red plate at the Jones family dinner table. That may sound like a throwback to the “Leave It to Beaver” days, but for us it has always been an important part of family life.

Years ago, we also learned about something called the “convivium” from our friends Randy and Rozanne Frazee. Convivium is the Latin word for “feast” where the table is the centerpiece of family life and community. At times, our family meals included friends and neighbors through our participation in a life group, a smaller extension of our church family. In his book *Making Room for Life*, Randy writes, “The table is the centerpiece and heart of community. This is an ancient belief, a tradition that stood the test of time. The ‘making room for life’ vision is to come to the table, to share a meal and conversation with a circle of family and friends each evening. It is no mistake that Jesus chose the meal as the place where the community remembers his saving work on the cross.”<sup>7</sup>

Even if the family meal has not been part of your regular family rhythm, you can start today. Plan a meal in your home for the express purpose of feeding your body and soul through good food and meaningful conversation with family and friends. You might be surprised when your kids say, “Can we do this again tomorrow night?”





CHAPTER 3

# Training Up Jesus

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*Encourage and support your kids  
because your children are apt to live up  
to what you believe of them.*

LADY BIRD JOHNSON

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**W**e know Jesus was a model child because He was the perfect Son of God. But does that mean that Mary and Joseph were model parents? We believe that, while specifically chosen by God to carry out a central role in His plan of salvation, Mary and Joseph were only human. They needed the grace of God as much as anyone else. However, from the brief glimpse the Scripture gives us into the early childhood of Jesus, there are some important things we can learn from Mary and Joseph. Based on Luke chapter 2, we see at least seven ways their parenting style can help guide us today.

First, *Mary and Joseph dedicated Jesus to the Lord*. Luke 2:22-24 says, “And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present

him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'"

Mary and Joseph raised Jesus in a home that practiced Judaism. According to their customs and the Law of Moses, they brought Jesus to the temple forty days after He was born and dedicated Him to the Lord. Although it is not Luke's emphasis, the Law also required Mary's purification after she gave birth. This overall passage mentions the Law of Moses five times, an indication that it played a central role in Jesus's moral training.

In a similar way, at our church we invite parents to bring their newborns and young children to a worship gathering, typically on Mother's Day, and dedicate them to the Lord. It is one of our favorite days of the year in the life of the church. Such a day gives parents the opportunity to make a public commitment before God, their family, and the church. They express their intention to spiritually nurture their child in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and in a way that leads the child to love God and others. In turn, the church family expresses their commitment to support these beautiful families by providing a spiritual environment where they can grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Have you dedicated your children to the Lord? If your church does not offer a way for you to do so, consider a special gathering at your home with family and friends where you can consecrate your children for a sacred purpose.

Second, *Mary and Joseph practiced family worship by attending the major religious festivals.* Luke 2:41 says, "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover." Flashback in your mind to the Psalms of Ascent (chapters 120-134) and picture Mary, Joseph, and Jesus traveling in a caravan to the Holy City for the Passover celebration. Picture them with their many extended family and friends. Imagine them going up to Jerusalem and singing the songs in the psalter, especially Psalm 127, which begins, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." As you imagine this scene, make the decision to prioritize family worship in your own tribe. For all of the reasons we discussed in chapter 1, this can be a challenge for Christian parents to implement.

Third, *Jesus received formal and informal religious training*. Luke 2:42-47 records one of the most rare and fascinating stories about Jesus's boyhood. Read it slowly and carefully.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple at the age of twelve. This was the age a young Jewish boy became obliged to observe the law during a special celebration called his Bar Mitzvah.

We can easily imagine the panic in the hearts of Jesus's earthly parents when they discovered He was missing from the caravan. When I was a young boy, I was part of a YMCA kid's program called Indian Guides. One day, my dad and I traveled with our club on the train from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to visit the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry located on the beautiful Lake Michigan shore. All day long we enjoyed the interactive museum exhibits and then boarded the train home that night. Half way home, one of the other dads noticed his child was missing. No kidding. As soon as we arrived at the train station in Fort Wayne, Mr. Palmer returned to Chicago and thankfully located his son Steve. It was like a story right off the pages of Luke chapter 2.

A day's journey back to Jerusalem must have felt like a year for Mary and Joseph. Today, parents freak out, and rightly so, when they turn around in a Walmart and find that their child has wandered into the next aisle. Mary and Joseph bear no shame in their concern. However, a smile quickly comes to my face when I learn from the story that Jesus remained in Jerusalem to further His moral and spiritual training informally with the teachers in the temple. When they found their son in the temple astounding the teachers with His understanding of Scripture, Mary and Joseph just scratched their heads. All of it says something about Jesus's

deep hunger for the word of God even at an early age.

As the Son of God, Jesus might have been an exceptionally gifted child when it came to understanding Scripture, but the underlying principle applies: moral and spiritual training cannot start too early in the life of a child. Nor should parents underestimate a child's ability to grasp the gospel. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is simple enough for a child to understand and sophisticated enough to challenge the hard-hearted skeptic. We began reading the Bible to our kids even before they could read and understand the printed page. There are many age-appropriate Bibles to aid parents in this stage of spiritual training. At our church, we also celebrate a child's first Bible when they get a little older and can read. We make a big deal of parents presenting a copy of the word of God to their child.

Fourth, *Mary and Joseph exposed Jesus to the positive influence of an authentic spiritual community.* Again, picture Mary, Joseph, and Jesus traveling in a caravan to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. The Bible says they were among "relatives and acquaintances." The idea that it takes a village to raise a child has some merit. A child's regular exposure to aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents is hugely beneficial. Growing up in Indiana, some of my best memories are the vacations we took with extended family and the holidays we spent together. However, even if you don't have a large extended family, we are still called to communal living (Acts 2:42-47). "Acquaintances" were also part of the caravan mentioned in Luke chapter 2. Those acquaintances provide us with a picture of families doing life and ministry together with kindred spirits and in authentic biblical community.

Over the years, our kids benefitted from us connecting as a family in a spiritual community called a life group, a smaller extension of our church family. Because our life group experience was always intergenerational, our children enjoyed the fellowship of other kids, but they also had many spiritual influences from across a spectrum of ages. Other men, both my peers and older, got to know my son and poured their wisdom into him. That happened as our life group shared meals, served the community, prayed, and talked about how the word of God applied to our lives. Because our life group gathered regularly in our home, and continues to do so, our son and daughter got to experience other families living

out their faith and talking about Jesus in a natural and authentic setting. We cannot overstate the value of this community in our family life over time. When we moved to serve a different church in another city, our kids wanted to make sure we would connect with a life group when we arrived. It was as important to them as their sports teams.

Fifth, *Mary and Joseph taught Jesus to respect authority*. Following the brief exchange between Jesus and His earthly parents when they found Him in the temple, Luke 2:50-51 says, “And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.”

Somewhere along the way, Jesus learned to respect parental authority. That is what the word “submissive” implies. I know that word has fallen out of favor today, but we must all learn to submit to proper, God-given authority. That includes respecting government authorities (Romans 13:1-7), parental authority (Ephesians 6:1), leaders in the church (Hebrews 13:17), and, yes, wives respecting their husbands—as husbands love their wives (Ephesians 5:22-33). God designed the nuclear family in such a way that it is the place where children first learn to respect authority. It is not too hard to see how the precipitous disrespect for authority in our present culture is a direct result of the ongoing breakdown of the family.

But how do parents, especially fathers, establish their authority in a way that does not provoke their children to anger? (Ephesians 6:1-4) Start early, avoid physical or verbal abuse, and remember the wisdom of Proverbs 22:15, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” If you do not tame the beast early in a child’s heart, he or she will live a foolhardy life.

Establishing proper biblical authority also starts by avoiding the pitfalls of the child-centered home we talked about in Chapter 1. No must mean no, not maybe, and “because I am the parent and I said so” is still a reasonable answer. It may not always work, but a child must clearly understand the authority God gave to parents in the home. That said, remember the McDowell principle: rules without relationship leads to rebellion. The opposite produces an equally bad result. Relationship without parents enforcing mean-

ingful boundaries often results in raising a spoiled brat that grows to become an entitled adult.

The Bible says that Jesus also learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). Think about that the next time you would rather be your child's best friend than her parent who administers discipline. God often uses hard times and consequences to produce an obedient heart in us. Permissive parents that fail to properly discipline their kids get in the way of this biblical way of tutoring a child. We will say more about discipline in chapter 4.

Sixth, *Mary and Joseph affirmed God's plan for Jesus's life*. Let's take another look at the scene when Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple. The young Savior explained His actions respectfully by saying, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) Then the Scripture says, "And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart" (v. 51). There is no mention of Joseph's reaction, but that does not surprise us. Perhaps he was the strong but silent type in the home. This early childhood narrative speaks further to Mary's understanding of Jesus's mission in life. She would spend the rest of her life coming to terms with her Son's divine purpose—pondering it, praying over it, and working to help Jesus move toward that mission to the best of her ability.

Accepting and affirming God's plan for your child's life is vital to his or her healthy transition into adulthood. You might not fully understand that plan, but the importance of celebrating what your child believes to be his or her purpose in life, and also what God impresses upon your heart as their purpose, cannot be overestimated.

