



# FAMILY FOCUS (series)

Minister Lamont Ross, Family & Youth Minister

## In Religious Saves: And 9 Other Misconceptions

Mark Driscoll gives 16 principles for Christian dating. We shared six of the principles in previous articles. This week, we will explore three more recommendations.

7. **You need to look at who God puts in front of you.** Too many singles are looking over people in their church and life who do love God in pursuit of a mythical person, who does not exist. Yet, in God's providence, good potential spouses are right in front of them. Furthermore, while a woman should not chase a man, she can wisely put herself in front of him. This is precisely what happened in the story of Ruth and Boaz. Although God providentially put Ruth at work gleaning for food in the field of Boaz, Boaz did not consider her a potential wife until Ruth took the counsel of the older woman Naomi and got dressed up and went to the same place as Boaz, where she did not chase him but did "get in his way." The result? One of the greatest love stories in the Bible.

8. **Invest in a romantic relationship only with someone you are entirely attracted to.** This means more than the usual goal of finding someone rich and hot; attraction must be to the whole person. Are you sufficiently physically attracted to envision marriage to that person? Are you mentally attracted to him and enjoy talking with and learning from him? Are you spiritually attracted to her and her love for Jesus? Are you financially attracted to him so that you both agree on what lifestyle you will have? Are you "integrity attracted" to her and can see the Holy Spirit at work through her character? Are you "ministry attracted" to him and appreciate how he serves God in his ministry?

9. **Only date someone who agrees with you on primary theological issues.** It is not enough simply to marry a Christian. For the sake of peace and unity in your home, you need to have the same theological convictions on primary issues. Do you agree on the Bible as God's Word and the highest authority? we agree that God is Trinity and that Jesus died as our sinless God in our place for our sins; we agree on a Reformed Protestant view of the gospel. Does your agreement extend to gender and family roles? Do you both believe that the husband is called to lovingly and sacrificially lead the family, that children are a blessing? Will the wife stay home with the children when they are young, or will she be employed outside of the home? Do you believe that only qualified males should serve as ministers, elders and deacons in a church? If you disagreed on these things, even though you are Christians, it would be next to impossible to build a life together. There is great peace, unity, and cooperation in a relationship where you agree on primary and secondary theological issues.

[Part I of "9 Misconceptions" \(click here\)](#)

# Youth Transformation

## Romans 12:1-2

Sunday, August 10 marks the beginning of our 2014 Youth Transformation. Most of us can quote the “Transformation Text” of the Bible, **Romans 12:1-2**: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* (NKJV)

As our children prepare to go to school, we encourage them to be transformed. God’s mercy is the motive for making a living sacrifice. In light of the fact that we are justified people, righteous in our standing before God, we are under obligation to live a righteous life. In view of the fact that we are the objects of the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification, we are to live those lives in the spiritual energy He supplies. In view of the fact that we are yet to be glorified, we are to look forward to our Lord’s coming, and purify our lives.

As you return to school, do not be fashioned according to the world. Don’t behave in a way which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are as a born again child of God. You must undergo a deep inner change by renewing the quality of your mind. This transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit in you! Be who God has re-made you to be. Focus on loving God with all your being. Read His word. Pray to Him. Lose yourself in Him and He will use you for His glory!

## How Do You Deal With Your Insecurities?

We deal with our insecurities in different ways. While we may handle it differently, all of us feel insecure from time to time. The important thing is not whether it exists, but how we deal with it. Some people turn to money to comfort their insecurities. Some people focus on appearance, or alcohol and drugs, or unhealthy relationships. Wherever you turn in times of insecurity and problems, that is your place of security. The only true place of security is in a personal relationship with God.

### There are three important steps to overcoming your insecurities:

**First**, turn to God. David describes God as a refuge and fortress. Paul describes turning to God when he experienced a "thorn in the flesh" (**2 Cor. 12:7**). When we encounter insecurity, we should turn to our Father before anything else. When the world feels insecure, it runs to something. ***We run to Someone.***

**Second**, embrace your weakness. That doesn't mean stop trying to improve or grow stronger. We don't have to accept everything that comes into our lives. But the fact that we can't easily change things about ourselves is proof that we need God. We are sheep who depend on a Shepherd to take care of us. When we give our weakness to God, it becomes strength. Why? Because together God and I are a perfect team. I'm not that smart, but He knows everything. I don't know where I'm going, but He has an eternal perspective. We must say, "I need you, Lord." This confession leads to strength. It leads to security. ***We can't find God until we admit our need for Him.***

**Third**, put faith in God's grace. This means we have to let go of worrying about whether we deserve His love or acceptance. We don't have to "deserve" anything. Paul said it himself in **2 Cor. 12:9**—His grace is sufficient for me, for His power is made perfect in my weakness. Generally, the times ***when we need God the most are the times when we deserve Him the least.***

Adapted from "Marriage Today" Newsletter by Jimmy Evans

# Single Parents: Take Care Of Yourself!

When traveling on an airplane, the flight attendant performs a demonstration on how to apply the oxygen mask so one could "breathe in" sustaining life. The instructions are to put your mask on prior to helping others. God has dropped the mask – it's called his words of wisdom – speaking forth: *"Yes, single parent, do attend to your child's needs, but don't forget this: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF."* Then, you'll have what you need to benefit your child. Yet, many single parents give and give with no oxygen left over for themselves. And what is the end result? A cranky mother or father who's short-fused, flustered, and gasping for her next breath. If you didn't administer oxygen for your own fortitude, then you will lack the fuel needed to think straight and keep your emotions in check.

**Recognize Your Limits:** Everyone is human, however, most single parents try to be superhuman. *After all, someone has to do it or it won't get done.* That's the way I felt as a single mom. What other adult in the house was going to carry the load, fold the clothes, or mow the yard? However, many fail to identify those warning signs that indicate overload - tears, snapping at the kids when all they asked for was an apple. Part of knowing your limit is being aware that you have them. Be wise about when it's time to regroup and redefine what's reasonable for you as a single parent. **Recognizing your limits helps you emotionally.**

**Ask for Assistance:** Why is that so hard? Most moms try to do it all themselves because they don't want to interfere in someone else's family time. Many times, people would be willing to help for a few hours here and there. Don't be afraid to ask friends or church members for help along the way. In the long run, it's a win-win for everyone. Asking for assistance helps you physically.

**Grow in Christ:** There are many activities a single parent *should* do, but only one you *MUST* do: nurture your relationship with Christ. And that takes being intentional, making it a priority to be in his Word every day and giving every concern to the Father in prayer. **Making it priority to grow in Christ helps you spiritually.**

So how about you? Needing refreshment? In what areas are you seeking care for yourself? God's dropping His oxygen mask. Will you reach for it while you still have time?

*Adapted from article by Pam Kanaly,  
popular author of The Single Mom and  
Her Rollercoaster Emotions*

# Money Doesn't Grow on Trees: Learning How to Save, Get a Budget and Preparing for a Strong Financial Future

Raising a financially responsible child isn't exactly the easiest thing to do. Some kids still believe that money grows on trees or think your name happens to be "ATM" or even "PayPal." But if you want to ensure that your kid is on the right path, the earlier you start, the better.

According to Tonya Rapley, founder of [MyFabFinance.com](http://MyFabFinance.com), strengthening a child's relationship with money is one of the first steps parents should take. "Show them ... that money doesn't grow on trees and that life costs money. Allow them to sit with you as you budget," Rapley says. "I once had a friend whose 7-year-old found out how much his day camp was. He felt guilty for asking for so many things and began to check his requests once he realized that he was expensive. So I think a first step in teaching budgeting is being transparent about household finances with your child when the time is appropriate."

"Piggy banks are a good way to reinforce saving habits early, and it's exciting for kids to watch their money add up. When you are ready to head to the bank, I recommend starting small with just a savings account and converting it over to a checking account a few years down the line when they are ready to make regular deposits and purchases," Rapley suggests. "Banks offer several options ... that link their account to yours so you can easily monitor it."

Rapley tells parents to question their kids when it comes to the material possessions they think they need. "Ask them why they want things occasionally—'Because I want it' isn't a good answer. Allowing children and teenagers to fall into the habit of buying material possessions can have problematic consequences that appear throughout their life and may even come back to haunt you during your so-called golden years," Rapley says.

You don't want to raise an overactive consumer or one who's constantly competing with the Joneses. With all of this said, the best way to raise financially responsible children is to show them a good example. If your financial situation is in shambles, you can't expect your child to pick up good habits. Being a good financial role model could quite possibly end up being the greatest lesson you give your child.

Adapted from article by Yesha Callahan, editor of The Grapevine

# 5 Ideas that Emphasize How Individuals and Families May Strengthen Their Relationship With God

**In Deuteronomy 6,** Moses is giving instructions to Israel in preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land. The instructions were designed to ensure that the word of God was passed on from generation to generation to the people of God. There are at least five ideas at work in this text that emphasize strengthening both an individual's and a family's relationship with God.

- **Recognition (v. 4):** Israel was to recognize Yahweh as the true and only God. There was to be no place in the life of the people of God for a deity other than the One who proclaimed "I AM that I AM."
- **Relationship (v.5):** God wants His people to obey Him because they love Him. This all encompassing love would give Israel the power to walk in His ways. He loved Israel as His specially chosen people and He wanted them to love Him in return.
- **Remembrance (v. 6):** The commands were to be internalized and remembered. God is more concerned with a transformed and renewed heart than He is with outward ritual.
- **Rehearsing (v.7):** Israel was to share the word of God with their children, so that the children would be able to establish a relationship with God. They were to rehearse the story of God with the next generation every chance they got.
- **Reminders (v.8-9):** While we may know the commandments of God, we often need to be reminded of what we already know. While remembrance recalls what has been internalized, reminders are external visual cues. We should not only think about and meditate on the word of God, but we need to place our eyes on God's word. This allows us to be reminded of what we already know and affords us that opportunity to explore the depths of God's message for our lives.

# The Status Of A Romantic Relationship

... could be in jeopardy if the couple or an individual in the relationship are frequent television watchers, according to a study from Albion College.

The study, published in the September 2012 issue of Mass Communication and Society, found that the more an individual believed in television portrayals of romance, the less likely they were to be committed to their relationships. In August 2012, several of the most-watched television shows featured romantic relationships prominently throughout their episodes. This research is especially important at helping individuals understand the impact that television viewing can have on their relationships.

"In this study I found that people who believe the unrealistic portrayals on TV are actually less committed to their spouses and think their alternatives to their spouse are relatively attractive," Dr. Jeremy Osborn, the article's author said. "My hope would be that people would read this article and take a look at their own relationships and the relationships of those around them. How realistic are your expectations for your partner and where did those expectations come from?"

Over 390 married couples participated in the study. The participants responded to questions about their satisfaction with their current romantic relationship, relationship expectations, relationship commitment, belief in television portrayals of romantic relationships, viewing frequency, and several others that focused on their spousal relationship. The research also discovered that the more an individual believed in the television romance, the higher people believed their relationship costs were. Relationship "costs" include a person's loss of personal freedom, loss of time, or their partner's unattractive qualities.

"We live in a society that perpetually immerses itself in media images from both TV and the web, but most people have no sense of the ways those images are impacting them," Osborn said. "The rate of marriage failure in the U. S. is not dropping, and it is important for people to have a sense of what factors are leading to the failure of so many relationships."

