

Purposeful PARENTING

Six Steps to Bring Out the Best in Your Kids

Turn Chaos to **Calm**, Stress to
Sanity, and Confusion to **Clarity**

JEAN S. BARNES

ENDORSEMENT

There are plenty of parenting books that will tell you to love your children even in the tough times but in *Purposeful Parenting*, Jean Barnes tells us how to love them and how to transform the challenges into life-changing events for our children. She goes beyond the “what to do” to the “why to do it” while guiding us to inject purpose and meaning into the life of each child. This is so rich, and you will be such a better parent for integrating the principals into how you are raising your kids.

—STEPHEN ARTERBURN

Founder and Chairman of New Life Ministries

Host of the #1 nationally syndicated Christian counseling talk show

New Life Live! and host of *New Life TV* (tv.newlife.com)

Founder of Women of Faith Conferences

Nationally known public speaker

Best-selling author with over 8,000,000 books in print

Purposeful
PARENTING

Six Steps to Bring Out the Best in Your Kids

JEAN S. BARNES





*Love when it's hard to like,
turn chaos to calm,
find sanity in stress,
bring clarity from confusion,
discipline without guilt,
and never give up.*



Copyright © 2015 – Jean S. Barnes

All rights reserved. This book is protected by the copyright laws of the United States of America. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The use of short quotations or occasional page copying for personal or group study is permitted and encouraged. Permission will be granted upon request.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Emphasis within Scripture quotations is the author's own. Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from The LivingBible; Tyndale House, 1997, © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Many of the names and identifying characteristics of individuals depicted in this book have been changed to protect their privacy. Some of the individuals described are composites of two or more people.

The author and publisher of this book intend for this publication to provide accurate information. It is sold with the understanding that it is meant to complement, not substitute for, professional medical and/or psychological services.

Published in association with the Literary Agency of Dupree Miller & Associates, Dallas, Texas, and New York, New York.

Destiny Image Publishers
P.O. Box 310, Shippensburg, PA 17257-0310
"Promoting Inspired Lives"

This book and all other Destiny Image, Revival Press, MercyPlace, Fresh Bread, Destiny Image Fiction, and Treasure House books are available at Christian bookstores and distributors worldwide.

Cover design by: Prodigy Pixel.

For more information on foreign distributors, call 717-532-3040.

Reach us on the Internet: www.destinyimage.com

ISBN 13 TP: 978-0-7684-0677-1

ISBN 13 Ebook: 978-0-7684-0678-8

For Worldwide Distribution, printed in the U.S.A.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 / 19 18 17 16 15

DEDICATION

For my sons,
Thomas and Michael Van Dyck,
who have grown up to be the men
I dreamed they would be,
men who are pursuing their purpose and passion
to make the world a better place.

SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR YOU—SIX GUIDING STEPS FOR THEM

1. Love unconditionally because love is the tonic that cures all and covers all.
2. Discipline because you care to get things right.
3. Pursue passion and purpose because finding your mission and message matters.
4. Develop character because tending the heart shapes their souls.
5. Grow in responsibility because owning up is growing up.
6. Persevere to the end because going on keeps you strong.

CONTENTS

Foreword	We All Need Help <i>by Dr. Jill Hubbard</i>	17
Introduction	Parenting Takes Three	21
Chapter 1	Love: More Than a Hug	39
Chapter 2	Discipline: Teach the Child You Treasure	79
Chapter 3	Purpose and Passion: Give Them the World	117
Chapter 4	Character: Shape Their Souls	157
Chapter 5	Responsibility: “I’ve Got This”	185
Chapter 6	Perseverance: Never Give In	213
Conclusion	Parenting Takes a Team	249
	My Prayer for Purpose	267
Appendix	Your Skills and Abilities Checklist	271
	Notes	273
	Acknowledgments	295
	About the Author	297

*...because you can tend the heart to do the
right things for the right reasons*

Foreword



WE ALL NEED HELP

Every day, I talk with people who struggle with their jobs, marriages, certain relationships, and creative endeavors and dreams, and I'm reminded life is challenging at best. It's so easy to feel stuck and entrenched in difficulty much of the time.

No wonder so many people want an escape, to get away and be saved from trouble and challenge, especially when it comes to the burdens and vulnerabilities felt in parenting. Raising the next generation is not for the faint of heart. In fact, it's downright daunting in today's world.

Everyone can identify with having been a child and the innocence and smallness that goes with it, especially, as ironic as it seems, when you're the parent. Yet even when adults are overly pressured with life and may have given up hope for themselves, they maintain hope for their children. They hope somehow life will be better for their kids, they hope even while striving and struggling to hang in there, even when weary. Too often, though, the gulf between what one hopes and wishes for their children, and their own resiliency to make it happen, seems to ever widen.

When I was pregnant with my first child, more than eighteen years ago, I became keenly aware of this and how touchy new parents can be. I positioned myself defensively. I wanted to guard against my lack of assuredness in the newly crowned role of Mom, but even this was mixed with an air of proud expectancy. I was like a child trotting off for the first time in Father's oversized shoes, exultant and unsure at the same time. Questions of anticipation swirled through my mind: *What type of parent might I be? How will my child respond? How will my child be regarded and known and someday contribute to the human race? Do I have what it takes to give my children all they need to thrive?*

In the meantime, many of the other new parents I met rattled off the latest child-rearing tactics they'd heard. They beamed about their child sleeping through the night or gaining the appropriate weight. The high expectations I had of my own parenting skills just got higher.

So I listened and worked at learning what it takes to be a parent, and by the start of the school-age years, I'd mastered all the early baby care tasks, the developmental milestones of guiding a child to walk and talk. That gave me a certain confidence, as most parents get at this point.

And then you relax (a little) and marvel at how surely brilliant and clever your child is. You are in the afterglow of getting past all the fundamentals of infancy, and you think, *This is going to be okay. We're walking. We're talking. Parenting is surely a love relationship and a miracle of God.*

Then your children move from moment-by-moment care at home to the larger world of the classroom.

New realities set in, comparison, for one, a big one. Parental fantasies and all those hopes and dreams are now replaced by realities: there are new goals to achieve, there's the treadmill to mount of measuring up—and that treadmill's set at quite a steep incline, moving faster and faster. Any mom or dad who walks the halls of a school or attends an ice cream social with other parents knows the grind. There's constant chatter about how their kids are fitting in or not, doing well or not, getting along. Or not.

All that confidence gained as a new parent suddenly erodes. Now you're not so sure of anything. Are you doing this parenting thing right? Are you really helping your kids or hurting them?

You don't have to question your every move as a parent, or feel lost, stressed, guilty, spent, and unsure. You don't have to stay stuck and crumbling in that place, fallen into that widened gap between what you always hoped for your child and the disappointing realities.

Life does not have to be a defeatist journey.

You can be the parent you always wanted to be, the parent God wants and your kids need, the parent with a purpose. Your life at home with your kids can be calmer, clearer, healthier, and happier today, starting right now.

That is, once you know what things to let go, what things to hold onto, and what steps and principles you need to get past the hard parts, the dry days, the bleak and unbearable. Life can be better beginning at home, in childhood, and in raising children, for that is where most of our troubles begin—in what we got or didn't as we started out in life, how we were enabled or not to go out into a hard and unforgiving world with healing love and forgiveness.

Jean Barnes knows all the right interventions and has a lifetime of experience in helping people find love and forgiveness. She's been one of the parents who at all those school event settings listened to every parent's minute detailed concern for a child. She's lovingly listened as part of her professional servanthood, and lovingly helped both parent and child.

I'm so keenly aware of what a gift this is for parents and children. Now that my youngest eagerly heads for middle school and pre-teen puberty (a topic for another book all unto itself), I'm so grateful for the investment educational psychologists like Jean make, along with fellow parents, and the community to help children thrive. And as Jean will tell you and I see firsthand every day, if we are going to strive and survive, we need this community, help, and encouragement.

The communities Jean Barnes has been part of have been lucky to have her experienced wisdom and championing spirit. I wish she had been part of my team the past twelve to seventeen years! Her optimism, skill, knowledge, and experience seep through the pages of what she empowers children and parents to do. In *Purposeful Parenting*, she gives moms and dads the tools they need for their most important job—helping children grow in love and grace, allowing parents and children alike to thrive.

Jean's heart extends to us single moms as well. Having been a single mom as well, she understands what stops us and gets us stuck, and what makes life hard and dry or challenging. Yet she is unwilling to leave anyone in that no-man's-land between hoping and wishing, and realizing and attaining.

Jean's track record of showing us how life can be better and brighter begins with her philosophy of six essential practices for success. For anything in life, there are things you can do that are positive and good; but for the best results, there are essential things that are more productive and effective, most powerful and healthy and life-giving in every way. I love how Jean observes how it is the same with God and the church; there are things you can do on purpose, with purpose that are good and lawful, as the apostle Paul says in First Corinthians 6:12, but not necessarily helpful.

Jean tunes you in to what's helpful, healthful, productive, effective, powerful, and life-giving. She will help you be a better parent and help you and your children grow in grace and love to thrive as a family and as individuals. She will renew hope in you that life can be good. And she will point you in the direction of what you know to be true but need to have cemented into your heart, so you can live as God created you to—and with him at the helm, everything is better.

Jean understands and unlocks the steps for you too, of all that can be.

DR. JILL HUBBARD

New Life Live! Radio

Introduction



PARENTING TAKES THREE

...because you're not born a parent

I remember the morning I asked Sammy, a six-year-old in the first grade, how things were going. He was so bright, but couldn't seem to complete a single assignment. I was concerned, and then, at his reply, surprised.

"Awful!" he lamented. "The car won't start, we don't have money to pay the rent, and my mother forgot to take the pill!"

No wonder Sammy couldn't finish anything. He carried to school a bag of worries that belonged to his mother. What he needed instead was a sack lunch for his hungry tummy, guiding principles for his searching mind, and certain assurances for his troubled soul to get through the circumstances of the day. Sammy needed something more too, that something-something that tips the scales. He needed that thing I call can-do power and can-do spirit. He needed to know he was the best he could be, and that was enough because God had a purpose and place for him in this life.

The sense of place in this world is that can-do spirit; it is the determination that says, "I can do this. I will do this. Watch me do this." It's that

mindset made up of the key ingredients found in these guiding principles: confidence and capability, responsibility and belief, purpose and passion, love, and perseverance. It's what gets you through the tough times and lets you enjoy the good. It's what brings about the positive and progressive in not only yourself but others too, and not just for school or a job but in life.

Sammy wasn't the only one missing some can-do spirit and sense of purpose. His mom needed it too. She could no more fix a simple sack lunch for Sammy than she could digest her full plate of all that was difficult in her life—divorce, a drug-addicted ex-husband, overwhelming bills, and loneliness. She needed things for her mind, body, and spirit: some rest, good health, clear support, guiding principles, certain assurances.

Every one of us needs these things as people, and even more as parents. Your situation may be much less dramatic than Sammy and his mom's, and yet you may be reeling just as much, in need of rest, health, help, and certitudes. At times, any one of these things can be a challenge to possess. Daily living can wear away these things, and with them our energy to parent, leaving us discouraged and feeling a failure as a mom or dad. We were certain the parenting thing would come to us so naturally. We bought into the myth that we're born parents, that parenting comes to us as a second nature, just like eating or sleeping, breathing in and breathing out, that it should be natural and if not easy, at least not this hard. Too many of us have bought into another myth too—that we can or should be able to do this on our own.

PARENTING TAKES MORE THAN YOU

The truth is not one of us was ever meant to parent on our own. Not one.

I can say that because I started as a mom who was married with two little boys. But things were hard. Being married doesn't mean you automatically have someone to help you parent. It doesn't guarantee parenting will be easy. It got more difficult for me when my dream for raising my family in a traditional way dissolved with my marriage. I went through a divorce I never wanted, and for several years was on my own parenting two young sons, a new kind of hard having to be both mother and father, breadwinner and homemaker.

When I met a wonderful man and remarried, parenting wasn't any easier. You can be married to a good spouse and fellow parent, yet feel alone for whatever reason including travel, detachment (temporary or more constant), distraction, and—when things get off track—infidelity. I dealt with all those things, and they were a different kind of hard because I thought I had a spouse helping me parent, and I did...sometimes, and sometimes not. When “not,” the gaps felt wider and deeper. I had learned how much better it is to parent in partnership.

Still, I pushed on to do everything I knew to give my sons the best home and most opportunity possible. I studied and learned how to help raise children right, not only for myself but as a profession, and for others. Still, I heard and saw how hard parenting can be every day. As a teacher in the classroom for more than ten years, and school counselor and psychologist for more than thirty-five years, I heard parenting stories of “harder” every day. I worked with children and parents from all kinds of situations and households, and every child would tell you growing up is hard, and every parent would agree that raising up is hard too, especially when you are alone or feel alone, when you have typical stresses like kids who tattle or fail to clean their room, or more dramatic troubles like a husband with an addiction or a child acting out and at-risk.

What I saw, experienced, and studied was that in every situation, and especially some more than others, parenting is just plain hard, and parenting is never possible to do really, really well, ideally, on your own. Even the best parents, the ones who seem to have it together, the ones whose kids seem well-behaved and happy, would tell you there are times you really need superpowers for the job of raising kids well: x-ray vision and the ability to stretch, deflect barbs, and fly.

You understand. You're probably nodding your head at this point. There are so many demands, there is so much energy required of a parent, that help is needed: Support. Reinforcement. Relief. Collaboration. Cooperation. A co-pilot. And not just that, but all of it in spades, super-sized, superpowered. In fact, getting that kind of help is probably why

you picked up this book. Intuitively, you already know you can't do this parenting thing in the very best way on your own.

God knows too.

GOD DESIGNED FOR YOU TO HAVE HELP

From the beginning, in the Garden, God gave Adam a helpmate—Eve.¹ That is why through God's story, our story, really, in the Bible, he is always showing us the idyll, a model that involves assistance, support, and a helper. God gave Moses a brother to hold up his arms when they were weary.² He had Noah bring the animals two by two into the ark for starting over.³ He had Jesus leave us the Holy Spirit for comfort and intercession.⁴ And Jesus had his disciples go in pairs to do their very best work.⁵

God designed a whole system with helpers to keep us going in this life—in the body, with its many parts, and in the church with its teachers and preachers, song leaders and stewards. It's so interesting to me that in the chapter just before God talks about love in the Bible, he talks about this need for a system of many parts and people (see 1 Corinthians 12:11-25).

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. ...If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Corinthians 12:12,15-18 NIV 1984).

This is where, as a parent and a Christian and someone who has devoted my life to family counseling and psychology, I've been amazed that both God's design and what psychologists call "best practices" say exactly the same thing.

The Ideal Family System

Evidence from a multitude of studies and research shows clearly that children who have a family system of two loving, committed parents thrive.⁶ These children have confidence and develop a good sense of self, which frees them to think beyond themselves, succeeding in work and other pursuits. Their home lives may vary, some from the city or suburbs and others the countryside, some rich and some poor, but they have a three-pronged family system in common: a mother and father who are married and love one another, experiencing intimacy and spiritual growth as individuals and a couple and with God. The parents are committed to raising children in unison, as a team, reinforcing one another in the important areas like character, how to love and persevere, live their purpose and passion, and practice discipline and responsibility. The siblings have a strong relationship for learning to negotiate, compromise, and compete with one another—the stage for rehearsing how to relate to others through life.

Some of the reasons for success from such a system are obvious: Two parents in disagreement present confusion to a child. A home split by discord can make for a fractured sense of safety and self. It's difficult for one parent, alone, to earn enough, and have enough time and energy to support others. One parent can sometimes slip and fall, get sick and tired—and where is the relief, the stand-in, the support? One parent cannot always be there. One parent cannot be everything, do all, and go everywhere at all times. Only a true superhero can save the day in some of these situations.

Does that mean if you're a single parent, you're doomed? Or if you're in a marriage where your spouse is difficult or distant, that you can't do this? Or if you're divorced, you can never raise a child who thrives? Am I saying you should feel badly or less-than, inadequate or “not enough,” if you're on your own? That you're not ideal and can't be the parent God made just for your child?

Not at all!

This whole book came about because I believe in every parent's can-do. I believe in every parent being the best they can be to bring out the best in their child. I've seen parents in all kinds of situations become successful. A

first step is understanding your family system, identifying where you need help and where you may already have it without realizing it.

What Is Your Family System?

Whether you've thought about it before or not, you already have a family system. There's you and your child already forming the system. Now who else is in the picture? Look hard at this and put it on paper. Write down the heading "My Family System." Now answer:

- **Who is in my immediate family?** (List every guardian and every dependent.)
- **Who helps me parent?** (List every person who acts as a support and helps you reinforce rules and discipline or boundaries and values.)
- **Who picks up the slack** when I'm sick or need to be away from my child, or need help getting my kids to and from school or events? (List the people you call on for backup and support.)
- **Who do I include** in celebrations like birthdays or holidays? (List the people included in every intimate gathering.)
- **Who do I call** in trauma or emergency, when I need a listening ear or help? (List anyone who's got your back.)
- **Who has been there** to tend to everyday matters like picking up the mail, mowing the lawn, watching the pets, getting my dry cleaning?

Does what you see on this paper surprise you? There may be people you never thought of before who help you along. You may have a bigger family system than you knew: a friend, relative, someone from church, or teacher who supports you and is there for you. Would you say any of these people are "like family"? Why or why not? Does this encourage you? Or, on the other hand, does the paper you're holding look empty? Are you also feeling that way inside, with too many blanks after some of these questions?

God knows, he never wanted that either.

God Gives Us Himself

Whether you're on your own or surrounded by support, God meant for you to begin life, and parenting, with him by your side.

He is your father and you are his child (2 Corinthians 6:16,18). He is the center of your family system, whatever that may be. Just as the wheel needs a hub upon which its spokes are fixed to roll, God is there in the middle of everything: the mess, the miracles, and the everyday matters. Whatever spokes of support you have, one parent or two or a village, God promises to stay and keep you going.

A STEP TOWARD A BETTER FAMILY SYSTEM

Call on Your Heavenly Superpower

The God who made you knows you, and your child, and cares about every detail of your life. Keep this prayer from Psalm 139:1-18,23-24 on an index card to carry with you, a reminder of how the God who made the heavens and the earth knows you and all that is best for you. He is always with you and will make a way for you through any, every parenting challenge.

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

Search me, God, and know my heart. . . and lead me in the way everlasting.

That means you can call on him for whatever you face, whatever family system you've come from or find yourself in right now, because he will fill you with can-do power, the strength you need when you're weary, and the strength he'll exercise for you when you can't seem to summon it on your own (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 and 13:9). He's not just talking about strength to soldier on, either, but to soar (Isaiah 40:29-31). That is his promise to you, his assurance so you can live and parent well. He also gives additional assurances for:

- **daily provision** (Matthew 6:25-30, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:6-7, and 1 Peter 5:6-7);
- **companionship and being there**—he will never abandon nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5);
- **purpose** (Jeremiah 29:11);
- **healing** (Matthew 9:22, Acts 3:16, and James 5:14-15); and
- **help to overcome whatever is in your way**—trials, troubles, and temptations right here, right now (John 16:33, 1 John 4:4, and 1 John 5:4-5).

