

A SAFE HARBOR

RAISING GODLY KIDS IN UNGODLY TIMES

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TO MY DADDY

JOHN WILLIAM HAZELRIG

IN CELEBRATION OF HIS EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

Through his selfless life he demonstrates the
love of Christ to those who have the good fortune
of knowing him.

A SAFE HARBOR - RAISING GODLY KIDS IN UNGODLY TIMES

INTRODUCTION

I have a passion for children. I love to talk to them. I love to kid around with them. I love their innocence. I love the way they reason, and I especially love the way our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ loves them. He states in Matthew as well as in Mark -

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.” (Mat 18:5 NIV)

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:37 NIV)

When we welcome children, Jesus is saying that we are in effect welcoming Him. Translated in the Greek, welcome means “to accept deliberately and readily, take or receive suggesting receptivity, favor, or interest on the part of the subject.” What an awesome thought! Jesus takes our actions toward children very personally. He is extremely interested in how we "handle with care" every child who is within our sphere of influence. It stirs my heart.

This book is written by the prompting, urging, and downright wrestling of the Holy Spirit! God put this title on my heart about two years ago. Being certain that He did not intend for me to write a book, as my literary skills are much to be desired, the idea was promptly disregarded! Yet that gnawing feeling would not go away – hence, the writing commenced. I took to heart Paul’s admonition to Archippus in Colossians 4:17 – “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.” What you hold is the completion of the work I have received.

What times we live in, what times. The news is brimming with all sorts of detestable things. One has to be strong-hearted just to be able to listen to or read the current events of our day. Yet, as I study the word of God, I realize that there really is not anything new under the sun. Man has always been depraved. Man has always wanted to go his own way. Man has always thought he knew better than God what was best for his life. How audacious, not to mention repugnant,

that idea must be to the Creator of the universe - the Creator of both you and me. How on earth could we possibly know better than Jehovah God what is best for us - it is heresy to think that we do. Just as Job had to "brace himself like a man" and answer God, so too we must brace ourselves and answer the same questions when we believe we have all the answers. Exactly where were we when God created the universe? Do we have any idea how He stores the rain and the lightning and the thunder? Do we know how to put the stars in place? If we can answer "Yes" to the above questions, it is really not necessary for us to be reading a "How To" book since we perhaps have all the answers. But if, like me, you have not a clue to the above questions, maybe just maybe we serve a God who knows more than we do. By studying His word and its truths and applying what we learn, we can renew ourselves in "knowledge in the image of the creator." (Colossians 3:10b)

Ok, so what has this to do with raising godly children? Everything. You cannot raise godly children if you are not godly. Our relationship to the Lord is paramount. If our relationship with Abba Father is askew, everything - and I mean everything - in our lives will be askew, and this includes our children. The basic premise of this book is to get our relationship right with God first and foremost; the rest will follow suit. Nothing else matters. Our relationship with the Lord has to take first priority.

Why read a self help book? Why not just go to the source? There is no substitute for the Bible. None. It is truth. It is life giving. It is sufficient. It is more than sufficient. We are all prone to go for the easy read and this is not wrong, in and of itself, if we continue along in the Bible also. It is just when commentaries and self-help books take precedence over the word that we fall into error. Other books are good perhaps to steer us back to the truth, the word of God, or perhaps to clear our thinking, but we must never put them before the study of God's holy word.

In light of that, I pray that this book will not only help us in raising godly children but will also help us become godly men and women - our example worthy of following. As we grow in His holiness, God will lead us in raising godly children in ungodly times. May He lead and guide us into all truth and fill us with all wisdom. Let's get started and see what He has to teach us!

CHAPTER ONE – “TUTORO IN UTERO”

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jer 1:5 NIV)

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. {14} I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. {15} My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, {16} your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psa 139:13-16 NIV)

You have just been informed that you are with child. If this is your first, fourth, or fourteenth you are sure to be filled with some emotion (probably not at all the same type of emotion but with some emotion nevertheless!). God has given you the most precious gift He bestows: the opportunity to develop, along with Him, a person with godly character. He is entrusting you with this awesome responsibility. It is one that should not be entered into lightly. We must always remember that this is not our child; it is God's. We are only caretakers. We nurture, we train, and we let go. All this to be done twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for eighteen or so years and our pay coming only after the job is done. But if done the way God has shown in his word, what a payday it is!

Remembering back to the day I was informed that the rabbit died, my very first thoughts were of a small candy shop in Laguna Beach, California, which made the most delightful chocolate, caramel, and almond turtles - the size of your hand! I surmised for nine months I would not have to hold my stomach in; therefore, I could partake in every delicacy imaginable. I had to start wearing maternity clothes the second day! Oh, the sheer joy of being with child! It did not matter that I was only two days into it - no one had to know! It did eventually catch up to me when on my first visit to the ob/gyn he let me know that it really was not normal to gain at the rate I had been going, and, if I were to keep it up, I might just be the first mother alive to deliver the good year blimp! It did not take a rocket scientist to figure out what he was trying to tell me. Besides that, I was certain I was going to have a girl since God knew I could tie pretty hair ribbons and I was confident that He did not want that particular spiritual gift to go by the wayside! Now if you know you are going to have a girl and you are gaining at the rate of many, many pounds a day you have two choices. You can decide to name her “Big One” (and that was not a family name) or you can cut back on the intake. I decided the latter was much more appealing!

Now that you know you are with child, what do you do with that information? You have nine months to prepare for the coming arrival. Of course, we all know that we must take care of ourselves physically and our baby in utero, but what about spiritually? One recommendation would be to purchase a prayer journal. Start praying for your baby on a daily basis, keeping a record of your requests to the Lord. When the years have passed and you review your prayer journal, you will be amazed how God mightily worked in the life of your child through your prayers.

Moms must be fervent prayer warriors for their children and it starts while they are in the womb. God's word tells us in James:

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16 NIV)

Our prayers for our children are powerful and effective.

Just exactly what do we pray for? Aside from the obvious of ten fingers and ten toes, some suggestions might be that they would come to know the Lord Jesus at an early age; that they would never know a time that Jesus did not sit on the throne of their lives; that they would look to Him for everything; that He would put a hedge around them keeping them from the attacks of the evil one; that they would live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; that they would be used by Christ in a mighty way to further His kingdom and to bring glory and honor to Him. I know God honors these prayers because they are from His word, and He always honors His word - He must because He does not lie or change like shifting shadows.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17 NIV)

"I the LORD do not change." (Mal 3:6 NIV)

That is the most wonderful, reassuring fact about God. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What He says for us in His word will always be true and will always be for our very best and the very best for our children. What a great and precious promise! We serve an awesome God!

Let's sidetrack for just a moment and review the things in the above paragraph in light of our own lives – scary, isn't it? After counting your fingers and toes, ask yourself does Christ sit on the throne of your life? Do you look to Him for everything - going to Him first in prayer before you forge ahead without giving any thought to His will for your life? Do you live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ – not, are you perfect, only are you striving to be conformed to the image of Christ? If we are counting more nays than yeas then perhaps we need to take some time to examine our own lives.

Again, perfection is not what we are after. We will not be made perfect until Christ returns for us yet, we should be heading in the right direction of being conformed to the image of Christ.

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (Rom 8:29 NIV)

We should be going forward towards this goal and not backward. Paul says in Philippians:

“Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” (Phil 3:16 NIV)

He realized that we all have a tendency to go backwards; therefore, we should always be examining our lives and testing our thoughts, actions, words and goals against God's holy word. Where we fall off base we should repent and ask God to help us change.

What in the world does all that mean? It all boils down to having a proper focus. Paul says in Colossians three that we are to set our hearts and our minds on things above:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. {2} Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. {3} For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” (Col 3:1-3 NIV)

The writer of Hebrews also says we are to fix our eyes on Jesus:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2 NIV)

Scripture is loaded with examples of people with both improper and proper focus. Let's quickly examine a couple of these lives and see the end results. On the improper side, we will look at the life of Samson; on the proper side, we will check out the life of Job.

Samson certainly had focus but just not on the correct object. He loved, and I mean loved, the opposite sex. Women were definitely Samson's Achilles' heel. We find his story in Judges chapters 13 - 16. Samson was a Nazirite, one set apart to God from birth. No razor was to be used on his head. This was the secret to his amazing, God given physical strength. Unfortunately, Samson had a bent for Philistine women. This, of course, was a grave sin in God's eyes. Because of his inability to control himself in this area, due to the fact that he allowed himself to focus on the ladies and not on the Lord, Samson had a mighty fall. God allowed Samson's eyesight to be taken away in order to get his sight back on Him. Samson's last recorded act was to pray and ask God to allow him strength once more to level the Philistines. In so doing, he perished. Improper focus always bears consequences in our lives. If our eyes are not fixed on the Lord they are either focused inward, which causes self-absorption, or outward on our circumstances making us easy prey for Satan and our own sinful nature and bents.

As an example of proper focus, let's turn our gaze to Job. The story of Job is powerful. There are many, many insights to be gleaned from the book of Job, but we are only going to direct our attention to Job's focus. Most of us know the story. In a matter of moments, this God fearing man had everything taken from him except his nagging wife (lucky him). This included his oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, servants and children - all ten. He was left with nothing. His response? Just check it out:

“At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship {21} and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." {22} In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.” (Job 1:20-22 NIV)

Satan again attacks. He covers Job with painful sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Again, his reply:

“He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from

God, and not trouble?’ In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.” (Job 2:10 NIV)

After many days of relentless pain and suffering and feeling very apart from God, Job hits the target with this proclamation of faith:

"But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. {9} When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. {10} But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (Job 23:8-10 NIV)

You see, dear friends, Job did not know why he was suffering, but he did know whom he served and he trusted in God's unfailing faithfulness. After his trials the Lord blessed Job's life even more than before. Keeping our focus centered on the Lord gives us hope, the ability to cope, and the strength to persevere.

How do we go about keeping proper focus in our lives? There are four very important steps. Quite frankly, it is not possible to keep your focus on the Lord for any period of time apart from doing these four important steps:

1. Read the Bible on a Daily Basis. I cannot stress this enough. I know of no other way to successfully walk with proper focus on the Lord than to be in His word daily. There is no substitute for this and no other way we will be able to stand our ground. We must renew our minds daily in the word of God. Paul says in Romans 12:1-2:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. {2} Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-2 NIV)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (2 Cor 4:16 NIV)

The key to unlocking the spiritual transformation process in our lives is found in verse two of Romans 12 where Paul says to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. How in the world do we transform our minds? By being in the word of God on a daily basis. Our minds are renewed or made fresh through His holy word. Remember what scripture says about scripture:

¹² For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Heb 4:12 (NIV)

Then, and only then, will we be able to discern God's perfect will for our lives.

Paul also tells us that this is not a one-time action. In Second Corinthians he shows us that it is a day by day by day renewal. We are all looking for the quick fix. That is not how you renew your minds, dear friends. It is in the daily study of God's holy word. Paul states in Ephesians:

“and find out what pleases the Lord.” (Eph 5:10 NIV)

And again:

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.” (Eph 5:17 NIV)

Do you want to know what is best for your life and the lives of your children? Be in God's word daily. I repeat, there is no other way. Start out by doing it as a daily discipline, if for no other reason, until it turns into a heart's desire. Pray for God's wisdom before beginning. Pray for the desire to do it. He promises to deliver:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. {6} But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. {7} That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;” (James 1:5-7 NIV)

The only stipulation given for receiving wisdom when you pray for it is believing that you will receive it. Always, always pray for wisdom and a clear understanding of God's word before you begin. He is faithful to his promise.

Paul tells us in Colossians:

“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, {3} in whom are hidden all the treasures

of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col 2:2-3 NIV)

In Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Jesus is called the Word in scripture over and over again:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. {2} He was with God in the beginning. {3} Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. {4} In him was life, and that life was the light of men. {5} The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:1-5 NIV)

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. {2} The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. {3} We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1-3 NIV)

The Word speaks of revelation. Jesus came to reveal God to man. He fleshed out Deity for the world to see. The scriptures also give us a glimpse into the character of God and His infinite wisdom. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through His written word. He did not have to, but He chose to. How can we know what He desires for us if we are not in His word? The Bible says in Second Timothy:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Tim 3:16 NIV)

If you want to be truly wise, study God's holy word.

The next step in maintaining proper focus is:

2. **Pray.**

“pray continually;” (1 Th 5:17 NIV)

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” (Col 4:2 NIV)

Over and over again scripture exhorts us to be prayer warriors. Our Lord and savior put a high priority on prayer Himself. Mark tells us:

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35 NIV)

“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,” (Mat 14:23 NIV)

“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray".”(Mat 26:36 NIV)

Over and over again in the gospels Jesus talks about prayer. We take this privilege so much for granted. We are given the unbelievable opportunity to come into the presence of God because of the blood of Christ and lay before him our petitions, our praise and worship, our thankful hearts. We can tell Him everything. We need not hold back anything. He desires this communion with us. Can you even begin to imagine why? Who are we that He would desire for us to commune with him? Unfortunately, most of our prayer lives consist of flippantly spouting forth a few requests or crying out to God when we are at the end of our ropes. We just do not grasp what is being offered to us. I believe that part of the problem lies in the fact that we have no clue of who God really is and who we really are.

Get on your knees. Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up. I often envision opening a very large, heavy door and running up to God's throne like a little child. He very lovingly picks me up and I settle in right under the "shadow of his wing". What better place to be? He allows me to bare my soul. He takes away my hurts and burdens and fills me with a peace that surpasses human knowledge. I am forgiven. I am loved. I am comforted. I am filled to overflowing. I am safe. I challenge you to test me in this. Try it for yourself. God longs to meet with you. He desires to be your sufficiency, your all in all.

Another very important aspect of prayer is knowing God's Word. God's holy Word is truth. In knowing His Word we are able to claim His promises. He blesses our obedience in praying back His truths to him. About fourteen years ago God put Psalm 112 on my heart to pray for my husband. I have missed very few days praying back those precious promises to God on behalf of my better half. I have hidden it in my heart so that I can pray it back to God as He puts it on my heart to do. I know God honors that because I have seen the results in my own life.

“Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. {2} His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. {3} Wealth and riches are in his house,

and his righteousness endures forever. {4} Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. {5} Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. {6} Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. {7} He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. {8} His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes. {9} He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor. {10} The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.” (Psa 112 NIV)

Psalm 112 is just one of many, many prayers and promises and passages we can pray from scripture for our husbands and our children and ourselves. Listed below are a few others that may be helpful in getting you started in this pattern of praying:

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, {10} so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, {11} filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.” (Phil 1:9-11 NIV)

As Christian parents we should greatly desire for our children to be able to discern what is best for their lives. We should be praying to this end.

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. {10} And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, {11} being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully {12} giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. {13} For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, {14} in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col 1:9-14 NIV)

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, {15} from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. {16} I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, {17} so that

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, {18} may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, {19} and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. {20} Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, {21} to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph 3:14-21 NIV)

If we know Christ, we will love Him. And if we love Him, we will serve Him. And if we serve Him we fulfill our very purpose for being here.

I substitute the names of my children, husband, family, or friend, as I am praying for them using the above passages. Again, God will honor this. He always honors obedience to his Word. Always. There is so much that we could discuss about prayer but since this is a book about raising godly children I am confident the subject will come up again at least once in every chapter - kids do have a way of keeping us on our knees!

The third step in keeping proper focus in our lives is:

3. **Memorize Scripture.**

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psa 119:11 NIV)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16 NIV)

I know of no other spiritual discipline that reaps as great a reward as storing God's Word in your heart. The Word of God is our only offensive weapon (sword of the spirit) listed in Ephesians for our use to combat the attacks of Satan.

“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph 6:17 NIV)

This is exactly what Jesus used when tempted and it is just as powerful and effective for us to use against the adversary. Not only that, it brings comfort for anxious moments in our lives, it improves our prayer life (as mentioned in the above paragraphs), and it enables us to help others by pouring forth what is stored

up within us.

A sweet friend of mine, Nita Pruett, has a like passion with me for scripture memory. In a study she wrote on the importance of scripture memory she says: "Pay special attention to verses that express our heavenly Father's wish that we value his Word. Use these for motivation and encouragement." A few to get you started:

"Do good to your servant according to your word, O LORD." (Psa 119:65 NIV)

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. {2} But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. {3} He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." (Psa 1:1-3 NIV)

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Josh 1:8 NIV)

What great and precious promises for those who choose to delight in God's Holy Word.

"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Psa 40:8 NIV)

"The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip." (Psa 37:31 NIV)

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15 NIV)

This is important. We have a responsibility to study and know God's truth. Ignorance is no excuse. This is particularly true for Americans who often have several Bibles in each house yet rarely bother to open them. We are held accountable for the light we have received.

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32 NIV)

She goes on to say, "Consider the benefits. We cannot expect our minds to function above the level of what we continually feed it. We have all heard the

expression 'garbage in, garbage out' referring to computers. Our brain is the ultimate computer. If we are putting scripture in it, we know we are putting the very best in it. Many times when my thoughts wander where they should not be, I start mentally reciting verses and the bad thoughts flee."

"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45 NIV)

The forth step in keeping proper focus in our lives is:

4. **Application of truths learned.**

All of the head knowledge in the world will not mean a hill of beans unless it is fleshed out. We must put into practice what God teaches us. We are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14, 16).

James tells us that this is a test of true faith in Christ. Our deeds must reflect our faith. He states:

"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. {18} But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. {19} You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder." (James 2:17-19 NIV)

According to James, belief alone or belief with emotion, only qualifies us to be a demon! The demons recognized Christ in scripture. They knew exactly who He was, yet they did not act on their belief. They did not trust or put their faith in Him.

"Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." {12} But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was." (Mark 3:11-12 NIV)

"Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ." (Luke 4:41 NIV)

“When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!” (Luke 8:28 NIV)

If we are true believers in Christ, our deeds will reflect our faith. Faith and action go hand in hand.

This first chapter was written under the assumption that the reader was a fellow believer in Christ. If we find ourselves questioning whether or not we are true believers, perhaps the following may help us.

We must first realize that God loves us and desires fellowship with us. He has a plan for each one of our lives. God is perfect. In him there is no darkness (sin) at all. He cannot fellowship with us in our sinful natures. Because of sin, we are separated from God and are doomed to eternal separation from Him, which is Hell. Before Christ, blood sacrifices from perfect animals were offered to God for the forgiveness of sin. This would restore fellowship but only for a short period until man would sin again. Then, another sacrifice would have to be made on behalf of the believer. Jesus Christ came to die for sin once and for all. His blood covers all sin. As Adam's sin caused all men to fall, so Christ's blood covers all man's sin - past, present, and future. Jesus Christ is the only way to God. He has come to bridge the gap between God and sinful man. We must each individually realize that we are sinners in need of a savior and ask Christ to come into our hearts by faith as our savior and Lord. We receive Him by asking Him into our hearts. Our eternal salvation is sealed and we are given the Holy Spirit to reside in us and help us conform to the image of Christ.

The following passages from God's holy Word illuminates the above truths:

"For 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." (John 3:16 NIV)

“Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isa 30:18 NIV)

“God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.” (1 Cor 1:9 NIV)

“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. {12} Then you will call

upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. {13} You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jer 29:11-13 NIV)

“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” (Deu 32:4 NIV)

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom 3:23 NIV)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 6:23 NIV)

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8 NIV)

“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Cor 15:22 NIV)

“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 NIV)

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12 NIV)

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- {9} not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Eph 2:8-9 NIV)

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” (Rev 3:20 NIV)

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. {12} He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. {13} I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:11-13 NIV)

If you would like to receive Jesus as Lord of your life, pray this simple prayer:
 “Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner in need of a savior. Please come into my life and make me all you have planned for me to be. Forgive me from all unrighteousness and lead and direct my every step. Thank you for coming into my life and for giving me eternal salvation. For it is in your precious name that I pray, Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer, I urge you to get in touch with someone whom you know to be strong in the Lord. They can help disciple you and direct you to materials that will help you in your new faith. If you do not know of such a person or a church that can be of assistance, prayerfully start reading your Bible. If you do not have a Bible, I recommend the New International Version Study Bible. It has great commentary to help illumine the passages that you read. Begin in the book of Mark in the New Testament. As stated earlier, pray for wisdom when reading God's holy Word and He will give it in abundance.

Praying the believer's prayer is just the beginning of your Christian faith. Jesus called it being born again. Just as a newborn comes into the world without knowledge, so also is the new believer. Like babies, we are to crave spiritual milk. Then, as we grow spiritually in the Lord, we are able to receive solid food. It is a growth process that will not be complete until Jesus returns or we die. We should be growing and going in the right direction. Do not kid yourself, no one stands still. We are either going forward or backward. Whether we are a new believer or we have been walking with the Lord for most of our lives, we should constantly be examining our lives against scripture to make sure we are progressing in the right direction.

If you are reading this book and your children are four, fourteen or forty, obviously you cannot start praying for your child in utero, you must begin where you are now. Without wasting time on regrets over things you cannot change, start by what you can change. You may have grandchildren you can begin to pray for and help nurture in the Lord. Start at whatever period of life this finds you. As Nike's slogan says - "Just do it!"

Lastly, whether you are reading this book as a new believer or you have been walking with the Lord for most of your life, I am begging you to appropriate the four aspects of focusing on the Lord in your life:

1. Daily be in the Word of God.
2. Be a prayer warrior.
3. Memorize God's holy Word.
4. Apply the truths learned to your life.

Based on the authority of scripture, if you make a regular practice of the above four things, you will know God's perfect will for your life - His good pleasing and perfect will. This will keep you in perfect peace. This will hinder you from sinning. This will enable you to be used of God in a mighty way. You will flourish. You will prosper. You will be successful. Not as the world deems success, although God certainly can do that if He desires, but more importantly, as God deems success. Everything else will never make it through the fire anyway. Christian, appropriate these in your life! I am begging you to try this. Just test and see for yourself. What have you got to lose? On the other hand, you have everything to gain. You will not be disappointed.

Excuse me, I think I hear a baby crying.....!

CHAPTER TWO – “PAINFUL PLEASURES”

Is there any sound in the world that is more recognizable than that of a newborn baby's cry? It can be quite deafening. I remember when our second child was born. The moment he came out he was screaming bloody murder! He was not a happy camper. He did not want to leave his warm home and he especially did not like being turned upside down in the buff in a cold room with everyone looking at him. I guess I can't blame him much for that! He screamed and screamed so much that even after they took him to the nursery and put me in a room - practically on another floor - I could still hear him! It gave me quite a fright for although I did have a spiritual gift of tying hair ribbons, I knew I did not have a spiritual gift for handling a colicky baby! Fortunately, once he was dressed and put in a warm bassinet he promptly went right back to sleep.