**Minister Lamont Ross**

# Personal Attitudes, Perspectives...

## They Run In Groups

Few things determine success or failure in life like our personal attitude—our perspective, our way of thinking, and how it's represented in our behavior. Attitudes are not isolated. They run in groups. Families have attitudes. Sports teams have attitudes. Even churches can have particular attitudes. Our attitude is what draws people toward us...and what repels them. Here are a few truths you should know about our attitudes:

**First, attitudes are a choice.** You can decide to have a good attitude or a negative attitude. They are not caused by circumstances, but by perspective. A great example of this is the successful motivational speaker, author, and psychologist Viktor Frankl. His family and wife were killed by Nazis in World War II concentration camps. Frankl was put into forced labor, but he deliberately chose to suffer with dignity. He chose not to hate. Though the Nazi regime defeated him physically, he was never defeated spiritually. He chose to go through life with a good attitude. People who are happy are happy because they have *chosen* that outlook in life.

**Second, God rewards good attitudes and disciplines bad attitudes.** Successful parents do the same thing. With children, you don't wait until a negative mindset turns into negative behavior. You discipline the attitude. Consider James 4:6—"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Pride and humility are both attitudes. We chose them, and they begin to dictate our actions. That's why God opposes our bad attitudes. He loves us too much not to fight us when we're going the wrong direction.

**Third, good attitudes predict success, and bad attitudes predict failure.** In the Psalms, when David was struggling, he chose to focus on God. He worshiped and trusted God despite his doubts or frustrations. That tenacity is what leads a person to success. It predicts whether he or she escapes the bad times or not.

Take a look at your own attitude. Is it positive or negative? Is it godly or worldly? If you find yourself going through life with a bad attitude, then I have good news: You can change. Make that decision today. The choice is up to you.

Adapted from Marriage Today Newsletter by Jimmy Evans



# Parents: 1 in 7 Teenagers Have Done This!

Adults do it, teens do it, even our politicians do it -- so what makes sexting so popular? Sexting refers to the transfer of sexually-charged messages or photos from one person's cell phone to another, and it's become more common than ever. Recent research in the journal *Pediatrics* found that one in seven teenagers has sent a sexually charged message. Teens who engage in sexting are more likely to engage in other sexual behaviors. Here are some facts that should make you think twice about hitting "Send".

**#1: Sexting can get you in trouble with the law!** In Texas, teen sexting is illegal. Because of the nature of the photos and information being passed along, sexting is often placed under the category of child pornography for those below the age of 18. More than 20 states have laws against sexting, with penalties ranging from mandatory educational programs to incarceration.

**#2: 20% of people accidentally sext the wrong person.** 40% of people 25 and under have sent a sext to the WRONG person.

**#3: 80% of college students sext.** Young adults beware. The temptation is real. Stay alert!

**#4: 30% of adults have received a sext.** Yes, adults are doing it too! Pew Research Center found that 30 percent of adults have *received* a sexually-charged text message or photo. While the most common age range was between 18 to 29, 17 percent of adults ages 30 to 49 admit to receiving a sext.

**#5: One out of every five students forwards a sext without permission from the sender.** This means that even if your high school boyfriend *tells you* he won't show anyone, there's a chance he already has. Once it is out there, you cannot remove it from cyberspace. Remember, anything that leaves your phone, goes out to the world. If you're uploading it to Instagram or Facebook, texting it to a friend or even sending an email to someone be sure to keep it PG, Pleasing to God.

**1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup>

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Adapted from an article by Jen Wolfe

# Are You Contemplating a Relationship? Principles for Christian Dating...

June 01, 2014

In the book *Religion Saves: And 9 Other Misconceptions*, Mark Driscoll gives some principles for Christian dating. These are some great things for singles to keep in mind as you contemplate relationships and eventually marriage:

1. **Maximize your singleness for God.** Accept that you're in a season of life that affords some freedoms and benefits you will not have if and when you marry. It is a good season to finish your education, increase your theological knowledge, travel to serve in missions, give time to your church, work long hours to establish your career, and pay off any debt you may have accrued. In short, invest your single years in a way that they later pay a great return. Do not waste them.
2. **Do not pursue a serious relationship until you are ready to marry.** There are many reasons why people should, for a season, devote their energies to something other than finding a spouse. Getting biblical counseling to overcome a habitual sin such as pornography or substance abuse, maturing as a Christian if they are a new or immature convert, or simply moving out of their parents' home and taking on adult responsibilities are all good reasons to delay a serious relationship until a better season of life. Basically, until people are mature enough to marry, they should not be in a serious romantic relationship but should use their energies to mature.
3. **Be reasonable.** Do not set your expectations too high or too low. If you set your expectations too low, you may marry and be miserable, having made the biggest mistake of your life. If you set your expectations too high, you may never marry, or you may marry the person you think you want but who may not be the one God would consider best for you. I discourage Christian singles from having too long a list of what they are looking for in a spouse. The truth is that most of these lists are simply idolatrous because they are comprised of the seekers' resume and what they like and do, as if the goal of marriage is to find someone just like them rather than someone different from them so that together they can learn to love and serve one another.

## Next Week: Additional Tips for Singles

# Graduates, Tassels, Toss Caps, Smile... You Did It!

May 25, 2014

This is the season where graduates move their tassels to the left, toss their caps in the air, and smile as cameras snap pictures all around them. And smile you should, because you did it! You put in the hard work required to graduate high school. There's only one thing left to do.

**To make the most of this major milestone, You have got to take time to reflect.**

You can do this by following three simple steps: relax, look back, and look forward. It's that easy!

**Relax.** If the last few months of your life have flown by at warp speed, you're definitely a graduate. Reflection requires a slower pace, a calm atmosphere and—dare we say it—a little peace and quiet. That means setting aside your smart phone, laying down the game controller, and taking out your ear buds. For the extra-social among you, it might even mean getting outside for a walk so nothing but nature distracts you. The goal here is to relax. By the pool, in a park, on the couch...It doesn't matter to me as long as you relax. Allow your mind to wander, think, and pray.

**Look back.** Start by looking back. Think about the past four years. What are you most proud of? What do you kinda-sorta want to forget? How did your high school experience shape who you are today? Who do you hope to keep in touch with? Will you see these people regularly, or are your lives going in different directions? Make plans now for maintaining friendships. It takes both intention and action to hold onto lifelong friends.

**Look forward.** Think the senior you is a way more grown-up version of the freshmen you? Just wait until you hit your early twenties. The next four years will have a profound effect on your life. And just like with any other change, it has the potential to be really good or really bad. Thankfully, the outcome is up to you! You control your destiny by choosing who will control your mind. Will it be the Holy Spirit or the sinful nature? Consider what you want your life to look like. Sure, you may know where you're headed to college, but this exercise is about looking beyond your next step.

This is about the big picture. If you're overwhelmed at the thought of it all, get some help! Talk with your parents, your minister or an adult you trust. Our fast-paced world only increases the value of quiet moments. Take some time to reflect now and be sure to keep up the habit for other big milestones in your life. There are so many exciting things ahead!

**Adapted from Dave Ramsey's Generation Change Newsletter  
Communicating with a Loved One or Friend Suffering with  
Alzheimer's**

May 18, 2014

People with Alzheimer's and other dementias have more difficulty expressing thoughts and emotions; they also have more trouble understanding others. Here are some ways to help the person with Alzheimer's communicate:

1. **Be patient and supportive.** Let the person know you're listening and trying to understand. Show the person that you care about what he or she is saying and be careful not to interrupt.
2. **Offer comfort and reassurance.** If he or she is having trouble communicating, let the person know that it's okay. Encourage the person to continue to explain his or her thoughts.
3. **Avoid criticizing or correcting.** Don't tell the person what he or she is saying is incorrect. Instead, listen and try to find the meaning in what is being said. Repeat what was said if it helps to clarify the thought.
4. **Avoid arguing.** If the person says something you don't agree with, let it be. Arguing usually only makes things worse — often heightening the level of agitation for the person with dementia.
5. **Offer a guess.** If the person uses the wrong word or cannot find a word, try guessing the right one. If you understand what the person means you may not need to give the correct word. Be careful not to cause unnecessary frustration.
6. **Encourage unspoken communication.** If you don't understand what is being said, ask the person to point or gesture.
7. **Limit distractions.** Find a place that's quiet. The surroundings should support the person's ability to focus on his or her thoughts.
8. **Focus on feelings, not facts.** Sometimes the emotions being expressed are more important than what is being said. Look for the feelings behind the words. At times, tone of voice and other actions may provide clues.

Read more: <http://www.alz.org/care/>

# Family Devotional on God's Order

**May 04, 2014**

There are some people who don't believe in God, and they explain creation as happening simply by chance. Consider this family devotional to teach your children about order.

1. Have a family member write the numbers 1 thru 10 on individual pieces of paper.
2. Mix the numbers in a pile, then explain that each person will get an opportunity to line up the numbers using only random chance to do it.
3. Invite each family member to toss the numbers into the air and see how many they can get to land in proper order (1,2,3, and so on).
4. Let each person take several turns, then congratulate the person who got the most numbers in order.

## Share:

The chance of these numbers landing on the ground in order is very small, if not impossible for you and me. The way the numbers landed when we threw them is called random chance.

Some people think the world was created by random chance. *Read Psalm 14:1* aloud. Ask:

- Why do you think the Bible calls these people fools? (The person who can't see the evidence of a Creator God in the mountains and sunsets is a fool.)
- Now have the children line up the numbers in different orders that you provide (1-10, even then odd numbers, etc.)

**Share:** If we use our hands to line up the numbers properly, we no longer rely on chance for them to be orderly. In the same way, the world was created and works in an ordered way because our invisible God created and directs the world.

*Close in prayer, thanking God for His order in creation and  
His master plan for our world*

# Parents and In-Laws: A Great Blessing

## BUT There Are Two Sides To That Coin!

**April 27, 2014**

There is no doubt about it: Parents and in-laws are a great blessing, but there are two sides to that coin. If we don't handle those relationships properly, they can cause problems. Many of us are dealing with past baggage related to our parents. Parents are imperfect, and because of imperfect parenting, they can pass along to us imperfect, and even destructive habits. Like a constant prevailing wind on a tree, these negative influences bend us away from God's Word and God's plan. Anger, substance abuse, sexism, infidelity, and racism are common generational "bends" that run in families. Children model what they see. They grow up and pass the bend on to their own kids. Parenting is more caught than taught.

Once we've recognized the problem, we need to call the sin what it is rather than become defensive of our family. If it's racism, admit that it's racism. We love our parents and grandparents, but our greatest loyalty is not to them, but to God.

Then we must take responsibility for our behaviors. Often people will blame their mother or father for one sin while excusing the same behavior in themselves. Avoid that impulse. If you don't recognize sin in yourself, you'll pass it—rather than righteousness—along to the next generation. After that, we have to take an important next step: We must forgive our mothers and fathers. We need to give them grace. This can be hard, because often we want mercy for ourselves but aren't always willing to dish it out to other people.

We need to understand that for every negative influence they gave us, that sin was also passed along to them—and sometimes it was even worse. Forgiveness is vital to becoming free from your past. You'll never be free from these negative influences until you forgive your mother and father and say, "God bless them." We need to take that area of our lives—the area filled with anger, sexism, racism, negativity, unhealthy attitudes about money, unwillingness to communicate—and give it to God. We make Jesus the Lord of that part of our lives.