He promises to go with you through every little thing, and every big thing too: the times you're so tired and still need to not only get yourself ready for work and the kids off to school, the times you're discouraged because your son keeps fibbing or your daughter keeps messing with her sister's room. Those are the times it's easy to think, *My kids don't need a mom or dad. They need a superhero.*

That is just what God is, a superhero always at work, always on the job (Psalm 121:4). He gives you ways to tap into his superpowers too:

- **In prayer**, you receive his listening ear and an opportunity to release your cares on him (1 John 5:14-15). At any given moment, he gives his presence (Jeremiah 29:14 and James 4:8). At your request, he provides guidance and answers (Psalm 37:1-4, James 4:2-4, and 1 John 3:22-24).

- **In Bible reading**, he shows his will and ways, gives practical advice, stories, and examples of what works (and doesn't) to resolve conflict and navigate the circumstances of the day. For instance, he doesn't just say "be good," but explains how and how it works: "Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12); and, what some people today call "karma" is actually his ancient wisdom, "Give generously, for your gifts will return to you later" (Ecclesiastes 11:1 TLB).
- **In fellowship** with others who follow him, he gives you encouragement, inspiration, and motivation to be better (Hebrews 10:23-27). You also receive his guidance through wisdom, correction and support, mentoring, or as God puts it, iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17). In fellowship, you get one more thing too—meaningful relationships.

God Gives Us Others

While God designed the ideal model for your family system and wants you to have that, he knew not everyone would get it. We live in a fallen world. Marriages dissolve. Spouses leave or die. Relationships suffer discord. So while God made everything good to begin with (the Bible tells us in Genesis 1:31), he also does the remarkable to remake it (Job 5:9). What's broken or damaged, he rebuilds, renews, restores. Where one family system may seem lacking, where some spokes on the wheel are missing, he fills in himself and gives us other supports.

"See," he tells us in Isaiah 43:19, "I am doing a new thing."

He did that even in how he sent Jesus to earth. He gave baby Jesus to a teenage, engaged girl, whose fiancé easily could have abandoned her. But by plugging into the superpowers of God, that young girl, Mary, became a mom, and then she and Joseph became parents of the Savior of the world.

I'm sure they started out feeling not enough, less-than, even "bad" by the judgment of many in their community. But they became can-do parents. Despite poor beginnings, able to give Jesus only a manger for a bed, a life

on the run from authorities, and the scorn of some neighbors for associating with the lowlife of the day (those transient shepherds), they raised a king.

They provided a loving home with two committed parents who knew the power of God. They understood that when a child is placed in a parent's arms and care, there are things parents need to know about the ideal parenting model: how much to feed the little one's stomach, and what to feed the child's soul, when to lay down the child for rest, and when to call him up for learning, creating, building, and doing what only he can do, following his purpose and passion in this world.

Mary and Joseph may not have known a thing about parenting, but they understood that from the time babies are born until the time they leave home, children learn how relations work at their parents' knees. Children see how people laugh, argue, share, confer, cry, comfort, yell, hug, and love one another and their neighbor and God. Children internalize these images and form a template for how to treat one other, communicate, and interact. They learn what healthy relationships look like and that is, in turn, what they model.

And something else Mary and Joseph discovered—parents can enlist helping hands and hearts.

God Gives Added Support

Since Mary was a virgin, and God the father, Joseph, in a way, was actually a stepparent or an adoptive father. He stepped up and stepped in to fill a role Jesus needed in an earthly father figure. In Jewish culture at that time, most men would have left Mary and been seen as righteous in doing so. But Joseph didn't. He stayed. He loved Mary and the baby she carried so much that he made them his. He looked out for their welfare, even finding that stable for Jesus's birth.

If Joseph could take on such a remarkable role in such a restrictive culture that otherwise would have scorned an unwed mother and her groom, imagine the different ways you can bring in parental support. Turn to your own family first.

- **Enlist grandparents.** More than 2.5 million grandparents have taken on the role of solely raising grandchildren.⁷ What

if you ask grandparents to help you financially or with lifts for the kids to and from school, or FOR their wisdom and all they've learned from experience. They can be your backup and give your children a bigger picture of the world. While “grandfamilies” may seem new, they're actually an original family system.

- **Become a multigenerational family.** According to the Pew Research Center analysis of the 2012 Census Bureau data, 18% of families in the United States today include parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles too.⁸ That's 28 million assorted family members pooling all their resources to live under the same roof because they otherwise couldn't function on their own. Some say the American economy that began failing in 2008 has brought about this pooling parenting effort. But living and functioning together is historically how many families have lived. Think of pioneers settling the West, immigrants settling America, generations and tribes under the same roofs and estates throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia—everyone in the family unit had a role in helping with daily chores, responsibilities, and needs from financial and passing along traditions and history, to reinforcing the tradition, values, rules, and boundaries.
- **Call upon the church to support you in teaching and training.** As early as possible, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to church and consecrated and dedicated him to the Lord (Luke 2:22-52). They brought him to church so much that once, when he was missing, they found him in a place so familiar to him that he was surprised they hadn't thought to look there first. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” he asked his parents, standing in the tabernacle (Luke 2:49). That is where Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man. How might you call on your faith community to

help you, married or not, raise up your child in smarts and respect, in both God and others' favor?

However you choose to fashion it, your family can be made up of a system of supports because God never meant for you to go it alone as a parent, and he never meant for you to automatically know everything yourself to raise your child in the best way.

PARENTING TAKES PRACTICE

Not one of us is born knowing how to parent and how to give our children everything needed to thrive, so it's not lost on me that even Jesus's parents needed help and know-how. Think about it: God gave us a picture

A STEP TOWARD A BETTER FAMILY SYSTEM

Choose a Godparent

Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty had fairy godmothers, and Little Red Riding Hood had a grandmother. Even in fiction, parents have called in extra help.

One mom did something similar. After she and her husband adopted a baby boy, she suddenly found herself single again. She knew she needed help. She lived across the country from her family, so decided to create one with godparents. This mom wasn't Catholic and didn't make the arrangement legal, but called on a couple she loved from church to:

- Pray for her and her son.
- Share their common faith in Jesus. They went to church together and made it typical conversation to talk about where they saw God show up in their lives, and how to live more completely for him in different situations.
- Care for her child's well-being enough to secure his safety, health, peace, and opportunities. Sometimes that meant they kept her son when she had to work weekends. Other times they talked with him about making good choices. When he was applying for college, they helped with admission forms and scholarship applications.

Godparents weren't chosen on the basis of finances, athletic prowess, or glamour. Rather, they were people this mom could rely upon for support and as step-in, backup parents. "For more than twenty years they were the hands and heart of God to me and my son," she said, "offering nonjudgmental acceptance, unconditional love, stability, and role models."

Such practical and powerful help is better than any fairy tale, and can help parents otherwise alone make their own happily ever after.

of the ideal home life with even Jesus, and there he started with an unwed teen and a step-in dad. If ever there were two people who might have gone to a parent-teacher conference and said, “We don’t know how to do this!” it might have been those two.

Had you or I been able to listen in on such a conference, you might have heard what I believe—in the beginning, no man or woman knows how to parent!

Not one of us, after all, is born a parent any more than we are born a bicycle rider or a scratch golfer. Having children may be as natural as taking a next breath, but being the parent you’re created to be takes some tools and exercise, some experience. Just like learning to ride a bike took some knowledge of how to sit in the seat, balance your legs on the frame, and push the pedals, there are skills needed to parent. Just as practice riding that bike took trial and error, some spills and then sailing down the road, so does parenting—because parenting isn’t something you *are*. It’s something you *practice*.

I thought of this one day playing golf. I love golf, and took it up as a guilty pleasure and a form of exercise when my children were young. I thought, *I will become a golfer*. But early on I made some awful strokes and played embarrassingly. I didn’t become a golfer by simply possessing the sticks or taking to the course. I didn’t become a golfer by reading books about the sport either. I did read a lot, sought instruction, mentally rehearsed the ten steps to a perfect golf swing, and showed up to rounds with my friends. But that didn’t make me a scratch golfer. It was practice, and practicing some more, and a commitment to keep on practicing.

For more than thirty years, I practiced. Sometimes I hunkered down and really focused on my strokes and my game, but most the time I just got out there and played. I loved the green and the camaraderie. I loved becoming a golfer. I loved thinking, *I can do this. I will do this. Watch me do this!* I loved taking one shot and then the next, and going round the green, taking each hole deliberately, purposefully one at a time.

Recently, I was golfing with a friend and I could feel her eyes studying my assessment of the shot, and then the shot itself. I stood at the tee, swung with confidence and force, and watched my ball sail down the green to land near the hole.

“You have a beautiful golf swing,” my friend said. “It’s so natural!”

I laughed and thanked her, but thought, *Other than the breath I took before making that swing, nothing about that stroke was natural!* The ease of that shot, the precision of landing the ball near the hole was practice, and experience, and intention and purposeful practice, more and more of it, years of it.

So it is with parenting. When you expect a child, you begin reading about the feeding and development, the needs, and best environment to create. You talk with friends and listen to experts on how to raise healthy, happy kids. You fill up on lots of advice and tips, determined to be the best parent possible, the one God wants and your baby needs.

Then you hold your child in your arms. *A miracle wrapped in skin*, you think. You feel so much love, so much desire to help this little being go into life with every good thing, every opportunity. And then your baby cries, wails, followed by screaming and food slinging, meltdowns and throw-up, pooping and peeing.

This is not what happens for just some parents or some children. It happens to everyone. Every child will stray and rebel at some point, test the limits and yours, devour your energy but refuse the meal you just slaved to fix. Every child can talk back now and then, but when you ask about the day—crickets, not a thing to say. All children can wear you out but refuse to sleep, keeping you from rest too. They can display brilliance and 100 percent concentration to figure out the latest gadget or game, but when it comes to a chore or homework assignment, seem unable to focus or finish. They become the center of your attention and then scatter it. They can give you every delight, but also your deepest agony. They can steal your heart, and then break it too.

Nothing prepares you for this. Nothing can floor you, stop you, and trip you up like the realities of raising a child. There’s mess. There’s mayhem. There’s eventual maelstrom. You find yourself praying for a miracle because you think, *Without one, I can’t do this!*

But you can.

With can-do spirit and intention and purpose you can tackle any next thing in your parenting path. That spirit is not something naturally given

to some parents, and absent in others. Just like it takes practice and experience to be a cyclist and a scratch golfer, the can-do spirit of a parent comes from applying what psychologists and family counselors would call the best principles for:

- **loving** in ways your child learns to love;
- **disciplining** so that your child can be disciplined;
- **building** your character so that your kids develop theirs;
- **taking responsibility and teaching** it so your children can do for themselves;
- **discovering your passion and living with purpose**, and helping your children do likewise; and
- **continually saying**, “**I can do this**. I will do this. Watch me do this because I have a God-given purpose and passion and place in this world.”

Developing this can-do spirit comes from exercising faith like a muscle, believing that God keeps his promises to stick with you through one challenge, and choosing to believe again that he will help you through the next circumstance too—until your faith and can-do spirit and purpose, like that muscle, can be relied upon again and again.

This muscle isn't something one parent gets and another doesn't. It's a muscle every parent can develop, whether you are a single parent or happily married, living in drama or what seems so ordinary, whether you face odds that seem insurmountable or issues that seem just blips in the road, like Johnny sneaking out to play when you've told him to stay home or Rachel staying up a few nights way past bedtime.

Every kind of parent and child needs can-do spirit and a sense of purpose. I'm reminded of this fact by another bright student of mine who concerned and surprised me. Little Lord Fauntleroy, as I secretly named him, was a cute, curly-headed fourth grader who couldn't have been more different or from more opposite circumstances than Sammy. Where Sammy showed signs of neglect, never having provision for lunch and often coming to school unkempt, Little Lord Fauntleroy (LLF) seemed as doted

upon as his fictional namesake, the poor little rich boy in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel who was spoiled with a never-ending supply of tailored velvet suits, chocolates, and playing cards.

My fourth grader wasn't dressed in expensive clothes or nibbling on candy and equipped with pricey playthings, but he was always clean and neat, his hair always combed, and he knew his manners, even if he didn't always exercise them. For all his signs of receiving lavished attention and guidance, however, my LLF was no different from Sammy in completing his schoolwork. LLF was bright. But at the end of each school day, he would pile all his books into a huge backpack and lug home the assignments he had somehow avoided finishing in class.

The next morning, however, unlike Sammy, LLF returned to school with every assignment completed.

That's a problem? you wonder.

Well, yes, it is. You see, LLF wasn't the one doing the schoolwork and he was learning, all right, but all the wrong things. He had grasped how to get out of any personal responsibility and to manipulate. He wasn't getting the know-how he needed from the assignments, or the adventure of trying and the fulfillment of achievement. He had begun down that slippery slope that was only going to make school tougher, but also "life on his own" a series of failures, discouragements, and downward spirals.

The problem was that neither LLF nor his mom, with all their right appearances, had any more can-do spirit than Sammy and his mother with all their wrong situations. In fact, Little Lord Fauntleroy's family system was as deficient as Sammy's.

In his family, LLF was calling the shots as much as Sammy was burdened with them. LLF had two parents living under the same roof, but neither was engaged with the family in a healthy way. The marriage was distant. LLF's mom sought from her son the attention she needed from her husband. She drew the boy's bath, gave him back rubs, served him breakfast in bed, and completed his homework.

Meanwhile, the boy's father was hard-working and busy with his career as a business executive—too busy, though, to pay attention to the guidance

and occasional correction his son needed. For example, when LLF used his father's expensive tools and left them to ruin in the rain, there was plenty of yelling and berating afterward, but no other consequence or making use of what could have been a teachable moment for father and son about the rewards of responsibility.

So those tools weren't the only thing going to ruin. So was Little Lord Fauntleroy's character and drive, his sense of identity and ability to know: *I can do it. I will do this. Watch me do this.* And his mother and father were going to pay the cost of that along with him, becoming stressed and trying to do things for their son that he could do himself, creating a Little Lord Frankenstein who never fully develops and matures or has confidence for life.

Parenting doesn't have to be that way. You can love parenting just like I loved golfing, and you can become good at parenting just as anyone can become good at riding a bike. Your parenting can become natural and your kids can grasp important life lessons and those essential principles that help them work through the challenges and problems. You can steer your child down a good path, through any valley, over any mountain, just like the cyclist who learns how to balance and pedal and builds muscle and stamina and determines to keep the faith that all that forward motion gets you somewhere.

And just like a teenage mom and foster father were able to raise a king, you can raise a child who depends wholly on God and gives to the world out of that. You can possess can-do power and use it purposefully, intentionally so that your kids have the power too. You can be the best parent you can be, and it will bring out the best in them too.

Chapter 1



LOVE: MORE THAN A HUG

...because love is the tonic to cure all and cover all

Last summer, at our large family reunion, we lingered one evening at the dinner table. We'd spent the day swimming and boating, water tubing and water skiing on the lake, and now we'd just enjoyed a summer's feast. We were full of food and happy, and no one quite wanted to let go of that rare moment of everyone together and things being right. We kept nibbling at things, laughing, and telling stories.

Lori, cute, curly-haired, and a very grown-up six-year-old, decided she wanted to stay over at her grandmother's cottage.

"Pleease," she begged her mom and then dad, who looked to each other, maybe a little surprised at first but then not.

They nodded to each other knowingly and smiled. I could almost read their thoughts, *Lori is becoming more independent with each passing day. Our little girl is growing up.*

"Okay," Mom said to Lori, who, bursting with joy, hopped up and down. "You have the clothes you came in to wear tomorrow morning. They're practically clean. You only had them on a few minutes before changing into

your swimsuit and then shorts. Oh, and you have your towel and brush and things from after swimming.” She smiled at Grandma, who winked back. “You’re set.”

“But, Mom, can’t you take me to get my nightgown, my blanket, my pink pony—”

“You’ve got everything you need,” Dad said. “Besides, it’s a good ten minutes across the lake and ten minutes back but it’s your bedtime now.”

They went back and forth on this till finally Lori’s bottom lip began to quiver. “Oh, pleeease? My toothbrush! My nightgown! My pink pony!”

“All right,” her father said. “Go get your shoes and—”

Even as he gave permission, Lori sprinted to the long flight of stairs that lead to the pier, where she’d left her sandals. “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” she said, scrambling down.

“Hurry,” he called down to her. “Get your brother’s swimsuit and come on now. Hurry up!”

Lori stopped on one of the stairs. “Dad!” she yelled, turning back. “Dad, I’m going as fast as I can!”

“Lori!” I could see and hear his frustration, that stern-bordering-on-angry tone every parent gets, feeling pushed by all the demands of getting their kids to bed on time, eating well, doing well—the million little things that feel so important in a day. Dad couldn’t help but voice it either. “Don’t talk in that tone of voice,” he snapped.

Lori picked her way down the rest of the stairs in tears. She was trying to do the right thing and her dad still barked at her.

Later, after everyone drifted to where they were staying for the night, Lori’s grandmother and I lounged in the living room to unwind before bedtime. Lori sat between us on the floor, braiding the mane of her pink pony, confiding as much in him, it seemed, as us.

“I don’t know why such a happy day had to end with Dad being so angry,” she said. “I was hurrying. I was *trying* to get my sandals. I wanted to be responsible like Dad and Mom always tell me.” She looked up at us. “Why Mom would want me to stay over without my toothbrush, I will never understand....”

I could hear Lori parroting her mom now, a dental hygienist.

“She always says, ‘Go brush your teeth,’ and I already have my six-year molars and four permanent teeth—see.” Lori grinned like a Cheshire cat at the pony that she planted squarely in front of her. She looked him in the eye as her smile faded. “If I don’t brush my teeth, they will rot in my mouth! Besides, I was just doing everything they asked.” Her voice trembled, signaling tears just beneath the surface. “I was *trying* to do everything right.”

WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO REMEMBER

Trying to do everything right. It’s what we’re about as purposeful parents, and most of the time what our kids are about too. But all the niggling frustrations of the day get in the way. You want to give your children wisdom and know-how, discipline, character, responsibility, purpose, and perseverance. But in trying to impart these things, there are episodes. Tears! Melt-downs! Like Lori, wanting her pink pony and blanket, your kids may get stuck on some one thing, and then you get stuck on something else, and you clash.

Is that what we want them to remember? The snapping and barking to straighten up and fly right, to get their teeth brushed and get to bed on time? Or is it the love you have for them? The love they can carry into everything they are and do?

It’s so important for your kids to have the essential ingredients needed to get them through life, and love is the most important, the tonic that cures all and covers all.

Love, after all, is where parenting begins and ends, right? Love is the glue. As the old standard song says, “The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is to love and be loved in return.”¹ It’s what matters most, and what you want to remember (and what you want your kids to remember) at the end of the day, at the end of their lives. But in everyday life, both parents and kids can get stuck on the things that don’t really matter, like how much you brushed your teeth or how fast you hurried. You can get so caught up on these things that you forget to reinforce, and they forget to remember, how

much you love them. One of the most poetic passages of the Bible puts this truth beautifully:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I...can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

That is because love is not only the glue that holds things together. Love is the key that can move mountains, or at least your seven-year-old into, well, everything from doing his chores to achieving something like no one before him. Love can drive you to do the astounding, beyond brains and brawn, savvy and style, things that last and are remembered and affecting.