Finally, *Jesus grew in a healthy and balanced way*. What resulted from the parental investment Mary and Joseph made in the life of their son? Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." He grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. Furthermore, the larger arc of Jesus's life and ministry shows that He never once retreated from the Father's plan for Him to serve as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When Jesus was older, He did not depart from His spiritual training, even when sweaty drops of blood fell from his body in the Garden of Gethsemane, resulting from the stress of the cross He would endure hours later (Luke 22).

Our children will never be Jesus, the perfect Son of God and Savior of the world. However, we can learn much from the way Mary and Joseph trained Him up.



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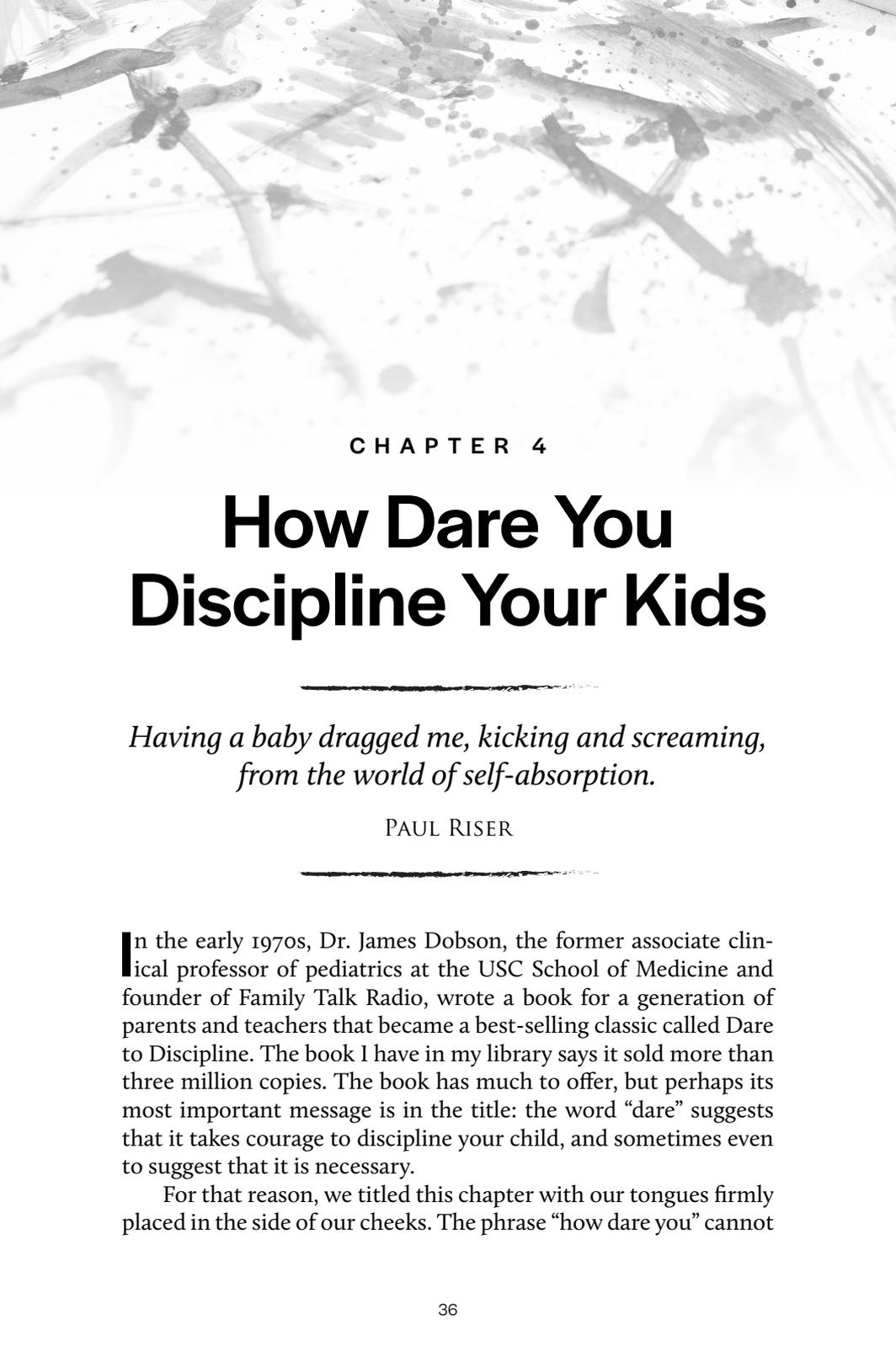
*From a Mother's Heart*  
**TURNING MOMENTS  
INTO MEMORIES**

A mother's heart is like a patchwork quilt of moments she spends with her family over the years. Family life is full of design, color, and textured experiences that time stitches together into a larger coverlet of memories.

That is why I encourage young mothers to record everyday moments with their children. They may not seem like much until you look back at them years later. Record with photos, video, scrapbooks, even quilts. Writing down your thoughts and reflections in a journal is a good idea, too. A journal (or the flyleaf of your Bible) is also the place to record the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit about your children.

For example, on the inside of my Bible I recorded a moment when the Holy Spirit prompted me to pray for my son's wife when he was still in elementary school. How crazy is that? However, the prompting was so strong that I pulled over the car and prayed with tears running down my cheeks. I then recorded the time and date in my Bible, thinking that one day when I meet my future daughter-in-law, I will ask her what she was doing at that very moment.

Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, said, "Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory." Find some way of your own choosing to record your family history as your kids grow through the stages of childhood development. You'll be glad you did when your toddler becomes a teenager and then a young adult. A full appreciation of each moment with your family, even the difficult ones, comes only with the passing of time.



## CHAPTER 4

# How Dare You Discipline Your Kids

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*Having a baby dragged me, kicking and screaming,  
from the world of self-absorption.*

PAUL RISER

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**I**n the early 1970s, Dr. James Dobson, the former associate clinical professor of pediatrics at the USC School of Medicine and founder of Family Talk Radio, wrote a book for a generation of parents and teachers that became a best-selling classic called *Dare to Discipline*. The book I have in my library says it sold more than three million copies. The book has much to offer, but perhaps its most important message is in the title: the word “dare” suggests that it takes courage to discipline your child, and sometimes even to suggest that it is necessary.

For that reason, we titled this chapter with our tongues firmly placed in the side of our cheeks. The phrase “how dare you” cannot

be said without wagging a finger in someone's face. It also conveys the skepticism some family therapists possess toward the practice of disciplining children, a skepticism we do not share. Some psychologists prefer to let children discover themselves through freedom and a lack of restraints. They tell parents to relax and try to understand their child when his behavior devolves into defiance, believing the child will naturally develop into a sweet, loving, and compliant person. Frankly, this view of children could not be more misguided. Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child."

Imagine a coach saying, "I believe every athlete will eventually become an Olympian. I don't worry about hard work and sweat in the gym, nor do I impose curfews on the athlete's time and sleep habits. Physical discipline only stifles an athlete's ability to become his or her best self." Are you kidding? That coach would not send many athletes to the Olympics.

Perhaps one reason the word discipline has fallen on hard times is because we don't know the difference between discipline and punishment in the home. The difference is more than semantics. Punishment aims at hurting the child, physically or emotionally, and is born of hostility in the parent's heart toward the child. Discipline, on the other hand, aims at correcting the child and overflows from the love in a parent's heart toward the child. When you are tempted to punish your child for bad behavior, remember this: you are not running a penal system, nor are you wardens; rather, you are building a family and you are father and mother to your children. Loving correction is always better than harsh punishment.

As we touched on in the first chapter, when it comes to child-rearing philosophies, the pendulum swings easily between authoritarian parents who rule the household like South American dictators and well-intentioned but permissive parents who allow their children to rule themselves. Balanced and biblically based parenting advice still runs against the popular pabulum found in most family therapy circles. However, everyone can agree when Dr. Dobson says, "Many parents today grew up without proper role models at home. They have no clear vision of what it means to be a good mother or father."<sup>8</sup>

## WHY CHILDREN SHOULD OBEY THEIR PARENTS

Family counsel ebbs and flows from one generation to the next, but God's word stands the test of time. That is why we return to the Bible for more plain talk about raising kids who love God. Not surprisingly, the word "discipline" appears in the Bible's discussion of child rearing in Ephesians 6:1-4. Let's take a closer look.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

This passage provides answers to two important questions: first, why should children obey their parents? Second, what is a father's responsibility in the home? Let's tackle the first question first. God's word tells us four simple reasons children should obey their parents.

First, children should obey their parents because *it is what Christian kids do in a Christian home*. The phrase "in the Lord" implies this reason. A child's faith in Jesus Christ should make him or her a better child in the home in the same way that our faith should make us better citizens of our country. We build a Christian home on the foundation of biblical principles because we believe God created the home as the primary place for making disciples that bring glory to Him.

Second, children should also obey their parents because *it is the right thing to do*. Go back to verse 1 and circle the phrase "for this is right." How simple is that? Sure, it gets complicated in a culture that rejects truth and morality. But in a Christian home, parents shape their children's hearts by the moral authority of God's holy word. They teach them right from wrong. Of course, if parents tell their children to do something wrong, like rob a bank with them, parents should not expect their children to obey them. Nor should children feel the pressure to obey their parents in those cases. Obeying is the right thing to do only when children are told to do what is right.