Finally, remember that your spouse also has some habits that he/she received from his/her parents. As they work through replacing those habits, extend the grace to them that you want extended to you.

**Adapted from Marriage Builder Weekly**

# What Do You Know About Money?

## What Do You Know About Money?

For most teens, information usually falls in one of three categories: need to know, don't need to know and how could you *not* know. Here are some examples?

**Need to know:** The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. This will come in handy on your American history final exam.

**Don't need to know:** Every single word to every single song that your little cousin sings from *Frozen*. **How could you not know:** What happened on the last episode of *Love and Hip-Hop*.

But what about money? Where does it land in the above categories? It can feel like money smarts aren't a priority until you actually have a decent amount of money. You'll learn what to do—and practice as you go—when you're getting paid a nice salary. You know, when you get your first job out of college or when your life is more established and settled. Those days are forever away, right? You don't need to know now, so you file it away for later.

**But here's the deal: Every dollar you make today matters.** Your decision to give, save or spend that dollar is a choice, whether you take time to think about it or not. What you do with your money as a teenager or young adult could mean the difference of *millions of dollars* one day. Yes, millions. You see, it all comes down to the basics. We're talking about doing a budget, avoiding debt, saving for the future, and giving generously. If you start early, you'll win big! You may be thinking, *“I don't know anything about saving, and how on earth can I stay away from debt when it seems like it's the only way to go to college?”*

**Relax! It's okay not to know something as long as you follow that up with the right questions.** Talk to your parents, ministers, shepherds or teachers. Learn all that you can about God's ways of handling money. And give yourself grace when you mess up, because you will. We all do! By practicing now, while your income is smaller, your mistakes will be smaller too. No matter where you learned about money, we invite you to test your knowledge in our \$15,000 Financial Literacy Challenge.

**High school seniors can enter for a chance to win one of three \$5,000 scholarships, and underclassmen can enter for a chance to win one of three Google Chromebooks.** The 20-question quiz, sponsored by Dave Ramsey and Fifth Third Bank, can be found at [53schools.com](http://53schools.com) now through April 24. Help us celebrate National Financial Literacy Month by participating in our \$15,000 Financial Literacy Challenge.

Adapted from Generation Change Newsletter

# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

## SECRET SERVICE OF LOVE

April 13, 2014

### **The best gifts are acts of service to one another!**

***You'll need:***

- Pretty Paper
- Markers, Pens, and
- Scissors

Have each family member, including yourself draw and cut out seven hearts, about three or four inches in size.

### **On each heart write, "*Secret Service of Love*"**

***Share:*** During the next week, we can secretly show our love to other family members with these hearts.

***Every day:***

Think of one way to serve another family member and secretly do it. Then leave one of your hearts at that spot as a further reminder of your love.

***Read Colossians 3:23-24.***

***Ask:***

What does this verse mean? (When we help others, we are really serving Jesus.) How should we go about our secret service mission this week?

***Take suggestions:***

Maybe doing someone else's chores one day, or leaving a surprise for them on their pillow, or making a special card for someone, telling them how special they are and how much you appreciate all that they do.

Who are you really serving with your actions? (Jesus). How does knowing you're serving Jesus make you feel about serving others?

***Read I John 3:16:*** "This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brother."



# 3rd Annual Family Conference

April 06, 2014

Our Third Annual Family Conference was a great success! Families were blessed and lives were impacted. Glory to God! The conference ended with a combined session on “The Art of Family” where families were tasked with putting together a vision board.

It was a throwback experience for many of the adults, who hadn't cut and pasted anything outside of Microsoft Word in the last twenty years. The experience is a reminder that periodically, when should simplify our lives. Technology is a great tool that can increase our efficiency.

However, it can also create emotional distance between family members. A family can be sitting in the same room, yet not engaged with each other. Mom is on her iPad, Dad is watching Sports Center, the son is on the PSP, while the daughter is texting her friends.

We must be intentional about being emotionally connected in our families. Living under that same roof is not the same as living together. Sometimes we need to disconnect from technology and social media so that we can reconnect to our family. Let us dream together, imagine together, plan together and enjoy the simple things in life together.

Our children will not remember most of what we do for them. They will, however, remember what we do with them. In ten years, they will likely not remember what you bought them for Christmas or their birthday in 2013. They will not remember the shoes you bought them with your credit card because you couldn't afford to pay cash. But they will remember the time you spent with them going on vacation, flying a kite, riding bikes together, having pizza night and being pushed really fast in the grocery cart.

Our children will remember and appreciate us the most for giving them the most valuable thing we have...our time!

# The Ultimate Test of Love For Another!

March 31, 2014

As a caregiver, we totally commit ourselves to caring for another person who no longer functions as they once did in the normal scheme of life. We move in with them or move them to us. We give up our jobs, our own independence, and very often our family and friends. We become so involved with the care of that person out of love that we ourselves are removed from normal day to day living. Our entire life revolves around comforting and making our loved one feel loved. We protect them at all costs. In a very real sense we have given our life for another...not out of obligation but out of LOVE! The Ultimate Test of LOVE for another!

The one day we wake up and our commitment has been released to a far greater LOVE in a place of no more pain or suffering! We grieve and then the process of finding our way back into the world begins anew.

How do we pick up the pieces and start again? I guess there is no so-called normal pattern that each of us has to follow. It seems to come down to taking one step at a time...some walk slower than others and some speed their way back out into the world! Often we take one step forward and two backwards ... it is not an easy process but there is a life after caregiving! We just have to look forward and find opportunities that are once again there for us.

Renew old friendships, find a job that you feel good doing, do volunteer work, find a new or renew an old hobby ... but begin to take a few small steps towards living again! One of the best therapies is finding a friend you can talk to...one who will listen and support you as you ease back into the world! Soon you will find that life does still exist and you are a part of it!

Butterflies are still flying and the birds are still singing. The light of another day is showing through the clouds, and all that you gave up was well worth it in the end!

We are better than ever for our commitment. We are forever changed in a good way ... no one can ever take that total love away from us as we again join the world!

*Article by Brenda Race, R.N. – taken from [www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com)*

# Disciplining Your Teenager

## In Today's Times, Part II

March 16, 2014

Last week we began our series on disciplining teenagers by emphasizing the need to establish a reasonable set of rules and expectations, including consequences, if not met. This week we share four more ideas.

**1. Follow through with reasonable consequences.** There's nothing more confusing for a teen if one or both parents fail to follow through with consequences for breaking the rules or failure to meet other expectations. If this sounds like your house, it shouldn't be a surprise if your teen continues to break the rules or engage in unwanted behavior. I know how easy it can be to "get played" by your teen, but be strong. Consistency is one of the most effective, albeit difficult, positive parenting strategies.

**2. Enforce basic behavior.** Teens will often say things or do things that unnerve their parents, including talking back to them in a disrespectful way, cursing, and so forth. Parents need to keep their cool but establish boundaries and consequences for violations of basic behavior, like the need to respect their parents and show common courtesy. Good manners are difficult to inspire in your teens, but if you're consistent and model these behaviors yourself, you'll be surprised at how your teens will follow suit.

**3. Don't sweat the small stuff.** If your teen is usually super neat and conscientious around the house, don't come on like a ton of bricks the first time he or she throws the towel on the floor or leaves the room in disarray. Rather, it may be more important to remind teens to pick up their clothes and belongings.

**4. Figure out what teens care about and remove these items as punishment.** If your teen is attached to his or her cell phone at the hip, removing this item - even for one hour at a time - may be a just and sufficient consequence for unwanted behavior. If your teenager is crazy about his or her iPod, maybe a day without it will send an important message about desired behavior and outcomes.

# Disciplining Your Teenager in Today's Times

March 9, 2014

Like in the old days, parents and their teens still clash over rules and responsibilities as well as clothing style and make up, dating, choice of friends, school performance, among others. For parents who seek a little peace of mind and for teens to gain greater freedom or autonomy, establishing reasonable rules and expectations is critical. But, it seems like rules are made to be broken during the teenage years and, as a result, parents may need to take action despite their best efforts to communicate what's expected.

Parents need to carefully consider the facts of the situation, the age of the teen, extenuating circumstances, and so forth, before determining appropriate action to correct the unwanted teen behavior. In addition, it's helpful if teens understand the connection between rules and responsibilities and their own well being, safety and health.

Over the next few weeks we will share tips for disciplining your teenager today. These high road strategies will help you and your teen work together during this wonderful, albeit challenging, stage of your child's development.

- 1. Establish a reasonable set of rules and expectations, including consequences, if not met.** Communicate what these are and why you have them.
- 2. Be open to ideas** from your teen on what's reasonable as he or she gets older and more responsible.
- 3. Listen carefully** and you may be surprised at what parents and teens can negotiate going forward.
- 4. As a parent, you want to challenge your child** to develop critical thinking skills and examine things from various perspectives.
- 5. Set the example** by trying to view things through their eyes. Your decision may not change, but your teen will know that you are willing to listen to their ideas.

James encourages us to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (*James 1:19*).

*Adapted from article 10 Tips for Disciplining Your Teenager Today  
by M.G. Hardiman*

# Helping Your Child Face the Pressures of Middle School

Take an informal poll of one hundred adults about what years of their lives they would never want to repeat, and you will probably hear "junior high" or "middle school" most often. All too frequently, a relatively well-adjusted, good-natured child enters the sixth or seventh grade and two or three years later emerges emotionally battered and bruised. What turns these years into such a war zone?

First, the tides of puberty are likely to be flowing at full speed. Among other things, these generate much concern and self-consciousness about physical changes that are (or aren't yet) under way. Such worries are intensified by the marked variations in development at this age. Within the same class will be skinny thirteen-year-old boys with squeaky voices and hairy hulks who appear qualified for the defensive line of the high school football team.

Similarly, flat-chested girls who have yet to experience their first menstrual cycle are mingling with fully developed counterparts who could pass for women several years older. The inevitable comparisons and insecurities can become more acute at the end of gym class if many classmates shower together. Second, wide mood swings and strong emotional responses to the ups and downs of life are the order of the day. Physical and hormonal components contribute to this stormy weather in both sexes. Emotional reactions to life's twists and turns, even in a stable home environment, can provoke physical responses as well, especially headaches, abdominal pains and fatigue.

*When parents understand what their child goes through, they can be better prepared to help their child face the pressures of middle school.*

Adapted from the *Complete Guide to Baby & Child Care*, a Focus on the Family.  
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# How Do I Teach Repentance To My Children?

February 16, 2014

This is a great way to teach your children about repentance. Try this during your family devotional time. We repent by turning away from sin and toward God. **Let's begin:**

1. Gather a blindfold and a Bible.
2. Ask one child to be a volunteer.
3. Blindfold this child then explain that you'll give a simple task to complete while blindfolded.
4. Instruct the remaining family members to yell, "Repent!" every time the blindfolded child is about to run into something.
5. This is their clue to turn around.

Do this activity until each family member has had a chance to be blindfolded. When it is your turn to be blindfolded, yell, "I don't need to repent!" every time you are warned.

Continue on your way, banging into furniture and crashing your knees. (Be sure to be easy on yourself, but your kids will get a kick out of your hamming it up with your injuries.)

**Ask:** Does this game give you any idea as to what it means to repent? (It means to turn around and go the other way.)

Why was it important to repent in our game? How is repenting different from saying you're sorry? Why does God want us to repent?

