



*Welcome to the **How to Have A Healthy Family Seminar**. I am so honored to be with you. Words cannot adequately express how much you, your marriage, and your family mean to me.*

This material has been prepared with much prayer, study, and input from many godly leaders through the years. We trust it will be of great value in enriching your marriage and family. Solomon has said there is nothing new under the sun. So, you may see and hear some information you have heard before. It is wise to use this material to remind you of truths you learned and to teach you new principles to help your marriage and family be all the Lord intends for it to be.

As you follow along in this workbook, you will accumulate much information. If you miss filling in a point here or there, just skip it and go on to the next. When a session ends, ask your spouse or a friend to help you complete what you missed. You are invited to request a completed workbook by contacting me at stanponz@makeitclear.org.

I want to make myself available to answer any of your questions and offer Biblical advice. Remember, God has brought us together to help each other have the best marriages and families possible. Let us keep one another in each other's prayers.

For His glory alone,

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How to Build a Healthy Family

A healthy family always begins with a healthy marriage. By observing the media or listening to the “person on the street,” you will soon discover vast opinions on what relationships should look like.

The worldview focuses on ‘what’s in it for me’ relationships. This view begins with no lifelong commitment to any relationship, then moves to relationships with the same gender, then to some type of commitment to people of the same gender, and then to swap between genders based on personal “needs” at the time.

It is hoped that relationships are developed with the opposite gender, then some commitment to the opposite gender, and then a lifelong marital commitment to one person of the opposite gender.

Our focus will be on what the Bible teaches about people looking for a commitment to one person of the opposite gender for life. The Lord intends marriage to be between a man and a woman for life.

Have you thought about what motives bring couples to the altar? Why did you get married? Why do you remain married?

- Escape Motivation – To get out of the house and away from parent(s).
- Rehabilitation Motivation – I can help my mate improve.
- Nursery Rhyme Motivation – Girls are sugar and spice, and everything nice.
- Gratification Motivation – I can become somebody with this person and even properly satisfy sexual urges.
- Obligation Motivation – I owe them this: we have been dating long, or it is too late to back out now.
- Security Motivation – They will take care of me.

Those who study marriages have discovered four distinct stages in a marriage.

Stage #1: Honeymoon Stage – view spouse positively but not realistically.

Stage #2: Specific Irritation Stage – view marriage realistically, but develop a memory block.

Stage #3: General Dissatisfaction Stage – view marriage as not being what it is “cracked up” to be.

Stage #4: “We Try Harder” Stage – Either:

- We unleash continual attacks until our spouse or marriage breaks OR...
- We make all the necessary commitments to make the marriage work.

Most people today are looking for a great marriage.

However, great marriages aren't *found*; they are *built*. You will learn what it takes to have a great marriage. Should you and your spouse follow the Biblical principles in this material and sessions, you can build a maximum marriage and family with the Lord's help!

1. Benefit from Using the Correct **BLUEPRINT: The BIBLE**

While many blueprints exist to build homes, not all accomplish what they set out to do. There are many marriage manuals...even ones written by Christians. Yet the very best blueprint/marriage manual is the BIBLE. Why? Because the designer is God! He knows what a great marriage should look like, how one should be built, and how to maintain it.

However, having a blueprint and following should not be two separate issues. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Tim. 3:16,17)

2. Begin on the Sturdiest **FOUNDATION: JESUS CHRIST**

The larger and more stable homes are built on the strongest of foundations. But to have a strong foundation, it must be made of the best material. The only homes that can withstand the winds and floods of adversity are those built on the foundation

of Jesus Christ. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11). But what does this mean? Each marital partner needs to go to the blueprint (God's Word) and build their marriage on the foundation of a relationship with Jesus Christ. How is this done?

- A. Place your faith in Christ alone to become a part of His forever family (John 3:16).
- B. Let the Lord be the owner/manager/counselor of your life, marriage, and family (Rom. 12:1,2).

3. Build with the Best **MATERIALS: CONVICTIONS**

There is a difference between preference and conviction. *Preferences* may change with time and maturity. For example, kids' food choices may be hot dogs for dinner, while adults will likely have more fruit and vegetables. *Convictions* should never change. **A conviction is a belief I have that will never change, no matter how much it costs me.**

To build a great marriage, I must build with the best convictions. Therefore, I must maintain the following convictions no matter the cost!

Conviction #1: "I accept no justification or alternative to get out of my marriage." (Matthew 19:4-6,8,9; Romans 7:2,3; 1 Corinthians 7:27,39). And if so, there are very limited exceptions.

Conviction #2: "The purpose of my marriage is to develop spiritual oneness." (Mark 10:7-9)

Conviction #3: "I will never look lustfully at another person nor fantasize what it would be like to be with them." (Prov. 6:27-29; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

- I will keep my heart turned toward my spouse.
- I will keep my promise of loyalty.
- I will never let anyone come between us.
- I will realize I belong only to my spouse.

- I will understand that sexual intimacy is only to be with my spouse and is intended for:
 - Pleasure (Proverbs 5:18,19)
 - Procreation (Genesis 1:28)
 - Partnership (Genesis 2:18)
 - Purity (1 Corinthians 7:2)

Conviction #4: "I will fulfill my God-given role by surrendering my rights to meet the needs of my spouse." (Ephesians 5:21-33)

- Husband = "I will give my wife the gift of selfless **sacrifice.**"
- Wife = "I will give my husband the gift of selfless **respect.**"

Conviction #5: "I will demonstrate unconditional love to my spouse." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Colossians 3:19; Titus 2:4)

- *Love is patient* – putting up with their forgetfulness over and over again.
- *Love is kind* – assisting with the housework when they have a difficult day.
- *Love does not envy* – their important position at work or church, or the praise they get for their good deeds.
- *Love does not boast* – about having a larger paycheck, making fewer mistakes, or parenting better.
- *Love is not proud* – but admits they may be right about what direction should be taken when driving.
- *Love is not rude* – speaking respectfully to them in private and public.
- *Love is not self-seeking* – but looks for ways to help ease the other person's burden.
- *Love is not easily angered* – and won't even raise its voice when the other person does.
- *Love keeps no record of wrongs* – and doesn't bring up past issues when it's time to move forward.
- *Love does not delight in evil* – and does not coerce their partner into improper behavior.

- *Love rejoices with the truth* – by dealing with reality and making necessary changes.
- *Love always protects* – by not resorting to bitter, sarcastic criticism.
- *Love always trusts* – knowing that our security is in the Lord, not another person.
- *Love always hopes* – keeping the shared vision when their job is terminated or completed.
- *Love always perseveres* – growing stronger during times of adversity and affliction.
- *Love never fails* – though youth, health, and energy diminish.

Conviction #6: “I will pursue **open communication by seeking to **understand** before being understood.” (James 1:19; Ephesians 4:25-32)**

Why is communicating with one another so difficult?

- We take each other for granted.
- We want to avoid confrontation.
- We are focused on our own interests.
- We feel they are being manipulated.
- We are too hurried to take the time.
- We don’t want to hurt the other person.
- We have different spiritual gifts and personality styles.
- We don’t know how to communicate effectively.

How to improve communication when you feel your spouse is not listening

- Tell of your need to communicate.
- Don’t rehash old conversations.
- Begin with facts and not emotions.
- Then, move to the feeling and “personal conviction” levels.
- Keep in mind the best timing, tone, and techniques.

Conviction #7: “I will **never change my convictions even if the conditions of **culture** and **society** change.” (Gen. 2:24,25)**

- I will leave all earthly relationships for only my spouse.

- I will cleave [bond] to only my spouse.
- I will become one only with my spouse.
- I will enjoy intimacy only with my spouse.

NOTES

The Foundational Principles That Will Make My Marriage Work

Ephesians 5:21-33

We live in a day and time when the worldview is assaulting marriages. The divorce rate is up and remains up. Some statistics claim that even Christian marriages are not any better. Movies, TV, DVDs, and men's and women's magazines belittle marriage and commitment while promoting the so-called benefits of non-marital relationships or same-sex marriages.

The worldview of marriage has permeated the church, and the church has neglected or disregarded the clear teaching of what a Biblical marital relationship should be like. Christians today are unfamiliar with what the Scriptures teach and even find it hard to accept.

Scripture spelled out another worldview on thinking, acting, and living. It is such a high, holy calling to be a Christian and to have a Christian marriage. Therefore, we need to discover what will make marriage work.

1. What Makes **Christian Living** Work: **SURRENDER**

"Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is...be filled with the Spirit," v. 17,18b.

- It is more than just being important; *it is a command to be obeyed. And it has the idea of "keep being filled."*
- It is *God's will becoming* our will.
- It is the realization of His *presence in and with you.*
- It lets Him dominate *every area* of your life (*including marriage and family relationships*).

2. What Makes **Relationships** Work: **SUBMISSION**

"...submitting to one another in the fear of God." v. 21.

- It applies to *every* relationship.
- It must be done with proper motivation: *Reverence for Christ.*

- It can *only be done when we are "filled with the Holy Spirit."*

3. What Makes **Marriage** Work: **SELFLESSNESS**

- ✓ **HUSBANDS** are to give their wives the gift of **selfless SACRIFICE**: "*Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself [up] for her...*" v. 25
- ✓ **WIVES** are to give their husband the gift of **selfless RESPECT**: "*...let the wife see that she respects her husband.*" v. 33

HUSBANDS

How to Develop the Attitude of **Selfless SACRIFICE**

1. Understand the two examples to encourage your **selfless sacrifice.**

- The way that **Jesus loves the Church**. "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing...by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*" vv. 25-27.
- The way that **I love myself**. "*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*" vv. 28,29

2. Realize what **motivates** you to sacrifice yourself to **meet her needs.** "*...submitting to one another in the **fear of God.***" v. 21.

- It helps my wife grow in Christ!
- It draws her to me!
- It makes me happier!

3. Avoid the **barriers** that hinders your sacrifice.

- "My needs will go unmet." The Lord meets those needs.

- “My sacrifice will go unrecognized.” The Lord sees your selfless sacrifice.
- “My sacrifice will go unappreciated and unrewarded.” The Lord will reward your faithfulness.