Third, children should obey their parents because *God commands it*. It is no accident that the apostle Paul inserts the Fifth

Commandment into the conversation, which says, “Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Again, moral authority in the Christian home comes from the word of God, starting with the Ten Commandments.

Whatever happened to the Ten Commandments as a moral code used in the training of children? Not too long ago parents taught them to their kids and schools posted them on the classroom walls. National monuments in Washington, D.C., have the Decalogue and other biblical references chiseled into them. Even Moses is prominently displayed on the pediment of the east entrance to the Supreme Court Building. The man who met with God on Mount Sinai is also inside the court chamber on the upper marble frieze to the left and right of the justices, along with seventeen other lawmakers from history. Some would like to sand blast all biblical references from America’s national monuments. But parents do well to point them out to their children and grandchildren, and we do well as a nation to welcome God into the public square as the Founders envisioned.

God expects a child to honor his parents. Obedience is the first way a child learns to express honor. However, mere external obedience is not the goal of honor or of the Fifth Commandment. A child can conform externally but still possess an insubordinate heart. We remember the story of the little boy whose mother wanted him to sit down but he refused. Finally she took hold of him and sat him down in the chair. He looked up at her with defiance in his eyes, and said, “You may make me sit down outside, but I’m still standing up inside!” We smile, but that story illustrates why a child also needs to understand the fourth reason he should obey his parents ... because *obedience yields blessing*.

The apostle Paul calls this command to honor one’s parents the “first commandment with a promise” (Ephesians 6:2). The promise is a good, long life. Solomon, who learned the Scriptures from his father, winks to the promises inherent in the Fifth Commandment when he instructs his own family, “My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you” (Proverbs 3:1-2). Earlier in his book of wise sayings, the son of King David writes, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake

not your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 1:8).

## THE CHRISTIAN FATHER

Let's return to Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4. It reads, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The first word of the verse could be translated and applied to parents in general, but the emphasis is on fathers for a reason. From God's perspective, the responsibility for what happens in the home falls upon fathers. The Bible's clear plan is for the father and mother to raise their children together before the Lord. But at the end of the age and at the final judgment, it is the father who will be held most responsible for the family outcome because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

We realize that an emphasis on the father's role in the home might discourage some single mothers, or wives who do not have the spiritual support of a Christian husband. Do not despair. No family situation is hopeless when you invite God into it. In fact, He stands ready to fill the gap created by a missing, passive, unspiritual, or otherwise deadbeat dad. Psalm 68:5 says that God is a "father to the fatherless [and] a defender of the widows." That means an extra measure of His sustaining grace and lovingkindness flows from heaven toward widows and single mothers. God has a special place in His heart for them. Later, the psalmist says, "The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the fatherless and widows" (146:9). Though difficult, single parents can draw upon an endless supply of God's goodness and grace as they bring up their children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord.

Keep in mind that when the apostle Paul wrote this text to the Ephesians, he upset the entire social order of his day. In *Successful Christian Parenting*, John MacArthur makes this historical note:

Rome had a law called *patria potestas* ("the father's power"). This principle gave men who were full Roman citizens absolute property rights over their own families. The children, the wife, and even the slaves were regarded as the patriarch's personal chattel, and he could do with them as he wished. By law,

he has full authority to dispose of all family matters, or family *members*, in whatever way pleased him.<sup>9</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine how this Roman law led to all kinds of family abuse. Then, it was customary to place a newborn child between the father's feet. If the father picked up the child, the child went home with him. Otherwise, the child was either left to die or sold at auction. These unwanted children often faced a life of prostitution and slavery. According to Seneca, one of Paul's contemporaries, some children were treated no better than mad dogs. "Children born weak or deformed were drown."<sup>10</sup> This practice in an ancient culture sounds barbaric to us. But are we any better after aborting millions of unwanted babies each year?

Two thousand years ago, Ephesians 6:1-4 introduced parents, especially fathers in a male-domineering society, to their responsibility to discipline and nurture their children, as well as provide them with uplifting, biblical instruction. The rest of verse 4 contains both negative and positive instruction for fathers. Negatively, a father should not provoke his children to anger. What does this mean? Let's dig deeper.

Two Greek words describe the various depths of anger. *Thumos* is explosive anger; the kind you can see, for example, when someone loses his temper. Picture a firework that goes bang! This sort of anger flashes and pops, but it does not necessarily linger in a person's heart. *Orge* is anger of a different kind. Words like quiet, inner, and hidden apply. Like the root system of a plant, *orge* travels beneath the surface and deep into the human heart; it strengthens over time, making it a most dangerous and insidious form of anger. My purpose in taking you deeper into the Greek language is to point out that *orge*—the anger that is difficult to see—is the word Paul uses when warning fathers not to provoke their children to anger.

A biblical counselor named Lou Priolo wrote an excellent and thought-provoking book called *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children*. Pictured on the cover is a young boy, approximately twelve years old, with his arms folded across his chest, chin tilted downward, lips pursed, and a scowl on his face. Sound familiar? Before offering biblical counsel for how to deal with an angry child, Priolo lists twenty-five ways

parents provoke their children to anger. Some of the more obvious ways include:

- Lack of marital harmony
- Establishing and maintaining a child-centered home
- Modeling sinful anger
- Habitually disciplining while angry
- Scolding
- Inconsistent discipline
- Double standards
- Constantly finding fault
- Not praising or encouraging your child
- Abusing them physically

As parents, especially fathers, many of us fail to realize how our words and actions can actually sow seeds that sprout bitterness, anger, stubbornness, and rebellion in a child's heart. Proverbs 18:14 says, "A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" The same is true of a child. Is your child's spirit wounded or crushed because of you? As parents, that's a difficult question to answer honestly.

What can parents do for an angry child? How does a father not provoke his children to anger? And, should the presence of anger in a child's heart change the way parents exercise discipline in the home?

These are huge questions that deserve more than pat answers. For starters, the best way to avoid inciting anger in your children is to ruthlessly self-examine your parent-child interaction by reviewing Priolo's list. Then, take responsibility for your shortcomings as a parent. Parents are not perfect any more than kids are. Admitting your failures to yourself and God is the place to start. That takes honesty, confession, and repentance. Admitting your failures to your children might also help rebuild the lost trust and respect that can occur when children see you erupt in anger or fall short in other ways. That requires love, courage, and authenticity.

Before responding to a child with corrective action, parents should also take a deep breath and try to discern what is triggering the child's bad behavior. Is the child exhibiting mere childish irresponsibility? Is he acting out of fear or anger brought on by your words or actions? Or, are his actions a direct challenge to your pa-

rental authority? The idea is to measure the corrective response according to the trigger. The third category—a challenge to your parental authority—requires the most direct response. Any challenge to parental authority must be met with a decisive response that says, “We are the parents. You are the child. You are not the boss!”

None of this minimizes the real source of rebellion in your child. A child’s heart, like his or her parent’s, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Pastor and author John MacArthur writes, “Your child’s heart is a battlefield where sin and righteousness are in conflict.”<sup>11</sup> Theology, not psychology, provides us with the best way to understand our kids. Your child’s biggest problem is not a lack of maturity, understanding, or experience. His environment is not the reason for his insurgency. Rather, David explained the root of the problem in all of us: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). Solomon, King David’s son, concurred wisely, in a verse we’ve mentioned several times already, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

Because a child’s heart is sinful and foolish, parents, especially fathers, must bring their children up in the Lord. Children will not get there by themselves. The phrase “bring them up” suggests the active rather than passive involvement of the child’s parents, including the administration of proper discipline in the home. But how far does discipline go?

## THE ROD OF DISCIPLINE

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon makes it clear that one way to deal with a child’s foolish heart is with the rod. For example, in addition to Proverbs 22:15, consider these wise axioms. Proverbs 13:24 says, “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” Proverbs 23:13-14 add, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.” Finally, Proverbs 29:13 says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” To spank, or not

to spank; Solomon, not Shakespeare, answers that question.

As noted earlier, the word “discipline” appears in Ephesians 6:4. The King James Bible translates the word “nurture.” We like how that translation conveys the heart of discipline—to support and encourage during a period of training and development—even when the rod is used. To speak of spanking raises concerns, especially in a culture that is rightly sensitive to child abuse. Does a three-thousand-year-old text that advocates the rod in child rearing have any relevance to us today? We have enough confidence in the Bible to say yes, because it is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

However, let us be clear. Any use of spanking that physically hurts a child is absolutely wrong. If the use of corporal discipline creates a bruise, welt, or worse on the child’s backside, parents have gone too far. Remember, loving correction not punishment is what biblical discipline is all about. It goes without saying but is worth mentioning that an angry parent should never administer spanking, nor should one that has a history of child abuse. We also believe that corporal discipline is not the job of grandparents, unless the child’s parents give the permission to do so.

The mere threat of paddling can serve as an effective deterrent in a child’s heart. When I was in elementary school, the principal possessed a reputation that placed fear in the hearts of students. His name was Mr. Coleman, but my friends and I called him Mean Ole’ Mr. Coleman. Legend said that he had a paddle in his office and he wasn’t afraid to use it.

