



foreword by  
**CHARLES  
COLSON**

hearts and minds

*Raising your child  
with a Christian view  
of the world*

Kenneth Boa  
John Alan Turner



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*Hearts and Minds: Raising Your Child with a Christian View of the World*

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## Foreword

A recent network television special on American evangelicals included some remarkably sympathetic interviews. One woman, however, jarred me with comments that probably are shared by millions of Christian parents. She said she was so busy running the kids to soccer matches, helping them with their homework, cooking meals, driving to her part-time job, and looking after her husband that, by day's end, she couldn't even care "what's going on in the world."

With my own children raising teenagers, I could understand. But I couldn't help wondering what this mother will be able to say when her son comes home from high school biology class to tell her that we evolved from the primordial soup—that through billions of years of natural selection we've arrived at our present state. And how will she respond when her daughter comes home from her college philosophy class bewildered because her professor announced there is no such thing as truth. And if her children are asked to participate in their school's Day of Silence in support of the homosexual agenda, will she know how to explain why this agenda is both deceitful and destructive?

If this mother thought about it for a minute, she'd realize that she cannot afford *not* to take time to learn what the world is teaching her kids, and then learn how to counteract it with bracing doses of Christian worldview instruction. Otherwise, her children may eventually lose their faith as they encounter competing worldviews in college or at work.

That's why I am so delighted that my longtime friend and associate Kenneth Boa and my new friend John Alan Turner have written a book that challenges parents to go beyond behavior modification in their children, to stop settling for the false positives of sleeping through the night or sitting still at the dinner table, and raise the bar of parenting to God's standard. They believe—and rightfully so—that God's agenda for children is that they grow up to become like Jesus, not just in Christlike conduct, but in Christlike thoughts, values, and attitudes.

Ken and John have presented an aggressive agenda in this book. They are convinced, as I am, that the church's most urgent priority today is equipping this generation to defend their faith in the marketplace of ideas, and to make a winsome defense of moral truth.

So in this book, Ken and John give parents the basic tools they need to shape the way a child sees God, the world, and their place in the world, so those children can help advance the borders of God's kingdom here on earth. With a steady stream of logic, real-life stories, and common sense, they equip parents with the nuts and bolts of a Christian worldview in terms that parents can understand, so they can transfer that framework to their children before launching them out into the world to change it for God's sake.

Perhaps what is most exciting about this book is how Ken and John take weighty concepts and distill them into clear and precise terms. This is not a book for the academic elite (though there is much to be gained here). Rather, this is a book for regular, everyday parents, the busy and overworked dad, and that poor, harried soccer mom I mentioned earlier.

And what a difference we can make if we give our children the tools they need to defend their faith. I am reminded of the story about a young college student who was coached by a graduate of Prison Fellowship's Centurions Program, a woman named Nancy Fitzgerald. For years, Nancy has taught a Christian worldview course, which she now calls *Anchors Away*, in her Indianapolis home. Her basement is packed every Sunday night with high school seniors. Nancy told me about an encounter that one of her *Anchors Away* graduates had with a college ethics professor who challenged his students with the classic Heinz Dilemma: that is, how do you choose one person to eliminate from a crowded lifeboat, thereby saving the others?

Nancy's student refused to participate in classroom discussions, claiming that choosing one person to die is immoral and offended her Christian conscience. Furious, her professor threatened to flunk her if she didn't participate. But she held her ground.

Something about this girl's moral stance intrigued the professor in spite of himself. He ultimately gave her an A and asked her to explain her beliefs to the whole class. And, if you can imagine it, the professor eventually became a Christian.

Most Christian kids, without worldview training, will not be able to

handle themselves this well at college. As part of my own teaching program, I speak to several youth groups a year. I always start by asking if there's such a thing as absolute truth. Hardly a hand goes up. After I've given several obvious illustrations (for example, if a little old lady asks for help crossing the street, it would be—always and everywhere—immoral to push her in front of a bus), their eyes pop open as they realize that the moral truth is written on their hearts (Romans 2). It's an "Aha!" moment.

The call to equip ourselves, and our children, with moral truth is a biblical mandate. It's what Peter meant when he said we must be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). We mustn't fail in this endeavor. That harried young mother in the NBC special, too busy to teach her kids where secular worldviews are wrong—that's just what the enemies of Christianity want to hear. And it's why you and I must get serious about learning and teaching worldview. If we do, I'm convinced we can save our children—literally.

