

LINDELL RECOVERY NETWORK

# PARENTING

*Steps for Successful Parenting*

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*The Marriage and Family Series*

# PARENTING

*Steps for Successful Parenting*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**A Personal Note** ..... 1

**Introduction** ..... 3

## Definitions

What Is the Role of a Parent? ..... 9

What Is the Role of a Father? ..... 12

What Is the Role of a Mother? ..... 14

What Is God’s Heart on Parenting? ..... 17

## Characteristics

What Are Four Problem Parenting Styles?<sup>11</sup> ..... 25

What Is the Positive Parenting Style? ..... 29

How Are the Four Problem Parenting Styles Corrected? ..... 32

## Causes

What Are Surface Causes of Poor Parenting? ..... 41

What Circumstances Contribute to Poor Parenting? ..... 46

What Stressful Situations Create Problems for Parents? ..... 49

What Are Common Causes of Problematic Parenting? ..... 51

What Is the Root Cause of Problem Parenting? ..... 54

What Is God’s Perfect Plan for You? ..... 57

## **Steps to Solution**

Key Verse to Memorize .....	63
Key Passage to Read .....	64
How to Have a Transformed Life .....	67
How to Reflect God during Your Child’s Development .....	72
How to Develop Positive Discipline .....	76
How to Help and Heal Angry Children.....	89
How to Offer Hope for Hurting Parents.....	93
How to Let Go . . . and Give Your Child to God .....	97
How to Navigate an “Empty Nest” .....	99

## **Scriptures to Memorize..... 103**

## **Endnotes & Bibliography.....109**

# A PERSONAL NOTE

*from Mike Lindell*

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network



# INTRODUCTION

Never will I forget the day when I was with my mother at Skillern's Drugstore. We were there only ten minutes, but that was long enough for me to spy what, at that time, was touted as "the biggest nickel candy bar you can buy"—a 3 MUSKETEERS®. My criminal eight-year-old mind thought, *Why shouldn't I take it?*

With my hot little hand, I stole the candy, slipped outside, shoved it into my mouth and swallowed it. Though I knew I didn't have much time, my plan worked like a charm. I felt so clever as I cuddled up next to my mother at the counter, just in time for her to complete her purchases.

On the drive home, my mother looked over at me and asked, "What's that chocolate on your face?"

"Uh, what chocolate?" I stammered. Although I was startled, I acted innocent.

"The chocolate on your mouth," she responded.

"I, I don't know," I persisted. But clearly, the jig was up. I had been found out.

"We'll talk when we get home," she said with a soft voice. The last five minutes of the drive seemed like five hours. I knew I had been caught.

As soon as we were in the house, my mom dealt with my deceitfulness. Not with anger, not with hostility, but in a calm, collected way.

"Honey, tell me, what did you do?"

I eked out a bare minimum explanation.

"What kind of candy did you steal?" she probed.

"I don't know"—back to my same song and dance. I just didn't want to tell the truth. Moments later, I thought we were at the end of the ordeal. But no, she continued, "Well honey, we need to drive back to the drugstore, and you'll need to tell the manager what you did, ask his forgiveness and pay for the candy." Horror of horrors. I couldn't believe I would have to go through all that humiliation.

Was that extra trip back to the store inconvenient for her? Yes.

Was the admission of stealing an embarrassment to her? Yes. Was my confession and restitution necessary in her mind? Yes! And why? Because she recognized that in order to do *positive parenting*, there needed to be *negative consequences* for *negative behavior*. I needed to feel more pain than pleasure over my stealing.

I praise God that I had a parent who handled my crime perfectly. What I saw modeled through my mother was this:

- ♦ Deal with deceitfulness immediately.
- ♦ Determine not to lash out in anger.
- ♦ Don't dismiss wrongdoing—even if it's just for a five-cent crime.

Through her example, I learned this important principle: “*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much*” (Luke 16:10). The Bible contains many excellent principles for parents who want to “do it right.” My prayer is that God will guide you and strengthen you to parent your children well.

June Hunt  
*Founder, Hope For The Heart*

# PARENTING

## *Steps for Successful Parenting*

Kids are much like kites<sup>1</sup>—struggling to become airborne, yet needing to be tethered to the stability of a strong hand by a string. Kites are not designed to be possessively protected inside the home, slamming against walls, or colliding with ceilings while trying to reach new heights. Indeed, parenting requires the same careful balance of providing guidance and promoting independence. Although separation can feel painful, God designed your role as a parent to prepare your “kite” for flight—to prepare your “kite” to soar.

As the fragile frame dips and dives, don’t be emotionally torn by the changing winds of circumstances. Keep running with your child, releasing more and more string of control into the hands of your trustworthy Lord.

*“Sovereign LORD, you are God!  
Your covenant is trustworthy,  
and you have promised these good things to your servant.  
Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant,  
that it may continue forever in your sight;  
for you, Sovereign LORD, have spoken,  
and with your blessing the house of your servant  
will be blessed forever.”  
(2 SAMUEL 7:28–29)*



# DEFINITIONS



---

*“Parents are intended  
to be loving teachers  
who exert a  
powerful influence  
in the lives  
of their children.”*



He's a rebel in the house of "the righteous."

Raised by spiritual giants, it seems inconceivable that a child of Ruth and Billy Graham would smoke, drink, and fight at school. Not only that, Franklin Graham almost flunks out of a private high school in New York, far from his home nestled in the Appalachian mountains. Eventually he is kicked out of a Christian college for keeping a coed out long after curfew.<sup>2</sup>

In the shadow of the world's most famous evangelist, Franklin descends further into darkness, rejecting the rigidity of religion. He feels the commands of God are too constricting, and he finds no way of relating to Scripture. Yet, the Bible says . . .

*"This is love for God: to keep his commands.*

*And his commands are not burdensome."*

(1 JOHN 5:3)

## What Is the Role of a Parent?

Imagine the continual prayers for Franklin that ascend to God's throne of grace by his loving parents. Then one summer, far from the protective influence of his parents, he heads to the Middle East on a mission trip to help build a Christian medical clinic.

For Franklin Graham, this trip is more about building memories than going on a mission—the ways of the world still hold much more appeal than *"the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). But young Franklin finds himself increasingly drawn to the two dedicated women who run the clinic—two servants of God who exhibit daring faith in the midst of dire need. The clinic consistently needs more funding, but instead of choosing to send out a public plea, the women simply choose to pray and trust God.

On one occasion, Franklin is particularly skeptical when the women ask God for the specific amount of \$1,355 to pay a huge bill. Yet because of his care and concern for both of them, Franklin quells his cynicism. Three days later, an interesting envelope arrives in the mail. It contains a handwritten note. The short letter reads, “I have heard about the wonderful work you are doing there, and you have been in my thoughts. I had some extra money and wanted to send it to you. Enclosed is a check. Use it any way you see fit.”<sup>3</sup>

The amount of the check? Exactly \$1,355! This miraculous incident touches the heart of this rebel. Within moments, he’s drawn like a powerful magnet to the faith of his parents and into a relationship with his heavenly Father. Franklin’s parents experience the fulfillment of Jesus’ words:

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;  
knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

(MATTHEW 7:7)

**Parents** are mothers and fathers who are responsible for being providers and protectors, teachers and trainers, defenders and disciplers of their children.

**Parenting** means physically rearing, emotionally encouraging, and spiritually nurturing a child.

**Parents** are intended to be loving teachers who exert a powerful influence in the lives of their children.

**Parent** in Greek is *goneus*,<sup>4</sup> which in Luke 2:41–42 reveals the discipling role of parents, as Jesus’ parents regularly brought Him to religious gatherings: “Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.”

*“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction  
and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”*

(PROVERBS 1:8)

## Biblical Instruction for Parenting

To determine your biblical accountability as a parent, ask yourself how many of the following statements are true of you.

**We regard** our children as a blessing.

*“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him”* (PSALM 127:3).

**We approach** parenting with common goals and actions.

*“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* (AMOS 3:3).

**We take every opportunity** to teach our children spiritual truths.

*“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”* (DEUTERONOMY 6:6–7).

**We consistently demonstrate** good values to our children by doing what is ethically right and just.

*“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned”* (TITUS 2:7–8).

**We plan ahead** to protect our children from danger.

*“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family”* (HEBREWS 11:7).

**We provide for** our children’s material needs.

*“Children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children”* (2 CORINTHIANS 12:14).

**We effectively discipline** our children.

*“Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire”* (PROVERBS 29:17).

**We live in a way** that deserves respect and instills a sense of pride in our children.

*“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children”* (PROVERBS 17:6).

## What Is the Role of a Father?

Billy Graham's love for his rebellious son reflects the heavenly Father's unending love for His own rebellious children.

Franklin never forgets one particular conversation he has with his father. Billy sits down with his son to deliberately communicate that "no matter what he did, where he went, or how he ended up," he can be assured of his father's love. He can call "from anywhere in the world," and he would always be welcome back home.<sup>5</sup>

The stubborn love of Franklin's father coupled with the persistent prayer on his son's behalf ultimately drives the young rebel to his knees. Finally, at age 22, Franklin yields his life to Christ. He learns that by "losing his life," *he finds it*. Jesus said . . .

*"Whoever finds their life will lose it,  
and whoever loses their life  
for my sake will find it."  
(MATTHEW 10:39)*

**Fathers**, biological or adoptive, raise their children or help in the raising of their children.

**Fathering** children means accepting responsibility for their needs and providing leadership, guidance, and protection.

**Father** in Greek is *pater*, derived from the root word *pa*, meaning "nourisher, protector, upholder."<sup>6</sup>

**Fathers** profoundly influence their children's concept of the heavenly Father. Jesus said . . .

*"If you, then, though you are evil,  
know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will your Father in heaven  
give good gifts to those who ask him!"  
(MATTHEW 7:11)*

## Biblical Instruction for Fathers

To determine your biblical accountability as a father, ask yourself how many of the following statements are true of you.

**I demonstrate** reverence for God before our children.

*“Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands. Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed” (PSALM 112:1–2).*

**I take godly responsibility** for the leadership of our home.

*“He will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just” (GENESIS 18:19).*

**I provide financial support** for our family.

*“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 TIMOTHY 5:8).*

**I take responsibility**—without harshness—for the spiritual training of our children.

*“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (EPHESIANS 6:4).*

**I lovingly discipline** our children.

*“The LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (PROVERBS 3:12).*

**I teach** our children to respectfully obey.

*“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect” (1 TIMOTHY 3:4).*

**I comfort and encourage** our children while urging them to live godly lives.

*“You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 THESSALONIANS 2:11–12).*

**I pray for** our children and for godly wisdom in parenting them.

Samson's father prayed, "*Pardon your servant, Lord. I beg you to let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born*" (JUDGES 13:8).

## Rebellious Son

**Question:** "My son is rebellious and often gets into trouble. Sometimes I feel like giving up. Am I wasting my time trying to set him on the right course?"

**Answer:** No. Even if your son continues to make wrong choices, as a parent, you are responsible for communicating what is right—in a loving, encouraging way. You are not accountable for your son's wrong decisions, but you are accountable for your parenting. If you won't try to teach your son what is right, who will?

*"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,  
turning a person from the snares of death."*

(PROVERBS 13:14)

## What Is the Role of a Mother?

Perhaps no one has a greater opportunity to impact a child than a mother who persistently prays. Ruth Graham knows when she can't control her son, she can give control of him to God. And that's exactly what she does.

Ruth and Billy Graham wisely discern: “We understood how difficult it must have been to have a well-known dad, yet we knew the rebellion was not against us personally. . . . In short, Franklin didn’t have a chance. He had been given to God before his birth, and God has kept His hand on him without letting up all these years.”<sup>7</sup>

After graduating from college, Franklin serves on the board of the emerging ministry Samaritan’s Purse, an organization dedicated to providing humanitarian aid to people in crisis. Franklin becomes its president in 1979. Under his leadership, Samaritan’s Purse circles the globe to provide food, clean water, and shelter to those who are most vulnerable. Franklin says, “God called my father to the stadiums of the world, and God called me to the ditches.” But now Franklin also leads and is the primary voice for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, preaching the gospel all over the world.<sup>8</sup>

God hears and answers Ruth’s persistent prayers for her son, much like Hannah’s prayer to the Lord.