For example, a desire for more love, demonstrated by brotherhood and fellowship, is what drove the completely deaf Ludwig von Beethoven to work for twelve years on what's considered the best-known and greatest musical work in the Western Hemisphere, the "Ode to Joy," or Symphony No. 9.² Enduring love for his wife is what compelled the Indian emperor Shah Jahan to build one of the wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal (or "crown jewel" of palaces).³ It was for love that King Edward VIII gave up the throne, abdicating as king of the United Kingdom in 1931, in order to marry divorceé Wallis Simpson.⁴ Love is what drove Eric Liddell to run a race longer than he had trained for, defying the odds, to win the 1924 Olympic gold medal for the United Kingdom in the 400-meter race.⁵

Love does, indeed, change everything.

How Love Is Constant

No one reminds me more of just how transforming love can be than Benny. When we first met, Benny was four years old and crawling along the floor beneath a classroom table. He was in constant motion with minuscule attention span, one of the most extreme cases of attention deficit disorder (ADD) I've ever encountered, compounded by poor motor skills

and coordination too. Benny couldn't get through even a short lesson without disrupting not only his education but that of the entire class. Yet his teacher couldn't ignore teaching all the other students just for Benny's constant, particular needs.

So Benny and I became well-acquainted. We began meeting on a regular basis. Quickly I could see that his high energy could drive even the most patient teacher or mom to wit's end. But Benny's mom knew how to keep her wits about her. I discovered how the day I met her in the hallway.

She was on her way to volunteer in Benny's classroom, and he was walking by my side to my office. The moment he saw her, Benny broke from my side to run into her arms, which were open wide. She grabbed him and raised him into a big bear hug.

Every time I saw them together, it was the same: exuberant hugs, lots of love. You couldn't help but notice how she began and ended every interaction with him in loving ways. She always demonstrated her love with not only the hugs, but pats on the arm, rub of the shoulder, a kiss on the top of the head. And she told him outright, "Love you, Benny."

What a blessing, the way she loves him, I thought. It wasn't just the hug. Love is so much more than hugs. It was that even in her frustrated moments and times she needed to discipline Benny and teach him things, she began and ended by showing and stating her love for him.

How Love Is Unconditional

Benny's mom loved him unconditionally, or as Dr. Ross Campbell says, "no matter what. No matter what the child looks like... No matter what we expect him to be, and, most difficult, no matter how he acts. Unconditional love means we love the child even though at times we may detest the behavior."⁶

This kind of love is the most important thing you can give your child. Dr. Berry Brazelton, a pediatrician and author, explains that's because this kind of love is essential in building a sense of trust and belief in oneself.

When you love unconditionally, your children see that they are treasured and cherished. They develop an internal sense of their own preciousness, or, as the Bible puts it, how they are "fearfully and wonderfully

made” (Psalm 139:14) for a purpose and on purpose—sensibilities that are the foundation for self-worth.

For Benny, time confirmed just how much of a blessing this kind of love can be. His issues haven’t gone away and probably won’t any time soon, maybe never. He’s still challenged by extreme hyperactivity and awkwardly so because of those underdeveloped motor skills. When we first met, he couldn’t hold a pencil or join other kindergarteners in a relay race because he simply didn’t have much strength or coordination. He still struggles with these things—keeping focused enough to use that pencil, and looking like a wobbling newborn giraffe on the verge of toppling to the ground when he runs. For Benny, so many simple things that other children tackle with ease, instead are challenges that set him apart. He’s smart and needs help in lots of extra areas, so if he doesn’t get it, he checks out and acts out in ways not always good for him or others.

Through all the challenges, though, his mother is there patiently teaching, disciplining, and, most importantly, simply loving him. She can get as exasperated as anyone with his behavior, which has altered even how their family does things. For instance, rarely does she take him to a restaurant where they are seated and served. Instead, like so many families with a

A STEP TOWARD LOVING BETTER

Find Love-able Moments

How do you know the moment your children need to hear “I love you” most? Is it just when you tuck them into bed at night? When they’re hurt or sad? What about when they hit a home run, forget their lines in the school play, start a new program or sport or hobby, apply for a scholarship, see a friend move away or make a new friend, lose a pet or bring home a stray, talk about something beautiful to them or funny, take something that doesn’t belong to them, help someone, disappoint you, or break your heart?

Every terse and tender moment is when your kids need to hear the words and experience the behavior that says, “I love you.” When you’re intentional about speaking your love, you’ll find that both you and your kids become more lovable because you’re more able to love despite circumstance or condition.

To say “I love you” more, think “Even when” and “Especially when”. This activates and enables expression: “Even when you don’t unload the dishwasher like I asked, I love you. (And you still have to unload the dishwasher!),” and, “Especially when you were able, though it was hard, to forgive that classmate who was mean, I love you.”

member who wrestles with ADD, they go to cafeterias where Benny can fix his short attention span on choices for supper, and can practice his motor skills serving his own plate and carrying his tray, things that keep him busy and help him behave.

It's unconditional love that finds alternatives like this, that says, "I am going to love you *in spite of* and *regardless* and even *when*—in spite of this, regardless of that, when you do or are this way." That kind of love, because it is a constant, reassures your children and creates a safe environment for them to try new things, to ask for help when needed, and to grow.

Anything less than that kind of love is conditional, and conveys the message, "I love you *when* you get straight As" and "I love you *if* you do what I say." Conditional love changes with the circumstances, as uncertain and unsafe as a faulty electrical circuit that flickers off and on again, always on the verge of erupting into sparks, igniting a fire, going up in flames, and leaving your relationships in ashes.

Thank goodness Benny's mom showed him a constant love not based on anything he did or didn't do. That kind of loving has made all the difference for him. Though, as a second grader now, Benny doesn't crawl under classroom tables, he can still make you at moments want to do so. He will always be a boy in gangly motion, with a short attention span. But he's learning and succeeding, and it is the safety of a constant, loving environment that is paving the way.

How You Can Love Imperfectly

Loving in that transforming way isn't easy though. How do you love someone when she or he is getting on your last nerve? How can you love the child who, much as you may be reluctant or loathe to admit, disappoints you?

Part of what helps Benny's mom is learning to let go of dreams of the perfect child. You know those dreams. All parents have them, whether our children have come to us naturally, by adoption, or some other way. You imagine tiny arms wrapped around your neck, sweet thank yous, and heartwarming pictures in crayon tacked to the refrigerator, gratefulness at the dinner table or when tucked into bed. You envision your child doing

great things, conquering the world, or at least some corner of it—at least the homework.

Then Reality steps in and pulls up the shade letting the light of day filter into Dreamland. Angry at being disciplined, your child yells, “I hate you.” Or there is your child bullying the neighbor boy, mean and saying ugly things. You never imagined seeing your daughter give a hard elbow in the chest to the neighbor boy for no reason. You never thought your son could fail so miserably at math, or perform so embarrassingly at the trumpet or on the soccer field. You are shocked to hear your daughter tell her classmate, “You are such a loser,” or gloat, “I knew I’d win because I’m better.”

Where did that child come from—that can’t be my child!? you think.

Getting such a hard look at how your child can be versus how you dreamed they would be is like planning on a wonderful trip to the villas of lush, sunny Italy, then ending up on the isolated tundra of Siberia.

The reality is your child, like every other, is not perfect, just as that Italian villa is filled with not only flowers and sunshine, but lizards and snakes too. Perfection is an illusion. Reality can be unsightly, wounding, and devastating. Reality can also be beautiful because even with all your imperfections you can love your child completely. You can:

- **Let go of how you wish your child could be and may become, and accept your child as he or she is right now.** Your child may have your looks, name, mannerisms, build, and any other number of similarities. But that doesn’t mean your child will share your ambitions, personality, or even your values. Your dreams for your child may not be theirs at all. The ancient proverb acknowledges this: “Even small children are known by their actions” (Proverbs 20:11). So this is a head-on, intentional choice to make, a mindset to deliberately nurture again and again, and the essential first step to loving unconditionally.
- **Celebrate the mix of strengths and weaknesses in your child.** This doesn’t mean praising or excusing bad behavior or tendencies. It means loving your child, even the flaws, while

still wanting the best for them. You can do this like Benny's mom, who can hear all about her son's constant motion, and before tackling what to do about it, says, "Yep, that is so Benny." See how that works? There's not a declaration of how awful he can be or a praising of it, just an acceptance: *That is him*. Another mom I know goes one step further. When she's told her daughter tends to leave her sweater or books and things wherever she wills (dropped to the middle of the floor or right in front of the door), Michelle's mother smiles wanly and says, "That's what we call a Michele-ism." This is neither praise nor a defense for behavior that needs correcting, rather a comment that acknowledges: *Yes, this is my daughter. This is who she is, and I know it, and I accept her.*

- **Honor your child's identity.** Affirm and call out the very best of and in your child, what *is*, reinforcing all that makes your son or daughter special. One mom I know does this for her definitely right-brained daughter by remarking on the doodles on her homework, or her eccentric outfit of a striped shirt with flowery pants, or her inventive combinations of ingredients to make pizza (cheese and veggies with no tomato sauce). The mom proclaims simply: "My little artist." These parents are calling out something deep in their children's identity and loving it, tending it.

And the ironic thing is that loving your children just as they are, flaws and all, helps them transcend those weaknesses or failures, becoming and achieving more.

BECAUSE LOVE CHANGES THE BRAIN

Even science confirms that love gives your children can-do power. An important study published in 2012 from the University of Washington at St. Louis, Missouri, shows that the child who feels loved and is well nurtured early in life grows more brain capacity.⁷

Love actually brings about an anatomical change. The hippocampus, the region of the brain important to learning, short- and long-term memory, spatial navigation, and stress responses, grows 10 percent larger with love and nurture. That means children loved well, especially in those early, formative years, have greater capacity to problem-solve, reason, remember, and handle stress.

In the study, ninety-two children, at age three to ten years, were followed for nearly a decade. Scientists observed live and on video outer behavior: how children were loved and nurtured, and how they reacted to the variety of parenting exhibited, some unconditionally nurturing and others not so. Along the way, researchers also tracked, by brain imaging, what was happening inside each child. Indisputably, the children receiving the most healthy, unconditional love and nurture showed definite growth of the hippocampus region of the brain, and as the brain physically grew, these children displayed more calm and confidence, joy, and ability to think their way through problems; they achieved greater and higher results in all manner of things than children not nurtured well or shown unconditional love.

Whether parents considered themselves loving and nurturing wasn't based on their own self-assessment. It was more than a hug. Instead, love was measured by positive behaviors, spoken words, expressions, body language, and responses. Love was demonstrated by speaking with positive reinforcement, smiles and hugs, and other things—things beyond personality and natural affinity of the parents. In other words, it wasn't just parents naturally inclined to be perky, optimistic, or quick to praise who were considered loving. It was parents of all different kinds of personality types using certain skills, practices, and actions that were loving—and all this dispensed unconditionally, not just when a child behaved or did well, but regardless.

That is encouraging because for years a variety of other studies have suggested that love and nurture can influence a child's *performance*. For instance, one University of Minnesota study, begun in the 1970s and following 267 children of first-time, low-income mothers, suggests that early love and nurture from a parent improve a child's intelligence (the actual

I.Q.).⁸ The Washington University in St. Louis study provides the first solid evidence that a parent's love and nurture throughout development changes the actual brain anatomy in children, enabling more *capability*.⁹

All of these studies suggest that the key is in how parents show love and nurture from even the early years of a child's life, and that this healthy parenting can be learned. Parenting education is the key.

This thrills me because the art, science, faith, and psychology on parenting agree: there are identifiable skills and actions for showing love that every parent can learn to exercise. And all these things undergird what God has been telling us all along—that love makes us able because love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8 NKJV).

SO WHAT'S A MOM OR DAD TO DO?

One of the first identifiable love practices that helps children thrive seems so obvious: spending time together. I'm talking undivided attention time, no television shows or computer games, text messaging, or distractions with Facebook in the background, just one-on-one time together. This may sound simple enough, but isn't focusing on one another increasingly a struggle in these times of multitasking, with calls for our attention from every direction, anyplace, anytime?

Even without the technology, when your children are young, simply delighting in them can be a challenge. When I was a young mother, in my twenties, I was divorced and raising two energetic boys on my own. I sometimes wondered how to possibly give them each the attention they needed, and still have enough reserve left over for all the other demands in my life.

I could start the day with the best intentions, and quickly find myself chasing after all the things that needed to be done instead of simply delighting in my boys. There were breakfasts and lunches to make, and piles of laundry waiting by the washer, that was waiting for a call to the repairman. There was getting us all ready and where we needed to be for the day. And then The Day at work with all its problems to solve. By the

time we were all home again, we were tired but there still was homework to do and lesson plans to finish, supper to prepare, more laundry and dishes. Pile on top of that the grocery shopping, bill paying, activities and church, mail and housecleaning, and—whew!—it was all I could do to get us all to bed at a somewhat decent time in order to start all over again the next morning.

That's when I heard something that changed my life.

Practice the Thirty Minutes a Day Rule

I was taking graduate courses during this time, and one of my professors was talking about what causes emotional disturbances in young children. He said if more parents would spend at least thirty minutes a day with their children, so many issues could be alleviated.

Thirty minutes a day? I wondered. Don't we already spend hours more than that together every day?

No, my professor showed. Today, both the two-income families, and single parents alike struggle. Everyone's busy, and even when they are together the rhythms of family life are so complex and fragile. One thing goes wrong and an entire morning routine can be interrupted. The things you mean to do, get lost or neglected or dropped entirely. By the end of the day, you're tired and your kids are too. And still there's the laundry, the dishes, the meals, and the preparation for another day waiting. No wonder moms and dads who work outside the home spend on average less than ten minutes a day on learning activities with each of their children.

Beyond that, my professor said he was talking about spending at least thirty minutes a day of undivided attention with your kids—and that's what made a difference: one-on-one time of simply delighting in one another, listening to one another, connecting. You would be surprised, he added, how many parents and children don't give one another even fifteen minutes a day of undivided attention.

I thought about all the times I'd been in the same room with my boys, folding laundry or reading and going over school papers, while they played or did homework. It was good just to be near one another. But that didn't compare to the times we played a game together, or worked together to

fold the laundry and cook dinner, while as things about their day spilled into the conversation. I loved those moments, and as my professor spoke, I knew immediately the power of simply delighting in one another and being there to listen. I knew that the thoughts and feelings shared in such times were sometimes secrets and always treasures, precious and rare, often not unearthed again.

That very day I determined to practice the Thirty Minutes a Day Rule with each of my boys. I knew this was something I could do!

While one of my sons got ready for bed, brushing his teeth and laying things out for the next morning, I could read a bedtime story to my other son and we could chat or play or make something together. Then as that son got ready for bed, I'd flip my focus to my other son for one-on-one time. We did the same thing in the morning, and alternated through the week who got one-on-one time first.

This spilled into other times during our day, and other events too. There would be a meal or special reason to celebrate with each son. Practicing the Thirty Minutes a Day Rule became intentional—and turned into so much more. By intentionally making thirty minutes a day for simply delighting in one another, we learned how to really pay attention to each other in snatches too. The moment one son achieved an A+ in a difficult subject, we celebrated by making a special dinner together; the time my other son completed a task he loathed without having to be nagged into it, we went for ice cream and laughed ourselves silly. Looking for ways to give one another undivided attention became a lifestyle, and it strengthened our relationship just like layer upon layer of glue holds things together, because nothing makes the ones you love feel more cherished than your attention, your constant practice of being there.

In *being there*, I discovered another wonderful practice in how to show the kind of love that's transforming. This practice is about seizing extraordinary moments that might otherwise pass you by as ordinary. It's about seeing the cracks in your child's soul, where values, discoveries, and new ideas can be planted and begin to seep in and take root. It's about moments like the epiphany I had one Christmas.

Practice the Teachable Moment

As my family gathered for our December celebration, I had a candy dish filled with See's chocolates on an end table. I love See's Candy, and it's a special treat, not an everyday thing at my house. No wonder, then, that my granddaughter, then three years old, locked eyes on the chocolates when she came to visit, and couldn't stop staring them down.

After a few times of telling her there was to be no candy before our supper, and even then just one piece, I thought, *Prudence!* I removed the temptations to the third shelf of the kitchen cabinet.

The next morning, upon entering the kitchen, I saw Haley standing on a high stool, chocolate smeared all over her mouth and dress.

"Haley!" I said, eyebrows raised. "What are you doing?"

Her chocolately lips quivered. "Nothing, Grandma! Just looking." She tearfully denied all wrongdoing, even with the evidence of it all over her.

"Haley..." I said in a *you-know-better* tone.

She bent her head. She did indeed know better, and so did I. From all those years raising her dad and his brother, I knew: *Here was a teachable moment. Here was where I could love Haley enough to set the course right here, right now for something life changing.*

The teachable moment, after all, is all about that: finding what can open up a discovery, change the course of how one behaves, bring wisdom and insight and personal growth.

But it's not something you can construct. It is the moment that comes completely unexpected. You can't plan it. Your children won't set it up like a stage on which you can act out a well-rehearsed play. The teachable moment slips in through the cracks and steps up behind you. It surprises you and your child. It's completely random and often tied to something that demands an emotional and moral response. It can be a moment your child has done something wrong or disappointed you or themselves, when you both witness something startling and disconcerting or something that gives you pause. It's that second that something stops you in your tracks or raises a question. When it's because of some wrongdoing or witness of

wrongdoing, the temptation is to swoop in with a line like my tone to Haley, “You know better than that!”

But they don’t. Not really. They don’t fully understand the *why*, or the consequences and effects, the costs and tolls. So here’s your opportunity to help them grasp the weight of a matter in an unforgettable way. You have the chance to gently take a circumstance by the shoulders and present it to your child, examine it together for what it is, and what it can be by our choices. You have an open door to punish, admonish, or pontificate for a moment (and there is a place for correction to stop something that can hurt your child or someone else)—or you can choose to impart a lesson for a lifetime, because the teachable moment is just that powerful.

It might be that moment when you and your daughter see a boy being bullied in the park. You can intervene and then talk with your daughter about the horrors and harm of bullying; how any person can stand up to a bully, why they should and how in doing so can give others the courage to follow; and how bullies usually strike out of their own deep wounds because they need help too.

With Haley, it was this moment of being caught in the act of doing something wrong, knowing enough to try and deny it, yet the evidence was all over her clothes, across her face, on her hands. I wanted her soul to be stained as well—with understanding, not just knowledge, of why certain rules are good for us. I wanted her to see how easily she could have fallen from that stool or gotten a tummy ache or even sugar shock from all those rich chocolates. I wanted her to have something sweeter than candy, the wisdom for a lifetime that breaking the rules can not only hurt us but others. I wanted her to taste the disappointment of the rest of the family who would miss out on our special treat, to know that everything we have and do always costs someone something.