One day, I got sent to the principal’s office. I sat in Mean Ole’ Mr. Coleman’s waiting room outside his office, and there it was. His legendary paddle was hanging on the wall behind his desk in plain view. I was terrified. I waited and waited for Mr. Coleman to return to his office. When he did, he called me in. He took a seat behind his desk and began interrogating me. All the while he was questioning my bad behavior, I could see his paddle hanging on the wall over his right shoulder. Because I was so scared of Mr. Coleman using his paddle, he sounded to me like Charlie Brown’s teacher—wah, wah, wah. I breathed a sigh of adolescent relief when he released me with a stern verbal warning but without ever turning around and reaching for his paddle. Actually, Mr. Coleman was not as mean as everyone said he was. I never returned to the

principal's office again for bad behavior.

On the matter of spanking, Dr. Dobson writes,

In my opinion, spankings should be reserved for the moment a child (between the age of eighteen months to ten years old) expresses to parents a defiant "I will not" or "You shut up!" When youngsters convey this kind of stiff-necked rebellion, you must be willing to respond to the challenge immediately. When nose-to-nose confrontation occurs between you and your child, it is not the time to discuss the virtues of obedience. It is not the occasion to send him to his room to pout. Nor is it appropriate to postpone disciplinary measures until your tired spouse plods home from work.<sup>12</sup>

An undisciplined life is an accident waiting to happen. That is why parents must create reasonable boundaries for their children. Doing so in a way that also teaches them the virtue of self-control is wise because the Christian life requires discipline. The apostle Paul says to Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). For this reason, parents dare not shy away from correcting their children in a loving manner, and must seek the Holy Spirit's help in doing so (Galatians 5:22-23).



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*From a Mother's Heart*  
**THE EMPTY NEST**

The day our kids left for college was almost as life changing as the day they were born. Because the difference in our children's ages is only fifteen months, the empty nest came abruptly. As soon as we sent our first child away to college (fourteen hours by car), we were making plans to send the second child away one year later. For years, we anticipated this transition in our family. Ron even says he thought about the day the kids went to college on the day they were born. That's the visionary in him, always thinking ahead.

But I'm more of a day-to-day person. Sometimes I did my best to emotionally ignore the approaching reality of our kid's departure. When the days finally arrived for our children to leave, this mother's heart grew sad and excited at the same time.

I was excited for the new adventures that awaited them. They were now young adults. No more carpools or volunteering at the Little League snack stand for me. That made me sad. No more curfews for them. They were happy to make their own schedules, coming and going as they please. Ron and I both have fond memories of our college years. We were excited for our kids to grow intellectually, spiritually, and relationally. We were also pleased to see them chase after their dreams and discover their divine destiny.

However, were Ron and I ready for the empty nest? Honestly, for the first couple of weeks it was strange. We didn't know what to do. The house was quiet. Sometimes we stared awkwardly at each other. Time was ours again. Intentionally, we embraced the opportunity to reconnect as husband and wife. We started praying and dreaming again. "Lord, if You are kind enough to give us another twenty years, what do they look like?" We believe the great adventure of our life and ministry continues. Maybe it's just getting started.

You might be saying, "I wish my kids would leave!" It's true that many young adults fail to launch out on their own. The boomerang generation is real. Many of them are back living in their parent's basement. What's going on with this generation? Are parents failing to raise their children in a way that makes it easy and natural for them to leave? Are helicopter and lawnmower parents reaping the seeds they have sown in the hearts of their kids — seeds of dependence not independence? In addition to teaching our kids to love God and love people, we must also teach them the value of hard work, thrift, and individual responsibility.

The transition to college is not the only time our kids will leave. Another time is coming, if the Lord wills, when they will both meet someone special and get married. It might seem really strange to mention "leaving and cleaving" in a book about parenting. What does a marriage principle from the book of Genesis have to do with raising kids who love God? More than you think. Part of our job as parents is to get our kids ready to leave ... and then let

them leave in a way that sets them free to become everything God created them to be.

The empty nest is easy or hard to accept depending on the expectations we allow to rise in our own hearts. Ron and I anticipate the day positively when our kids get married because them leaving and cleaving does not mean us losing. On that blissful day, we gain a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law rather than lose a son or daughter. Besides, there are always grandkids to look forward to. More gain. Stay tuned.





CHAPTER 5

# Drive-Time Parenting

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*We cannot always build the future for our youth,  
but we can build our youth for the future.*

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

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**M**y wife loves to drive in the car. She says it's therapeutic for her. Her idea of a great family vacation starts by packing up the SUV, backing out of the garage, and driving for hours, even days, to get to our desired destination. For Cathryn, the journey is as enjoyable as the destination. I, on the other hand, prefer to fly. For me, relaxation starts when I finally slump into a chair on the beach and feel the warm glow of the sun on my face.

Cathryn gets her love for driving on the open road from her father. He made it his goal in life to visit just about every family vacation spot in America, and did so by car. He even had a map of the United States in his home and placed a pushpin on every location to which the Dibble family traveled. At the end of his life,

the map was covered from sea to shining sea with various colored pushpins.

I must admit that driving on the open road as a family did provide memorable experiences for the Jones family. And, the time spent in the car gave us the opportunity to enjoy conversations we might not have had otherwise. Those conversations happened with our kids not only during family vacations, which we highly recommend, but also when traveling to and from school, ball-games, and church. They happened at the breakfast and dinner table, too. Without forcing family worship into a compartmentalized time in our home, Cathryn and I instead looked for ways to permeate our family life with God's truth as we did our best to live out our faith authentically before the kids. We call it drive-time parenting, and it's the way we raised kids who love God.

Of course, the automobile is a relatively recent invention in human history. But as a concept, drive-time parenting goes back nearly three thousand years. What exactly is drive-time parenting? We define it as the integration of religious education into family life through the natural conversations and teachable moments parents enjoy with their kids. We actually get the idea from Deuteronomy chapter 6. Let's start by reading these ancient words recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Where's Moses when we need him most? The ancient lawgiver and leader of the Israeli exodus was truly a giant in his time. He not only confronted Pharaoh and successfully gained the release of the Hebrews after 430 years of Egyptian slavery, but he also led the Israelites through forty years of wilderness wanderings. Through many ups and downs, Moses led them to the edge of the Prom-

ised Land where the Lord told him he would die before the people crossed the Jordan River. The book of Deuteronomy records six speeches Moses delivered to a new generation of Israelites that would take possession of Canaan under Joshua's leadership. These verses from Deuteronomy 6 are among Moses's farewell speeches, his final imploring to the adult children and grandchildren of the generation that came out of Egypt.

Why travel into the Old Testament for more plain talk about raising kids who love God? As Christians, we are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). However, the New Testament reinforces all of God's moral code with the exception of the Sabbath commandment, which Jesus repurposed as Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-21). Plus, the Old Testament Scriptures reveal much about the person and nature of God while providing many examples, both positive and negative, from which to learn (1 Corinthians 10:6). It should not surprise us that God, through Moses, addresses family life. We can learn much from a glimpse inside the Hebrew home. Let's take a closer look.

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Raising kids who love God is another way of talking about a child's religious education. Deuteronomy chapter 6 tells us that a child's religious training starts in the parent's heart. That's right, it starts with a dad and mom! Speaking to the next generation of Hebrew parents, Moses says, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart." Before we get to the heart of the matter, what words was Moses talking about? Let's drop back to the start of the chapter for a look.

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and

that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 6:1-3)

Moses reminds the Israelites of the Lord's statutes, rules, and commandments which they learned over the years and under his leadership. He encourages them to "fear" or respect the Lord by keeping all of His commands for all the days of their life. If they do, they will enjoy all the good the land offers.

Moses also envisions the whole counsel of God written on the hearts of parents. How well do you know the word of God? Imagine ordering a laptop computer that arrives with only half of the operating system it needs. That computer would not serve you well. In the same way, God's moral code is like an operating system in our hearts when we place ourselves under the Lord's authority. Parents are well equipped to raise children who love God if they are familiar with the word of God and, from their heart, draw upon it to raise their children.

Why is it so important that parents have the word of God on their hearts? Jesus told us that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Think about it. Nobody has a greater opportunity to speak into the life of a child than do his or her parents. The words parents speak to their children matter and shape them for good, for bad, and for life. Therefore, parents must feed their hearts with the Holy Scriptures, and then pray, "May the words of my mouth be pleasing to you, O Lord, and pleasing to the hearts of my children."

In verses 4 and 5, Moses goes on to encourage his listeners to love God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you love God completely? It is difficult to teach your children to love God if a genuine love for God does not reside deeply in your own heart. How do you know if you truly love God? Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Moses and Jesus agree on this. We have more to say on this later.

Rarely does a child grow up to love God apart from the influence of a parent or grandparent. We are not saying it's impossible. Rather, God intended for the seed of faith that sprouts in a child's heart to come first from the influence of godly parents whose hearts are a tributary from which the word of God flows. That's plain talk you can take to heart.

## IT'S YOUR JOB, PARENTS!

Our friend Moses goes on to say in Deuteronomy, “You shall teach the commandments I am giving you diligently to your children.” The pronoun he uses at the beginning of the sentence is “you.” That means the responsibility for training up a child to know and love God rests with the parents, not the church or the Christian school. The church and the Christian school can certainly supplement and support what parents are already doing, but the spiritual responsibility is not transferable to an institution. Does that make you quake in your bones? It should because parenting is an awesome responsibility with eternal consequences.