*“I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life.”*

(1 SAMUEL 1:11)

**Mothers** give birth to and/or raise their biological or adopted children.

**Mothering** children means nurturing, protecting, and comforting children.

**Mother** in the Old Testament is the word *em* and is referred to as “a source of comfort, teaching, and discipline” who is worthy of respect.<sup>9</sup>

**Mothers** are often considered the “bond of the family” and a source of blessing.

*“Her children arise and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her.”*

(PROVERBS 31:28)

## Biblical Instruction for Mothers

To determine your biblical accountability as a mother, ask yourself how many of the following statements are true of you.

**I have** a gentle, caring spirit toward our children.

*“We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 THESSALONIANS 2:7 ESV).*

**I openly express** motherly compassion toward our children.

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?” (ISAIAH 49:15).*

**I demonstrate** sincere faith in Christ Jesus as our Lord.

*“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 TIMOTHY 1:5).*

**I give unconditional love** to my husband and children.

*“Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children” (TITUS 2:3–4).*

**I exhibit self-control**, kindness, and a pure heart in our home.

*“Urge the younger women . . . to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (TITUS 2:4–5).*

**I provide for** the needs of our family to the best of my ability.

*“She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family” (PROVERBS 31:15).*

**I set an example** of strength and dignity and express optimism about the future.

*“She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come” (PROVERBS 31:25).*

**I faithfully instruct** our children with godly wisdom using carefully chosen words.

*“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue”*  
(PROVERBS 31:26).

## What Is God’s Heart on Parenting?

When God created man and woman in His image, He said, *“Be fruitful and multiply”* (Genesis 1:28 ESV). In short, the first command of God to His creation involved becoming parents. God’s plan for the first parents, and all parents today, is to reflect His image to their children and to the world. Parenting, therefore, is God-centered. It begins with Him. The goal of parenting is to raise children who reflect Him and follow Him. And throughout the process, God is available to guide, instruct, and help you.

Parenting is a privilege and a process—a long, unpredictable process. By God’s design, parenting stretches over years, affording children an opportunity to mature physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As difficult as parenting can be, it is still a privilege. The Bible says, *“children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him”* (Psalm 127:3 NLT). It is a blessing to have children, to love them, to teach them, to watch them grow and mature. Parenting is often a process by which *you* grow and mature as well. God often uses parenting to teach us important lessons about life and about Himself.

Realize, God is a Father who cares about you and your children. He has not left you alone to the difficult yet rewarding task of parenting. He has given you His Spirit and His Word, the Bible, to encourage, equip, and empower you in your own life and in the important work of parenting.

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for  
teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,  
so that the servant of God may be  
thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

(2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17)

**God wants you to know** Him as a loving Father.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”* (1 JOHN 3:1).

**God wants you to have** a personal, loving relationship with Him—from which you can love your children well.

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts”* (DEUTERONOMY 6:5–6).

**God want you to constantly teach** your children about Him—about His character, His Word, and His works.

*“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”* (DEUTERONOMY 6:6).

**God wants you to seek** His guidance in parenting.

*“Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always”* (PSALM 105:4).

**God wants you to convey** to your children that they are deeply loved and immeasurably valued by both you and the Lord.

*“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ”* (EPHESIANS 3:17–18).

**God wants you to lead** your children into a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 TIMOTHY 3:14–15).

**God wants you to teach** your children to delight in the Lord—to enjoy Him, thank Him, and find great pleasure in Him.

*“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart”* (PSALM 37:4).

**God wants you to teach** your children that He is able to meet all of their needs.

*“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 4:19).*

**God wants you to train** your children to tell others about His character and His ways.

*“He [the Lord] commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands” (PSALM 78:5–7).*

**God wants you to model** repentance and forgiveness to your children.

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).*

**God wants you to lovingly discipline** your children.

*“Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them” (PROVERBS 13:24 NLT).*

**God wants you to honor** your parents.

*“Honor your father and your mother” (EXODUS 20:12).*





# CHARACTERISTICS



---

*“Your method  
of parenting  
impacts the  
development  
and behavior of  
your children.”*



On May 21, 2008, parenting becomes incredibly more challenging for Christian recording artist Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife, Mary Beth.

Little Maria Chapman is so excited when she hears her big brother Will returning home in the family car. As he pulls into the driveway, she hurriedly runs out to greet him. The eyes of five-year-old Maria are fixed on her brother's face—not on the front of the car. In an instant, she runs into the path of the vehicle and is tragically killed.

Terrified, Will bolts out of the car and runs away—wanting to be *anywhere* except the scene of the tragedy. And from the emotional overflow of a father's broken heart, Steven later makes a keen assessment: "I just really had a deep concern in my heart that I wouldn't lose two children as a result of this because I knew what Will was struggling with."<sup>10</sup>

Steven's compassionate father's heart is a reflection of the compassion of the heavenly Father.

*"As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him."*

(PSALM 103:13)

Parents raise their children in different ways. Consequently, your method of parenting impacts the development and behavior of your children. Different approaches have distinguishing characteristics that make up basic parenting styles.

## What Are Four Problem Parenting Styles?<sup>11</sup>

Steven and Mary Beth Chapman could have easily slipped into a problem parenting style by becoming *doting parents* or *dependent parents* to compensate for their tremendous family pain, but God's grace, strength, and wisdom is their constant support.

After Maria's death, one of the greatest challenges Steven and Mary Beth face is grieving the loss of a child while trying to emotionally support the other five who are experiencing deep sorrow. "We have talked a lot," Steven reflects. "And you will hear all of us talk about the process of grieving with hope. That's what has kept us breathing . . . while we are grieving this process, there is a hope that we have that we're anchored to in the midst of just what sometimes seems unbearable."<sup>12</sup>

The Bible describes this hope, alluding to Jesus . . .

*"We have this hope as an anchor  
for the soul, firm and secure."  
(HEBREWS 6:19)*

## Dependent Parents

**Goal:** To control their child's behavior and feelings

When parents are **possessive**

- Children tend to become **passive**

When parents are **manipulative**

- Children tend to become **deceitful**

When parents are **suspicious**

- Children tend to become **jealous**

When parents are **inconsistent**

- Children tend to become **indecisive**

When parents are **overinvolved**

- Children tend to become **nonassertive**

**Biblical Example:** Genesis 27:2–17, 41–45

Rebekah tries to control the life of her favored son, Jacob. She feels she must not only protect this younger twin, but also make all the important decisions for him. Failing to trust God, Rebekah schemes and manipulates Jacob into deceiving his father in order to receive the blessing due to his older twin brother, Esau. The enmeshed relationship between this controlling mother and her passive son results in hatred, jealousy, and division within the family.

Instead of seeking control, the Bible says to release control to God and trust Him.

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.”*  
(PROVERBS 3:5–6)

## Domineering Parents

**Goal:** To control their child’s behavior

When parents are **overcontrolling**

- Children tend to become **subservient** or **strong-willed**

When parents are **inflexible**

- Children tend to become **bitter** or **rebellious**

When parents are **performance-oriented** (vs. people-oriented)

- Children tend to become **underachievers** or **overachievers**

When parents are **hypercritical**

- Children tend to become **perfectionistic** or **apathetic**

When parents are **black-and-white thinkers**

- Children tend to become easily **discouraged** or **argumentative**

**Biblical Example:** Genesis 29:1–31:55

Rachel's father, Laban, is a picture of a domineering father. He uses his authority to control the decisions and activities of his family and his extended family. Laban deceives Jacob in order to make sure his older daughter, Leah, marries first. He cheats Jacob on his wages and then becomes critical of his son-in-law's success. Laban's deceit and excessive control eventually drive his son-in-law, daughters, and grandchildren far from him.

In contrast to Laban, Jesus says . . .

*"Whoever wants to become great among you  
must be your servant, and whoever  
wants to be first must be your slave."*

(MATTHEW 20:26–27)

## Doting Parents

**Goal:** To control their child's feelings

When parents are **overprotective**

- Children tend to become **spoiled**

When parents are **yielding to pressure**

- Children tend to become **manipulative**

When parents are **desperate for harmony**

- Children tend to become **disrespectful**

When parents are **rescuing**

- Children tend to become **irresponsible**

When parents are **too helpful**

- Children tend to become **helpless**

**Biblical Example:** 1 Samuel chapters 2 and 4

Eli serves as a spiritual leader of Israel—both as a judge and as a priest—yet he is a doting, permissive father who fails to discipline his two sons. He does not restrain his sons’ rebellious behavior nor does he model an accurate picture of the character of God. By giving up leadership for the sake of harmony, Eli raises sons who become irresponsible men with no regard for the Lord or for His laws.

The Lord says to Eli . . .

*“Why do you honor your sons  
more than me?”*  
(1 SAMUEL 2:29)

### Detached Parents

**Goal:** To avoid responsibility for their child’s behavior and feelings

When parents are **apathetic**

- Children tend to become **withdrawn**

When parents are **ambivalent**

- Children tend to become **emotionally hardened**

When parents are **uninvolved**

- Children tend to become **insecure**

When parents are **unwilling to set boundaries**

- Children tend to become **undisciplined**

When parents are **lacking in follow-through**

- Children tend to become **underachievers**

**Biblical Example:** 2 Samuel chapters 13, 14, 15, and 1 Kings 1:5–6

King David is highly successful at battling Israel's enemies, but sadly unsuccessful at disciplining his children. He is, in fact, detached from taking responsibility for his many wives' children, apparently putting all his energy and time in "attending to business." There is no evidence of appropriate discipline in response to the outright defiance and sinful behavior of his own children. The rape of his daughter by her half brother goes unpunished, and two of his sons, in outright rebellion, consider how to usurp their father's power.

The Bible offers this insight:

*"Discipline your children, and they will give you peace;  
they will bring you the delights you desire."*

(PROVERBS 29:17)

## Spending Time as a Family

**Question:** "My wife wants me to spend more time with the children, but my business keeps me out of town during the week and I often work on the weekend. What can I do?"

**Answer:** As a husband and father, you have many important responsibilities. Keeping a right relationship with God is paramount as it affects all other relationships. Your family needs to be a priority to you. You don't want to rob your family of the closeness you need to have with one another. The one totally unique gift you have to offer your family is yourself.

- Look over your schedule with your wife and see what times you have available to regularly spend time together as a family. Plan activities together a week or a month in advance and discuss ways to spend quality and quantity time together.

- If necessary, discuss the possibility of changing your job or work location. If a job change is not an option, talk with your boss about the situation. Ask if you can adjust your hours or workload to meet your needs.
- If there are no other options other than your current work schedule, just remember to make the most of the time you do have with your family.

God will honor your desire and your obedience when you make the most of every available moment with your family. As a parent, whether you are with them or away from them, pray diligently for your children and commit your plans to the Lord.

*“Commit to the LORD whatever you do,  
and he will establish your plans.”*

(PROVERBS 16:3)

## What Is the Positive Parenting Style?

Because Steven and Mary Beth Chapman adopt the positive parenting style known as *discipling*, their children learn to share each other’s burdens and their family support system increasingly strengthens.

Their son Will, who was driving the vehicle that hit Maria, recalls the immediate support of his siblings following the accident: “I started running after the accident . . . just running away from the house. And I remember Caleb was the first one to run and kind of just jump on me and hold me. And then Shaoey was right there by him. To me . . . that meant a ton.”<sup>13</sup> Positive parenting by the Chapmans supports their children through unforeseen tragedy and prepares them for the difficult times that lie ahead. And they are teaching their children to obey the call of this scripture:

*“Carry each other’s burdens,  
and in this way you will  
fulfill the law of Christ.”*

(GALATIANS 6:2)

## Discipling Parents

**Goal:** To develop christlike character in their child

When parents are **leading wisely by example**

- Children tend to become **competent**

When parents are **implementing healthy boundaries**

- Children tend to become **secure**

When parents are **encouraging responsible behavior**

- Children tend to become **confident**

When parents are **comforting in times of trial**

- Children tend to become **compassionate**

When parents are **loving unconditionally**

- Children tend to become **caring**

**Biblical Example:** 2 Timothy 1:5–7; 3:14–15

Timothy is raised by a godly mother and grandmother. Lois and Eunice model sincere faith, which encourages love and develops self-discipline in Timothy. They also train him from infancy in God’s Word, which leads him to a saving faith in Jesus. Timothy becomes a leader in the church at a young age and is greatly respected by the apostle Paul, who becomes Timothy’s “father in the faith.”