And then our kids will learn, as Francis Schaeffer used to say, how to become worldview missionaries to their own culture, fulfilling the Great Commission and the cultural commission in their own generation.

*Chuck Colson*

## Acknowledgments

From Ken Boa:

Through the grace of God, I have been blessed all my life with a rich tapestry of treasured relationships. These people, too numerous to name, have shaped, encouraged, guided, and taught me throughout the course of my journey. Because of the nature of this book, I want to give particular thanks not only for my parents, Kenneth and Ruthelaine, who are now with the Lord, but also to others who participated in the process of parenting me. My extraordinary grandmother, Lottie Mae Bacle Kelley, shaped my spiritual journey more than any other person, and our reunion will be a joy. I also think of my uncle and aunt, Roland and Ann Kelley, with profound gratitude for their abiding impact on my life, and of David and Roxie Haines for their palpable model of what it means to walk with Christ.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”  
(Hebrews 13:7, NASB)

From John Alan Turner:

This book has been part of my life for nearly two-and-a-half years, from initial outline to final, last-minute corrections. Many people helped at points along the way—and their help was immeasurable.

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The Wednesday Night Bible Study I teach at the North Atlanta Church of Christ is the highlight of my week. You have learned the good, the bad, and the ugly about me and my family, and you love us anyway. Thanks for your prayers on this journey.

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Dr. B., thank you for offering me the chance to write this book with you. I often tell people that being friends with you is like being friends with C. S. Lewis. That's not true. Being friends with you is like being friends with Jesus.

And then there's my wife, Jill. You learned most of this stuff right along with me. You certainly wrote most of this stuff right along with me. You're not only my editor, you're my best friend and my partner in all things. You're the only person I want to partner with in parenting the three beautiful girls God has given us.

## Introduction

Jeff Sandstrom, a Dove Award–winning music producer, grew up going to camp every summer. A Christian organization near his home in up-state New York hosted a summer camp for boys, designed to train them to be Christian leaders. In that time and place, being a Christian leader meant knowing how to lead congregational singing, stand in front of an audience, and preach.

One of the main events each summer was for these young boys to memorize prewritten, three-minute sermonettes and recite them for the rest of the camp on parent-visitation day. There were hundreds of these mini-homilies—with titles such as “Why Ivory Soap Floats” and “What Christ Did for Sinful Men”—and whoever could recite the most sermonettes verbatim, would gain admittance to the Hall of Fame.

Jeff Sandstrom desperately wanted his name in the Hall of Fame. His father was an associate pastor at their church. He led worship and the youth group, and the Sandstrom family was a pillar of the congregation. As a pastor’s son, there was some pressure on Jeff to act in certain ways and to know certain things. Everyone just knew that Jeff would leave camp that summer as the newest member of the Hall of Fame.

They did not expect Timmy Tollison to be as good as he proved to be.\*

Timmy was a memorizing machine. It quickly became clear to everyone at camp that he was better than Jeff at reciting the sermonettes. He was likely going to be admitted into the Hall of Fame first and steal all of Jeff’s thunder.

This is how it came about that on a muggy summer morning in the early 1980s, Jeff Sandstrom prayed, “Dear Jesus, please do not let Timmy Tollison remember ‘What Christ Did for Sinful Men.’”

It’s a good thing we grow out of that kind of childish behavior, isn’t it?

\*Timmy Tollison is not the boy’s real name. We have changed the name to protect the innocent. Jeff Sandstrom’s name has not been changed, because he told us we could use his story, and he was not innocent.

The July 19, 1996, issue of *USA Today* carried a story from Dadeville, Alabama, about a Bible-quoting contest gone wrong. Gabel Taylor and another man began an informal match to see who could quote the most Bible verses. Eventually, as in all such contests, one man bested the other. Thirty-eight-year-old Gabel Taylor was the victor. The other man, whose name was not revealed in the news article, got a gun and shot and killed Gabel Taylor.

Beyond making us laugh or wince, these two stories illustrate how important it is to define success properly for our children.

In this book, we're going to talk about how we as parents should live. We're not going to talk very much about how children ought to behave, although there will be some of that. Instead, we're going to cut straight to the heart of the matter and help you understand why it's more important to focus on what's happening inside your child than on what your child is doing.