4. Faithfully demonstrate the actions that show your selfless sacrifice by:

- Humbling yourself and forgiving your wife of all her offenses to you (Eph. 4:31,32).
- Doing the little things...daily!
 - One big sacrifice...Jesus died for the church (v. 25).
 - Daily little sacrifices...Jesus cares for the church (v. 29).
- Assuming your responsibility to be a spiritual servant/leader. The one responsibility I cannot ask my wife to take for me is the responsibility to be the spiritual leader in the family.
- Being aware of unhealthy “sacrifice”.
 - When I’m giving “to get” manipulation. Because you will stop sacrificing if you aren’t respected.
 - When sacrificial love turns to martyrdom.
- Remembering from where your power comes (Eph. 5:18b).

I was especially convinced to avoid any barriers in my marriage with Carol after reading the letter of resignation of Dr. Robertson McQuilkin, the former president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary. In March of 1990, he announced his resignation in a letter with these words:

My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far, I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear -- even terror -- that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of

anger when she cannot get me. So, it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of my announcement of resignation in chapel. The decision was made for me in a way 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel "in sickness and in health...till death do us part." So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me – her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not have to care for her, I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

WIVES

How to Develop the Attitude of **Selfless RESPECT**

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." vv. 22-24

1. Follow the example of **the Church respecting Christ.**

- **The Church** recognizes and responds to His leadership (His Headship). It is normal. Where there is no head, there is deformity and death. Where there are two heads, there is deformity and a "monster."
- **The Church** uses the "gifts" to carry out responsibilities. Some women feel that if they follow

their husbands, they must give up all their gifts, talents, and brains. When a woman gets married, she responds to her husband by using all the gifts God has given her.

- **The Church** follows Christ's leadership. It gives Him honor and respect.

2. Avoid **barriers** to respect.

- "There is nothing to respect." You can respect the "husband" position, not necessarily his performance.
- "Our marriage might not last." You can't control the quantity of years, but you can control the quality of years.

3. Keep in mind the **reasons** for respecting him.

- God commands it (1 Peter 3:1)
- You can do this when you fully trust the Lord to help you.
- Your husband needs it.
- You need it. When you give him respect and let him take leadership in the home, it will fulfill and complete you (not finish you off).

4. **Demonstrate selfless respect by:**

- Prayerfully giving your expectations and "rights" back to God while assuming your responsibilities. (Ps. 62:5,6)
- Deciding to accept him (Romans 15:7). How does Christ accept us? Unconditionally. We choose to accept our spouse once and for all, and then we continue to choose to accept them over again.
- Checking out your own faults first (Mt. 7:3).
- Focusing your thoughts and words on the positive (Phil. 4:8).
- Telling him and showing him your respect. Don't sweat the small stuff or challenge every decision. Look for the areas you can respect.

5. Beware of **unhealthy** respect, like:

- **Flattery** – faking respect to get what you want. That's manipulation.
- **Resignation** – when you mindlessly follow. You are not supposed to follow your husband's leadership when

it is contrary to the Word of God or when it hurts or harms you.

6. Remember where your power comes (Eph. 1:15-23; 5:18b)

NOTES

A Marriage That Thrives, Not Just Survives

Ephesians 5:21-33

According to a recent National Center for Health Statistics report, approximately 41% of first marriages and 60% of second marriages end in divorce, highlighting marital challenges. [latest research].

I received an email from a ministry called *Focused on the Family* on the high break-up rate in marriage. I believe it would be worthwhile to read it.

A big reason why the rates are so high said John Thomas, marriage and family policy analyst for Focus on the Family is that Christians are divorcing just as often as others.

"I think there is a weakness in the church in communicating why God created the institution of marriage," Thomas said.

But there is good news. Government leaders in Bible-belt states are leading the effort to stop the divorce judgment. The number one idea they're considering: covenant marriage.

In a covenant marriage, couples agree to undergo pre-marital counseling, limit grounds for divorce, and try counseling before they are granted a divorce.

The Oklahoma Governor proposed reducing divorce rates by 25% using a "Community Marriage Covenant." That proposal would include a four to six-month waiting period, pre-marital counseling, and mentoring couples for newlyweds.

The Arkansas Governor has declared a "state of marital emergency" and is considering legislation that would include a covenant-marriage plan.

Tony Perkins, a former Louisiana State Representative and the father of the covenant marriage law, said, "Covenant marriage attempts to address a growing realization that the no-fault divorce experiment has failed."

Obviously, we do not live in the Bible Belt, but who can deny that divorce is at an all-time high rate here? And who would not want a better, healthier marriage...more than one that is emotionally divorced but still living together? Remember...divorce can happen to you!

The FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The One Thing that Makes Marriage Work...SELFLESSNESS!****

- **WIVES** are to give their husbands the gift of **selfless RESPECT** "...let the wife see that she respects her husband." v 33 **Respect shows gratefulness and admiration for the value God has placed in his life!**
- **HUSBANDS** are to give their wives the gift of **selfless SACRIFICE**: "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself [up] for her..." v. 25. **Sacrifice means giving up yourself to meet the needs of your wife!**

Ephesians 5:21: "...submitting to **one another in the fear of God."**

Walls have been built between spouses—one brick at a time, set with cement and mortar. The walls keep spouses apart in intimacy, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, roles of who does what, correcting mistakes, and handling differences...to name a few.

*"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be **united** to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*
Ephesians 5:31-33

Verse 31 is taken from the Old Testament, Genesis 2:24.

To help us learn how to be *united* (as it says in the NIV), we need to look at the very first married couple...Adam and Eve.

From the beginning – the marriage of Adam and Eve was designed with two marital attitudes:

- The attitude of **Wonder**
- The attitude of **Oneness**

The unifying power in marriage is our selflessness...the **decision** to sacrifice, and the **decision** to respect.

Question...How Do You Change Your Spouse?

You cannot **make** someone change!

You can **invite** someone to change!

What are some ways we try to get people to change? Nagging, "reason" the other person to death, silence (pouting), pressuring, holding back favors, or getting your needs met outside of marriage (like work, hobbies, sports, shopping, the kids, other relationships, or affairs)

The most powerful way to *invite* your husband to change is through **respect**, and the most powerful way to *invite* your wife to change is through **sacrifice**.

Don't try to do what only the Holy Spirit can do. Our #1 struggle with respect and sacrifice is that they make us vulnerable. Vulnerability is at the center of love.

How Does the Principle of RESPECT and SACRIFICE Work in Six Important Areas of My Marriage?

1. Making Contact – Communication

RESPECT means being **careful** with my words.

SACRIFICE means being **open and available** in my communication.

√ Matthew 12:34b: "...for out of the abundance heart the mouth speaks."

√ Ephesians 4:15a: "...but speaking the truth in love..."

- √ Ephesians 4:29a: *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification..."*

Four Principles to Remember About Communication

- Healthy communication fuels all healthy relationships. Cars need fuel to run, and they need fuel *regularly*.
- Communication is always "from the heart".
- The foundation of communication is trust.
- Communication that makes a healthy marriage is positively honest.

2. Making Decisions – Problem-Solving and Decision Making

Now that we have learned that there is a spiritual leader in the house, does that mean the husband makes all the decisions? How do you work out your problem-solving and decision-making?

RESPECT causes the wife to look for the value in her husband's opinion before looking for the flaw.

SACRIFICE causes the husband to consider the wife's needs, opinions, and input before pressing to achieve his wants and make wise decisions.

- √ 1 Corinthians 13:4,5: *"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil"*
- √ Philippians 2:2-4: *"Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."*

3. Making Love – Romance and Intimacy

Women tend to think of **romance**.

Men tend to think of **intimacy (sex)**.

Christians often don't want to talk about sex and romance. When they do, it brings back flashes of immorality, etc. Yet married Christians do need to talk about it. If we don't, we will get the worldview, which is not necessarily God's view. The key to healthy intimacy is when both the husband and wife are selfless.

Marriage is a decision to be faithful and specialize in **one person** – for life!

Refuse outside intimacy – Prov. 5:15: "*Drink water from your own [well]...*"

Rejoice in marital intimacy – Prov. 5:19: "*Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love.*" 1 Corinthians 7:3-5: "*Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*"

Why is sex so important anyway?

Because it reaches down into the depths of the soul.

Wives – **RESPECT** my husband's God-given **need**.

Husbands – **SACRIFICE**, don't demand and never demean...but **delight**.

4. Making the Bed – Roles, Who Does What?

Galatians 5:13-15 "*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'* But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

The key to who does what is **SELFLESSNESS**. And it begins with the right attitude.

Ask yourself three questions:

- Is my home a place of indulgence or service?
- Is my home a place of law or love?
- Is my home a place of fighting for my rights or of giving my spouse what they need?

Wives – Serve him with selfless **RESPECT**

Husbands – Serve her with selfless **SACRIFICE**

5. Making **Mistakes** – When My Spouse **Blows It**

Three things you must live with:

- My spouse has “character flaws.”
My response: **Accept** their flaws!
- My spouse makes mistakes...Major mistakes!
My response: Have compassion and show **understanding**
- My spouse sins
My response: **Forgiveness**
 - √ Galatians 6:1 *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”*
 - √ Ephesians 4:32 *“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted and forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”*

6. Making **Peace** – Handling Our **Differences**

Men and women are different. Their cells are different. Men tend to be goal-oriented. Women tend to be relational. Men tend to be apart from their surroundings. Women tend to be entwined with their surroundings.

God clearly wants men and women to be different. God not only made our bodies different, but He also made our brains different. He did, so we would “complement” one another.

Our differences can become our greatest enemy...or our greatest strength.

Romans 15:5-7, *"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, receive one another, just as Christ also received us to the glory of God."*

Selfless respect and selfless sacrifice help us to say:

"We can be together what we could never be alone."

"We're both right."

"We need each other to see the complete picture."

My marriage is more than a place for my needs to be met.
My marriage can become a picture of the love of Christ.

Ephesians 5:32, *"This is a great mystery [this being one], but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

When we allow Christ to work in our marriages:

- It gives us **joy!**
- We encourage the **Body of Christ.**
- We witness to the world around us that Jesus is authentic and trustworthy, and He can **change us!**

If Christ can change a life, He can change a marriage.

Digging Deeper:

1. Lessons to **learn**: Compare the following Scripture to Ephesians 5:21-33... Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 19:7,8; 21:2.
2. Lessons to **do**:
Husbands: Put down the newspaper this week.
Wives: Pick up a newspaper this week.
3. Lessons to **apply**: Have a quiet date in the next two weeks to discuss the six principles of respect and sacrifice. Make a commitment to your spouse in each of those six areas.