Newborns are such a wonder. For nine months we can only imagine what our precious little bundle of joy is going to look like. Then after our "light and momentary trouble" we deliver this child into the world and we cannot wait to examine it. I am sure every mother thinks that on first sight the baby has to look either like the daddy or Winston Churchill! We all say that our newborns are beautiful but on first sight very few newborns would be elected beauty queen or king! Now I realize that there are some exceptions, but they are the exception and not the rule! On second sight, after they are clean and wrapped in a blanket they start to look more like the mother! I am sure all of the mom's will agree on that point!

I am no medical doctor (does that surprise you?) And I know very little about medicine; therefore, I was always a bit apprehensive when the nurses would bring my babies into my hospital room and leave them there. I was afraid that something might happen and I would not know what to do for them. I would sit and watch, waiting for something to occur. My hand would hover over the nurses call button (they loved me for that!). I do not know if you have ever watched a newborn intently or not, but they make the most peculiar faces and sounds. Several times I had the nurses running due to the fact that I was sure the baby was having a convulsion or at least a mild tremor. Each time they came to my room they would sort of look at me and mumble under their breath something about thanking the insurance companies for only letting the new mom's stay for two days! I don't think they could have taken me for any longer than that.

Bringing a new baby home for the first time is a bit disconcerting to say the least. It takes awhile to get used to being totally responsible for another life twenty-four

hours a day! I well remember bringing our first child home from the hospital and I had this feeling come over me that this was forever! This was not something I could take back if I decided I did not like it - lucky for our daughter I thought she was absolutely wonderful! (She still is for that matter!).

Commitment in our nation has taken on an entirely new meaning. The dictionary defines commit as "to bind or obligate oneself as by a pledge"; pledge meaning "a formal promise to do something"; promise meaning "a declaration assuring that one will or will not do something; vow"; assured meaning "undoubted; guaranteed; made certain". How different our definition of commitment has become. We obligate ourselves but only with qualifiers. For instance, we make a vow before God when we marry "until death do us part", then we quickly add if he or she continues to make us happy or some other stipulation that has nothing to do with the original commitment.

The world teaches us that we should do whatever it takes for our own happiness and well being. We should look deep inside ourselves and seek to fill our needs and desires - a look out for number one mentality. We live for self no matter what the cost, no matter what the previous commitment. If it does not make us happy then it does not matter. Because of our lack of commitment and self-indulgent ways we are insecure in our marriages and we breed insecurity into our children. Our kids live in fear of divorce and abandonment. I am not trying to pick on divorce alone. I realize that there are Biblical grounds for divorce. I am just saying that most people now go into marriage with the idea that if it does not work out we give up rather than in decades past giving up was really not an option.

I hate divorce because it effects so many people besides the two that are getting a divorce. I am not alone in this feeling. God says in Malachi:

“Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. {14} You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. {15} Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. {16} "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.” (Mal 2:13-16 NIV)

God's words are very clear. He made the married couple one in flesh and spirit. Why? Because he was seeking godly offspring. “Guard yourself” used in verse sixteen is the Hebrew word samara. It is a term that “expresses the careful attention paid to the obligations of a covenant, to watch, guard and keep.” We are to pay close attention to the vows we make in our marriage covenant before God.

Why do I bring this up in a chapter on babies? I believe the point is very clear. As we are to be committed to our marriage partner we are also to be committed to raising our children in the Lord. Most of us are familiar with Proverbs 22:6:

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Prov 22:6 NIV)

The word translated “train” is the Hebrew word hanak meaning “to teach, dedicate, consecrate, and inaugurate.” It is used only five times in the Old Testament. The four other times it is used refer to dedicating something to God. The point is very clear, we are to be dedicating our children to the Lord. I do not mean just dedicating them in a church service dedication, I mean in a day by day dedication to training them in the ways of the Lord.

God says in Proverbs:

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” (Prov 16:3 NIV)

We are to commit the raising of our children to the Lord. Do you know what the word translated “succeed” means in Hebrew? It is the word kun and it means “to be firm, be established, be steadfast, be faithful, be sure, be reliable, be fixed, be certain; to be ready, be prepared; to be determined; signifies the deep satisfaction and sense of well-being which comes from the certainty that one's heart steadfastly trusts in the Lord, who directs man's paths.” Awesome. This does away with insecurity and vacillation. It breeds confidence and security. It has nothing to do with our own ability but everything to do with God's ability. We must remember what Jesus said in Mark:

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’” (Mark 10:27 NIV)

My husband tells the story of feeling overwhelmed with inadequacy when he found out we were going to have our first child. He prayed for God to show him

how he should raise our baby in the Lord. He committed his way to God. He wanted to raise this child the way God desired for this child to be raised. And God honored his prayer. We are all inadequate and incapable apart from Christ. If we earnestly seek His way He shows us. The way I often explain this is if my child comes to me and says, "Mom, I desire to do your will. I want to do what pleases you. Tell me and show me what you would have me to do" - do you think for one moment I am going to say, "Honey, I want you to guess and see what you think my will is or what I desire for you to do" - of course not! I am going to let them know what I desire. How much more will God show us what he desires for us as we earnestly seek His will. The problem does not often lie in the fact that we do not know God's will, it lies in the fact that we do not choose to do it. King David gives this charge to his son Solomon in First Chronicles:

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever." (1 Chr 28:9 NIV)

Isaiah also states:

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. {7} Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. {8} "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. {9} "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:6-9 NIV)

And lastly in Jeremiah:

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13 NIV)

These are promises given to us to claim. When we feel inadequate and overwhelmed with this new life we are to train and raise in the Lord, we can stand on His Word that if we seek His ways He will show us.

Babies are such a wonder. They are so helpless. So seemingly innocent yet the hard truth is that we are all born broken. Each one of us is born with the propensity towards certain sins. We are born with a sinful nature. No exceptions.

Paul says in Romans:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom 3:23 NIV)

Our job as parents is to help our children overcome these particular bents. I think we like to think of babies as being pure and blameless and that we need to protect that state as they are growing up. It is true that we need to protect their innocence, but the fact remains that they, like us, are all born with a sinful nature - I repeat, we are all born broken. We should approach child - rearing with the attitude that just as we are trying to conform to Christ's image by constantly peeling off the layers of sin in our lives as the Holy Spirit brings it to light, so too our children should be going through the same process. As parents we should be trying to help them break their particular bents.

Some of you may be thinking that I have lost my mind. While it is true I might be mindless, I am not wrong on this point. Let me illustrate this for you. For those of you that have had children, how many of you have had to teach them to lie? How many of you have had to teach them to steal or cheat or to be selfish or rude? We do not have to teach these traits, they are part of human nature. Just observe toddlers. They see something that does not belong to them and they go get it. The rightful owner comes and takes it back. The perpetrator proceeds to punch the lights out of the rightful owner. Another familiar example among parents is your favorite whatever is found in pieces on the kitchen floor. Not one person has any idea how in the world it got there. Let me ask you again, did you teach your children how to lie? Of course you did not do that. It comes with the package. It is listed under the SOS (save our skin) column in the child's ingredients manual.

One of the most important jobs for a parent is to know their child. Study their behavior and see how it lines up with God's Word. If you really want to help your believing children, help them cooperate with the Holy Spirit in overcoming their particular bents. Do you want to know a scary thought? (Probably not but here goes anyway)! Sinful bents are generational. Do you have a particular sin in your life that you have not been able to overcome? Do you realize that you can pass that on to your children? I hated that. But it is true. You see it so very often in families. A particular bent passed on and on and on. Adultery, alcoholism, drugs, gambling, lying, obesity, selfishness and on and on and on. A wonderful example of this from Scripture is found in the life of Abraham.

Did you know that Abraham had a bent toward lying? When he and Sarah were in the region of Gerar he told them that Sarah was his sister. He was operating under

the SOS philosophy (save our skin). You see Sarah was very beautiful and he reasoned that the king of Gerar, Abimelech, would kill him for her. He was going to allow her to be taken by this man to be his wife. In fact, Abimelech did send for Sarah and took her but the Lord intervened and prevented him from sinning against Sarah. This is Abraham I am talking about here. The same Abraham listed in the “Who’s-Who” chapter eleven of Hebrews that says:

“By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.” (Heb 11:11 NIV)

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, {18} even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." {19} Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” (Heb 11:17-19 NIV)

This great man of faith, whom God had already made a covenant with, acted out of fear for his life and lied. To show you how generational bents can be, let us just take a look at Abraham's son Isaac. Isaac's wife was Rebekah. She was a very beautiful lady. There was a famine in the land. Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The Lord told him to stay there. When the men of Gerar asked about Rebekah, Isaac told them that she was his sister:

“When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." (Gen 26:7 NIV)

The exact same lie. God is so faithful to show us in Scripture not only the faith of his saints but also the failures. As we are not perfect, neither was Abraham nor Isaac. We all have our sinful bents to contend with and to overcome. We must realize though that as there is always blessing in obedience, there is always consequence to sin, always. That is why it is so important for us to deal with sin in our own lives and to help our children deal with their sin. The how-to on this subject we will get to in a later chapter but for now, as we are embarking on a journey to raise a godly child, we must realize that our child enters into this world with a sinful nature.

I have always enjoyed babies. I played with dolls until I was well into my teens, of course it was on the sly! I had this one particular doll dubbed "jelly baby" by my

second mom, Daisy (she works for my parents and has since before I was born). "Jelly baby" was so named because my grandmother would make homemade jams and jellies and put them into baby food jars. I would pretend to be feeding the doll out of these baby food jars hence the name "jelly baby". That doll had so much sugar caked around her mouth it is a wonder that my room was not infested with ants! I loved playing dolls. I would bathe them and dress them and feed them all sorts of delicacies - like hand lotion for instance. It was in a white container that looked much like a milk bottle. Between jelly and Dermasage hand lotion my babies were well fed. I am not that much better at cooking now!

When I had my first real live baby (you know the kind that really eats and sleeps and cries and wets - you get the picture), I had this overwhelming enjoyment of caring for and nurturing this little person that had been given to me. I nursed my children - Daisy always said it would have been a sin to waste all that free milk - and I loved holding them close as they received their nourishment from me. Babies loved to be held. I really do not think you can hold them too much. From the time they were born until well into their toddler years I would whisper into their ear, "I love you, I love you, I love you", and then I would kiss them three times. I did this over and over and over again, as I would hold them tight. What fond memories I have of their faces as I would do this. It was an expression of sweet peace. I am sure many of you have other ways of bonding with your newborns this is just one way. The important thing is that you choose a way to nurture and bond with your baby.

I think it is so very interesting to know that God loves to hold us too. Just read what God says in Isaiah:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! {16} See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." (Isa 49:15-16 NIV)

The word "engraved" used here is the Hebrew word haqqaq meaning "to cut or trace, to hold so tightly that it makes a mark." God is holding us so tightly that we make a mark in His hand. That overwhelms me. God speaks of holding us close many, many times in Scripture. Some other examples from the Word:

"If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; {24} though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand." (Psa 37:23-24)

NIV)

“My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.” (Psa 63:8 NIV)

“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.” (Psa 73:23 NIV)

“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.” (Psa 91:4 NIV)

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isa 41:10 NIV)

“For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’” (Isa 41:13 NIV)

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. {28} I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. {29} My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all ; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. {30} I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27-30 NIV)

The word “hand” mentioned in Psalm 37 and in Psalm 73 translated in Hebrew is the word yad meaning "hand, power, strength, assistance"; God holds us with power and strength. He does not want us to be fearful. We are to flesh this same idea out on our babies. As we hold them, as God hold's us, they feel secure and loved. We are to give our babies a glimpse of God's love. Of course our love can in no way come close to God's love for them, yet we are to be an earthly example of God's love for our babies. This expression of love goes far beyond infancy. I still like to sit in my Daddy's lap and I am no spring chicken! I feel loved, protected, secure, and blessed. If you want to breed significance and security into your children show them God’s unconditional love.

Parenthood actually teaches us a wonderful lesson in Christianity. I call it Christianity 101. The basic premise of Christianity is to die to yourself. To give up all rights of ownership of self. Jesus says in Luke:

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. {24} For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.’” (Luke 9:23-24 NIV)

We are to daily give up our rights for Christ. We are to be selfless. A sold out for Christ existence. There is no better way to experience this selfless life than to be a parent! I can remember when my children were infants and sleep was as rare as gold in our house! Not only sleep, but sometimes it would be 5:00 PM before I could even get my shower and get dressed for the day (it would be a very short day!). Babies do not care if you have not had your turn to read a book or play the piano or even eat for that matter. Everything is on their timing - they have not learned to be selfless yet (we will get to that in a later chapter too)! Parents we must use this opportunity to be obedient to Christ's command. Let your life reflect Christ's life by being selfless towards your children.

Paul tells us of the selfless life of Jesus in Philippians:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: {6} Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, {7} but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. {8} And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! {9} Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, {11} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:5-11 NIV)

You see, Christ never asks of us what he did not already show us by example. And what an example! He is God for heaven's sake and yet He empties Himself and becomes a man. Not only that, He died the worst sort of death - crucifixion. And why? To save my chicken neck and yours too. Selfless beyond what we can even begin to imagine. Yet if we claim to be Christians, this is the very life He has called us to. Study the gospels if you disagree on this point and God will make it clear to you.

In First John it tells us:

“But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: {6} Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:5-6 NIV)

This is how we can know we are followers of Christ - by walking as Jesus walked. Will we fail? Of course. Will we reach perfection? Of course not, not in this life anyway. But our goal is to be aiming towards conforming into His image. One

day we will be made perfect but until then we must be pressing on towards the goal. As Paul so eloquently states in Philippians:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. {13} Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, {14} I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. {15} All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. {16} Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” (Phil 3:12-16 NIV)

We forget our past failures as we confess them at the cross and we press on. In verse fourteen the word “called” translated from the Greek word *klesis* means “vocation, employment.” The dictionary defines vocation as: “a regular occupation or profession; especially, one for which one is specially suited or qualified.” Beloved, this is what we are called by God to do. Not only does He call us to do this, we are specially suited and qualified for it through the working of the Holy Spirit within us.

Do you want to know the most effective way to witness to anyone - (this especially includes our family members)? Walk as Jesus walked. The most compelling people are those that are the most selfless and humble. This does not mean some lilly livered, mamby pampy whimp who cowers and allows any and everyone to walk all over him. This is a person of unbelievable character, strength and focus. It is a person with the realization that they are sold out for Christ. That, if we are truly His child, nothing happens to us that has not passed through His hands and that is ultimately for our good and His glory, never one more than the other. Filled with the Spirit, they are able to be super human in regard to their emotions and will. You see there is not one thing natural about being selfless and humble. It totally goes against human nature. But as Christians our human nature should be shrinking and Christ's nature should be enlarging.

Remember Paul's words in Galatians:

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

And again in First Corinthians:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; {20} you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Cor 6:19-20 NIV)

We are to be crucified with Christ and we no longer have ownership over our bodies. This may sound overwhelmingly impossible or even very unappealing to you, yet this is the very essence of Christianity. Dying to ourselves so that Christ may live through us. The irony lies in the fact that as we give up our rights to ourselves God freely, and I mean freely, gives back to us - more than we could ever give to him. You absolutely cannot outgive God. Whatever you give up to Him He so richly blesses that you wonder why you ever held back anything in the first place. That is how faith works. You can say, “Ok Lord, I am jumping in with my whole being. I am trusting in you to show me how to live my life. I am emptying myself so that I may be filled with you. I want to be wholly yours.” It is a conscience decision made that you relinquish your will for His. Once relinquished, He takes over. He gives you the strength and the power to do His will for your life. And guess what? It is good and pleasing and perfectly suited for you. In fact, it is the very, very best for you. Paul says in First Corinthians:

“However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’.” (1 Cor 2:9 NIV)

We do not have a clue how wonderful God's will is for our lives. If we truly believed what is said here, we would be clamoring for it. As it is we still believe we know what is best for our lives. How it must grieve God's heart to see us wasting all of our energy on what is going to be burned up. On things that will never make it through the fire. He longs for us to relinquish our will for His. He desires the very best for us just as we desire the very best for our children. If you are his child, He will not give you rest until you relinquish your will for His. What a sad commentary that God has to beg us to give us the very best for us. It is amazing to me that He keeps on keeping on with us. I truly cannot understand His patience, His love, and His grace. How does he keep from zapping us? Oh the unbelievable love of God!

Just exactly how does a person go about dying to self so that they may appropriate God's will for their lives? What exactly is involved in the process? It involves giving up all rights of ownership over our body to Christ. Our hands for His, our feet for His, our thoughts and actions for His. Scripture calls this a crucified life.

Remember again Paul's words in Galatians:

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

This crucified life is not done one time and it is behind. It is done on a day, by day, by day, by day basis. Do you get the picture here? We are to prayerfully give up our right to ourselves daily. Jesus described it in Luke this way:

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. {24} For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.’” (Luke 9:23-24 NIV)

"Whoever loses his life for me" is a saying found in all four gospels, John varying it a little:

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25 NIV)

This saying is repeated two times both in Matthew and in Luke placing great emphasis upon it. Whenever anything is repeated in Scripture it is of utmost importance. Take heed of this.

We are unable to live a crucified life on our own. It is not possible. What is called for here is the daily crucifying of our will for His will. Once we make the decision to do this, He takes over. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, and only through His power, we are able to live victorious lives in Christ. All our vain attempts to do this apart from the Holy Spirit are exactly that, vain attempts. We give up our will for His daily. He gives us the power. We can live victoriously. The equation is simple. The fleshing out extremely difficult. There is nothing easy about living the Christian life. It goes against our very nature as we have talked about. Nevertheless, once you have tasted of its sweetness, once you have been a partaker of the divine nature, that is all you want to seek. Nothing can compare. It is the great adventure!

To quote Solomon:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." (Eccl 1:2 NIV)

I can tell you all day long the utter pleasure of walking daily with Christ, yet you

will never know it fully until you yourself experience it. Just as I can put a piece of chocolate in my mouth and I can describe to you how smooth and delicious and sweet it tastes, unless you taste it for yourself you really have no idea. You have heard but you have not yet experienced. There is a vast difference. I will say it again with my whole heart attached, it is worth it. It is more than worth it.

As we set out to raise these precious babies into godly men and women, let us continue to remember that it is not in our own strength or power but in His. It is also the desire of His heart that we do this. It is honoring to Him and He will bless this decision as He always blesses obedience to His Word. My prayer is that every parent that reads this book will make the decision to raise his or her children in a "manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".

Pardon me, but I believe I have some spilled milk to clean up.....!

CHAPTER THREE – “MY CUP RUNNETH OVER”

Other than a pig or perhaps a teenage boy, there is absolutely nothing messier than a toddler when they eat (I should probably add and when they play, and when they do anything else but sleep!). My children were so messy when they ate that I sometimes had to hose down the high chair outside, oftentimes with the child in place, just to get all the food off of it - and them too! They could smash green beans so carefully into the tray that it did not remain white but a lovely shade of green. Add to that the aroma of peanut butter pressed deftly into the tiniest cracks and crevices of the chair and about a cup each of milk and apple juice on the floor and you have the perfect picture of my kitchen at eating times when my kids were toddlers. My mother used to say it would be easier to throw them out and start over again than to clean them up! It was just a good thing that they were as precious as they were or I might have been tempted to do just that!

If it could have been possible, I would have loved to have kept a count of how many cups of milk, juice or whatever I cleaned up during the toddler years. It seems it would happen at least once a meal - right when your food was hot and ready to eat! It never happened when you were finishing up. It was very similar to the phone call you get wanting you to purchase vinyl siding or some other such item at 6:00 PM. Who on earth thinks about purchasing vinyl siding, or anything else for that matter, at dinnertime (except perhaps a burger!)? I mean, if I got a call around 6:00 PM that said "Mrs. Yoe, how would you like to purchase a juicy burger with all the trimmings, delivered hot to your door in five minutes flat for the low price of \$5.99", then perhaps it would catch my attention! But anything other than that does the same thing to my nerves as a glass of spilled milk!

I wonder sometimes if God looks at me the same way I looked at my toddler when they spilled their whatever? Always having to clean up the messes I make due to the sin in my life? He gets me all cleaned up, He forgives me and cleanses me and makes me whiter than snow, and then I go out and wallow in the mud again. Just as the toddler did not intentionally spill the milk, hopefully, I do not intentionally wallow in the mud. Hopefully.

Let's take a moment and address the intentional action versus the unintentional. Sin is sin in God's eyes. We commit many sins everyday, sometimes sins that we are not even aware of. We can start out with the very best intentions and before we know it, we have fallen into sin. As David says in Psalm 130:

“If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? (Psa 130:3

NIV)

And Solomon in Proverbs 20:

“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?” (Prov 20:9 NIV)

As mentioned above, sin is sin in God's eyes. Yet throughout Scripture there is a vast difference with regard to the condition of your heart in God's eyes between intentional and unintentional sin. Also, the consequences served for the intentional sin seem far greater. This is a great clue for parents in treating wrong behavior in their toddlers. Was the action intentional or was it unintentional? Let's examine what the Word of God says about this. What does Scripture say with regard to intentional or deliberate sin?

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: {17} haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, {18} a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, {19} a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” (Prov 6:16-19 NIV)

“For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. {22} The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. {23} He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.” (Prov 5:21-23 NIV)

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, {27} but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. {28} Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. {29} How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? {30} For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." {31} It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb 10:26-31 NIV)

God does not look lightly on any sin. Sin cost him the life of His precious Son. How much more He must hate the sin that has been well planned out and schemed and concocted and carried through? The story of David and Bathsheba is a great

case in point. The story is found in Second Samuel chapters 11 and 12. David, the man after God's own heart, planned and schemed and concocted to get what he wanted - Bathsheba. David adored the Lord yet when his focus and attention was poured out on a strong desire contrary to God's will, he had a great fall. Unlike Humpty Dumpty, God was able to put David's life back together yet not without severe consequences. Let's take a look at what scripture has to say.