What happens when we don't repent? **Read Luke 3:8 & Acts 26:30.**

**Ask:** What might be some "fruits of repentance" our lives could show? How do we prove we've repented? **Read Galatians 5:22-23.**

**Share:** When I refused to repent in our game, I crashed into things and caused damage. In real life when we don't repent, we can get into even more trouble! We'll keep making a mess of things. These verses tell us what God expects us to do when we've sinned - ask for forgiveness and be sorry, but it's very important that we repent, or turn around and do what's right instead of what's wrong. **Remember:** *"When we sin, we disobey. So repent and go the other way."*

**Used with permission from Heritage Builders  
www.HeritageBuildersGlobal.com**

# “SLOW DOWN!” “STOP RUNNING!”

February 9, 2014

These phrases are an essential part of the vocabulary of every parent, teacher, hall monitor and anyone else who deals with children. We know that speed increases the likelihood of the child having an accident. The child who runs through the school hallway and runs over a teacher; the toddler who runs through the house and trips on the tile floor, knocking out a tooth or busting his lip. Adults understand the risks involved when children run, especially when they run indoors.

As adults, we too need to be reminded to “**SLOW DOWN!**” “**STOP RUNNING!**” No, we do not use the center aisle of the sanctuary as a track. We are guilty of running through life. We start our days at sunrise, get home after sunset, finish the work that we didn’t finish at work, catch the 10 o’clock news and drift off to sleep just as Letterman and Kimmel are wrapping up their opening monologues.

But why? Why are our schedules full and yet our lives feel so empty? Why are we constantly connected to the world around us through social media, email, blogs, news feeds, the television, yet have no time to connect to the God above us?

God, like any good parent is saying “**SLOW DOWN!**” “**STOP RUNNING!**” Many of us are too busy. We are too busy for ministry. We are too busy for our children to be involved in the youth ministry. We are too busy to pray and study the Word of God. The bottom line is that if we are too busy for God, then we are just too busy. Christ did not die so that we could live the busy life. He died so that we could live the blessed life!

I challenge you to examine your life and look for ways to slow down. Look for ways to give God more of you as you seek to be more like Him.

# Caring for Aging Parent(s) Who Have Become Vulnerable and Dependent

February 2, 2014

Watching a parent grow vulnerable and dependent is an uncomfortable transition. But shifting family roles are becoming increasingly common as more and more people try to meet the demands of their own children, while feeling the tug to assist their aging parents.

With financial implications, strain among family members and difficult decisions at every turn, it's no wonder so many caregivers and potential caregivers feel overwhelmed. There are practical ways to prepare for and adjust to the new roles within a family.

**Talk with your aging parents early—before too many challenges arise.** Certainly, it isn't easy talking with your siblings and parents about the "what if's." But listening to your parents, involving everyone in the decision-making and working together to set up a plan will be worth it in the long run.

**Assess finances—both yours and your parents.** From savings accounts to medical insurance to routine tasks like paying bills and balancing the checkbook, the whole family can attain a sense of relief from having money matters in order.

**Collect medical information and learn the medical history.** Who are your parents' doctors? What medications are your parents taking? What are the dates of their recent medical tests? It pays off to have this information available if and when the need arises.

**Keep communication lines open among siblings.** Adding emotions, finances and family history to the mix can result in damaged relationships; this is a time when family members really need one another. Try to remain sensitive, work through disagreements calmly and keep in mind that these relationships will endure for years to come.

**Accept these changes as a natural part of life.** No one would deny that watching a parent fall ill or grow weak with age is an emotionally draining experience. Yet hiding or diminishing painful emotions may lead to withdrawal, depression or anger. Working through the stages of grief is a necessary part of facing the inescapable realities of living and dying.

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# Adult Children Caring for an Aging Parent(s): How Will You Handle It?

January 26, 2014

Caring for an aging parent is a responsibility few people ever expect or envision. We avoid thinking about our parents falling ill or growing weak. We don't feel equipped to handle the welfare of those who raised us. Confusion, sadness, helplessness jar us during this unsettling transition.

As baby boomers live longer, healthier lives, any assistance that is required typically becomes the children's responsibility. For many families, the discussion about who will take care of Mom and Dad comes on the heels of a crisis. As a result, most families find themselves unprepared to handle their parents' increased dependency. Still, with the increase in number of older adults comes the increase of adult children caring for their parents.

More than 20 million in the U.S. alone provide care for an aging parent or in-law. What's more, families rather than institutions provide 80 percent of long-term care. So how can adult children, siblings and parents deal with the inevitable challenges that accompany this life transition?

Begin by openly discussing each person's role and responsibilities within the family structure. While care giving can be extremely stressful, sharing duties is a guaranteed way to ease the tension. Whatever distance family members live from one another, devise a care plan so everyone can be involved. Addressing the sensitive topic of finances is also a must, as is compiling important personal and financial documents. Finally, take the time to evaluate how to build unity among siblings—in spite of the high potential for tension.

There's no question that many caregivers only find frustration and exhaustion. But with solid support and communication, caring for an aging parent can bring a renewed sense of love, compassion and tenderness into any family.

Article adapted from *Caring for Ill or Aging Parents* by Carol Heffernan  
[www.focusonthefamily.com](http://www.focusonthefamily.com)

# Being Diligent Means Working Hard

January 11, 2014

**Being diligent means working hard and working well.** Begin by having family members list as many chores as they can that everyone does around the house. Then go through the items and assign a value to each one. (Ex: washing the car - \$5; picking up your room - \$2. You can also use candy pieces instead of money if you choose.)

Then have each family member choose one job they can complete during the next half hour, then dismiss them to go do their jobs. After the jobs are complete, have an inspection time to see if the work was completed and done well. If the job passes inspection, award that person the appropriate pay or food reward. If not, send that person back to the job to complete it correctly.

**When all jobs are complete, form a circle and discuss:** What was it like to do your job? What did it feel like to get your payment or reward after you completed the job?

**Summarize the story of Joseph from Genesis 39-41:** Joseph worked hard even when unjustly sold as a slave since he worked like he was working for God, not for people. Because Joseph worked for God, he worked diligently and did his job with excellence. God was able to bless him and reward him. Joseph's masters saw that Joseph was not only a great worker, but that everything went well when he was in charge. As a result, they promoted him.

**After the discussion, ask:** What does this story tell us about working hard? (God wants us to work hard; if you work hard, people will notice; working hard gives rewards.) What are ways we can be diligent like Joseph? (Work harder on homework; clean my room more often; spend more time reading the Bible.)

**Share: Being diligent means working hard.** We learn from Joseph's story that hard work usually pays off with rewards. But sometimes those rewards aren't as obvious as a promotion or more money. But when we do everything as if working for God, our best reward is our obedience to Him and His promise to bless us.

Teach the slogan: "In all we do, we must give our all."

Used with permission from Heritage Builders ([www.HeritageBuildersGlobal.com](http://www.HeritageBuildersGlobal.com))

# Ways to Cope with Loss of a Loved One (continued)

December 22, 2013

Last week we introduced some ways to cope with the loss of a loved one during the holiday season. This week we continue with some thoughts on how to help your family cope through the holiday season from GriefWorks (visit [www.grief-works.org](http://www.grief-works.org)).

## Remember Your Loved One

1. Buy a gift for your loved one. Give it to someone who needs it. You will receive twice the pleasure. (This may be too difficult for someone whose loss is recent.)
2. Donate money to a special cause in your loved one's name or volunteer your time and/or talents.
3. Contribute a poinsettia to your church, a local nursing home or school in your loved one's name.
4. Talk about the deceased with those you are comfortable sharing.
5. Plan a time for remembering. Set a place for them at the table, hang a stocking, retell stories of them.

## Anniversary Dates

1. An anniversary of the death of a loved one can cause anxiety and stress, which are normal grief reactions.
2. Give yourself permission to feel your own feelings about the day and plan how you want to spend your time.
3. Remember that anticipation is sometimes worse than going through the actual day.
4. Don't allow others to dictate the extent to which you observe the day.

# Teaching Your Children How to Be A Godly Friend

November 17, 2013

Try using this activity to teach your children how to be a godly friend. Use a black permanent marker and write “Jesus” on a dark piece of paper. Have the children leave the room and then tape it up in a dark corner. Turn the lights out in the room and then give each child a flashlight. Have them enter the room again and see how far away they can be and still read the sign. Then sit in the dark room with the flashlights and...

*Ask:* What happened to the sign when we got closer? (Answer: it became clearer.)

*Ask:* How did the letter become sharper? (Answer: the more light the sharper the image became.)

*Read aloud:* Proverbs 17:17; 27:17 and ask: What does this tell us about friends? (Answer: Friends love at all times – during good times and bad, they are there during the celebrations of life and the times of distress. They bring us closer to God.)

*Then share:* As we went closer to the sign, it became sharper. The same is true with our friends. If the light is Jesus – the closer we bring our friends to Jesus, during good and bad times, the sharper they become in walking and talking in ways that honor God. And so, a good friend should bring you closer to God too.

Have family members brainstorm ways to bring their friends closer to God and how others bring them closer to God. End in prayer.

# Try this Fun and Interactive Family Devotional

Parents, try this fun and interactive family devotional with your children. The main message of this family devotional is to seek God's will and learn not to follow your emotions, which can lead you down the wrong path. For this object lesson you'll need balloons, a broom, a fan, and a Bible. **Blow up 10-15 balloons and set them on the floor in a large room.**

1. Place an oscillating fan on a chair so that it blows over the top of the balloons, near an open area or hall where kids will try to herd the balloons.
2. Turn on the fan, and have family members take turns using the broom to herd the balloons over to the designated area.
3. To make it more challenging, tell participants they may only use the stick end of the broom! Repeat so everyone gets a turn.

## After playing the game, discuss:

- “What challenges did you face while herding the balloons?” (*Possible Answers: They kept scattering; they wouldn't go the way I wanted.*)
- “How is this like the way you feel sometimes as you head into adolescence?” (*Possible Answers: I can't always get things going in the right direction; it's hard to keep emotions in line sometimes.*)

**Share:** “It's tough to know how to keep moods and emotions in line as we become teenagers. Often it is especially hard to understand God's will over our emotions. But the best steps for keeping things in order are: to ask God for help, and count on His Holy Spirit to guide us.”

## Have volunteers read aloud the Scriptures: John 14:7, I Corinthians 2:9-12, John 14:26

- What do these passages teach us about the Holy Spirit? (*Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit lives inside believers, leads us to truth, reveals truth, can direct us.*)
- How do we hear from the Holy Spirit? (*Possible Answers: Read the Bible, listen to other Christians, and through our conscience.*)

**Share:** “God's Holy Spirit speaks to us first and foremost through the Bible. He also uses other Christians. When we listen to the Holy Spirit and seek advice from parents, godly friends, and teachers, we can discover God's will and overcome the confusing and difficult moods.”

This week's life verse – Romans 8:26-27 | Adapted from [www.HeritageBuilders.com](http://www.HeritageBuilders.com)

## Parents:

# How Listening Will Connect Us with Our Children

November 10, 2013

Parents lead by listening. If we want to connect with our children, we often need to listen first. This is a leadership principle. As parents, we are our children's leaders, not their peers. Good leaders know that the way to connect with others is to listen first and then talk.