Our goal is to help you train your children to think about and see the world in a certain way, and we firmly believe that their behavior will adjust itself accordingly. We are convinced that people usually act as they do because of what they believe. We're also convinced that parents who are overly concerned with external results (i.e., behavior) can turn out a lot of false positives—children who look great on the outside but whose insides are corrupt; children who do the right thing only until no one is looking. We may think that our children are on the right track because they attend church and know their memory verses, but the truth about a person's character eventually reveals itself, often with devastating results. Ask Gabel Taylor's family.

We've intentionally avoided techniques or gimmicks for making your children behave better. We have tried not to get bogged down in external measures that can produce a false sense of success for parents. This is not a book about how our children ought to behave, but about how we ought to live as their parents.

We built this book on a foundation laid by researchers and theologians, experts in the fields of psychology and education, such as Hal Runkel, Kevin Leman, Alfie Kohn, Ray Guarendi, Tim Kimmel, Edward Hallowell, and many others. We read a lot of books during the process of writing this one to be sure that our opinions were sound.

One of the biggest flaws we've found in many parenting books (especially Christian parenting books) is the myth of technique. Often

the impression is given that we can control our children with the proper technique. This usually comes from misreading Proverbs 22:6: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” The truth is that you cannot really control your children.

If your goal is to make your children behave in a certain way or to force them to be a certain kind of person, you may or may not achieve that goal. Kids grow up to be adults with minds of their own. You may do everything right and still see your kids walk away from their faith when they get older. Despite what you may have been led to believe, they may not come back. If your definition of successful parenting is having faithful children who make you proud and turn your friends green with envy, you may be setting yourself up for a rude awakening.

The truth is that you can't control your kids or their choices. The only person you can really control is yourself, and most of us struggle with that. What if we took Gary Thomas's advice? He says, “The ultimate issue is no longer how proud my children make me, but how faithful I've been to discharge the duties God has given me.”<sup>1</sup> Focusing on our God-given responsibilities as parents changes our definition of success.

Parenting our kids requires gifts and skills that we don't have. Only God has what it takes to raise children properly, and he calls us to parent in partnership with him because he knows that it will make us rely more on him. As we are invited to draw closer to him each step of the way, parenting becomes a spiritually formative activity. We need to raise children as much as they need us to raise them.

We don't know many parents who feel completely competent in their role. When you find out that you're expecting a child, it changes who you are and how you live. How you live out the principles of a biblical worldview in the presence of your children will either help them or hinder them in their quest to connect with God.

The stakes are high because how parents live today will shape the world for the next generation. Our children will inherit the world that we bequeath to them. But don't let that discourage you. God is prepared to equip you for the task at hand.

### Better Parenting or Better Parents?

How would you answer if you were asked, “Are you better at being a Christian or at being a parent?” Most of us would say that being a good Christian is a snap compared to being a good parent. Most of

us think of ourselves as decent Christians. The basics of Christianity are relatively easy to get a grip on, and they have remained constant for centuries. We have plenty of areas that we're working on, but God has helped us and brought us to where we are spiritually, so we feel relatively certain that he will continue to work in us.

But being a good parent? With all the talk shows and seminars out there, some of us feel that we must rely on the insight and education of professionally licensed and board-certified experts because they know more about our children than we do. It's difficult to master even the basics of parenting because there seem to be more basics now than there used to be.

Here's a secret that you may not have heard: Personhood sets the tone for parenthood.<sup>2</sup> In other words, *the kind of person you are will have a longer-lasting effect on your children than your parenting techniques*. Whether or not you were able to insightfully discern the inner monologue of your preteen daughter will not matter as much as whether or not you were an example of Christlikeness to her. If you want to be a better parent, the place to begin is with your own relationship with God. The closer you draw to him, the more transformed you will be by the power of the Holy Spirit; the more you take on God's perspective, the better you will be at parenting.

The proliferation of parenting books at the local bookstore can be overwhelming, and parents can begin to feel doubtful, anxious, and guilty. The last thing we want to do is to make parents feel more intimidated. God has called you to do something remarkable—to live in such a way that your child will see God and his purpose for each of us. That purpose is to bring glory to God by living with integrity, enjoying the gifts he gives us, and being good stewards of those gifts.

Chief among those gifts are our children. Part of living a God-honoring life is remembering that children are a blessing from God—however much they may sometimes feel like part of the Curse! One of the best things you can do for your child is to become the kind of person who feels good when you're told, "She's just like you." Instead of telling your son, "I can't wait until you have one just like you," what would it be like to say, "I hope you have a son who is as much of a blessing to you as you have been to me"?