While I could reprimand Haley in order to teach these things, there were other ways I could inspire a deeper understanding and create change. These are the things any of us can do when the teachable moment presents itself:

- **Use the emotions running.** Tap into what your children are thinking or feeling, and ask about his hopes or her fears in a situation. What do they wish? What do they regret? What do they dream for and want more than anything? This gives you a window into their souls, and opens the way for you to bare and share your own soul. Emotions can help you connect with your child.
- **Guide your children into discovery with questions.** This means getting your children to think deeply and exploringly. It means asking questions, but not just any that lead only to knowledge. You want questions that lead to understanding, the ones that don't seek one acceptable answer—a *yes* or *no* or parroting of what your child has already heard from you (“don't do that”) and thinks you want him or her to repeat. Rather, the best questions help your children explore a situation and their own part in it, the context and values attached. For instance, I could have asked Haley, “You know what you're doing is wrong, don't you?” Or I could ask, “Why do you think we needed to wait for that special candy, and to share it?” The first question demands a *yes* or *no* answer; the second causes her to consider her own conscience and mine and others'. *Why* and *how* and *what do you think* questions will always get you closer to understanding than questions that seek only a *yes* or *no*.
- **Listen with all your heart.** This may be the most important thing you can do, since the teachable moment is as much for you as your child. In listening, you will discover your children's insight and beliefs, and probably something from them about life, and they will receive wisdom from you about values and conscience. So there is some give and take, and it may not be clear who is doing what as they open up and you lean in. But as they spill their thoughts, look them in the eye. Don't interrupt. Perhaps repeat things they say as a question to make sure you're hearing what they really mean

and to encourage them to explain more. Watch their body language as much as listen to their words: Are they keeping you at a distance with arms crossed? Are they at a loss with hands thrown up in the air? Are they frustrated and angry with tears or fists? Are they looking for escape with darting eyes or an actual moving away from you? When you actively listen, you do some of your most meaningful work as a parent. You show your children that you love them enough to know and understand them. In turn, you also teach them by modeling how to be a good listener.

- **Defer judgment.** There are times that clearly correction is needed. Your willingness to save correction for later allows you time to hear out your children, to truly know and understand why they did what they did, and more thoughtfully consider what correction measures will make the greatest impact. There are times, like the instance with Haley, when you know why your children did what they did—they wanted that treat. But your willingness to allow your children to speak without an immediate stamp of approval or disapproval teaches them how to think for themselves, trust you, and bring their troubles, questions, and struggles to you for help in sorting out. This can so surprise your children, this show of such determination to love them through their good choices and bad, that you give them pause, startle them into thinking deeper, turning them from their own wants into considering others. Isn't this kind of transformative turn the goal?

WHERE LOVE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Of course, you can go wrong in how you love your kids or how they love you back, in a dozen little ways. What's worse, you can see the breakdowns and not even realize that it's love that's missing, that love is the antidote you need. I'm talking about when your six-year-old starts fibbing all the time, or when your son and daughter go to war day after day in acts of

sibling rivalry, when your fourth grader picks apart everything and everyone, when there are angry outbursts and episodes of conflict.

The root of every single one of these problems is love, or really the lack of it. Children lie out of fear (they don't want to be punished) or to hide something (there is no trust). Sibling rivalry stems from jealousies (there is envy and hurt). Conflict and anger come from wanting but not getting your way, disagreement, and simply no understanding or willingness to understand.

God says there are none of these things in love: no envy or meanness, no arrogance or selfishness, no anger or ill will. Rather, love is patient and kind, doesn't envy or boast, isn't arrogant or self-seeking or easily angered, keeps no record of wrong, delights in truth (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Love gives your child the roots to grow and the wings to fly, and something to return to when there are troubles or questions. Even John Lennon got this when he sang, "Love is the answer, and you know that for sure."¹⁰

Take a closer look at where love goes wrong, where there's an absence of it, and how to use love to make things right.

With Critical Spirits, Love Can Turn Hurting Words to Healing

Stephen, a seven-year-old, came to school without one good thing to say about anyone or anything. He called other kids "stupid." He reacted to every new lesson or assignment in class with "Not this!" or "This again?" and "Can't we do something we really need instead of this crap?" He actually used even more coarse language than I will repeat. And he wouldn't be quiet.

Right away we needed to talk, though, honestly, I wished I could talk and Stephen would stop! *How does someone just seven years old get so negative?* I wondered.

Then I met his mother. She came to a meeting I'd requested, complaining about everything, "I couldn't find a stupid parking place. It took me forever just to get to the building. The classroom wasn't easy to find either." She said a few more coarse things too.

Wow. There were a lot of issues Stephen and his mom needed to deal with, because as I've said before, one problem usually does not march alone.

But the immediate issue to tackle had to do with words. Even when you can't control your circumstances, you can control your words, and your words can either build up or tear down.

This mom's words were wrecking balls. They were so critical, negative, and demeaning that no wonder Stephen spoke the same language. Good words and thoughts were foreign to him. He and his mom needed a lot more love in their lives, and especially in their language. They needed to speak encouragement rather than discouragement, blessing instead of curse, and to call out the positive more than reinforce the negative. This was so important because they were on a slippery slope, just a word away from the kind of discouragement and despair that can stop or trip and debilitate. They spewed those things onto others too.

Words have that power. God says a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1), and what you say can mean life and death (Proverbs 18:21). Life and death! The proverb goes on to say that the one who speaks good words will be rewarded. And science and psychology echo the Bible. One study has found that just hearing sentences about the elderly caused participants to walk more slowly. In another, individuals who read words of "loving kindness" showed increases in self-compassion, improved mood, and reduced anxiety.¹¹

Words spoken truly and with genuine feeling do, indeed, affect your thinking and behavior, your reactions and beliefs.

What Stephen and his mom needed to do, then, is the same thing you can do when you catch yourself or your child cursing, saying things that are negative, critical, false, mean, and nonproductive. It's not a magic answer or list of steps to take. It's a decision. You stop using words that tear down: *stupid, fool, crazy*, and worse. You do both the simple and hard thing of catching yourself or your child talking negatively and just say, "Stop!"

Then you practice blessing rather than cursing. You speak words that bring life. You say something constructive rather than destructive, positive instead of negative. If you can't do that, say nothing until you can. This is an intention, meaning you determine to do it, you actively look for opportunity, and you choose to build up. Make it a habit in your house to practice blessing in one of these ways:

- **Put praise on paper.** Susan said she and her husband decided before their children started school that they would take turns writing to each of them an encouraging, loving note every morning and tuck it into the lunch sacks. “These aren’t letters,” she said. “Most of the time they’re just scribbles on a Post-It: *You are magnificent. You can do this today. I love you.* But every note reminds the kids that we believe in them, and that they each are special. We wanted the words to be things they would internalize, and I think they have. I’ve seen them saving the notes. My son stashes them in his top dresser drawer, between the socks and the T-shirts. My daughter keeps hers in a pretty box where she puts her beads and little trinkets. They have the notes as reminders, especially for the times they will need them, that they are valuable and loved.”
- **Bless your children around the table** as in the examples from the Bible. This cue is straight from Jewish culture, as families from Abraham’s to King David’s to Jesus’s family would have practiced. Every Friday night, at their special *Shabbat* dinner, Jewish fathers place a hand on each of their children’s heads and praise something specific about what each child uniquely brings this world: “God, thank you for Kathy and the way you made her to run fast.” Or, “Lord, thank you for Phillip’s kind heart.” Do this in your own way by praising one thing beautiful about your children in your prayers before meals.
- **Speak a blessing as a prayer straight from the Bible, Numbers 6:24-26:** “May God bless and protect you. May God’s face shine toward you and show you favor and grant you peace.” Or, upon waking from sleep or tucking in your child at bedtime, pray a personalized version of God’s promise in Jeremiah 29:11: For God knows the plans he has for you, my daughter, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

- **Mark the milestones with blessing.** In their book *Lord, Bless My Child*,¹² William and Nancie Carmichael identify in Bible six critical times for blessing to be received from God through parents for their children: upon conception, while in the womb; at birth; in infancy; for puberty or as a rite of passage into adulthood; upon marriage; and in old age. Birthdays, graduations, the start of a new school year or sport and hobby are each opportunities to celebrate with your child, and can be as formal as you like, or not. The key is to make it intentional and dedicated.
- **Speak it on the thresholds.** A single mom, Deb, prays God's promises and blessing over her daughter whenever they cross the threshold of the front door to their house. "Whenever we entered and left our home, we prayed for God to prosper and protect us. The idea came from Psalm 121:8 that says 'the Lord will watch over your coming and going.' I loved that, so that became our prayer. Now saying this prayer is just what we always do, like buckling up when you get in the car. I want my daughter to know she is blessed through the day, every day. I wanted her to hear me say the blessing, and to be able to repeat it to herself and others. Just last week we brought home a couple of Shara's friends from soccer practice, and as we walked in the front door, Shara and I looked at each other, laughed, and she said to her friends, 'Lord, watch over the coming of the soccer team,' and I added, 'because our living room field is only so big!'"

Deb and Shara's practice reminds me of something John Trent and Gary Smalley pointed out in their book *The Blessing*: "In the Bible, Abraham spoke blessing to his son Isaac, who spoke a blessing to his son Jacob, who spoke a blessing to each of his twelve sons and two of his grandchildren. When God blessed us with the gift of his Son, he said his Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). God has always been a God of words."¹³ And his words are ones of promise, blessing, goodness, and mercy

for, as the shepherd-king of the Bible says in Psalm 23, “all the days of our lives.”

With Sibling Rivalry, Love Can Turn Competition to Connection

Rick, a handsome fifth grader, transferred to our school in the fall and quickly made friends. He was charming and outgoing, fun and funny. But as fall turned to winter, not just the weather changed. Rick changed too.

He began telling tales about his weekends. “I played baseball with one of the Knicks,” he announced one day in class. He teased other students. “You stink,” he’d tell the boy sitting next to him, then laugh. “Just kidding.” Only he kept on tormenting the boy, who began to cringe the moment Rick entered the room. Before long, fights erupted. Rick, the new boy, the quickly popular boy, was just as fast unpopular, and his turn in behavior had become old. His teacher called me for help.

Rick’s father walked into our meeting with obvious weariness and defeat. His shoulders sagged as did his spirit. He admitted what happened at school was going on at home too, only in reverse. Rick’s older brother Jon, normally amiable and fun-loving, had begun to tease Rick until they broke into fights.

“It’s pretty much non-stop whenever they’re in the same room,” he admitted. But his wife saw nothing wrong. “They’re just boys being boys,” she said. Rick’s dad felt at a loss.

See what I mean about how when there’s one problem, it doesn’t march alone?

As much as their boys needed some resolution, Rick’s mom and dad needed to support one another’s concerns and work together to find peace and create harmony. At the root of each of their needs is what we’re talking about throughout this chapter: a whole lot of concentrated, unconditional love.

You see, Rick, the “baby of the family,” was getting a free pass to bad behavior from his mom. Without realizing it, she made excuses for him (“C’mon, he’s just a kid” and “He’s the youngest”). She had “dethroned,” as psychologists call it, her firstborn, Jon, from her attention.¹⁴ Dethroning

is when one child is diminished in some way as another, given more attention, is brought into the family.

Rick's mom was horrified when she realized this is what she had been doing. She didn't love Jon any less or Rick any more, but her personality and Rick's were so complementary that in practice she tended to favor him. The effects were cyclical: Jon, who butted heads with his mom anyway, became increasingly jealous, enough to lash out at Rick, who in turn behaved at school as he was learning from his brother Jon. The sibling relationship, after all, is the first social laboratory in which children interact with their peers, where they learn to cooperate, negotiate, compete, share, empathize, be self-controlled and play fair, feel encouraged or ridiculed, valued or rejected. It's with a brother or a sister that a child first learns how to make friends, save face, and achieve recognition. And Rick had learned some falsehoods, and experienced some bad behavior that he was enacting at school.

This cycle isn't so uncommon in families. I've seen variations of it year after year in the classroom, though few parents would admit to loving one of their children more than another. (Would you?) Yet a host of studies show most parents do favor one of their children without even realizing it, only "favor" doesn't necessarily mean they like or love one child more, just that there is more natural simpatico or alliance in temperaments.¹⁵ That's what was happening in Rick's family. Rick and his mom tended to see and deal with things the same way; and Jon, usually contrary, always being asked to pick up the slack for his brother, began to feel unappreciated, unheard, and unloved.

Each one of these feelings is a seed of sibling rivalry but combine all three and you've got big trouble: fights at home, fights at school, and a growing loathing between brothers and others.

Even though Rick was getting away with a lot at home and that needed to be addressed, his mom was distressed to learn Jon thought he was loved less. She never felt that way and never meant for him to either. Yet, as the old adage goes, perception is reality.¹⁶ Even if one child *thinks* there's favoritism, there *is* for him, or her.

Have you noticed that with your children? Have you ever heard, “Mom, she’s wearing my cashmere sweater!” or “Dad, he just rode off on my bike!” Has the clamor for territory, things, and attention erupted in front of you? Does one of your children seem to be the apple of your eye at the expense of making another look bad or even invisible?

These are signs of sibling rivalry, of one child feeling relationship with you is threatened because of the attention you give another, or of one child trying to find his or her place in the family and show how they are special and unique. And these feelings and behaviors can happen naturally at some point in every family, extending outside the family, like with Rick, mimicking at school behavior learned at home.

What can you do? The same thing that worked for Rick’s parents:

- **Set up avenues for cooperation.** It may seem counterintuitive when you have children who can’t seem to get along, but you want to bring them together more and separate them less. Give your children opportunities to work, not fight, together. For instance give them projects as part of their chores that cause them to seek one another’s cooperation. Instead of having them race one another to see who can do their part first to clean the family room just trashed, have them race the clock. Instead of assigning them separate chores, have them complete tasks together, like folding clothes or cooking dinner (and to assure there’s no sabotage, make sure they understand they must both eat whatever is fixed). This teaches your children how to appreciate what they each can contribute and do together, and reinforces the Golden Rule of “Do unto others as you’d like done unto you,” regardless of age, size, who’s got longer or shorter hair, or patience and tempers.¹⁷
- **Call out rather than compare.** Instead of “Rake the leaves like your sister” or “Why can’t you hang up your jacket like your brother?” you can complement with “What a good strategy making this recipe work” and “You are clever to

find we had everything for this dish to begin with!” Children really do need to hear what makes each of them special too. I had a conference once with Ashley’s mom, who couldn’t stop talking of the wonders of her older son, who apparently was handsome, brilliant, artistic, scientific, athletic, and popular. “Wow,” I said. Recognizing she’d just bragged, the mom said, “Oh, but I’d never go on like that about either of the kids in front of them.” *Why not*, I wondered. *Speak each of their praises*. Ashley was beautiful, with a flair for fashion, and had a wonderful gift for sizing up personalities quickly and accurately. God knows that both Ashley and her brother, who were competing for their mom’s attention, needed to hear to their faces what is wonderful about each of them. That’s why God tells us, “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work (Jeremiah 1:5 New Century Version).

- **Let each child bend your ear rather than break your hearts.** Jon needed to be able to tell his mom he felt marginalized, sometimes invisible, often unloved, and constantly pressured to help his younger brother when Rick was entirely capable of taking care of himself. By the same token, Rick needed to tell his parents he was tired of being picked on by Jon, and having a tough time getting along at school too. What this whole family needed—every family dealing with sibling rivalry—is better listening skills. One thing Rick’s dad did was to give permission to speak up. When Rick started to tattle on Jon, Dad said, “Don’t tell me about your brother—tell me about you.” One thing Mom did was what family counselors Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish recommend as a key listening skill: acknowledging feelings.¹⁸ To help Jon express his pent-up hurt, fears, and jealousies, his mom helped him with the words: “You sound furious [feelings acknowledged]. You wish Rick would ask first before taking

your basketball [wishes acknowledged]. You can make a PRIVATE PROPERTY sign for your bedroom door [symbolic activity or creative problem-solving prompted]. You aren't his dumping bag [hurt acknowledged]. Tell him with words, not punches, how this upsets you [coaching for an acceptable expression of feelings].”

- **Encourage responsibility.** After a Time Out, separately ask each child what he or she can do if the problem occurs again. This allows each of your children to open up to you about what happened, perhaps why, and also what role they played in the situation. You'll be surprised at how they can step up and offer smart solutions too. For instance, toddlers and preschoolers who fought over crayons might suggest putting their names on their own boxes of crayons and respecting one another's things. Pre-teen sisters fighting over clothes might agree to each pick one article of clothing they each could share without permission on a weekly basis and specify what is off-limits no matter what.

With sibling rivalry, love really is the answer because the best antidote is also the most preventative measure—catch your kids loving one another well. This practice can be powerful, reinforcing good behavior and celebrating the sibling connection. You'll be surprised, too, that when you look for it, you'll find it.

The moment your children are laughing at the same silly scene in a movie is the moment they're delighting together and even in one another. The time you see your son pick up the jacket your daughter dropped, or squeezes the toothpaste for his brother are the times they are helping one another.

Call attention to those moments, comment on them, call them out, make a to-do over them, say outright that you love how your children love one another. Make them notice that their siblings aren't all bad, that there are wonderful moments, then reward those times. With younger children, put up a monthly calendar for each child where stickers go on the day you

observe and note good deeds, kindnesses, and helps. When the charts are hung in a family hub, like on the refrigerator, everyone sees and can praise the goodness even more. With older children, you can write a note or make a card that acknowledges and commemorates good things. Loving one another well becomes a celebration, something imprinted on their minds and in their hearts

With Anger and Conflict, Love Rights All Wrongs

As much as you love your children, you can be angry with them. That's because love and anger are flip sides of same coin: both cost us something, both measure how much we feel, both can be something we hang on to no matter what. But only one—love—is worth treasuring.

That's why the crux of nearly every issue in relationships, psychologist Gary Chapman says, comes down to how to express love and process anger.¹⁹ Chapman, in practice as a marriage and family counselor for more than thirty years at the time he wrote this, said nearly every case he addressed, thousands of cases of people seeking help, centered on resolving conflict and anger in order to love one another better, more, stronger.

I've found that true in my own experience counseling thousands of parents, teaching thousands of their kids, and dealing with my own relationships. No matter how much we love our children and they love us back, conflict and anger are part of the picture, and it's not always pretty.

I learned this at an early age. I grew up in a home where my mother's temper regularly exploded. She could be angry at me, my dad, or any given situation with the slightest provocation. I heard her fight with words both to my face and with my dad in another room, both when I was intended to hear and not. Looking back, it's no wonder that each month when the next issue of her *Ladies Home Journal* arrived in the mailbox, I'd steal away with it and turn the pages fast to read "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" It's also no wonder to me that after nearly sixty years since its beginnings, that column remains one of the most popular in women's magazines today.²⁰ Whether we're wives or husbands, parents or children, we're eager for solutions to anger and how it separates. We long to know more about how to express love and process anger. We

would rather live in and look back upon the picture of a peaceful, safe, loving home.

So we need to know how to deal with anger, because conflict will always be part of relationships, especially between parents and children, who grow up exploring boundaries and pushing them, testing our limits and their independence, trying our patience and their freedoms.

A STEP TOWARD LOVING BETTER

Love Your Self

Where do you turn when as a parent you're the one who needs love? When I was in a difficult marriage and then single again after a divorce, I found encouragement and help...