“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.” (2 Sam 11:1 NIV)

Notice that the kings generally go off to war in the spring, but David sent Joab and the whole army off. This was his first mistake. He should have been with his men. Perhaps he was bored or lonely or whatever when he decided to walk around on the palace roof. It was there that he spied Bathsheba bathing. This turned into his second mistake. Instead of quickly turning away he soaks in the view. He realizes that she is very beautiful and he desires her greatly. He sends someone to find out about her. Their reply was that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his own fighting men off at war. This does not stop David and he sends for her. She came to him and he slept with her. She conceives and sends him a message that she is pregnant. David goes into action. Plan A - He calls for Uriah:

“So David sent this word to Joab: ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent him to David. {7} When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. {8} Then David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house and wash your feet.’ So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. {9} But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.” (2 Sam 11:6-9 NIV)

David assumes Uriah will go home and be with his wife since he has been away at war. But to David's dismay, Uriah proves to be an honorable man. Notice what the Scriptures say:

“When David was told, ‘Uriah did not go home,’ he asked him, ‘Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?’ {11} Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!’” (2 Sam 11:10-11 NIV)

David goes into plan B. He tells Uriah to stay one more day and he invited him to eat and drink with him. David's plan was to get Uriah drunk and he was confident he would go home to be with his wife. Again, Uriah proved more honorable than David:

“At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. (2 Sam 11:13 NIV)

David goes into plan C. He sends a note via Uriah to Joab his commander in chief and tells Joab to put Uriah where the fighting was the fiercest and retreat. Joab does what is commanded of him to do and Uriah dies. Bathsheba mourns then marries. David thinks he has covered his bases and all's well that ends well type of philosophy - but guess who was watching? Enter God on the scene.

God sends his prophet Nathan to David and he tells David a story about a rich man, a poor man, and a little ewe lamb:

“The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. {2} The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, {3} but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. {4} "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." (2 Sam 12:1-4 NIV)

David burns with anger. He says the man deserves to die. He must pay for the lamb four times over. Nathan responds to David:

“Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. {8} I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. {9} Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. {10} Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'" (2

Sam 12:7-10 NIV)

Then comes the consequence. There is always consequence to sin.

"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. {12} You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" {13} Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. {14} But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." (2 Sam 12:11-14 NIV)

If you are familiar with the story of Absalom, David's son, you know that he slept with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel:

"So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." (2 Sam 16:22 NIV)

Not only did God take away the child Bathsheba bore, his own flesh and blood became a thorn in his side for many years. You see, we can choose to sin but God chooses the consequence. David repents and fellowship with the Lord is restored. His heart is broken over the sin in his life. God is looking for broken repentant hearts. David says in Psalm 51:

"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psa 51:16-17 NIV)

God is looking for the repentant heart. He longs for our fellowship to be restored with Him. This is an important issue in raising godly children. Are they repentant, truly broken over their wrongdoing? I am not talking about being sad over getting caught. I am talking about being sad over the sin. What we are to be looking for as parents is the condition of their hearts. Like God, we do not want our fellowship with our children to be broken. When they disobey or rebel against our wishes, it breaks our fellowship with them. Even children as young as toddlers are effected by this.

When my son was a toddler and he was acting contrary to my desired standards (this was an hourly type of thing!), I would say to him, "do you know where my

son is?" "I know you are not my son because my son does not act like this."
 "What have you done with my son?" "You look like my son, but you do not act like my son." He would immediately start saying, "I your son, mamma", "It's me, it's me!" He hated for me to be at odds with him. Now I realize that some children could give a flying rip if you are at odds with them or not but in this particular case it worked (at least until the next time something happened!). The important issue here is the attitude of the heart. You might be asking the question, how can I tell? Study and know your child. If you make it your business of knowing your child you will be in a very good position to evaluate the attitudes and motives of their hearts. This will enable you to discipline accordingly. Was their action intentional or was it unintentional? The punishment should fit the crime.

We must realize that punishment or discipline must never be abusive. Never. God always disciplines His children out of love. Always. He desires for us to be conformed to the image of His Son and any behavior contrary to that must be disciplined. If we are desirous to raise godly children then we too must discipline behavior contrary to that. Again, it must be done out of love.

Scripture has much to say about discipline. Let's take a look:

“Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law;”
 (Psa 94:12 NIV)

“My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, { 12 }
 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”
 (Prov 3:11-12 NIV)

“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.” (Prov 13:24 NIV)

“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.” (Prov 19:18 NIV)

“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. { 14 } Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.” (Prov 23:13-14 NIV)

“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! { 10 } Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God

disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. { 11 } 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.” (Heb 12:9-11 NIV)

Once again, all discipline should be motivated and administered by love. A wonderful illustration of this is a story told about a man who had two children. He had told them that they were not to jump on the bed. He made it clear that the consequence for jumping on the bed would be a spanking. The children decided to jump on the bed anyway. When the father discovered the transgression he was in a dilemma over what action to take. Although he knew the action must be punished, he did not want to have to spank his children. He came up with a solution that very much resembled Christ's love for us. He told the children that their action had to be punished but because of his lack of desire to spank them, he would take their punishment for them. He took off his shirt and lay across the bed and told the children that they must strike him three times each with the belt. They began weeping and begging him not to make them do that. He insisted that they follow through with the punishment. Through many tears, it became clear to the children the high price of sin. Someone else was punished for their actions. Someone they loved. The lesson learned here - invaluable.

The point is not that we should always be taking the punishment for our children, the point is that we are to administer punishment out of love. Hopefully, that is clear to you by now. Enough about discipline as it will be addressed in latter chapters. Let's talk toddlers!

There is nothing more precious than a toddler. They absolutely adore their parents! They want to copy everything that we do. What a perfect time to be training them. They listen to us. They think we are smart. They want to be just like us. (It is unfortunate that our teens subscribe to a different philosophy)!

How exactly do we go about training our toddlers? Remember that they love to copy. They are more likely to do what you do rather than what you say. If you put a high priority on reading your Bible, for instance, they will want to read (or look at) their Bible with you. The same goes for praying, memorizing scripture, or any other godly discipline you are implementing in your life. You will be surprised how very capable toddlers can be.

When my children were young (2 to 4 years old) they attended a Christian pre-school that had a wonderful plan for scripture memory. Each child received a list

of verses, one for each letter of the alphabet. Just simple verses but done acrostically A through Z to help them remember. It not only helped them remember but me too! It was really quite simple. For example A was: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."; B was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."; and my particular favorite, C was: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." You get the picture. Just one line of scripture per letter. They loved memorizing and it took them absolutely no time at all to accomplish this. Whenever we were in the car we would go over the verses to seal them in their memory. Remember this is how we keep our way pure and keep from sinning:

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. {10} I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. {11} I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psa 119:9-11 NIV)

It is easy to make up your own list of verses and it is exciting for the children to keep a record of how many they have learned. Young children love charts with their names on it and stars put for each verse learned. You may also want to give them some sort of an incentive to memorize all the verses - we all work harder for rewards! You know which way your child learns best. The important thing is that they are learning them.

As mentioned above, toddlers love to be with their parents. Parents, enjoy this fleeting time! Laugh with your kids. Interact with your kids. Watch them as they are discovering all the wonderful things God has created - the butterfly, the daffodil, the puppy. Without sounding trite or overly syrupy, relish the time you spend with your little ones. As parents we oftentimes feel much pressure to do many, many things that keep us away from our families. Things that are in and of themselves good but possibly just not the best. Teaching Sunday school, leading Bible studies, volunteer work, and on and on and on, are all very good things yet if you find yourself stressed to the max and taking your toddler from one sitter to the next to accomplish these tasks - you are missing the mark. You have a mission field at home. Please remember your family comes before outside activities. Learn to say no. Sometimes this is difficult to do. Our pride gets in the way. We want to be able to say that we can do it all. Be everything to everybody. You can not. You were not even made to do that. Everything we are considering to do should be covered in prayer first and foremost. We should pray for God's direction and will for our lives. God is in the business of leading us. Where we fall into grave error is when we try to lead God where we want to go.

When my first child was a baby God blessed me with a Christian friend who helped me see this so clearly. At that point in my life my focus was askew. I was definitely a Martha Stewart wanna be! Entertaining, decorating my house, cooking (that is hard to believe now!) - I wanted to do it all and I wanted everyone to think I could do it all. And guess what? I could not. I ended up being grumpy and tired - not good traits for a wife or mother. Thankfully, my precious friend pointed out to me how wrong my focus was. My focus needed an adjustment from the temporal or the perishing to the eternal. None of the things I was seeking were bad, they were just not the best. Why should we be wasting our time on things that will never make it through the fire? As Jesus so succinctly put it in Matthew:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. {20} But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. {21} For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Mat 6:19-21 NIV)

God has made it clear in Scripture what our top priorities should be: God first, spouse second, children third. These priorities God gives us to follow for our very best and the best for our families. Now I realize that I am slow, ignorant and unlearned, but when my children were small, there was not much time left for anything else. Again, it is not that these outside activities are bad, it is just that they may not be the best. Just make sure that your priorities are God's priorities.

An honest look at our priorities is invaluable. Write down what you consider your top priorities to be. Next, keep a record over the following week of how you spend your time. Be honest! After the week is over tally up your time and see if it reflects your priorities. This was really an eye opener for me. This simple test may also be done for the way you spend your resources. If we are really serious about making our priorities God's priorities we will be able to use this simple test to get us back on target.

Gratefully, my friend showed me the error of my ways when my first child was a baby therefore I had the privilege of incorporating Biblical truths and godly character traits into their upbringing. For that I am eternally grateful. It is so easy to get off course and distracted. The glitz and glamour of this world is often very hard to resist. It always has been. The most perfect example from Scripture about craving the world's glitz is found in Genesis - the story of Lot and his salt block wife!

The story begins in the thirteenth chapter of Genesis. Abram (this is before God changed his name to Abraham) and Lot, his nephew, were traveling from Egypt to the Negev. They had both amassed great fortunes - livestock, silver and gold. Their flocks and herds had become so great that the land could not support them while they were together. Their herdsmen began quarreling among each other. Abram then says to Lot that there should not be any quarreling between them since they were kin. Abram goes on to say that there was plenty of land before them and that Lot should pick the direction he would like to settle in, whatever direction Lot picks, Abram would go the opposite. The Bible goes on to say:

“Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.” {10} Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) {11} So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: {12} Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. {13} Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.” (Gen 13:9-13 NIV)

Lot is leaning towards the glitz and the bright lights of this world. You see from this passage that he pitched his tents near Sodom. Sodom was a very wealthy and flourishing place. It was also very wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord especially with regard to sexual sins. It is so much like human nature to not jump full force into the world's ways but gradually and ever so subtly we become entrapped. This is exactly what happened to Lot. In a later passage we find that he was living in Sodom:

“The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. {12} They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.” (Gen 14:11-12 NIV)

It starts out so innocently. We can almost hear Lot and Salty's rationalization: "This area will be so much better for the girls. There is so much more opportunity here. So many things the city has to offer. The sinfulness of the city will not bother us because we will not let ourselves buy into that! We will not start thinking the way that they do. Besides that, we are going to live on the outskirts of town. Nothing will bother us there." Yet you see, all it took was one chapter and he is living among them. Subtle movement towards full blown sin.

Sodom was attacked and Lot was taken off along with all his possessions. Abram rescues Lot. The king of Sodom tells Abram that he can keep all the goods recovered. This is where Abraham's strength of character and focus on the Lord's will shines:

“But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath {23} that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' {24} I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me--to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share." (Gen 14:22-24 NIV)

How easy it would have been for Abram to have accepted the bounty. Yet he was not willing to have any part of what belonged to that wicked place. As Christians, we are to be in the world but not part of the world. This is often very difficult. We are to be the light of the world yet we are not to be partakers of the sins of the world. Abram knew, as did Lot, that Sodom was very wicked and he would have no part of it. We are to be the same way with regard to sinful things. Paul states this so clearly in Colossians:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. {6} Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. {7} You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. {8} But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. {9} Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices {10} and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” (Col 3:5-10 NIV)

We are constantly warned in Scripture to flee from sin. This brings us back to Lot. First he camps near the sinful city. Then he moves into the city. Then God brings disaster upon the city.

The story continues:

“The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. {2} "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the

square." {3} But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. {4} Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom--both young and old--surrounded the house. {5} They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." {6} Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him {7} and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. {8} Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." (Gen 19:1-8 NIV)

Lot had so bought into their way of life that he was going to allow his daughters to be raped by the men of Sodom, or I should say, as verse four says, "all the men from every part of the city". The angels give Lot God's warning:

"The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here--sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, {13} because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." {14} So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking." (Gen 19:12-14 NIV)

When dawn approached the angels urged Lot to take his wife and daughters and hurry so that they would not be swept away with this wicked city. But guess what Lot does? He hesitates. He is slow to leave even though he is confident of God's impending wrath. Why? Because his focus was on the glitz of this world.

Scripture goes on to say:

"When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. {17} As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" {18} But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! {19} Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. {20} Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it--it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." (Gen 19:16-20 NIV)

Check out verse 18. Can you even believe that Lot is still begging to stay close by? He could not bear leaving what he and his family had bought into. Again, God is merciful to Lot and the angels agree to Lot's plan:

“He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. {22} But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) {23} By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. {24} Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the LORD out of the heavens.” (Gen 19:21-24 NIV)

At least Lot had the presence of mind to be obedient to what the angels had told them to do. Unfortunately, Lot's wife was not. She could not bear to tear herself away without one last look:

“But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Gen 19:26 NIV)

She looked back and became the first (and only to my knowledge) human salt block! But before we come down so hard on Salty, maybe we should compare this with our own lives. How often do we look back or gaze longingly at what the world has to offer? It is so easy to do. We do not start out doing it, but like Lot we ever so slowly buy in little by little.

Perhaps, as in Lot's case, God in his grace decides to remove it from our lives. Do we fight with him over His decision to do what is the very best for us? Do we look back and long for what is wrong? Again, this is such a subtle trap of Satan or the inclinations of our own selfish bents and hearts. We do not start out by turning our backs on God and our focus off of Him. It is ever so gradual. Satan never appears the way he truly is. He is not going to approach us with horns, a long tail, and a pitchfork! It sure would be handy if he did. I suspect that none of us would have a hard time running from him if that were the case. He does approach us, however, as something good, as something that appeals to our senses. In fact we are told in Scripture the following about Satan:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. {14} And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. {15} It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” (2 Cor 11:13-15 NIV)

This is why it is so important to know the truth. To know what the Word of God teaches so that we may be able to stand firm and not be swayed by false teachings or by what the world has to offer. Paul is very clear in Colossians about this very thing:

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, {7} rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. {8} See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. {9} For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, {10} and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” (Col 2:6-10 NIV)

Christ is head over every power and authority. This, of course, includes Satan. The only power Satan has over a believer of Jesus Christ is what is given to him by the believer. Satan has no right over you if you are a believer in Christ. He has no right. Do not believe his lies. Know what the truth is and stand firm in it.

Why do I bring up the temptations of the world in a chapter on toddlers? First of all, the toddler stage can be very demanding and draining. We seem to do the same things over and over and over again. We seem to answer the same questions over and over and over again. We seem to clean up the same messes over and over and over again. Do you get the picture? It sure would be easy to shirk our responsibilities and lay them in the laps of a sitter in order to do something like volunteer work or the likes. Not that that is wrong, it just might not be the best. It is very easy to convince myself of something like this, especially if it is a good thing. What I must realize is that if it is not God's will at that time in my life it is a bad decision. As mentioned in earlier chapters, if we are not in the center of God's will then we are not experiencing what is the very best for our lives.

The second reason for discussing temptations of the world in a chapter on toddlers is the fact that our toddlers watch what we do. As stated earlier, they are wonderful imitators. Nothing is more convicting to see our bad habits fleshed out by our children. If we are caught up by the world's standards, desires and longings that is exactly what we will be teaching our children whether we do it verbally or not. Our actions will speak loud and clear. And since they want to be just like us, they will be just like us.

The first five years of a child's life are the most important. Believe it or not, mothers of toddlers, they fly by. I am begging you to take seriously this job of

training your young child. You cannot and should not depend on the church, the preschool, the nursery, the babysitter or the whomever or the whatever to take on your responsibility. So many parents today are neglecting the most important task they have been given. They surmise that they are doing a grand job because they are providing for their families financially, or their children are involved in all the “right” activities, or they indulge their children with their every whim. It does not dawn on us that we are neglecting the most important thing. We are not building into them godly character traits that are substantive. Traits that will enable them to prosper, to stand firm for the right thing, to make a difference for Christ, and to be truly blessed.

What does it matter if a teenage girl can twirl a baton yet when her boyfriend breaks up with her she is so hopelessly distraught that she takes her life? What does it matter if your son is the star of the football team yet he lacks the courage and the conviction to say no to drug abuse. You may be thinking that this has nothing to do with toddlers, but what is of the utmost importance to understand is that you must lay the foundation while they are young and you have their attention. Give them what will sustain them when life becomes difficult. It is a given that our children will have difficulties in this life. Jesus himself says in John:

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 (NIV)

The word “trouble” that Jesus uses here is translated in Greek as *thlipsis*, meaning “to crush, press, compress, squeeze. Tribulation, trouble, affliction. *Thlipsis* conveys the picture of something being crushed, pressed, or squeezed as from a great weight. It is used to denote grievous physical affliction, or mental and spiritual distress.” In contrast, the word for “peace” that Jesus uses here in Greek is *eirene*, meaning “peace, tranquillity, repose, calm; harmony, accord; well-being prosperity. It denotes a state of untroubled, undisturbed, well being. Such a state of peace is the object of divine promise and is brought about by God’s mercy, granting deliverance and freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as a result of sin. Hence the message of salvation is called the gospel of peace, for this peace can only be the result of reconciliation with God.” Both believers and non-believers alike will have trouble, but only believers will have peace in the midst of tribulation. Teach your children what cannot be taken away from them. Give them the spiritual foundation they will need to draw from. Give them what will sustain them throughout this life.

If your children are older and the spiritual foundation has not been laid, begin where you are now. God can pick up the broken pieces and heal the troubled hearts. Remember David's words in Psalm 51:

¹⁶ "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Psalms 51:16-17 (NIV)

God hears and God heals. Nothing is hopeless or helpless with Him. We serve a merciful, forgiving God (thank goodness). He awaits the sound of our voice. Do not spend another moment apart from His peace.

Let me address for one moment the subject of suffering, trails, and persecutions that the Christian and the non-Christian alike are promised. Jesus does not take away the troubles of the Christian. What He does do, however, is to give us the grace to endure. He gives us a peace unlike the world's peace. He states this so clearly in John:

²⁷ "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

John 14:27 (NIV)

Taking a look at Scripture we see many examples of this peace given to the saints at just the appropriate time. You see God gives us the grace we need sufficient for the day. God is not a grace waster. Indeed, He is not a waster of anything, including our trials. If we are His child, He gives us what we need at the moment we need it. Let's take a look at some examples of saints under fire and their response to their situations.

Paul is a marvelous example of being the recipient of immeasurable grace throughout his tribulations. We are going to look at two examples from Second Corinthians. The first is found in Chapter one:

³ "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

2 Cor 1:3-5 (NIV)

⁸ “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

¹¹ as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”

2 Cor 1:8-11 (NIV)

And again Paul refers to the comfort and grace he received during trials in Chapter eleven:

²³ “Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

2 Cor 11:23-30 (NIV)

Continuing on in Chapter 12:

⁷ “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

2 Cor 12:7-10 (NIV)

He speaks to the church at Philippi:

³ “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in

Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--

⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:

⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Pressing on Toward the Goal

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Phil 3:3-14 (NIV)

What a testimony for following Christ! Here we have in black and white the words of a man who had it all and literally gave it all away for the sheer privilege of following, and may I add suffering for, Christ. Not only that, but Paul was ever so joyful over the matter. I do not know about you, but I start squirming in my seat when I read about his trails and persecutions yet he was able to say with joy that it was worth it – that it was more than worth it. That certainly perks my interest.

How could a person with flesh and bones, a person like you and me, respond to persecution in that way? I have heard of martyrs bravely dying for a cause or gravely giving up their lives for others to live, yet Paul exudes joy. What is the difference? The answer lies in Jesus Christ. Paul knew Christ intimately. His passion and love for Christ was overwhelming. His accomplishments in life held no meaning for him - only to serve his Master. This was his hearts desire, this was his daily focus, and this was his entire purpose in life. What did he get in return? Peace, calmness, joy and sufficient grace. A state of undisturbed, untroubled well-being. I do not know about you, but this is what I greatly desire for my children and myself. There is no better investment to make in your child's future

than to give them a strong Biblical foundation on which they can stand firm.

Another example from Scripture of saints under fire and their response is found in Acts. It is the story of the stoning of Stephen:

⁵⁴ “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Acts 7:54-60 (NIV)

The word “glory” used in verse 55 is the Greek word *doxa*, meaning “glory, honor, wealth, and splendor. Theologically, with respect to believers, it signifies their exalted status as the objects of divine approbation and blessedness. It is a state in which one is accorded the fullest enjoyment of the admiration and honor of God – the object of His highest regard and praise.” God is so incredibly awesome. In the midst of Stephen’s stoning, God is giving him a heavenly high-five. Stephen knows without a doubt who he serves. That he is on the winning team. He is able to be bold, he is able to be courageous because his focus is fixed.

Based on the truth of Scripture, if you are a child of the King, there is nothing that can happen to you that will separate you from His love. Paul puts it beautifully in Romans:

³⁵ “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:35-39 (NIV)

Both children and parents alike desire greatly to be loved, to be accepted unconditionally and to be found precious and worthy in the sight of those we love.

Yet here it is in black and white and we still fail to see the importance of instilling these truths into the lives of our children. We are so busy trying to acquire the “things” we think necessary to pass on to our children. “Things” such as stocks, jewelry, antiques, and homes – you name it. And in all of our busyness we neglect the most important. In doing this, we are handing our children all of the security of a spider’s web. They may cling to these “things” but these “things” will never be able to hold them. Indeed, the only thing worth passing on to our children is that which is eternal. As Jesus tells us in Mark:

³⁶ “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”

Mark 8:36-38 (NIV)

Parents, I urge you to get your priorities straight in raising your precious children. Give them what will last. Give them what will sustain them when the winds of life blow hard. You will not regret your efforts. I know that I appear very strong on this subject, but I believe this to be is a very critical period in the life of a child and most parents do not realize this fact until this time has long since past.

One more thought on training your toddlers (I know you are thrilled) is to establish a time for you to read the Bible to them. There are many wonderful Bibles for children that go over the stories in ways that your young child can comprehend. This can be a very special time for your child. They will love the attention and you will be surprised at how much they will love the stories too. After reading the stories try to apply the truth learned to a real life situation for them. This process, when learned, will be invaluable to them as they study the Bible as they mature. We used to read a Bible story right before bed (what a novel idea!) and then try to apply that story to what was going on in their life that day. Most kids (and I believe adults too) have a hard time remembering much past the day! This is such a rewarding discipline and it makes the Bible come alive for our young ones.

Love your mate. Toddlers are not ignorant. They know when things are tense and stormy. Even infants can perceive this. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, this breeds insecurity in your child. It has been said that the most important thing you can do for your child is to love your mate. This is God’s plan. This is God’s will. This is the way it works the best. I realize that some of you may be single parents (or feel like single parents) and God can certainly use you to raise a godly child. Remember that He is looking for a heart committed to Him and to His ways. The

road will be harder, the gratification probably greater and the reward at the finish line definitely worth it.