It might also be helpful for you to know that the basics you need to be a good Christian are the same basics you need to be a good parent.

To be a good Christian you need to have the right beliefs, the right values, and the right practices. In other words, you must love God with your head, your heart, and your hands. As you do that, God's Spirit will transform you into a godly person, and your parenting will change as well.

There are other good books that deal with how to get your child to sleep through the night or sit still at the dinner table. We're more concerned with how you can help your children to see the world as it really is, to understand the world and their place in it, and to give them a filter through which they can interpret life as it is happening.

Your worldview shows up in why you vote, what you watch, where you shop, and how you drive. Your worldview determines how you talk to yourself and others, how you treat your neighbors, and whether or not you can forgive your enemies. Your worldview is demonstrated by your thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

Here's the scary part: If you say you believe one thing but your behavior reveals something completely opposite, guess what your kids will remember.

That's why we're going to focus less on children and more on parents; less on child rearing and more on how parents can live in a way that demonstrates a life of faith to their children.

## An Overview of the Book

In part 1, we will talk about families as the basic building blocks of society. As families go, so goes society—not the other way around. Therefore, if something has gone wrong with society, it is precisely because something has gone terribly wrong in our families. If we are ever going to stem the tide of moral decay in our world, we must begin at the family level.

Several factors make this difficult to do. In chapter 1, we'll consider the challenge of parenting in an age of specialization, and we'll make the case that parents must stop outsourcing their children's faith development. During the past couple of generations, the faith development of children has become church-based and home-supported. According to the biblical paradigm, however, it's supposed to be home-based and church-supported.

Parents are often afraid to take ownership of the faith-development process. It can be a daunting task; but with a simple understanding of the typical stages of faith development, parents

can devise age-appropriate strategies. In chapter 2, we'll walk through four basic stages of faith development and give some practical examples of the things you can do at each stage to smooth the transitions your child will naturally go through.

One idea in this first section that isn't usually part of parenting discussions—even of biblical parenting—is using Jesus as our example. We tend to think that because Jesus did not have children, he doesn't have much to say about how we parent. In chapter 3, we'll look at Jesus' relationship with his disciples to glean some tips for teaching and training our children.

In part 2, we'll begin the heavy lifting. We'll unpack the basics of a Christian worldview in a way that busy dads and even-busier moms can understand. We hope it will help that we are both busy dads ourselves.

In chapter 4, we address the basic questions that a worldview seeks to answer, such as, Who am I? Where am I? How did I get here? Why am I here? What's wrong with me and my world? and, Is there a solution to the problems of this life? We can tell our children what we believe, but the way we live reveals more about our faith than our words ever will. If our lives were congruent with what we say we believe, the whole world would change.

Everything begins and ends with our concept of God. Either he exists or he does not. If he is who he says he is, then he defines reality. If our children are convinced that God exists and that he is not silent, more than half the battle is over. Chapter 5 deals with the importance of giving our children an accurate picture of God.

Once we grasp the fact that God exists and has revealed himself and his will to us, we can begin to piece together some answers to questions about meaning, purpose, and destiny. Chapter 6 presses the premise of God's character to its logical conclusions and shows how God's existence and his revealed will affect the other fundamental life questions.

Part 3 examines what we value as Christians. There is a wrong-headed notion in our society that all ideas are equally valid and that truth is relative. Values are often culturally determined, but some things are more valuable than others. Some values have been held by all (or most) societies throughout history.

The first such value is truth, the subject of chapter 7. Societies have generally attached high value to truth and honesty over error and

dishonesty. Truth is the basis for social order. Without truth, there can be no trust, and trust is what cements human relationships. Trust must be given and received.

The second value is goodness. History often divides the good guys from the bad. In old Westerns, it's pretty easy to tell them apart: Good guys wear white hats; bad guys wear black. In real life, no one is completely good or absolutely bad, but societies nevertheless agree that there is a difference between good and bad, right and wrong. In chapter 8, we consider who gets to decide which is which. Without an objective source of truth, good and bad are easily confused.

The final value we examine is beauty. Our cultural biases make it tricky to deal with the concept of beauty, but people throughout time have considered nature to be beautiful. Likewise, people have always regarded destruction as ugly. We believe that nature is beautiful because it is a reflection of God's nature. God is creative, so we reflect the image of God (the *imago Dei*) when we are creative. Satan is destructive, and thus destruction manifests our fallenness.