Most parents we know spend a lot of time, energy, and money teaching their children how to play sports, dance, act in a theater, or play a musical instrument. Some parents teach their children to work with their hands, using tools to learn a trade and become a master craftsman. Others train their kids to take a role in the family business. All of that is good. But parents cannot afford to neglect the most important aspect of child training, teaching them to know God and walk with Him.

Moses’s advice is sage, but how do we put it into practice, practically speaking? What must parents do in order to carry out these duties faithfully? For starters, do you know God personally? If yes, can you introduce Him to your children? How well do you know the Bible? These questions are not meant to intimidate you. Nor are we suggesting that you need to enroll in a Bible college or seminary to parent your children. However, Second Timothy 2:15 encourages all believers, not exclusively pastors and missionaries, to study the Bible with the goal of “rightly handing the word of truth.” This, too, is the duty of Christian parents. But where do we begin?

Moses began with the knowledge of God and basic theology expressed as monotheism. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (v. 4). In Judaism, this is known as the Shema. For thousands of years, the Hebrew people have expressed the Shema as a confession of faith and have used it in their morning and evening prayers. Do you have a family Shema, a verse of Scripture that captures some basic theology to pass on to your children and grandchildren? John 3:16 is a good place to start with an emphasis on God’s love and eternal life: “For God so loved the world, that he

gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Moses followed the Shema with a summary of the law. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Jesus added “and your neighbor as yourself” in response to a question about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Basic theology like this is the hallmark of both the Hebrew and Christian home. As simple as it sounds, teach your kids to know God, love Him, and love their neighbors.

Brett Kavanaugh and his wife Ashley teach their two daughters to love God and their neighbors, even their political enemies. In 2018, Judge Kavanaugh was nominated by President Donald Trump to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. As it appeared the Senate would confirm Kavanaugh on the merits of his excellent judicial record, the confirmation hearings devolved into some of the most vicious personal attacks against a nominee in the history of our nation. Politics clearly played a role when a woman made sexual assault charges against Judge Kavanaugh based on an incident that allegedly happened thirty-six years ago when the two of them were high school students.

The spectacle played out on national television in a way that was not our country’s finest moment. During remarks made by the Judge in his own defense, he expressed no animosity toward the woman who accused him. Instead, while categorically denying the accusations and with a deep show of emotion, he revealed what his ten-year-old daughter said during their family prayers the night before, “We should pray for the woman!” Three cheers for the little girl! Hip, hip, hooray for the Kavanaughs for teaching their daughters well.

Furthermore, the first place a child should hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is in the home. The gospel is simple enough for a child to understand and, therefore, easy for Christian parents to communicate. Children also have a large capacity to believe. They believe to see rather than see to believe. Studies show that nine out of ten Christians express faith in Jesus before the age of eighteen.<sup>13</sup> This underscores the importance of parents sharing the gospel with their children as early as possible. Because a law never changes a human heart, the primary goal of Christian parenting is not behavior modification through a set of rules; rather, the goal

must be the redemption of the child's heart and soul through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Childlike faith is what Jesus encourages in all of us (Matthew 18:2). The specific age at which a child grasps and believes the gospel differs for each child. At whatever age faith is expressed, a child must demonstrate a reasonable understanding of why the facts of the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—apply to him or her (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). Children must also receive character training in the home. As we mentioned earlier, it's the parent's job to teach children right from wrong. This might be challenging in a culture that has rejected truth and morality. However, nobody can tell you how to raise your own children. As early as possible, read the Bible with your kids and teach them the Ten Commandments as a moral compass for their soul.

Years ago, William Bennett, Secretary of Education for President Ronald Reagan, did parents a favor by publishing a treasury of great moral stories called *The Book of Virtues*. Families in early American history often read the poems, Greek myths, fables, fiction, philosophy, and fairy tales he included. The repository of literature also reinforced biblical principles and taught important virtues like responsibility, courage, compassion, honesty, friendship and persistence. We are not suggesting the stories contained in *The Book of Virtues* are on par with the inspired word of God. However, the book's 830 pages do illustrate how important character training was to early American families. Long before families formed on the American frontier, Moses stood on the banks of the Jordan River, encouraging a generation of Hebrew parents to diligently teach their children the ways of Yahweh revealed in the Pentateuch.

Finally, the book of Proverbs also provides an inspired collection of wise sayings for everyday family life. Solomon penned much of it as a father to his sons. Parents should enthusiastically use Proverbs to teach their children to fear God, guard their minds, obey their parents, choose good friends, control their sexual desires, discipline their words, work hard, love neighbors, manage money, and more. Proverbs contains thirty-one chapters. As a family, read a chapter a day for one month and you will be wiser.

## THE EBB AND FLOW OF FAMILY LIFE

God designed the family in such a way that its natural ebb and flow provides the best context for a child's spiritual training. The close proximity of relationships within the family allows this to happen, and this is the essence of what we call drive-time parenting. Moses describes it to the next generation of Hebrew parents with a bit of rhetorical flare.

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. (Deuteronomy 6:7)

The idea is to look for those natural opportunities to have a spiritual dialogue with your kids. Take full advantage of the teachable moments. Speak God's truth into the everyday conversations of life. The rhythmic prose Moses uses pictures this happening at the start and end of each day, plus as opportunities present themselves throughout the day. What does this look like in the Jones family?

When our kids were little and the verbal interaction between the two of them became spirited, Cathryn would often quote Psalm 19:14 to them, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." It was her way of reminding the kids to guard the words that came from their mouth. Believe it or not, the result was equal to or better than what came by washing their mouths out with soap. Our children heard their mom speak that truth in the school carpool line, while running errands, at the family dinner table, and while traveling in the car on family vacations.

Moses also said teach your children "when you lie down." Like many Christian parents, we read the Bible with the kids at bedtime, especially when they were young. As the kids got older, I would put together Bible reading plans for the family so that we were all reading through the same Scripture at the same time, and then we would look for natural ways to talk about what we were each gleaning from God's word. Those conversations might happen at the dinner table or while traveling to one of the kid's sporting events.

Hopefully, you are getting the idea that the spiritual training of your children is not as onerous as it sounds. By God's grace, parents really can do this! Does it require a dad and mom to follow hard after Jesus? Absolutely. Does it ask parents to pass on their own vibrant faith to their kids until they, too, possess a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? It sure does. Is this starting to sound like the way we make disciples in the Christian life? Exactly! Perhaps Paul's instruction to Timothy works for parents, too. He writes to his "child" in the ministry, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). We call that making disciples of Jesus Christ who go and make disciples. In part, the Christian parent's job is to disciple their children, encouraging them to follow Jesus fully without turning back. To do that well, there is one more aspect of drive-time parenting we must discuss.

#### PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

A child learns to love God when he sees his parents loving God. That is why the old adage "practice what you preach" applies here. Let's go back in time again to the speech Moses delivered to the Hebrews before they entered the Promised Land.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:8-9)

For thousands of years, Orthodox Jews have put these words literally into practice by placing on their foreheads small, black leather boxes called phylacteries that contain verses from the Torah. In this way, they keep the letter of the law. However, the word "sign" indicates the spirit of the law. A sign is something visible that points us to the truth and leads us to believe. For example, the apostle John recorded eight miracles designed to point people to Jesus and encourage them to believe in Him (John 20:31). He called them "signs."

The spirit of the law reinforces the idea that truth is caught

as much as it is taught. Moses encourages parents to live out their faith in a way that their children see the authenticity of what they believe. There is nothing worse than when parents say to their children in so many words, "Do what I say not what I do." That is called hypocrisy and children easily detect such duplicity in adults. Children also tend to pick up on the bad, even sinful, habits of their parents. This is why the Old Testament warns about the sins of the father from generation to generation.

For example, we are old enough to remember an anti-smoking public service announcement called "Like Father, Like Son" that first aired on television on September 15, 1967, and ran until 1982. The PSA shows a father and his young son enjoying the day through a series of chores and activities they do together. They paint a house, ride in the car, wash the car, toss pebbles, and then sit down next to a tree and rest their weary bodies. The little boy does everything his father does, including picking up a pack of cigarettes after his dad lights one up.

Like father, like son. Like mother, like daughter. The example we set as parents is just as powerful as the words we speak into our children's lives.

Let's return to the banks of the Jordan River one last time and hear the echo of Moses's voice to the next generation of Hebrew parents. Did anybody listen? Did they take to heart the plain and sincere words from this leather-faced man of God about raising kids who love God? Some did and some did not. One who did was a father named Joshua, Moses's military sidekick and successor, who said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Remember his words the next time you pack up the car for a family vacation.



*From a Mother's Heart*

## TIME AND TRAVEL SPORTS

The kids and I spent a lot of time on the road during their high school years traveling to their sports events. Today, both of our children are NCAA athletes. Both achieved their dream to play in college. Thankfully, Ron and I achieved our dream to reduce college expenses.