If, however, you are in the process of thinking about leaving your mate, I beg you to reconsider. I realize there are Biblical grounds for divorce, but there are also Biblical grounds for forgiveness. Many marriages could be saved if the partners would focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and not on the flaws of their spouse. We are each responsible for our own actions. We are not responsible nor will we be held accountable for the actions of our spouse. Paul says in a passage in Colossians on rules for Christian households:

- ¹⁸ “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.
²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.
²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,
²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.”
 Col 3:18-25 (NIV)

Verse 25 tells us that everyone will be repaid for the wrongs they do to others. God will show no favoritism. Paul also tells us in Romans 12 what God says about trying to get even:

- ¹⁹ “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.
²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."
²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
 Romans 12:19-21 (NIV)

You see, we do not have to worry about the actions of others only about our reaction to them. Nothing, I repeat, nothing goes unnoticed with God. He will take care of the wrong others do to us. He said it and He means it. He is always true to His Word. Always.

We are not perfect, and neither are our spouses. When you have two sinners living under one roof, both demanding their own way, you have the potential for an explosive situation! It is Christ living in us that enables us to love our spouses.

There is nothing natural about this. It goes against our very selfish nature. Yet it is not our spouse we are serving, it is Christ. Sometimes when I do not “feel” like serving my husband because I did not get my way, I envision Christ’s face in place of my husbands. It is easy to serve Christ. All I have to do is to think of what He has done for me. My meager efforts to be obedient to His will pale in comparison to what He has done for me. In fact, I hate to even put my feeble obedience with His perfect sacrifice in the same sentence. It is a privilege and a joy to serve Him, it can be an unpleasant experience to serve my fellow sinners – especially when they are so wrong! Remember always that it is not in our strength but in His. Our part is to make the choice to be obedient. When we turn over our will to Him, He does it through us and for us.

Enough on toddlers and the pre-schooler. Just know that this time is of great importance in the life of your little one. And even though it is a fabulously fun period it is also very fleeting. Just blink hard and you are in the next chapter! Before you know it they will be waiting for the yellow bus to pick them up. While we are on that subject.....Hold the bus!

CHAPTER FOUR – “HOLD THE BUS!”

I still can have nightmares about it. We would have started the day in plenty of time to catch the bus. I just do not know what would happen. Before I knew it, I would be standing at my front door in my attractive moth eaten orange bathrobe yelling at the top of my lungs – “Hold the bus!” My precious first grade daughter would be high-tailing it down the driveway, book bag and lunch box in hand, blonde curls blowing against the big bow in her hair, wiping oatmeal off of her face! I would be praying for her the entire run down the driveway, knowing she could wipe out in a twinkling of the eye! I tell you it was exhausting! I would be ready for bed and it was only 7:00 a.m.! To this day I cannot imagine why in the world I subjected myself to this day after day. I had a car. I even had a driver’s license. I must have liked the sport of it all. What else could it be? My stars, the school was only two miles away! Looking back I could have saved myself a lot of frustration by throwing the bathrobe to the wind and donning some duds, grabbing the kids and heading for school. Although, I must admit, we did carpool in latter years and it proved as effective as catching the bus!

What is it about mornings and school age children anyway? It is kind of like mixing oil and water. They just do not seem to go together! You wake them up. You go start the coffee. You wake them up again. You get breakfast on the table. You wake them up again. You go get your clothes on. You wake them up again. Finally, you get the fog horn out of the closet! You get the message.

I suppose it is a lack of desire on their part to do what they have to do. As adults, we are much akin to the school age child too. Sometimes it is hard for us to muster up the desire to do what we are supposed to do. I find this so very true in my Christian walk. God calls me to do something and I really want to be obedient yet I can find a million things to do before I do what He has called me to do. Similar to the example above, I could just stay in bed with the covers over my head! Of course, then I would miss the wonderful blessing that comes from obedience.

Scripture has a great example of this very human, very strong, character trait. It is found in the book of Jonah (what a surprise!). God had given Jonah very specific orders. We find in verse one:

¹ “The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:

² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

Jonah 1:1-2 (NIV)

God was clear. Go to Nineveh, Jonah. Just like we are clear to our children in the morning when we tell them to get up. How does Jonah respond?

³ “But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”

Jonah 1:3 (NIV)

He did the human thing – he fled! Just as our kids do the human thing and pull the covers over their head! As we persist in trying to get them up, so God persisted with Jonah. We find in verse four:

⁴ “Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.”

Jonah 1:4 (NIV)

Through the casting of lots, the sailors discover that Jonah is the cause of this violent storm. Jonah tells them that it is his fault and that to calm the waves all they needed to do was to throw him overboard. The sailors try rowing back to the land but to no avail. They were terrified to throw Jonah into the sea and cried out to God not to hold them accountable for this man’s life. As soon as Jonah hit the water the sea grew calm. At this the sailors offered a sacrifice to God and made vows to Him.

The Lord then provides a great fish to swallow Jonah. Finally, God gets Jonah’s attention. I used the example of the fog horn to get the attention of my children, but if you would rather use a great big fish, be my guest! You see, God will get the attention of His disobedient children. If you are truly His child and you are being disobedient to His revealed will in your life, He will discipline you to get you back on the right path. That is the promise of Hebrews 12:

⁵ “And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our

good, that we may share in his holiness.”

Heb 12:5-10 (NIV)

The word “disciplines” used in verse six is the Greek word *paideuo*, which is derived from child. “It is used in the activity directed toward the moral and spiritual nurture and training of the child to influence the will and the behavior. In a religious sense, to discipline in order to educate someone to conform to divine truth.” God does this to those He loves. The word “loves”, used in this same verse, is the Greek word *agapao* meaning “to value, esteem, prize, treat as precious, to be devoted to.” You see, we are precious in His sight and He wants the very best for us which, of course, is His will. Therefore, if we are His child, He will discipline us back into His perfect will for our lives. He tells us in verse eight that if we do not undergo discipline then we are not true sons. We are not His.

Let’s return now to Jonah. Here he is in the belly of the great fish. He realizes the sinfulness in his life and he effectively combats it with the following prayer:

⁷ "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

⁹ But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

¹⁰ And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

Jonah 2:7-10 (NIV)

He realizes that by clinging to his own will he was forfeiting the very mercy, love and kindness of God. Nothing is worth that. God, in His love for us, does not delight in His discipline or chastening of us. He is far more concerned with our holiness than our happiness. As parents we too must be more concerned with our children’s holiness than their happiness. It is far easier, and much more peaceful to let our children have their way, but if we give in to the happiness now we chance losing the holiness later.

Elementary school age children can be such a delight. From about ages six to eleven or twelve is a period in their life that is relatively peaceful. I like to call it the calm before the storm. You are through with changing diapers and having to dress and feed them and you are not yet to the point of handing them the car keys! The physical stresses of taking care of them have somewhat subsided and the mental anguish of the teen years has not yet come into play. They are still very much under your wing and that is a place that I always enjoyed having my children! I realize that there are exceptions to this. Some children are just plain

difficult to raise. From the time they are born to the time that they leave the nest it is overwhelmingly demanding. Take heart parent. Some of the most difficult children to raise are the most exceptional as adults. You do your part. That is your responsibility. God will handle the results. That is His responsibility. We will not be held accountable for our children's actions before God, only for our own actions or lack of actions.

¹³ "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Heb 4:13 (NIV)

¹⁶ "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."

Deut 24:16 (NIV)

When raising a difficult child, we sometimes have the desire to give up. It is easier to pour our lives into our work and activities and even our other children, than to face squarely the problems we may be having with our problem child. Do not give up. Do not give in. God's ways are tried and true. Be a parent that perseveres. Again, we do our part and we leave the results to God. You are probably saying to yourself, "I am tired, I am weary of all this". Do not try to do this in your own strength. You will fail. You must totally rely on the strength of God to be able to keep going. Remember what Jesus says in Matthew:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matt 11:28-30 (NIV)

That is such a comforting verse. The word "rest", is my particular favorite. In verse 29 is the Greek word *anapausis*, which means "pause, rest, cessation from labor. It implies the relaxing or letting down of chords or strings, which have been strained or drawn too tightly." Don't you feel that way sometimes - that you are drawn so tightly that you could snap at any given moment? Christian, appropriate the strength of Christ! It is available to us in abundance. It is inconceivable to me that we would live our lives apart from His power that is available to us. Of course, this is not done once and then forgotten. You cannot just pray for the strength of Christ and never pray again. It is a moment by moment, day by day occurrence. This is what the Christian walk is all about. We trust in the Lord, we acknowledge His ways and we let Him direct us. Therein is the peace. As

Solomon puts it in Proverbs:

⁵ “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”
 Prov 3:5-6 (NIV)

The word “trust” used in verse five is the Hebrew word batah, which means, “to attach oneself, trust, confide in, feel safe, be confident, secure. The basic idea signifies firmness or solidity. It denotes a confident expectation. The folly of relying upon any other types of security is strongly contrasted with depending upon God alone.” To put this in terms that my moronic mind can understand, we are to be human remoras! Just as the remora attaches itself to the shark for its sustenance, we are to attach ourselves to the Lord. The word “lean” in verse five is equally interesting. In Hebrew it is the word saan, which means “to rest upon, support oneself upon; to rely on, to place confidence in. It denotes an attitude of trust.”

God knows how we are made. He knows our very strong tendency to rely on our own strength. I am confident that is why He addresses this subject so often in Scripture. The word He uses for “understanding” in verse five is the Hebrew word biynah, which means “intelligence.” I think it is so comical that we continue to rely on our own flimsy abilities when we are offered the very intelligence of God. Paul says in Colossians:

² “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,
³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
 Col 2:2-3 (NIV)

We have available to us all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now I do not know about you, but that sounds awesome to me. Perhaps I appreciate this fact so much because I have trouble even spelling Einstein much less being him!

Back to Proverbs three, the word “ways” used in verse six, is referring to your life’s journey. As I said before, this trusting is to be throughout your entire life not just a one-time thing. The word “acknowledge” used in verse six is the Hebrew word yada, which means, “to know, to be familiar with.” Our job, throughout our life’s journey, is to know God. To be familiar with His ways and His will. As Paul writes in Philippians:

¹⁰ “I want to know Christ”
Phil 3:10 (NIV)

Paul goes on to say in verse twelve of the same chapter:

¹² “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Phil 3:12-14 (NIV)

Paul realizes that this is a process. He forgets the past, we cannot change that, and he presses on to the future. His goal is to win the prize. That, dear Christian, should be our goal.

Returning again to Proverbs three, the word “paths” used in verse six is the Hebrew word orah meaning or describing “the way of righteousness or wickedness, the path leading to life or to death.” The word “straight” is the Hebrew word yasar, which means “to declare right, to approve, to be pleasing. It is ethically an upright, moral life.” What Scripture is saying is clear. If we attach ourselves to the Lord and our pursuit is to know Him, then He, and I emphasize He, will keep us on the path of righteousness which leads to life. God does the work here. Our job is to relinquish the control to Him. Again, this is not done just once but moment by moment, day by day.

God’s rules for raising children are really not that difficult to comprehend. We are to love them, care for them, discipline them, teach them His Word and commandments. It is really quite clear. I just wish it were as easy as it was clear! The reason, I believe, that it is so difficult for us as parents is that it forces us (or it should force us) to examine our own lives and deal with the weaknesses that the Holy Spirit brings to light. It is never easy to face our flaws. We do not like to dwell on our shortcomings. But, as mentioned earlier, you cannot raise godly children if you choose not to be godly. We cannot give something that we do not have to give. The godly life must be ours before it can be taught to our children.

The Bible is very clear that we are to teach our children God’s Word.

Deuteronomy states:

- ⁶ “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.
⁷ 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.
⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.
⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”
 Deut 6:6-9 (NIV)

According to the above passage it appears that we are to be teaching our children at all times. If we are to be teaching them when we sit, when we walk, when we lie down, and when we rise, that covers about all of our day! We are to incorporate God’s truths into all of our experiences in life. This is not the only place in Scripture that we are told to teach our children God’s truth.

Deuteronomy four states:

- ⁹ “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”
 Deut 4:9 (NIV)

The book of Proverbs adds:

- ⁶ “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”
 Prov 22:6 (NIV)

Paul in First Timothy adds a wonderful reason:

- ⁷ “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.
⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”
 1 Tim 4:7-8 (NIV)

The spiritual training of our children is of utmost importance to God. We are not only to train our children in God’s Word, we are also to tell them all the wonderful things God has done in our lives. This is to encourage them to persevere in their faith and not only them, but it is also encouraging for us to remember all the ways God has worked in our lives. If this is our focus, we will have less of a tendency to stray.

Remember the Creator of the universe, The Creator of both you and me, knows exactly what makes us tick. He knows us perfectly. He knows that we are prone to forget all the wonderful things He has done in our lives. The repetition of all that He has done for us keeps us focused and on target. He does not give us rules

for no reason. Everything He commands has a purpose. This is a great truth especially for those of us who detest any and all things that waste our energy, time and money.

What are some suggestions for training our children in God's Word? When my children were in elementary school I would get a poster and write a Bible verse on it. One that I thought was particularly applicable for them (for that matter applicable for all of us!). I would tape it to the wall in the kitchen – a room we were always in. You would be surprised how quickly we would all pick up the truth just by having it displayed. I suppose that is what it means to put it on your doorframes as mentioned in Deuteronomy.

It is important for our children to know that God's commands are not burdensome but rather they are for our good. John says this perfectly in First John chapter five:

³ "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,"
1 John 5:3 (NIV)

If we can get the concept through to our children (and to us for that matter) that God's ways are for our very best, then they (like us) will be more inclined to be obedient. I believe this is a key factor in training our kids. First, they must realize that, like them, we too are sinners. We are in the same race as they are. Never mislead them into thinking that you have attained perfection in your Christian walk. You, like they, will never attain this until Christ returns. As Paul stated in Philippians three:

¹² "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Phil 3:12-14 (NIV)

All of us are to be pressing on towards perfection. The second factor is that we must get it into their understanding that obedience to God's commands is for their very best. Again, if we do not believe that, neither will they. Jeremiah has the most terrific verses regarding this very subject:

¹¹ "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.

¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Jer 29:11-13 (NIV)

God’s plans for us are always for our good and for His glory, never one surpassing the other. Our children need to know and understand this truth. A firm belief in this will keep them strong during the storms of life. If we believe that God has purpose in all things, then even the most horrific circumstances can be endured. Their pain has purpose.

Another very important point for them to realize is that you did not make the rules. God did. Your job as a parent is to enforce the rules (and to obey them yourself!). When my kids were this age and would misbehave, I would find a Bible verse that related to their poor behavior and make them write it and write it and write it – you get the drift! Even if they did not get the spiritual truth memorized they at least had practice in their penmanship! This procedure reinforced the truth that these were God’s rules and not something that I made up on a whim. Another benefit was that it would usher in a brief period of quietness!

Some examples of the above exercise would be as follows. Let’s say your child has a problem with telling the truth. A perfect passage to choose is found in Proverbs:

¹⁶ “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

Prov 6:16-19 (NIV)

Perhaps your children have a problem getting along with each other. Paul addresses that perfectly in Romans twelve:

⁹ “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

¹³ Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
Romans 12:9-18 (NIV)

The entire chapter of Romans twelve is so applicable to righteous living that we memorized the whole chapter. You get the idea. It is well worth your time and effort to get into the Bible and select verses appropriate for the offense. There is tremendous benefit in it for your children too. It is never a waste of time to be in the Word of God. It shows them that we are not the ones that made the rules, God did. It is also wise for them to learn at an early age that just as there is blessing in obedience, there is consequence to sin or disobedience – always. God’s Word is very clear on that. Jeremiah chapter seven is a wonderful chapter on obedience:

¹ “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:
² “Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.
³ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.
⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"
⁵ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly,
⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,
⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.
⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.
⁹ "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,
¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"--safe to do all these detestable things?
¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.
¹² "Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.
¹³ While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer.”
Jer 7:1-13 (NIV)

And later in the same passage:

²¹ “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!
²² For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,
²³ but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.

²⁴ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.”

Jer 7:21-24 (NIV)

May it not be that way in our homes Christian. May we always walk in obedience to His commands. May we always go forward and not backward. Never believe for a moment Satan’s lie that God is not watching. How much clearer can He be in His word than in verse eleven:

¹¹ “Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”

Jer 7:11 (NIV)

I would always tell my children that they might be able to fool me but they would never be able to fool God. As the writer of Hebrews states clearly:

¹³ “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Heb 4:13 (NIV)

At this point I would like to interject that I am no big fat example of perfect parenting. In fact, when my son found out I was writing a book on raising godly children, he suggested I do it under an alias! Our example is, and always will be, Christ. Parenting is a struggle for me too. I fail miserably every day. I am a sinner, as are my children, striving, along with them, to become Christ-like. I have seen success and I have experienced failure, just like you (if you are breathing that is!). As stated before, the Christian walk is very difficult. It is a daily relinquishing of the will and your flesh will fight you every step of the way. There is not one thing natural about it. That is why it is so important to realize that we do not do this in our own strength. It is the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian that enables he or she to walk as Jesus walked. If you attempt to walk the Christian walk in your own flesh you will fail every time.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John:

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”

John 15:5-6 (NIV)

The word “can” used in verse five is the Greek word dynamai, which means “to be

able. It also means to have the power to do something by virtue of one's own ability and resources, to be capable and to possess skill or competence, to be sufficiently powerful." Christ is plainly telling us that we do not have the ability to produce fruit (walk a successful Christian walk) in our own strength. Remember it is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to be godly parents, our example being worthy of following. When we fail we are to repent and ask God for forgiveness and to restore our fellowship back with Him. Keep your accounts short with God. The longer you go without repenting you become dull to the Holy Spirit's leading in your life. When this happens you will begin to live your life in the flesh and sin will become more and more apparent. I know this is true because I have experienced this in my own life and I have seen this in the life of others and also throughout Scripture. Christian, beware of living in the flesh.

I realize I may seem repetitive about the Christian walk. I hope that through this repetition I am stressing to you the grave importance of it all. A famous football coach was once asked what was the key to his fabulous success. He replied, "I go over the basics, and I go over the basics, and I go over the basics." The Christian walk is the same way. We must constantly remind our children, and ourselves, of the basics, lest we lose our focus. I believe this is one of the main problems of our churches today. We have fallen away from teaching the basics of the Christian faith. We no longer emphasize the importance of daily Bible reading, scripture memory, prayer, and application of God's truth in our churches and we are reaping the consequences of this. We have churches that preach many things contrary to scripture and because we are not in the word of God we are not aware that we are not being taught the truth.

Paul admonishes us in Colossians:

⁸ "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."
Col 2:8 (NIV)

He adds in Second Thessalonians:

⁹ "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,
¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie
¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

2 Thess 2:9-12 (NIV)

Our ignorance will be no excuse. Search the scripture and know the truth. Be able to back up what you say with God's Word. Make sure what you believe is in line with God's Word. Truth is not relative. God's Word is truth. It is trustworthy. It is absolute. It is sure.

Returning our focus again to the elementary school age child, we are going to discuss encouragement. I believe this to be a very important aspect of child rearing. In fact, encouragement is a very important aspect of the Christian walk.

Paul tells us in First Thessalonians:

¹¹ "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."
1 Thess 5:11 (NIV)

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ shows us His perfect example of encouragement as Paul states in Second Thessalonians:

¹⁶ "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,
¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."
2 Thess 2:16-17 (NIV)

The first word "encouragement" mentioned in verse sixteen in Greek is paraklesis meaning "encouragement for the purpose of strengthening and establishing the believer in his faith." This, he says, is eternal. So is God's Word. All of scripture is actually a paraklesis bringing exhortation, encouragement and comfort. The second word used for "encourage" in verse seventeen is the Greek word parakaleo meaning "to the side of, to call. To aid, help, comfort and encourage." I love that He uses this particular word because it allows me to envision Jesus walking beside me, bringing me encouragement. We should note that our encouragement is not some vain attempt to build others up but rather to encourage them in the faith. To encourage them in what really matters.

How do we go about encouraging our youngsters? Certainly we can encourage them by our words. Let them know how precious they are in God's sight. They need to realize that they are of great value and of great significance. Christ died for them. He died for us too. We must never forget the sacrifice He made for us. It is very humbling but it also shows us how very much we are worth to God. My human mind will never be able to fathom His love for us.

As Paul says in Romans chapter eleven:

³³ “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.
Romans 11:33-36 (NIV)

Children, as well as adults, can be very cruel to each other. This is an extremely hard world we live in. Rejection and hatred are rampant. Your children face plenty of all the world has to offer in school. Be a safe harbor for them. Teach them, through your words, of the love and acceptance of Jesus Christ. As I stated before, all everybody really wants is to be truly loved and accepted.

Another form of encouragement is the written word. I particularly like this method. I used to enjoy putting notes in their lunches to let them know how much they were loved during the day. It never hurts to remind them! I would rather make the mistake of letting them know too often (if that were possible) than not often enough.

A wonderful example of this is a story told of a high school teacher who one day, when her class was acting up, decided to give a marvelous assignment. She told everyone in the class to take out a sheet of paper and write down the name of every member in the class. Beside each name the students were to write down something that they particularly liked or admired about that student. The papers were turned in and the teacher made each student a sheet of all the things written about them and by whom. When she passed them out, she heard several statements like, “I never knew they felt that way” or “I did not realize they admired that”.

The class graduated and several years passed. The teacher received a call one-day about an untimely death of one of the students in that particular class. She was asked to come to the funeral. When she arrived and was introduced, several people told her how much she had meant to the student that had died. When the parents of the student realized who she was they handed her this worn piece of paper. On it were the comments of the other students that she had written down for him. The parents told her that he had always carried it around with him in his wallet. Several other members of the class were there also. Each one went on to say how they had kept their papers too. Some carried it with them, others had put it in a

special place for safe keeping. Never underestimate the power to encourage in the written word. Unlike verbally, where a word might ring in your ears or your heart for a time, the written word is tangible and can be read and re-read when the encouragement is needed. Everyone needs encouragement from time to time, especially those who are young and tender and so susceptible to the harshness of this world.

Another way to encourage your children is by doing special things for them. It does not have to be anything big just thoughtful. Perhaps you can cook their favorite dinner, iron their pillowcase, buy their favorite snack or better yet, take them out for their favorite snack after school. Whatever floats their boat. You know what is special to your child. The action on your part shows them your love (sometimes sacrificial) and that you were thinking of them. A planned action of encouragement, whatever form it takes, be it a meal, a flower, a snack or a small gift, tells the person that they were thought of – and it is special to be thought of - especially by your parents.