If children don't feel like we are giving them our full attention when they share their feelings, they may shut down, stop talking to us, get frustrated with us or learn to keep their feelings to themselves. Our children face many challenges: relationship issues, peer pressure, stress, questions of identity, and more.

As parents, it's important to be aware of what is going on with our children. That's why this principle of listening first is so valuable. When we really listen to our children, without rushing to judgment or trying to fix their problem, they will feel comfortable talking to us when it really matters.

When we listen to our children respectfully, they experience the kind of respect that we want them to give us. By modeling good listening when they have a feeling or concern, we are teaching our children good listening skills. When it is time for them to listen, we can expect them to show us the same respect that we have given them.

*Adapted from Parenting Partners © 2008 by Dave and Patty Bunker*

# Children and Divorce...Conclusion

October 23, 2013

This week we conclude our series of articles designed to assist parents help their children during and after a divorce. In his book, "Growing Through Divorce", Jim Smoke suggests these guidelines for parents.

- 1. Don't try to be both parents to your children.** As much as we would like to, we cannot be everything to our children. A mother cannot be a father and a father cannot be a mother. As a parent, be who God called you to be. Parenting is tough enough without the added stress trying to be someone that it is impossible for you to be. While you may have to take on some of the responsibilities in the household that your former spouse used to handle, you cannot replace him or her.
- 2. Be honest with your children.** Communicate what is going in an age appropriate manner. Do not make empty promises or give your children false hope. Let them know what will change and what will remain the same. Divorce typically means a reduction in income, so the family may have to eat out less or make adjustment in the brand of clothes and shoes purchased.
- 3. Don't criticize your former spouse in front of the children.** Children need to have a healthy view of both of their parents. Do not impose your views on your children. They will arrive at conclusions about each of you on their own, based on their experiences.
- 4. Don't make your children undercover agents who report on the other parent's current activities.** Children do not need to be dragged into the drama of adults any more than absolutely necessary. .
- 5. Don't become a parent who acts like a weekend Santa Claus,** showering their children with good times and gifts, then sending them back to the realities of daily living with the other parent.
- 6. Recognize that the children need both parents,** so don't deny the other parent the right to see their child.

# Helping Children Cope with Divorce, Part II

October 13, 2013

Last week we explored ways to help their children cope with the divorce of their parents. Additionally, children need to see both parents demonstrating the love of Christ towards one another. The nature of divorce lends itself to hostile relationships between former spouses.

However, the love of Christ should control us (*2 Corinthians 5:14*). It should control what we say, what we do and how we feel about all people. Understanding how God loves us even when we are not very lovable should help exes extend the love that they have received from God to each other. Children learn how to handle conflict by looking at their parents' reaction to conflict. If you want your children to handle conflict in a healthy way, let them see you extending God's unconditional love to others. One way to do that is by forgiving your spouse because love covers a multitude of sins (*1 Peter 4:8*).

Children can also benefit from a support system outside of their relationship with you. They need to be able to talk about their feelings and fears. Often a child thinks that he or she is the only one feeling what he or she is feeling. It is helpful for children to know that they are not weird because they are feeling various emotions like anger, depression and confusion. Knowing that other children feel the same way means a lot to the child. It can also assist the parents in knowing what to expect from your child when you are going through a divorce.

KidsWorks is a resource designed to assist children of divorce to cope with the divorce. They provide free sessions for children. **Visit [www.christian-works.org](http://www.christian-works.org) or call 972-960-9981.**

The best advice that can be given to couples is to seek help before things get to the point where you are considering divorce.

If you are a couple who desires marriage counseling or are interested in enriching your marriage, contact the **Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ Life Management Center, 214-941-2531.**



# Divorce Is A Reality...

October 13, 2013

...that is often ignored in the church. The truth is that divorce impacts the lives! It is especially difficult on the most fragile among us, children. During and after a divorce, it is important to be sensitive to the needs of your children.

Children need to hear from both of parents that you love them and that the divorce is not their fault. Children often believe that they are somehow responsible for their parents splitting. They need to know that they are not the cause of the break-up.

It is also important that parents don't transfer the anger and frustration that they are feeling onto their children. When we are stressed in other areas of our lives, it can lead to impatience in our parenting. As the adult, it is important to exercise self-control and regulate your emotions.

Additionally it is critical that you be available to your children. Keep the lines of communication open and answer their questions. Don't hide out in your room or avoid contact with your children. They need as much normalcy and stability as possible. They are trying to make sense of what is happening and will have questions. By keeping the lines of communication open, they will feel comfortable sharing their feelings, both good and bad, with you. If you shut them down or seem too busy to talk, then they are more likely to act out due to their feelings of frustration and helplessness.

It is also important for you to provide as much continuity as possible for them. The less their worlds are disrupted, the easier the transition will be. Try to keep them in the same school. Maintain the same rules, schedule and routines.

**Following these tips will help make a difficult situation  
more bearable for the children**

# October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October 6, 2013

This year, about 6 million women will be victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence includes physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, spiritual and financial abuse that occurs by one person in a relationship to control another.

It is the mistreatment of one family member by another. It can include name-calling or putdowns, keeping a partner from contacting family or friends, withholding money, stopping a partner from getting or keeping a job, actual or threatened physical harm, sexual assault, stalking, and intimidation.

It is the pattern of behavior that establishes control and power over another person through fear and intimidation. Studies indicate that battering escalates over a period of time, beginning with behaviors like threats, destroying property, and name-calling then escalating to life-threatening assaults.

It is estimated that one out of four Christians is a victim/survivor of domestic violence. Many abusers will misuse and distort God's word to justify their sin of abuse. But the truth is that when the Bible speaks of submission and the man being the head of the wife, it has nothing to do with abuse and everything to do with love. Men are called to love their wives. Women are called to respect their husbands (*Ephesians 5:33*). Love and respect are in no way abusive. No one deserves abuse. It is not the victim's fault that he or she was abused. Being more submissive or obedient will not end the abuse!

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence you may call 911 for immediate help or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233). There is help available for abusers through the ***Battering Intervention and Prevention Program by calling 214-692-8295.***

## 4 Additional Considerations for Handling Conflict in Our Relationships

September 29, 2013

Last week we examined four ways to help deal with and resolve family conflict. We suggested that you should first examine your role in the conflict. Then, out of examining your role, admit when you are wrong. Thirdly, acknowledge to the other person why you are upset. All of this requires an understanding that your preferences are not gospel truth. We now focus on four more additional considerations for handling conflict in our relationships.

1. **Address the issue, don't attack the person!** “It upset me when you said...” sounds better than “You are always talking crazy!” Own your feelings. When a person feels attacked, the issue is not likely to get resolved. We go into fight or flight mode. A person will either avoid discussing the situation or attack back. Many people begin arguing about the way they are arguing and never get back to addressing the issue.
2. **Be flexible.** As perfect as you think your way is, there is probably an even better way! Remember that conflict resolution is not about winning the conflict, it is about resolving it. When we take the attitude of “I won and you lost”, the relationship ends up losing. Take the time to brainstorm and come up with solutions that you can both live with.
3. **Only try to control what you can actually control - yourself.** There is no way that you can control another person. You cannot make a spouse, sibling, child, parent, cousin, church member or any other human being do anything! It is difficult enough to control self. In fact, self control is the work of the Holy Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*).
4. **Understand that we all have something we need to change!** We are all works in progress and we each have something that we need to change. When we are merciful and patient with others, people will in turn be merciful and patient with us (*Luke 6:36-38*).

# Managing the Conflict in Our Lives

September 22, 2013

As we seek to better manage the conflict in our lives, there are some important things to keep in mind.

1. First of all, examine your role in the conflict. Ask God to show you your contribution to the problem. Reflect on these questions:
  - a. Did you respond to them in a way that pleases God?
  - b. Do you refuse to talk to them, so even if they wanted to apologize, you would never know?
  - c. Have you already in your mind sent them to hell and you are just waiting on God to process the paperwork?
  - d. Are you using your influence in a way that will bring about a peaceful resolution to the situation?
2. Out of examining your role comes admitting when you are wrong. Don't try to justify your wrong by using the other person's wrong as your reason for doing wrong. Remember two wrongs don't make a right.
3. If you feel someone in has done you wrong, acknowledge why you are upset. When people hurt us, we make two fatal assumptions. We assume that they know they hurt us and we assume they know why we are hurt. Help the person understand the effect of their actions and give them the opportunity to clarify the intentions of their actions.
4. Understand that your preferences are not gospel truth. It doesn't mean a person has sinned just because they didn't do what you thought they should have done.

# Have You Ever Been Hungry?

September 8, 2013

Have you **EVER** been hungry? Of course you have. But have you noticed that whatever item you don't have in your kitchen is the very thing that sounds the most delectable? In the book of Exodus, the Israelites were hungry. They were hungry for life away from the barren desert -- the one option their "kitchen" did not hold. With the help of Moses, they had recently acquired their freedom from Egyptian authorities. However, only one and a half months into their freedom, they made it clear that they longed for the security of their old captivity.

In retrospect, it sounds like madness to have hungered after captivity in the midst of newly found freedom. How tempting it would be to decide that the Israelites were fools to be discounted; and yet how familiar their story. In the midst of our blessings we also "hunger" for that which we do not have. Each phase of life offers unique elements of joy and peace to be relished. Even so, we can spend our entire lives ignoring the gifts of life that surround and await us, hungering for that which is not yet, or no longer ours. Indeed, children hunger to grow up. Teens hunger for independence.

Singles hunger for marriage. Married couples hunger for children. Middle-aged couples hunger for children to grow up. "Empty-nesters" hunger for their children to return home. Seniors hunger for the days of their youth.

The Israelites had everything they needed. God provided a leader, a means of escape, and daily physical provisions. Clearly it was not His desire to lead them that far and then squash them with His God-sized thumb into desert dust. Their one responsibility was to bring their faith along for the journey, and they failed. Instead, they hungered vainly for things before and beyond.

Generations from now will our descendents look back on our unfolded lives and question: "Why couldn't they see what God was doing? Clearly He was guiding them toward good and not harm?" God is providing all that we need to change the cycle of our hunger. History teaches us that, having brought us this far, God will lead us further still.

*Adapted from the article Letting God Satisfy Our Hunger by Hohna Cass*

# Ideas to Help Your Child Have A Great School Year

August 25, 2013

## After-School Plans:

School gets out before most working parents get home, so it's important to figure out where your children will go, or who will be at home, in the afternoons. You might find an after-school program through the school itself, a local YMCA, or a Boys and Girls Club. If possible, try to arrange your schedule so you can be there when your child gets home during those first few days of school. It may help your child adjust to the new schedule and teachers.

## Make a Sick-Day Game Plan:

Working parents also know the trials and tribulations of getting a call from the school nurse when they can't get away from the office. Before school begins, line up a trusted babysitter or group of parents that can pinch hit for each other when children get sick. And make sure you know the school's policy. You may have to sign forms ahead of time listing people who have your permission to pick up your child.

## Talk to the Teachers:

When you talk to your child's teachers, ask about their approach to homework. Some teachers assign homework so kids can practice new skills while others focus on the accuracy of the assignments they turn in. Ask for the dates of tests and large assignments so you can help your child plan accordingly. For instance, if you know a big test is coming up on Friday morning, you will know to keep things simple on Thursday evening.