Part 4 deals with our actions. Our children may not care much about what we say, but they are watching what we do. Biblically speaking, certain behaviors and activities validate our faith in God. Without evidence of life change, however, our faith will be shallow and ineffective. It won't be the attractive force that our children need if they are going to grow deep in their relationship with God.

God calls us to make a difference for him in the world. In this section, we'll see how *faith* prompts us to engage the world, *hope* sustains us in our engagement, and *love* is the means by which we engage.

In chapter 10, we consider the life of William Wilberforce, who sparked the beginnings of the worldwide outlawing of human slavery. Wilberforce demonstrated that we can make a difference for social good if we allow God to change our hearts. We must tackle social issues as ambassadors of Christ. Real faith is never relegated to Sundays only. It permeates every part of our lives.

Chapter 11 is about the hope that is necessary for sustaining life. The question is not, do you have hope? but rather, in what are you placing your hope? Martin Luther King Jr. had the certain hope that he would inherit everlasting life with God, that justice would one day prevail, and that all our questions would be answered. These beliefs sustained his tireless efforts to see God's will accomplished in his



generation. Such hope can be ours as well, and we can transfer it to our children by reminding them of great men and women of God.

Chapter 12 is about love, the core of the Christian life. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves; to care for marginalized people; to be Good Samaritans; and to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned. Nineteenth-century prison reformer Elizabeth Fry is a great example of someone who carried out these loving acts. Her compassion and compulsion to care for others came from her belief that every person has inherent value and dignity because they are created in God's image. Without that, we have no logical reason to care for others. When we treat people with love, we offer the best argument for the love and goodness of God, and we show our children what it looks like to be an ambassador for him.

Our conclusion suggests that you—yes, you!—will be able to pull this whole project off. As we've already said, parenting is difficult, but God has promised to give us the tools and resources we need to pass our faith along to the next generation. With God's help, by using the Bible and relying on the Holy Spirit, Christians can become better parents than they ever thought they could be.

### Externals or Internals?

Jeff Sandstrom survived his childhood camp experience and became not only a good man but also a godly man. But like so many of us, he was a product of a system that defined success improperly. Success was often measured by what we externalized, not by what we internalized. When Jeff stood before his peers and their parents to recite his memorized speeches, his mission was accomplished. Never mind that the words coming out of his mouth hadn't yet reached his heart.

Contrast Jeff's childhood experience with the story of another little boy: Stuart and Kelley Hall's son, Grant. Stuart shared this story with us so that we could share it with you.

It is a glorious day for any parent when their children reach the point where they can use the bathroom and not go in their pants. The earlier that happens, the better. That was our experience with all three of our kids. Stunning how such a necessity of everyday life can be celebrated like the Red Sox winning the World Series. Sobering how such an occasion can bring you to your knees.

My wife, Kelley, began to notice blood on the toilet paper after my five-year-old son used the bathroom. A visit to the doctor calmed our fears a bit as our pediatrician assured us that Grant just suffered from a slight case of hemorrhoids. Not exactly the coolest thing for a kid in kindergarten to deal with.

Only days after that visit, however, Grant stood up from the toilet and blood spilled on the floor. Needless to say, we freaked. We made an immediate appointment with a specialist. After examining Grant, the specialist sat us down and said there was a strong possibility of cancer. Kelley and I sat there in shock. Exploratory surgery was necessary as quickly as possible, and we scheduled it for the following week.

I couldn't sleep that night. I pored over the Scriptures, begging God to show me a promise that he would heal my little boy. I did not find that promise. As far as I can surmise, nowhere does God promise to heal us from sickness or disease. He tells us that he *can*, but he does not promise that he *will*. The verse that got my attention was Psalm 31:24. David says, "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord."

I wrote that verse in big letters on a piece of paper and put it by the coffee pot. Kelley and I made it a part of our conversation and prayers. I shared that verse with Grant and helped him to memorize it.

Two days before his surgery, I picked him up early from school for his pre-op tests. When he walked out of class, big tears were streaming down his face. For the first time since the whole ordeal began, he said, "Daddy, I'm scared." I quickly referred to that verse. I wish you could have witnessed my brave little boy, trying to catch his breath, dry his tears, and repeat those words: "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord." Then again, I'm glad you weren't there, or you would have seen me turn my back to him and begin to cry.