Signs of A Super Parent

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Parenting children today becomes increasingly complicated as society deteriorates due to sin. No family is immune to its effects. There is no such thing as ignoring children and expecting them to mature properly. It takes constant diligence.

What makes a super parent is not necessarily how kids turn out, but how much effort parents put into learning and practicing biblical parenting skills.

The apostle Paul, a preacher and a teacher, spent 1 ½ years “parenting” his spiritual children in the church he planted in the city of Corinth. Yet after he left and they were, so to speak, on their own, they manifested every sign of baby and immature Christians.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul displays all the characteristics of a super-parent of misbehaving “children.”

Let’s peek at how you can become a super parent and respond to children who should know better. ***You would...***

1. **Love** Your Children – V. 14a

“I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children...”

2. **Admonish** Your Children – V. 14b

“...as my beloved children I warn you.”

Definition: “Warn” from the Greek word, *noutheteo* = “put in mind, caution, admonish.”

Explanation: It is a type of instruction with a warning intended to change one’s thinking (values) to change one’s habits, behavior, and lifestyle. The idea is to state what is wrong.

To do this with children requires:

- √ A knowledge of God’s Word – Hebrews 5:11-14 cf. Romans 15:14.

- √ A lifestyle of consistently applying God's Word – Hebrews 5:14a.
- √ An understanding of good and evil – Hebrews 5:14b.
- √ An awareness of their lifestyle (implied).
- √ A compassionate heart and tongue – Acts 20:31.

3. Help Your Children Come to Faith in Christ Alone – V. 15

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

Whose responsibility is it? Dad should assume this responsibility first (Deut. 6), but if not, then Mom (2 Timothy). And if neither of them shares it, then any brother, sister, or family member, like a grandparent (2 Tim. 1), who can correctly, clearly, and compassionately, should do it!

Your *responsibility* (1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1; 2:2) is to...

- √ Know the Word of God.
- √ Know the importance of your children knowing how to go to heaven – Matthew 19:13-15.
- √ Know the simple plan of salvation (gospel) – 2 Timothy 3:15.
- √ Know how to present the salvation plan on your child's level.
 - Use easy terms for the hearer to understand: 1 Cor. 14:7-9.
 - Use clear illustrations = from life, from objects, from stories.

Your *resource* is the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the sins of the world, including your children.

- √ Use Scripture to present the plan and person of salvation.
- √ Explain the chastening of the believer in light of his rewards.
- √ Sense when:
 - to close the conversation
 - to come to a decision.
 - to come back again to talk about the gospel – salvation vs. service and grace vs. works.

4. Be a **Model** for Your Children – vv. 16,17a

"Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord..."

The definition of the word "imitate" comes from the Greek word *mimeomai*, which means to imitate, mimic, and follow. It sounds like mimeograph – making copies. The word is:

- √ Always used in exhortations.
- √ Always used in the continuous tense, suggesting a constant habit or practice, and usually practiced after a first decisive act. It teaches what we became at the moment of our salvation that we must diligently continue to be thereafter – W.E. Vines.
- √ Always used in a good sense.

Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to imitate him so accurately that he sent Timothy (another son in the faith who fully knew Paul – 2 Timothy 3:10,11) to remind them.

Do you want your kids to be replicas of you? Scripture says you should encourage them to be imitators of you – as you are to be imitators of Christ. Kids typically have a built-in desire to mimic others – rock stars, athletes, TV and movie celebrities. They often dress up like mom and dad when they are young!

But what we really want them to imitate and mimic is our character, values, and Christ-like lifestyle. Ask yourself, do I want my child to grow up and:

- √ Read the Bible as much as I read now?
- √ Serve in the church as much as I serve now?
- √ Give of their financial resources as I give now?
- √ Share the gospel as frequently as I share now?
- √ Have the same ideas about God (a biblical worldview) as I have now?
- √ Respect and follow spiritual leaders as I am now doing?

5. **Instruct** Your Children – v. 17b

"...I teach everywhere in every church."

The phrase "to teach" in this passage comes from a Greek word, *didasko*, which means "to give instruction."

What was to be taught was the following:

- (1) "The faith" – Deuteronomy 6:4,5
 - √ That Jehovah is one God
 - √ To love Jehovah Elohim with all heart, soul, and might.
 - √ Including essential doctrines such as the Deity, verbal plenary inspiration, and salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ.
- (2) The law – Proverbs 4:1-4. In verse 2, the word law is *torah*.
- (3) To seek wisdom. An example is David, who taught this to Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:9,10.
- (4) God's person and performance – Psalm 78:1-8.
- (5) The Holy Scriptures – 2 Timothy 3:15.
- (6) Attention to the "book" of Proverbs.

How children should be taught:

- (1) "Teach" possibly refers to *principles*.
- (2) "Talk" possibly refers to *practice*.

6. **Discipline** Your Children – vv. 18-21

"Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?"

By knowing...

- (1) What *does* discipline mean?
 - √ The words discipline and disciple come from the same root word. Dr. Henry Brandt, a well-known Christian psychologist, wrote in his book *Build a Happy Home with Discipline* [Wheaton Scripture Press, Inc., 1960, pg. 2]

that a parent is “a partner with God in making disciples of their children.”

- √ Discipline is a combination of love and firmness. See Hebrews 12:5-7; Proverbs 13:24.
- √ Discipline involves two significant actions, which are taken from two Old Testament Hebrew words:
 - Correction that requires instruction. The Hebrew word *towkachath* refers to reproof, convince, correct, reason, or rebuke. Discipline is not discipline if it is only a rod or tongue-lashing. It is interpreted as anger, resulting in humiliation, exasperation, and despair. (Colossians 3:21 cf. Proverbs 29:17)
 - Chastisement that involves the use of the rod. The Hebrew word *yahsaars* refers to chastisement with a rod. The word “rod” is used or referred to at least eight times in the book of Proverbs, meaning discipline.
 - Discipline early = Prov. 13:24; 19:18
 - Discipline consistently = Prov. 22:15 cf. 23:13.

(2) How discipline is administered:

- √ With dignity and dialogue – Job 23:3-7; Proverbs 15:1,2,4 [Children see vv. 5,10,20].
- √ With corporal means (the rod rather than the hand)
- √ With compassion – Proverbs 3:11,12

(3) What *violations* bring on discipline? Some include:

- √ Proverbs 22:15 – foolishness – the Hebrew word *eveyl* means silliness, the tendency toward rebellion, mocking of God, perverseness, defiance, and orders their steps without authority.
- √ 1 Corinthians 4:18 – arrogance.
- √ 1 Corinthians 4:19,20 – lack of self-control (implied), backtalk, disrespect, disobedience

Lessons to Live by:

1. Kids are fragile, so handle them with compassion, consistency, and responsibility.
2. Remember, the memories of a super parent are made by what we do today.
3. Take one sign of a super parent and begin to do it now.
 - He loves his children – 4:14a
 - He admonishes his children – 4:14b
 - He evangelizes his children – 4:15
 - He is a model for his children – 4:16,17a
 - He instructs his children – 4:17b
 - He disciplines his children – 4:14-21
4. Use the example of the best Father of all – your heavenly Father!

NOTES

Five Tools to Build A Godly Family?

Back in the 1990s, there was a very popular sitcom called *Home Improvement*. It starred Tim Allen and others and was about Tim "The Toolman" Taylor, host of the home-improvement show "Tool Time," who certainly was not as handy at home as he is on screen. He and his wife, Jill, raise three boys racing toward adulthood. The Taylor family often relied on next-door neighbor Wilson, who provided unconventional wisdom and perspective to the Taylors' personal and familial crises, and his side-kick "Al Borland," who seemed to know how to navigate tools and fix things.

The show was hilarious, demonstrating Tim Taylor's misadventures as a bumbling home improvement specialist on "Tool Time" and in his home.

Perhaps we all have felt, from time to time, like we bumbled our way through fixing things around the house *and* "fixing" things with our family. Learning how to experience *home improvement* and knowing and using the tools is really not that complicated.

First, we must remember that tools are not toys to play with or weapons to do battle with. Tools are to be used to repair and build things (or people).

There are lists available of three, seven, ten, or more tools to have in your toolbox. We could have made similar lists of tools to have in our *godly family* toolbox. However, we will learn the five most important tools to have in your toolbox.

1. Our Bible

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is a tool for growth, not a weapon for punishment! Parenting is challenging, and the Bible is the tool to help us have answers to the questions and issues we face. Being a

parent without knowing the Bible is too difficult. Parenting is far too challenging.

2. Our **Example**

"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)

Kids are more impacted by example than almost any other way.

Parenting must be taken seriously, especially if you are a single parent and must share your kids every other week, then two weeks during the summer, or more.

I absolutely enjoy teaching the Bible and helping unchurched people come to faith in Christ alone and grow to become fully obedient worshippers of God. But I know others can do the task. Only one person can be a father to my kids, and that's me. And if I let this other task, which many people can do, get in the way of what I can only do, I've missed God's will for my life in this area.

David Frost interviewed Billy Graham, and he said his only regret was that he didn't spend more time with his kids. If there was ever a person who did more to populate heaven and have his kids walking with the Lord today, it is Billy Graham. Yet he said he wished he had spent more quality time with his kids.

Parenting requires us to make choices. We must put some things off so we can raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

3. Our **Words**

The Bible is crystal clear about the importance of our words. They are one of the foremost tools we have, *"A word [spoken in right circumstances] is like apples of gold in settings of silver."* (Prov. 25:11)

[Why this section on parenting is for everyone...1) You may be a parent committed to godly parenting, 2) you may know other parents who need help, and you want to know what you can say to them, and 3) these principles, especially on using our words, is helpful in any relationship]

Let's be honest and admit we have all used our words in a way that didn't necessarily build up someone. Even James talks about how difficult it is to tame the tongue.

While we focus on nurturing our kids with our words, kids, you might look at the following five points on using your words to honor your parents.

- **When someone is worried...speak kindly.**

Let me ask you: do you worry about anything, or do you have a child who worries? While kids worry about things that don't seem important to us, they are very important to them. So, when they worry, speak kindly to them. *"Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad."* (Proverbs 12:25)

Is home a dark attic of anxiety or a bright place of peace? Words can make a difference. Kindness is caring about the details. Let me be candid; sometimes, when Carol or one of our kids expressed worry, and I was not Spirit-filled (influenced), my response was – "Get over it!" When I was doing better, I would say, "Everything will be okay," as if the prophet had spoken! But when I am Spirit-filled (influenced), I listen to their fears and concerns (details) and try to find words of Scripture to share in a soft tone.