*“For you know that we dealt with each of you  
as a father deals with his own children,  
encouraging, comforting and urging you  
to live lives worthy of God,  
who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 2:11–12)

## Balancing Parenting and Marriage

**Question:** “My wife doesn’t want the two of us to spend time together apart from our teenage daughter, and she won’t go on any trips with me. Shouldn’t our marriage sometimes be a priority over our daughter?”

**Answer:** This sounds like an overly dependent mother/daughter relationship. When a parent primarily focuses on one child, sometimes that child becomes a barrier against intimacy with the marriage partner. One problem with this behavior is that the child realizes the relational dynamic and feels excessively responsible for the enmeshed parent. Additionally, healthy bonding in marriage is not being modeled for the child. An enmeshed parent feels that investing in the child is all-important, but there needs to be balance. No child is to be prioritized over a marriage partner because . . .

- The primary relationship in a family is the one between the husband and wife, united as one for life. Children, however, are to grow to maturity and form a life and family apart from their parents.
- The marriage relationship is the glue that holds the family together. It provides the foundation for children to grow into healthy, responsible adults and become biblically accountable parents themselves. One of the best things parents can do for their children is to have a strong marriage relationship.

One solution is to have your daughter stay with a trusted family member or friend so you and your wife can enjoy a trip away together alone. You can also reciprocate and do the same favor for another family so they, too, can get away.

*“Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 9:9)

## How Are the Four Problem Parenting Styles Corrected?

If you are practicing one of the problem parenting styles, don't be discouraged—you can change. Just as your children can change how they respond to you, you can change how you parent them. Only three elements are necessary to change your parenting: 1) be aware of your own problematic patterns, 2) know how to practice positive patterns, and 3) discipline yourself to make the desired changes.

With God's help, you can do the hard work, the good work, the grace-filled work God created you to do.

*“For we are God's handiwork,  
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

(EPHESIANS 2:10)

### If You Are a Dependent Parent, You Need to . . .

**Stop** being possessive.

- Understand that genuine love is not possessive—your children are not your possessions but rather creations of God, who made them with His plan and purpose for their lives.
- You don't have the power to control your children or how they live their lives.

**Reject** being manipulative.

- Manipulation shows a lack of trust in God and is rooted in a selfish desire to control others.
- The desire to control your children is often rooted in the need to feel significant, but true significance is found only in God.

**Cease** being suspicious.

- Suspicious behavior can be a real detriment to your relationship with your children, creating resentment toward you.
- A lack of trust in your children can be rooted in an underlying distrust of God.

**Quit** being inconsistent.

- Inconsistency breeds insecurity and disrespect in your children.
- You need to rely on the Lord to give you both the will and the power to develop a pattern of consistency.

**Avoid** becoming overly involved.

- Being overly involved in the lives of your children can delay their ability to develop self-confidence.
- Realize that a need to hover indicates a lack of dependence on God to meet your needs and the needs of your children.

Entrust your children and their activities to God. Look to Him to meet your own need to feel significant by learning to see yourself as God's chosen child.

*“Am I now trying to win  
the approval of human beings, or of God?  
Or am I trying to please people?  
If I were still trying to please people,  
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*  
(GALATIANS 1:10)

**If You Are a Domineering Parent, You Need to . . .**

**Quit** being overcontrolling.

- Attempts to control your children are counterproductive and can hinder your children from learning to rely on God.

- The need to control others can demonstrate a lack of faith in God and fearfulness born out of events in the past or unpleasant situations in the present. Entrust your children and your need to control them to God, and submit yourself and your children to the loving, sovereign rule of God over your lives.

**Refuse** to be inflexible.

- Rigidity does not reflect the grace of God, but emphasizes performance-based behavior.
- Realize that inflexibility communicates an inaccurate and harmful view of God, portraying Him as a hard taskmaster instead of a loving and compassionate Father.

**Stop** being performance-oriented.

- Understand that by emphasizing how your children perform—rather than focusing on who they are becoming and how they feel—you are hindering your relationship with them.
- Acknowledge that your zeal to elevate performance over people hinders you from establishing loving relationships with others and with God.

**Avoid** being hypercritical.

- A critical spirit could drive a wedge between you and your children and is a futile attempt to make you feel significant and powerful.
- Entrust your frailties and flaws and those of your children to God. Focus on scriptures that reassure you of God's grace, love, and forgiveness.

**Abandon** being a black-and-white thinker.

- A rigid approach to right and wrong leaves no room for anyone to think differently than you and sets you up to be a higher judge than God.
- Acknowledge that black-and-white thinking can hinder you and your children from looking to God for guidance concerning right and wrong choices.

Entrust yourself and your children to God to guide and direct each of you according to His will. Depend on Him to dictate right and wrong.

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.  
‘As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”*  
(ISAIAH 55:8–9)

### **If You Are a Doting Parent, You Need to . . .**

**Quit** being overprotective.

- Understand that overprotectiveness is not loving, it’s smothering.
- Acknowledge your limitations to protect your children.

**Refrain** from being desperate for harmony.

- Realize that harmony in the home is important but not as important as the freedom to speak, the right to be heard, and the realization that your opinions are valued.
- Acknowledge that you have placed a higher value on avoiding discord than on confronting wrong, which results in your children disrespecting you as a parent and increases their desire to rebel.

**Cease** yielding to pressure.

- Understand that caving in to pressure can send a message to your children that you are weak and that they can wear you down to get their own way.
- Acknowledge that the unwillingness to hold your ground with your children can be a great disservice to them.

**Stop** rescuing.

- Understand that rescuing your children teaches them to escape their problems rather than learning how to resolve problems.

- Realize that children can resent interference and can become angry toward you for not having confidence in them to solve problems for themselves.

**Resist** being overly helpful.

- Understand that unneeded help leaves children feeling inadequate, helpless, and leads to irresponsibility. Realize that your children want and need to do things for themselves as much as possible and that failure is a necessary and valuable part of the process.
- Entrust your children and their abilities to God, committing to pray for their success. Be sure to praise their accomplishments along the way.

*“Whoever heeds life-giving correction  
will be at home among the wise.”*

(PROVERBS 15:31)

### **If You Are a Detached Parent, You Need to . . .**

**Put away** your apathy.

- Detachment behavior can reveal a fear of investing in your children and self-centeredness in refusing to give of yourself to your children.
- Realize that apathy can force children to parent themselves by default and can send them the message that God is apathetic toward them and disinterested in their lives.

**Quit** being ambivalent.

- Understand that indecisiveness toward your children can cause confusion as to what is expected of them. They may experience problems with decision making as they grow older.
- Trust God and find guidance in His Word when making decisions regarding your children. Be an example of following God’s direction so that they, too, will depend on God for direction. Focus on loving your children as He loves them.

**Cease** being inattentive and uninvolved in the lives of your children.

- Understand that a lack of involvement in the lives of your children communicates to them that they are insignificant to you and can create insecurity and a sense of unworthiness within them.
- Realize that a disinterest in your children can damage their self-esteem and can create resentment in them toward you and toward God.

**Change** your unwillingness to set boundaries.

- Understand, your failure to set boundaries leaves your children without direction and godly values and results in undisciplined lives and deep-rooted insecurities.
- Realize that failing to set guidelines for your children leaves them open to being carried away by the world's standards in opposition to God's standards for living.

**Abandon** your lack of follow-through.

- Realize that being unreliable communicates a lack of concern to your children regarding their relationship with you, and can cause them to view God as undependable also.
- Acknowledge that a lack of follow-through with your children can reveal selfishness. Ask the Lord to give you the desire to attach to your children. Commit to becoming as dependable with your children as God is with you.

*"God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble."*

(PSALM 46:1)





# CAUSES



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*“The root cause  
for most  
parenting problems  
is a wrong belief  
regarding  
the proper balance  
between  
love and limits.”*



The innocence of our children is increasingly under attack in today's culture, and parents will never win the battle with unending awkward and inefficient talks—much less a long list of strict rules.

Dennis Rainey, cofounder and former president and CEO of FamilyLife Today, has observed that too many parents are taking a passive role when reacting to their children's mistakes, rather than choosing to be proactive.<sup>14</sup> Parenting with a proactive mind-set requires prayer and a conscious effort by the parents to take the leadership role in guiding their children through the many dangers and pitfalls of adolescence.

Unfortunately, parents often feel like failures as they struggle to find their way through the chaos and confusion of their child's youthful need for independence. Wise parents place their trust in the Lord who loves their children even more than they do.

*“Be strong and take heart,  
all you who hope in the LORD.”*  
(PSALM 31:24)

## What Are Surface Causes of Poor Parenting?

At a men's conference, Dennis Rainey admitted, “The scene caused a chill to trickle down my back.”<sup>15</sup>

Imagine an outdoor stage covered with a dozen animal traps, one big enough to snare a bear. Imagine all of these traps—each with a strong spring and with sharp-toothed projections heavy enough to hold its prey. Imagine each steel trap labeled with the snares of youth: “alcohol,” “sex,” “rebellion.” Now imagine a 15-year-old boy, blindfolded and barefoot, walking straight toward the traps. Suddenly his father shouts, “Trent, stop! Don't take another step. I'll be right there!”<sup>16</sup>

After whispering to his son, the father turns around and the blindfolded boy places his hands on his father's shoulders. The father then guides his son as they wind their way through the precarious path, careful not to veer into a vice, not to be snatched by a snare, not to trip into a trap. When the two complete the treacherous obstacle course, thunderous applause erupts. Dennis exclaims before the male audience: "Men, that's what God has called us to as fathers—to guide our children through adolescence, the most dangerous period of our children's lives!"<sup>17</sup>

Parents need to be willing to walk with their sons and daughters who are often unaware of the dangers they face, particularly during the turbulent teen years. Although this period of time is often characterized by rebellion, God can redeem it because of His unconditional love for us.

*"Do not remember the sins of my youth  
and my rebellious ways;  
according to your love remember me,  
for you, LORD, are good."  
(PSALM 25:7)*

### Perils of the Parent Traps

No parent sets out to fail at raising a child. Your heart's desire is to do the very best you can for the precious children God has placed in your care. You certainly want to take your parenting role seriously, but you must also be wise and be aware of the hidden traps that can cause even the most dedicated parent to miss the mark.

Consider the word *traps*. It paints a perfect picture of the hazardous pitfalls you might fall into, only to find yourself later ensnared in a hedge of prickly thorns and complicated entanglements. Nowhere is this more evident than when people enter the precarious world of parenting. However, take heart . . .

*"For the LORD will be at your side  
and will keep your foot from being snared."  
(PROVERBS 3:26)*

## TRAPS

(an acrostic for the word TRAPS)

### T—Treasure-seeking parents

- Place money and possessions ahead of everything else
- Please people to gain acceptance and recognition
- Push for status and prominence
- Prefer pleasure and luxury over commitments

### R—Rejecting parents

- Lack quality and quantity time
- Lack attention and eye contact
- Lack physical touch and intimacy
- Lack respect and courtesy

### A—Absentee parents

- Choose workaholic lifestyles
- Choose careers or hobbies over family
- Choose unnecessary childcare
- Choose excessive time with friends

### P—Power-driven parents

- Demand control
- Deceive through manipulation
- Deny personal faults and weaknesses
- Demean others

### S—Spiritually-divided parents

- Differ in theological beliefs, goals, and expectations
- Differ in the time spent practicing spiritual disciplines
- Differ in understanding the character of God
- Differ in ways to practice their faith at home and church

*“Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,  
for you are my refuge.”*

(PSALM 31:4)

## Helping a Son Say No

**Question:** “What can I do about my teenage son being exposed to pornographic and other inappropriate material, even though both my son and I object to it?”