We had to be at the hospital very early in the morning on the day of the surgery. The nurses gave Grant the equivalent of "children's cocaine" to sedate him. He started hallucinating, seeing cows flying around the room, talking incoherently about stuff only God could understand. As they rolled him away for the surgery, he smiled as his mom, grandparents, and I kissed him and

told him that we loved him. When we reached that point in the hallway where we could go no further with him, his nurses said that we had to leave. As I leaned down to kiss Grant one more time, I wiped away a huge tear from his cheek and heard him mumbling something unintelligible.

I bent closer and finally understood what he was saying. Over and over, Grant was whispering, “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

One little boy memorized Scripture to gain status and acceptance. The other little boy memorized Scripture to gain courage and strength. One little boy learned about God in order to get something. The other little boy learned about God and became a different person. Both little boys externalized the right things. Only one boy also internalized the right things.

Jeff Sandstrom grew out of his externalism into a good and godly man, but he had to unlearn some of the bad habits of his childhood in order to gain a better understanding of godliness. Grant Hall—who survived the surgery and today is a fine, healthy young man—knew from a young age that true righteousness comes from the inside out. Real godly behavior begins with what’s going on in our children’s hearts and minds.

part 1

## **The High Cost of Parenting**

*In this first section, we encourage you to recover the lost role of parenting. Parents have the primary responsibility for the lifelong process of their children's faith development. We hope to build confidence and awareness by showing you the most common stages of that development and how parents can be more involved in leading their children to spiritual maturity through Christlike teaching.*

## Chapter 1

### *Parenting in an Age of Specialization*

Given the amount of information available today on every imaginable subject, it's no wonder that we live in an age of specialists. In nearly every field, areas of expertise are shrinking, and the impact is acutely felt by parents.

We want our kids to be healthy, so we make sure they have a doctor. It's hard to find a good, old-fashioned general practitioner these days, so our children may well have age-appropriate, gender-specific pediatricians.

We want our kids to be intellectually advanced, so we choose the locations of our homes according to school district, and we grill the teachers to ensure that our little Einsteins will have the best environment possible for developing their minds. Long gone are the days of the one-room schoolhouse with one teacher who taught all the subjects. Now we want young, attractive, energetic, multilingual math teachers who come in for one hour a day to teach only math (in a young, attractive, energetic, multilingual sort of way). If we want our child to learn Spanish, we'll find a good private tutor in the suburbs.

We want our children to be athletic, so we enroll them in sports programs. God forbid that one kid in America should miss out on youth soccer! We find that coaches tend to concentrate on one sport. After all, what does basketball have to do with soccer? We enroll our children in piano, art, and ballet lessons so that they will be cultured and appreciate the arts. Of course, ballet lessons for a four-year-old are mainly an excuse to dress her up in a pretty outfit. There's nothing wrong with that.

We send our overscheduled, under-rested, stressed-out kids from person to person to ensure that they are having well-rounded childhoods.

Do they have an appropriate balance of physical, cultural, and academic activities? Are they growing up with all the advantages we never had? Is there a specialist whose help we have not sought—a time-management expert or a nutritionist? Is there someone who can teach our children the most beneficial way of playing in the backyard?

There's nothing wrong with specializing in a particular skill or with seeking the expertise of someone uniquely qualified in a given field. If we can afford to give our children a leg up, we should do what we can. After all, we want the best for them, and we can't do it all by ourselves. No one says we have to coach Little League or learn a foreign language in order to parent our kids.

But who is responsible for our children's worldview and their connection with God?

## **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

The fundamental assertion of faith among the people of God in the Old Testament was “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Every time the people recited these words, they renewed their covenant with God. It was a gentle reminder of their true identity and of the relationship they had with the One who gave them that identity.

The Israelites recited these words at least twice every day—when they woke up and when they went to sleep. These were the first words taught to a Hebrew child who was learning to talk, and they were often the last words spoken at death by Israelites who took their commitment to God seriously. The *Shema* (a Hebrew word for “hear” or “listen”), as it came to be called, was to be their first sentence and their last sentence—of each day and of their lives. Every Jewish person knew this portion of Scripture as the very core of what it meant to be a child of God's covenant love. Everything else was subordinate to this overarching principle: Love God with everything you have!

