

MATTERS

FAMILY

PARENTING

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Dedication

To Jeanelle, Jonathan, Joanna, and Jaclyn, whom God has given us the privilege, responsibility, and joy of parenting.

They are God's heritage and blessing for whom we are so thankful and by whom we continue learning and growing.

The first quotation on page 71 is from "Becoming 'parent of your parent' an emotionally wrenching process" by Mindy Fetterman. First printed in the June 24, 2007 issue of *USA Today*.

The second quotation on page 71 and the quotation on page 72 are from *The Prime of Your Life* by Woodrow Kroll and Don Hawkins. ©2005 Published by Fleming H. Revell. Used by permission.

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Introduction

Parenting is a work in progress. It's not just a phase of family life with a beginning and an end. Parents may reach plateaus and experience occasional setbacks in their parenting; nevertheless, parenting is a progression that lasts a lifetime. God the Father planned it that way. He planned for parenthood to be dynamic, not static, and enriching, not just something to endure.

We used to think that parenting would end when our children were grown and gone. We used to think that when they left the nest for college or to be married or to pursue a vocation, that parenting essentially was over. We were wrong. Parenting never ends; once a parent, always a parent. But that is good, not bad, even though sometimes it is hard. It's the way God designed parenting to be.

This book is a study about the perpetual, progressive role and responsibilities of parenting and its different phases. When our children were underfoot and under our roof, parenting was a line upon line, day in and day out, give and take experience wrapped in tough and tender love. Parenting our children through the teen years was a marathon, not a sprint. Then they became adults, which took parenting to a whole new level or phase. The problems and challenges were fewer but bigger, with

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greater consequences. Physical exhaustion was exchanged for mental and emotional fatigue. Then our children had children, and we became grandparents, a very different but delightful new phase of parenting. This was closely followed by the beginning of yet another phase, “parenting” our parents, or providing care for them as they age. Thus, parenting is a work in progress.

This book has been a work in progress. We have been parents for over thirty years, and are now grandparents, and also are providing a measure of care for our parents. But we have not arrived or consider ourselves complete. We continue to learn and grow in our role as parents. It is our privilege to share through this book what we have learned about parenting through our personal experience—our failures and successes—and our understanding of what is revealed about parenting in the Bible. This study is far from being the final word on parenting. In citing Isaiah 40:8, Peter wrote, “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Peter 1:25). The strength of this study on parenting is the perfect and enduring Word of God, which is replete with principles on parenting that work when believed and applied. God always has the last word.

Parenting is work, but it’s worth it! It’s not for wimps, but it has many perks! We have a much better understanding of our Father’s love for us, having been parents ourselves. May our Heavenly Father, the only perfect Parent, be pleased to use this study to further your progress as you endeavor to be His kind of parent.



Bringing Up . . . Letting Go

KEY VERSE

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Wonderfully exhausting. Painfully rewarding. Overwhelmingly mundane. Happily persevering. Heartbreakingly successful. Though these terms seem strange and contradictory, even illogical, those who are parents can relate to these paradoxes. Because of our own experience as parents of four wonderful, energetic, talented, needy children, these word pairs make perfect sense to us.

Yes, parenting is wonderfully exhausting and happily persevering, requiring the heart and stamina of a marathon runner. At times, it is overwhelmingly mundane, calling for creativity and the patience of Job. When a child leaves the nest for college, marriage, or another good venture, parents experience a painful sense of reward and a heartbreaking sense of success.

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When our children were born, we were not prepared for the hard work, challenges, laughter, expenses, tears, pride, compassion, satisfaction, amazement, joy, and multiplied blessings that would be added to our lives.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Parenting is not for cowards. Why not?

Parenting requires courage in the face of testing and in the heat of battle. One proof of courage is consistency. When parents lack consistency in practicing Biblical parenting principles, children are likely to grow up insecure and angry. Courageous parents consistently encourage, discipline, comfort, and confront.

2. You can't change your ancestors, but you can do something about your descendants.
 - a. What can you do about them?

 - b. How?

3. Cite two things about your children that you have learned just by watching and listening to them.

As a personal diagnostic test, take the following quiz for each of your children.

How many of these questions can you answer right now?

Who is your child's best friend?

What is your child's favorite activity?

Who is your child's favorite teacher?

What is your child's most precious possession?

What part of your child's personality does he or she consider a strength?

Who in your local church does your child admire?

Which character in the Bible would your child like to imitate?

Children are a gift from God. But they are also a trust. Our children belong to God, but they are given to us to bring up to let go, or release (Genesis 2:24). On the average, parents have eighteen to twenty years to invest in their children's lives that which will have immediate, short-term, and long-term benefits. Parents whose children are out of the nest know how quickly that time passes. Though parents may think, "There will be time for that," or "I'll do that later," they may not. All too soon their children are grown and gone.

USE YOUR BIBLE

1. Read Psalm 127 and list the ways rearing and releasing children is either stated or illustrated.

So, how can parents make the most of the rearing years so their children are ready to be released?

Parents Must KNOW Their Children

To grow their children, parents must know them. Although there are basic training principles for rearing children, every

child is unique. Parents must know their children's God-given bents and bring up each child accordingly (Proverbs 22:6).

2. Read Proverbs 20:11 and 12. According to verse 12, what are two things parents must do to know their children?

Parents need to be with their children, investing undistracted personal time and attention. It is important to notice what interests, skills, talents, and temperaments are developing in your children. This is character development, which proceeds from the heart, put there by God to be nurtured and cultivated.