- **When someone is angry...speak gently.**

What do we naturally do when an angry person speaks loudly to us? We respond even louder! And they respond to us even louder, and... But the Bible says, *"A [gentle] soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."* (Proverbs 15:1)

What are gentle words? They are words that are humble, simple, truthful, and to the point. Gentleness does not necessarily mean quietness. We can give a zinger quietly. It's called under-our-breath mumbling!

How do we break the cycle of anger that goes on all day? It starts with ME, using gentle words. This can change my relationship with my kids and my family!

- **When someone is deciding...speak wisely.**

"The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:2,23)

If we don't help our kids when they are younger, we lose the opportunity when they are older. Sometimes, we forget how vital advice is and just give our opinions quickly without thinking through what we say.

You can't help them with every decision they have to make, but we should teach them how to make decisions.

- **When someone is hurting...speak encouragingly.**

"As you know how we exhorted you, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God..." (1 Thess. 2:11,12a)

Sometimes, it seems like we live in alternative homes on the range, "where seldom is heard an encouraging word and the skies are cloudy all day." Ann Landers said that out of all the questions she was asked, the most asked were variations of the one question, "What's wrong with me?" Encouragement is helping a person see his situation from God's perspective.

- **And before you speak...LISTEN!**

"...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:" (James 1:19). Usually, when we are listening, we are mostly thinking about what we are going to say next, so we don't hear what the other person is saying or hear wrongly what the other person is saying.

To be better parents, we need to listen more. *“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.”* (Prov. 18:13)

4. Our Prayers

What is the most important gift you can give your child? A quality education? A healthy diet? A childhood full of fun memories? A large inheritance? A box full of Legos? A home filled with love?

All these wonderful gifts can significantly impact a child, but one of the greatest gifts you can give your child is your prayers for them.

If God is our children’s Creator (Ps. 139:13), the only One who can save them (Acts 4:12) and effectively change them from the inside out (2 Cor. 3:18), what could be more important than faithfully bringing them to God in prayer?

And yet, I’m sad to say that it has not always been my priority. Praying for my kids has sometimes been like my workout routine—weak, sporadic, and aimless.

Jesus gives guidance to strengthen and equip us as we pray for our kids. Here are six simple prayer principles to consider:

- **Plan a Time and Place to Pray (Lk 11:1)**

“Now...as [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’”

Jesus’ disciples came to Him after He finished praying “in a certain place.” In Luke’s gospel, Jesus repeatedly pulls away from the crowds to pray with His Father. He prays before big decisions (Lk 6:12), all alone (9:18), and sometimes with others (9:28).

Prioritize prayer for your children by scheduling a time slot in your schedule.

In addition to personal morning prayer time, my wife and I take a few minutes every night to pray with our children in their bedrooms as we put them to sleep. We all plan for those things that are important to us, so plan a place and time to pray for your children.

Father God, grant me the grace, wisdom, and strength to organize my daily schedule so that prayer for my kids is demonstrated as the priority that I know it is.

- **Bring Your Children to their Heavenly Father (Lk 11:2a)**
"He said to them, 'When you pray, say: "Our Father...""

Jesus begins His model prayer by referring to God as His "Father." When we purposefully address God as our "Father" as we pray for our children, we are reminded that children are ultimately not ours; they are God's. If our children have been "born again" through faith alone in God's Son, Jesus Christ, they are children of God and become our brothers and sisters in Christ. Begin your prayers by addressing God as Father and remembering He will always love your children more than you do.

Father, I acknowledge that the children who call me daddy are not my own. As a steward of these precious gifts, I bring them to You to ask how You want me to parent them.

- **Submit to God's Sovereign Plan (Lk 11:2b)**
"...hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come."

Jesus continues His prayer by calling for God's holy Name to be revered and God's kingdom rule to be accomplished. As a dad, I'm often more concerned that my name is respected and that my plans for the family are carried out.

However, Jesus' prayer reminds me that our identity and mission as part of God's family are ultimately more primary than the reputation of the Ponz family. I have plans and hopes for my kids, but these must take a backseat to God's

good and sovereign will. I must submit to God's plans because He is the King of my heart and our home.

Father, I submit to You as King and ask that You reign over my heart and home. Guide my planning for my children so that together we might serve Your kingdom purposes for Your glory.

- **Ask for Daily Provision and Protection (Lk 11:3-4)**
"Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation..."

Jesus lists a few different examples of requests to make to our heavenly Father. It is very easy for me to default to praying for the urgent physical needs of my children, including their health and safety, but fail to prioritize their spiritual needs. They need both the provision of daily bread and protection from sinful temptations. They need to grow healthy and strong and grow in love, forgiving others who have wronged them. By God's grace, we must care for what food goes into their bodies and what attitudes come out of their hearts.

Father, I pray that You would cause my children to grow physically and spiritually every day, protected from the temptations of Satan, who desires to harm their souls and bodies.

- **Don't Stop Praying for your Child (Lk 11:5-10)**
"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (v. 9)

After Jesus' model prayer, He gives a brief story about a dad who reluctantly helps out a friend who repeatedly knocks at his door and asks for help in the middle of the night. Jesus gives this illustration to teach about the power of persistence and determination in prayer and concludes, "...ask [and keep on asking], and it will be given to you; seek [and keep on seeking], and you will find; knock [and keep on knocking],

and it will be opened to you.” If you are a parent like me who wonders if your children will ever overcome specific sin struggles, don’t stop praying! There’s nothing impossible with God.

Father, please help me faithfully labor in prayer for my children, knowing that You have invited me to persist in prayer and that nothing is too hard for You.

- **Pray with **Confidence** in the Father’s **Goodness** (Lk 11:11-13)**

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (v. 13)

Jesus concludes His teaching on prayer by using yet another illustration of fatherhood. When our children ask us for good things (like a fish or an egg), we don’t respond with evil gifts (a serpent or a scorpion). How much more will our good heavenly Father give us (and our children) exactly what we need?

If God doesn’t give your children what you are praying for, you must trust that it is not truly good for them. In this gospel account, Jesus highlights our children’s greatest need and His New Covenant gift—the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Father, in Your perfect wisdom as a gracious Father, I trust that You will always answer prayers by giving my child only what is good for them. Above all, I pray that You save them so they might have the Holy Spirit’s presence.

Praying for your children involves lifting them to God and seeking His guidance and protection for their lives. It can include praying for their health, safety, spiritual growth, and well-being. It’s a way to support them on their journey, nurture their hearts, and protect them from harm.

Here's a more detailed look at how to pray for your children:

1. Gratitude and Praise:

- Start by expressing gratitude for the gift of your children.
- Acknowledge God's role in their creation and development.
- Praise God for His love and provision.

2. Specific Prayers:

- **Protection:** Pray for their safety and well-being in all areas of life.
- **Health:** Ask for their physical and mental health.
- **Guidance:** Pray that they will trust in God for His plans for their lives.
- **Faith:** Ask that each of your children, grandchildren, and their spouses will trust in Christ for their salvation and that they will know and love God intimately.
- **Relationships:** Pray for positive relationships with friends and family.
- **Wisdom:** Ask for wisdom to make good choices and to discern right from wrong.
- **Character:** Pray for traits like humility, compassion, and generosity.
- **Purpose:** Pray that they will find and follow the Lord's purpose in life.
- **Power:** Pray that they would know and use the power the Lord has given them in the Holy Spirit when they trusted Christ as their Savior (Eph. 1).

3. Scripture and Guidance:

- Use Scripture as a basis for your prayers, like Psalm 103:17, which speaks of God's everlasting love.
- Reflect on verses that speak of God's protection and guidance.
- Pray for God to help you teach and model good values to your children.

4. Ongoing Prayer:

- Make prayer a regular part of your daily life.

- Consider praying together with each family member separately and as a family.
- Don't stop praying for your children, even as they grow up.

5. Specifics for Different Ages:

- **Young children:** Pray for milestones, learning, and growth.
- **Teens:** Pray for discernment, wise choices, healthy relationships, and a godly future spouse.
- **Adults:** Pray for their spiritual well-being, relationships, and purpose.

Our parenting prayers demonstrate our dependence on God and our trust in Him as the One who gives His Holy Spirit and effects lasting change in our child. May God grant us the grace to be faithful parents who labor in prayer.

**Adapted from *Jesus' Guide for Praying for Your Children* by Gary Dalrymple and others.*

5. Our Friends

Friends can significantly impact a family, both positively and negatively. Positive friendships can provide emotional support and companionship, strengthening family bonds. However, negative friendships or those that encourage conflict can strain family relationships. The frequency and quality of interactions with friends can also influence how much time individuals spend with family.

- **Positive Impacts:**
 - **Emotional Support:** Friends can offer emotional support and companionship, especially during challenging times.
 - **Socialization and Skill Development:** Friends provide socialization and social skill development opportunities, contributing to a child's overall development.
 - **Stress Reduction:** Spending time with friends can help individuals cope with stress and may lead to healthier coping mechanisms.

- **Improved Well-being:**
Social support from friends can enhance psychological well-being, leading to a greater sense of meaning and purpose.
- **Complementary Relationships:**
Strong friendships can complement family relationships, providing different types of support and companionship.
- **Brain Activity Synchronization:**
Studies have shown that close friends can have similar brain activity patterns, suggesting a deeper connection.
- **Negative Impacts:**
 - **Strain on Family Bonds:**
Friends who engage in negative behaviors or encourage conflict can strain family relationships.
 - **Negative Peer Influence:**
Their friends can influence children and teens, potentially leading to negative behaviors or choices.
 - **Reduced Family Time:**
Spending excessive time with friends may lead to less time with family, potentially affecting family dynamics.
 - **Parental Conflict:**
Friends' influence can sometimes lead to conflict between parents and their children over choices or behaviors.
- **Key Considerations:**
 - **Spiritual Health and Development:**
Friendships can add value to all family members if the friends are spiritually healthy and growing in their relationship with Christ.

A **principle** of Biblical friendship is found in 1 Cor. 15:33, which *states*, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits [character].'" It is a warning about the negative influence of those we associate with. The verse emphasizes the importance of carefully selecting our companions and the potential harm of being around those with negative traits or beliefs.