Moses told them, “These commandments that I give you today are

to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

## **THEY’RE YOUR KIDS**

Who is responsible for making sure that our children develop spiritually? The Bible is pretty clear on this. Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their children to know and respect God. Their worldview will flow from the foundational text of the Shema, so parents should make every effort to teach this principle to their children.

This isn’t just an Old Testament concept—in the New Testament, the apostle Paul says the same thing: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Clearly, children are meant to be raised by their parents.

As obvious as this seems, however, we seem to have gotten off track somehow. With school, tutors, Little League, and band practice, a parent is just one of many voices in a child’s life. As we spend less time with our children, we lose confidence in our ability to parent. Society also contributes to this anxiety. We are told that the state can do a better job of educating children. Every magazine rack contains articles on how to be a better parent. Radio and television experts sometimes belittle traditional families with traditional values. In his book *You’re a Better Parent Than You Think!* Dr. Ray Guarendi notes, “We are in the midst of a rush into child-raising awareness—a rush that is having an unexpected backlash on parents. It is breeding worry, guilt, indecision, and a host of other uncomfortable emotions that can undermine self-assured parenting.”<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, we live in an increasingly self-consumed society that no longer prizes such values as sacrifice and selflessness. This has created a startling lack of heroism in our culture as fewer people are willing to set aside their personal comfort and safety for the good of others. It doesn’t take much of this prevailing sentiment to persuade parents that they can

continue to pursue their own interests with minimal interference from their children—provided that they allow other people to raise their children for them.

Society thus tells us that we are probably not very effective as parents and that we have our own things going and shouldn't have to give them up. These two ideas combine to generate some serious consequences. It has now become acceptable, even normative, for parents to abdicate their role as the primary guardians of their children.

Under such intense scrutiny and pressure, many parents are content to allow institutions and organizations to educate and socialize their children. Schools and private tutors are readily available for everything from horseback riding and computer skills to table manners. Unfortunately, many people assume that they can also outsource their children's spiritual development.

It is shocking that the church often contributes to this upside-down philosophy. All too often, churches and pastors are eager to ride in on white horses, saying, "Leave those kids to us; we'll take care of them! Just drop them off in our age-appropriate, self-esteem-building, sterilized children's ministry environments. We'll let you know when they're ready to be picked up."

It is sad that churches have also played on the selfish mentality of many parents by billing their children's ministry as child care. "Mom and Dad are free to build themselves up while we take care of their children." Very few churches offer meaningful intergenerational gatherings where parents and children can together learn the basics of faith and how to live it out at home.

Should we let the professionals take care of it? After all, you probably didn't go to seminary. You don't know Greek or Hebrew, and you may not even know all the books of the Bible. How can you be responsible for the faith development of your kids? When everything around us requires a specialist, how can we presume to be our children's spiritual mentors—when we don't even have things figured out for ourselves?

We have made the faith development of children church-based and



home-supported. But look through the Bible sometime for even a single verse about how the church is supposed to raise children. You will find that the Bible repeatedly tells parents how to relate to their own kids. In other words, churches should be assisting parents as they work at home to train their children and instruct them in the knowledge of the Lord.

There is a lot of truth to the old cliché “It takes a village to raise a child.” But the village—the community of faith surrounding the family—must never replace parents as the primary caregivers, guardians, and instructors of children. Rather than eroding the confidence of parents or feeding their naturally selfish urges, churches should offer their resources and guidance to parents. They should avoid the trap of thinking that they are the primary source of spiritual development for children.

The Bible clearly says the primary responsibility for instilling faith and values in the next generation belongs to moms and dads who must commit time, effort, prayer, learning, and growth to this endeavor. We shouldn’t expect it to be easy—and we cannot help our children grow in spiritual things if we are spiritually immature ourselves.

## IS IT IN YOU?

Anyone who has ever flown with children knows the preflight statement, “In the case of an unexpected loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the panel above you. Those traveling with small children should secure their own mask before attempting to assist others.”<sup>2</sup>

Most parents think that it would be far more appropriate to make sure that the kids are okay first, but the airlines have a good reason for this policy. Parents are oxygen-givers. Our children—especially if they are young—depend on us for nearly everything. If a parent passes out, the kids are in trouble! Children need parents who are clearheaded and alert. You have to take care of yourself first when others are counting on you.

That’s why Moses says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts” *before* he says, “Impress them on your children.” It’s impossible to give something away if you don’t have it. Otherwise you can only fake it, and children are very good at detecting

phoniness. Children look to their parents for ideas on how to live their faith. If parents aren't providing an example of what faith looks like in the rough-and-tumble of everyday life, children cannot be expected to "do as I say and not as I do."