Resist the thought that perhaps you need encouragement too. Satan has a way to keep us from encouraging others by thinking we should be the one receiving the encouragement. First of all Christ is sufficient. Even if no one encourages you, Christ is sufficient. Remember He is right beside you to encourage you. Secondly, there is a wonderful promise in Scripture given to the encourager. It is found in the book of Proverbs:

²⁵ “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”
Prov 11:25 (NIV)

The word translated “refreshes” in Hebrew is rawah meaning “to drink to satisfaction, quench the thirst, satisfy, lavish upon, refresh.” The word “refreshed” in Hebrew is yarah meaning “to water upon, rain, shower – to be refreshed.” Just as the flowers of the field are rained upon by God to bring about their exquisite beauty, those who satisfy others by their encouragement are showered upon by the very encouragement of God. God is faithful to His promises. Christian, do not miss the blessing of being an encourager.

Aside from the need of encouragement, love and affirmation, the elementary school age child needs help learning how to redeem his or her time. We are told in Scripture that we are to redeem the time:

¹⁵ “Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise,

¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”

Eph 5:15-17 (NIV)

We are to make the most of every opportunity given us. Our lives are so full of time wasters. From the television to the telephone to the shopping malls to the catalogs and magazines that come across our desk (plus a billion other ways), we are constantly given the chance to waste our precious time. I, for one, fall for many of these things! Again, the best way to teach our children is by our example (ouch!). If we find ourselves spending an inordinate amount of time on any activity that does not reap eternal rewards we should change that activity.

This is often easier said than done. Old habits can die hard. During the past few years I have been convicted of many time wasters in my life. God has faithfully shown them to me one by one (He did not overwhelm me by showing them all to me at once - thank goodness!). I am now, and will continue to be, in the process of making my time count. I try to make this my daily focus. It is very evident in my life when I fail on this point. I revert back so very quickly to my old habits. God has a daily plan for our lives. I am saddened when I miss out on what He has in store for me on a particular day because I chose to do some mindless activity that is not redeeming. I miss out on the blessing and the fellowship of being in the center of His will. Make sure your children realize that time is a very precious gift and one that we will be held accountable for. Again, monkey see, monkey do. They will be more careful with their time if you are.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed for the elementary school age child is the matter of friends. This is the first time most of our children are placed in the position own their own, so to speak, in making new friends and building relationships with others. Prior to this time, their friends have probably been the children of our friends. People that we have put them together with. This new venture can be a very exciting time for them. It is enjoyable for most children to branch out and discover others with common interests as their own. As parents we should discuss with our children the importance of selecting close friends with admirable character traits (hopefully, such as theirs!). The Bible is very clear on the type of friends we should seek.

Paul tells us in First Corinthians:

³³ “Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

1 Cor 15:33 (NIV)

And again Solomon tells us in Proverbs:

²⁴ “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered,
²⁵ or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.”

Prov 22:24-25 (NIV)

I heard a great analogy of this once. If you take a white glove and put it on and run it across the dirt you no longer have a white glove. It is our natural tendency to migrate down to the lowest level. This is true for adults and it is especially true for children. As Christians, we have a difficult task in keeping our balance in life. We are called to be in the world but not of the world.

Jesus says in John:

¹⁴ “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

John 17:14-21 (NIV)

Jesus tells us twice, in verses fourteen and sixteen, that we are not of the world. Yet sandwiched between these two verses he prays that we are not taken from the world but protected from the evil one. What does He mean that we are not of the world? I believe He is saying we are not to be caught up in all the world has to offer. We are not to buy into worldliness, self-gratification, sexual immorality, impurity, evil desires, greed and on and on. The world’s voice is so loud it drowns out the gentle whisper of God.

It is very easy to fall for the temporal worldly actions of non-believers. Jesus goes on to say that we are to stay in the world and prays for our protection from evil. Why on earth does He want us to remain here? The answer lies in the fact that for some unknown reason to man, God desires to use humans to further His kingdom. I cannot imagine why. If I were God I would not want to use such a frail

undependable species as man for the workings of my kingdom. Yet God, out of supreme love for us, lets us have a taste of the eternal and blessings in abundance by allowing us to serve Him in winning others to Christ.

What does this have to do with close friends? It is easy to choose friends who are of the world – especially if you are young and immature in your thought process. It is very exciting to live on the wild side. Unfortunately, sin can be a lot of fun! Do not misunderstand, I believe we are to have non-Christians as friends. How else could we be used to witness to others? But your close friends, the ones that you listen to their counsel, your inner circle, should be believers.

This concept is difficult for adults to master but even more difficult for children. First of all, they do not have the maturity or wisdom to always know what to look for in choosing a friend. Adults fall prey to this too. We all want to gravitate to the popular or the exciting or the outgoing personality. You know the type that everyone longs to be friends with. Just because a person is popular, successful, famous or whatever, does not mean that they automatically have the qualities a person should desire in a lasting friendship. Friendships that stand the test of time include such qualities as loyalty, honesty, confidentiality, loving kindness, selflessness and courageousness. It is also important that a friend is willing to take a stand for their friend – to go to battle for them, so to speak, and to be willing to go into and follow through with a covenantal relationship. All these traits are displayed in the lives of King David and his close friend Jonathan, son of King Saul. Scripture gives us much insight into a desired godly friendship through the lives of these two men.

The wonderful examples are found in the book of First Samuel starting in chapter eighteen:

¹ “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.”

1 Sam 18:1 (NIV)

³ “And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.”

1 Sam 18:3-4 (NIV)

Jonathan was the son of King Saul. David was a shepherd. Because of Jonathan’s love for David he makes a covenant with him and ratifies it by giving David his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt. This action showed that Jonathan considered

David to be an equal, even though he was heir to the throne and David was just a shepherd boy. Scripture goes on to say:

¹ “Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David

² and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there.

³ I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

⁴ Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.

⁵ He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

⁶ Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."

⁷ So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before."

1 Sam 19:1-7 (NIV)

Jonathan goes to bat for David and gets results. He stood up for his friend and was able to totally change the situation – at least for awhile! We read on:

¹ “Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?"

² "Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!"

³ But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."

⁴ Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

1 Sam 20:1-4 (NIV)

¹² “Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know?"

¹³ But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father.

¹⁴ But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed,

¹⁵ and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family--not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account."

17 And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.”

1 Sam 20:12-17 (NIV)

30 “Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"

31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"

32 "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father.

33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

34 Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.”

1 Sam 20:30-34 (NIV)

41 “After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side [of the stone] and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together--but David wept the most.

42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.”

1 Sam 20:41-42 (NIV)

In the last chapter of First Samuel, the Philistines kill Jonathan and his three brothers and Saul is wounded. Saul tells his armor-bearer to run him through with the sword but the armor-bearer refuses. Saul took his own sword and fell on it taking his life. Many years later David remembers his covenant with Jonathan and we find in Scripture the following:

1 “David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "Your servant," he replied.

3 The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."

4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar."

5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "Your servant," he replied.

7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

2 Sam 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹³ “And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet.”

2 Sam 9:13 (NIV)

Loyalty, honesty, confidentiality, loving kindness, selflessness, courageousness are characteristics found in lasting friendships. Teach your children this. Help them see the importance of friendships that are founded on these wonderful traits. It will benefit them for a lifetime.

In closing this chapter on the elementary school age child we need to look once again at the importance of spending time with our children. Of course you cannot do much of what is discussed in this chapter apart from spending time with your child! We must take advantage of their desire to want to be with us. This is so fleeting. Have fun with your kid. Throw a ball with them. Go to lunch with them. Take them to the park or the movies or to get ice cream. Believe me when I tell you that no time is wasted when invested in the lives of our children. There are two wonderful illustrations of this very point, both are true I might add. One was given to me first hand by a very dear lady, the other I heard in a sermon. Both were very convicting!

I had the privilege of riding home from a church retreat with my sister-in-law's mother. I was asking her to tell me about her relationship with her parents when she was a young girl. She told me her father had been a doctor in a small southern town. One day he had asked her if she would like to ride with him to call on a patient. She said that she joyfully accepted! She adored going anywhere with her father. She went on to say that she waited in the car while he went inside to treat the patient. Upon returning he asked her if she would like to go get something to eat. She, of course, was delighted. The restaurant was about thirty minutes away. She told me that he ordered one hamburger and a glass of milk for her and two hamburgers and a glass of milk for himself. What is so amazing about this story is that it took place over sixty years ago and this dear lady still remembers with fondness every detail of the time spent with her father – even down to what he had ordered. Again, the time we spend with our children is precious to them and to the Lord.

There was once a small boy named Johnny whose father asked him if he would like to go fishing for the day. Joyfully, the boy accepted. The father and son spent the entire day fishing together, talking and laughing. The day made such an

impression on Johnny that even when he became an adult he still told the story of how special it was to spend the entire day fishing with his father. Many years later, long after his dad had died, Johnny came across an old diary that had belonged to his father. He was thumbing through it and came across the special fishing day. On it was written, "Went fishing with Johnny, wasted day." What we may perceive as a waste of time may very well be of utmost importance to our child. No time is wasted when invested in the lives of our children.

Now that we are so proficient in raising the younger child it is time for us to take a deep breath and proceed on! There is still very much to learn from God's Word for the completion of the task that lies before us. Hold on to your hats and let's get started.....I believe I hear someone falling UP the stairs!

CHAPTER FIVE – “LANKY LADS AND LASSIES LACKING LUSTER”

The pre-teen age is so totally awkward. From their appearance to their gangly limbs (and the forthcoming actions due to their gangly limbs), they are anything but graceful. Often their nose is too big for their face, their teeth are too big for their mouth and their hands and arms, feet and legs do not seem to be able to work together! Add to this that most, if not all are totally insecure and feel friendless, unattractive and truly afraid of where they would stand in a popularity poll. This, my friends, is what we have to work with (oh goodie!).

The search for significance has begun. If we can capture this period of time and instill in them the true meaning of significance we will have given them a priceless gift that will remain with them throughout life.

First and foremost they, as do we, must understand that our significance does not depend on our abilities, our popularity, or our things. Our abilities may fail, our popularity may cease and our things may be taken away. If we base our significance and worth on any of the above we will always be vulnerable and insecure. There will always be someone with greater abilities, prettier, richer, more popular, thinner, more athletic, etc. than us. It has always been true and it will always be true. We must never base our significance on what the world views as valuable. Any attempt to do this will lead to greater feelings of inadequacy and loss of self worth. It is so easy to fall into this trap, set by the father of lies.

Satan wants us to believe we are valueless. He greatly desires that we to fall for his lie, that just because we may not be attractive or wealthy or popular or famous we have no worth. In doing this, he freezes or paralyzes us to the point that we are not effectively accomplishing anything for the kingdom of God. He leads us to believe we are not able to do God's work. He desires for us to constantly be second-guessing ourselves so that we are not productive. He wants us to be like him. He does not want us saved and if we are saved, he does not want us to do anything that would further God's kingdom.

Satan, the father of lies, does everything opposite of God. He has a negative for each of God's positives. He is the father of lies, God is the father of all truth. He desires for all to die, God desires for all to live. He wants the worst for us, God only wants the best for us. If you are a believer, Satan has no right over you. The only right that he has is what you allow him to have.

If we are not to look at people or the world for our significance, where then do we

begin our search? I am sure this will come as no surprise to you by now, but we must always look for our significance in Christ. We do this by the study of His Holy Word. We are of invaluable worth in God's sight. Probably the most familiar verse in Scripture states:

¹⁶ "For 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.

John 3:16 (NIV)

The word loved used in the above verse is the Greek word agapao. It is defined in the Greek dictionary as "to love, esteem, cherish, favor, honor, respect, accept, prize, relish; to be devoted to." The Lexical Aids goes on to say that agapao is "a love rooted in the mind and will of the subject and means to value, esteem, prize, treat as precious; to be devoted to. Such love entails the treatment of things with value or respect, and consequently, action, which is done for the benefit of that object. God placed such value upon mankind, showed such estimation of him, that though he deserved nothing but rejection and wrath, God sacrificed His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, for man's salvation. This was done for man's good and solely because God, the subject, accorded him this wholly undeserved value." Are we of great value? You bet we are!

Since God has demonstrated His great love for us, why is it that we have such a hard time with our significance. Paul states in Romans:

⁶ "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:6-8 (NIV)

We were powerless to save ourselves. There was nothing we could do to reconcile our state before a Holy and Righteous God. I cannot fathom why God chose to do this. Consider His cost. He traded His perfect Son, without blemish, for our pitiful necks. We must be of tremendous value in God's sight. Why else would He do that? Bottom line, I believe we struggle with this issue because we care more about man's opinion than we do God's opinion. That may seem hard to deal with at first glance but this point seems to hit the mark. Why else would we ever wonder about our significance? If we knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God, the Creator of all things, loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins so that we could have an abundant life now and an eternal life later, would that not give us

enormous worth? We have three choices here. We can choose to value man's or the world's opinion over what Scripture has to say, we can not believe that God is telling the truth and therefore continue on in our feelings of insignificance, or we can believe God. We are going to discuss these three choices in greater detail and hopefully come to the realization that God indeed is telling the truth and that we are of immeasurable value.

Let's look a little closer on the subject of valuing man's opinion over God's opinion. Scripture has much to say on this subject. I am sure this is due to the fact that this is a struggle for so many of us! I want us to look at two different accounts in Scripture - one, which values man's opinion and the other that values God's - and the ensuing results. The first passage from Scripture is taken from the fifteenth chapter of First Samuel.

Saul, the first king of the Hebrew nation, was told through the prophet Samuel to totally destroy the Amalekites because of their harsh treatment of the Israelites.

¹ Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD.

² This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt.

³ Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

1 Sam 15:1-3 (NIV)

Saul summoned his men and attacked the Amalekites. He took the king of the Amalekites, Agag, alive and totally destroyed all his people with the sword. Scripture goes on to say:

⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs--everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

1 Sam 15:9 (NIV)

Saul disregarded what God had specifically told him to do. He took it upon himself to decide which things were worthy of keeping and which things should be destroyed. Instead of following God's instructions, he decided to place value on what God had already condemned. God's response:

¹¹ "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

1 Sam 15:11 (NIV)

God, as well as Samuel, is grieved over Saul's disobedience. But the kicker comes when we discover that Saul thinks he has done a great job. In fact, he has set up a monument in his own honor! Scripture tell us:

¹² Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."

¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

¹⁵ Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

1 Sam 15:12-15 (NIV)

Saul is happy to see Samuel. Check out verse thirteen. You can feel Saul's sense of pride. He knew he had done a wonderful job. But Samuel comes back with, "What's this bleating and lowing I hear?" "I believe God told you to wipe out everything Saul, even the good stuff!" Saul immediately begins to pass the blame on to the soldiers. Samuel sees right through his charades and replies:

¹⁶ "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.

¹⁷ Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.

¹⁸ And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.'

¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"

1 Sam 15:16-19 (NIV)

Saul continues on in his defense:

²⁰ "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king.

²¹ The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

1 Sam 15:20-21 (NIV)

That is so much like us! We think that if we are partially obedient God should be so happy with us! But Samuel gives Saul, as well as us, the following wisdom:

²² But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

1 Sam 15:22-23 (NIV)

Finally we get to the real issue. Saul responds to Samuel:

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

1 Sam 15:24 (NIV)

Saul feared his men over God. Bad decision. Saul rejected God, God in turn rejected Saul:

²⁶ But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"

²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore.

²⁸ Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors--to one better than you.

²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

1 Sam 15:26-29 (NIV)

Because of Saul's lack of courage to stand up against his men, God took away his kingdom. Do we place more importance on man's opinion or on God's? Is man our judge or is God? Let's flip the coin and look at a life that values God's opinion over man's. We are going to examine the life of Daniel. His name even means, "God is my judge".

We are going to focus our attention on chapter six of Daniel. Daniel had distinguished himself among the administration of the Babylonian Kingdom and the king had planned to place him over the whole kingdom. Because of this, jealousy became rampant among his fellow satraps and administrators. They tried to find something wrong with his conduct but they were unable to do so. They decided they would never be able to find charges against him unless it dealt with the law of his God. Scripture goes on to say:

⁶ So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever!

⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king

should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

⁸ Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered--in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Dan 6:6-9 (NIV)

Daniel's response is overwhelming:

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Dan 6:10 (NIV)

Way to go Daniel! Those men are not going to intimidate you! They predicted exactly what Daniel would do. They knew he was "trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent". And, of course, they were ready to pounce:

¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands--in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

¹³ Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."

¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

Dan 6:11-15 (NIV)

Even though the king was distressed over the matter, he could do nothing to change the decree. And the Bible goes on to say:

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

Dan 6:16-18 (NIV)

Even though the king could do nothing to save Daniel's neck, guess who could?

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.

²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹ Daniel answered, "O king, live forever!"

²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Dan 6:19-23 (NIV)

Would you like to know what happened to the bad guys? Scripture goes on to say:

²⁴ At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

Dan 6:24 (NIV)

We indeed serve a God who sees and knows everything. This is not even the end of the story. The king writes a decree for every part of the kingdom:

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly!"

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Dan 6:25-28 (NIV)

Two words catch my eye in verse twenty-eight – “Daniel prospered”. It brings to mind Psalm One:

¹ Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalms 1:1-6 (NIV)

What God says is true. It has always been true and it will always be true. He

shows us through Scripture these truths manifested out in the lives of Biblical characters and if you will let Him, He will manifest these truths in your life too. What God desires is a willing heart, a person that will value His opinion over the world's opinion, a person that will stand for the hard right against the easy wrong. Let us each resolve to be that person.

Realizing it is often very difficult to value God's opinion over man's, especially during your pre-teen years, I have devised a list of things to do that seems to help the situation.

1. Examine our own actions. Do we always seek man's approval? Is it overwhelmingly important for us to be accepted by a certain social level? Are we willing to "associate with people of low position"? Who did Jesus approach? The unlearned and ignorant, the adulterer and the tax collector, the poor, the blind and the lame. I am most definitely not saying that we are to alienate ourselves from those who are intelligent, wealthy, famous, etc. They need a Savior just like we do. What I am saying is we are not to be a respecter of what we call in my area of the country, "the beautiful people". I can assure you that if you are this way, your children will be too. This is setting them up for some powerful blows in life. We must guard ourselves and keep our lives in check. We do this by confessing our sin to the Lord in prayer and TURNING from it or repenting. If necessary, this may have to be done on a moment by moment basis until God is put into His rightful place. This is worth the effort – it always is to be obedient!
2. Make your home a Safe Harbor (hence the title of this book). Kids need a place of unconditional love (just as we do) and they are going to seek that place until they find it. I am begging you to make your homes a haven lest they search for it in other sources like, for instance, a gang. Love your kids. Show them demonstrative love. Hug them. Let them sit in your lap if they want to. Give them that security that every person alive desires – to be loved unconditionally by another.
3. Teach them verses that show God's love for us. Memorize these truths with them. Anytime they are feeling insecure among their peers it is wonderful to have these truths stored in their hearts to reaffirm their value. This is a great exercise for us too. It helps me to remember how precious I am in God's sight.
4. Pray with your kids. Pray for those children who are giving your kids fits. Consider this an exercise of dying to self if you cannot think of a better reason to do it. God tells us in Romans twelve:

¹⁹ "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Romans 12:19-21 (NIV)

We are also told to bless those who persecute us. I know this is totally opposite of what the world tells us to do, yet as Christians this is exactly what we are called to do. The best way I know how to do this is to pray for them. God knows our hearts and our hurts. Ask God to help you forgive them and to give you the love for them that He desires for you to have. God will bless this because this is in direct obedience to His revealed will. The blessing may not be that He removes this person from your life. In fact, the blessing may come in having that person remain. He uses everyone around us to bring out what is stored up in us. Things that He desires for us to rid ourselves of, for example "anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips". These types of "things" may only erupt when certain people are involved in our lives. Remember, God is conforming us to the image of His precious Son therefore there is no room in the inn for things such as these.

5. Lastly, build on your kid's strengths. God has equipped His children with gifts to use to further His kingdom and to build up the Church over which Christ is the Head. Help your children discover and subsequently put to use their spiritual gifts. If you want to see a child flourish, get them using the spiritual gifts God has equipped them with. It is very rewarding. This is not difficult to do. Does your child like to serve? Get them involved in a ministry that would enable them to serve – believe me, there are many! Is your child compassionate? Go to the nursing homes and visit. Many of the elderly people long to just touch the hand of a child. I remember when my husband's grandmother was in the nursing home. Our oldest child decided that it would be fun to get all of her younger cousins and dress them up as cheerleaders and have a pep rally right in the middle of the nursing home! I can promise you that not one of those elderly people had a clue about cheerleaders or pep rally's but they all had a grand time! They just enjoyed seeing active life and energy in abundance. Did my nieces and daughter have fun? You bet they did! It is always more rewarding to be a giver than a taker. The latter is a fleeting high and the former a genuine peace.

Another choice we can make in evaluating our worth or significance is to choose not to believe that God is indeed telling the truth. Scripture is full of passages

describing God’s love and compassion for us. He longs to protect us. He delights in showing us compassion and in being merciful to us. He knows how we are made. He remembers that we are mere flesh. So great is His love that He lavishes on us that He even calls us His children. Scripture points to these facts over and over again:

¹ “How great is the 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 (NIV)

³ “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”

Eph 1:3-8 (NIV)

“I love you, O LORD, my strength.² The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³ I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

⁴ The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

⁵ The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.

⁶ In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.”

Psalms 18:2-6 (NIV)

¹⁶ “He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.

¹⁷ He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.

¹⁸ They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.

¹⁹ He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.”

Psalms 18:16-19 (NIV)

³⁰ “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

³¹ For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God?

³² It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

³³ He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.

³⁴ He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

³⁵ You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.

³⁶ You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.”

Psalms 18:30-36 (NIV)

⁸ “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field;

¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children--

¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.”

Psalms 103:8-18 (NIV)

¹⁸ “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”

Micah 7:18-19 (NIV)

God can be trusted. What He decrees, that He will most assuredly bring about. In fulfilling the scores of prophecies, He has not been wrong once. Not once. I would say that is definitely good odds! Do you realize that it takes more faith not to believe God than to believe Him? Scripture tells us:

⁴ “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”

Deut 32:4 (NIV)

Our last choice in evaluating our worth or significance is to choose to believe God. (This, of course, is the choice I hope everyone picks!) As seen in the above Scriptures, and there are countless more, God loves you. We must value God's opinion over that of mans. Jesus tells us:

⁴⁴ “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”

John 5:44 (NIV)

John adds:

⁴³ “for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”
John 12:43 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, keep from falling into this error. It is such a trap and it is so empty. Solomon likens it to a chasing after the wind.