- knowing Jesus is my bridegroom who cherishes me. He calls me his (Isaiah 54:5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:4); he reminds me that he, too, was alone in this world and left Heaven for me, loving me enough to come looking for me and show me the way Home.
- reading the promises in the Bible reminded me how God would never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5-6), help me (John 14:26); show me kindness, goodness, and mercy (Psalms 23:6 and 27:13). He would provide for me (Matthew 6:25-27), grant peace (John 14:27), give me hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11), enable me to do good work (Ephesians 2:10), and love me forever (Jeremiah 31:3 and John 3:16).
- praying. Even science agrees that prayer can help your health, outlook, and even your heart. Prayer is the way to stay connected to God, who is always listening and seeing you through trouble. The beauty of prayer is it can be activated anytime, anywhere because, as David said, God never slumbers, never sleeps (Psalm 121:4).
- staying connected to church provided ritual for our lives, Sunday morning worship services, where we could sing, be encouraged, chat, and pray with others. Church gave us friends, support groups for sharing ideas and solutions to issues, and activities like potluck suppers and game nights where I could nourish my body and spirit.
- calling 211, which is like dialing 911 on your phone, for practical health and human services help in desperate times. Set up by the Federal Communications Commission, the 211 phone number connects people, state by state, to community-based organizations and government services for help with finance (rent and utilities) and clothing needs, medical insurance and programs, job training, transportation, and homemaker and childcare services. You'll find the FCC online at <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/dial-211-essential-community-services>.

God assures us of this. We're made with tempers. We'll get angry, and maybe for good reason. It's what we do with anger and how we deal with conflict that matters: "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26).

But that's easier said than done at times, right? Like when your first grader, angry at you for being given a Time Out in the corner, scribbles in black permanent marker all over the wall. Or when you find out your preteen, not the best swimmer, has invited friends to sneak over to the vacationing-and-away neighbor's pool for a party. Damage and the fear of it can stay with you a while, making it hard to defuse the anger. But reluctance to let go of anger is what's really damaging.

I overheard two fourth grade boys talking about this once at the most elemental level. Chris was telling how his mom made him go with her to watch his sister play basketball. "The game wasn't even special," he said, "not a playoff or championship or anything, just a regular meet. So I was mad at mom the whole game, mad at my sister after, and then my mom got mad at me for being mad!"

"I know what you mean," Jeff said. "If I ever do something wrong my parents never talk to me about it. My mom just starts yelling and screaming. Then my dad just grounds me. That's it...yelling and screaming and grounding. They don't really care what happened."

"Yeah," Chris said, twisting his limbs around his chair like a pretzel. "They say, 'I love you,' but they just want to be mad."

You say "I love you," but your behavior, and maybe your words too, say you're mad. That's not what you want them to remember, is it?

So how do you referee the fights and manage the anger? There are things you can do that are healthy and can actually strengthen your relationships for having worked through the tensions, frustrations, and separations wrought by conflict:

- **Give yourself a Time Out.** Stop. Before you spout off or stuff your feelings, give yourself a second to calm down and put your emotions under the jurisdiction of your brain. Take three deep breaths. If you still feel roiling inside, take three

more deep breaths, maybe this time with your eyes closed and palms open. Move, whether that means taking a step back, walking around the block, or just across the room to shut a door. Anger and frustration can melt away with each step. Also, the more you move, like walking around that block, the more you activate endorphins, chemicals released in your body that trigger a positive feeling (“euphoric,” you often hear runners and walkers say) similar to that of morphine. Endorphins actually act as analgesics, which can diminish the perception of pain and offer a slight sedative effect. This means you can think more clearly in a relaxed frame of mind, and, as it turns out, body.²¹

- **Hold your judgment.** You don’t need to determine in the moment who’s right and who’s wrong, who’s “good” and who’s “bad.” Such labels immediately pit people against one another. Besides, no one is wholly good or wholly bad. A certain behavior may be right or wrong, but every person is capable of both. What you want is harmony, resolution, and alliance, not discord, conflict, or separation. So instead of issuing a punishment, or acting in a way so as to punish, defer with something like “Each of you go to your rooms for twenty minutes” or “Let’s talk about this in an hour.” This gives your child or children and you time to think about, and investigate if needed, what just happened.
- **Attack the problem, not the person.** There’s an Aesop’s fable of a wasp that settles on the head of a snake.²² The wasp stings the snake several times until, in pain and desperate to get rid of the creature, the snake lays his head under a moving wagon, where both perish. That’s what happens when you say things that sting someone opposed to you. When you attack a person and not the problem, you both end up wounded for the moment, and worse—well beyond it. There’s a way to love even when you’re angry and even in

a fight. Of course in those moments you may feel like the snake, reeling in pain and desperation. So now is the time to prepare. Think of how to address issues and not the people. Identify what you see: “Someone’s going to get hurt” or “This is getting ruined,” not “Theresa, you’re killing him!” or “Kevin, you’re destroying everything.” Describe what you see with respect: “That’s a tough one. Two children, one bicycle.” Choose your words wisely: “I” statements can be stronger than “you” accusations (“I am so frustrated” communicates more how you feel, where “You make me so frustrated ascribes more blame). Intervene when needed: “It’s not safe to be together. Quick now, you go to your room, and you go to yours.”

In the end, there will be times when you need to correct your kids.

“That can be so hard,” a mom once told me. “I hate to see my boy hurt when I punish him.”

Punishment isn’t the goal. Correction that helps, not hurts, is. Correction doesn’t wound or bruise. It’s not used to inflict suffering. Correction shows that there are consequences for everything we do, and how especially bad behavior and ill will costs everyone something. Correction stops us from damaging or being damaged, gives us pause, and helps us turn toward better living and being. So when you need to correct your child:

- **Think about the best timing**, which is everything. Are you exhausted? Have you just come through a long, hard, trying experience? Give yourself a break, get some rest. If you’re going to sleep on the issue, be sure to state you’ll deal with things in the morning and restate your love. This assures you’re troubled by the problem but still love the person.
- **Pick a place where you can focus** without interruption, distraction, or added stress.
- **Look for the win-win**, where everyone gains something. Your goal is to correct, change, transform, after all. So, for

example, if your twelve-year-old son keeps sneaking out to meet with friends, you can ground him from seeing them and isolate him to his room. Or you can require he spend a day on a project at home or helping someone in need. By digging a new flowerbed together or painting a room, raking leaves in the yard of an elderly neighbor, or serving at the food kitchen, you can do something productive that opens his eyes and maybe his heart in sharing what's really going on with him and in this world.

LOVE'S HEALING FORCE—FORGIVENESS

No matter how well you practice loving your children, there will come times you still have to say you're sorry. There will be times, because loving well is a practice, when we need to start over or try again, and forgiveness becomes the most powerful fuel for moving us forward.

Randy, a hard-working, cooperative kindergartener, showed me the power of forgiveness, and his mom too. He was struggling in school. Drawing and learning to print his letters were laborious. He tried hard, but his fine motor development was slow and awkward. While other kids were starting to read, he struggled to make out letters that he couldn't yet write, let alone words to read. He was scoring slightly below grade level expectations in other areas too, which pained his mother. When she asked educators to hold him back from first grade and keep working on the basics, she was advised that retention isn't effective in resolving learning problems. Some targeted and tutoring help could help Randy and keep him moving forward. But his mother insisted on holding him back...only she failed to talk with Randy about this. She had four other children to tend. It wasn't that she was hiding it from him or neglecting him. She just was constantly swirling around what each of her children needed and she thought she might be able to talk with him once everyone was out of school for summer, which was another three months away.

One afternoon at the supermarket, however, Randy and his mom ran into their small town's Boy Scout leader. "I'll be able to join this year,"

Randy said, standing tall, pointing at his chest. "I start first grade next fall!"

"No," Randy's mom said, looking at him sadly, then smiling apologetically to the Scout leader. She knelt down to look Randy in the eye. "Honey, I've been meaning to tell you that we're going to stay in kindergarten another year."

Randy just stared at his mom, then looked down, as the embarrassed Scout leader coughed and said over his shoulder, moving down the aisle, "It will be good when you're ready to join, Randy. We can't wait to have you!"

Randy was subdued as they finished shopping and drove home, but he didn't ask any more questions about the decision, and his mom got swept up in all the to-dos back at the house. They never spoke more about it.

A month later, Randy's mom got a call from his kindergarten teacher: "Could we meet for a conference? Randy's completely changed from a kind and hard-working boy to being sassy and disobedient."

That same thing was going on at home, Randy's mom confessed. It didn't take her long to figure out he was angry and hurt from what was not only a crushing blow of being held back in school, but being humiliated with that news in front of the town's Scout leader. From Randy's perspective, he had worked hard and his mom had declared his effort and ability invalid. His budding sense of competence and identity had been bruised and wounded.

"Ohh," his mother sighed. She was even more pained now, realizing she'd worsened a situation for her son when all she ever wanted to do was make things better, smoothen his way, help him excel.

"We can help him here, now," his teacher insisted, and together they talked about how with some extra tutoring, exercises, and attention. They developed some teaching and learning strategies for the last two months of the school year.

Later that evening, Randy's mom sat down with him and told him the plan. "The goal is to work on some things so you will be ready when you're promoted to first grade."

"Mom!" Randy beamed.

As she went to start dinner, the cooperative, loving Randy returned. “I’ll set the table!” he offered. “I’ll help clean up!” At bedtime that evening, he admitted, “Mommy, I’m so sorry for thinking that I hated you for doing this to me. I love you.”

Randy’s mom looked deep into his eyes. *So much going on in that little brain*, she thought. She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him on the forehead. *Big brain, it turns out*. “Randy,” she said. “I’m the one who is sorry. I should never have made a decision like that without talking with you. I should never have said anything in front of anyone without talking with you first, either. Can you forgive Mommy?”

“It’s okay,” Randy said, planting a big wet kiss right back on his mom’s forehead. With that, he flopped over and went sound asleep. As she turned out the light, she noticed his older brother’s Boy Scout manual back on Randy’s nightstand.

“How much we underestimate one another,” she admitted later.

Indeed. We can fail to love one another enough to solve the problems, tackle the challenges, and shoulder one another through the valleys *together*. But forgiveness is that solvent, that tackling gear, and shoulder to lean on when love falls short. Forgiveness is what renewed Randy’s faith in his mom and himself. Forgiveness is what can transform any situation—you failing your children or them failing you.

“Love forgets mistakes,” God says (Proverbs 17:9 The Living Bible). And you can make it a practice in your house, not just something to teach your children but to exercise with them. Here’s how:

- **Keep a tender heart and a thick skin.** There’s nothing like being around a forgiving spirit, someone not easily offended who can receive what you have to give, and forgive what you can’t. One year I was counseling two first graders, Amber and Tiffany, in a program for at-risk children. The girls became close friends during the ongoing sessions, and began socializing after school too. One weekend, at the birthday party of a mutual friend, both Tiffany and Amber’s parents were drawn into a huge argument. The following Monday

the girls had barely entered my office when they were at each other arguing and insulting one other. Borrowing some techniques from art therapy, I had each girl draw a picture. Amber wrote with big letters on her picture “I hate you!” As we continued to process the problem, Tiffany wrote in tiny letters, “I love you!” That short, small sentence spoke volumes to Amber, whose anger immediately melted. Such is the humble spirit, ready to not only give, but forgive, giving for no reason.

- **Look ahead.** Does the wrong done, the feelings of yours that are hurt really matter? Can you let it go?
- **Exercise empathy, kindness, and compassion.** Put yourself in the other person’s shoes.
- **Give gratitude.** Make a list, keep a notebook, post notes in a Gratitude Bowl that you read each night at dinner—do whatever it takes to document and remind one another how much you all have been given, how much there is for which to be thankful.
- **Be quick to make things right.** If, like Randy’s mom, you know you’ve caused hurt or done something wrong, don’t wait to make things right or apologize. However you say it—straight, plain, elaborate, or simple—just say it, “I’m sorry.” Those two words work wonders, as do these four, “Can you forgive me?”

Sometimes, though, how you act says more, offers more, than any words. I witnessed this with Chris, a high school senior I was counseling with his family. Chris was struggling to overcome drug abuse, and it didn’t take much one weekend to slip back into his former ways. We met to try and get him back on track.

Chris came into my office with dark circles under his eyes and looking unkempt and unavailable. He stared blankly at the floor and slumped into a chair like he wanted to disappear into it—into the horror, he confessed, he’d made of their lives.

As the details of that horror came to light, Chris's father became enraged. He jumped from his chair and screamed horrible names at Chris, called him terrible things. Chris, already loathing himself for falling back into his old ways, screamed back. The shouts still echo in my mind—searing, piercing, ugly names and words.

Meanwhile, Chris's mother sat by silently, tears streaming down her cheeks. She was devastated, but looked at her son with such tenderness that he stopped ranting. Tears came to his eyes. Her message was clear: *You are my son. I love you. What you are doing is wrong. You have a choice to make. I have faith in your ability to make the right choice.*

The family left and I silently prayed: *Father, forgive them. Let them forgive one another. Help them love like only they can, and love them like only you can.*

Sometimes, as parents and people who work to help children, praying and forgiving are all we can do. But, God reminds us, praying and forgiving are maybe the most powerful things we can do. You can have confidence, he says, that if you ask anything according to his will he hears you (1 John 5:14-15). He hears whatever you ask. He knows what you say outright and what your heart wishes.

One day, long after that meeting, a new Chris sat in my office, straight in his chair, clear-eyed, cleaned up, even smiling. He was in recovery and doing well. "How could I not try?" he said. "How could I not do this?" The unfailing love of his mother, always evident, even in silence, is what gave him the strength to believe in himself, forgive his father, and overcome.

LOVE LIKE ONLY YOU CAN

That is the power of love, especially when it's practiced beyond one hug, one tender look and forgiving word, and one teachable moment. Receiving one experience of such lavish love, and then another, and then another can make you turn like Chris.

It's not just because I'm a teacher that I can say all these practices of love add up. You can do the math with a week in your life and see the difference practicing love will make for your children and for you. It is practice, after

all, that makes perfect. It is because we exercise the things discussed in this chapter that they are called practices! You exercise the teachable moment and show some unconditional love, and then you do it again and again and over again. Transformation is a process. Every destination is reached with one step after another in the journey toward becoming more than you are this minute. Each new road block, delay, or stop asks you to choose how you're going to love because love really is the fuel that will get you and your child to rise and shine.

I was reminded of this when I took in a recent exhibit featuring Princess Diana of Wales. At a time when it seemed everything was falling apart for her, the princess began to embrace the world's problems rather than simply retreat into her own. Her marriage and home life were in shambles, and she was shy and reserved, yet afforded no privacy to work out her most intimate struggles. She could have refused to engage public life. Instead, she stepped into its spotlight to bring the deepest needs of others to public attention and rouse help and support. She distributed food to the hungry in India, walked the minefields of Angola where the poor and impoverished lived and lost limbs or died every day. She hugged AIDs babies in New York, helped fund research that has led to healing treatments for breast cancer, and held abandoned orphans in Pakistan to find them homes.

“Diana used her power just like a magic wand, waving it in all kinds of places where there was hurt,” one charity leader said.²³ “And everywhere she used it, there were changes—almost like a fairy tale.”

MY PURPOSEFUL PARENT CHECK-IN

How Am I Doing with Love?

I'm seeing my children grow in love, and I'm being my best to bring out their best, by:

- Practicing the Thirty Minutes a Day Rule.
- Finding and using Teachable Moments.
- Loving them unconditionally with words wherever we come and go.
- Righting wrongs with forgiveness and correction.
- Practicing unconditional love in these ways as the tonic to cure all and cover all.

A placard at the exhibit I attended explained what the princess's power was. "I think the biggest disease the world suffers from is the disease of people feeling unloved," Diana was quoted as saying. "I know that I can give love for a minute, for a half-hour, for a day, for a month, but I can give. I am very happy to do that...I want to do that."²⁴

Love is the magic wand that Princess Diana waved—magical, healing, powerful. Love is truly the tonic that cures all and covers all—and every teacher and mom and dad have it in their possession to use. It's your most powerful tool, and loving unconditionally is the essential principle that holds all the others together.

Only you can love like no other. Only you are best to give your child love like no one else. Only love will bring your children back to every good thing for them to thrive in life.

Love like that is what brings Lori back to the lake where our family has enjoyed so many summers and family reunions. The lake is where Lori learned some of life's great lessons, where her parents taught her about responsibility and discipline, character, and pursuing her passion and purpose. Most importantly, the lake is where her parents showed her unconditional love, where there were many teachable moments like that summer night she melted into tears for being reprimanded for hurrying.

Enveloped in unconditional love, Lori was able to talk about wanting to do the right things, and her parents were able to wrap her in their arms and tell her they wanted only the best for her because they did indeed see her big heart, her brilliant will to be good. Even now, though busy at work in digital communication in a high-powered job at the White House, Lori will take whatever day off she can to return to that Midwestern lake. It's where she regroups, finds peace, sorts out things, and remembers she is loved and can, in turn, love. She walks the lake, rides the boats, sits on the banks to watch sunrise and sunset, and thinks on how her parents loved her when she hurried and when she didn't, when she brushed her teeth and when she forgot to do so, when she erupted into tears or squealed with laughter.

You may never spend time at a lake. You may have family reunions of two, just you and your child. You may not have boats to ride or banks to sit upon. But you can be there for your children, to love them through sunrise

and sunset. Your child's "lake" may be the table in your dining room, or the backyard, or a corner of your office where he or she played and did homework and got in trouble and delighted you. When you love your children unconditionally, when you love them enough to know them in that teachable moment and help them grasp values and wisdom, you give them shores on which to collapse, return, rejoice, and shine.

That's real magic, and the wand you can wave to change the world, the tonic you take and give your children again and again. And again.

Chapter 2



DISCIPLINE: TEACH THE CHILD YOU TREASURE

...because you care to get things right

Mom, I told you no way,” Lilly shrieked and stomped her foot. She was just getting warmed up. She wailed, throwing herself over a chair, screaming and crying, “No, no, no, no, noooooo!”

Lilly’s mom, Shirley, shook her head and put her face in one hand as she described her seven-year-old’s fit for the fourth morning in a row. “She simply refuses to ride the school bus because there’s a substitute driver she doesn’t know. But I can’t be late for work one more morning because of having to take her to school myself.” Shirley choked back tears of her own. “I’ve tried everything. I walked her down the street to a friend’s house so they could board together. I promised her a reward to just get on the bus with the other kids and go. I sat down with her for a long talk to see if she was afraid, which was a no. She said she doesn’t like new people. Really, she finally admitted, she just wants her regular driver back because she likes him. So every morning it’s the same. War! Lilly refuses, throws a fit, and

demands her way. This isn't working and if it keeps up, I won't be either!" Shirley looked at me pleadingly. "What can I do?"

What can any parent do in such a power struggle with their child? When a child refuses your direction or instruction, when he or she rebels and defies you, fights, melts down, tunes out, turns off, and turns away, you face one of the most challenging aspects of parenthood: discipline. Another word for *battle*, right?

No. Discipline is really another word for *love*, another word for, not *war*, but *ways* to love with care and purpose.

Unfortunately, this is where too many parents buy into the idea that discipline is about making your kids mind and getting them to obey and behave. When you think like this, you go into fight mode, *Me* (authority) against *Them* (the children who should obey) in a battle of wills and for control, yelling and nagging. That's what a power struggle requires, right?