In general, God wants parents to know three things about their children (Psalm 127:3–5). One, they are God's gift; they are His heritage and inheritance (v. 3). What a treasure to be valued! Two, they are God's reward, "the fruit of the womb" (v. 3). Like fruit, they bruise easily, they must be handled with care, and they contain the seeds of the next generation. Three, they are God's blessing, "like arrows . . . happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (vv. 4, 5). Like arrows, they need direction and motivation. A "full quiver" represents blessing and happiness. Aim carefully and accurately.

3. In what other ways are your children like fruit and arrows?

Parents Must GROW Their Children

Parents grow their children by not provoking them to wrath. We are not to irritate, frustrate, or agitate our children and thus cultivate an angry, critical spirit (Ephesians 6:4). We are not to stir up our children's anger, which leads to exasperation, discouragement, and bitterness (Colossians 3:21). *Note: These do not mean our children should never be upset or displeased, but they do mean that we are not to raise angry, impulsive, bitter adults.*

4. How do parents provoke their children wrongly?

Parents grow their children by bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We grow our children through nurture, or consistent instruction. Nurturing involves training, conditioning, and discipline. Parents need to be proactive as opposed to reactionary, training their children so as not to have to retrain. S. Truett Cathy, Founder and CEO of Chick-fil-A Restaurants wrote a book titled with the truth that *It's Better to Build Boys than Mend Men*.

5. What are some areas or issues of life about which children need the personal, proactive training of their parents?

Parents grow their children through admonition or confrontational counseling. Admonition involves warning and correction, which is confrontational by nature but without being harsh or abusive (1 Thessalonians 2:10–12). Parents who fear the Lord will love their children, not fear them. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). Godly parents speak the truth in love and give wise counsel and consistent correction, following the example of their Heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:5, 7, 8).

Parents grow their children by allowing them to fail. In his book, *Culture Shift*, R. Albert Mohler Jr. includes a chapter titled, “Are We Raising a Nation of Wimps?” in which he calls many of today’s parents “hyperprotectors” who often see their children as little trophies to be polished. “Hyperattentive” parents shield their children from hurts, disappointments, and failures. Coddled children become immature adults who cannot cope with the tough realities of life. Mohler states, “As our children

grow older, they should demonstrate an increasing maturity that allows them to deal with the problems of life—not run from them.”

6. Read Proverbs 24:16. How does this apply truth to what Mohler addresses in his book?

Parents Must SHOW Their Children a Glimpse of the Future

Parents show their children a glimpse of the future by modeling the Christian life. Children need to see their parents personally applying truth to their everyday lives and then transferring it to the children (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

7. What do you believe are some of the most important truths you can model for your children?

Parents show their children a glimpse of the future by being an example of devotion to God. Spiritual values such as the following are both taught and caught.

Obedience to God, especially in times of testing or trials. This builds and fortifies faith in our children who need to see a connection between obedience to God and the blessing of God.

Prayer and time in the Word of God when facing important decisions. Pray for and with your children. Ask them to pray for you. Share some of your struggles and let your children know when prayers are answered. Be careful to talk about what is most important.

Parents show their children a glimpse of the future by showing an interest in their children’s future, investing in it with their money, time, and experience. Your children are your inheritance and your greatest trust (Psalm 127:3). Give careful attention to “Voices from the Future” as an example of the effects of parenting on your children.

Voices from the Future

*Will our adult children say?
You never talked with me.
You didn't keep your word.
You didn't listen to me.
You didn't understand what I was going through.
You were never satisfied.
You never touched me or hugged me.
You wouldn't trust me.
You wouldn't let me make decisions.
You never took the time to have fun with me.
You were rigid and unreasonable.
You never helped me to feel good about myself.
Or, will our adult children say?
You were always there when I needed you.
I always knew you loved me.
I still remember some of the talks we had.
I always knew I could talk to you.
You trusted me, and I knew I could trust you.
You admitted when you were wrong.
I always knew you wanted the best for me.
You showed me how to care for others.
I knew you'd love me no matter what.
You let me learn from my own mistakes.
I knew you always tried to keep your word.*

APPLY THE TRUTH

1. Read the following anonymous prayer for Christian parents; underline or highlight the three most significant statements to you as a parent.

Dear Lord, help me to be the person I want my children to be. May they see Christ in me, especially when I am tired and rushed or

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when things haven't gone my way. Help me never to be too busy to stop to listen to them without interrupting and contradicting them. Let me answer their questions kindly.

Lord, guide me so that I will have no habits that I would not want them to have. May my daily life show that honesty produces happiness. May I, by my own actions, never tempt them to lie or steal. Help me to be fair in granting my children all their reasonable wishes, but give me the courage to withhold a privilege that I think would not be best for them.

Lord, I want to encourage and praise them when that's what they deserve, and discipline and correct them when that's what they need.

Let them see that the Christian life is the greatest life on earth.

Lord, what I want more than anything else is to love them and care for them as You love and care for me.

Thank You for being my loving Father. Help me to be their loving parent. Amen.

2. Talk to your child(ren) to learn the answers to at least two questions that are listed in the quiz on page 11.
3. Read Psalm 127 once each day for four days during the next week and write down one observation or insight about parenting after each reading.

Reading	Insight/Observation Noted
1	
2	
3	
4	