¹⁰ “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”
Eccl 2:10-11 (NIV)

⁴ “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”
Eccl 4:4 (NIV)

Solomon adds:

²¹ “Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you--
²² for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.”
Eccl 7:21-22 (NIV)

Compare this to what God says in Jeremiah:

³” The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”
Jer 31:3 (NIV)

The word “loved” used in verse three is the Hebrew word *ahab* that means, “to love, desire, delight, like, be fond of, covet, be beloved, amiable, be a passionate lover. It implies an ardent and vehement inclination of the mind and a tenderness of affection at the same time.” The word “everlasting” used in this same verse is the Hebrew word *olam* meaning “without beginning or end and ever-continuing.” The choice is ours to make. Do we choose to believe the One who loves us “without beginning or end and ever-continuing” or do we choose to believe in the fickleness and frailty of the world’s opinion? When it is put in those types of terms the choice seems simple unless of course you enjoy having your security based on the whims of others.

God is worthy of our trust. He does not change His opinion of us. Unlike man, He is always the same. If then you are desirous of steady peace and calm in your life, cling to the Creator and value His opinion only. Herein is where true freedom is found. This may seem ironic, but freedom is found when we are bound to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If we place our worth and value in the hands of mere men we will always be subject to the fickleness and frailty of human opinion. Our stability will resemble a cork tossed to and fro on the wild open sea. On the other hand, Christ offers peace and rest. He tells us:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matt 11:28-30 (NIV)

²⁷ "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

John 14:27 (NIV)

One last point I would like to make (before I run this thing into the ground!) is that we need to have a firm resolve on this issue. Vacillating between man's opinion and God's opinion will only rob you of your peace. This is nothing new. It is an age-old problem. In the eighteenth chapter of First Kings there is an excellent example of this very issue. The prophet Elijah is about to show the people of Israel the difference between the god of Baal and Jehovah God. So many of the Israelites were now serving Baal that Elijah felt he was all alone in serving the Lord. It is a marvelous chapter on the power of God and it is definitely worthy of your reading it, but we are only going to look at Elijah's question to the Israelites. He asks them in verse twenty-one:

²¹ "Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing."

1 Kings 18:21 (NIV)

The word "waver" used here is the Hebrew word *pasah* that means "a limping dance." He is asking them how long they were going to dance between two opinions. Don't you feel like that sometimes? We go back and forth from man to God as if we were waltzing between the two (and a limping waltz at that!). This is no way to live and it is no way to teach our children to live.

The promises in Scripture are only ours to claim if we are consistently following

the Master. If you are outside of His will, if you are dancing with the god of Baal (which, by the way, is anything that has mastered you), He is no longer obligated to work out all things in your life for your good. He can, He is certainly able, but He is not obligated to. Let me illustrate this with verse twenty-eight in chapter eight of Romans:

²⁸ “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Romans 8:28 (NIV)

The word “love” used in the above verse is the Greek word *agapao* meaning, among other things, “to be devoted to.” The verse is telling us that God works all things for the good of those who are devoted to Him, those who cherish and honor and relish Him. If we are doing the two-step with Baal, I hardly think we are devoted to God. So why should we be devoted to God (I hope by now we can answer this question!)? Paul goes on to say in the same chapter:

³¹ “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)

The little word “for” used in verse thirty-one is the Greek word *hyper* meaning “over, above, beyond, in behalf of, for the sake of, in the sense of protection, care, favor, and benefit.” The word “against” used in the same verse is the Greek word *kata* meaning “motion from a higher to a lower place.” No one can take us down if we are serving the Lord. That does not mean we will not suffer hardships or persecutions. These things will not take us down. Instead, they will build us up. They will be used for our good. They will also be used to bring us into conformity to Jesus Christ. There will always be sufficient grace to get us through every trial.

In doing some research I came across an interesting bit of information you might enjoy. This applies to those who want to make our lives miserable by giving us the brush off, or making us think they are superior. My information has to do with the word “snob”.

The word snob derived its name in the following manner. Cambridge University was the first university to offer advanced education to commoners. Prior to this, only the nobility was educated. On their forms to register for school the applicant had to mark either “Nobilitate”, which meant nobility, or “Sine Nobilitate”, which meant without nobility. “Sine Nobilitate” was abbreviated to S. Nob. or “Snob”. Those without nobility thought themselves better than their fellow commoners since they were allowed to be educated, hence the name snob. Therefore, next time you or your child is slighted by a snob it may ease your pain to remember that they are without nobility!

Please remember to be encouraging to your pre-teen. It is a difficult period, and they need all of the love and encouragement you can muster. If you are successful in building significance into your child during this period of their lives, the teenage years will be far, far simpler. Isn't that the way it always goes? If we do the job right the first time it seems as if things go much smoother. Believe me, it is much easier to talk and relate to them now rather than trying to establish a relationship in their teens. I have found that almost everyone not only improves but also brightens with encouragement. Do you want your child to shine? Pour on the encouragement. It will cost you nothing yet it reaps wonderful benefits.

I would like to share a short story with you that you may enjoy passing on to your kids. It is a story of encouragement, and one that illustrates the importance of our words. The story is true.

IS YOUR NAME JOAN?

What you are about to read may seem very insignificant at first glance. After due reflection upon it, however, I hope you will see that it packs a powerful punch.

I was thirsty and tired and had just a few minutes to spare. I popped into a drug

store that had a small old-fashioned soda fountain to purchase their specialty – icy limeade. As I approached the counter, I noticed a woman sitting slumped shouldered at the end of the line of stools. She looked haggard and frail, unkempt and drawn. I thought I recognized her face as someone that I had gone to high school with but I was not quite sure I had the right person. I felt the Holy Spirit move me to ask her, “Is your name Joan?” Immediately, almost as if a bright light turned on, she looked at me with the most angelic smile I had ever seen, and responded, “Yes.” We exchanged some small pleasantries and I paid for my limeade and left. That’s the story, but what God showed me later, broke my heart.

In high school this girl was anything but attractive. She was homely and painfully shy. I can still remember changing classes and seeing her in the halls looking down at the floor and trying to get to her destination as quickly as possible without anyone noticing her. Changing classes was fun for most kids. You saw your friends and laughed and kidded around with them. But to Joan, you could tell it was a painful ordeal. Her objective was to draw as little attention to herself as possible. She always appeared very sad and thinking back on it, friendless.

As I was praying a few days later, God overwhelmed me (as He always does) with a truth that broke my heart and reduced me to a puddle of tears. How could four little words totally change the countenance of a person? What made a drawn woman become angelic in her demeanor? Someone knew her name. Someone had remembered her. Four small words made her feel valuable and gave her worth. I was overcome. How often had I passed her by in high school without uttering a word? How many times had I missed God’s blessing by being so self-absorbed that I did not reach out and show compassion to the hurting, to the lonely, to the friendless? I was so sorry.

I received the blessing all right. I saw an angel smile and all I did was utter four small words, “Is your name Joan?” Indeed, Solomon hits the mark when he says in Proverbs:

“He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” Proverbs 11:25.

Do not withhold compassion and encouragement from others. If you do, you may just miss seeing an angel smile.

I have to go now. I must bolt down my windows and doors. There is a wild tornado rapidly approaching.....!

CHAPTER SIX – “THE TAME, TUMULTUOUS, TACITURN, TALKATIVE TEEN”

Living with teenagers is often similar to living through a tornado. You are never quite sure where a tornado is going to touch down just as you can never be quite sure of the behavior of your teen! You can think everything is fine and dandy when they leave for school, only to find on their return that they have pierced some odd body part and are now sporting a tattoo! God obviously knew about teenagers when he added Leviticus 19:28. Look it up. I think that you will find it most interesting.

If you have ever lived through a tornado you know that it can be quite a thrill. There is a mixture of extreme fear, excitement, wonder, and when it is finally over, relief! I think you can say about the same thing for raising teens! If you are a parent of a teen you will probably experience thrill, fear, excitement, wonder and relief and all before ten in the morning! (I am confident most of us could add anger to the list too but I decided we would not go in that direction!).

One very important piece of information I learned early on in my child rearing years is never (and I emphasize the word NEVER) say your child will not do something. Just as sure as I am sitting here writing this book, whatever you say your child will never do, that they will do! This is especially true of teens. I have learned the hard way to keep my big fat mouth shut and pray harder! This keeps me from having to eat so many of my words! There is a bumper sticker that reads, “Lord, let my words be sweet and tender because tomorrow I may have to eat them!” We would be wise to adhere to that little piece of advice!

Keeping my tongue in tact comes very difficult for me. I wonder if any of you incur the same problem? I have a feeling that I am not alone in this matter. That little slippery body part has been the cause of much trouble and trials for many a soul. Since it is sometimes wise to just keep quiet when we are dealing with our teens, it’s appropriate to check out what the Bible has to say about, as I believe Chuck Swindoll puts it, that “three inch lightning rod that makes its home behind our incisors”. I think there is more than one reason God put our tongue behind our lips and teeth. If we cannot keep our lips shut we can at least grit our teeth. This gives us two opportunities to tame the torch!

What exactly does the Bible have to say about our tongues? James is anything but flattering in his description:

⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,

⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:5-8 (NIV)

The tongue is without a doubt a major study in contrasts. With it we can attack and destroy like a deadly bolt of lightning. On the flip side, we can encourage and strengthen and build others up. Scripture has much to say regarding this subject. Jesus himself spoke many times on this very issue. Since Christ is our Supreme example, we would do well to examine His words on the subject.

³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Matt 12:34-37 (NIV)

Jesus understood very well that the mouth (or tongue) was only a symptom of the true problem. The words that we speak come from the condition of our hearts. We may be able to fake it for a brief period of time but if you turn up the heat, the pot will inevitably boil over. Jesus tells us in Luke:

⁴³ "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.

⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6:43-45 (NIV)

Since we are to be conforming to the image of Christ, just exactly how did He use His mouth? How did He communicate with others? Jesus would simplify and make clear issues that others had complicated. He would inspire others and motivate them to think and search their own hearts. He used examples that they could relate to. He was not out to impress people. He cared very little what others thought about Him. He was clear and precise and He did not major on the minors.

He emphasized the essentials of life. Jesus left things unsaid. Economy of words, punctuated and held together with truth, forcing those He spoke with to think for their self. He meant so much more than He said. Unfortunately, most of us say much more than we mean! We would do well to follow the example Jesus sets out for us.

Jesus has promised to give us His words and wisdom through the power of the Holy Spirit. He tells us in Luke:

¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves.

¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

Luke 21:14-15 (NIV)

Paul also tells us in Colossians:

⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Col 4:6 (NIV)

We are not to waste our words. Sometimes it is better to remain silent. My old Auntie Sue had a wonderful saying: “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open one’s mouth and remove all doubt!” This thought, I am told, she snatched from Mark Twain!

The little book of James in the New Testament gives us no less than eleven applications for the tongue. The book of Proverbs written by Solomon also gives us insight. Let’s take a look at what each has to say and try to apply what we learn to our own pattern of speech.

1. We are to be slow to speak. We have already noted how Jesus did not waste His words. James also adds:

¹⁹ “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,”

James 1:19 (NIV)

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, tells us:

¹⁹ “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

²⁰ The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

²¹ The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.”

Prov 10:19-21 (NIV)

²⁷ “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.

²⁸ Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”

Prov 17:27-28 (NIV)

(I guess my old Auntie Sue and Mark Twain hit the bull’s eye!)

Loose lips sink ships they also wreck lives. The words we speak have the power to break hearts, ruin reputations, injure and destroy. We must think before we speak. This is especially true when we are dealing with our teens.

2. We must keep a tight reign on our tongue guarding it with all diligence. James tells us:

²⁶ “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

James 1:26 (NIV)

And Solomon states:

¹⁸ “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

¹⁹ Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

Prov 12:18-19 (NIV)

²³ “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.”

Prov 21:23 (NIV)

¹⁹ “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

Prov 10:19 (NIV)

3. We must speak knowing we are going to be judged. James tells us:

¹² “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,”

James 2:12 (NIV)

Jesus also states in Matthew:

³⁶ “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Matt 12:36-37 (NIV)

4. We are not to slander. Scripture tells us:

¹¹ “Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. James 4:11 (NIV)

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

Eph 4:31 (NIV)

¹ “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”

1 Peter 2:1 (NIV)

Slander means, “To speak critically of another person with the intention of hurting them. A malicious statement that injures the reputation or well-being of another.”

There was a story told of a young man during the Middle Ages who went to a monk saying he had sinned by telling slanderous statements about someone and he wanted to know what he should do now. The wise monk told him to put a feather on every doorstep in town. The young man left and did as he was instructed. He returned to the monk and asked if there was anything else he could do. The monk told him to go back and pick up all the feathers. Excitedly, the young man said that that would be an impossibility since the wind would have blown them all over the town by that time. At that the monk replied, “Your slanderous word has also become impossible to retrieve.”

Just as the toothpaste cannot go back into the tube, once the words come out of your mouth you cannot put them back. I have found that most words spoken in anger and haste are a waste! Unfortunately, this is all too common in our discussions with our teens. Tempers flair and the words start to fly. Take some hard-earned advice, pull away, cool off and regain your focus. You will have less to regret.

5. Do not grumble. James tells us:

⁹ “Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”

James 5:9 (NIV)

Paul tells us in Philippians:

¹⁴ “Do everything without complaining or arguing,

¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe”

Phil 2:14-15 (NIV)

This passage in Philippians is a great one for both our teens and us. So much of our time is spent wasted grumbling, complaining and arguing, none of which, I might add, counts for anything. If I read verse fourteen correctly, that word everything is pretty much all-inclusive. That, my dear friends, is very convicting!

6. We are not to swear. We are told in James:

¹² “Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.”

James 5:12 (NIV)

We are also to put away perversity in our speech:

²⁴ “Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.”

Prov 4:24 (NIV)

God says that He hates perverse speech:

¹³ “To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.”

Prov 8:13 (NIV)

Paul adds in Colossians:

⁵ “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.”

Col 3:5-8 (NIV)

Teens, as well as adults, have a tendency to talk trashy. God is clear. If we are His children we should rid ourselves of this. Like most habits, filthy language begins in a small way by saying a few ugly words here and there. Unfortunately, unless it is dealt with, it builds and becomes part of our normal speech. God’s revealed will is clear on this issue. If we are His child and are in the habit of having filthy language on our lips, we must break the habit. Some may say that is impossible. I will tell you that it is not. Any habit that goes against God’s revealed will can be

mastered through the help of Christ. There is not one exception. God never tells us to do or not to do something without giving us the power to accomplish what He desires. Paul states in Philippians:

¹³ “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”
Phil 4:13 (NIV)

We can be more than conquerors in everything. All that is required is for it to be the desire of our heart and the relinquishment of our will for His. Just as the habit was not full blown in one day, more than likely it will not be broken in one day (it can, but it is doubtful). We make the decision to break the habit and we prayerfully give it to God. When we slip and fall we repent and He restores. I have no idea how long the process will take for you. In my own experience, some things He has taken away quickly while others I still deal with after years and years (I think He uses these to make me ever aware of my stubborn, sinful nature!). He has promised me a way out when tempted. I need only to accept and act on the way that He offers.

Paul states in First Corinthians:

¹² “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!
¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” I Corinthians 10:12-13

Each one of us has different bents or sins that we are more susceptible to. We may have to deal with that bent or bents for our entire life. This does not mean that we are to give into that bent. If it goes against God's revealed will, IT IS WRONG! We have already shown that God has provided a way out for us. It does mean, however, that we must stand with a firm resolve in our hearts to conquer that particular bent by depending on Christ and His strength. Will we fall? We may. But the more we stand firm in the power of Christ and His word the less we will see defeat in our lives. The more we stand firm, the more we will see the removing of strongholds. As Christians we are not to live in bondage to sin but in bondage to Christ. David had that down pat. He writes in Psalm 27:

¹ “The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?”
Psalms 27:1 (NIV)

The Lord was his stronghold. The Lord was his enabler. The Lord was his

confidence. Therefore, he was able to write in verses thirteen and fourteen:

¹³ “I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.
¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”
 Psalms 27:13-14 (NIV)

7. We are not to have faulty speech. James tells us:

² “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”
 James 3:2 (NIV)

The word fault used here means “something that prevents perfection, a flaw, a blemish, a defect, a mistake, or an error.”

Paul states in Ephesians:

²⁹ “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
 Eph 4:29 (NIV)

We are to use our words to build others up rather than to take them down. The world would certainly be a different place if we followed Paul’s instruction.

8. We must always remember how very powerful the tongue is. This is particularly true in dealing with our teens. We are told in James:

⁵ “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”
 James 3:5 (NIV)

Solomon tells us:

²¹ “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”
 Prov 18:21 (NIV)

The power of the tongue should be harnessed by us and used in ways that will build others up and help them grow spiritually. There are many positive ways to help others (this does include our teens!) with our words. Below is a sampling of just a few, followed by the appropriate scripture. I hope that this will prove as helpful for you as it was for me!

A. We are to encourage others. Scripture tells us:

¹¹ “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.”

Prov 10:11 (NIV)

²³ “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply-- and how good is a timely word!”

Prov 15:23 (NIV)

¹¹ “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”

Prov 25:11 (NIV)

⁴ “The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”

Isaiah 50:4 (NIV)

B. Our words should be gentle:

¹ “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Prov 15:1 (NIV)

¹⁵ “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.”

Prov 25:15 (NIV)

Gentle and calm words can turn even the most volatile situation into a peaceful one. Of course this can be very difficult to do with teens. My nature is to regress to about a three-year-old (sometimes I do a little bit better and only go as far back as their level!) It never ceases to amaze me why God has never given up on me. His patience, a testimony for His abundant grace!

C. We are to use our words to rebuke. We are told in scripture:

²³ “He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.”

Prov 28:23 (NIV)

We are to be very careful with this one. First of all, because I want everyone to like me, I find it very difficult to come to someone with a negative about his or her behavior. I have never liked to be the bearer of bad news. I enjoy living in harmony with everyone. Yet, the price of harmony becomes too expensive if it is at the cost of a soul. Therefore, scripture is clear that we are to help those who are on a self-destructive path.

James says:

¹⁹ “My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,

²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

James 5:19-20 (NIV)

Jesus tells us in Luke:

³ “So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”

Luke 17:3 (NIV)

And Paul says:

¹ “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Gal 6:1 (NIV)

The second reason we should be careful is found in the above scripture. We can fall too. We should be constantly keeping a check on our own hearts and our motives behind trying to help someone.

Paul goes on to say:

³ “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,”

Gal 6:3-4 (NIV)

Remember, we will be held accountable for our own actions and words, not someone else’s.

D. We are to use our words to impart Biblical knowledge.

Solomon tells us:

²⁶ “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”

Prov 31:26 (NIV)

Paul tells Timothy:

² “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.

³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

2 Tim 4:2-4 (NIV)

He goes on to say:

¹⁵ “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

2 Tim 2:15 (NIV)

Of course, we cannot impart Biblical knowledge if we do not have it. This will call for diligence and discipline on our parts. Remember that God blesses any obedience to learning His Holy Word. He is the author of all wisdom and knowledge and bestows it on whomever truly seeks Him.

E. We are to use our words for righteousness. We are told in Proverbs:

²⁰ “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

²¹ The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.”

Prov 10:20-21 (NIV)

³¹ “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out.

³² The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.”

Prov 10:31-32 (NIV)

Back to our applications from James regarding the tongue:

9. God must control our tongues. Like a very steady and strong hand must control the rudder on a sailboat, so too, must God control the tongue.

³ “Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Psalms 141:3 (NIV)

We should pray that above Scripture every morning! I believe we would have a lot less trouble in our lives if we would adhere to that!

³⁰ “The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.”

Psalms 37:30 (NIV)

10. James tells us that the tongue is set on fire by hell.

⁶ “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

James 3:6 (NIV)

As we know, Satan is the father of lies and practices deceit. A lying tongue is one of his greatest tools.

¹ “Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?”

² Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit.

³ You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah

⁴ You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!”

Psalms 52:1-4 (NIV)

God is very clear in Scripture about lying. It is a detestable practice to Him. Solomon tells us in Proverbs:

¹⁶ “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

Prov 6:16-19 (NIV)

He lists it right after pride. When lists are given in the Bible they are given in order of importance. It is interesting to me that lying is listed even before murder.

²² “The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.”

Prov 12:22 (NIV)

⁴ “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”

Prov 15:4 (NIV)

²⁰ “A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.”

Prov 17:20 (NIV)

²⁴ “A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit.

²⁵ Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.

²⁶ His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.”

Prov 26:24-26 (NIV)

²⁸ “A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”
Prov 26:28 (NIV)

The last application taken from James is:

11. The tongue is full of deadly poison. He tells us:

⁸ “but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”
James 3:8 (NIV)

How do we relate to that? Just what should our application be? A deadly poison our tongues deal with delightfully is gossip. Scripture is not fond at all of gossip (I wonder why?!?). Proverbs lets us know quite clearly:

²⁰ “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

²¹ As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

²² The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.”
Prov 26:20-22 (NIV)

¹³ “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”
Prov 11:13 (NIV)

Gossip and rumors should never be a part of the Christians life. It tears down and destroys another. This is in direct opposition of what a Christian should be doing for another – building and encouraging others to grow in their faith.

At the end of James’ analysis of the tongue, he went directly to the source – the heart. If the source is pure the outflow will be pure. This he calls wisdom and wisdom is life changing. You see my friend, nothing is really known or learned until it reshapes your life. He charges us:

¹³ “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”
James 3:13 (NIV)

Now that we are all proficient with our tongues, let’s use what we have learned on our teens. Remember we are held accountable for the knowledge we have received. Therefore since we are no longer ignorant of God’s will for our speech, we must put it into practice.

Most children want the approval of their parents. I am talking about children of all ages. Even as adults we desire their approval. Why is it then that we scrutinize

their lives and are determined to point out their every flaw? Not only can this alienate them but also it often causes them to turn a deaf ear to us. I believe that, in most cases, we desire the very best for them and think that by pointing out the wrong in their lives they can change and become better people. In other words we believe we are helping them. This is all well and good if our intentions are to raise godly kids. If, however, our intentions are to make them like us (or what we wish we were), our motive is wrong and it needs adjustment.

Let me explain. As Christian parents our goal for our children is to raise them up in the Lord – not in us! We are seeking godliness not humanness. Paul tells us:

⁷ “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance

¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

¹¹ Command and teach these things.

¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

1 Tim 4:7-12 (NIV)

The word “myths” Paul uses in verse seven is the Greek word *mythos* that means “something that is fabricated by the mind and set over what is real. It is where we get the word mythology.” We are to avoid these profane mindsets. We are to command and teach the truth. Because our children are looked upon as an extension of ourselves, out of pride we are prone to impress upon them our desires and character traits. In doing this, what we end up with is something that resembles us – yikes! This, my friend, is not God’s objective and neither should it be ours. The goal, both for our children and us is to be conformed to the image of Christ. If that is our motive behind helping our children with their shortcomings, then we are on the right track. If it is not, then we need to adjust.

Let me illustrate this point. Take clothes for example. This is an area that is generally an issue among parents and teens. The questions we should ask ourselves are:

1. Does it cover their body parts that need to be covered?
2. If you have a daughter, does her outfit scream “Inappropriate behavior welcomed here?” Does she dress in a fashion that would cause her male friends

to stumble? Girls need to be very sensitive to this, as it can be a very real problem for their male counterparts.

3. Is their outfit cultic? Does it sport some inappropriate message? Does it offend a particular group of people? Anything that opposes Christianity should not be tolerated.

These are some basic Biblical reasons to confront our teenager's dress. I am sure you can think of more but you get the idea. If it goes against what the Bible says then it needs correcting. Otherwise, it is just your taste or opinion that you are forcing upon your teen. Trust me, there are many more battles you would rather win than the battle over clothes, as long as it falls under God's standards.

As parents of teens, we must choose our battles wisely. It is important for us not to major on the minors. If we choose to do this, we run the risk of losing the most important ones. It will also behoove us to remember that love compels but anger and resentment repels. Jesus shows us this so perfectly throughout His ministry here on earth. The most wonderful example of His constraining love is evidenced in His encounter with the women at the well. Here Jesus confronts a woman living in sin in such a way that He not only draws her to believe and accept His gift of salvation but because of His words, she becomes an amazing evangelist.

Below is the story found in Scripture:

⁷ "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)"

John 4:7-9 (NIV)

Jews did not associate with Samaritans. The Jews believed that the Samaritans were unclean; therefore, a Jew would become ceremonially unclean if he used a drinking vessel belonging to or handled by a Samaritan. Also, Jewish religious leaders would rarely speak to women in public. The woman was in shock that Jesus would even speak to her, much less ask her for a drink.

The word "ask" used in verse nine is the Greek word *aiteo* which means "To ask, request or beg. The seeking by an inferior from a superior." Isn't that interesting? Christ uses this particular word for ask instead of the Greek word *erotao* which some scholars believe "denotes asking between equals rather than from an inferior to a superior." Whenever Christ would make requests of the Father, He would

only use the word erotao. He is seemingly trying to put her at ease by not lording over her His rightful position. That is so Christ! He is God for heaven sakes yet “He does not consider equality with God something to be grasped” and lowers Himself to save a soul.

Two other places in scripture denote the request for water as Jesus did. All three requests were made with the intention of giving the giver something far greater in return. The first was in Genesis chapter twenty-four when Abraham’s servant asked Rebekah for a drink of water. In return, he wanted her to be the bride of Isaac. The second example is found in First Kings chapter seventeen when Elijah asks the widow for a drink of water. In return, God provided for she and her son during the entire drought. Jesus wanted to give this Samaritan woman eternal life in return for her drink of water.

What are some important points to glean and apply from this passage? First, I believe when we are relating to our teens, we must be careful not to lord our authority over them. We are not equals (they probably already know that!). We are given the position of authority over our kids BUT (and this is a big But), we stifle interaction and a closeness we could have if we are constantly being the big cheese.

This concept is difficult for dogmatic always-right people like myself! We are not always right, and our kids are not always wrong. We will see later on in this same passage that the Samaritan woman was in the wrong, yet the way Jesus handled her was not to lord His authority over her, but rather to get her to see for herself her error.

As Christian parents, our “requests for water” should bring a greater benefit to our kids than what we are asking of them. For example, we may make the request for them to study the Bible. If obedient, what they receive is far greater than what we have asked of them. Or take for instance godly behavior. They will receive blessings in abundance for obedience. God will always bless obedience.

Continuing on in the passage of the Samaritan woman at the well:

¹⁰ “Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,
¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:10-14 (NIV)

Jesus here is contrasting the literal water, which only temporarily satisfies with the Living Water, which is the gift of God that quenches one's spiritual thirst and is synonymous with eternal life. The word "gift" used in verse ten is the Greek word *dorea*. It means "free gift, gracious or extremely generous or lavish gesture." Jesus tells this Samaritan woman that if she only understood what He was offering her she would have asked for it. He says the same thing to us. If we only realized what He was offering us, we would be begging for that which totally satisfies. Just as oftentimes we do not get it right away, she did not grasp what He was offering. He goes on to tell her again in verse fourteen what He is offering. His word choice for "spring" is the Greek word *pege* that means "a fountain or well; metaphorically, of life-giving doctrine; an emblem of the highest enjoyment." This same word is used in Revelation chapter seven:

¹⁷ "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Rev 7:17 (NIV)

This, of course, depicting how glorious heaven will be. But you see, the exciting thing is that Christ is not only offering us salvation, He is also offering us what will bring us the highest enjoyment in the here and now. Notice that He did not add the word knucklehead to verse fourteen when she did not understand what He was offering her! Sometimes what we offer to our teens for their best seems so blatantly obvious to us that we cannot understand how they could possibly miss it. But, like the woman at the well, it goes right over their heads. This calls for patient endurance on our part. Jesus gently leads her into the truth. He does this by leading her to her own realization of sin in her life. Scripture adds:

¹⁶ "He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband."

¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet."

John 4:16-19 (NIV)

To get our teens to the realization of error in their lives can often be quite difficult. One way that has worked for me is to use a third party illustration of their

particular problem. This keeps them from feeling attacked and helps them to ingest the truth without becoming defensive. Remember, with your teens as well as with us, realization of the problem is the first step in correcting the poor behavior. Did it work for the woman at the well? Let's take a look:

²⁸ "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,

²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him."

John 4:28-30 (NIV)

³⁹ "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.

⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

John 4:39-42 (NIV)

That is so awesome. Because of her realization of the truth and the acceptance of the gift offered her, she became a first class evangelist! Many believed, scripture says, because of her testimony. I believe Jesus knew exactly how to handle the error in the life of the unbeliever! No surprises here! Let us put into practice the example we have seen through the life of Christ and let us start with our teens.

God's word is true. It can be trusted. What He says, He means. If you are obedient to His will for raising your kids, He will bless your obedience. One area He blessed exceedingly in our family was the area of Bible study and scripture memory.

When my kids were in their early teens I was burdened by the fact that not only did they need to have a quiet time on their own but that we needed to be in the Word together. I believed that they needed direction in helping them apply Biblical truths to their lives. I admit that I am a morning person. I love to get up before everyone else, have my quiet time and prayer (not to mention coffee!). This sets the tone for my entire day.

Once the decision was made to have a Bible study and memory time together, the implementation was easy. I would get up and have my quiet time and then I would get the kids up. While they were getting ready for school, I would fix lunches and then their breakfast. They were to be down by 7:00 A.M. That was the most

difficult part! (I am sure that was not hard to guess!). I would start calling them before the deadline to try to get them down on time! While they were eating breakfast I would either go over what God had taught me that morning, or we would read passages of scripture that I believed they could readily relate to. We would always make application so that the Word would be relative and alive to them. We would discuss issues important to them and find out what God had to say about them.

Now comes the kicker. We would memorize blocks or passages of scripture. We would do this by going over a verse at a time until it was down perfectly in our minds. (I use the word we because I would do it with them). Everyday we would go over all the verses in the passage we had learned - not just the one we were working on. You cannot believe how easy it was.

God blessed that small amount of effort to the greatest extent. It certainly was not always without complaining or grumbling, but looking back, I would not trade that time for anything. Most families object because they do not believe they have the time to study the Bible together and to memorize scripture. I realize that all families have different schedules and morning may not be your best time. But every family has been given the same twenty-four hour gift each day. Find the time. It is a decision that you will not regret.

After our study and memory work we would pray out loud together. What a precious memory I have of praying for each of our needs as well as the needs of others. It was always exciting for the kids (as well as me!) to see God answering our petitions. I know I am repetitive, but if your kids are still at home, do not miss this opportunity. You will be richly rewarded.

Having children and raising them is really a series of letting go. Little by little we loosen the reigns and they are given more and more freedom until they are able to run on their own. As stated earlier, as parents we are to be working ourselves out of a job.

This is so perfectly illustrated in the way an eagle teaches her little eaglets to fly. From the nest high in the cliff she nudges her eaglet with her beak until it falls out of its safe haven. As it starts to fall, she swoops down under it and catches her baby on her wing. She then proceeds to fly a mile up in the air. Turning sideways, she again allows the eaglet to fall. It flaps its tiny wings for perhaps a thousand feet. All the while she is circling and watching for distress. Again the eaglet is caught on the wing of its mom. They go through this procedure again and again,

each time the eagle allows the eaglet to fall further getting closer and closer to the ground. Little by little the eaglet learns to fly. The eagle knows when the eaglet is getting weary and when it is time to take it back to the nest.

This is such a great analogy for us as parents. While still under our protection and watchful eye, we should allow our teens to make decisions. Out of this will come blessings for making right choices and consequences for choosing the wrong path. Do not try to cover up for your teen's poor choices. Experiencing both blessings and consequences are both invaluable in the maturation process. We may not always be around. God may choose to take us home. Our desire for our teens is that they will be able to make correct choices throughout their lives and the best time to begin is while they are under our watchful eye.

Another tidbit that may prove to be helpful in raising teens is to remember that laughter dispels much tension. Things can be heated and heavy and something can happen to make everyone laugh and the load immediately lightens. Laughter gets those "happy" chemicals flowing through your brain, easing the tension. I am not saying that you should laugh away your problems (I wish it were that easy!). Nor am I saying that we should allow disrespect. What I am saying is that sometimes it may help the situation to have a hearty ha-ha! Very often the only thing that comes out of heated arguments is high blood pressure! Remember what scripture has to tell us:

²² "A cheerful heart is good medicine,"
Prov 17:22 (NIV)

We also need to let our teens have a chance to give their opinion. It is important that we hear them out. They should know that whatever matters to them also matters to us. Keep communications open. We may not like what we hear at times but at least with open communications we can give them Biblical guidance. This should always be done in a loving manner.

This brings up an important issue, especially dealing with teens. Repetitive ragging reaps resentment and may cause riotous rebellion or a reclusive response. This truth is very difficult for me to grasp. It is so hard to keep my big fat mouth shut – especially if I know that I am right on an issue! I just want to keep telling them and telling them and telling them (you get the picture!). Fortunately, my husband is wonderful at keeping his cool and perspective. He can make people see the error of their ways with very few words. I am learning, by the hardest, to give them the facts based on Biblical principals once or twice and then get on my face

in prayer before God and giving it to Him.

Ragging and nagging rarely accomplishes positive results. I do not like to be nagged. For that matter, I do not know anyone who does! It is so easy to fall into the habit. We reason that we are just trying to help our teens. Our motives may be ever so pure but the results are negative nonetheless. Now when I find myself ragging I try to repent quickly and God, thankfully, restores faithfully!

It would do us well to remember that just as our teens do not have all the answers, neither do we. This may come as a surprise to some of us! Indeed, we can learn a great deal from our teens. I do not believe I would have ever learned how to set the clock on the microwave had it not been for my daughter (not to mention how to use the printer on our computer)! Seriously, my kids have opened my eyes to many areas in my life that needed attention. I am grateful for their perception and honesty. Quite frankly, it is our family that knows us the best. We may be able to hide our true self from others but the ones we live with know the real us. We must realize that we are all in this together. Not one of us has yet achieved perfection. We are all as Paul said, "Pressing on toward the goal".

This is a good time to discuss setting boundaries for our teens. Everyone needs boundaries. Even before the fall, when everything was perfect, God set boundaries. God tells Adam in Genesis:

¹⁵ "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Gen 2:15-17 (NIV)

God wanted Adam to work the garden. This was not a punishment. He wanted Adam to be productive. This was before the fall. Work is NOT bad! It is good to be productive. When we are not being productive is when we get into trouble. This is very true for teens too.

Adam also had freedom to eat from any tree but one. God had set boundaries for him. He was to work and he was not to eat from one of the trees. We all know the story. Adam exceeded one of the boundaries, with the help of his new wife, and the rest is history. They had to suffer the consequence. And what a consequence it was. Did God love Adam and Eve? Of course He did! He allowed them to suffer so that they would learn obedience. God always has consequence to sin. As

parents we too should follow through with consequences for exceeding the boundaries set.

What type of boundaries should we set? The obvious ones are those set out in God's word. This puts the burden on us to know what God says in His word and also for us to be obedient to it ourselves. If God says we are not to do something (for example: lie, steal, murder, adultery etc.) we are not to do that. This is God's revealed will. Other boundaries could include curfews and responsibilities in the home and at school. We should not overwhelm them with tons of rules and regulations, especially as they mature and prove themselves trustworthy. The process should be that we give them more and more freedom, as they grow older, not less and less. More freedom provided they are trying to make correct choices. Most of us have the tendency to give out more rules and regulations as our kids become older. I am sure it is because we know all too well the kind of trouble they can get into!

What types of consequences should we enforce? They should be immediate, severe and not long term. They should be administered out of love and never anger. They should fit the trespass. Grounding for a year is a bit out of hand! First of all, who is going to enforce it? We should never give out a consequence we cannot enforce. It would be like making idle threats that they know we will never carry out. This is just a waste of our breath and time. If we do not mean it we should not say it. Take away all privileges, but do it for a day or perhaps a week. Any longer and it loses its punch and purpose. Besides that, it is painful to enforce. Remember what you inflict you must enforce.

Rewarding good behavior always seemed to work better for us than punitive action. This may have something to do with greed! Our kids always seemed to opt for the prize if one was placed in their reach for proper behavior. I am for whatever it takes to bring forth obedience out of our children whether it be rewards or punishments. You know what works best for your kids. We must be faithful in our responsibility.

Having teens can be a wonderful experience. It can also be an awfully hard one. Just remember to set boundaries for them (that are enforced), love them and give them faithful Biblical instruction. If we do not seem to be getting through to our teens, we can remind them that in Old Testament times they stoned rebellious kids – and I do not mean with something you smoke! If you would like a reference point on that it is Deuteronomy 21:18-21! Of course, I am only teasing, but it is important to note how very serious God takes rebellion. On the other hand, we

should remind our teens how much He approves of their obedience.

Paul tells us in Ephesians:

¹ “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

² “Honor your father and mother”--which is the first commandment with a promise--

³ “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Eph 6:1-3 (NIV)

God promises them that it will go well for them if they are obedient. Paul also states in Colossians:

²⁰ “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”

Col 3:20 (NIV)

The words Paul uses here for “pleases” are the Greek words *eimi*, which means “to be,” and *euarestos* which means “well pleasing, acceptable, that which God wills and recognizes.” Not only does God instruct our kids, He recognizes their obedience. This is very pleasing to Him. I think it is important for our teens to know this. We must remember that just as it sometimes goes against our nature to act in a Christ-like manner, we do so out of our obedience and love for Christ. This can be true for our teens too. They may not “feel” like being obedient to us but they must remember that their obedience to us is being obedient to God’s will. He will bless that.

Rebellion can be very difficult to handle with our teens. Unfortunately, there is no magic formula, no twitching our noses to make everything fine. We can be model parents, doing all scripture calls for us to do, and still have rebellious children. This calls for patient endurance of the saints. If we have done our job, then we must prayerfully allow God to do His. We must claim His promises and rely on His strength, always remembering that God is good and that He has purpose in all things. We may never understand the “why” in this life, but be assured my friends, we will have complete knowledge when we see Him face to face. Paul tells us in First Corinthians thirteen:

¹² “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

1 Cor 13:12 (NIV)

How do we handle the rebel? We are told in Scripture that we are to despise the sin, “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (Jude 23), but we are to

love the sinner. We are never to condone or accept what God plainly tells us is wrong. But we are called to be merciful and loving. This is very difficult. Indeed, we cannot accomplish this within our own abilities. It is Christ through us that can love and be merciful to the rebel. There is certainly nothing natural about loving someone who has wounded you deeply. It calls for total dependence on Christ. Guess what? That is exactly what the Christian walk is all about.

We must have a total dependence on Christ. Jesus does not want part of us. He wants all of us. Just as He was telling the rich young ruler who asked Him what was required of him to inherit eternal life? Jesus replied that he should obey the commandments. At this the young man replied that he had kept them since he was a child. Looking at him with eyes of love Jesus told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor and that he would have treasures in heaven. At this the young man turned around and sadly went away because he had great wealth. You see, brothers and sisters, Jesus zeroed in on what the young man was not willing to give up. He always will. Whatever area we are not willing to relinquish our control over is the area He wants. Not for Himself, but for our good. Whatever we do not relinquish has us captive and we are slaves to that which captivates us. This, of course, is contrary to Christianity. We are to be slaves to Christ and Christ alone.

Back to our example of loving the unlovely, if we fail to let Him love our rebel through us, we not only fail Him we fail our rebel as well. Who knows if God has not chosen us to love our rebel into the fold? Allow Christ to do His thing through you! It is not natural but it is obedience!

There is a grand example in Scripture of forgiveness and love towards a rebel (I know this comes as a great surprise to you!). It is, of course, the story of the prodigal son. It is found in the book of Luke. To me, the prodigal represents every one of us who comes to Christ. You see, we are all to come to Jesus in the state the prodigal is in – without hope, poverty stricken, empty with absolutely no way of becoming filled on our own. All of our resources spent. All of our abilities and honors cast aside. Stripped, laid bare and naked – that is what He wants. You are probably saying to yourself that you do not want that. It sounds terrible and unappealing, but what we must realize is that apart from Christ we are terrible and unappealing! The only way Christ can fill us is if we are empty. And the only life worth living is the life filled with Christ. Try to prove me wrong if you desire, but in end I believe you will discover the vain emptiness and shallowness of anything and everything apart from Christ.

Back to the story of the prodigal son we find in Luke chapter fifteen:

¹¹ “Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”

Luke 15:11-13 (NIV)

What the prodigal did was unheard of. He basically told his father that he wished he was dead and that he wanted what would come to him at his death. Of course, you see in verse thirteen that he had a wonderful reason for asking for the jack! He desired to do his own will and not his fathers. Let’s see what happens to him:

¹⁴ “After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”

Luke 15:14-16 (NIV)

He begins to be in need. He discovers first hand how cold and hard the world can be. He was starving, Scripture says, and no one gave him anything. He comes to his senses and we are told:

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”

Luke 15:17-19 (NIV)

Smart boy! He remembered his father and how good his father treated even his hired men. He thinks, I will go home, I will go back to my father. I wonder how many rebels think the same thoughts and I wonder how many fathers react the same way:

²⁰ “So he got up and went to his father. “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.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on

his finger and sandals on his feet.

²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Luke 15:20-24 (NIV)

Did you notice that he was still a long way off when the father spotted him? That father was looking for that boy! We may have ten kids but if one of them is off course that is where our focus is. When they get back on track there is more than enough reason to celebrate! Sometimes, like us, our teens make the wrong choices and end up longing for pig's pods! We must be merciful and loving just as we desire mercy and love. Unfortunately, all too often we resemble the other son rather than the father:

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Luke 15:25-32 (NIV)

In reality, the older son was just as lost as the prodigal. He was filled with bitterness, resentment and the pride of his own works. He resented the fact that he had worked and the prodigal had squandered. This showed his work to be out of duty or obligation rather than love. This proved to be an attitude of the heart check and unfortunately for the older son, he did not pass. His resentment and bitterness blinded him to the joy of having his brother return to the fold. This is such an easy human pattern to fall into. Are we bitter because they are forgiven? Are we resentful because we believe we did not get what we deserved? One thing that has truly helped me in my Christian walk is to always remember that I have no rights. I am called to deny self as a Christian. Apart from Christ I deserve nothing but eternal separation from God. These are hard facts but true. As God's child I am receiving something that I do not deserve. Through the blood of Christ and on His

merit alone can I enter into the very presence of God. There is not one thing that I have done to deserve such amazing grace. In light of that fact, why should I ever be resentful or bitter because grace was bestowed on someone else? Indeed, we are called to be merciful to others.

In the book of Micah we find:

⁸ “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8 (NIV)

Jesus himself tells us in Luke:

³⁶ “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Luke 6:36 (NIV)

Bitterness and resentment are cancerous. They are consuming and unredeeming. Forgiveness and mercy are for your own well being. They bring life and health to your bones. The main person that bitterness and resentment hurts is the person that is bitter and resentful. They harbor and harbor and dwell and dwell until it becomes a festering wound of which we all know is not very pleasant to have or even to be around! Take a tip from Barney Fife and “Nip it in the bud!” Give it to Christ and do not take it back. Therein is where true freedom is found.

Although the teenage years can be very trying they are also very rewarding. Teens are fun to talk to and to laugh with. They keep us young, not to mention humble and exhausted! And you have to admit it is seldom dull. There is always some sort of action going on be it good or bad! I suppose God uses this last burst of energy from us on our teens so that we can truly enjoy the quiet of the empty nest - that very short period between teens and grandchildren! I also believe that God uses the teenager to get our hearts prepared for our kids to leave home. Let me explain this. If you look at your four-year-old it would break your heart to know that they were about to leave home and go away to school. They are young and innocent and not prepared. On the other hand, when you look at your teenager and think that they are about to leave and go away to school – well you get the picture. Your heart is just made ready! We are more able to release our kids as we see that they are prepared to take on more responsibility and are making wise choices. Indeed, this is a time for us to see the fruits of our labor.

As always, let love be that which motivates you in dealing with your teens (or

anybody else for that matter!). Paul gives us a wonderful definition of love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. In closing this chapter on teens, it is fitting that we end on this definition:

¹ “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Cor 13:1-13 (NIV)

CHAPTER SEVEN – “THE INDEPENDENT DEPENDENT”

At first glance this chapter title might appear to be impossible to you. However, when I tell you that the subject matter is young adults I believe you will quickly agree that it is appropriately named! If you have a child in their late teens or early twenties and they are still on your insurance plan you will most likely be able to relate all too well with this chapter!

Parents with kids who are either in college, graduate school or seeking employment are in a very interesting position. Their young adult is more than likely independent in most areas but one – money. They are generally confident and sure about what they want or do not want. They are energetic, full of ideas and have the world by the tail. Everything is exciting and ahead of them. The only problem that they seem to have is financial!

I believe in allowances (if at all possible) and I also believe in working. We are not trying to make life difficult for our kids. We want to help them in any way we know how – especially if they are trying to help themselves! But giving them unlimited resources with no responsibility is fertile ground for a rotten unproductive person! We should never give our kids more than they have the ability to appreciate. We take away much of their joy when we do not allow them to plan for, work towards or look forward to things. There is tremendous satisfaction in reaching a goal or working hard for something. Do not rob them of this no matter how much they try to tell you differently!