Adapted from WebMD article by Joanne Barker

# Time to Get Ready for a New School Year

August 18, 2013

When summer winds down, it's time to get ready for a new school year. Buying notebooks and scoping out sales is the easy part. There are less tangible things you can do as well. Here are some ways you can help your child -- and yourself -- get ready to go back to school.

**1. Re-Establish School Routines:** "Have your child practice getting up and getting dressed at the same time every morning," suggests school psychologist Kelly Vaillancourt, MA, CAS. Start eating breakfast, lunch, and snacks around the times your child will eat when school is in session. It's also important to get your child used to leaving the house in the morning, so plan morning activities outside the house in the week or two before school. That can be a challenge for working parents. But when the school rush comes, hustling your child out the door will be less painful if he/she has broken summer habits like relaxing in PJs after breakfast.

**2. Nurture Independence:** Once the classroom door shuts, your child will need to manage a lot of things on his own. Get him ready for independence by talking ahead of time about responsibilities he's old enough to shoulder. This might include organizing his school materials, writing down assignments, and bringing home homework. Even if your child is young, you can instill skills that will build confidence and independence at school. Have your young child practice writing her name and tying her own shoes. The transition to school will be easier for everyone if your child can manage basic needs without relying on an adult.

**3. Set Up a Time and Place for Homework:** Establish a time and a place for studying at home. Even if it's the kitchen table, it really helps if kids know that's where they sit down and do homework, and that it happens at the same time every day. Turn off the television and minimize the noise while children are doing home work. As much as possible plan to make yourself available during homework time, especially with younger kids. You might be reading the paper or cooking dinner, but be around to check in on your child's progress.

*Adapted from WebMD article by Joanne Barker*

# Youth Transformation: Challenge & Inspire the Youth to Grow in Their Relationship with God

August 11, 2013

Sunday, August 11, 2013 kicks off our Youth Transformation. Youth Transformation is designed **to challenge and inspire the youth of the church to grow in their relationship with God.** We want our youth to know God for themselves. God should not just be the God of your parents and grandparents. He must become your God. Many times, God seems distant to teenagers. They have a difficult time connecting to a God that they cannot see. This is evident by the fact that most those who commit sin and mischief focus on not getting caught. However, when we connect to God, we understand that He sees everything. So even if parents and other adults do not catch you, you are caught by God. Growing in your relationship with God also means that you talk consistently with Him through prayer, turn to Him for guidance and trust Him in everything.

Youth Transformation is also designed **to reinforce the biblical principles taught in the home and in the church.** Parents teach and live the biblical principles that you want your children to adopt. The home is the primary place where faith is formed. The church's role is to support and reiterate those principles. Too often, parents expect the church to take on the primary role in forming a child's faith. However, the Bible is clear that the home is to be the place where children should receive their biblical foundation. A youth ministry, no matter how strong and active, is no substitute for parental guidance in the ways of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ephesians 6:4)

Even young Christians have been called by God to share the gospel. Therefore, Youth Transformation **provides an opportunity for youth to invite their non-Christian friends and family members to experience Jesus.** Many people have been to church services, but have never experienced Jesus. Our mission is not to invite people to church. Our charge is to invite them to Jesus. When visitors come into our presence, they should leave declaring that God is certainly among us (1 Corinthians 14:25). Youth Transformation provides an opportunity for others to experience Jesus in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them.

Finally, Youth Transformation is designed **to usher in the new school year with a focus on God and His Word.** In a world that focuses on back-to-school fashion, our youth must be reminded to look good to God. It doesn't matter how clean our clothes are if our hearts are not washed with the Word of God. While preparing to go back to school, make sure that God is at the top of your supply list.



# Do's and Don'ts of Discipline - Conclusion

August 4, 2013

We conclude our series on the dos and don'ts of discipline by focusing on what happens after you and your child have a disagreement. Maybe you handled it well, or maybe you didn't. Perhaps your child was well out of order and was punished.

What happens next? This is critical, and is a rule of discipline because many parents get this horribly wrong. Their child comes back to them, contrite, even apologetic, and their parent lays into them again about how badly they've behaved. Next thing they're on the defensive, arguing back, and sent to their room or punished again. Or maybe the parent just stops speaking to them for a while and goes into a sulk.

Either way you're not allowing the child to escape from the bad feelings that they've just been trying to come to terms with.

I heard a parent recently say to a child who apologized to them, "The important thing is not to apologize. The important thing is not to do it again." This is quite true of course, but not the time to say it. The poor child obviously felt he was still in trouble and un-forgiven, and I could see his face crumple.

The most important thing of all is for your child to know that you still love him/her. Children also need to know that there's a purpose in apologizing and determining to modify their behavior. If you're still angry with her, why did she bother? So when the fight is over, let your child know he/she is loved and welcomed back into your affection. Also let them know that you appreciate the apology and the child's ability to recognize that he/she was (at least partly) responsible for the argument.

Article adapted from [familyeducation.com](http://familyeducation.com)

# The Way We Behave Is the Strongest Model Kids Have For Their Own Behavior

July 21, 2013

One of the things that should be coming through by now is that **the way we behave is the strongest model our kids have for their own behavior**. We've said that if you don't want them to lose their temper, you must not lose yours, and if you want them to say please and thank you, you must be as polite to them. Well, now here's another of those things you have to do with your kids. Unfortunately, many parents seem to have a problem with this one.

I guess the feeling is that if you admit you were wrong, you undermine your child's confidence in your all-powerfulness. If you say sorry, they'll realize you're not always perfect. Well, I've got news for you. It's only a matter of time before they come to this conclusion for themselves. You might as well let them down gently by showing them, now and again, that you're not God and you do make mistakes.

The more ready you are to apologize when you're wrong, the more your kids will see that it's not belittling to admit to being wrong-grown-ups they admire can do it readily. And they'll also see that everyone makes mistakes and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Aware of, yes, and ready to put it right, but not shaming. You need your kids to regard apologizing as something they instinctively do as soon as they realize they've hurt, offended, inconvenienced, or upset anyone.

Article adapted from [familyeducation.com](http://familyeducation.com)

# Discipline Tip: Focus On the Problem, Not the Person

July 14, 2013

This week's discipline tip is focus on the problem, not the person. When you tell a child that they are bad, selfish, lazy, fat, stupid, rude, pushy, careless or anything else, you label them. And if they believe that label (and why shouldn't they -- they're trained to believe what we tell them), they will start to live down to it. They'll think, "There's no point to make an effort, I know I'm lazy." Or "What have I got to lose? They've got me down as bad anyway." Of course, this won't be a conscious thought process, at least not when they're small. But if you give them a label, they'll live down to it.

Condemn their behavior, not them. You can tell them, "That's a selfish thing to do," or "It's very rude to push." That way you're not passing comment on them, but only on their behavior. If at this point you feel like shouting, "But he is lazy!" I'm not telling you you're wrong, though it would be very un-PC of me to admit you could be right. I'm just saying that you should never, ever say so in front of him, or anyone else in case it gets back to him. Save it for your most private thoughts after the third time in a row he goes out without even clearing the table, let alone helping you load the dishwasher.

Positive labels are a different thing entirely. If they're accurate (don't pressure your child by trying to make them live up to something they can't), they likewise encourage your children to behave like their label -- thoughtful, careful, brave, or whatever.

And actually, you can sometimes use these positive labels to reinforce good behavior when they've lapsed: "I was really surprised to see you behave so rudely. I always think of you as a particularly polite person." It reassures the child you haven't given up on your positive view of him/her, so it's not too late to live up to the "polite" label.

Adapted from [www.familyeducation.com](http://www.familyeducation.com)

# Effective Discipline

July 7, 2013

Last week we began our series on effective discipline by stressing the importance of parents being on the same team. This week we will focus on consistency. In his book *The Rules of Parenting*, Richard Templar writes, "When I was a kid, you could answer my mom back one day and she'd laugh and tell you she was pleased you could stand up for yourself. Next day, you could say the same thing and get walloped for it. And there was never any clue to which way she'd go. This applied not only to giving her back talk, but to most other things, too. It meant I spent a lot of my time walking on eggshells.

"It also meant I had no idea what was and wasn't allowed -- it seemed to be decided on some kind of secret lottery basis that I wasn't privy to. So there was little point in regulating my behavior. After all, I might get into trouble, but then again I might not. It generally seemed worth the risk -- certainly to me.

"Your kids are just the same. They need to know what is and isn't acceptable. And they judge that by what was and wasn't okay yesterday and the day before. If they're not getting a consistent message, they're clueless as to how they have to behave, and those all important boundaries aren't being properly maintained. That means the kids feel confused, insecure, and perhaps even unloved.

"I'll tell you the toughest thing about this Rule: It means that a lot of the time, you can't break the rules even when you want to. It's just not fair on the kids. If you've decided that you don't allow the kids to sleep in your bed with you, you have to stick to it (unless you're prepared to change the rule permanently). Let them into your bed once and it will be ten times harder to say no to them next time, and they won't understand why. Say no now (softly and with an extra hug) and you're only being cruel to be kind (to yourself as well as them)."

# Demonstrative Love

June 23, 2013

**Demonstrative love is “meaningful and appropriate touching that occurs each day.”**

A UCLA study revealed that these displays of affection need to occur eight to ten times a day to maintain our emotional and physical health.

Demonstrative love was a theme of the apostle Paul in his teaching to the believers in Ephesus. After giving some strong instructions to husbands and wives, he turned his attention towards fathers. “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (**Ephesians 6:4**)

Two qualities are contained in that sentence: nurture and admonition. Admonishing our children is to counsel them against a fault, gently pointing them to a blind spot in their character. It’s an instruction to the children of their responsibilities. They will be held accountable for the consequences of not following them.

Nurturing, on the other hand, is the positive approach to leading our children to growth and features the love only parents can give them. Such love assures children that they are accepted by virtue of who they are, not what they do.

Our children need to know they are accepted and loved. Through touch and words, we can dispense love like a treasure. You may not be able to give them every material thing they want, but you will grow them strong and with the nurturing component of their family fragrance called affection.

Article adapted from the June 2013 Heritage Builders Bulletin Insert

# Fathers Must Work Harder Than Moms to Sustain And Nurture Bond with Children

June 16, 2013

They're both called parents, but mothers and fathers bond with their kids differently. Most dads have to work harder than moms to sustain and nurture the bond they have with their children, and when they share a special relationship, it's easy to inspire their kids to go on to do great things in life. If you're a father, here are a few ways to inspire your children:

- **Set an example:** Rather than teach your children with words alone, show them what needs to be done by setting an example. When you're hardworking and responsible, you teach your kids to be so too. They look up to you and want to emulate you when they grow up.
- **Treat their mom well:** Kids are very attached to their mothers as they grow up. If you don't treat their mom well and accord her due respect, they're not going to respect you, or be inspired by you. One of the best things you can do for your children is to love their mom and be nice to her.
- **Spend time with them:** Fathers who are absent most of the time from their children's lives don't have much of an impact on them. So if you want to inspire your children, be around for them and spend time with them; help them with their homework, play games with them, drive them around for their activities, and get to know what they like and who their friends are. This way, the bond between you becomes stronger.
- **Encourage them without finding fault:** Kids are full of energy for the things they are passionate about, and as a father, it's up to you to encourage your children to reach for the stars and achieve their goals. Don't find fault because they don't live up to your expectations.
- **Teach them right from wrong:** The best way to do this is to be a good Christian yourself. When your kids see that dad doesn't lie, cheat or treat other people badly, they pick up these traits. You're an inspiration as to how they want to live their lives and treat their children.