**Answer:** If possible, directly confront the person who is exposing your son to inappropriate material. They need to know that it is not okay to share that with him. Establish proper boundaries and enforce consequences when needed. You also need to teach your son how to respectfully say *No* to things that violate his conscience. For instance, he might say to the person:

“I want us to have the best relationship we can. So, I need to tell you about something that’s bothering me: It’s very uncomfortable for me to watch this. It goes against my conscience and fills my mind with images I don’t want there. Besides, there are so many other things we can do together that we both feel good about.”

As the parent, you need to train your son what to do with his eyes and mind. If he’s ever exposed to sexually explicit or objectionable material, let him know how important it is that he look away immediately. A godly man named Job consciously “*made a covenant*” with his eyes for his own protection.

*“I made a covenant with my eyes  
not to look lustfully at a young woman.”*

(JOB 31:1)

## Responsibility with Authority

**Question:** “My 19-year-old son is a college sophomore and wants to do things that I believe are wrong for him. Do I have the right to tell him *No*?”

**Answer:** As a parent, you always have a right to speak into your child’s life, regardless of their age or circumstances. But realize, as they grow older, they will need to make their own decisions. This is especially the case if they are living independently of you and your support. Consider this: If your son is financially responsible for supporting himself—earning his own living, buying his own food, paying his own rent, fueling his own car, and providing for his own schooling—then he has earned the right to make his own decisions.

However, if your son is not living autonomously, then he has not earned the right to make autonomous decisions. In this case, he is still under your authority and needs to respect your right to maintain house rules and make decisions regarding his activities.

If he says, “That’s not fair,” simply explain that he is still dependent on you and thus needs to live under your authority. When he begins to live independently of your support and takes financial responsibility, he will then have the right to make his own decisions. But remember, as his parent, you can always express your loving concern for his well-being if you believe he is heading down a wrong path.

*“Listen to your father, who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old.”*

(PROVERBS 23:22)

## What Circumstances Contribute to Poor Parenting?

The problem with Greg’s parents is that they appear to be *too good*.

They seem to have it all together, excelling in life on all fronts, but the pressure of performance has taken a toll on their 17-year-old. He passes out on his bed after overdosing on his father’s pain pills. Dennis Rainey’s ministry helps the family and soon discovers that Greg’s mother and father also pay a high price for performance. They are beset with worry over almost every aspect of Greg’s life, ranging from grades to relationships to sports achievement. They even seem more concerned about damaging their own reputation if it becomes known that Greg has been using drugs.

Greg seems to bear the weight of the world on his shoulders. “I feel as if it all hinges on me—how the family is doing, what the mood is at the house, and whether we’re going to have a good time or not.” Greg also shares, “I feel as if I’m under a microscope and that if I don’t perform up to expectations, the whole family will fall apart.”<sup>18</sup>

If parents live with mixed motives, they can be oblivious about why their parenting is ineffective. But the Lord sees the hidden areas of the heart.

*“All a person’s ways seem pure to them,  
but motives are weighed by the LORD.”*

(PROVERBS 16:2)

In truth, many circumstances can contribute to poor parenting. Most stem from the past, but some blossom in the present. Children see how their parents live and are the product of their environment—the sum total of their experiences. Children are also great imitators, regularly repeating what they hear and reenacting what they see and feel.

However, some children distinguish themselves early in life by not following the status quo, not fitting in, not playing by the rules of the family. A force within them seems stronger and more compelling than the forces outside them and they won't be squeezed into a mold. Instead, they exert self-will over parental will. These children—the ones with a rebellious bent—create chaos within families that are unable or unwilling to accommodate their differences and integrate them into the family unit. They are like the rebellious people the prophet Isaiah describes . . .

*“For these are rebellious people, deceitful children,  
children unwilling to listen to the LORD’s instruction.”*

(ISAIAH 30:9)

### Reasons for Poor Parenting Include . . .

- Poor modeling** by parents when growing up
- Preconceived false ideas** about parenting and raising children
- Unmet emotional needs** in present relationships
- Unresolved issues** from past relationships
- Damaged emotions** and emotional immaturity
- Inflated egos**, immaturity, and selfishness

### These Setups Often Produce Parents Who Prioritize . . .

- Rules** over relationships
- Dictating** over discussing
- Raging** over reasoning
- Criticizing** over complimenting
- Relegating** over relating
- Belittling** over blessing

Wounded parents who lack inner strength and wholeness are not prepared for the demands of parenting. Those who take responsibility for the growth and development of their children first need to take responsibility for their own growth and development. Parents need . . .

**Courage** to establish and enforce healthy boundaries with their children because they have the determination to set and keep their own personal boundaries

**Commitment** to live with sacrificial love toward their children because they have experienced the sacrificial love of Christ on a personal level

**Confidence** to help their children develop Christlike character because they have made it their personal goal to allow the Lord to develop Christlike character within them

**Clarity** to see their children as God sees them, their strengths and weaknesses, their challenges and callings, and the goals they need to reach because they have come to see themselves through God's eyes and know the importance of seeing others as He sees and loves them

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

(2 PETER 1:3–4)

## What Stressful Situations Create Problems for Parents?

“I should have picked up on the clues that he gave us from the very beginning.”<sup>19</sup>

The distressed father pours his heart out to Dennis Rainey. A stressful situation concerning his son fills him with remorse and regret. First the boy begins to dress counter culturally, then his behavior becomes reclusive as he spirals downward into drug addiction. Acknowledging he should have been far more involved in his son’s life, the father resorts to sending him off to rehab in another state to keep him away from destructive influences.

According to God’s Word, an involved father might say,

*“My son, pay attention to what I say;  
turn your ear to my words.  
Do not let them out of your sight,  
keep them within your heart;  
for they are life to those who find them  
and health to one’s whole body.”*

(PROVERBS 4:20–22)

Yet, for many parents, the ability to effectively parent children is greatly diminished, not by their lack of good parenting skills or as a result of past painful experiences, but by present problematic circumstances. Everyone has physical and psychological limits. When these limits are stretched to the max or broken, it may result in a breakdown that makes it difficult for the person to function as efficiently or effectively as before. Those caught in the distress produced by such an overload can relate to the cry of the psalmist:

*“Be merciful to me, LORD,  
for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.  
My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my affliction,  
and my bones grow weak.”*  
(PSALM 31:9–10)

**Difficult physical conditions** that can turn competent parents into confused parents include having a child who is:

- Mentally, emotionally, or physically challenged
- Hyperactive or easily distracted, such as: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention-deficit disorder (ADD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Prone to frequent physical ailments and/or hospitalizations

**Highly stressful situations** that can negatively impact both parents and children include:

- Frequent relocations by the family
- Drastic changes in the economic status of the family
- Absence of a parent due to employment, illness, accident, military service, or imprisonment
- Death or impairment of a significant family member or family pet
- Remarriage or a new family member
- Adultery, divorce, or abandonment
- Debilitating accident, home invasion, or natural disaster trauma
- Sexual violation or verbal, emotional, or physical abuse

Parents who find themselves under great stress because of challenging circumstances can find great comfort in the experience and example of King David:

*“In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God.  
From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. . . .  
He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.”*

(2 SAMUEL 22:7, 17)

## What Are Common Causes of Problematic Parenting?

Dennis hears the story of brokenness countless times from other parents and determines to do things differently. When two of his children are young teenagers, he takes them to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting. Samuel and Rebecca hear testimonies about how alcohol has destroyed marriages and families, and they observe firsthand the devastation of addiction. “I knew an indelible image had been etched in the minds of my daughter and son,” Dennis recalls.<sup>20</sup>

Scripture describes the path Dennis and Barbara Rainey set before their children:

*“The path of the righteous is like the morning sun,  
shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”*

(PROVERBS 4:18)

While some parents have no particular interest or investment in parenting, no one sets out to *parent poorly*. Many parents feel their reputations are at stake in how their children “turn out.” For this reason, problematic parenting is typically unintentional. When *positive parenting skills* are not taught, they are not learned. These parents are unaware of the purposes and processes, the principles and procedures, the pains and perplexities of raising children.

Unfortunately, they may not yet have experienced this biblical truth:

*“I applied my heart to what I observed  
and learned a lesson from what I saw.”*

(PROVERBS 24:32)

## Purpose and Process

**Many frustrated parents are *unaware* of the:**

**Basic emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of children—**and therefore fail to meet those needs in healthy, productive ways

**Different stages of childhood development—**and therefore do not know how to best help children successfully navigate through the individual stages

**Varying needs of children in each developmental stage—**and therefore fail to anticipate, identify, or meet the different legitimate needs of children during the various stages of development

**Different capabilities of children in each developmental stage—**and therefore do not know what is realistic to expect of children at various stages or how to appropriately respond to them or encourage them

**Specific skills children are to acquire in each developmental stage—**and therefore do not understand why their children act as they do and do not know how to help them learn what they need to learn

**Degree of impact their words and actions have on children—**and therefore act inappropriately in the presence of children and take no responsibility for any subsequent problematic behavior by those children

*“While these people were worshipping the LORD,  
they were serving their idols.*

*To this day their children and grandchildren  
continue to do as their ancestors did.”*

(2 KINGS 17:41)

## Principles and Procedures

**Many frustrated parents are *unaware* of the:**

**Primary ways children learn**—and therefore fail to provide sufficient mental stimulation to enhance learning and neglect to instill in children correct values or teach basic foundational learning skills

**Effect their behavior, tone of voice, and emotions have on children**—and therefore speak angrily or harshly and unknowingly instill fear, anger, distrust, or even hatred in their children

**Fact that children mimic behavior more than they obey commands**—and therefore fail to model appropriate behavior for children while verbally demanding appropriate behavior from them

**Biblical prescription for discipline**—and therefore fail to administer proper discipline with love and compassion and neglect to consistently set healthy behavioral or relational boundaries

**Inherent differences between children**—and therefore make comparisons between children and have the same expectations of them all, regardless of their gifts and talents or individual likes and dislikes

**Need to learn what parenting approach works best with each individual child**—and therefore treat and discipline all children in the same way and expect identical results in all of them

*“Set an example for the believers in speech,  
in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”*

(1 TIMOTHY 4:12)

## Pains and Perplexities

**Many frustrated parents are *unaware* of the:**

**Complexities of children as unique creations of God**—and therefore react only to observable surface behaviors of children without looking for the underlying thoughts, feelings, or beliefs that drive those behaviors

**Strong desire in children to please the authority figures in their lives—**and therefore use threats or bribery to get children to behave, rather than praise them when they act appropriately

**Insatiable drive in children to gain the approval and acceptance of people who are significant to them—**and therefore withhold approval, fail to give compliments, and berate children for trying to get attention or compliments from those around them

**Basic need of children to sometimes be close to authority figures and distant at other times—**and therefore become hurt, confused, or angry with their child.

**Many sacrifices required in parenting—**and therefore expect children to be full of gratitude, to obey their every command, to put no demands on them, and to accept that children are to be seen and not heard

*“Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:21)

## What Is the Root Cause of Problem Parenting?

Dennis Rainey learns over time the need for balancing love and limits in order to establish boundaries. As the family’s foremost authority figure, he knows the pitfalls of ruling with an iron fist.

One such case arises as he walks down a hallway at home behind his son whose jeans are about to reach a jaw-dropping stage. “From my vantage point they were ready to slide off his behind at any time. I kept my mouth shut.”<sup>21</sup>

Dennis looks for opportunities to talk with his son about the pressure to conform and what a young man of God ought to do. Soon the jeans “crawled back up to a more decent elevation.”<sup>22</sup>

Love and limits provide children with security and solid direction. The biblical book on wisdom says . . .

*“My son, keep your father’s command  
and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.  
Bind them always on your heart;  
fasten them around your neck.  
When you walk, they will guide you;  
when you sleep, they will watch over you;  
when you awake, they will speak to you.”*  
(PROVERBS 6:20–22)

### 3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>23</sup>

**Love**—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (JOHN 15:12).

**Significance**—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”*  
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

**Security**—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

*“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge”* (PROVERBS 14:26).

### The Ultimate Need-Meeter

**What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?**

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*  
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

**Love**—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

**Significance**—*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

**Security**—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

The root cause for most parenting problems is a wrong belief regarding the proper balance between love and limits. Giving love without limits is not positive parenting, but neither is giving limits without love. Conscientious parents who provide protective limits do so out of love.