The athletic road we traveled with our kids was long, time-consuming, expensive, and sometimes comical. Caroline and I still belly laugh about the time I returned the rental car to the wrong airport in Chicago. We were supposed to fly out of O'Hare and I mindlessly drove to Midway. Sigh. I became aware of my mistake only while riding on the transit bus from the rental car depot to the terminal. It was so unlike me because I make all of the family travel plans meticulously. Flights. Hotels. Rental cars. Restaurants. Check in. Check out. Ron calls me Rand McNally and Ms. Travelocity. How I convinced the rental car company to reissue me the car so we could get to the right airport would make a seasoned Priceline negotiator take notice.

As much as kid's travel sports can consume everyone's life in the family and, therefore, must be balanced with other priorities like being in church on Sundays, I cherished the time with my children in the car while traveling to the different softball fields and basketball courts. This was drive-time parenting at its best. At least I knew where they were; they were with me and not roaming some shopping mall or staring endlessly at a video game in the basement of someone else's house.

Competitive sports taught our kids life lessons about winning and losing, being part of a team, leadership, and more. It also provided them with the physical exercise and outdoor playtime absent in many kid's lives today. We enjoyed plenty of time just talking before and after games. Sometimes our conversation wasn't so much about how they played as it was about their interactions with other players on the team. Interpersonal relationships are an important part of a child's development.

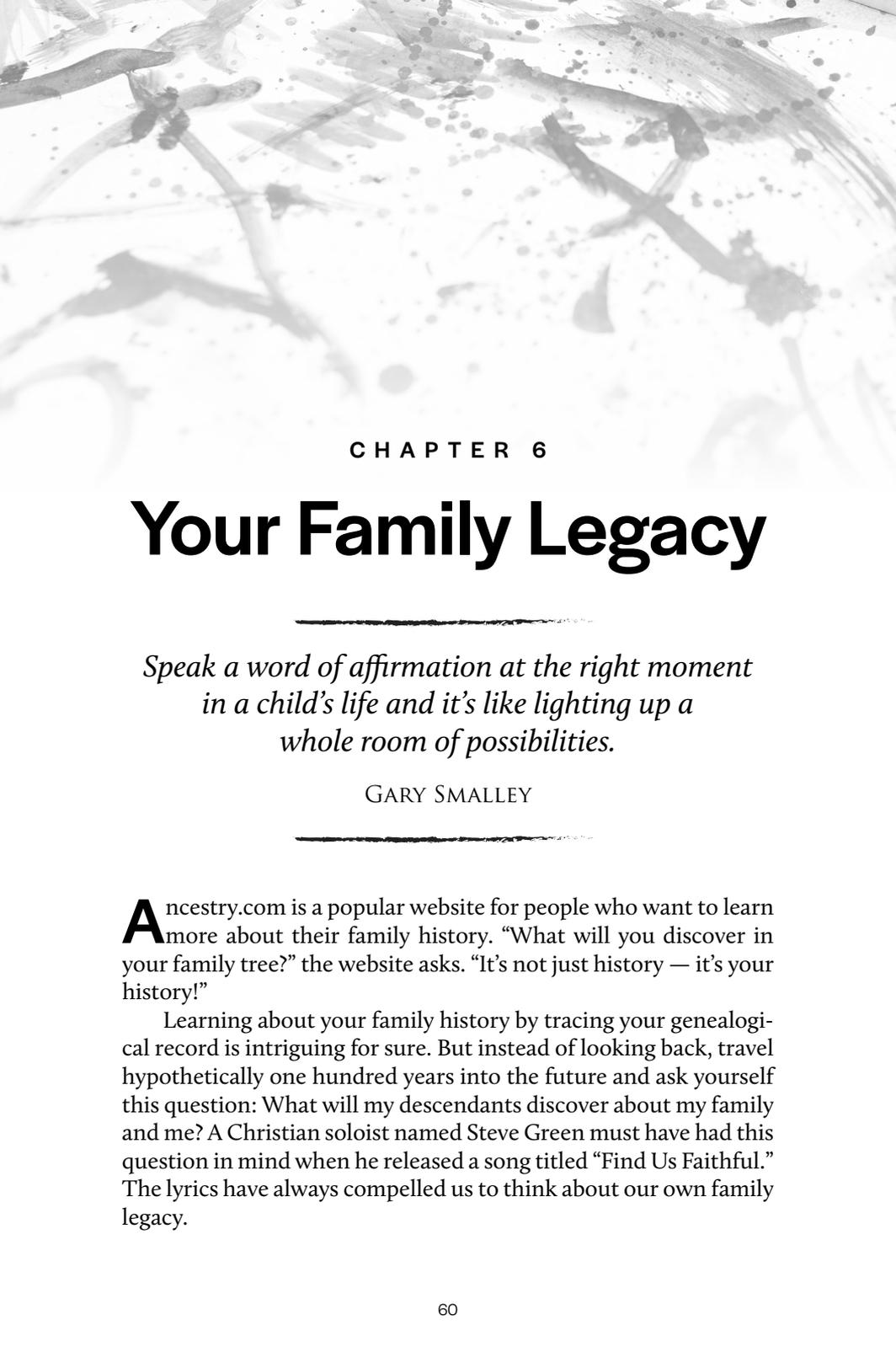
Ron and I also made sure the kids respected the coach's de-

cision about who played when and where. We refused to act like helicopter or lawnmower parents. We provided the kids with the opportunity to play and cheered enthusiastically from the bleachers, but we made it clear to them that they would need to earn their spot on the team on their own.

I am convinced that God orchestrated our family drive times. He gave Ron and I ample opportunity to interact and talk deeply with our kids about life, love, friends, Jesus, and so much more. We still talk with them every day on the phone or via FaceTime. As a mother, it warms my heart that they call us as much as we call them.

The investment of your time with your kids will pay big dividends in the future. Kids really do spell love T-I-M-E.





CHAPTER 6

# Your Family Legacy

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*Speak a word of affirmation at the right moment  
in a child's life and it's like lighting up a  
whole room of possibilities.*

GARY SMALLEY

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**A**ncestry.com is a popular website for people who want to learn more about their family history. “What will you discover in your family tree?” the website asks. “It’s not just history — it’s your history!”

Learning about your family history by tracing your genealogical record is intriguing for sure. But instead of looking back, travel hypothetically one hundred years into the future and ask yourself this question: What will my descendants discover about my family and me? A Christian soloist named Steve Green must have had this question in mind when he released a song titled “Find Us Faithful.” The lyrics have always compelled us to think about our own family legacy.

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful <sup>14</sup>

These lyrics will grip your heart if you take the time to think about them. They remind us that we are making history every day. It may not be the kind of history that people read about in history books centuries from now, but it's your family history and ours. We all inherit a family legacy and we leave one behind. The choices we make today have a profound effect on the members of our family for generations to come. May we all be found faithful with the family God has entrusted to us!

Consider two different family legacies, starting with Jonathan Edwards, a Puritan preacher who lived in the 1700s. God used Edwards's ministry to spark a great spiritual awakening that spread throughout the Colonies. Many historians see the work of Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening of his time as a precursor to the American Revolution and the birth of the nation we call the United States of America.

Jonathan and Sarah Edwards left a godly legacy through their eleven children. One hundred and fifty years after Edwards's death, an American educator and pastor named A.E. Winship traced the descendants of the Edwards family. What he discovered is truly astounding. Jonathon Edward's family legacy includes one U.S. Vice President, three U.S. Senators, three governors, three mayors, thirteen college presidents, thirty judges, sixty-five professors, eighty people who held public office, one hundred lawyers, and one hundred missionaries (the missionaries cancel out the lawyers—just kidding!).

Now compare Edwards's family legacy to a man named Max Jukes. Who is Max Jukes? Good question. Max Jukes would have remained historically anonymous except for the work of someone who traced the family trees of forty-two different men in the New York State prison system to him. Max Jukes's descendants include seven murderers, sixty thieves, fifty women of ill repute, one hundred and thirty other convicts, three hundred and ten paupers, and four hundred people whose lives were physically wrecked by indulgent living. Someone estimated that Max Juke's descendants

cost the state more than \$1.2 million over time. That was a lot of money back then.<sup>15</sup>

## JESUS'S FAMILY LEGACY

The Bible contains many genealogical records and they all say something about family legacy. For example, Matthew begins his gospel with the record of Jesus's ancestry. He uses it to make the case for Him being the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew begins, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Pretty impressive! How would you like to discover King David and Abraham in your family ancestry?

Matthew covers four generations and hundreds of years by continuing, "Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers" (v. 2). That portion of the record spans the migration of a family from the Ur of Chaldeans to Egypt where Judah and his brothers, including Joseph, eventually relocated. It all began when the Lord God of heaven and earth appeared to a retired man named Abram and said,

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

God thinks long term and plans far into the future. The future He laid out for Abram took generations to fulfill. But God was looking for one person who was willing to take a step of faith and begin moving his family in a new direction. The first word God spoke to Abram was "Go!" and it required faith to obey.

Earlier, we said we all inherit a family legacy, and that is true. Abram grew up in a family that worshipped the foreign gods of the Babylonians. He was an idolater, as were his father and grandfather. Abram continued in that legacy until God intervened in his life. He was the first in his family to break away from a pagan religious heritage and follow the true and living God.

God informed Abram that his own seed would populate the

land that God promised to him. However, Abram was seventy-five years old and Sarah was ten years younger when they began their faith journey. Even more challenging, the couple was childless. It took another twenty-five years before Isaac was born. No wonder Abraham is called the father of faith.