No again. The whole point of correcting bad behavior isn't about engaging in a power struggle at all. Discipline is about teaching, helping your children live with self-control and goals, a sense of direction, doing the right things, not harming and instead helping themselves and others. In fact, the very word *discipline* comes from a Latin noun that means *teaching* and *instruction*. So disciplining your child is a *we* thing. In correcting them, you are on their side, for them, not fighting against them. You invite cooperation rather than demand or coerce compliance. This diffuses the power struggle, where there's no winner or loser of the war for control. Rather, you both win. You teach them something beyond how to behave for a moment, and they learn the means and tools that can carry them through life.

That's the principle of discipline, after all—teaching the child you treasure because self-control leads to wise choices and everyone wants to get wisdom just right.

CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES

You may have heard the following story before, but its wisdom deserves another telling. An elderly Cherokee, talking with his grandson about life,

gives us a clear picture of what this principle looks like.¹ “A fight is going on inside me,” he tells the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is angry, envious, regretful, greedy, arrogant, self-pitying, guilt-ridden, resentful, feeling (and wanting others to feel) inferior, full of lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is full of joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.”

The boy stared at the grandfather’s chest, which lifted and fell ever so slightly with each breath.

The grandfather followed his grandson’s eyes, then put his hand on the boy’s heart. “The same fight is going on inside you,” he said, “inside every person.”

The grandson looked at his own chest. It rose and fell ever so slightly with each breath. He sat quiet, thinking. “Grandfather,” he asked, “which one will win?”

The old man looked at the boy and said, “The one you feed.”

Constantly through life both you and your children will be faced with choices to do the right thing or wrong thing, exercise self-control or none at all, give or take, work or play, create peace or stir up, unify or divide, love or hate...the list goes on. Knowing how to choose and recognize consequences is essential, for even when a choice isn’t made, one of the two wolves inside each of us is fed. Is it the wolf of peace, love, and hope? Or the wolf of anger, envy, and regret? What are you feeding your children and what are they consuming? Mouthfuls of understanding? Cups of reason and insight? Plates of directives, frustration, and punishment?

When you think of discipline in this way, your response to misbehavior, misunderstandings, outright defiance, and power struggles will change. So will your children’s. You’ll both understand there are outcomes from whatever you chew upon and swallow. For every matter, there are choices and there are consequences. There are two fighting wolves you can feed at any time, and one will always win.

Allowing your children to choose which wolf to feed gives them the chance to:

- **exercise free will.**
- **learn how to make independent and thoughtful decisions.**

- **experience the consequences** that flow from their decisions.
- **realize responsibility and accountability** in an environment of emotional security.
- **separate an action from the person**, which enables one to love and forgive in ways that foster love and forgiveness in others.
- **and focus on the present and future behavior** (punishment focuses primarily on past behavior).

A STEP TOWARD BETTER DISCIPLINE

Find Your Parenting Style in Thirty Questions

Find how you're doing now in terms of discipline style—are you too hard on your kids, too soft, or just right? This quick quiz takes less than ten minutes and can give you an instant clue. Answer if the following statements are true or false from your experience.

1. Often I need to give instructions two or three times before my kids listen.
 TRUE FALSE
2. I am the mom and it is my children's job to do what I say. TRUE FALSE
3. The rules I have are based on logic and reasoning. TRUE FALSE
4. I establish daily routines. TRUE FALSE
5. My kids seldom have chores to do. TRUE FALSE
6. When my son disobeys me, I give him a good swat. TRUE FALSE
7. I spend time with my child each day. TRUE FALSE
8. If my youngster questions a rule, I'll discuss why that rule is important.
 TRUE FALSE
9. Often I'm reluctant to enforce rules. TRUE FALSE
10. My child likes me to be right alongside when doing homework.
 TRUE FALSE
11. My kids constantly bicker or fight. TRUE FALSE
12. As long as you're in my house, you'll do what I say. TRUE FALSE
13. My husband and I have a few rules that are consistently enforced.
 TRUE FALSE
14. Often it's easier to let the kids do their own thing. TRUE FALSE
15. My children are respectful of one another's belongings. TRUE FALSE
16. When I come home to find toys lying around all over the place, I hit the roof.
 TRUE FALSE
17. Often I find myself yelling and screaming. TRUE FALSE
18. I explain and enforce a few simple rules. TRUE FALSE

In the process, discipline becomes something your children internalize and do, not something you must address and bemoan. By teaching and correcting, using choices and consequences, your child learns to feed the better wolf inside. The battles for control and power struggles melt away. The key is in helping your kids see which wolf to feed themselves, which choices are positive, and which consequences lead to more dangerous and snarly issues.

The key is also in how to do the feeding because you can bark directives and expect obedience. But that won't get you where you want to be.

19. I encourage my kids to be responsible and think for themselves. TRUE FALSE
20. Threats and bribes are my main arsenal. TRUE FALSE
21. It's necessary to spank your kids to get them to obey. TRUE FALSE
22. Getting my kids to do chores is too big a struggle. It's easier to do these tasks myself. TRUE FALSE
23. Frequently I find myself doing things for my kids that they could do for themselves. TRUE FALSE
24. I frequently come to my child's defense when corrected by teachers because I don't want the criticism to damage his self-esteem. TRUE FALSE
25. If my child misbehaves in public places, I frequently ignore it. TRUE FALSE
26. I am tuned in to and support my child's feelings and needs. TRUE FALSE
27. I create fun rituals, such as reading to my child every night. TRUE FALSE
28. Teachers complain that my son doesn't follow directions and prefers to do his own thing. TRUE FALSE
29. I would rather give in to my children's desires than argue with them and have them mad at me. TRUE FALSE
30. I think it's very important to praise and encourage my children so they feel loved and appreciated. TRUE FALSE

How do you think you did?

An authoritarian parent would answer true to questions 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, and 21.

The permissive parent who is too lenient would answer true to questions 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, and 30.

Authoritative parents, finding that balance between being firm and corrective while teaching and helping grow, would answer true to questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 13, 15, 18, 19, 26, 27, and 30.

You may find that you lean a couple directions, for instance most of your true answers are split between two categories. Look at how you lean now and keep reading in this chapter for how to find a healthy, authoritative balance.

HOW DO YOU DISCIPLINE?

While it's often easy to see which wolf is winning in children who act up, it may not be clear to you which wolf you're feeding, how the choices you make in correcting and disciplining your children affect their outcome.

Diana Baumrind, PhD, a developmental and clinical psychologist in California, helps us with her groundbreaking, lifelong research on parenting styles. Begun in the 1960s, Baumrind's studies found there are three typical tendencies of parents:

1. strict and heavy-handed **authoritarian**,
2. loving and engaged but loose and **permissive**,
3. balanced and **authoritative**.²

Where the first two styles go to extremes in discipline, the last style is more balanced, the target you want to hit. (Later, other researchers added a fourth style—the unengaged parent, but the very fact that you're reading this book makes that one moot for discussion.)

Finding where you are and what you'll want to refine in order to raise delightful children, is a lot like what Goldilocks went through trying to find the best chairs at the Bears' house. Remember how she tried one chair after another and one almost swallowed her and gave no support, and another was so uncomfortable she abandoned it as quickly as she could, but one was just right? Baumrind found that styles of parenting can serve you in the same way. The permissive style can collapse, offering no support for you or your kids. The authoritarian style can be painful and even do damage. But the authoritative style can hold up and help you be the best, most purposeful parent possible. As you think about which way you lean in responding to your kids, take a closer look at the three styles.

Are you Authoritarian? Too Hard?

You've heard the authoritarian parent's typical line, and maybe even said it yourself, "Because I'm your mother/father, that's why!" Or, "Because I said so—now do it!"

Set on shaping and controlling a child's behaviors and attitudes, the authoritarian parent values unquestioned demands and obedience. These parents give directives and orders, discourage verbal give and take, close off and shut down choices and options, and use punishment, threats, criticism, and guilt to curb a child's self-will and enforce their own directives. Like the chair Goldilocks found that was too hard, this style creates discomfort to such an extreme that a child's emerging autonomy is stifled. There's no wiggle room for reasoning or feelings; and no place of comfort or encouragement for children to think for themselves or solve their own problems.

I remember one pretty little girl referred to me by her kindergarten teacher because she was bossy, argumentative, and disrespectful to her teacher and other students. She had a habit of pinching people who didn't do as she demanded, and when her mother came to a conference, I understood why.

Talking about how she disciplined at home, the mom said, "I am the boss. That's it. What I say goes!"

Of course, her daughter was modeling this absolute, authoritarian behavior, which was, "My way, or no way—no matter what." The wolf both mother and daughter fed was the one that needed to be top dog, in control, and obeyed—or else. The environment was one of black and white, complete submission or harsh punishment. Mom and daughter both were living in fear, frustration, anger, and discouragement.

The mom's authoritarian parenting style does real damage because:

- **Control is external to a child and doesn't teach inner control.**
- **There's more focus on obedience than moral development.** The reason behind rules and their impact on others when not obeyed is never discussed.
- **There's an emphasis on power and control** (and clamor for it at all costs) rather than teaching, encouraging, and guiding.
- **The frequent use of physical force, demeaning, and belittling demonstrates aggression and results in shame, higher levels of aggression and antisocial behavior, even retaliation.**³

- **dependency is fostered** by the parent's constant directives, leaving little room for flexible thinking.

Are You Permissive? Too Soft?

At the other extreme, the permissive parent is often heard saying, "Okay, one more," or "Oh, all right..." Pretty much whatever the permissive parent's child says or does, goes, because this parenting style is to make few demands and allow kids to exercise as much control as possible over their own activities. Permissive parents tolerate much, rarely take an active role in shaping or altering their child's impulses and actions no matter how incorrect, and use as little punishment as possible, often as a path of least resistance.

This creates some ugly situations that I've dealt with firsthand. In the 1970s, permissive parenting was in vogue and I was working as a school counselor, on the front line of seeing its ineffectiveness. Teachers regularly sent kids to me who would smile in agreement to classroom rules, but return to their own agendas the minute a teacher's attention focused on someone else. These kids were a handful. They didn't get enough attention or limits from their parents, and would run amuck. They never cleaned up their own messes, and expected privileges similar to those of the teacher. They were in constant turmoil and caused division and upset among other children too.

Sandie, a second grader, said so well how these kids of permissive parents affect everyone around them. Her cousin was visiting from another state and even though she was younger, Kelsey got away with so much more, doing what she wanted, when she wanted, and practically with her permissive parents' blessing.

"I really don't like Kelsey," Sandie said. "She refuses to go to bed until her parents do, so last night I went to bed at eight o'clock and Kelsey stayed up until eleven!"

Of course this disrupted the whole family. Sandie wondered why she couldn't stay up late too. In the meantime, Kelsey was a mess, tired and cranky, insistent upon her own way, and willing to have meltdowns or throw a fit to get it. At seven years of age, Kelsey already had a huge

sense of entitlement without any self-control or responsibility. What a setup for doom later in life, where this kind of behavior makes a person unlikeable at the very least and avoidable and even shunned much of the time.

Just as Goldilocks found the soft chair couldn't hold her, easy or permissive parenting style won't hold up for you or your kids. Rather, it damages by raising children who:

- **Expect privileges** far beyond their status, and expect others to do for them which interferes with and impacts their academic achievement.
- **Have little sense of responsibility.**
- **Can't find or adapt to structure** to manage their lives, leading to daily chaos and a sense of insecurity.
- **Don't monitor their behavior** and are often inappropriate, causing disruption, upset, and unrest. The constant need for discipline in group situations negatively impacts their relationship with peers and sense of self-worth too.
- **Are immature** and lack impulse control and self-reliance.
- **Lack security** due to insufficient parental guidance, which can result in feelings of anxiety and depression.

A permissive parenting style eventually crashes because it feeds the lesser wolf too, the one that's greedy and arrogant, self-centered, and driven by ego.

Are You Authoritative? Just Right?

But before you think there must not be any style that works when kids misbehave, know there is hope. Just as Goldilocks found the perfect chair by rejecting the extremes of too hard and too soft, you'll find that practicing an authoritative style is the sweet spot on the continuum between authoritarian and permissive styles. The authoritative style gives you a model of how to love with limits, and brings out the best in you and your children. It provides support and is reliable.

When you use an authoritative style, you can set controls and demand high standards of behavior in warm, rational ways that free your child, welcome their expression, and value who they are, if not always their actions. This combination of firm control and positive encouragement helps your children thrive and learn which wolf to feed.

Specifically, as an authoritative parent you:

- **Establish firm, clear, and relatively demanding expectations** for your children—all with moderation so as not to stifle them or hem them in rigidly with no room for self-expression or development.
- **Encourage verbal give and take so there is constant learning.**
- **Value both autonomous self-will** (where your children make their own choices), **and disciplined conformity** (where your kids cooperate and work within rules, parameters, and structure).
- **Share the reasoning** for policies, rules, and direction so your children understand and can apply principles, not just rules, beyond any one situation.
- **solicit objections** when your child refuses to conform (because you don't regard yourself as infallible nor divinely inspired).
- **Set consequences** that enforce the perspective as an adult while recognizing a child's individual interests and special ways.

This style helps your children develop self-discipline, where they gain a strong sense of both social responsibility and independence, and are happier, with greater confidence and self-esteem, according to Stanley Copersmith in his *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem* book series about behavioral science.⁴ You've created an environment where your kids can be more sure of themselves because there's no ambiguity about the rules and limits or

who's in charge. This is where kids can thrive and begin to mind, behave well, and grow in grace.

Even babies can sense and respond to an authoritative parent, according to Dr. Everett Waters, a psychology professor at the State of New York at Stony Brook. Researching the response of babies and toddlers to the discipline in a variety of parenting styles, Waters found that the parents practicing love with limits, and setting choices and consequences from the earliest age, got appropriate responses in a timely manner.⁵

Look at the different styles in action: An *authoritarian* parent might yell at or spank a toddler who grabs from the table something curious like a knick-knack or clock, a completely natural thing for a child to do. A *permissive* parent might let the episode go entirely, even if the toddler breaks the object. An *authoritative* parent would take the object from the child, look her in the eye, and say something like, "No touch," while returning it to a place out of reach on the table.

While not happy having the object of desire taken away, the child of the authoritative parent understands not only what happened but why. Within a few more tries, she modifies her behavior, is secure in what she's learned, and can behave similarly in other circumstances according to the choice and consequence shown. The balance between love, encouragement, and firmness is there.

Without those three essentials—love enough to correct and teach, encouragement with the belief your kids can learn and grow, and firmness through the meantime—the toddler of authoritarian and permissive parents is left on shaky ground. Things are out of balance; and as with anything unbalanced, their understanding is wobbly. The toddler of the authoritarian was punished for a natural behavior and may not understand what happened for a long time, and maybe never why. The child of the permissive parent wasn't told or shown in any way the behavior was poor. They need that just-right discipline; without it, no wonder researchers find children grow up with less (and sometimes lacking) impulse control, self-reliance, social responsibility, and independence.⁶

ESTABLISH YOUR AUTHORITY WITHOUT BREAKING THE SPIRIT

So how do you to achieve that authoritative style? How can you be firm but not harsh, hold high standards without pressuring, be ready to correct without waiting to catch them in the act of doing something wrong? How do you become the parent who lovingly teaches and whose children grow delightfully? How do you best feed the best wolf?

Start Now

Both the Bible and child development psychologists agree—it's never too early to start. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Proverbs 3:12).

More admonition is needed earlier in life and makes a great difference, which is what educational psychologists Michael K. Meyerhoff and Burton White found in researching the children of each parenting style.⁷ Authoritative parents who weren't afraid to set realistic but firm limits on behavior before the first birthday had the most self-disciplined, responsible, and well-behaved children—and love with limits was enforced from the moment these children began to crawl. When behavior was either unsafe or unacceptable, toddlers received a clear message to that effect, and the authoritative parents usually didn't have to tell their children more than once not to do something because the admonitions were clear and quick, and disobedience was followed up with immediate action.

The key was the parents' commitment and persistence to put actions behind their words.

Be Mindful of the Love-Discipline Gauge

The child who feels and knows he is loved is the child who will respond more readily to discipline. Before you do a single thing, remind yourself that loving unconditionally gives you more leverage to discipline. Think of what you say and do as having an actual gauge for how much love you give and how much correction. Are your words balanced with both? Are your actions? The measures for this gauge will differ with circumstance, personalities, and the situation, but this is the question to return

to before and after the times you're called on to discipline your child: For every correction you give, are you saying and showing your children you love them unconditionally?

Practice the Law of Sowing and Reaping

From fairy tales and fables, to the classroom and conference room, we grow up hearing how we reap what we've sown. A few years ago one of the best-selling business books went so far as to use the idea for both its title and packaging. *The Little Red Book of Selling* by Jeffrey Gitomer⁸ taught the principle of sowing and reaping, the consequences of getting sales by your choices, as shown in that old Russian folktale of the little red hen.

Nearly every child hears by third grade, if not well before starting school, the story of *The Little Red Hen*, published by Little Golden Books in the 1940s and popular in the mass market ever since. You know the story. A little red hen finds a grain of wheat and asks for help from all the other farmyard animals to plant it. But no one volunteers for the planting—or the harvest, threshing, milling the wheat into flour, and baking the flour into bread. All the animals refused to help, but then hope to help eat the tasty bread. To their dismay, the little red hen feeds her chicks, and all the other animals lose out. Help out or miss out, the moral of the story goes. If you don't work, you don't get to enjoy the fruits of the labor, other versions say.

Of course, long before the children's story and business book, the Bible gave us the law of sowing and reaping: A few loaves and fish brought to Jesus are turned into basketfuls of food, enough to feed a huge crowd with leftovers too (Matthew 15:35-37, Mark 6:41-44). A widow and her son give to God all they have and are given by God all they need, and then some (1 Kings 17:10-16).

Sowing and reaping is so simple and true, throughout the Bible, as well as in nature, and in disciplining your kids. Apple seeds planted grow into trees that bear apples. Apple trees cut down, die. If you lie, people do not trust you or believe what you say. If you are late arriving at the airport, the plane leaves without you. You do reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7).

There's power here that even a child can understand, whether you're talking about a law of nature, relationships, or the Bible. So when you start applying this principle of choice and consequence, your kids will grasp it, know it, and learn to live by it. They'll understand that every choice reaps a consequence, positive or negative. They'll see how the choices you make determine the quality of your life.

The way they learn this law of life is in how you practice it and reinforce it at home. That is where discipline comes in—not to punish but correct and teach this principle. The goal is not to control your children with such a law, rather to help them make responsible choices to thrive on their own. As they develop self-control, the issues they face belong to them, not you, and that's what you both ultimately want.

Set Choices

However, practicing choice-making doesn't mean setting up a free-for-all where your kids are in charge. You're not giving your children the choice of *what* to do, which can invite a power struggle. You're engaging them in *how* to do it, inviting their participation into developing their own independence. So when you offer choices, it's important to:

- **State the expectation** because some structure is non-negotiable. For instance, eating and sleeping, being hygienic, learning, honesty, and respect for life and places and things are essentials that you as the parent make sure your child gets. So when it's time for school, you don't ask, "Do you want to go to school now?" because getting an education isn't an option. You're responsible for your child to have every opportunity to learn and grow. Where choice comes into the picture is in helping them see their essential needs, understand why certain things are essential, and think and act for themselves on how to get what's needed. So you invite their participation. You say something like, "I expect you to get ready for school in a timely manner. You need to comb your hair and get dressed before breakfast." Then you help them make the right choice. For instance, you help them lay

out their clothes the night before so getting ready the next morning goes more smoothly. You make rules for no TV or wandering around the house in pajamas on school mornings, to minimize the temptations that get in the way. For really little ones, five- and six-year-olds, you walk them through the morning: getting dressed, combing hair, eating breakfast and brushing teeth, then grabbing the backpack from a designated place. Your child has a choice then to follow these directions and get ready on time or suffer a consequence such as, “If you don’t get to breakfast on time, then you’ll have to take your breakfast to school and eat it during snack time.” When you always state the expectation, you help your child meet it.