### WRONG BELIEFS:

#### Permissive Parents

“All that my child needs is love. Imposing limits on my child will only result in resentment and bitterness, then I’ll lose my child’s love.”

#### Power-oriented Parents

“All that my child needs is strict limits. Allowing independence will result in self-centeredness and rebellion, then I’ll lose control of my child.”

### RIGHT BELIEF:

“Even if our relationship is strained for a period of time, I will be consistent and balanced in exhibiting love, enforcing limits, and teaching my child the character of God through the way I live my life.”

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

(PROVERBS 22:6)

## What Is God’s Perfect Plan for You?

The heavenly Father is the only perfect parent, and He invites us all into His family. He longs to spend eternity with you and to guide your life in loving wisdom, always being available to help as you fulfill your God-ordained purpose.

God promises:

*“I will be a Father to you,  
and you will be my sons and daughters,  
says the Lord Almighty.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 6:18)

## 4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

### 1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

## 2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

## 3. God’s Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

## 4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you've humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
I admit that many times I've chosen to go my own way  
instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for my sins.  
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross  
to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
Change me from the inside out and make me the person  
you created me to be.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

### What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



# STEPS TO SOLUTION



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*“Parents are to equip  
their children to fly—  
to soar—to reach  
their utmost potential  
in serving God  
and serving others.”*



Dr. Tim Kimmel is a nationally recognized expert on parenting—and *he’s a dad*. From academia and actual experience, he offers wisdom and wit to meet the challenges of purposeful parenting—to raise children to become independent and fully functioning adults.

As founder and executive director of Family Matters, an organization providing support to families of all ages and all stages, Dr. Kimmel primarily invests in what he presents as the true wealth of a nation—its parents. He clearly states, “Their guidance—or lack of it—determines the character and longevity of a people.”<sup>24</sup>

As a parent, you may feel you have been thrust into a position for which you are thoroughly unprepared. However, a basic understanding of child development and positive discipline will serve you well in becoming the parent God wants you to be. The important first step is to consult God’s Word.

*“Listen to his instructions, and store them in your heart.”*

(JOB 22:22 NLT)

## Key Verse to Memorize

At three years of age, Cody considers it an exasperating moment, but later learns this life-changing ordeal is orchestrated by his dad to be a “designed dilemma.”<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Kimmel and his son Cody are in a busy mall. Not once, not twice, but four times Cody lets go of his dad’s hand and runs off. Each time, Dr. Kimmel emphatically issues the warning to hold on for safety’s sake. The words ring in Dr. Kimmel’s ears as he recalls the countless times he has told parents it is their job not only to *protect* their children, but also to *prepare* them. And what better time to prepare Cody than now?

Keeping his eyes on Cody the entire time, Dr. Kimmel slowly slips out of Cody's sight. Several minutes pass before Cody realizes his father is missing, but when he does, sheer panic sets in. Cody runs around in circles in the crowd, his eyes trying to stare past the knees and waist of every man he encounters, searching frantically for the familiar face of his father. His anxiety heightens and tears stream down his face.

After about ten seconds, Dr. Kimmel longs to leave his hiding place and console his panicked son, but he knows "few lessons are learned in ten seconds."<sup>26</sup> He lingers a few minutes longer, then finally appears in full view.

The overjoyed boy races into his father's arms, and the two walk hand-in-hand to a nearby bench. Dad now has a captive audience—ready to listen, to learn, and to change—because of this "designed dilemma."<sup>27</sup>

Tim lovingly begins to instill responsibility in young Cody in agreement with the following key verse from God's Word:

*"Train up a child in the way he should go,  
and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

(PROVERBS 22:6 NKJV)

## Key Passage to Read

In "parenting" the early church, the apostle Paul continually uses the word *grace*, reminding Christians that living for God isn't centered on a demanding list of "dos and don'ts." Rather, it revolves around a deepening relationship with the Lord and serving Him out of a heart filled with love and gratitude. This liberating message, however, wasn't understood by Dr. Kimmel's mother when she was a young parent.

Dr. Kimmel remembers going outside at age seven on a Sunday afternoon and bouncing a small rubber ball off the side of the house. But his ball playing comes to a screeching halt with a sudden shout from his mother: "Tim, stop that immediately!" Confused, he asks:

“Why, Mom?”

“Because it’s Sunday!”

“But why can’t I play catch on Sunday?”

“We’re not allowed to do things like that on Sunday.”

“Who told you that?”

“God!”<sup>28</sup>

Actually, this strict mandate—a restriction not found in the Bible—came from their pastor. Meanwhile, her fear of God formed the foundation for *graceless parenting*, evidenced when she adds, “Besides, what if someone from the church drove by and saw you playing ball on Sunday?”<sup>29</sup>

Through the years, grace eventually permeates the parenting style in the Kimmel home, but not before young Tim experiences firsthand the negative effect of his parents’ misunderstanding that kids who comply to strict obedience become the *best kids*.

“Hardly.” Dr. Kimmel assesses, “If anything, this in an excellent way to wreck your kids.”<sup>30</sup>

Looking back to centuries ago, a stark contrast can be seen in Paul’s parenting of his spiritual children.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

### Paul’s Example of Parenting the Church

<sup>7</sup> *“Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup> so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*

<sup>9</sup> *Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

<sup>10</sup> *You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.*

<sup>11</sup> *For you know that we dealt with each of you  
as a father deals with his own children,*

<sup>12</sup> *encouraging, comforting and urging you  
to live lives worthy of God,  
who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

- Be a blessing**, not a burden, to your children. ....vv. 7, 9
- Be caring, loving, gentle, and attentive** in all your ways. .... v. 7
- Be an avenue** of God’s love by sharing the life-changing truth of Christ. .... vv. 8–9
- Be willing** to share yourself on an intimate level. .... v. 8
- Be willing** to sacrifice, endure hardship and hard work for the benefit of your children. .... v. 9
- Be aware** that God is constantly watching over you and your children. .... v. 10
- Be an example** of a holy, blameless, righteous life. .... v. 10
- Be committed** to leading, guiding, protecting, and providing for your children. .... v. 11
- Be encouraging and comforting** toward your children. .... v. 12
- Be consistent** in urging your children to please God by living responsible, godly lives. .... v. 12
- Be thankful** that God has called you and your children into His kingdom and glory. .... v. 12

Paul’s ultimate joy would come in seeing the growth and maturity of his spiritual children, whom he so lovingly nurtured and encouraged.

*“For what is our hope, our joy,  
or the crown in which we will glory  
in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?  
Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 2:19–20)

## How to Have a Transformed Life

The greatest command God has given us is that we love Him. The greatest task of parents is to develop a deep, abiding love for God in their own hearts and then cultivate that same love for God in the hearts of their children.

Loving God requires coming to know Him *personally*. Dr. Kimmel states: “Just as you build a house from the ground up, you build your child up. It starts with a firm foundation that is rooted in a solid relationship with Jesus Christ”<sup>31</sup>

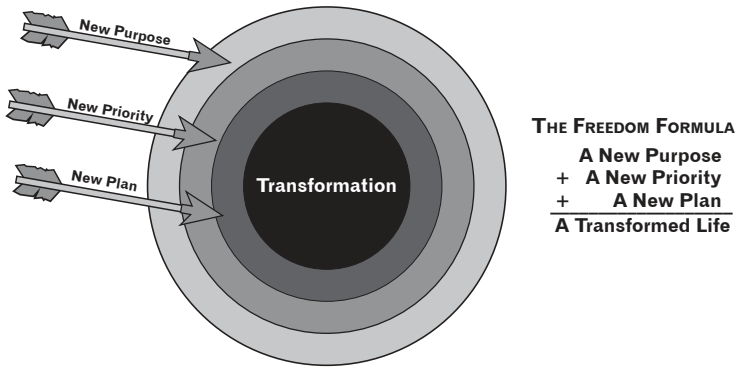
Developing Christlike character in children is the most important parenting responsibility. The example we have for inspiring children to develop godly character is found in Christ. Jesus, who is God, came to earth and took on human form, enabling people to see, hear, and interact with God, and even form a personal relationship with Him.

Parents who live their lives in dependence on Christ will reveal the character of Christ to their children just as Jesus, who lived in dependence on the heavenly Father revealed His Father to His followers. The greatest motivation for a child to change is to see the parent change—increasingly reflecting the character of Christ. Ultimately, parents can influence their children to follow them as they are following Christ. This means both parents and children become Christlike. As the apostle Paul said,

*“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 11:1)

## Reaching the Target: Transformation!



### Target #1—A New Purpose

**God's purpose for me** is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

*“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

### Target #2—A New Priority

**God's priority for me** is to change my thinking.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

### Target #3—A New Plan

**God's plan for me** is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

## My Personalized Plan

In seeking to make known the character of Christ to my children and to encourage the development of Christlike character in them, I will . . .

### Lead Wisely by Example

**Walk** in total dependence on Christ in every area of my life and live my life by the same principles I teach my children.

**Read** and discuss God's Word with my children on a daily basis using a Bible study or devotional for young children and teens. I will create opportunities to teach my children godly principles, relating them to everyday experiences and mentioning them during mealtimes and other times the family is together.

**Maintain** an active prayer life, teaching my children to pray on a daily basis about their individual activities, decisions, and for the people in their lives. I will keep a prayer journal with them, sharing God's answers to both my prayers and their prayers.

**Project** a positive, joyful, hopeful, and thankful attitude with my children, frequently mentioning the goodness and faithfulness of God to me and to other family members.

**Attend** church faithfully and do volunteer work together as a family. I will demonstrate for my children how they are to show respect to others in their lives.

### Implement Boundaries by Example

**Establish** boundaries in my own life and begin setting boundaries early in the lives of my children, explaining their importance and training my children to set boundaries for themselves.

**Present** boundaries that are clearly understood by stating what the boundary is, why it is needed, what the repercussion will be for crossing the boundary, and what the reward will be for keeping it.

**Assure** the boundaries are fair, age-appropriate, and within my child's ability to maintain.

**Enforce** the stated repercussion when my child disobeys and grant the reward when my child obeys.

**Help** my children learn the importance of not following the crowd if the crowd is engaging in wrong or questionable behavior. I will teach them instead to look to Jesus as their example to follow.

### **Encourage by Example**

**Communicate** confidence in the ability of my children to succeed in school, in relationships, and in their efforts to live a life that is pleasing to God.

**Encourage** my children to be good workers, to take pride in their accomplishments, to perform their individual responsibilities as unto the Lord, and to always look for ways to serve the family and others.

**Attend** school activities and regularly spend quality time with each child.

**Make** kindness to others a priority by emphasizing it, praising it when it is practiced, planning specific acts of kindness to be shown by the family toward others in need, and by consistently modeling kindness before my children.

**Read** biographies of Christian heroes to my children and talk with them about the impact these people had on the lives of others, the personal impact of their stories on me, and the pleasure and praise they brought to God.

### **Comfort by Example**

**Assure** my children that their feelings are important to me by sharing my feelings with them, inviting them to share theirs with me, and responding to their feelings with understanding and compassion.

**Show** my family members that they can trust me and that I will always be in their lives. I will make sure my actions match my words.

**Allow** all of my children to speak freely regarding their feelings, thoughts, and problems—without fearing repercussions—even if what they say is upsetting to me.

**Embrace** everyone in the family of God with open arms, especially those who are lonely, suffering loss, or hurting physically or emotionally.

**Provide** a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and reasons to laugh together.

### **Love by Example**

**Tell** my children daily how much they are loved and give them frequent, meaningful reminders of my love for them, of God’s love for them, and of my gratitude to God for them.

**Surrender** myself and my children to God daily by submitting to His will and by pursuing His desires above my own—teaching my children by example to daily surrender everything (themselves, their friends, their plans, their activities, and their possessions) to God, who loves them beyond measure.

**Begin** a Scripture memory program in my family by selecting a verse or portion of Scripture to be memorized each week. I will place it on the refrigerator door and bathroom mirrors and have a time at the end of the week for family members to quote the selected verse(s).

**Tell** my children about my personal love for God, my conversion experience with Christ, and the difference He and His love for me have made in my life. I will explain to them everyone’s need for salvation and God’s loving plan for salvation.