A **pattern** of Biblical friendship is found in the relationship between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18-20).

A **prayer** for Biblical friendship by David can be found in Psalm 119, "I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts." (v. 63). "Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word." (v. 74). "Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies." (v. 79).

- **Individual Differences:**
The impact of friends on a family varies depending on the individuals involved, the nature of the friendships, and the family's overall dynamics.
- **Parental Role:**
Parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's friendships and ensuring they are positive influences.
- **Cultural and Societal Norms:**
Cultural and societal values can influence the importance of friendships versus family relationships.
- **Age and Development:**
The influence of friends can change as individuals age, with friendships becoming increasingly important during adolescence and young adulthood.

These tools—our Bible, example, words, prayers, and friends—must be integrated into our *godly family* toolbox.

Let's keep this in mind:

1. **Knowing** these essential tools doesn't mean we have these tools in our toolbox.
2. **Having** these tools in our toolbox doesn't mean we use these tools.
3. **Using** these tools doesn't mean we use them correctly, confidently, compassionately, courageously, and consistently.

Digging Deeper

1. Lessons to ***learn***: Read 2 Timothy chapter 3 and find the verse when Timothy began to learn the Scriptures. Who were his primary teachers? (See 2 Timothy chapter one)
2. Lessons to ***do***: Review the five ways you can use your words with your children (and your parents). At the end of the week, make a list of what the situation was and what you said.
3. Lessons to ***apply***: If you are comfortable, let me know how you used these essential tools to build your Godly family.

NOTES

How to Get Along Better With Others

Philippians 2:1-11

What do you think is one of our world's most significant causes of unhappiness? The *surface* cause is strained relationships. When people can get along with others, things just seem to go better. To have a successful business, the employees must work together. For teams to experience more "wins," players must work together. To have a successful marriage, the husband and wife must work together. To have an effective and healthy church, we must work together. Success is never really a one-person show.

Very little gets done without cooperation, but there is power and potential with unity. The big problem is that people don't get along. The *root* problem is a non-existent or broken relationship with God.

Today, we will learn how to have a healthy relationship with the Lord and others.

You will notice the apostle Paul was not interested at this time in himself or in being released from jail...but in the spiritual and social well-being of the dear Christians in Philippi. Sounds like a parent, committee chairperson, boss, team captain, pastor, or...He desperately wants them to work together. So, he gives the *appeal to get along, the attitude to get along, and the action steps to get along.*

Let's learn: ***How to Get Along Better with Others!***

The *Appeal* to Get Along

"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded..."
(2:1,2a)

What did this appeal look like?

The "therefore" implies that Paul is here expanding on the exhortation (Phil. 1:27), "In one Spirit, with one mind (soul)." He urges five influencing motives behind his appeal in this verse,

- 1. Consolation in Christ.** Have you not been consoled in Christ when lonely, rejected, or betrayed?
- 2. Comfort of love.** "If there is any comfort in Christian love, in God's love to you, in your love to God, or your brethren's love to us, in consideration of all this, be you like-minded." – Matthew Henry
- 3. Communion of the Spirit.** Just like the Godhead is in communion with each other, we can be in communion with the Spirit. Therefore, they can be in communion with one another.
- 4. Compassion.** If you expect the benefit of God's compassion for yourselves, be compassionate to one another. *Affection and mercy* often must go together.
- 5. Completing one another's joy.** "If you have found any benefit by your participation of the gospel of Christ, if you have any comfort in it, or advantage by it, fulfill the joy of your poor minister, who preached the gospel to you." – Matthew Henry

The church at Philippi had many excellent qualities. Outwardly, things looked great, but internally, things weren't so good. So, the apostle Paul appealed to them to get along better with each other.

Why was this appeal so important?

- 1. Paul was concerned about **personal strife**,** *"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."* (4:1-3).
- 2. Paul was aware of how **essential unity** was to the Lord and to the church,** *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep*

through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are." (John 17:11).

3. Paul was mindful that a lack of like-mindedness stunted spiritual growth, and the example to others would be disastrous.

The *Attitude* to Get Along

*"...having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."
(2:2b)*

Human behavior specialists know that correct behavior comes from correct attitudes. Correct attitudes come from correct thinking; Paul explains the proper way Christians are to think and feel *before* he tells them how to act.

For us to get along better with others, we need to have:

- 1. The same *love*,** *"fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love..."* The same love of Christ, for Christ, and for one another.
- 2. The same *soul*** *"fulfill my joy by...being of one accord..."* Greek, *sunpsuchoi* from *sun* and *psuchê*, "harmonious in soul," are souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other. Today, we would call these 'soulmates.' We would have the same purpose and passion for such things as fellowship, growing in the Lord, and being trained to do ministry, outreach, and worship.
- 3. The same *thinking*,** *"fulfill my joy by being like-minded...of one mind."* Like clocks that strike at the same moment. Perfect intellectual telepathy. Identity of ideas and doctrinally 'on the same page' Romans 12:5,16, *"so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another...**Be of the same mind** toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion."* Romans 15:5-7, *"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to **be like-minded** toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with **one mind** and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Therefore receive one another,*

*just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." 1 Cor. 1:10-13, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be **perfectly joined together in the same mind** and in the same judgment For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided..." 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, **be of one mind**...Greet one another with a holy kiss..."*

Doesn't it amaze you to some degree how many people can't get along with one another? Talk to anyone in law enforcement or the legal world, or marriage and family counselors, or to almost anyone in the clergy, and they will all tell you that there seems to be a growing epidemic of conflict.

You can go as far back as the Garden of Eden with the world's *first family*...Adam and Eve with their sons Cain and Abel. Conflict upon conflict.

We can bring this problem closer to home. Pick up any daily paper, and you will read about a conflict between different groups.

And then we can get personal. If the truth were told, there has been conflict in your family this week, maybe even this morning. Whether over one issue or a chronic problem, conflict still seems to be a way of life.

Everyone will have difficulty getting along from time to time. No one is immune to it, and not all conflict is necessarily wrong. You can read the life of Paul the apostle, who even wrote a letter to the church at Philippi explaining *how to get along better with others*, and discover that he had conflicts with all sorts of people.

Yet the admonition from the Lord through His Bible writers to all of us is to, *as much as possible, live at peace with all men!*

The Action Steps to Get Along

1. Eliminate Unhealthy Competition – v. 3a

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition..."

We often compete not with the other team but against ourselves. Selfish ambition includes motives of rivalry and a lack of humility. In 1:17, the same word describes those who shared the gospel with pretense.

When I think of rivalries, I think of "sibling rivalries," like those between brothers and sisters. But that still can go on even as adults. You can compete for attention, position, or anything your selfish heart wants.

James 4:1: *"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"*

We live in a competitive world, and it begins in the nursery, then daycare, then the soccer field, then college, then career, then life, then retirement, then assisted living. It is a life of one-upmanship.

We must begin today to eliminate unhealthy competition!

2. Cease Conceit – v. 3b

"Let nothing be done through...conceit..."

This is nothing more than vain boasting, empty glory, and pride. Remember how Scripture addresses this:

- √ *Pride causes contention and quarrels, "By pride comes nothing but strife..." (Proverbs 13:10)*
- √ *Pride's consequence is destruction ...especially in relationships, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18).*

The first step in getting along with others is eliminating unhealthy competition. The second step is ceasing conceit. Unhealthy competition and conceit breed quarrels. By eliminating competition and conceit, we can solve many problems in the world today!

3. Don't Criticize – v. 3c

"...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

When people lack humility, they have a high opinion of themselves and a low opinion of others.

Don't we live in a society that thinks they are better than everyone else?

Humility is not thinking less of you; it is not thinking of yourself at all. The focus is on Jesus and others. James also says, "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (Jas. 4:11,12)

To get along better with others, eliminate unhealthy competition, cease conceit, and don't criticize. Instead, value other people!

4. Show Consideration – v. 4

"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

To show consideration, we need to look at the needs of others. The word "look" comes from the Greek word *scopeo* and means "to look with consideration" of a need...this could mean "heed." We get the word "scope" like on a rifle. This would mean we should focus on the needs of others.

Husbands, do you know and show consideration for your wife? Wives for your husband? Kids for your parents, your brother, and your sister? Church members for other members?

It is easy to get along with others when we eliminate unhealthy competition, cease conceit, don't criticize, and show consideration.

5. Develop **Christ-Likeness** – vv. 5-11

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those of earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

No one is better at relating to others than Jesus Christ. He is our model. If we have His attitude, we will undoubtedly get along with others (v. 5). Have this attitude in yourselves that is also in Christ Jesus:

- (1) *"Who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God:" v. 6*
 - *Jesus didn't demand His rights, though He could have "grasped" or "held on to" them. When we demand our rights, we get into trouble. Christlikeness is letting go of our rights, letting God have them, and defending ourselves.*
- (2) *"but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." v. 7a*
 - *Jesus didn't empty out His deity but instead gave up His rights (v. 6) and now His privileges v. 7a. What did He give up? J. MacArthur writes, "1) heavenly glory—while on earth He gave up the glory of a face-to-face relationship with God and the continuous outward display and personal enjoyment of that glory (John 17:5); 2) independent authority—during His incarnation Christ completely submitted Himself to the will of His Father (see note on Mt 26:39; John 5:30; Heb. 5:8); 3) divine prerogatives—He set aside the voluntary display*

of His divine attributes and submitted Himself to the Spirit's direction (Mt. 24:36; John 1:4-9); 4) Eternal riches—while on earth Christ was poor and owned very little (2 Cor. 8:9); and 5) a favorable relationship with God –He felt the Father's wrath for human sin while on the cross (Mt 27:46; see note on 2 Cor. 5:21)"
[MacArthur Study Bible, pg. 1823]

Kenneth Wuest wrote, "The only person in the world who had the right to assert His rights waived them."