Adapted from article by Karen Anderson on [www.christianfathers.com](http://www.christianfathers.com)

# “A Re-Commitment to Purity”

This article originally appeared on [Boundless Webzine](#)

June 9, 2013

...will have great reward! Like anything worth doing, it will be difficult at times. There are plenty of reasons to abstain until marriage – the myriad diseases that can only be transmitted through sex; the fact that sex outside of marriage will never satisfy our desire for intimacy; the statistics showing that marriages last longer and grow stronger when they are based on a foundation of self-control and mutual respect. You have likely read about those elsewhere.

Now, let it become personal: Consider what kind of a person you want to be. What kind of a lifestyle do you want to live this week and ever after? What kind of a marriage do you hope for? If you listen, your heart will tell you the things you may need to change in order to come closer to those desires. Some women find they want to try a different way of dressing – to show more respect for their own bodies. Men may repeat a phrase to themselves to help them respect the women around them. "Lord, show me how to love this woman, as one made in Your image, loved by You."

If you are still involved with some that you slept with, you have some unique obstacles. It is possible for you both to be celibate, but only if both of you are trying. If only one of you wants to change, it is probably time to take a break from one another. If having sex together didn't sour your relationship, what's stopping you from getting married? The best way to demonstrate your sincerity in wanting to be pure is to set a date to marry and commit to abstain until then. Far better to marry earlier than you might have planned, than to burn with guilt or lust.

As you continue to build your relationship, watch for the damage that occurs in more subtle ways. When sex happens before commitment, trust is eroded; each person wonders if he or she is the only one, and if it will remain that way. Meanwhile, it seems that no matter what they try, the couple cannot go back to a sex-free love. Times alone together too often lead to the same thing - intercourse - followed by guilt and confusion.

If you are both committed to changing, don't spend your time and energy meditating on what you are not going to do (i.e., have sex again). Rather, replace bad habits with good ones. Pray together. Go out with friends. Do anything but leave yourselves with a void, because you will inevitably be tempted to go too far. Find creative, expressive, platonic ways to share your love. And get input from someone older and wiser. Lots of married couples would be happy to share their experience and mentor you in your own journey to relational wholeness. Most of all don't condemn yourself when Christ has forgiven you, and never let your past sins be an excuse to compromise in the present.

# “The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs” (final conclusion)

(Excerpts from an article “The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs” by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.)

June 7, 2013

Last week we shared the first three of the six reconciliation needs for mourners. This week we conclude excerpts from an article “The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs” by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. For the full article and other helpful resources visit [www.grief-works.org](http://www.grief-works.org).

**Need 4. Developing a new self-identity.** Part of your self-identity comes from the relationships you have with other people. When someone with whom you have a relationship dies, your self-identity, or the way you see yourself, naturally changes. A death often requires you to take on new roles that had been filled by the person who died. After all, someone still has to take out the garbage and someone still has to buy the groceries. You confront your changed identity every time you do something that used to be done by the person who died. Many people discover that as they work on this need, they ultimately discover some positive aspects of their changed self-identity. You may develop a renewed confidence in yourself, for example. You may develop a more caring, kind and sensitive part of yourself. You may develop an assertive part of your identity that empowers you to go on living even though you continue to feel a sense of loss.

**Need 5. Searching for meaning.** When someone you love dies, you naturally question the meaning and purpose of life. You probably will question your philosophy of life and explore religious and spiritual values as you work on this need. You may discover yourself searching for meaning in your continued living as you ask "How?" and "Why" questions. "How could God let this happen?" "Why did this happen now, in this way?" The death reminds you of your lack of control. It can leave you feeling powerless. The person who died was a part of you. This death means you mourn a loss not only outside of yourself, but inside of yourself as well. You may doubt your faith and have spiritual conflicts and questions racing through your head and heart. This is normal and part of your journey toward renewed living.

**Need 6. Receiving ongoing support from others.** The quality and quantity of understanding support you get during your grief journey will have a major influence on your capacity to heal. You cannot - nor should you try to - do this alone. Drawing on the experiences and encouragement of friends, fellow mourners or professional counselors is not a weakness but a healthy human need. And because mourning is a process that takes place over time, this support must be available months and even years after the death of someone in your life. To be truly helpful, the people in your support system must appreciate the impact this death has had on you. They must understand that in order to heal, you must be allowed - even encouraged - to mourn long after the death. And they must encourage you to see mourning not as an enemy to be vanquished but as a necessity to be experienced as a result of having loved.



# “The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs”

(Excerpts from an article “The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs” by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.)

May 26, 2013

This week’s focus is on the first three reconciliation needs. The second half will be shared next week. For the full article and other helpful resources visit [www.grief-works.org](http://www.grief-works.org).

“The death of someone loved changes our lives forever. And the movement from the "before" to the "after" is almost always a long, painful journey. From my own experiences with loss as well as those of the thousands of grieving people I have worked with over the years, I have learned that if we are to heal we cannot skirt the outside edges of our grief. Instead, we must journey all through it, sometimes meandering the side roads, sometimes plowing directly into its raw center. There are six "yield signs" you are likely to encounter on your journey through grief - what I call the "reconciliation needs of mourning."

**Need 1. Acknowledging the reality of the death.** Whether the death was sudden or anticipated, acknowledging the full reality of the loss may occur over weeks and months. To survive, you may try to push away the reality of the death at times. You may discover yourself replaying events surrounding the death and confronting memories, both good and bad. This replay is a vital part of this need of mourning. It's as if each time you talk it out, the event is a little more real.

**Need 2. Embracing the pain of the loss.** It is easier to avoid, repress or deny the pain of grief than it is to confront it, yet it is in confronting our pain that we learn to reconcile ourselves to it. Unfortunately, our culture tends to encourage the denial of pain. If you openly express your feelings of grief, misinformed friends may advise you to "carry on" or "keep your chin up." If, on the other hand, you remain "strong" and "in control," you may be congratulated for "doing well" with your grief. Actually, doing well with your grief means becoming well acquainted with your pain.

**Need 3. Remembering the person who died.** Do you have any kind of relationship with someone when they die? Of course. You have a relationship of memory. Precious memories, dreams reflecting the significance of the relationship and objects that link you to the person who died (such as photos, souvenirs etc.) are examples of some of the things that give testimony to a different form of a continued relationship. This need of mourning involves allowing and encouraging yourself to pursue this relationship.”

# Motherhood and Faith

May 12, 2013

Tosha L. Williams writes concerning motherhood and faith, "All day long I had given and given and given until I had nothing left to give. A frustrated, angry spirit was quickly replacing my "good mommy" attitude.

"There I was, desperately needing a break from serving my children, when God took the opportunity to tell me how much I needed to be with Him. He wants my relationship with Him to supersede every other relationship in my life, including my children.

I really wrestle with this, though. And, as I've informally surveyed other mothers, I have found that it is truly a common struggle. We "good" mothers tend to give all our best to our children, seldom leaving time for ourselves, much less God. However, regardless of our children's ages or stages, God always demands first place in our hearts. He wants you and me to honor Him more than we honor anyone else.

This is a fine line, because mothering our children well is a way we honor God. Taking care of our children, even going beyond the call of duty for them, is not the issue, though. The heart of the matter is that nobody, not even our kids, should have a higher place in our hearts than God, lest they become our idols.

Please don't read me wrong. I am not suggesting that we ignore the realities of motherhood. Teaching the alphabet, cooking healthfully and involving our kids in sports are excellent things to do. Figuring out how to be the best mom possible is good and admirable. However, we cannot — indeed, we must not — allow these pursuits for our children to minimize our pursuit for God. We cannot be fooled into thinking that all the great things we do as moms are more important than being intimate with God. The stakes are too high if we put our children before God. He must have the highest place of honor in our hearts."

# Normal & Abnormal Adolescent Behavior

May 05, 2013

This week we will continue to share suggestions on how to distinguish between normal and abnormal behavior in an adolescent, and how to decide whether the behavior should be of no concern, or of mild, moderate, or great concern to the parent.

## How Often Does the Behavior Occur?

All children, at one time or another, are moody, argumentative, or withdrawn. However, to determine if the behavior or attitude is cause for concern, it is important to note its frequency. A child who is occasionally flippant or insolent is certainly not that unusual, compared to a child who is disrespectful every time she talks to her parents. The more frequently the behavior is seen, the more it may deviate from normal.

## Does the Behavior Interfere with the Teenager's Ability to Function in the Environment?

All of us become depressed at times, but if this feeling or attitude prevents us from going to work or completing necessary duties around the house, then it should be a concern. If it does not significantly interfere with our daily functioning, however, then concern about this attitude and behavior can be somewhat minimized. Similarly, most children share an aversion to homework and some also to class work, but if this attitude or behavior results in failing grades or the necessity to attend summer school, then it may be considered not typical and should be a concern. If, it does not restrict or prevent the teen from functioning like an average child, however, then parents need have less concern.

## Does the Behavior Interfere with Others?

Most siblings occasionally fight with one another, but if this type of behavior on the part of one child provokes a fearful or negative reaction on the part of the sibling, it may not be considered normal. A teenager who always fights with a younger sibling can disrupt the household from the time he comes home from school until the time he goes to bed. Conduct that significantly interferes with the routines, behaviors, and activities of other members of the household may deviate from the norm and be of concern.

## Talking about the Texas STAAR Test: Using Prayer and God's Word to Overcome

April 2013

The week of April 1, 2013 was a particularly stressful week for students, teachers and school administrators. Children across Texas took the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness or STAAR test. The test provides a perfect opportunity for parents to talk about God with their children. It is important for children to understand that God is not just restricted to the church building. God is present every day of our lives in every situation. Parents should consider discussing the following concepts with their children.

\* Don't dismiss your child's concerns by saying, "It's just a little test. In ten years it won't even matter." Children want parents to understand that their issues and problems are real. When you minimize a situation that your child faces, you reduce the likelihood that your child will share things with you in the future.

\*If a child is nervous, anxious or worried about this or any test, pray with them about it. Encourage them to talk to God about the things that concern them. Take the time to pray out loud in the presence of your child.

\*Encourage them to organize a prayer group that meets before school to pray for the safety of the school, the success of the students and thank God for teachers and staff who are committed to their education.

\*Recommend that your child ask other Christians to pray. They need to learn early that the prayers of the righteous bring about much good.

\*Suggest that your child publically thank God for blessing him/her to do well on the test.

Your child should have an attitude of gratitude. This gratitude provides your child with an opportunity to talk about God to others.

Make the most of opportunities to teach your child how to apply God's word to their everyday lives.

## Teens CAN Lose Perspective...Burn Out...

March 01, 2013

**Q.** My son seems burned out, but when I ask him, all I hear is "I dunno." How can I get past that invisible wall?

**A.** His response is just another clue that you may be right about his being burned out. When pushed beyond their limits, teens can lose perspective on their own business. That's why your sensitivity to his state is crucial to healing.

First, assist him in evaluating his life. Simply reviewing his schedule may help illustrate that a problem exists. Then ask him about — and observe personally — sleeping patterns, study habits, relational demands, etc. Once you agree a problem exists, you can begin to develop solutions together.