**Obey** the Lord in every area of my life, sharing with my children whenever possible my own intentional acts of obedience and my faithfulness to God. Then I’ll explain how God expects my children to obey and how I also want them to be faithful to obey. I will assure them that as a loving parent, I always want God’s best for them.

With children, more is “caught than taught.” Expose your children to people who possess Christlike character and express it. Christlikeness is not developed by merely seeing or hearing about Christ but by *believing* in and receiving the person of Jesus Christ—giving Him control of your life. People who do not have the spirit of Christ within them through faith in Him can never possess true Christlike character—they can only mimic what they see and hear. If you desire your children to be like Christ, then your children must be in Christ and Christ must be in them, reproducing His character through them.

*“Whoever says, ‘I know him,’  
but does not do what he commands is a liar,  
and the truth is not in that person.  
But if anyone obeys his word,  
love for God is truly made complete in them.  
This is how we know we are in him:  
Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”*  
(1 JOHN 2:4–6)

## How to Reflect God during Your Child’s Development

Parents Darcy and Tim Kimmel call it their “crisis in the closet,” but it becomes a key component in their daughter’s development.<sup>32</sup>

Darcy and young Karis certainly aren’t the first mother/daughter duo to battle over appropriate school apparel. Little Karis is a “big girl” and now a first grader. She wants the freedom to choose her own clothes. Mom selected most of her outfits during her kindergarten year, and on this particular day with questionable selections in hand, Karis glumly gives in to Darcy’s other preference. Mom is relieved it has been only a small skirmish.

But Tim recognizes a key dynamic at play: “You know, Darcy, that conflict is going to occur more frequently as she gets older. . . . She wants independence and freedom to make some choices for herself. She needs it, too, in order to feel complete and significant. But her taste in clothes—it’s unbelievable sometimes.”<sup>35</sup>

The parents make a wise decision to nurture Karis’ emotional development. For three days Darcy picks the outfits, and Karis chooses them the other two days. In second grade, Darcy selects for two days and Karis for three; and in third grade Darcy chooses for one day while Karis picks for the other four. By fourth grade, Karis has full freedom in clothes selection, within parental parameters.

This orderly supervision is a source of security, much like what the heavenly Father provides for us. Karis submits to her mom’s decision and gleans the benefits of the following scriptures:

*“I instruct you in the way of wisdom  
and lead you along straight paths. . . .  
Hold on to instruction, do not let it go;  
guard it well, for it is your life.”*

(PROVERBS 4:11, 13)

## Infants

### Bonding Stage:

Infants’ needs are met by forming an attachment to their parents.

Infants cannot understand spiritual concepts but can be influenced by the overall spiritual atmosphere within the home.

### Parent’s Goals:

To help your infant feel secure with tender caressing and cuddling and by meeting physical needs

To provide a spiritual atmosphere by praying and reading Scripture over your infant and filling your home with joyful music and praise

## Toddlers

### Exploration Stage:

Toddlers are intensely curious, unaware of danger, and eager to explore their world.

Toddlers begin to separate from parents by being independent and saying *No*.

### Parent's Goals:

To encourage your child's curiosity in a protected environment instead of being annoyed or harsh

To allow your child to safely explore their surroundings and test developing mobility, while not always interpreting their *No* as disrespectful, but as a normal phase

## Preschoolers

### Testing Stage:

Preschoolers push against the rules to test the limits.

Preschoolers often begin to be deceitful.

### Parent's Goals:

To establish structure, set limits, and hold the line with love and understanding

To reflect the patience and compassion of God while correcting your child

## Elementary School Children

### Desire for Acceptance Stage:

Children seek acceptance from different groups by performing various activities and roles.

Children want to please parents and teachers, and they adopt the morals of their parents, whether good or bad.

### Parent's Goals:

To reflect acceptance—enabling your children to see their God-given worth

To help your child memorize meaningful Bible passages that show God's holy standards and His plan for their lives

## Adolescents

### Independent Stage:

Adolescents test the boundaries.

Adolescents begin to look to peer groups for affirmation.

### Parent's Goals:

To help your adolescent choose to stay within safe parameters while adhering to a system of rewards for acceptable behavior and repercussions for unacceptable actions

To protect your adolescent from unwholesome influences, know your child's friends, and monitor their activities

## Teenagers

### Identity Stage:

Teens seek to define their own set of values rather than mindlessly parroting their parents.

Teens are idealistic and begin to search for their purpose for living.

### Parent's Goals:

To increase your teen's exposure to godly role models (pastors, youth leaders, camp counselors, biographies of Christian leaders)

To reflect the character of God, explaining that God's purpose is that you both become more and more like Christ

*"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

(2 PETER 3:18)

## How to Develop Positive Discipline

Following the “crisis in the closet” comes the “battle with the bus.”

In third grade, Karis rides the bus to school, which is a long way from the Kimmel home—much too far for a little girl to walk alone. Increasingly, Karis procrastinates in the morning and her mother tires of pushing her out the door. One morning Karis hasn’t even touched her breakfast when the bus goes chugging by, and Dad decides it’s time for positive discipline.

“Okay, honey, let’s go,” Tim says.

“Are you going to take me to school?” Karis asks.

“Kind of,” the focused father responds.<sup>34</sup>

The two drive off but then Tim stops about three-tenths of a mile from the school. This is close enough for Karis to walk and for him to watch her every step.

“This is all the farther the taxi goes today, Babe,” he says.

“But Daddy, I’m late,” Karis declares, hoping her “taxi driver” will accelerate and give her curbside service.

“I know,” Tim acknowledges, “but you got up at 6:30 this morning and had plenty of time to be ready. You made the choices that set all of these consequences in motion. Now you have to bear them.”<sup>35</sup>

So Karis begins the final leg of her trek to school and positive discipline drives home the necessary point. Ultimately, her father reflects the disciplining heart of God.

*“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline,  
and do not resent his rebuke,  
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in.”*

(PROVERBS 3:11–12)

## The Principles of Discipline Hebrews Chapter 12

Discipline is training that corrects, molds, or strengthens a person's mind or character.

<b>Discipline</b> is essential. ....	v. 5
<b>Discipline</b> is positive and meant to encourage. ....	v. 5
<b>Discipline</b> is an expression of love and acceptance. ....	v. 6
<b>Discipline</b> is a natural part of healthy parent/child relationships. ....	v. 7
<b>Discipline</b> builds a sense of security. ....	v. 8
<b>Discipline</b> instills respect. ....	v. 9
<b>Discipline</b> develops godly character. ....	v. 10
<b>Discipline</b> is painful. ....	v. 11
<b>Discipline</b> produces right living and peace. ....	v. 11
<b>Discipline</b> must be consistent. ....	v. 11
<b>Discipline</b> , to be accepted, requires strength. ....	v. 12
<b>Discipline</b> , when willingly accepted and acted on, brings healing. ....	v. 13

*“Listen to advice and accept discipline,  
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.”*

(PROVERBS 19:20)

## The Don'ts of Discipline

*“Know then in your heart that as a man  
disciplines his son,  
so the LORD your God disciplines you.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 8:5)

**Don't feel guilty** when you discipline your child.

You are loving your child well when you hold the line on limits.

**Don't discipline** your child in anger.

Wait for your anger to pass as you pray for wisdom in order to discipline appropriately.

**Don't be afraid** of losing your child's love.

By obeying God's will, you will earn your child's respect.

**Don't view** structure and limits as punishment.

You are establishing beneficial boundaries.

**Don't manipulate** your child with fear or guilt.

See discipline as a positive step to put your child back on a correction course.

**Don't embarrass** your child in front of others.

Remember to praise in public and correct in private.

**Don't belittle** your child with sarcasm.

Speak the truth in love, and discipline with compassion.

**Don't compare** your child with others.

See your child as a unique creation of God.

**Don't use your hand** for correction.

If you spank your child, use a neutral object—not a father's belt or a mother's brush—but an object used only for the purpose of discipline.

*"A refusal to correct is a refusal to love;  
love your children by disciplining them."*

(PROVERBS 13:24 MSG)

## The Do's of Discipline

*“If you are not disciplined—  
and everyone undergoes discipline—  
then you are not legitimate,  
not true sons and daughters at all.”*

(HEBREWS 12:8)

**Do mold the will** without breaking the spirit.

- **A child's will** is molded by applying appropriate discipline when the child seeks to go in a direction contrary to the will of the parents.
- **A child's spirit** is uplifted by being valued as a unique creation of God and by being treated with kindness and respect.
- **A child's spirit** can be broken in an atmosphere of overreacting or too many rules, criticizing or teasing, false accusations or inflexibility, impatience or harsh punishment.

### Example:

A wild stallion has some intrinsic value; however, the most valuable horse turns with the slightest nudge from the rider's reins. The goal of the master is to break the will of the horse, but not the spirit of the horse. Your goal as a parent should be to mold the will of your child without breaking the spirit of your child.

*“A crushed spirit who can bear?”* (PROVERBS 18:14).

**Do communicate** your expectations clearly.

- **Prior to any problems**, get on your child's eye level and describe in detail what you expect of your child regarding structure and limits.
- **Form an agreement** with your child. Then ask your child to state his or her understanding of your expectations.
- **When it is time** for your child to obey, give one gentle reminder.

### Example:

**Don't Say:** “Don't you think it is time for you to go to bed now?”

**Do Say:** “Remember, we agreed that your bedtime is 8:00. It’s 7:55, so what do you need to be doing now?”

*“For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life” (PROVERBS 6:23).*

**Do embrace** beneficial behavior.

- **Doing physical exercise** helps expend excess energy and improves your child’s physical health.
  - ♦ Do jumping jacks, push-ups, and sit-ups; take a walk around the block or walk the dog; do housework or yard work.
- **Performing volunteer services.**
  - ♦ Sign up for community service activities for a month or more; volunteer at a church, city shelter, food pantry, community center, hospital, or animal shelter; assist elderly relatives, neighbors, or church members.
- **Caring for others.**
  - ♦ Have your child help their sibling, friend, or neighbor with chores, such as cleaning, yard work, or walking the dog.

**Example:**

Jennifer, age 14, is allowed to adopt a dog after she demonstrates the ability and discipline necessary to care for and feed a pet fish. If she chooses not to care for the fish, she will be forfeiting the right to adopt a dog.

*“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (LUKE 16:10).*

**Do establish** repercussions for misbehavior.

- **To establish effective repercussions,** know your child’s likes and dislikes.
- **If possible, choose a repercussion** related to the behavior.
- **Clearly communicate the repercussion** in advance.

- **Prior to a problem, confirm your child’s agreement** to the repercussion.
- **Allow your child to experience the agreed upon repercussions** for disobedience.

**Example:**

Tommy, age 10, lives on a busy street. He likes to ride his bicycle with his friend who lives across the street, but he was told never to cross the street without an adult. If Tommy disobeys, he will not be allowed to ride his bicycle the next day.

*“Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray” (PROVERBS 10:17).*

**Do encourage** and develop responsibility.

- **Allow your child** to make age-appropriate choices and decisions.
- **Permit your child** to experience the repercussions of wrong choices and the rewards of right choices.
- **Give increased freedom** when your child acts in increasingly responsible ways.
- **Restrict freedom** when your child acts in irresponsible ways.

**Example:**

Seven-year-old Katie is told, “You may play in the front yard, but do not leave or go in the street.” If Katie disobeys, say, “What is the rule about leaving the yard?” . . . “Why do we have this rule?” . . . “Yes, the rule is for your safety. What is the repercussion for breaking the rule?” . . . “That’s right, you may not play in the yard anymore today.”

*“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (HEBREWS 12:11).*

**Do assign** beneficial chores.

- **Chores need to be assigned** to every capable person in the family, compatible with each person’s ability.

- **Chores need to be explained** as benefiting the entire family.
- **Chores need to be clearly defined** and detailed. A time for completion must be assigned and enforced.

**Example:**

**Don't Say:** "Michael, I want you to mow the lawn once a week."

**Do Say:** "Michael, you're responsible for mowing the yard by 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. Please be sure to clean up afterward. Put away any garbage in the trash cans out back. And please put away the equipment when you're finished."

*"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty"* (PROVERBS 14:23).