- (3) *"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." v. 8*
- Jesus didn't just die. He died a shameful, painful death.*
 - His entire attitude was like the opening of a telescope. Each truth opened to the next, where Christ was not only a manservant but also obedient. He was not only obedient; he was obedient to the point of death. He was not only obedient to the point of death; his death was shameful and painful.*
 - This lifestyle of humility and unity to get along with others is impossible. It can only be done when Christ lives His life in you. And that only happens when you trust in Christ alone to save you and then choose to allow Him to live this lifestyle through you.*

NOTE: The glorious reward that Christ described in vv. 9 – 11, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- While we are not to be worshipped, the Lord does reward humility in us by exalting us as well: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5:6)*

If you ask, "Why can't I have it my way?" You're never going to be happy. You must commit to getting along better with others. And then commit to:

- *Eliminate Unhealthy Competition – Is there competition going on in your marriage? Over free time? Over TV? Over money? Over anything?*
- *Cease Conceit – Do you always have to be right? Couldn't your parents be right? Or your kids be right? Or could church leadership or membership be right?*
- *Not criticize – Do you give more pokes than strokes?*
- *Show Consideration – Do you take those closest to you for granted?*
- *Develop Christ-Likeness – Are you thinking and acting more like Christ?*

By choosing to respond to Paul's [which is God's] appeal to get along better with others and developing an attitude of Christlikeness, you will want to take the necessary action steps to get along better with others. The benefits are absolutely astounding!

Appendix

How to Rescue a Damaged Relationship

Many relationships lose their spark over time, but it isn't always a sign that things are broken beyond repair. What might feel like a dying relationship can often be saved or restored with a mutual commitment to making things work.

You've heard it a million times, but it bears repeating: even the strongest relationships face challenges.

Building a happy, healthy partnership takes work and may not always be easy, especially when there's been a breach of trust.

Issues are a part of life and a part of being in a relationship. The goal is not to fixate on the past but to work to create together meaningfully.

So, how do you go about that? Here are some tips to get you started, whether dealing with the fallout from a betrayal or trying to keep a long-distance relationship going.

When you're in a long-distance relationship or going to be apart due to external circumstances

Being physically apart, more often than not, can be rough on a relationship. Keeping the romance alive takes extra effort on everyone's part.

Manage expectations

Have a discussion with your partner about your exclusiveness and commitment to each other. What does this look like for each of you? What are you comfortable and uncomfortable with?

Being honest and upfront about your expectations can prevent more issues from happening as you go forward.

Have regularly scheduled visits

It's critical that couples know and have scheduled times to be together and can look forward to those with a plan to make them special.

Research has shown that long-distance relationships where partners plan a reunion are less stressful and more satisfying.

Set aside time for online dates

If you cannot organize scheduled times together due to significant distance or finances, set up regular online dates with a theme or specific focus.

Don't just go for your usual conversation topics. Cook a meal together, watch a movie while you keep the video chat open, play a virtual game, or even read Scripture together, taking turns. And always make time to pray together. Do as much in a virtual visual way rather than just phone calls.

Don't let your world revolve around your partner

While paying attention to fostering closeness in a long-distance relationship is essential, that aspect shouldn't consume you.

No matter how much you miss them, don't forget about other important areas of your life.

Keep up with your hobbies, interests, and ministry activities — a happy and healthy relationship involves each partner being their own person.

When you live together

No matter how you dice it, going through a rough patch when you live together is stressful.

Plan a regular 'check-in'

Consider setting up a specific time each week or so that allows you to talk about more difficult topics, such as money, sex, and trust, so that these don't bleed over into all of your interactions.

Learn to compromise

All relationships require give and take. When living in close quarters, accommodating their needs and preferences without sacrificing your own can help foster more happiness and fulfillment.

Consider working out some kind of temporary agreement that allows each of you to unwind at home alone.

For example, maybe you stay a little later at the gym on Tuesdays and Thursdays while they hang out with a friend on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Spend time with friends outside of your relationship

Spending time with friends who add value to you and your relationship can have a powerful effect on your mental health and can help strengthen your identity.

Remember, staying connected to your spouse means having a life outside your relationship.

Engage in affectionate physical contact

It is helpful to regularly hug each other in a fully present and connected way. Holding hands or hugging releases oxytocin, reducing stress and boosting your mood.

If you're not on great terms right now, this might be easier said than done. Try starting slow — simply putting your hand on theirs can help to show that you still care.

Don't be hooked on romance

Deep-level intimacy is about creating a satisfying and meaningful relationship that isn't always based on romantic expression.

Sure, many people want to be swept off their feet occasionally, but it's essential to genuinely respect and enjoy your spouse for who they are, outside of what they can give you.

When you've just had a big fight

Picking up the pieces after a big fight can seem impossible. Try these techniques to help you each move forward.

Use skilled communication

Once tempers have calmed down, it's essential to make sure you each have a chance to get your points across. Try to give each person space to communicate their point of view.

Being open and honest about one's thoughts and intentions about the relationship itself and the future can restore — or newly create — a sense of safety in the relationship.

Speak from your heart

For your partner to truly hear you, it's essential to communicate your feelings beneath all the tension.

For example, avoid accusatory phrases like, "You did this to me!" Instead, aim for something like, "When X happens, I feel Y, and I think it would be helpful if you could do Z to reassure me or prevent that from happening in the future."

Actively listen

If you catch yourself forming a rebuttal in your mind as someone is talking to you, you're not listening carefully. You are likely getting ready to defend yourself or go to battle.

You can win the argument but lose the health of the relationship. If your spouse feels that they lost, it will likely contribute to more distance, tension, and resentment, so in the long run, you lose, too.

Break the pattern

When rebuilding the relationship, consider it a new one with the same person rather than saving an old one or starting a new one with a new person. It creates an opportunity for defining rules and boundaries from the beginning.

It means striving to understand and work through underlying issues and letting go of past resentments you've been holding onto.

When you just aren't feeling it

A lack of passion or a case of the "mehs" doesn't automatically mean your relationship is beyond repair.

Look at the upside of your relationship

Spend a week noticing or writing down everything your spouse does "right."

People tend to see what they're looking for. If you're looking for reasons to be mad or upset with your spouse, you'll probably find them. But this works in reverse, too. Keep your eyes peeled for the good things.

Say 'thank you' for the small things

Similarly, don't just silently observe your spouse's right-doings. When they do something helpful, even if it's just tidying up the kitchen after a meal, verbally thank them.

Have fun together

Sometimes, you just fall into a rut. It might sound cliché, but setting aside some time, even for only a few hours, to do something out of the ordinary can make a big difference.

Psychological research shows that spouses who play together experience more positive emotions and report greater happiness.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Take a one-time class together.
- Put together a puzzle, together.
- Grab a board game you each used to love and head to the park.
- Scan your local weekly paper for unusual events. If you're unsure what the event entails, plan to go check it out together, whether it's a craft fair or a car show.

Maintain intimacy and communication

Determine how to take care of each other emotionally.

What does this mean? Commit to giving each other a heads-up when you're drifting apart.

Sit down together and look at what might be causing that. Have you each been wrapped up in work? Has it been too long since you spent the day enjoying each other's company?

Committing to work on the relationship is just as crucial as being committed to your spouse.

Frequently asked questions

How do you save a broken relationship?

How you save a damaged relationship can depend on the cause of the damage. Still, strategies should involve restoring trust, intimacy, and communication and committing to repairing the relationship. Consulting with a professional, such as a couples' biblical counselor, may help provide specific strategies you can try.

Is there a way to save a dying relationship?

You may be able to save a dying relationship if you and your spouse commit to rebuilding it.

Vital strategies include active listening, compromise, honesty, and communication.

More specific advice can depend on the reasons your relationship is damaged.

How do you bring a relationship back to life?

You can potentially restore a relationship by both spouses committing to noticing what the other does right, having fun together, and finding ways to take care of each other emotionally by building intimacy.

Can you save a relationship after falling out of love?

You may be able to save a relationship by remembering or rediscovering the things you like about your partner, engaging in physical contact if both partners want to, and doing things to have fun and make memories together, like attending a one-time class. Or just treat each other the way you did when you first met!

The bottom line

Ultimately, you'll need to evaluate whether the relationship is worth the work required to save it from a low point. Biblically, marriage is a life-long commitment, but can be broken by infidelity, abandonment by a non-Christian spouse, abuse, or even the safety of the children.

Ensuring everyone involved is committed to saving the relationship is also essential. If you're the only one willing to do the work, reconciliation isn't likely.

That said, abuse of any kind, whether it's physical, verbal, or emotional, is a red flag. Keep in mind that signs of toxicity can be subtle. Are you walking on eggshells around your spouse? Have you lost your confidence or sense of self?

If you have any inkling that you might be experiencing abuse of any kind, consider reaching out to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233).

When there's been a breach of trust

Anytime trust is broken, a rift will occur in the relationship. It might be painful to face these issues but leaving them unaddressed will not help anyone in the long run.

Take full responsibility if you're at fault

If there has been infidelity or trust has been broken, it's essential to take full responsibility for what happened and understand how your behavior hurt your spouse.

Avoid becoming defensive or sidestepping your mistake or sin, but don't fall into self-loathing either. You should create the space to start rebuilding trust by lovingly owning it.

Extend compassion and care to the person you hurt

If you've hurt your spouse, it's easy to fall into a spiral of shame and disappointment in yourself. But that's not going to help either of you.

Rather than spend all your time beating yourself up over what you did wrong, try shifting that energy toward showing care and compassion to your spouse.

Give your spouse the opportunity to win your trust back

While you have every right to feel hurt and angry, there should be a desire to work on the relationship.

Trust can never be restored until the person whose trust was broken allows their spouse an opportunity to earn it back. Love and forgiveness are free, but trust must be earned, which takes time.

Practice radical transparency

Instead of bottling up emotions, be "radically transparent" with each other about what has hurt them. It involves carefully and truthfully getting it out there, even if you feel silly or self-conscious about certain things. However, speak the truth in love lovingly.

If you're the one who broke the trust, this also involves being radically transparent with yourself about what motivated you to do so. Was it simply a lapse in judgment? Or was it an attempt to sabotage a situation you didn't know how to escape?

Consult with a professional

Broken trust can take a toll on everyone in the relationship.

If there has been a significant breach, consider working with a qualified biblical counselor who specializes in relationships and can guide the healing process.

When Stonewalling Occurs

Say you're dining out for the evening with your spouse, and you both begin discussing that one thing that always gets both of you going — and not hot and heavy. Maybe it's finances or the division of household chores.

You start expressing your side of things, only to have them abruptly stop talking. This leaves you staring into your meal, feeling angry, alone, and resentful.

It turns out there's a word for this frustrating kind of behavior: stonewalling. It's a way of emotionally checking out.

We've all been guilty of this at some point, whether by clamming up during a fight or refusing to make eye contact when we're mad.