Abraham and Sarah's family tree includes Isaac who married Rebecca. She gave birth to twins named Esau and Jacob. The principle Jesus taught about how the first shall be last and the last shall be first started with these two boys. Esau was the firstborn, but God told Isaac to bless Jacob, who was a deceiver from the moment he came out of the womb. Nobody needed more of God's grace in his life than the heel-catcher named Jacob.

Jacob fell in love with Rachel, his mother's brother's daughter and Jacob's first cousin. Uncle Laban promised Jacob Rachel's hand in marriage in return for seven years of work. But after seven years, Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah, Rachel's ugly-duckling older sister. Jacob, madly in love with Rachel, cut another deal with his father-in-law and married his first love in return for seven more years of labor. Between the two of them, Leah and Rachel gave birth to Jacob's twelve sons who formed the twelve tribes of Israel.

As a father, Jacob played favorites with his sons. Joseph, the youngest child born to Rachel, was the apple of Jacob's eye. Filled with rage and jealousy, Joseph's older brothers threw him into a pit and then sold him to Ishmaelite slave traders. Then they lied to their father, telling him wild animals had killed Joseph.

Jacob grieved and never quite got over the loss of his favorite son. However, it was all part of God's plan. Through a series of divine orchestrations, Joseph rose to power in Egypt. He became Prime Minister, second in command to Pharaoh himself. When famine struck, Egypt possessed a supply of food and grain that brought people from around the world to Joseph who oversaw the distribution of food.

One day and in a twist of irony, Joseph's brothers arrived in search of food for their family. They did not recognize their brother who was now a grown man. Joseph was seventeen when his brothers turned on him. Now their only hope for survival lay in the hands of the brother they almost killed years earlier.

All of this led to a most remarkable family reunion. Joseph re-

vealed himself to his brothers and forgave them. A divine perspective on life had come to him over time. “As for you,” he said to his brothers, “you meant evil for me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20).

Let’s pause for a moment of reflection. Is there someone in your family that you need to forgive? Is there a broken relationship in your immediate or extended family that needs repair? Is God urging you today to take the first step? Make the phone call. Send the email or text. Write the letter. Life is too short to leave a family legacy of broken relationships.

When Jacob learned that Joseph was alive, a touching reunion took place. The aging patriarch made the long journey to Egypt. His nightmare was over. God fit together the broken and sharp-edged pieces of their shattered family into a beautiful mosaic of His grace and providential care. Joseph made generous provision for his father, his brothers, and their families. Jacob lived in Egypt with Joseph for the next seventeen years of his life before he died. Only God could bookend Jacob’s life that way. He enjoyed Joseph, his favorite son, for the first seventeen years of the boy’s life and then again for the last seventeen of his own life.

That brings us to Genesis chapter 48. The time of Jacob’s departure from this earth draws near. As it does, he models for us how to pass on a family legacy in the waning moments of life. As we’ll discuss in more detail below, these key elements in establishing a family legacy include gatherings, shared stories of God’s faithfulness, meaningful touch, verbal affirmation, and intentional generosity.

## FAMILY GATHERINGS

The story of Jacob’s home going begins this way,

After this, Joseph was told, “Behold, your father is ill.” So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, “Your son Joseph has come to you.” Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. (Genesis 48:1-2)

Genesis 48 describes a sacred family moment. At the beginning, three generations gather in Jacob's waning moments. Grandpa Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. More family comes later. Jacob, also named Israel by the angel of the Lord, reached for all the strength that remained in his body to sit up in bed and bless his family.

As simple as it sounds, make sure you leave a legacy of family gatherings. Family reunions, vacations, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, and other special times families spend together are important ways to build family traditions and deepen relationships. And when it comes time for the family patriarch or matriarch to die gracefully and be with the Lord, it is easier to gather when you have been doing it all along. Of course, leaving a legacy of family gatherings requires intentional effort. Families must make it a priority or else the busyness of life will crowd out the experiences that matter the most.

Recently, we put this principle into practice by attending three family weddings in three years, each in different locations across the country. The occasions cost us time and money, but we still believe the investment of our family resources into the lives of our nieces, nephews, and their spouses were worth it.

## SHARING STORIES OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that

is, Bethlehem).” (Genesis 48:3-7)

Jacob tells the story of when God appeared to him the first time and blessed him. Was this one of those stories he told over and over again? My eighty-four-year-old father has some stories he tells every time we get together. Sometimes my brothers and I laugh because Dad recites them as if we have never heard them before.

If Jacob was going to tell one story at the end of his life, he chose a good one—the story of God’s faithfulness throughout his life. He makes sure his story connects to everyone in the family by repeating what the Lord said to him: “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.” The continuity of God’s blessing from one generation to the next is clear. Make sure your children and grandchildren see the same in your family. You might need to connect those dots for them. The perspective that a long life gives to you makes that easier. So does a faithful walk with the Lord over the years.

Stories of God’s faithfulness shared with the family must also include the times He sustained you during seasons of sorrow and grief. Jacob talks about the death of Rachel, the love of his life and matriarch of the family. Next to the loss of Joseph decades earlier, nothing brought sorrow to Israel’s life more than the death of his beloved Rachel. This happened on his way to Ephrath, which is also called Bethlehem. We love how God drops Bethlehem into the story, a reminder that He has a long-term plan for Jacob and his family. Though the first Christmas is still many generations away, this family will eventually give birth to the Messiah.

Of course, the best story to tell of God’s faithfulness starts with your personal testimony of how you came to faith in Jesus Christ. Do your children and grandchildren know that story? If you do not have a story like that to tell, make today your spiritual birthday by placing your faith in Jesus Christ and receiving the free gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).

## MEANINGFUL TOUCH

Let's read on beginning in verse 10.

When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also." Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). (Genesis 48:10-14)

We love this scene. It shows the simple affection of Jacob toward his grandchildren. In his best-selling book *The Blessing*, John Trent calls this the blessing of meaningful touch. When the Old Testament patriarchs blessed their sons and grandsons, meaningful touch was an important part of that.

Joseph brings his two sons near to their grandfather because Jacob is almost blind in his old age. Israel hugs and kisses the boys. We get the impression this is not uncommon for Jacob to do. He loves these boys as only a grandfather can. At some point they climb onto Grandpa Jacob's lap and sit with him. By this time, Ephraim and Manassah are probably in their early twenties, which makes this scene even more amazing.

A study at UCLA revealed that humans need eight to ten meaningful touches every day to maintain emotional and physical health. God designed us that way. Researchers at the Duke University Medical School discovered that a certain enzyme crucial to growth is missing in rat pups that do not receive maternal touch. Put the pups back with their mother and they produce the enzyme.<sup>16</sup>

Meaningful touch is perhaps easier for those who grew up in an affectionate family. For those that did not, or for those who are victims of child abuse, the idea of blessing your children with meaningful touch may be more difficult. The distinction between appropriate and inappropriate touch is significant and should be understood. However, to avoid touching and embracing our children and grandchildren in appropriate ways is to sacrifice the much-needed physical and emotional health our families need.

### VERBAL AFFIRMATION

In one of the most powerful family moments recorded in the Old Testament, Jacob stretches out his feeble hands and places them on the heads of his grandchildren. Reminiscent of his relationship with Esau and against the wishes of Joseph, Israel reverses the order of blessing by placing his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the older. “The first shall be last and the last shall be first,” Jesus said to his disciples centuries later (Matthew 20:16). Then Jacob speaks words of blessing and verbal affirmation.

The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. (Genesis 48:21-22)

“Bless the boys,” says Jacob. He speaks a blessing on his children and grandchildren, not a curse. His words affirm his family and his family’s future. Do your words do the same? How would you describe the verbal atmosphere in your home? Do your words encourage or discourage? Do they lift up or tear down? Do they inspire your children and grandchildren to soar and aspire after great things in life for the glory of God, or do they sow seeds of failure and defeat?

We heard about a teacher who asked her students to share their extra pencils with other students for an upcoming exam.

One student was reluctant to lend his pencils out to his fellow students. When she asked him why, the boy said his mother wrote special messages on his pencils to encourage him, and they meant a lot to him. For example, on a pencil he used for a math exam, she wrote, "You are a math genius." On another pencil he used at the start of the school year, she wrote, "This will be a great year." On two pencils, she wrote three simple words, "I love you!" Get the idea? No wonder he wanted to hold on to his writing tools.

Words of affirmation go a long way in a child's heart. Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Verbal affirmation leaves a powerful family legacy.

## FAITHFUL GENEROSITY

Finally, leave a legacy of faithful generosity. In an act of both faith and generosity, Jacob bequeaths a mountain to his favorite son. "Then Israel said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow'" (Genesis 48:21-22).

Though an imperfect father who played favorites and deceived people, Jacob lived his entire life by faith, believing the promises God made to his father Isaac and to his grandfather Abraham. But just as Isaac and Abraham died without their feet touching the Promised Land, so will Jacob. However, Jacob believes God will fulfill His promises, perhaps during the generation of his son and grandsons. To help Joseph believe and not become too attached to Egypt, his father gives him a "mountain slope" in the land of Canaan, apparently acquired by Jacob in a battle with the Amorites that Moses does not record.