**Do reward** positive behavior.

- **Give your child praise** regarding character traits.  
"Your room looks great, I'm so proud of you for keeping your room clean! Great job!"
- **Give your child verbal expressions** of gratitude.  
"I really appreciate your willingness to bring in the groceries. Thanks for your help."
- **Give your child recognition** in front of others.  
"Kyle mowed the lawn today. He does such a great job."
- **Give your child attention.**  
"Lisa, I heard you have learned to dive from the side of the pool. I would love to see you dive."
- **Give your child respect.**  
"Chris, I respect your need for privacy. I won't enter your room without knocking."
- **Give your child smiles** and physical affection.  
Children need to be lovingly touched by their parents—with plenty of hugs, kisses, squeezes, pats on the back, or a hand on the shoulder.

*"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing"*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

**Do maintain** consistency.

- **As parents, come to an agreement on issues** regarding your children and present a united front, even if you disagree in private.
- **Make only promises** you know you can keep.
- **Give careful thought** to a request before approving or denying it. Then briefly explain your decision.
- **Refrain from requiring** too many major changes at one time.
- **Evaluate your rules** and change them as your child grows and matures.

**Example:**

**Don't say:** “No, Molly, you can't ride your bike to school. I've already said *No* and that's final!”

**Do say:** “Molly, let me discuss this with your dad. Now that you are getting older maybe it's time to reconsider this restriction. Our most important concern is your safety.”

*“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures”*  
(PROVERBS 24:3–4).

**Do examine what the Bible says** when you contemplate spanking a young child who defies authority. The purpose of spanking is to make the child aware that wrongdoing has painful consequences and is to be avoided.

- **Never spank your child in anger or revenge**, but rather in sorrow that an unwise choice has been made.
- **Spank your child in private**, not in the presence of others.
- **Explain the reason for the spanking**, identify the wrong behavior, and convey your sadness and disappointment in the wrongful activity and the act of disobedience toward you.
- **Ask your child to repeat the reason** why the spanking is being given.
- **Give a few swift swats** on the buttocks only.

- **Verbally and physically comfort your child** immediately after spanking, extending your forgiveness and conveying your confidence in the child to make good decisions in the future.

Spanking should be used *only* when productive. (Some children don't require spanking in order to become repentant; others don't respond to spanking.)

**Example:**

“Susan, what did Mommy and Daddy say about spitting on your sister?” . . . “That’s right. You are not supposed to spit on anyone ever. But what did you do?” . . . “Yes, you disobeyed and spat on her. What happens to you when you spit on someone?” . . . “Yes, you get a spanking because we love you and want you to learn to do what is right.” (After spanking, hold your child and allow time for crying.) Then say, “Susan, are you sorry you disobeyed and spat on your sister?” . . . “Good, I forgive you and I trust you to stop doing that. (This can be an appropriate time for a hug to reassure your child of your love and forgiveness.) Now, who else do you need to ask to forgive you?” . . . “You’re right, your sister. You need to go and ask her now so that we can all learn from this and put it behind us.”

*“Don’t be afraid to correct your young ones; a spanking won’t kill them. A good spanking, in fact, might save them from something worse than death”* (PROVERBS 23:13–14 MSG).

## To Spank or Not to Spank

**Question:** “Spanking is such a controversial issue today. I am confused about whether or not it’s appropriate to spank my child for misbehaving. How do I make that decision?”

**Answer:** Few topics ignite the passions of parents more quickly than debating the pros and cons of spanking. Both sides cite Bible verses and principles, their own parents’ practices, and a multitude of opinions to “prove” the rightness of their position. Some points to consider include:

- Keep in mind that *spanking is not a beating*—never done in anger or when out of control.
- It is not meant to *injure* the child. The parent must remain calm and compassionate when spanking and must not apply a spanking anywhere other than on the child’s buttocks.
- When spanking is wisely and judiciously applied as a repercussion for willful acts of disobedience, many parents consider it to be an appropriate form of discipline.

In some places in the world, corporal punishment may be banned altogether or legally restricted, so know the laws governing your area.<sup>36</sup>

Although the word *spanking* is not referenced in many Bible translations, *the rod* (of discipline) is mentioned (Proverbs 13:24; 23:13–14). This can refer to general discipline or correction, but it also denotes physical discipline. While spanking a child isn’t explicitly prescribed in the New Testament, loving, godly discipline is (Hebrews 12:6).

Spanking is most effective for children from the age of two until around six or seven years of age. By the time a child reaches the transitional years of ten to twelve, other forms of discipline become more effective.<sup>37</sup>

Pray to the Lord, asking for wisdom and guidance on the correct means of discipline for your child. God's Word says, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you"* (Psalm 32:8).

**Some people object to spanking today** because they personally believe:

- It can be demeaning and counterproductive.
- It concentrates on external compliance rather than on the internal heart attitudes.
- It focuses on short-term "behavior modification" rather than long-term character transformation.
- It produces in parents an unhealthy sense of control and in children an unhealthy sense of powerlessness.
- It is a part of the Law of the Old Testament and doesn't express the heart of Jesus or the New Testament teaching on parenting.

Ultimately, the basis for all decision making is God's Word—what it says—either *directly* through a specific instruction or command or *indirectly* through teachings that outline principles for daily living. We are to read God's Word, pray about how it relates to specific decisions we need to make, and then wait on the Spirit of God to reveal His will to us. No action on our part is ever "right" if our heart is not "right" and fully submissive to God. Ours is a walk of faith, not sight—not human reason, but faith that God is all-knowing and always right. We can trust Him to reveal His will to us.

James, the brother of Jesus, said it this way:

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God,  
who gives generously to all without finding fault,  
and it will be given to you."*

(JAMES 1:5)

## Time-Outs<sup>38</sup>

**Question:** “I know that parents today use time-outs as a form of discipline, but in what situations and for what age child does this form of discipline work best?”

**Answer:** There are many effective ways of correcting children that are not specifically identified in the Bible. One corrective measure often used by parents today is a time-out.

Time-out is a form of discipline and can be effective for children around ages 2-10 years old. Its purpose is not so much to punish, as it is to give the child an opportunity to calm down and regain self-control.

### **Time-outs could be used when:**

- Your child doesn’t obey your direct instructions.
- Your child displays inappropriate behaviors (for example, defiance, temper tantrums, hurting others, destroying things).
- Your child does something dangerous to themselves or others.

### **Time-out areas should be:**

- Free from distractions or entertainment
- Free from anything dangerous or breakable
- Somewhere neutral (hallway, dining room) and not somewhere that would cause fear (a dark closet)
- A place where your child can quietly sit for a few minutes

### **Time-out guidelines:**

- **Be immediate.** Take your child to the time-out area immediately following the inappropriate behavior.
- **Be specific.** Explain exactly what behavior is not acceptable.
- **Be calm.** Do not explode or give in to anger. Be firm but gentle in your voice and demeanor.

- **Be instructive.** Explain to them the rules: They are to sit quietly in a chair until a specified amount of time has passed and you tell them they can get up. If they talk or get up during time-out, the timer will start again. (If your child gets up too early, calmly return them to the chair without speaking.) It can be helpful to practice a time-out scenario with your child before a problem behavior occurs—this can help them understand the process.
- **Be timely.** The recommended amount of time for a child to sit quietly in time-out is one minute for each year of their age, but for no more than five minutes. Feel free to use a timer, so you don't go over or under the allotted time. Time-outs begin when they are calm and quiet—and end when the child has remained calm and quiet for the allotted time. At the end of the time-out, ask your child, “Would you like to get up?” If they politely answer Yes, allow them to do so and let your child know time-out is over.
- **Be consistent.** Above all, be consistent in the process. Inconsistency will lead to time-outs being ineffective. Consistency will take time, effort, and discipline on your part. Remember this truth for both you and your child: *“No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way”* (Hebrews 12:11 NLT).

Time-outs are intended to help your child learn appropriate behavior and develop self-control, including learning to stop and think before acting. The Bible says . . .

*“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,  
but the folly of fools is deception.”*

(PROVERBS 14:8)

## How to Help and Heal Angry Children

The Kimmel family maintains an intriguing tradition in their home—about every two months they have a “What’s Your Beef?” night.<sup>39</sup>

This provides the four Kimmel children the opportunity to both *vent* and *prevent*—to *vent* any frustrations concerning their parents and to *prevent* the potential for full-fledged anger. The discussion occurs over dinner, following each child’s selection of an entrée, meaning one may be eating pizza, another a hot dog, another a hamburger, and yet another Chinese takeout.

According to Dr. Kimmel: “These have been some of the most exciting and eye-opening nights of our lives. Often we find out we’ve done things that we never knew had hurt them. The key to getting them to be honest is that we don’t defend ourselves. They get a chance to ventilate without fear of reprisal.”<sup>40</sup>

The Kimmels’ receptivity to their children’s needs demonstrates this biblical truth:

*“If you listen to constructive criticism,  
you will be at home among the wise.”*

(PROVERBS 15:31 NLT)

### Model Love and Listen Attentively<sup>41</sup>

**Listen** with your ears and your heart.

- If you have an angry child, ask, “Help me understand why you are angry—would you please tell me?” Listen carefully. Repeat what was said. Then ask, “Did I get it right?” and “Is there more?”
- Get to really know the heart of each child. Ask them about their dreams and desires, their feelings and fears, their likes and dislikes. Listen without judging, with the hope of understanding them.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”*  
(JAMES 1:19).

**Model** repentance and forgiveness.

- The best way to teach a child how to repent and request forgiveness is to show it in your own life. When you sin against your spouse in the presence of your children, you should ask for forgiveness in front of your children and then demonstrate your change of behavior.
- When you sin against your children, ask for their forgiveness and then change your behavior toward them. “I realize I was wrong in (state your wrong attitudes or actions). Would you forgive me?”

*“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love”* (EPHESIANS 4:2).

**Organize** your family God’s way.

- If your family is controlled by your children, they will tend to demand their own way and become angry when they don’t get their way.
- When the home is controlled by loving, godly parents, many of the dynamics that create anger in children are removed.

*“Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths”* (PSALM 25:4).

**Establish** reasonable, child and age-appropriate boundaries with rewards and repercussions.<sup>42</sup>

- Determine rewards for staying within the boundary (for example, increased time with friends) and repercussions for crossing the boundary (decreased time with friends).
- Explain: “I want you to be able to be with your friends, but you will be the one who determines whether you get the repercussion or the reward. If you cross the line, you are the one choosing how much time you will be able to spend with your friends.”

*“We instructed you how to live in order to please God”* (1 THESSALONIANS 4:1).

**Enforce** boundaries consistently.

- Never make ultimatums that you will not carry out. Be true to your word.
- If you are not able to discipline at the time of disobedience, let your child know that the repercussion will be enforced at a later time.

*“Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death” (PROVERBS 19:18).*

**Learn** to deal with your anger appropriately.

- You are your children’s model for proper relationships. They will learn angry relationship skills if you are an angry parent, and they will learn self-control if you keep a calm demeanor when upset.
- Children who have angry parents often think of God as an angry God. If you are an angry parent, your children may reject your faith because they perceive it as harsh and filled with anger.

*“Now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips” (COLOSSIANS 3:8).*

**Let** your discipline be based on love, never on anger.

- Discipline because your child needs it, not because your child has hurt you and you want to retaliate.
- When you discipline, be sure your children recognize that you love them. Do not give the impression that you hate or disapprove of them. Value them as your children and as your treasured family members. Make it clear that you are rejecting their behavior, not them.

*“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent” (REVELATION 3:19).*

**Love** your spouse unconditionally and openly.

- How parents relate to each other is often reflected in how their children relate to others. The best way to give security to your child is to love your spouse.
- When parents show little love toward one another, children can feel insecure and, therefore, angry.

*“Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (EPHESIANS 5:33).*

**Validate** each child by refusing to show favoritism.

- By showing favoritism to one child, you breed anger within the other children.

- Fairness does not mean that you must give each child the same present or that all have the same amount of ice cream. But it does mean that you are not showing more love to one child than to another.