Here's a look at some of the classic signs that can show up in a relationship and steps you can take if you recognize them on your own.

What does it look like?

Stonewalling happens when you try to avoid anger by ignoring conflict. The person retreating is generally overwhelmed and starts shutting down as a way of self-soothing and calming themselves down.

While it's normal to use the silent treatment as a coping mechanism occasionally, it's a red flag when the behavior turns chronic.

A person who stonewalls may be unable to express their feelings and find it easier to disengage. It can look like:

- Closing their eyes during an argument
- Turning away

- Checking their phone nonstop in the middle of a heated discussion

They may also change the subject or use one-word answers to avoid talking. And when they *do* say something, they'll use these common phrases:

- "Do whatever you want."
- "I'm done."
- "Just leave me alone."
- "I have to get out of here."
- "I can't take it anymore."

Is it just a 'guy thing'?

Many people assume that stonewalling is more common in men. While older research indicates that men are more likely to withdraw from difficult conversations compared to women emotionally, it's a myth that it's only a "guy thing."

Anyone can give the cold shoulder. It's generally a defensive tactic learned in childhood.

Is it that bad?

It may not seem like a big deal, but refusing to speak can be a serious issue in several ways.

It creates a sense of isolation

Stonewalling isolates both of you instead of bringing you together toward a resolution.

It can end a relationship

Even if it creates a feeling of relief at the moment, regularly "checking out" is a destructive habit that eventually deteriorates your relationship. According to researchers at the Gottman Institute, when women stonewall, it's often a predictor of possible divorce.

It can affect your health

If you're the stonewaller, you can experience physical reactions, such as elevated heart rate and rapid breathing.

One 2016 Trusted Source study found that emotionally shutting down during conflict was linked to backaches or stiff muscles.

Is it a form of abuse?

When determining whether the behavior has turned abusive, looking at intention is essential.

Someone who is stonewalling often feels unable to express their emotions and will "freeze" you out to protect themselves.

Conversely, stonewalling can also create a power imbalance by allowing the other person to decide when and how you'll communicate.

Keep an eye on whether their behavior has become a manipulative pattern that reduces your self-esteem or makes you feel fearful and hopeless.

If their silent treatment becomes deliberate with the intent to hurt you, it's a clear red flag that they're trying to dominate the relationship.

Is there any way to work through it?

Stonewalling doesn't necessarily mean the end of a relationship, but feeling safe when communicating is essential. Here are some ways to restore communication.

Avoid lashing out

It's important not to become hostile or force the other person to open up, especially if they're already feeling overwhelmed.

Instead, calmly let them know you're willing to hear what they say. Taking the time actually to listen can help de-escalate a difficult conversation.

Take timeouts

When stonewalling occurs, it's OK to give each other permission to take a break. It can help you both feel reassured and cared for.

Whether you're the person who tends to retreat or it's your spouse, allowing the space for timeouts can help you both avoid becoming overwhelmed during a conflict.

Seek help from a qualified biblical counselor

Reaching out to a couple's biblical counselor early on can deepen their connection and foster healthier communication.

A biblical counselor can also help each of you explore the reasons behind a spouse's silent treatment.

They can work on helping them better express their emotions and cope with conflict.

Remember that relationships are two-way streets and require an openness to outside help from both spouses.

The bottom line

We all need a break occasionally, especially when dealing with tough conversations. But refusing to engage in productive discussions, even difficult ones, won't do anyone any favors.

There are ways to work around stonewalling. But if it seems part of a larger pattern of manipulation, it may be time to rethink things.

*Adapted from articles by Cindy Lamothe and others.

How to Nurture My Kids

Ephesians 6:4

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training [nurturing] and admonition of the Lord."

We should remember that a healthy family results from Spirit-filled living, and Spirit-filled living is respectful and selfless!

1. Wives are to make the selfless choice to give unconditional respect to their husbands.
2. Husbands are to make the selfless choice to give unconditional love to their wives.
3. Children make the selfless choice to obey and honor their parents.
4. Parents make the selfless choice to nurture their children in the Lord.

Why is it essential to invest time in parenting?

1. Most parents today are unaware of what the Bible says about parenting.
2. Biblical parenting is the most effective way to raise children to become spiritually and socially healthy adults.
3. Scripture records how emphatic the Lord is on what our kids should be taught and how our kids are reared.
4. Frankly, it is not enough time to do this awesome subject justice.

What does it mean to "nurture"? It means to set up an environment for growth. Are parents responsible for growth? No. You only *nurture* your children to grow. Different environments produce different growth.

- √ *Hothouse environment.* They look "healthy" in the hothouse but wilt when they enter the world.
- √ *Japanese Bonsai plants.* They are constantly being clipped but never allowed to grow and expand.
- √ *Neglect.* They are let go wild but starved.

What are the tools used in nurturing? Our Bible, example, words, prayer, and friends!

What Does Nurturing Involve?

1. Nurture Them in the Training of the Lord "...bring them up in the training [nurturing]...of the Lord." (v. 4)

- **As a Christian parent, I am responsible to...LOVE my children.**

Psalm 103:13 says, "As a father pities [has compassion] his children, so the LORD pities [has compassion] those who fear Him." Titus 2:4 says, "that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children," The word admonish means "to cause someone to be of sound mind and to have self-control." The idea is that younger wives and mothers must be taught these truths. So, if you struggle to love your kids, you must learn how.

Three ways to love your kids:

(1) Unconditionally. We should be aware that we shouldn't leave the impression, "If you do this, I'll love you or love you more." When we unconditionally love our kids, it makes up for many of our mistakes = we reap what we sow. The Bible says, "Love covers the multitude of sins."

(2) Personally. We are to love our kids by spending time with them. Love each child *separately* and *individually*.

(3) Practically. It is done by demonstrating 1 Cor. 13:4-7. Your fun assignment is to go home and make a list from the passage of how you can demonstrate love practically to each of your kids, corporately and separately.

- **As a Christian parent, I am responsible to...DISCIPLINE my children**

(Proverbs 3:12) "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights."

(Proverbs 13:24) "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."

(Hebrews 12:7-11) *"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom the father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."*

Notice the following truths from these passages:

- **Everyone needs discipline.** Why? We have a sinful nature and need to know how it hurts us and everyone around us.
- **Discipline is painful.** If you put Christians and many psychologists together, you will have a lively discussion on the subject of whether children should be spanked. I want to know what the Bible says; it says that if you don't spank, we hate our kids. Obviously, it doesn't say to abuse the child or spank out of anger, or that it's the only kind of discipline. It is done rarely, carefully, briefly, and is age-appropriate (not teenagers or older elementary age).
- **Discipline is for the benefit of the one disciplined.** Not because we parents want to look good or vent our anger. It *is* to produce righteousness and peace in the one being disciplined.
- **Our short-term discipline is for God's long-term blessings.** This way, we can share His holiness.

So when we discipline, we ask ourselves, how is my discipline like God the Father's discipline?
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- **As a Christian parent, I am to...LEAD my children to the Lord**

Many people ask me how I know when my child is ready. So, I thought I would take a moment and answer this.

Many say, "I don't want to force my kids to decide." And I agree, but the extreme other side of letting them make up their mind is equally dangerous because we are letting them choose whatever or whomever to believe!

It is disheartening to hear parents say to their kids, "You need to sign up for soccer, Little League, music, or dance." But when it comes to Christianity, "You need to make your own choice." That's wild. This is the most critical decision they will make. We can't make it for them, but we should strongly influence and lead them. And, of course, God will draw them if the gospel of Jesus is correctly, clearly, and compassionately explained to them.

You will discern when they are ready when they know the difference between right and wrong.

How Do I Lead My Child to Christ?

- (1) Lead them to Christ. Don't drive them to Christ!
- (2) Make the issue trusting in Christ alone, nothing else. It's not faith in faith or prayer. It's faith in Christ!
- (3) When giving assurance, emphasize a fact, not a date.
- (4) Don't base their salvation on their behavior. Remember, they may be Christians, but they are still children!
- (5) Keep the terms biblical and easy to understand.

- Larry Moyer, EvanTell

- **As a Christian parent, I am responsible to...PRAY for my children.** We should already be praying *with* our children, but we must also remember to pray *for* our children. And vice versa. After they grow up and move out, we pray with them over the telephone and when we see them. See: 1 Samuel 2:1-10.
- **As a Christian parent, I am responsible to...PROVIDE for my children.**
 - Provide for their basic needs.

- Provide for their future.
- Show them how to get, guard, and give their resources. See Proverbs 13:22; Psalms 37:25,26.
- **As a Christian parent, I am responsible to...PROMOTE my children's SPIRITUAL GROWTH**
 - How to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ
 - How to be a member and participate in God's family
 - How to grow to spiritual maturity in Christ
 - How to minister to others
 - How to share their faith correctly, clearly, confidently, compassionately, and consistently both locally and globally

Children may learn Bible stories, truths, and verses in Sunday school, Child Evangelism Fellowship, and AWANA, but it is in the home that they learn Christ-like love, godly attitudes, and Christian living.

- The average church has a child 1% of the time; the home has him 83% of the time.

- Columbia University spent \$250,000 on a research project, only to corroborate what we learn in Scripture – the #1 influence on a child's life is in the home.

2. Nurture Them in the Teaching of the Lord

This has to do with God's Word.

- **What do parents teach their children?** *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."* (Deuteronomy 6:4,5)
 - The LORD is the only God and is our God, the LORD alone.
 - To love the LORD with all your heart [mind], soul, and strength.
- **How do parents teach the Scripture to their children?**
 - **You personalize them.** *"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart."* (Deut. 6:6). They are to be in your heart first.

- **You verbalize them.** *"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."* (v. 7)
 - Teach them diligently (impressively). It refers to *principles*.
 - Talk to them. It refers to *practice*. (1) Meals, (2) in your car, (3) when going to sleep, and (4) when getting up in the morning.
- **You visualize them.** *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."* (v.8, 9) You can make them visible. Where did people put messages in the Old Testament? They put it on their hand and frontlets between their eyes. Where do people put messages today? On refrigerator doors, plaques on the wall, computer screens, calendars, sticky notes everywhere! Even on T-shirts. However, you display Scripture, make sure the emphasis is on the Word, not how creative the display is.
- **You memorize them.** *"you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul..."* (Deut. 11:18)

Remember:

"submitting to one another in the fear of God." (Eph. 5:22)

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 4)

Families can change!