- **Be clear and make sure children understand** both your rules and consequences for breaking them. Say clearly and directly, “You have a choice between this or that way.” Give some ideas and instruction on how to go about each way. For example, when you’ve taught your children the steps involved in cleaning up their rooms, the directive is, “We each need to clean our rooms every Saturday morning.” The rule of working before playing applies, so you say, “If you haven’t finished cleaning your room by noon, you forfeit going to the movies or playing with your friends.” You can be sure your kids understand the consequence by asking them, “What are you going to do?” They should be able to answer, though the real test is in their choice-making itself, where experience becomes the teacher. After one round of choosing wisely or poorly, remind them that they can either learn from mistakes or repeat them and suffer the consequences. They will begin to internalize the truth that they have a choice: *Do the chores and play. Ignore the chores and pay.* Either way, they learn: *I live with the choices I make.*
- **Let age appropriateness be your guide.** So much of children’s behavior that annoys adults is developmentally appro-

priate. Toddlers, for instance, will say “no” a lot because they’re developing individuality and increasingly learning to exercise their own will. Few also have little understanding of time. So if you give two-year-olds a choice of either picking out their own clothes in the next hour or you doing it, they may simply respond, “no,” and your time option is meaningless. That hour may as well be a day or forever. For one- to four-year-olds, you’re best focusing on rules and choices that regard safety, care of personal possessions, and interpersonal relations, according to Dr. Claire B. Kopp, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles, who has studied how to best reach one-to-four-year-olds.⁹ Think about rules and choices for toddlers that foster independence, such as asking your little one to return toys to

A STEP TOWARD BETTER DISCIPLINE

Keep Choices Simple as a Song

Giving parameters with some rhythm, rhyme, and even a song helps your children learn how to behave and act in ways good for them—and everyone around you. These techniques work.

- **When, then:** Teach your kids “When, then” as a principle by talking with them about how certain things are best done before other things, and other things are best enjoyed when those certain things are done first. For example: “When you’ve finished your chores, then you may play outside,” or, “When you’ve cleaned up, then we can go to the movies.” When, then gives kids a choice and you’re not the bad guy when they make a poor choice—there’s simply a consequence.
- **Abuse it, lose it.** Teach that taking advantage can take away a privilege because someone loses out when only one person is on the take. A good example is: just as too much sun can burn your skin, too much of other things can hurt your well-being. That’s why you have certain rules like not too much TV (so you don’t become a couch potato), not too many video games (so you learn to live in and enjoy a real world, not just a fantasy one), and not too many snacks (so you don’t fill up on junk and kill your appetite for nutritious meals, and so you don’t gain too much weight).
- **Rap your rules.** The Center for New Discoveries in Learning in Windsor, California, teaches that learning and memory actually increase at least five times

the toy chest or bin after playtime. Toddlers especially need ample demonstration, support, and encouragement. Then when you see your five-year-old placing a dirty shirt in the hamper and your six-year-old parking his bike and skateboard in the garage after use, give them big hugs. Praise goes a long way in encouraging them to make those new choices over again: “Look at Gracie being a big girl” or “Ross, you’re being so responsible.”

- **To be authoritative, sound authoritative.** Too often parents tell their children to do something and give choices on how, but sound tentative or, worse, pleading. At best, this confuses a child and plants doubt that you know what you mean. At worst, it empowers a child and invites disobedience because it sounds like you don’t really mean what you say. Meaning

by using sixty beats per minute in instruction or direction. That’s probably why the ancient Greeks sang their dramas rather than recited them. Music does help you remember. So just as singing “The Alphabet Song” helps little ones learn their ABCs, you can use rhyme, rap, and some playfulness to teach your kids your rules. Even a chant or sing-songy approach makes the rules more fun and can get your kids to play along in every way. Here are some good starters:

THE RULE	THE RHYME AND REASON
Put your dirty clothes in the hamper to get washed or they’ll stay dirty and stinky.	<i>Clothes on the floor, clean no more.</i>
Put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher.	<i>Dirty dishes left around, no more dishes to be found.</i>
Anytime you’re on wheels, wear a helmet.	<i>No helmet, no wheels.</i>
Homework, chores, and assigned reading before play, pleasure, and TV.	<i>When the work’s done, have fun.</i>
Clean up your own mess because if you don’t pick up after yourself, including your toys and things, the privilege or toys are taken away.	<i>Pick it up or give it up.</i>
Make your bed every morning before school or you’ll practice making it after school.	<i>Make it in the morning or make it later over and over and over and over and over again.</i>

what you say is the key. If you mean, “Stop! Now!” then say that firmly, clearly, and with authority. Speak from your gut. Project your voice. That doesn’t mean yell at your kids. It means imagine the sound of your voice surrounding your child. Speak with energy in a measured pace with pauses. Fast, eruptive speech usually is perceived as nervousness and uncontrolled. Slowing your pace helps you relax, gives you time to think, and your listener time to take in what you’re saying. Practice authoritative responses so they come naturally at the moment needed.

- **Reward rather than bribe.** Jake’s father told me he used bribes to get Jake to follow directions and rules. So many parents resort to this: “If you get an A on the math test, I’ll give you a dollar.” “If you pick up your toys, you can have an extra cookie.” “If you graduate from high school, we’ll buy you a car.” Giving something to Jake so he would get up and get dressed in time every day for school? “That’s worth a dollar to me,” Jake’s dad said. But, oh, how that’s going to cost him and Jake. As popular and commonly practiced as this may be, bribing a child doesn’t get the effect you want for long, concluded Daniel H. Pink who researched this for his best-selling book *Drive*.¹⁰ Offering short-term rewards to elicit behavior isn’t the same thing as giving your children choices that help them develop and learn self-discipline. In fact, Pink found, the effects are unreliable, ineffective, and can cause long-term damage. Your child works for the reward and when a reward isn’t available, the behavior stops. What’s been learned? To behave well only when you get something you want? All this teaches is manipulation. It’s better for your child to feel the intrinsic benefit of a job well done, says Alan Kazdin, director of the Yale Parenting Center.¹¹ Incentives focus too much on the end result instead of behavior leading up to the result, Kazdin explains, “You can’t throw rewards at behaviors that don’t exist and

get them.”¹² Rather than threats and bribes, consequences for choices made bring lasting results.

- **Talk often about “a better way.”** Sometimes you may give your kids a choice and they abide by a rule but still fail to get the point of it. For instance you may tell your fourth grader to come straight home from school because you want him to tackle his homework before supper. He may come straight home from school but play around instead of working on assignments. He followed the rule but missed the point. Get your kids thinking more and more about the point. Reward times they accomplish the greater good by choosing a better way than you even imagined. Apostle Paul said this so well: All things might be lawful or allowed, but not all things are beneficial or constructive or good (see 1 Corinthians 10:23). Just as you’re always encouraging your kids to “make good choices,” help them to always “look for the better way.”s.” You can use teachable moments, like when you witness other kids misbehaving, melting down, or acting out, talk later with your kids about better ways to act. Ask them to identify some better ways of acting in similar situations. Plant ideas of what’s better too. Kids can’t model what they’ve never seen nor experienced. Help them know best ways to behave by setting an example and calling out examples in the books you read, movies you watch, and places you go, people you see.

Determine Consequences

To some parents, determining consequences is an easy matter. There’s punishment and there’s spanking. The trouble is that punishment and corporal or physical punishments are not consequences, and using them creates other problems.

One young mother learned the difference in a powerful way. As she nursed her newborn boy in one arm, she wrapped the other around her toddler daughter. The little girl nestled close with a picture book, but her eyes, green with envy, stayed on her baby brother. A natural jealousy sprouted.

She'd once been the center of Mom and Dad's attention. Now the newborn got much of their attention. Mom, drowsy, closed her eyes and the toddler seized her opportunity to slap her brother in the face just as he, too, was drifting to sleep.

The baby shrieked awake as Mom grabbed her girl's hand and said, "Honey, people are not for hitting."

Her bright-eyed moppet teared up and apologized. She sank deeper into her mother's side and watched Mommy comfort and calm the baby, stroking his face, cooing him back to sleep.

Weeks passed and the green-eyed monster struck again. The girl slapped her brother when Mom's back was turned. Patiently, Mom reminded, "People are not for hitting." Again, her little one apologized, sniffing through more tears that fell on a protruding bottom lip.

Soon after, Mom struggled to get the kids ready for her first outing on her own with both little ones in tow. She tucked her sleeping newborn into his car seat and turned to grab her purse and jacket. As soon as her back was to her newborn, she heard a cry. She whirled around as he screamed from being pinched awake by his sister.

Exasperated, Mom grabbed her daughter by the arm and spanked her three times. "I've told you enough times not to do that. You are in big trouble, Missy. Time Out!"

In tears, the toddler ran to her Time Out chair. "But, Mommy," she cried. "You said people are not for hitting."

Preschoolers can try your limits and test your patience with their growing pains, but a pat on the butt (or worse) is coercion, not correction, and even a toddler picks up on the hypocrisy and confusion.

How much better Mom, toddler, and baby brother would be if Mom had not reacted in anger. Parenting on purpose helps you be the parent who thinks through and talks through the situation before it explodes into something hurtful to you and your child. In this situation, Mom could have planned a distracting activity for her daughter from the start. Of course her daughter was going to be jealous after being the sole center of all love and affection in the family then suddenly, overnight, having to

share it. Even without the activity, Mom could help her daughter express her feelings and reassure her that Mom and Dad have more than enough love for everyone in the family (“And that’s not going away!”). Mom could also engage her daughter in something special, just for Mom and daughter (“Since you’re my big girl now, let’s you and I make cookies in a minute for Daddy.”). After all this, Mom could give a consequence: “If you hit your brother, you’ll have to go to the Time Out chair” (one minute for every year of age, so five minutes for a five-year-old, six minutes for a six-year-old, and so on). Time Out chairs work, even if you have to hold your child there and explain the time doesn’t start till he or she sits in the chair—so dallying and rebelling to go there doesn’t work either. The consequence will be waiting.

And consequences do work.

While you’ll find plenty of people in favor of corporal punishment, I’m not one of them. These folks believe a spanking or strike to stop certain behavior teaches a lesson. It does—that an aggressive response in anger is okay. Most parents who spank admit what they intend to be a pat on the fanny turns out to be something much more forceful delivered in rage. I do not believe that tactic teaches a child anything productive.

Neither are child development experts. Research shows why. Nearly half of moms (42 percent) in a survey conducted by Rebecca R. Socolar, a clinical assistant professor at the University of North Carolina, admitted they spank their children—and more for dangerous behavior like getting too close to a hot iron than annoying behavior such as splashing water all over the floor from a bathtub or tracking in mud from outside all over the carpet.¹³ Every single one of their children was found to be more aggressive, angry, and developmentally behind in moral reasoning and in self-esteem (some even clinically anxious and depressed) than the children of moms who used an authoritative style of choices and consequences to discipline.

Socolar’s study is just one in a deep sea of research with the same conclusions. Spanking as a means of punishment lowers a child’s self-esteem, develops anger and resentment toward parents, and can plant seeds of aggression, even juvenile delinquency. “It’s an epidemic in America that people readily accept that hitting is an appropriate way of changing

behavior,” said Dr. Irwin A. Hyman, director of the National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the Schools, which he founded at Temple University School of Psychology in Philadelphia. “But we have fifty years of research showing that rewards and building self-esteem are a much more effective means of changing a child’s behavior.”¹⁴

It’s not just research that’s so convincing to me.

I’ve seen the faces and behavior of little ones from families where spanking is the punishment for misbehavior. Their lives match the findings of research, and their lack of learning and self-discipline troubles me deeply. These children struggle to grasp the consequences of their choices and often wrestle with a deep sense of shame, that they are inherently bad, because they’re used to coercion rather than correction. They’re often angry and frustrated, and when faced with any challenge, lash out at others, alienating themselves because that’s what they’ve learned. While I work with them, I’m reminded of the Bible’s wisdom: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4 ESV).

And yet encouragement to spank and use corporal punishment comes from many church pulpits and Christian leaders who quote Proverbs 13:24 (NKJV): “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”

How sad that one verse is pulled out to justify hitting, and so many other passages and examples in the Bible of God’s tender care to correct and teach, are ignored. Jesus always taught us to bear fruits, or evidences, of a godly spirit: act and think in love, kindness, self-control, gentleness, and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22-23). Such teaching goes back to his great (and twenty-eight generations-great) grandfather, David, the shepherd-king. David used a rod and staff to ward off wolves and protect and guide his sheep. He wrote in the Twenty-third Psalm what so many of us learn as children, “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

How does this picture fit with the leader of one Bible study I attended, who shared how his son made him so angry that he hit him with a belt, forgetting he’d ever read the Bible? Right. It doesn’t.

Thank goodness more Christian leaders are taking a 180-degree turn on their support of corporal punishment, agreeing it's not congruent with the teachings of Christ.

Truly, the wise parent establishes authority without using physical punishment. Based on a simple rule of always treating one another with respect, there's no hitting, spanking, or physical violence. The rule of respect and wisdom is: "People are not for hitting. I'll never hit you, and I expect you to never hit your brother, sister, other children or adults." Once that's clear, the teaching opportunity is there for you to seize. When your child misbehaves, you have that open door to confront choices or suffer consequences—and you set the consequences by knowing:

- **Consequences are the control.** This is key. Control is at the crux of so many discipline issues, but the "sowing and reaping" or "choices and consequences" model breaks down the wall of you against them. You're not the meanie or bully against your kids, as those punished would feel. There's simply a consequence for every choice. For instance, many battles concerning control are fought around the dinner table. Your child refuses to eat. You easily can go into action by begging, pleading, scolding, and demanding them to eat because you want to make sure they get proper nutrition and grow. That motivation isn't the problem but your responses are when you play into the power struggle. Led by your fear of malnutrition, you've joined the ranks of short-order cooks trying to please the little generals. I know of one mother of a kindergarten-age child who literally became so desperate, she spoon-fed her five-year-old son like a baby. He was victorious in his ability to get his mother to do his bidding; and while he won the battle by deciding what to eat, she lost a bigger war of maintaining authority and teaching him something good way beyond one meal. He'd learned the first time she gave in and fixed something else that he was in control of his mother instead of himself. The sad thing—their interaction made reality a lie. She was treating a five-year-old like a

baby and he, a five-year-old, had control of an adult! Eating problems always tell us there are blurred boundaries and a fight for control. On the other hand, giving choices and consequences reestablishes the boundary and solves the battle of wills. So when your children refuse to eat what you serve, they miss out on snacks. They may even go hungry until they will follow the healthful pattern. Hunger will work pretty fast to motivate a child to eat better. The rule you set is this: “Eating a balanced meal is important for your health. If you make the choice not to eat healthy food, then snacks and sweets will be forfeited” or “This is it until breakfast.”

- **A few rules consistently enforced are better than lots of rules enforced sporadically.** Before making a rule, ask yourself: Is this rule really necessary? Does it protect my child’s health or safety? Does it teach my child how to play and get along with others? Does it teach my child to clean up her own mess? If not, maybe it’s not a rule to keep. Too many rules can overwhelm and suffocate a young child’s budding identity, and can also give your kids the feeling that you expect them to be perfect, rather than that you’re helping them learn how to be self-controlled.
- **Logical or natural consequences make the most sense—and difference.** Rudolf Dreikurs, a medical doctor and author of *Children: The Challenge: The Classic Work on Improving Parent-Child Relations*, explains that allowing natural consequences to follow a natural social order creates the greatest impact on your child. For example, if your daughter plays ball too close to the house and breaks a window, the natural consequence is to repair the window. If the family rule is to place soiled clothes in the hamper, the natural consequence for your son dropping dirty jeans on the floor is they don’t get washed. “The order of things is pretty straightforward,” Dreikurs says. “Children can understand and accept this

flow of things.”¹⁵ So when bikes or skateboards are left lying around, they’re consequentially put out of use for one day. If non-compliance continues, increase the time of not using these vehicles for two to three days or maybe a week. For school-age kids, homework, books, and materials needed for assignments should be brought home daily, and if Mom or Dad have to drive them back to school to get forgotten things, then the kids owe you the time that it took, doing something for your benefit. With consequences like these, kids (and adults) can grasp the principle of choices and start making better ones pretty fast.

- **Consistency is the glue.** You have no authority if you don’t mean what you say and do something about rules unheeded or broken. Don’t give a direction if you’re not prepared to follow through. Too many parents issue commands too many times. Children quickly learn to ignore the first two commands, like one cute first grader sent to my office for habitually not following his teacher’s directions. The boy admitted his response record was to become “parent deaf” at will. With a smirk, he said, “I wait until Mom says something three times, or until she gets mad, whichever comes first, to do what she says!” As expected, the behavior learned at home to not worry, because a direction doesn’t mean act now, carried over to school—and Mom’s style of issuing commands didn’t work. “Children who come from environments that are reasonably consistent and predictable generally have higher self-esteem and more self-confidence,” said Dr. Darwin Dorr, a consulting professor of medical psychology at Duke University and editor of *The Psychology of Discipline*.¹⁶
- **Parents stick together no matter what.** If you argue, disagree, and lose control with your spouse or any other authority figure in front of your children, you sow confusion and

anxiousness. You also, unwittingly, teach your kids the art of manipulation and how to pit one parent or authority figure against another. This doesn't mean you'll always think exactly like your spouse or another authority figure. A certain amount of disagreement actually helps you see alternatives, enlarge your repertoire of effective parenting strategies, and temper what to do when you're at extreme ends. But you don't do that tempering in front of your kids. You talk through differences of opinion in private or in a way

A STEP TOWARD BETTER DISCIPLINE

Keep Your Cool When They Melt Down

It's distressing to me that yelling has become the new spanking when it comes to discipline. At the grocery store, in the park, even during church, you hear parents yell at their kids to "Come here," "Stop that right now," "Straighten up." But yelling and nagging don't work, even though every parent has resorted to it at some point.

In yelling with frustration, you may have let off your own steam, but you haven't solved a thing. You might shock your child into stopping for a moment. But after the shock wears off, they haven't learned why to stop, and you may have actually caused additional issues: hurt feelings, frustration, resentment, anger—and all because they don't understand that it's their behavior, not them, that drove you over the edge. Some children yelled at by their parents think there's something wrong with them, or their parents. They wonder, *Why is Mom having a temper tantrum?* Face it, you are having a tantrum when you yell and throw a fit, because your child is throwing a fit. That's Crazy Mother Syndrome.