*“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism” (JAMES 2:1).*

**Encourage and affirm** each child daily.

- Offer praise regularly for both the little things and the big things. Children want to please their parents. Let them know that they do not have to seek your approval, but that you love them unconditionally.
- Children are a gift from God. Remind them how thankful you are that God has given them to you.

*“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him” (PSALM 127:3).*

## Temper Tantrums

**Question:** “My child has temper tantrums when people are around. What can I do to correct this behavior?”

**Answer:** Children have certainly been known to use temper tantrums and other “power trips” as a means to control and manipulate their parents.<sup>45</sup>

At home, a good approach to correct this bad behavior is:

- Take your child to the bedroom.
- Calmly state, “If you choose to have a temper tantrum, you will do it alone. When you are finished and ready to apologize, you can rejoin the rest of the family.”
- Then leave the room, closing the door behind you.

This separation communicates that you will not get into a power struggle with your child over having a tantrum but you are going to stop yourself from being controlled by the tantrum. Remain calm and disinterested in the tantrum.

When a tantrum erupts in a store:

- Say, “This isn’t the way to act. If you don’t stop we’ll leave.”
- If your child doesn’t immediately calm down, leave the store. (You might ask an employee or manager to hold your items until you can return.)
- Sit in the car for a short while as a brief time-out, and then attempt to continue shopping. If the behavior repeats, then leave the store and go home.
- Later, if possible, make arrangements for someone to watch your child so you can finish shopping.
- Realize, a temper tantrum isn’t worth having if someone isn’t there to see it!
- Explain, “I would like for you to go shopping with me, but last time our shopping trip had to be cut short due to your temper tantrum. Because of your choice then, you’ll have to stay home now. Next time I hope you will choose to behave so you can come with me. It’s your choice.”

*“Don’t sin by letting anger control you.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:26 NLT)

## How to Offer Hope for Hurting Parents

The father is a builder by trade, and he is trying to hire Tim to reconstruct his family.<sup>44</sup>

His office is lined with blueprints, signifying efforts to meticulously build structures that will stand the test of time. He calls Tim because his family's foundation is cracking and he hopes the parenting expert can "fix it." A daughter has become a prodigal, becoming involved with an immoral man who involves her in a felony. The other children have their share of problems too, and the builder is about to implode.

Using an illustration that he hopes will resonate, Tim asks, "Have you developed a set of blueprints for your children's character? What's the foundation on which you're structuring their lives? Have you picked out the best windows and doors for them to access the outside world, capture the view, and benefit from the Light of the World? Have you factored in the proper insulation to protect them from life's dangerous elements, and attached them to the right kind of power to light them for a lifetime?"<sup>45</sup>

In the family life of the builders it is time for some demolition and reconstruction—to lay a biblical foundation that won't crumble in trying times. And the troubled father, too, is hopeful that one day he may experience the joyous return of his own prodigal. Luke describes the emotional reunion.

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him  
and was filled with compassion for him;  
he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."  
(LUKE 15:20)*

### Parents of Prodigals

The parable of the prodigal son describes the response of a parent suffering the pain of raising a child who rejects his early training and goes his own way. The godly father in Luke 15:11–32 let his rebellious son go! He gave his child the dignity of choice while maintaining a heart of hope. When you release your children into the Lord's loving hands, He has the full freedom to work in their lives.

### Receive the compassion of God.

- God understands your pain.
- God is aware of your needs and weaknesses.
- God loves your child even more than you do.
- God’s compassion never fails.

*“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail” (LAMENTATIONS 3:22).*

### Examine your emotions.

- Am I embarrassed about what others are thinking?
- Am I afraid of what will happen to my child?
- Am I angry at my child for doing this to me or angry at God for allowing it?
- Am I disappointed about how life has turned out?

*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (PSALM 139:23–24).*

### Leave the past in the past.

- Don’t play the “blame game.”
- Don’t rehearse the “what-ifs.”
- Don’t rehash what went wrong.
- Don’t assume responsibility for your child’s choices.

*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (ISAIAH 43:18–19).*

### Entrust the future to God.

- God is the God of countless chances.
- God has a timetable different from yours.
- God is working continually.
- God has all the resources He needs to accomplish His purposes.

*“That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day” (2 TIMOTHY 1:12).*

### **Acknowledge your need for the Lord.**

- “I admit I am brokenhearted over my child.”
- “I cannot carry the pain on my own.”
- “I see this time of trial as an act of God’s love, drawing me into deeper dependence on Him.”
- “I will look to Christ, who is in me, to sustain me as my source of strength.”

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GALATIANS 2:20).*

### **Seek to build a new relationship with your child.**

- Stop trying to change your child and start changing yourself.
- Stop judging and start respecting.
- Stop criticizing and start complimenting.
- Stop talking and start listening.

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).*

### **Exchange your pain for God’s peace.**

- Choose to trust in God’s goodness.
- Choose to rely on God’s faithfulness.
- Choose to believe in God’s involvement.
- Choose to live in God’s presence.

*“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal” (ISAIAH 26:3–4).*

The prayer of all parents of prodigals is that their wayward children will one day return home. As Jesus presents His parable of the prodigal son, the father joyfully proclaims . . .

“Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again;

he was lost and is found.’

So they began to celebrate.”

(LUKE 15:23–24)

## How to Let Go . . . and Give Your Child to God

Sometimes the main problem in the home is a *smother mother*. With Cynthia’s mother, it is a classic case of “smother love,” according to Dr. Kimmel.<sup>46</sup>

Cynthia’s mother simply will not “let go.” She is determined to micromanage her 22-year-old daughter, even down to the shade of her hair color. For years, Cynthia caves to her mother’s pretentious assumption that “her little girl” will always be a blonde, but Cynthia is totally unprepared for the volatile reaction when she pulls up in the driveway of her parents’ home as a brunette. A shrill scream slices through the air, and Cynthia’s mother blurts, “What happened to my baby? What happened to my little girl? Cynthia, what on earth were you thinking? The sparkle’s gone from your eyes. That color makes your complexion look horrible. It just isn’t *you*. You were meant to be a blonde!”<sup>47</sup>

The power struggle goes on for weeks, with Cynthia’s mother refusing to buy her daughter’s sorority pictures and forbidding Cynthia from buying them herself. She even excludes Cynthia from being in a family wedding photograph, exclaiming before the wedding guests, “I don’t have time to write a letter to all our friends explaining what happened to my precious little girl!”<sup>48</sup> Cynthia’s resolve finally weakens, and she returns to the hairdresser to once again become a blonde. Thinking the saga is finally over, Cynthia is stunned when the hairdresser answers a phone call and she soon realizes that *she* is the topic of the conversation. Cynthia’s mother is calling to give hairstyling instructions!

Parents are to equip their children to fly—to *soar*—to reach their utmost potential in serving God and serving others. Unless parents let go, children will not ultimately function independently or live emotionally healthy as adults. Cynthia’s wings are clipped by “smother love,” and only through prayer and sound biblical counseling can she break free, heal, and take flight.

God’s heart is for Cynthia to discover God’s hope for her—His plan, His future, His freedom.

*“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.”*  
(ISAIAH 40:31)

Your child is a gift from God—temporarily under your care to mold and to teach to be more like Christ. Just as arrows are made to be thrust from the bow, children are created to be released to soar on their own. The more you pray and trust in God’s personal involvement in your child’s life, the less possessive and reluctant you will be to release your child into His hands.

### **Let go of . . .**

**Seeing** your child as an extension of yourself

**Desiring** to possess your child

**Looking** to your child to meet your needs

**Trying** to relive your life through your child

**Controlling** your child

**Imposing** your expectations on your child

**Jumping in** to save your child from failure

**Seeking** harmony at all times

**Needing** to be appreciated

**Seeing** parenthood as your primary identity

*“Children are a heritage from the LORD,  
offspring a reward from him.  
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one’s youth.”*

(PSALM 127:3–4)

## How to Navigate an “Empty Nest”

When grown children have flown “from the nest”—having reached the goal of living independently from their parents—what then? What do parents do after they have devoted their lives to training and equipping their children to live productively on their own “outside of the nest”? What do parents now do with no one to train, no one to equip, no one to nurture or take care of?

In truth, no parent is ever without a job, either in the home or otherwise employed. Parents of young adults are simply promoted to an advisory role rather than a hands-on, in-the-trenches role. The bottom line: Life is full of change, and the *promoted parent* is in transition just as their children are in transition. However, the goal is still the same: to continue using every opportunity to teach and train children how to grow in Christlikeness whether the children are small, adolescent, or grown. And that job always includes prayer and is always empowered by prayer. As Paul, the spiritual father of Timothy, said . . .

*“I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did,  
with a clear conscience,  
as night and day I constantly  
remember you in my prayers.”*

(2 TIMOTHY 1:3)

Some helpful suggestions for making this adjustment as painless as possible include:

**Remember** that your true meaning and purpose in life comes from God and is found in your relationship with Him rather than in family, friends, or functions.

**Reflect** over the good job you have done in fulfilling your responsibilities as a parent. Celebrate your experiences, the events you planned and completed, and the satisfaction you felt in meeting the needs of your family.

**Rejoice** over God's love for you, the way He has matured you over the years, and how He has worked in your life and in the lives of your children. He has been there when you faced family crises, strengthened you when you were physically and emotionally spent, and brought you through the various milestones of raising children.

**Realize** that you are still and will always be a mom or dad to your adult children. It is only your type of involvement in their lives that has changed—they still need you, your love and emotional support, and your wise counsel.

**Release** your children to God's care as they begin their journey into independent living and discovering the life God has for them—beyond growing up at home and living with their parents and siblings.

**Recall** your life before you had children and the things that you enjoyed doing. Remember the strengths, talents, and gifts you possessed, the aspirations you had, and the enthusiasm you had for life and for your future.

**Recognize** the opportunities around you to minister to young mothers and fathers who are trying to navigate the road you have already walked down and know quite well.

**Redirect** your focus from raising your children to investing in the spiritual lives of others. Help grow God's children through Bible studies, mentoring young men and women, or being a confidant to troubled teens.

**Rest** in the fact that God’s purpose for your life is not complete. He still has a plan for your fulfillment and new ways of making your life abundantly full and thoroughly meaningful—just ask Him, and He’ll confirm it to you!

*“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:24)





# SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



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*“First seek the counsel  
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

What is a **father's** primary responsibility in **training** his **children**?

***"Fathers, do not exasperate your children;  
instead, bring them up in the training  
and instruction of the Lord."***

(EPHESIANS 6:4)

When I **discipline** my **children**, will I experience **peace**?

***"Discipline your children,  
and they will give you peace;  
they will bring you the delights you desire."***

(PROVERBS 29:17)

How can you effectively **impress** the Lord's  
commandments **on your children**?

***"These commandments that I give you today  
are to be on your hearts.***

***Impress them on your children.***

*Talk about them when you sit at home  
and when you walk along the road,  
when you lie down and when you get up."*

(DEUTERONOMY 6:6–7)

How **must** a spiritual leader **manage his own family**?

*“He **must manage his own family** well  
and see that his children obey him,  
and he must do so in a manner  
worthy of full respect.”*

(1 TIMOTHY 3:4)

Why should you **train up a child in the way he should go**?

*“**Train up a child in the way he should go,**  
and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

(PROVERBS 22:6 NKJV)

Is it essential to **discipline your children** in order to  
**not be a willing party to their death**?

*“**Discipline your children,** for in that there is hope;  
do **not be a willing party to their death.**”*

(PROVERBS 19:18)

Whom should **children** be able to take **pride** in?

*“Children’s children are a crown to the aged,  
and parents are the **pride** of their **children.**”*

(PROVERBS 17:6)

How does a parent who **s pares the rod** feel about **their children**  
compared to one who is **careful to discipline them**?

*“Whoever **s pares the rod** hates **their children,**  
but the one who loves their children  
is **careful to discipline them.**”*

(PROVERBS 13:24)

What **things** should a parent **be careful to not forget to teach** their **children** and **to their children after them**?

*“Only **be careful**, and watch yourselves closely so that you do **not forget** the **things** your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.  
**Teach** them to your **children** and **to their children after them.**”*

(DEUTERONOMY 4:9)

How should **a father deal with his own children**?

*“You know that we dealt with each of you as **a father deals with his own children**, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 2:11–12)





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