It is a good thing to give your children and grandchildren an inheritance. Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the

righteous.” Not everyone agrees with this biblical perspective. Worldly views about life, death, and family inheritances abound. For example, Stephen Pollan and Mark Levine wrote a book called *Die Broke*, in which they said, “Passing on wealth may be possible for some, but why do it? It wouldn’t be good for you, your child or society. Now you can use your money while you’re alive, doing good for yourself and others.” We see why this message resonates with some, but we disagree with their assertion that it wouldn’t be good for you, your child, or society to give an inheritance, or to give your money away for a cause.

Jesus encouraged generosity as an antidote to materialism. Because we cannot serve God and money, Jesus told His followers to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-24). Note the word “yourselves.” Jesus actually encourages us to do something for ourselves. I call this sanctified self-interest. When we invest in the kingdom of God and in gospel ministry, we put money, as it were, in our eternal retirement account (Philippians 4:17). Such an investment will increase in eternal value. And be sure of this: heaven’s dividend reinvestment plan is truly out of this world. If you want to die broke, at least do so by giving your money away to reach the next generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But leaving an inheritance to your children’s children is still a good and godly idea. The Bible says it is the wise thing to do. If done correctly, it is also a way to inspire faith in your children and grandchildren, plus leave a legacy of faithful financial stewardship and generosity. I am a living example of this. Because my grandparents on my mother’s side were careful with their money, they left an inheritance to their three daughters. My mother used a portion of that inheritance to help me get started in ministry by paying for the cost of my seminary education. I also credit my grandfather’s wise money management for inspiring in me a passion for biblical financial stewardship.

We ask you again: One hundred years from now, if Jesus does not return first, what will your descendants discover about you and your family? What is your family legacy?



*From a Mother's Heart*

## A FATHER'S GENEROSITY

Like a lot of newlyweds, Ron and I could barely rub two nickels together when we got married. We tied the knot on a hot August day in Texas at eleven o'clock in the morning. We enjoyed a brief honeymoon and then returned to Dallas where Ron started his last semester in graduate school as a full-time seminary student. I provided the only income for our family at that time. It was enough for us to move into a cozy, one-bedroom apartment. Ron also began looking for his first church to serve as lead pastor, a search that lasted nearly a year. We prayed and waited.

Eventually, we moved south to Houston where Ron assumed the leadership of a hurting church. The ministry required much faith and promised no financial security. Seven years later when God called us to another ministry, we had stories to tell of God's faithful provision as He grew His church.

One of the ways our heavenly Father provided for our family was through the generosity of my earthly father, who made sure we enjoyed an annual vacation. Family meant everything to my parents, and they made it possible for my two brothers, our families, and me to gather at the beach every year. Our parents would rent the beach house large enough for fifteen of us. All we had to do was get ourselves there. Ron and I could afford the two tanks of gas it would take to drive from Houston to Gulf Shores, Alabama. As part of the deal, we kids also helped cook the meals.

Generosity is one of the great legacies my father left before he went home to be with the Lord. The annual Dibble family beach vacation was not the only way my father expressed his generosity, but it was one way that left a huge impact on us.

So, what are you teaching your children and grandchildren about money? How are you inspiring them to live generous lives, full of faith and good works? Will you leave them a legacy of debt, materialism, and selfish financial decisions? Or, will you leave be-

hind the fingerprints of faithful financial stewardship as taught in the pages of Scripture?”

Ron often quotes John 3:16 and then says, “God is the most generous Being in the universe. He loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son.” Our heavenly Father’s example should inspire us to live generously, too.



# Conclusion

Simplicity almost always triumphs over complexity. That's what Picasso believed about art. When asked how he sculpted a lion, the famous artist said, "That's simple. I take a slab of stone and remove everything I don't need." Where's Picasso when we need him the most?

If simplicity is the elimination of the unnecessary, and if parenting is more art than science, then the art of parenting is to keep it plain and simple. That's why we have kept our focus on the simple but profound instructions to parents found in the pages of God's word. Remember, our goal was to make God's plan for raising kids who love Him more apparent to parents and grandparents. We hope we have achieved that end for you.

Our final encourage to you is to do what comes natural with your kids because God created you with basic maternal and paternal instincts. Pay attention to those instincts as you follow hard after Jesus and point your children to Him. When what comes natural is not enough, trust God to infuse you with His supernatural power until the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ transform the countenance of your family (Galatians 5:22-23).

Thank you for traveling this plain talkin' journey with us. We pray God makes His love more apparent to you and sculpts your family into one of His masterpieces.

# Small Group Discussion Questions

## CHAPTER 1: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING AND TAKING

1. Describe the last building project you were involved with. How did it go? Funny stories?
2. As you reflect on last weekend's sermon, what one principle or insight stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
3. What does it mean for the Lord to build your house? What do you need to do to make Him the general contractor? What benefits are there to doing so?
4. In what ways is it hard or easy to receive your children as a gift from the Lord? How does a married couple with infertility problems read and receive Psalm 127 and verse 3?
5. Picture families journeying towards Jerusalem to worship the Lord and singing this Song of Ascent. Discuss three benefits of family worship and how that can work in your family life.
6. Using the war motif in Psalm 127, describe how your children are like arrows in your hand.
7. Did you come from a large or small family? What benefits and/or challenges do you see in both? What does this psalm say about the size of one's family or quiver, and how does that align with today's family trends?

## CHAPTER 2: GOING TO SCHOOL ON YOUR KIDS

1. What is your funniest childhood memory?
2. If Pastor Ron had to give an abbreviated version of last weekend's message, what two points or ideas would you tell him to include no matter what?
3. Discuss some ways you are successfully training up your child in the way he or she should go. Discuss the challenges you are currently facing as parents.
4. If more is "caught than taught," as the old adage says, how has your example as a parent helped or hurt the training up of your child? Share examples with the group.
5. How do today's cultural norms when it comes to parenting differ from the biblical model?
6. Does training up a child in the way he/she should go include discipline (loving correction)? How are your thoughts on disciplining your child influenced today? How do each of your children respond to discipline?
7. Is Proverbs 22 and verse 6 a promise that every wayward child that grows up in the church will eventually return to following God? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 3: TRAINING UP JESUS

1. Describe a time when you "lost" your child, or something happened in your family life that caused you to feel panic in your heart.
2. If you were Mary and Joseph, describe how you would have felt when you found your son Jesus talking to the religious teachers.

3. Describe what it means for you to dedicate your child to the Lord.
4. In what ways do the church or small groups help in the training up of your child to love God and others?
5. How did Jesus express His understanding of His life purpose, even as a young boy?
6. What did you learn most from the example of Mary and Joseph training up Jesus to love and follow God?

#### CHAPTER 4: HOW DARE YOU DISCIPLINE YOUR KIDS

1. What is the funniest story about your kids you are willing to share?
2. What is one thing from this week's sermon you hope we talk about today?
3. What aspects of the culture threaten to pull your family apart? How have you kept this from happening?
4. Read Ephesians 6:4. In what ways can a Father avoid provoking his children to anger?
5. What is your reaction to the word "discipline" as it relates to child rearing? Describe what you learned about raising children from your parents? How did they discipline you as a child? How is the way you discipline your children the same or different?
6. Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Discuss how relationships work in the Christian home and how they differ from today's cultural norms.
7. What impact can/does the Christian home have in the culture today? Is your Christian family having a positive impact on your neighbors, friends, and co-workers? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 5: DRIVE-TIME PARENTING

1. What is your favorite family road trip story?
2. What one thing did you most agree or disagree with from this week's sermon?
3. What parenting lessons (good and bad) did you learn from your parents or grandparents? What lessons are you teaching your children that you hope they do or do not repeat?
4. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. List and discuss the different things the passage says families should teach their children.
5. How much time do you devote to family worship in your home? Compare time spent reading God's Word together as a family to your time spent on entertainment choices such as movies, television, Internet, and social media.
6. What role can/should the church and its leaders play in the parenting of your children?
7. Read Deuteronomy 6:8-9. What place does the Word of God have in the family and in the raising of children? Discuss how this relates to your family presently. How can you infuse the Scriptures into your daily family life better?

## CHAPTER 6: YOUR FAMILY LEGACY

1. What is your greatest memory of your grandparents, or of your grandchildren?
2. From Jacob's example in Genesis 48, why is it important that parents and grandparents pass on their spiritual legacy to their children and grandchildren?

3. In Genesis 48, Jacob rehearses his spiritual journey verbally prior to his death. What are some other ways we can record our own spiritual journey for our kids and grandkids?
4. Discuss some practical benefits of recording your spiritual journey for your kids and grandkids.
5. How do we value or devalue the role of grandparents in our culture today as compared to biblical times?
6. What challenges you most from this discussion? What principles will you take home with you and apply? What do you feel God is leading you to do as a result of this sermon discussion?

# About the Authors



Ron and Cathryn Jones married on August 20, 1994, and are parents of two children they believe are truly gifts from God. These days, their nest is empty and they enjoy watching their adult kids fly like arrows from their quiver.

Ron and Cathryn live in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where Ron serves as Lead Pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church. Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast called *Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones*. *Something Good Radio* exists to share the love of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR).

Cathryn, a Realtor, serves on the board of *Something Good Radio* and as the Director of Operations for the ministry.

# Notes

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