But you can get a grip. When you feel the frustration rising so much that you want to yell or scream:

- **Withdraw and stop.** "Just one minute," you can say. Or, "Go to your room. I'll come to talk with you in fifteen minutes." Now step away. Do something to break the emotions. Splash water on your face. Sweep the floor. Walk the dog around the backyard. Literally regain your footing. The break gives you and your child time to think and prepare for the discussion. Also, during the break, you can decide what you're going to do if your child starts to argue.
- **Go to Plan B.** Always have a Plan B in your pocket. Determine ahead of time what kind of situations make you and your child melt down. Be intentional, purposeful, and list them: the grocery store, in a restaurant, driving to church or in a service. Decide what you can do. Write out your options to reinforce the ideas and keep somewhere as a reminder for only you. It's easier when you're calm in your kitchen than in the middle of church, a busy street, or

that shows respect and how you're going to stand together on the course to follow. You never say, "Do as your mother said," or "See what your father says." Instead, you use "we" in giving direction, and avoid one parent being solely in charge. Otherwise, the other parent's authority is undermined. I saw this mistake while working with a group of mothers whose kids were in a special class to correct behavior problems. Every mother was in full conflict with the child's father, or in a distant or broken relationship with him. None of

Aisle 2 at the grocer's. At the store, for instance, you can tell your child you'll give one warning, then you will both leave if he misbehaves or melts down for not getting something he sees and wants. Plan to go to your car if he begins to lose it and you do too. The very act of leaving the site of the meltdown can help you both calm down until you're ready to try again. In the car, you can talk about what to do differently. Another option is to go home for that talk. Your child will learn how to handle these situations away from them, when not overstimulated or distracted. Parents who are mentally prepared for how they're going to act when children react have a much greater chance of not losing their temper.

- **Self-soothe with self-talk.** If you're thinking, *This behavior isn't fair, everybody thinks I'm a failed parent, other parents don't go through this*, or are repeating some other self-defeating self-talk, things are sure to escalate. But when you're thinking, *I can handle this, this is simply a child misbehaving and not a reflection of my parenting skills, other parents go through this, there are things I can do safely about this now*, there's a much better chance you'll keep your cool.
- **Don't take it personally.** When you feel disrespected, unappreciated, ignored, or put down, you can get mad or hurt. Remind yourself that often what your kids do really isn't about you. They're thinking of themselves. They're hungry, tired, overstimulated, or curious. Remind yourself to look at the bigger picture, that they're thinking of their own wants and desires, not trying to walk all over yours.

At the end of the day, don't beat yourself up emotionally for losing your cool now and then. If you do lose your temper, acknowledge that to your children, not necessarily in a teary confession, but in a matter-of-fact and sincere way. "Mommy lost her temper," or, "Daddy didn't mean to get mad...and he was mad about what you did, not who you are." In so doing, you model good behavior. You show that no one is perfect, not them, not you, but no one has to be controlled by emotions either. You can talk about what you, and they, would be better doing.

these couples were working as a team in disciplining their kids. One parent often gave in to the other's rules, or said *no* when the other said *yes*. Many parents kept secrets from their spouses about giving in; some spouses were just plain absent and uninvolved. The result was exactly what Dr. Everett Waters, psychology professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, found in a study of 200 families where parents disagreed over child rearing practices: The children learned to manipulate their folks; and ended up with no respect for authority, and saw their parents as weak and dysfunctional.¹⁷

- **Staying engaged and working together** is the antidote to raising kids who respect authority in healthy ways single with supportive friends and family, learn how to be united in the way you discipline your kids. This is especially important to remember in an age when, according to one study by the University of Michigan, two in three moms (as opposed to one in three dads) are the sole disciplinarians in the family, setting limits on television watching and computer games.¹⁸
- **Routine helps reinforce.** Too many caring parents end up sleep deprived for years because their two- or three-year olds rule the roost. It's common, after all, for preschoolers to develop a second wind just when parents say it's time for bed. No sooner is a little tyke tucked in for the night than out he or she pops again, heading to Mom and Dad's room, asking for water or kisses, or playing on sympathies with tales of monsters or nightmares. The ploy is to get snuggles and more time awake. But let this behavior go unchecked and the cycle will continue until you simply give up and allow your kids to stay up, or slip into bed with you. That's when the true monster appears—right next to you with a triumphant grin. But routines help put monsters in their place. A repertoire of soothing activities leading up to bedtime

can make kids forget to disobey until they're so relaxed and sleepy that they drift into Dreamland without misbehavior. What works—the progression of a warm bath each night, followed by a story, and saying prayers together. Once you establish a routine for bedtime, you'll see how a little routine helps in other areas too, returning backpacks or bikes not in use to a designated place, for instance, or taking off your shoes at the door, or eating dinner at a set time. Once you've established the rules, you can always break them now and then for some spontaneity or special occasions, but you've got to have the structure first of all to break it. Routines like eating at a set time around the dinner table, teach your kids important things for others areas of life, punctuality and the importance of gathering to feed not just the stomach but the soul. Prayers before bed teach the good of daily giving God time and thanks, praise and even the troubles of the day.

- **Harshness is not the same thing as firmness.** Harshness springs from anger and frustration, while firmness is delivered in a sense of calm strength. Where harshness attacks the person, firmness addresses the problem giving steps to resolve the issue. Nicole, a lawyer at a prestigious New York law firm and mom to five-year-old Sarah, discovered this within weeks of the start of a new school year. She was used to being in control, from the kitchen to the courtroom, but mornings became chaotic and stressful as she struggled to get Sarah ready for school and herself to the commuter train on time. This particular morning had been horrendous. Nicole found Sarah playing with her action figures in the sink instead of brushing her teeth, and getting socks and shoes on. Time was up, and so was Nicole's temper. She grabbed the action figures and flushed them down the toilet, yelling, "You're making us late when you know we can't be, so these have to go." Sarah sobbed, "You couldn't wait to do that, could you?" Mornings had become their battleground,

where a cycle of revenge exploded. Like a hammer, Nicole's angry words smashed Sarah's budding sense of self-worth. Nicole needed to master firmness in place of harshness. She needed to take a strong stand toward a Sarah's dawdling, and deliver that stand in a calm, controlled voice. Instead of trashing her daughter's toys, she could say, "Now is time for brushing your teeth, not playing with toys, so I'll take these action figures so you can concentrate on getting dressed for school."

- **Care as much about how you say something as what you say.** Most power struggles could be eliminated if parents' directives to their children were delivered in a calm, respectful manner that doesn't aim to control. Unfortunately, too many times parents bark at their children to do this or stop that, and an offensive tone automatically puts kids on the defense. How you deliver a message truly does invite compliance or instigate rebellion. That means avoid using words like *should*, *must*, or *have to*, each of which conveys the idea that your words are the be-all, end-all, with no give and take or room or care for what a child thinks and feels. Such authoritarian language only sets you against your children and instigates a power struggle. Instead, offer two appropriate choices versus dictating a command. For example, you might say, "Would you rather have your snack right after school as you do your homework, and then play until dinner time? Or would you rather have your snack and play outside for one hour before finishing your homework before dinner?" See how homework and dinnertime aren't debatable choices but the order of things can be, based on preference and style? This approach engages your kids in what needs to be done or met, and sets them up to receive and engage in how to do it. Tact and tone do go together; even unpleasant things spoken in love can be received well. Think of how Jesus disciplined the adulterous women at the well.

His manner was inquisitive, loving, caring, and compassionate. He didn't shame her. Instead, in a firm gentle voice, he asked her questions while making it clear, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11).

PART OF THE SOWING: DIG UP YOUR ROOTS

As you move toward being the parent just right in disciplining your kids, you may need a Time Out yourself. By that I mean take time and space to reflect on whether or not you're parenting in knee-jerk reactions. It's so easy to parent this way, as if on autopilot according to how your parents disciplined you. Either you automatically do what they did because you think it worked, or you do the exact opposite because you're at odds with what you experienced. Either way, this isn't the best, most mindful way to parent and could be hurting you and your kids.

This was the case with Jeff's dad.

Jeff, a large, gawky first grader, was getting into fight after fight with classmates at school, and his dad wasn't doing a thing about it. I learned Mom was the disciplinarian and Dad disagreed with most every attempt she made to correct Jeff. Dad had grown up with an alcoholic mom who was abusive and had disciplined him by spankings that turned into beatings. So discipline to Dad meant something horrible and painful. His mother never established rules and expectations, or taught him how to achieve those on his own. Instead, she berated him, called even innocent and expected behavior *wrong* and *bad*. Her son never felt understood, heard, or helped as a boy. Instead, he was broken. His sense of shame grew with every beating. As a man and then a dad himself, he determined never to correct or punish (and, therefore, hurt) his son.

The result: everyone was walking wounded. Jeff had no self-control or respect for his parents, himself, or anyone else, and was getting away with whatever he wanted. Mom was frustrated because every time she tried to correct and help Jeff, Dad shot down her authority. And Dad could see Jeff created and faced growing problems, but felt clueless about what to do and was contributing to the bad behavior by allowing it.

Jeff's dad needed help to rethink discipline, where it was good and how it could go awry. He needed to know what he experienced as a boy was abuse and not to be confused as a discipline style. He needed assurance that true love for a child is correcting and teaching him, not coercing or abdicating guidance altogether.

But how could he change the thinking and attitudes about discipline that ran so deep in his own soul? How could he make the move toward being authoritative from completely permissive? How could he learn to work together with his wife to be a unified front for Jeff?

How can any parent do these things?

Thinking purposefully, intentionally, and reflectively is the start. No matter what your family background, you learned its patterns. Digging into those roots will help you grow into being the best parent you can be, the one God wants, who sows wisdom into your children's hearts and minds.

Glean from Reflection

Begin by writing down some of the most formative incidents where you were disciplined, addressing for each one what you remember of what happened: What did you do? How did your parents learn of your actions? How did they react? What did they do and require of you? What did you understand of their response, and why or why not? How did it make you feel? How did it change you?

There's power in writing down these things. You acknowledge what happened and you begin to peel back the layers, like that of an onion, revealing how and why you discipline (or not) now.

One of the layers to look at is an outer one—the outcomes. What was helpful, corrective, instructive, or guiding, and why? Make a list of these positives, and any negatives, like what felt hurtful, harmful, spirit-crushing, frustrating, and why.

Now, from the list (another layer to look into, this one interior), identify your emotional vulnerabilities and strengths. For example, maybe a parent's harsh and authoritarian discipline has left you, like Jeff's dad, struggling to trust or forgive, and full of so much shame that you fear failing and even succeeding. Or maybe your strengths are that you're

quick to correct things, follow through, don't repeat mistakes, and you're consistent.

Think how each quality leads you to respond with discipline of your children. You'll quickly see how you can attach what you've felt as a child to how you react now. Once you know where you want to be more mindful in correcting your kids, you can begin to take powerful steps forward that will help you and your kids. Knowing is the first step toward change, toward being the parent on purpose that you want and God designed.

Have Faith in All that's Planted

Don't expect change overnight. You may still react, or want to, on autopilot when your kids misbehave. But be encouraged that doing better starts in your head, and now that you know better, you can do better. God promises this. You will be transformed by a renewing of your mind, he says (Romans 12:2). That's where change begins. The Spirit of truth helps you learn and is at work within you to enable you.

Jesus said it plainly too, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). So, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). The way to do this is so very practical, too. As in any relationship, you:

- **Spend time together.** Tell God your concerns. Ask him questions. Plan to meet with him every day in prayer, praising, and worshipping him. The Bible says when you give God your concerns and every thought, he supplies you with all you need, even guarding your heart (Philippians 4:6-7).
- **Get to know his mind, wisdom, and will.** You can know what God thinks by reading and listening to his Word. There are free phone apps with almost every version of the Bible in audio to hear as you drink your coffee, fix a meal, drive to work, or walk and work out. In the process, God will give you the wisdom (2 Timothy 3:16-17), power (Hebrews 4:12),

and hope (Romans 15:4) you need to become the parent he wants and your kids need.

- **Draw near to him and he will draw near to you and help.** God is just a call away and waits to help you (Psalm 145:18 and James 4:8). Look for how he will work in you, through you, and around you. He promises not only his presence to be alongside you through whatever is ahead, but also his strength (Isaiah 33:2 and Philippians 4:13).

Keep Practicing and Sowing

The bottom line is practice. Your actions need to speak louder than words, your sowing the seeds of wisdom needs to happen over and over again. When you keep sowing, disciplining, and feeding the right things as a way of life, you will see change.

Counselors give the same advice. “Whatever you practice, you become,” says H. Norman Wright, a psychology professor, the author of more than seventy books, and a marriage, family, and child therapist with a private practice in California.¹⁹ He continues, “If you argue regularly, you become an argumentative person. If you criticize often, you become a critical person.” But if you praise, encourage, and keep looking to do the right things, you become someone who is a joy to be around, full of encouragement and goodness.

REAPING DISCIPLINE’S REWARD: GROWTH

That’s what you want, after all, to be the authoritative parent who encourages and imparts wisdom in your children. It’s the whole point of discipline, teaching your kids to make right choices, or, as the Bible says, disciplining them so they are a delight (Proverbs 29:17).

More delight and less drama was exactly what Shirley was ready for after we talked about discipline as a way of correction and teaching. She knew the battle over riding the bus was going to turn into bigger things unless Lilly learned to make better choices on her own. So Shirley determined to stop engaging in the power struggles, cease growling at her daughter

to mind, and stop Lilly's howls of "Noooooo." Shirley determined to start sowing wisdom.

"You have to ride the bus to school in the morning," she told Lilly in a talk before bed that night. "So tomorrow you can get on the school bus on time or you can give up coloring."

Lilly, whose all-time favorite activity was coloring, looked surprised, then troubled, but nodded that she understood. In fact, she didn't yet, not entirely anyway because consequences were all new to her.

So the next morning there was another morning meltdown.

"Fine," Shirley said, calming Lilly instead of reacting to her. "I'll take you to school and I'll also take your crayons since that's your choice."

When Lilly handed over the crayons but walked triumphant to the car, Shirley wondered in a call to me later, if she'd failed.

"No," I reassured. "You've only just begun."

That's the way sowing goes. You plant choices. You give consequences. But there's still tending to do, still teaching for understanding and wisdom.

That evening, Shirley upped the consequences. She was on purpose about discipline. Her goal wasn't just to get Lilly to mind, to perform because Mom said so. Her goal was to teach Lilly that morning needed to go smoothly so they both could go about their day and not get stuck in unnecessary drama.

MY PURPOSEFUL PARENTING CHECK-IN

How Am I Doing with Discipline?

I'm seeing my children grow in discipline, and being my best to bring out their best, by:

- Finding the balance toward being just right as authoritative, not authoritarian or permissive, in my parenting style.
- Teaching the idea of choices and consequences, of sowing and reaping.
- Reinforcing the idea that while there's usually a good way to act and behave, there's always a best way—and pointing my child toward choosing the better way like feeding the better wolf inside.
- Watching the gauge on the love-discipline, making sure I'm balancing the correction I give my child with both a show and words of unconditional love.

“Today didn’t go so well, did it?” she asked Lilly that night. She was smiling but firm. “Let’s try again tomorrow. You have to ride the bus to school or you’ll miss out on the fun things at school and Mommy will get in trouble at work. So tomorrow you’re going to get on the bus on time or you’ll give up coloring again *and* spend time alone in your room thinking about it *and* go to bed early so we can get up early to try again. Do you understand?” Shirley could see the recognition in Lilly’s eyes that she did understand and was beginning to fully comprehend what consequences meant. Mom wasn’t engaging in a fight here. There was just a choice to make.

But choices were all new to Lilly. So the next morning, when the two wolves inside her went to war, Lilly gave in to the howling. “I don’t want to get on the bus,” she yelled at the door. “Noooooo.”

“Fine,” Shirley said calmly. “You’re choosing to give up coloring *and* to spend time alone after school in your room *and* to go to bed early. Let’s get in the car and I’ll drive you to school.” Shirley was matter-of-fact, and there was no yelling, no battling out what to do at the door. A choice was made. A consequence was coming. This wasn’t about her winning or Lilly. It was about Lilly learning.

At home that afternoon the student faced her consequences. She went to her room, without crayons or paper or anyone to talk to—and she didn’t last an hour. Within thirty minutes, Lilly burst from her room, promising to be ready on time for the school bus.

Standing her ground wasn’t easy, Shirley said, because Lilly didn’t make the right choices overnight. But teaching the better way wasn’t entirely hard either. In less than a week Lilly had learned the better way of behaving, and both she and Shirley were delighting in their day again.

When you care enough to plant wisdom in your children, you will reap a harvest. It’s true that some children will test you. They may rebel. All that you plant may take root but droop for a time. Your child may one day choose to feed the lesser wolf inside. This is one of the most trying parts of parenting. Raising a living, growing being who chooses his or her own way is indeed holy ground. Sowing and disciplining is truly a picture of the divine, what God does with us, spreading grace, nurturing wisdom,

allowing us choices and consequences. But his promise is in the harvest. You are establishing the roots of a glorious harvest.

“Start children off on the way they should go,” Proverbs 22:6 says, “and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” What’s sown is rooted deeply in the soul, and the soul is where God lives. Deep calls to deep (Psalm 42:7), and all you are planting will never be in vain, no matter what choices your children ultimately make. God will always call with his ways and his wisdom.

Continue reading!

Click on your favorite retailer below to purchase this book today!

amazon.com®

Christianbook.com
1-800-CHRISTIAN

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS

BAM!
BOOKS·A·MILLION

Family
CHRISTIAN

MARDEL®
CHRISTIAN & EDUCATION

PARABLE®

8ooceoread

Want **FREE** and deeply-discounted **eBooks?**

Click Here! →

Destiny
Image.com >



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEAN BARNES is a veteran educator and pioneer in recognizing the importance of teacher-parent collaboration for the benefit of children. She's worked in preschools through high schools in ten school systems across the country nationally recognized as "outstanding," and been hailed for her work as a school psychologist, counselor, teacher, and team leader.

After retiring in 1999 from twenty years at Fairfield Public Schools in Connecticut she moved to Orange County, California. There she served the Capistrano Unified School District as a school psychologist.

She pioneered the groundbreaking Family Growth seminars that rouses parents and teachers to work together for the benefit of children. Her model program in 1983 earned a grant by the State of Connecticut, was published in *Promising Practice in Special Education and Students Services*, and led to professional development seminars for psychologists and counselors. The second model program she created, *Love and Discipline* (1990), and the third that she inspired and helped shaped, *The Teacher-Parent Connection* (1997), were presented upon request and are recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists.

With ten years in the classroom and forty years total as an educator and as a mom in a variety of roles (married, divorced and raising young children on her own, and then remarried and widowed and parenting adult children), Jean Barnes knows what works for parents and children to grow together. And her knowledge, experience, and effective practices are trusted by parents.

She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a masters from the University of Cincinnati, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in psychology from Fairfield University. Her doctoral studies in marriage and family therapy, as well as human development at the University of Connecticut, shaped many of her principles that help children thrive.

LOVE to READ?

Get FREE eBooks,
Deep Discounts and New Release Updates!

Sign up now.
destinyimage.com/freebooks

SHARE this BOOK!

Don't let the impact of this book end with you!

Get a discount
when you order
3 or MORE BOOKS.
CALL 1-888-987-7033

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

Exclusive interviews with your favorite authors!

Tune in today.
voiceofdestiny.net



Destiny Image is a division of Nori Media Group.