As parents of young adults we walk a very fine line. We want them to make decisions and to learn to live independently of us. But at the same time, if they are still under our roof or on our payroll we do have a say. The object is not to try to be the “Big Boss” but rather steering them into correct behavior by condoning Biblical principals and shunning anything that is contrary to the truth. They may not accept readily what we espouse but they will know where we stand. If they cannot comply and decide to go it on their own, like the prodigal they will also know what they can expect if they choose to return home – love and forgiveness.

One very important topic that is applicable to this particular age group (as well as many others!) is the subject of self-control. Even as I type those two words I can feel guilty! I do not know of a person that does not struggle in some area of their life with self-control. I believe we think it has something to do with our own power. Do you know that if you are a believer you do have self-control? Unfortunately, just because you have it does not mean that you are using it. It is

part of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul tells us:

²² “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
 Gal 5:22-23 (NIV)

We do have self-control we just must learn how to make it evident in our lives by appropriating the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe Satan’s lie that we cannot overcome temptation. We have already discussed what God tells us about that, but for review I will repeat the verse:

¹³ “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”
 1 Cor 10:13 (NIV)

God promises that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure. So we no longer have to believe Satan’s lie. Believe me, he desires greatly for us to be defeated. A defeated Christian is not very useful in furthering God’s kingdom. Do not believe his lie anymore. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome the fleshly desires that drive us into all kinds of compulsions. Christ did not die to free us from sin in order that we would be bound again. We are to be a slave to Christ not to addictions or compulsions. Paul states in Galatians:

¹ “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
 Gal 5:1 (NIV)

The word “burdened” Paul uses is the Greek word *enecho* meaning metaphorically, “to be held in or by anything; to be entangled in something, be enmeshed, to be subject to.” Why on earth would we want to be subject to anything but Christ?

Scripture is full of admonitions to be self-controlled. In the small book of Titus, Paul refers to living self-controlled lives no less than five times. It is a character trait listed for elders, older men, and young men, older women and young women – basically for everyone! The word Paul uses for “self-control” is the Greek word *sophron* meaning, “to be of sound mind.” Isn’t that great? When we are living self-controlled lives we are of sound mind.

Paul goes on to say that it is God’s unearned, unmerited favor towards us that

influences our will and behavior so that we can say no to worldly passions and desires and live self-controlled, upright and proper lives. Christ cleansed us from filth when He shed His blood for us why then should we want to cover ourselves with it again?

Solomon speaks to this issue also. He tells us in Proverbs:

²⁸ “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”
Prov 25:28 (NIV)

The city wall in biblical times was their fortress against the enemy. The strength of the city was dependent on the strength of their wall. They would have been left defenseless if their walls had been broken down. So it is with us. We are defenseless against the enemy if we lack self-control.

The words Solomon uses here for “self-control” are the Hebrew words *masar* and *ruah*. The meaning of the first is “restraint” and the meaning of the second is “referring to the rational mind, that is the seat of the senses, affections, and emotions. It is also used to signify the human will, the intellect, and the disposition. It is used in the sense of purposelessness, uselessness, and emptiness.” To put the two together it is a man that does not restrain purposelessness, uselessness and emptiness. I do not know about you, but that does not sound very appealing to me!

Peter addresses self-control several times too. He states:

¹³ “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”
1 Peter 1:13 (NIV)

⁷ “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”
1 Peter 4:7 (NIV)

⁸ “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;
⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,

¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 1:6-11 (NIV)

In the above verses Peter speaks of the mind in relation to self-control. We must prepare our minds, be clear minded and alert and self-control should be added to our knowledge. It begins with the mind. If we vacillate in our thinking over the world's ways or God's ways we will inevitably lose our self-control as well as our peace. The decision made in your mind to follow God's ways must be firm, steadfast, and unswerving. Isaiah has a wonderful promise on this very subject:

³ “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”

Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

The word “keep” used here is the Hebrew word *nasar* that means “to guard, protect, keep and watch.” God promises to guard and protect our perfect peace IF we keep our minds steadfast. The word “mind” used here is the Hebrew word *yaser* that “denotes plans and purposes formed in the mind.” This is the same word used in Genesis chapter six for inclination:

⁵ “The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

Gen 6:5 (NIV)

Our plans and purposes formed in our minds are to be fixed on Christ. What would He have for us to do, think, or say. How would He respond? What would His actions be? Remember if we claim to be His, we are to walk as He walked. As Christians, I believe that self-control is a misnomer. I believe it should rather be called Spirit-controlled. As stated earlier, this has nothing to do with our own abilities. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ within us that allows us to live and walk “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” We are to live Christ centered lives. This means He is a part of every decision. He is a part of every thought process. He is a part of every action. This is NOT a Sunday thing! He desires our fellowship, our obedience and our will – moment by moment and day by day. This is what Christianity is all about. That is why Paul states so emphatically in Philippians chapter one:

²⁰ “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Phil 1:20-21 (NIV)

For Paul, living meant exalting Christ in his body. Webster defines “exalt” as “to glorify, praise, honor and extol (to praise lavishly)”. Our bodies are to be used to glorify, praise, honor and extol Christ. How convicting is that? If we go all week without a thought of Christ, I believe we are falling short of what we are called to do! This should be our goal. This should be the direction we are heading.

As parents of “Independent Dependents” we should be on our faces in daily prayer for them. We should pray as Epaphras prayed for the brothers and sisters in Colosse. Paul tells us:

¹² “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”

Col 4:12 (NIV)

Our greatest desire for our young adults should be that they are standing firm in ALL the will of God – mature and assured. This is what brings contentment and peace and the ability to persevere and endure. I like to include in my prayers that the Holy Spirit crawl all over us, convicting us quickly, so we can repent and be restored to a right relationship with our Lord and Savior. Anytime we are out of fellowship with Christ we are in BIG trouble! God knows what is the very best for His children. On the other hand, we do not. It behooves us greatly to let Him lead.

Remember, as our kids get older and mature, the rules need to become less and less. They need to be able to make choices and decisions while under our umbrella of protection, seeking God’s direction. Our desire is to have them independent of us and dependent on God. That is our goal in raising Godly kids. If we are their strength and power, we have done a poor job. Allow them the freedom to fall and soar. As I am sure you realize, this is how they learn.

Whether you choose to believe this or not, our young adults still keep a watchful eye on our behavior. We must set the example in our own lives so that they will be assured of what truly brings life. As Paul tells us in First Timothy:

¹⁷ “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in

wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

1 Tim 6:17-19 (NIV)

I desire greatly for my family to “take hold of the life that is truly life”. This is what God desires for us. He does not want us to live defeated lives but rather abundant ones. It is in the practice of our faith, the actual fleshing out of our beliefs that our kids glean from. Not the preaching, nagging, picking that we are all inclined to do. A Spirit-filled life is compelling. A Spirit-filled life is catching. This is the biggest problem with Christianity today. If the Christians would only practice what they say they believe, we could take the world for Christ. Unfortunately, we do damage by espousing to be a Christian, yet living as the world lives. There appears to be no difference in our lives. Paul tells us in Second Corinthians:

¹⁷ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Cor 5:17 (NIV)

We are a new creation. We **MUST** live as one! Throughout Scripture we are called to obedience. That message is repeated over and over and over again. Anything repeated in Scripture just once stresses the importance of it. Think about how important the message of obedience must be, since it permeates most pages of God’s word. Take a tip from an old hag. It is vitally important both for our well being here and now, and for eternity. Take heed on this point and search the Scriptures yourself to see what God says about obedience. It will be well worth your time and effort.

In closing this chapter on the young adult, we should remember to keep communications open. Our kids need to be able to come to us for sound Biblical counseling. If we cut them off and do not listen to their needs or problems but belittle them or make light of their situations, we will find that they will seek another source for their help. We most definitely do not want this to happen. This is a period in their lives where they will want direction from you in areas that will greatly affect their adult lives, for example, what field to study or career choices. They may ask our counsel (and hopefully they will) on their spouse to be. These are important decisions that they face and they will need our wise (hopefully!) counsel. Do not shut them off, keep the lines open. Both of our young adult children are in school out of town. We use the phone like water! I do not care

what time of day it is they know if they need us for anything they can call. I love being able to speak with them daily and being an integral part of their lives. Even if it is just to let them know that I am thinking about them and praying for their needs. Almost everyone loves to be thought of and prayed for. If we as parents are not praying for our young adults, who may I ask, is? This is our responsibility. This is our privilege.

Parenting is the only job I know of that you work your way out of. At this point in our kid's lives, we are coming to the end of our careers! This, of course, does not mean that they no longer need us, but rather our actual parenting days are coming to a close. We should always be available for counsel or in any other way that we may be able to help them if they should request our help. It is time now for us to see the fruits of our labor and discover first hand the best reason for having kid's in the first place – Grandchildren!

CHAPTER EIGHT – “THE CROWN OF THE AGED”

⁶ “Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.”
Prov 17:6 (NIV)

Grandparenting, according to Scripture, is a crown to the aged. Webster’s defines “crown” as an “ornamental circlet made of precious metal set with jewels and worn as a symbol of sovereignty, victory, honor, or distinction.” This is precisely what grandchildren are to their grandparents. What an exciting thought! I do not know about you, but I have always wanted to be a queen! Perhaps my grandchildren will call me “Queen Ma-Ma”, but more likely, it will turn out to be “Queenie Maw-Maw”! This will at least keep any inflated feelings about myself at bay!

In thinking about grandparenting, I was reminded of the time when my oldest was a newborn. She was born in California and when she was three weeks old we moved to Alabama. When we landed I can still remember my father somehow getting on the plane and picking up Betsy before I even had time to get my seat belt unbuckled! Prior to our arrival, he had not had the opportunity to see our precious daughter. I do not believe I had the chance to hold her again until she entered grade school (just teasing)! The house we bought was under construction, so we lived at my parent’s house while it was being completed. Dad had even set the baby bed up in the room by his bedroom so that he could get up with her in the middle of the night. She was also born on his birthday making the bond between them even stronger! I can attest to the fact that the above passage in Proverbs is true as I have seen first hand grandparents made into kings and queens by their grandchildren!

Since we have been made into royalty by our grandchildren how are we to act? Because our crowns symbolize sovereignty, victory, honor and distinction I thought it would be interesting to see what Webster had to say about each of these. First off, we are “of royal rank and authority. We have triumphed! We are regarded with esteem, respect, reverence, and nobility of mind or integrity. We are thought of as excellent in character and reputation.” I do not know about you but that makes me want to examine my actions very closely! If this is how we are thought of, how should it affect the way we behave?

Jesus addresses leadership in the New Testament many times. His emphasis in leadership is always on servanthood. That seems so opposite to what the world thinks of as leadership. When we think of leaders, we think of power, pride, and prestige. We cannot even imagine a leader being a servant yet that is exactly what

we are called to be if we are in a position of authority. Jesus states:

²⁶ “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--
²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Matt 20:26-28 (NIV)

The word Jesus uses here for “servant” is the Greek word diakonos meaning “minister and servant. It emphasizes the individual attention given in the service of another and carries a note of affection or devotion.” The word “slave” is the Greek word doulos meaning “a bond-slave, one owned as the property of another.” A slave possessed no rights and lived in total dependence upon his master. This same word is used of Christ’s humble, human position in Philippians chapter two. Leaders are to be servants as shown by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, Jesus states:

²⁵ “Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.
²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.
²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

Luke 22:25-27 (NIV)

The word Jesus uses for “serves” in verse twenty-six is the Greek word diakoneo meaning to “minister or serve. Generally speaking it means to take care of someone’s needs, to do someone a service.” As the spiritual leaders of our families as grandparents, we are commanded to be servants. We are to set the example for others to follow. We should not lead others astray by being disobedient to God’s command to serve. We are so indoctrinated to the world’s view that we should be served rather than serve. We are so easily offended when called to serve. Paul tells us in Galatians that we are to serve one another:

¹³ “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.
¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Gal 5:13-14 (NIV)

Christ set a wonderful example of servanthood for us all when He washed His disciples’ feet. John tells us in chapter thirteen of his book:

³ “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

John 13:3-5 (NIV)

¹² “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them.

¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.

¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

John 13:12-17 (NIV)

Grandparents were also made for loving and for giving love. They are in the unique position to love and nurture, to build up and strengthen their grandchildren. Unlike the parents, grandparents can do all this without having to add the other hard responsibilities that go along with raising children. They are free to love and perhaps even spoil a bit! Grandparents play a very important role. While parents have many other concerns and activities that consume a great deal of their time, grandparents, in general, have more time available. What a wonderful opportunity for us to invest in something that is eternal and that will reap such great rewards!

How do we go about investing in the lives of our grandchildren? There are many things we can do to help them on their spiritual journey. A few suggestions to help us get started are listed below:

1. Pray for and with your grandchildren. This cannot be stressed enough. What a blessing to have grandparents praying for you! This is indeed a rich heritage. My Mom says that now that all of her kids are married with children it has greatly increased her prayer time! Now, instead of just four kids to pray for she has nineteen! They just grow up and multiply! Let your grandkids know that you are praying for them. Ask them if they would like to share with you any particular requests or pray with them citing Matthew 18:19-20 for encouragement:

¹⁹ “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done

for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Matt 18:19-20 (NIV)

There is no greater encouragement or testimony to God’s faithfulness to young and old alike, than answered prayer. Keep a journal of your prayer time together so that at a later date you can go back and be reminded of God’s work in your life.

2. Share with your grandchildren about their spiritual heritage. Tell them how Christ has been a part of your life and the lives of other family members. Let them know how God has worked in your life citing blessings for your obedience and consequence for your disobedience. Show them how very real God is to you. This does several things. First, it may prevent them from making the same mistakes we have made. It also may encourage them to act in a way to receive the blessings God desires to bestow. Secondly, it serves as a reminder to them of God’s total faithfulness. That He indeed is very active in the lives of His saints. This will help them realize the realness of God. This is also commanded to us in Scripture. God knows how we tend to so quickly forget all the wonderful things He does for us therefore He commands us to remember them and to tell them to our children and their children after them:

⁹ “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

Deut 4:9 (NIV)

⁴⁵ “When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel,

⁴⁶ he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.

⁴⁷ They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

Deut 32:45-47 (NIV)

⁵ “He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,

⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

⁷ Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

⁸ They would not be like their forefathers-- a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”

Psalms 78:5-8 (NIV)

3. Be available. This sounds so trite but if you desire to have a positive impact on your grandchildren and help them on their spiritual journey you have to be there. Absence, in this particular case (and many others I might add) does NOT make the heart grow fonder! Even in latter years, when we do seem to have more time available, we seem to fill it. It is the tyranny of the urgent. The urgent nudges out the important. If we are not careful we can waste years and possibly lifetimes just catering to the urgent. What a sad commentary to live a wasted life. Be a part of your grandchildren's lives.

4. Encourage Scripture memory. This is such a wonderful opportunity for us to help them begin their journey in this particular spiritual discipline. Any effort you put forth in this area will impart such a blessing making it so very worth your time. Please do not take this lightly. We are commanded to hide God's word in our hearts. Do not approach this as drudgery but as a delight. Think further to the blessings you will receive by storing this Treasure in your hearts. Try to make it fun for your grandchildren. Show a little creativity. Put a verse to a popular tune or have your grandchild come up with a tune. Nothing is more precious than to hear a young child quote scripture. In helping them to memorize, it refreshes us and stimulates us to persevere in this area of our lives. If you know your telephone number by heart, you CAN memorize scripture! Trust me and try it.

5. Incorporate Biblical truths into your conversations with your grandchildren making them applicable to their particular situations and needs. For instance, what does God's word have to say about lying or sharing or loving our neighbor. If you spend time with your grandchildren there will be plenty of opportunities to impart Biblical truths to them in a way that they can understand and apply.

Have fun with your grandchildren. There are so many things that you can do with them that cost very little but make a great memory. When my kids were small, my mother-in-law would let them dress up in her clothes and pack suitcases pretending to take these glamorous trips. Not only would they dress up, but she would too! I have precious pictures of them dressed in their finery on their way to who knows where. She would also allow them to make "dinner" and I use that term lightly! Tuna with chocolate syrup, cheese, pickles and peanut butter would all team up for a delectable meal. Cooking or dressing up not your thing? Take them to the park or the zoo or play cards or games with them. Find out what they like and pick from that list. Remember, if you want to have an influence and an impact on your grandchild's life, you cannot be a bystander. If you are, you will just stand on the

sidelines and never be a real part of their life. Even very young age children perceive if you desire to be in their company or not. They pick up BIG time if they are wanted or not. Be a part of their lives and figure out ways to do it!

Another area that needs to be discussed in grandparenting is the area of discipline. In my humble opinion, I do not believe discipline falls under the grandparenting job description. I realize that while they are in our care we may have to use some form of discipline but on the whole, discipline should be left up to the parents. Unsolicited advice given by the grandparents to the parents in regard to this area usually alienates rather than bonds. Grandparents have had the opportunity to raise and discipline their offspring as they thought best and now it is their children's turn to be parents. Again, I am not saying that we take a total hands off approach in this area especially when they are in our care. They will often need our guidance and direction. What I am saying is that we need to keep our big fat mouths shut if our form and manner of raising and disciplining children differs from theirs. This can be very difficult since of course we know so much more! Just remember we raised our kids and if we did as good a job as we think we did then we will not have to worry about our grandchildren.

There is one major exception to keeping mute and not interfering and that is if we find our adult children or our grandchildren breaking Biblical principals in their lifestyles and in the choices they are making. Then, in a LOVING manner, we should counsel them and try to love them back into the fold. This does not mean lecturing and hounding every time we are in their presence. What it does mean is that we are to lovingly show them the error of their way once or twice and remain in daily fervent prayer for them. I am certainly not discussing things like abuse or addictions. These need an immediate strong approach and effective Christian counseling. What I am discussing are things like pride, unforgiveness, jealousy, greed and the like. Things that cause our fellowship with God to be broken. One approach I like to take is to put it into writing. This gives them a chance to read without being defensive. It also enables them to go back over the Biblical truths being presented. Usually people will be more attentive to a letter than a lecture. Try this approach and see if it works for you.

Remember, like us, our adult children will no doubt make mistakes. We need to be supportive and guiding. We must make our guidance worthy of their application of it. Our wisdom must be deeply rooted in God's word. This is the only guidance worth their attention. Our opinions are of very little value. Wisdom comes from many years of seeking after Christ. It is a legacy of a life well lived. It inspires those who come after us to seek Christ too. We should live in such a way that

others will see a difference in our lives and want what we have. Remember that a city on a hill cannot be hidden. Just as Christ tells us in Matthew:

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Matt 5:14-16 (NIV)

The demonstration of Christ in our lives not only benefits our children and our grandchildren, it effects everyone in our sphere of influence. We have no idea how many people we have a direct influence on. Some, we do not even know their names. They are drawn to the Spirit of Christ within us. However much that is manifested in our lives is how compelling we are to others. However little that is manifested is how repelling we are to others. Get the picture? If we flesh out flesh our witness is as effective as a sleeveless chemise in a snowstorm. On the other hand, if we flesh out the Spirit our effectiveness likens to the warmest thermals available for the cold.

So many Christians live defeated lives. No wonder so few people want what we have. What an extremely sad commentary for the Christian community. With all the power we have available to us, we still choose to live without electricity. Many of us have so little light showing that not only are we not effective witnesses, we are groping and stumbling around in the dark ourselves. As Christians we need to wake up and tap into the source that will enable us to bring forth light into this dark world. That is what we are called to do. That is what we must do. We would all do well to heed Jesus’ warning to the lukewarm church of Laodicea in the Book of Revelation:

¹⁴ “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.

¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.”

Rev 3:14-19 (NIV)

Do not let Christ spit you out of His mouth dear Christian. Tap into the life and power that He longs to give us in abundance. Show forth His power and let Him use you in ways that you cannot even imagine. He has got BIG plans for us – really BIG plans! Do not miss out on what He longs to bestow. Remember and take to heart Paul’s encouraging words to us in First Corinthians:

⁹ “However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”—

1 Cor 2:9 (NIV)

Bottom line, our lives must be lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. This is not only for our benefit (which is unbelievable) but also for the benefit of the generations that will come after us. There is no greater legacy. There is no worthier goal. There is no higher aim. There is nothing more beneficial. Nothing. Join with me in making this your goal. Prayerfully ask God to give you the ability to achieve this high standard and get prepared for the ride of your life! Paul tells us in Philippians chapter one:

²⁷ “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Phil 1:27 (NIV)

And again in Ephesians chapter four:

¹ “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Eph 4:1 (NIV)

The word Paul uses for “conduct” in Philippians is the Greek word politeuomai meaning, “to fulfill one’s duty, to lead one’s life.” It is our duty to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. In the Ephesians verse, the word rendered “calling” are the Greek words klesis meaning “vocation or employment” and kaleo meaning “to call someone in order that he may come or go somewhere, particularly with a voice as a shepherd calls his flock.” That is so awesome to me because the shepherd is always leading his sheep to safety or to provisions. He is looking out for their best interest. The vocation Christ calls us to is also in our best interest. I do not know how this impresses you but I find great comfort in the fact that His ways will always be for my best.

If after reading this book you do not accept the truths presented, you owe it to yourself to prove me wrong. Let me know about your life apart from Christ. Tell me of your joy and your peace and your contentment. Show me how you live

above and beyond your circumstances. Tell me how others are drawn to your compelling, loving ways. Prove me wrong if you are able and let me know. My prayer is that Christ would open the eyes of everyone that should read these pages. That He would be shown through the power of His word, the Scriptures presented within, and that His Word would indeed not return to Him void but accomplish what He has set out for it to accomplish. From one fellow sojourner to another, you do not want to miss a single minute apart from walking with Him.

In closing I would like to leave you with the words from a song written by Babbie Mason and John Madgett entitled “The Peace of the Lord”:

“May the grace of God surround you
 May His light direct your path.
 May His Spirit lead and guide you
 As the weeks and months go past.
 May your soul be blessed
 And may your joy be full
 Of the love that His light brings.
 As you obey His call
 Remember most of all
 You’re a child of the KING!

May the Peace of the Lord go with you
 The peace of the Lord go with you
 May His Spirit rest within you
 To comfort and befriend you
 He is right beside you
 To constantly remind you
 You’re a child of the KING!”¹

1. “The Peace of the Lord,” Words and Music by Babbie Mason and John Madgett, copyright 1997 Word Records, a division of Word Entertainment, Inc., Nashville, TN.

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