In his "burned out" condition, it would be natural for conflicts to bubble up. If issues surface here, deal with them before trying to pull him out of the more general rut of burnout. Then brainstorm some options for healthier overall balance. Can he cut back on work? Adjust class schedules? Delay a project? Get some help with relational issues? Be sure to reserve time for fun, relaxation and "recharging the batteries".

This process should develop a sense of hope and direction in your teen, as well as accountability. Monitor and encourage him, but also make him responsible for following through on the changes discussed. If you don't see improvement, it may be time to consult a professional counselor (or your family physician to rule out medical problems).

As a caring parent, you can lift your teen out of the burnout ditch by gathering data together creating new lifestyle options to reduce stress following up to assess progress

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# Perfectionism

February 24, 2013

Today, more than ever it seems, teenagers are at no loss for involvement in activities. Family, school, church, friends, neighborhood sports leagues and clubs. But can anyone — even an energetic teenager — do it all? It's tempting to look at young people as having unlimited energy reserves, but they don't. Concerned parents want to know how to help their stressed-out, over-worked, too active kids. Maybe you're asking yourself what many parents have asked: What can I do about my teenager having too many activities that can lead to burn out? How do I deal with emotional distance as a result of fatigue? How can I help my teen who is just plain stressed out from being on the go too much?

Kids learn by example, and most parents are over-committed themselves. You may have passed this "trait" down without even realizing it. Remember, every time we say yes to something, we must necessarily say no to something else, whether we want to or not. Keep this principle in mind: Choose your no's carefully. Before saying yes, stop and identify exactly what you will be saying no to. It's usually life's less tangible things — down time, sleep, family, quiet time with God — that get pushed aside. Those are the items we say no to most frequently.

Before making a new commitment, consider what might be sacrificed. Then ask yourself, "What will be the cost of saying no to (X)?" "Can I afford to say no to (X)?" "Is (X) wise to say no to?" Be honest with yourself and ask God to reveal the best option. Base your decision on your ability or willingness to say no to (X) rather than your desire to say "yes" to something new. It's harder than you might think. Most choices will not be between the bad and the good; they'll be between the good and the better.

Telling someone yes is easy. That's why so many adults and teens are overcommitted and bordering upon burnout. Also, insecurity can drive us into "performance" mode and make us reluctant to say no to others out of fear of rejection.

One more note for parents: If you're overcommitted, you may need to say no to some good things in order to say yes to one of the best things . . . your teenager.

Adapted from an article that first appeared in a 1996 issue of *Plugged In Magazine*.  
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# God Shows Respect to His Children through his Mercy

February 17, 2013

God shows respect to His children through His mercy. We all learn by mistakes. Second chances show that a parent has enough confidence in a child's character to trust he will see a task or situation through to a resolution. An unforgiving parent will impede a child's learning processes.

One only has to be vaguely familiar with Israel's history to see this characteristic fleshed out. God consistently forgave and corrected Israel's course to match His plans. He told them through the prophet Jeremiah, "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to hard you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11).

Remember, however, that this verse was spoken to a people about to be taken into Babylonian captivity as a consequence of their defiant disobedience. In His loving mercy, He eventually brought them back to the Promised Land yearning to have a relationship with Him. The Lord accomplished His perfect plan with imperfect people by being a God of second chances.

One of our jobs as parents is to balance our love and mercy with accountability. That cannot be effectively expressed by righteous indignation, but rather by following our Heavenly Father's example and being parents of second chances.

In the New Testament, Jesus illustrates this with Peter. Peter's impulsive temperament was consistently in need of second chances. He denied His Lord, sagged in his belief and influenced others to give up. After the resurrection, when he encountered Jesus on the seashore, Peter sat silently, wondering about his status with the Lord, but afraid to ask. He was afraid that his unbelief would bring displeasure to God.

Jesus left Peter's responsibility intact. Because Peter was prone to mistakes does not mean he was not a man after God's own heart. Second chances paid off. Peter became an enormous influence in the early church.

As parents we can become a channel of God's unconditional love – not by being an unforgiving parent seeking perfection from our children with criticism and harsh words. We need to follow the description of our Savior who was "full of grace and truth." Knowing, teaching, and living the Truth is very important. But with Jesus knowing our weak frame, Grace came before truth. We need to follow His example by giving grace to our children and being parents of second chances.

Excerpt from Family Fragrance by J. Otis and Gail Ledbetter  
[www.heritagebuilders.com](http://www.heritagebuilders.com)



# Perfectionism, Part III

February 10, 2013

We end our series highlighting the final two characteristics that create a negative family atmosphere.

## **Martyrdom.**

We don't hear too much about martyrs today, yet many exist in dysfunctional families. Martyrdom in this sense is not a calling from the Lord or a spiritual gift. It's a distorted sense of self-denial. Martyr families have a high tolerance for personal abuse and pain. Martyr parents tell their children that others always come first, no matter what the cost. Many of these children grew up watching their parents punish themselves through overwork, eating disorders, substance abuse, etc.

Children of martyr parents often grow up seeing themselves as victims, pleasers or martyrs. Self-denial is the name of the game, but it's destructive because it's self-deprecating.

## **Entanglement**

Have you ever reached into a drawer or closet for extension cords and found them tangled together? Probably. Were you able to use them to their fullest extent in that condition? Probably not. Entanglement happens in families as well. The mother, father and children become emotionally entangled in each other's lives to the point that their individual identities are blurred and diminished. Each family member pokes his nose into the others' business. Mom makes the problems of Dad and the kids her own. Dad and the kids do the same. If one family member is depressed, so is everyone else. And they're so emotionally entangled that each person blames the others for his condition.

It's as though the whole family is sitting together on a giant swing. When one member goes up, the others go up with him. When one goes down, so do the others. Individual members don't think or feel for themselves. In time they begin to wonder, "Who am I?" Their individual identities are lost in their entangled relationship.

Entanglement also impedes parent-child communication. It's difficult for a child to carry on a conversation in an entangled family because someone is always chiming in with his opinion. Sometimes discussions are never completed because everybody keeps jumping in and out of the conversation. And you can't count on anyone keeping a confidence. Anything shared with one family member will eventually be shared with all others.

Adapted from *The Power of a Parent's Words*  
by H. Norman Wright

# Perfectionism, Part II

February 3, 2013

So far we have examined destructive habits of abuse, perfectionism and rigidity and their impact on families. This week we will explore two more habits worth breaking.

## **Silence**

Some parents would give a lot to bring a little silence into their noisy homes. That's normal. But some parents in dysfunctional homes insist on a gag rule for the family. "We don't talk outside the walls of this home. We don't share family secrets or ask others for help if we're having a problem." Everything is to be kept within the family. No one else is supposed to know about their conflicts or problems.

Children sworn to forced silence grow up believing that they have to handle the burdens of life by themselves. They don't allow themselves to share their struggles with others, even those who may be able to help them.

## **Repression**

Identifying and expressing emotions in a positive way is healthy. Over-controlling and repressing them is asking for future difficulty. Many husbands and wives grew up in homes where emotions were denied and repressed. Then they carried this unhealthy trait into their marriages, and it became the death sentence for the relationship.

God created us as emotional beings, and our feelings cannot be bottled up, especially negative feelings like anger, fear, depression, etc. These emotions must be expressed creatively and positively within the context of a loving, accepting family. When we repress emotions we are denying reality. Children of emotionally repressed parents learn to wear happy masks all the time, masks which only serve to perpetuate their pain.

Clogging the emotional pipelines by repressing or denying feelings leads to many physical problems. Repression can even trigger numerous compulsive behaviors such as eating disorders. We think that if we repress our feelings they will go away. But they don't; they're simply dammed up. Eventually the dam will crack and burst, and the emotions will explode unchecked, usually in a hurtful way to all involved.

Adapted from *The Power of a Parent's Words*  
by H. Norman Wright

# Perfectionism, Part I

January 20, 2013

Perfection in parenting is not often considered an unhealthy symptom. But it is a common source of many family problems. A perfectionist is often angry because he cannot live up to his own standards. As a parent, this person is also angry at his children because they can't live up to his standards either, reminding him of his own inadequacies.

Perfectionists usually communicate their unrealistic demands to their children through many means: verbal rebukes and corrections, disapproving scowls, critical harping, etc. The words "should" and "ought" seem to dominate the communication of a perfectionistic parent.

Sometimes perfectionistic messages are hidden or implied in what sounds like a message of affirmation. **For example:**

- "You've always been an obedient child. You've never given me a minute of trouble." Translation: "Don't change or rock the boat. Always conform to what I want, and I'll be happy."
- "You've always been able to adjust and to be positive." Translation: "Always be pleasant, adaptable and easy-going. Don't get upset. Bury your unpleasant feelings."
- "I expect the best from you. You're the one child I can depend upon." Translation: "You are the one person who can make my life fulfilling. Sacrifice yourself for me. Never, never disappoint me."

This kind of communication is a form of verbal torture. Children end up feeling substandard: "Why bother trying to be good?" they rationalize. "I'll never measure up anyway."

## **Rigidity**

Unbending rules, a super-strict family life-style and a legalistic belief system make for an overly rigid, negative family experience. Life is governed by routine. Relationships and events are strictly controlled. The joy and surprise of spontaneity in the family is smothered by responsibility and duty.

Rigidity is seen in parent-child communication in statements like: "We don't ever do that"; "This is the only way for this to be done"; "We always follow our family tradition for our activities on Thanksgiving"; "No, we cannot change our schedule. You will just have to skip that activity." Parents should be flexible enough to allow their children to experience the joy of childhood.

Adapted from *The Power of a Parent's Words*  
by H. Norman Wright

# The Power of Words

January 13, 2013

## The Power of Words

Nobody's perfect. We are all shaped by imperfect people. Sometimes, those imperfect people pass down traits and thinking that is unhealthy. As a result, you can get off course because you have been sailing without a compass. The sooner you recognize that you are not headed in the direction you want to go, the easier it will be to get back on course. The first step in correcting your parenting course is to identify some elements of family atmosphere that you *don't* want in your home. There are nine of them that we will explore in the weeks ahead.

## Verbal/Emotional Abuse

Abuse is the most devastating element of a dysfunctional home. When you hear about abuse, perhaps you immediately think of physical or sexual abuse. Tragically, these forms of abuse occur all too frequently—even in Christian homes. But verbal and emotional abuse is even more frequent in our homes. Obvious forms of verbal/emotional abuse include parents screaming at their children or making disparaging remarks to them. Yet subtler forms of abuse are just as painful and damaging. **Here are several examples:**

1. Ignoring a child by not listening, not responding, etc.
2. Constantly projecting blame onto a child.
3. Distorting a child's sense of reality, such as saying, "Your brother doesn't do drugs. He's just having a hard time. You're imagining things."
4. Overprotecting a child.
5. Blaming others for a child's problems.
6. Communicating confusing double messages to the child, such as saying, "Yes, I love you. Now, for crying out loud, don't bother me. Can't you see I'm busy!"

What messages are we sending our children? Our words are often launched as verbal missiles to attack a child's behavior, appearance, intelligence, competence or value as a person.

## **James recognized the potentially toxic nature of the words we speak:**

The human tongue can be tamed by no man. It is (an undisciplined, irreconcilable) restless evil, full of death-bringing poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who were made in God's likeness! Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so ([James 3:8-10](#)).

Adapted from *The Power of a Parent's Words*  
by H. Norman Wright