- * Your family life does not have to be determined by how you were raised, not if you are filled [dominated, influenced] by God's Spirit.
- * It does not have to be governed by how it has been if you are now filled [dominated, influenced] by God's Spirit.
- * It does not have to be limited to what it is now, [dominated, influenced] by God's Spirit.
- * It can become what God and you want it to be, [dominated, influenced] by God's Spirit.

Digging Deeper

1. Lessons to **learn**: Read through the lives of the following Bible characters and pick out as many examples in their lives that would illustrate the parenting responsibilities that should be taught today – Moses' mother, Hannah, Lois, and Eunice.
2. Lessons to **do**: Memorize Ephesians 6:1-4.
3. Lessons to **apply**: Using the list of responsibilities for Christian parents, list what, when, and with which of your children you will apply each responsibility.

Tips for the Parent(s) Who Blew It with Their Children

My life experience is more the norm rather than the exception.

I'm not necessarily referring to the sensational chaos that my family exemplified, but that my family is representative of the standard, in that very few children come from God-centered, gospel-loving, gospel-motivated parenting models.

Though your sin list or your family's sin list may be shorter than mine or not nearly as dramatic, you more than likely came from family dysfunction to whatever degree that is. If this is true, you're part of the majority report.

My purpose in writing about my child-rearing experience is to draw attention to the grace of God. Like me, if anything good happens to our kids, God's grace brings about the good rather than our wise and well-thought-out parenting strategies.

This worldview is not a call for parental sloppiness or to say that gospel-motivated parenting doesn't matter. But we must have a proper perspective: it is by the grace of God that any of us are saved or will experience salvation.

Paul Miller said the best counseling advice you will ever receive is to pray for yourselves and your children. Prayer is the most essential and valuable component of our parenting.

It's Not Too Late

It's never too late for your children, regardless of their age. If your goal for your children was for all of them to experience salvation at a young age, you may be disappointed and discouraged. Not every child becomes a Christian, and not every adult becomes a Christian.

I did not know John 3:16 at the time that God saved me. It had to be explained to me. From a human perspective, there was little hope for me. But my condition, situations, contexts, and lack of Bible knowledge did not hinder God from doing what He wanted to do in my life. Death is the only experience that makes it too late for the unsaved to know Jesus in a salvific way.

Be Theology-Centered

Let your theology drive your hope and understanding rather than your feelings. Your feelings may cause you to think it is too late, but you must remind yourself that those feelings are not born out of sound theological thinking.

If you believe it is too late for your children and you're partly the cause of where things are now, you must inform your thinking with a better theology. Sound theology is not hopeless. And regardless of the mistakes that you may have made, the gospel has not lost its power. As sound theology drives your understanding, start speaking to yourself with that sound theology.

Don't Compare Yourself

Guard your heart against comparing yourself to others. The woman in the temple gave two copper coins (Luke 21:1-4). And because of her gift, she received heaven's attention and applause. Be careful about judging yourself based on wrong cultural or religious expectations. The only opinion that truly matters is our heavenly Father's.

The gospel-centered person should be able to rejoice in what God has done for his friends, even if the Father has not done the

same for him. And if your children have not trusted Christ as their Savior or are not living for God, this does not make you any less loved or precious in God's eyes. Inform your mind with the gospel.

Watch Out for Self-Pity

Guard your heart against **self-pity and doubt**. When we yield to the temptation of self-pity, we essentially say we are self-sufficient. The self-reliant person becomes depressed, discouraged, or some other form of self-pity or doubt when things do not go according to his plans.

What is going on is that the person has a high view of himself and is discouraged because he did not meet his self-imposed expectations. The humble, dependent, and gospel-centered person will exercise hope in God, even when things do not make sense or there seems to be no way forward. What you may believe to be a failure does not necessarily mean God is not at work. The gospel is the most profound illustration of this.

Guard Against False Guilt

Distinguish between real guilt and false feelings of guilt. You have made some mistakes in your parenting, as all parents have. I have made more mistakes than I can recall. Making mistakes is part of who we are and the reason Christ came.

When our heavenly Father reveals your mistakes to you, take ownership of them and fix them. But make sure that what you believe to be a mistake is indeed a mistake. It would be wise to talk to someone you trust and who knows you, who can bring the Bible to your situation, to get help thinking through what is real and what is not. Take responsibility for what is legitimate and guard your heart against false guilt.

Teach Them Always

Tell your children what you have learned, regardless of **how old they are**. If God is showing you a better way to parent or giving you wisdom, even though your parenting responsibilities are

mostly over, go to your children and let them know what you have learned.

You may need to change your thinking about the wrongs you have done. Several times, I have gone to our children, admitting I was wrong in thinking about and practicing specific aspects of our parenting. Humility and transparency could have an incredible effect on your children, even if they have their own families. Here are a couple of examples:

1 – Perhaps your children have already learned that you were wrong in certain areas, but do not feel free to talk to you about some of your not-so-effective parenting practices. Your humility and transparency could open the door to a new and better relationship with your child.

2 – Perhaps your children are not as informed as they need to be on parenting their children. Maybe this “late in the game wisdom” you have gained will serve them and their children’s children for generations to come. It would be unwise and unkind to withhold what our heavenly Father is teaching you, regardless of when you learn it.

Don’t Fall for Accusations

Guard your heart against your children’s accusations. If your children blame you for how they turn out, own what you need to, but consider walking them through the weakness or wrongness of their argument and the misguidedness of their anger.

Most of us could make excuses because of how someone sinned against us. I’m not saying that being sinned against is not real or does not hurt, but at some point in our lives, we’ve got to “get over it” and choose to follow God.

Nobody sinned against anyone more than we sinned against Christ, but He was able to understand it and respond correctly to it. And if Christ is truly in us, we should also be able to understand and respond rightly to the sins of others. And just maybe, we will be able to walk our children through a God-centered perspective on how we have sinned against them.

For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This excellent Ephesian text has historically been used to explain that there are no good works a person could do to save them, but only faith in Christ is enough to save us. That is the theological and historical meaning of the passage. However, it would serve many parents if they applied it to their parenting.

Not only were you saved by the grace of God, assuming you are a Christian, but so were your children if they trust Christ as their Savior. As I said earlier, this is not a call for poor parenting, but an Ephesian perspective is essential.

Because of God's wondrous grace, all of us can be saved, including our children. Parent the best you can, but hope in and pray to the Father even more. God is the One who will ultimately change our children.

Now, to the most challenging part...working toward the apology!

Would you apologize to your children if you messed up?

Many years ago, I would have said no. I was of the mind that to apologize to a child would mean that they would begin to question my authority.

Besides, I don't remember adults ever apologizing to me when I was a child.

Consider for a moment, however, what it would feel like to have received an apology from a parent; for a parent to have said, "I was out of line and said some hurtful things. You don't deserve that, and I am so sorry."

As a parent of young children (or even teenagers), there will be moments when you don't show up as your best self. These are moments when frustration and anger get the better of you, and you snap, perhaps saying something you don't mean or being overly aggressive.

You may have an overwhelming sense of guilt after or during these moments. You may have thoughts such as:

“I am a horrible parent.”

“I am ruining my children.”

The guilt and shame that you feel when you yell at your child are natural. However, it can cause you to ignore an essential part of parenting:

The Repair

Here’s the thing. You are human. You can feel a full spectrum of human emotions and sometimes become so overcome with an emotion that you forget that your children are tiny humans, new to this world.

You are the adult with more experience. I won’t tell you that you *should* know and act better because the truth is that your overwhelming emotions are an indicator that something is not in alignment with your values or your desires.

Sometimes, your emotions get the best of you, and that’s OK.

When this happens, though, owning up to your mistake is essential. Apologizing to your child sets an example. You show your children that even adults make mistakes—that you are human and can sometimes react without thinking and cause hurt or pain to another person.

By apologizing, you demonstrate to your child the importance of owning your mistake and making amends. You also show your child how to appropriately apologize for hurting someone else, an important life skill.

Finally, the follow-through allows your child to observe change and growth in others, and they will learn to expect this from future partners and friends.

Before we get into how to repair your child after an incident, let’s first decide what is *not* an apology. It is not:

Ignoring the need for an apology.

It is a common leftover belief from earlier generations that adults never apologize to children.

The belief that adults are always right or know better than children fuels this idea and can lead you to believe that you don't owe your children an apology.

Gaslighting.

The first experience children have with gaslighting often comes from the adults around them.

When children recall a moment that may or may not have happened the way they remember it, it is essential to validate their experience rather than tell them that the way they remember it happening is inaccurate.

"I'm sorry, but ..."

It is not an apology; this is an excuse. Take ownership of your response to a stimulus. Your child may have broken your favorite vase or lied about sleeping at a friend's house before you lost your cool, but their behavior doesn't dictate your reaction.

Silent treatment.

Similar to ignoring the need for an apology, the silent treatment is avoiding talking about the situation or even addressing your child for an extended period.

So, how do you make a proper apology?

It is essential to ask for forgiveness as soon as possible (Matt. 5:23,24).

An apology has four components:

Own your mistakes. Admit you messed up and are working to do better.

Reconnect. Sit with your child. Acknowledge their feelings. Let them be seen.

“I’m sorry I hurt you.” Acknowledge the impact you had, even if it was unintended.

Reflect. Take time to consider your behavior and what emotions might have triggered your reaction.

An apology to a younger child might sound like this:

“I had big feelings earlier and said/did some things I did not mean (*ownership*). That was probably really scary for you. (*reconnect/validation*). I am sorry that I hurt you. It is never your fault when I yell like that (*acknowledge*). I will do better next time. **Will you forgive me?**”

The (*reflection*) part of an apology is separate from your apology. It is where you work to understand the trigger, what emotion it brought up in you, and the childhood message or pattern that lies underneath, so you can heal the wound that the trigger exposed.

Apologizing to your children is essential to their emotional intelligence. It teaches them that people take responsibility for their actions and helps them build trust that people will do the right thing. Apologizing will also support your child’s understanding of their own emotions by validating their experience, allowing them to develop self-trust.

It’s never easy to take accountability when you make a mistake, but like anything else in life, the more you do it, the easier it becomes.

*Adapted from an article by Rick Thomas and many others, including the school of hard-knocks

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An expanded outline of this manual is available upon request!