As parents, we find time for the things that matter most. We manage to eat, bathe, and sleep—most days at least (unless we have a two-year-old, and then all bets are off). Most of us even find time to exercise and keep ourselves physically fit. Yet we claim not to have enough time to maintain our connection with God.

In the opening chapter of his book *Finding God in Unexpected Places*, Philip Yancey analyzes America's health craze and its obsession with physical fitness. Yancey, an avid runner, joined a Chicago health club after a foot injury prevented him from running. After his experiences at the health club, he wrote:

In the end, the health club stands as a pagan temple. Its members strive to preserve only one part of the person: the body, which is the least enduring part of all. . . . Physical training is of some value, Paul advised Timothy, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8). As I pedaled, straining against computer-generated hills, I had to ask myself: What is my spiritual counterpart to the Chicago Health Club? And then, more troubling: How much time and energy do I devote to each?<sup>3</sup>

We need exercise. We are, after all, stewards of life and health just as we are stewards of money and talents. But we must place first things first.

## **THE HIGH STAKES OF PARENTING**

A human being enters the world bearing an immortal soul. Every child will one day give an account of his or her life to a holy judge. All of us will face an unending eternity of either unspeakable joy or unbearable separation from God. In our society, parents are expected to think a lot about how to give their children temporal gifts—a nice house, good

vacations, the best education—but these same parents neglect the one gift that will last for eternity. Parents love their children best by preparing them to stand before God.

Moses gave the Israelites clear instructions on helping their children to develop a relationship with their Creator. He warned the people about the dangers of departing from God's ways. "Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. Do not test the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 6:14-16).

How did the Israelites respond to this clear warning? Apparently they did quite well—for a generation. Joshua inherited the position of leadership from Moses and lived to be 110 years old.<sup>4</sup> During his lifetime, he brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, led them to many victories, and set a great example of a life of faith. After his death, others of his generation lived on for a while, but eventually they died as well. "The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel" (Judges 2:7). While the memory of God's greatness and the work he did for Israel was alive, the people maintained their devotion to God.

After the death of Joshua and those who had seen God's mighty acts, "another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals" (Judges 2:10-11). Therefore, "in his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist" (Judges 2:14).

The people honored God because Joshua and his generation had direct personal knowledge of God's mighty acts among the people. The next generation didn't know God or his work on their behalf. This new generation turned to other gods, and the true God brought judgment upon them.

Judges is perhaps the saddest book in the Bible. It follows the children of Israel during one of the darkest times in their history and traces a depressing cycle: The Israelites honor God; the Israelites forget God; the Israelites are enslaved; the Israelites call out to God; God raises up a judge; the Israelites are delivered. Then the process is repeated—six times! If only the people had taken Moses' instructions from Deuteronomy 6 seriously, the whole pattern could have been avoided. Every time the cycle came back around to the part where they were delivered and again honored God, they had a chance to avoid repeating the process. And every time, the parents failed to pass the lessons they had learned on to their children.

If only this historical message no longer applied to God's people! Unfortunately, the cycle continues. Each time a baby is born, the parents have a choice: Will we pass the torch of faith to this child, or will we allow the darkness to claim another generation? Unless we parents teach our children about God and pass on a Christian worldview to them, the problems of our society will continue. We can turn the tide if we will courageously take back the responsibility that has been ours all along.

## Notes

### Introduction

1. Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Parenting: How Raising Children Shapes Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 16.
2. Raymond N. Guarendi, *Back to the Family: How to Encourage Traditional Values in Complicated Times* (New York: Villard, 1990), 65.
3. Stuart Hall, personal correspondence with John Alan Turner.

### Chapter 1: Parenting in an Age of Specialization

1. Dr. Raymond N. Guarendi, *You're a Better Parent Than You Think! A Guide to Common-Sense Parenting* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 2.
2. Although this illustration is common, we are indebted to Hal Runkel's book *ScreamFree Parenting* for first introducing the concept to us as it relates to this topic.
3. Philip Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (Ventura, Calif.: Vine, 1997), 4–5.
4. See Judges 2:8.

### Chapter 2: Faith Development

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2. Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 31.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 31–32.
5. Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood* (New York: Seabury, 1983), xiii.
6. Ibid., 35.

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