

RAISING GODLY TEENS

C. Maychild



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Dedication

“Honour thy father and thy mother...”

This book is to honour my parents who brought me up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

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Foreword

I'm a mother – a mother of a two and half year old 'live-wire' boy. He is an 'entertainment' to our friends and relatives but an 'energy-out-of-control' to my husband and me, especially when this 'tiny rebel' screams 'No.....' when we only expect him to obey. My heart skips a beat when I wonder what his teenage years would be like.

I know I can never be a perfect mom (I wish I could be! Don't we all?). But even as my 'tiny rebel' grows up I'm anxious for him to avoid all those things that would trip him up and distract him from fulfilling his dreams. I want to do all that I can to help him walk through his teenage years safe and sound.

And that is why I believe that the author's choice of theme has produced an invaluable book for many parents today. She has made a beautiful effort to integrate the principles from the Word of God and the practical issues that parents face globally today.

I'm certain that it will be a useful resource for both parents of teenagers and 'to-be' parents of teenagers.

A learning mom,
Neena Matthew

Preface

In a world that is fast changing and losing its spiritual perspective on virtually every area of life, including raising children, this book is stepping up to the task of re-orientating families on the lost *Biblical Worldview* on raising children the God way.

In this little volume, I have attempted to assist parents desiring to bring up their children ‘in the fear and admonishing of God’ by providing useful insights into God’s word in the area of parenting.

You will find the principles which are put together in this book both realistic and do-able, and it is my hope and prayer that you will see the results which are desired.

C. E. Maychild, 2012

Introduction

*“... bring them up in the training and admonition of
God.”*

- Ephesians 6:4

The Scripture admonishes fathers (and mothers) to bring children up in the training and admonition of God. As a matter of fact, the original King James Version uses the word “nurture” instead of “training.” This distinction is significant.

You see, whereas this word “training” refers to the process of learning the skills and acquiring the know-how to do something, “nurture” describes the care, protection, support and encouragement that is given to someone who is in the process of growth.

In essence, therefore, the Bible reference is not merely concerned with the process through which children can learn to live their lives to please God, but also with the procedure for attaining this, namely the *care, protection and encouragement* that goes into the training.

Of course, the basis for raising teenagers who fear God is in the foundation laid from their early years (please look out for *Answers to Questions That Young People Ask*, another book I have written in which I share insights on how to answer young children’s questions about eternal things). But even if your children’s teenage years have come upon you suddenly and you are not sure whether you have laid sufficient background for this next lap, I believe that you will still find this book useful. It is never too late to do the right things or, indeed, to search out God’s purpose for our lives and that of our children – no one can stray so far out of divine will that God can’t find them and bring them back.

In the chapters about lessons you should teach your children I have attempted to arm you with general principles to

guide you in taking children through the school of obedience, and also for teaching them God's word.

There are three chapters devoted to the subject of leadership, the Jesus-modeled leadership style is considered.

Then there are what I like to call *the bonding chapters*. They will give you a fresh perspective on how you see your children and how you can relate with them more meaningfully. You'll also learn the values of fostering friendships in the home and the unique partnership in raising your children which you operate on your knees.

Lastly, there's the unequivocal statement that you need a role-model.

The ideas in this book develop and support one another and are by no means complete. *Raising Godly Teens* has by no means said everything that needs to be said about raising teenagers that fear and love the Lord and live according to His precepts. Indeed, that would be an impossible claim for any one book to make.

This small booklet is intended to set you on the journey to raising your children in the in a godly way. It is meant to encourage you to begin the journey today, now. It is meant to constantly remind you, all along the way, of the real destination which is raising *godly adults – men and women of God in their generation*.

Raising Godly Teens is a God-centered manual rather than a child-centered one. It is intended as a constant reminder that God is depending on you for the next generation of godly men and women.

1 Find Out The Purpose of God For Their Lives.

For an uncomfortable number of people, having a family (husband or wife and children) is their personal dream. There is no further reason other than that it will please them and conform them to the world's standard of success or perceived achievement in life. It is just simply a 'stage in life' and no more is thought of it.

This on its own is not necessarily bad, at least not at this point. However, if you do not go further to have and hold a vision for the husband and wife union; a vision for the family together; and a vision for the children of the marriage, then the decision to have a family has been at best pointless and at the other

end, selfish, self-centered and uninspired. It will fulfill only your own purposes and not God's.

The implication for such a family unit is that the children will be brought up all wrong. Now, do not get the wrong idea here. The children may become *successful* by the world's (or your own) standards but the family and children would have failed by God's standards.

It is not enough that you raise your children to be lawyers and doctors and other professions just because it has always been your dream to have a lawyer or doctor in the family or even because they themselves aspire to be those things.

The most important and pre-eminent consideration is that they become what God has made them to be.

You are not the God of your family (at least I hope you are not contesting the position) and so, it is important for you to recognize the headship of God in the family and in the life of your children.

God's word says, "*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it!*" This is the clear instruction from God's word on this matter. It however raises the salient question, 'in what way should the child go?'

To answer this question, parents will need to consult the child's Maker, the One who formed the child and placed him or her on earth in their care. They would also have to be watchful to recognize the calling of each child. The child's calling will usually manifest itself in several ways – their rare gifts or talents, natural abilities or aptitude, their passions, areas of strength (and weakness!), and even their basic make-up or temperaments.

For instance, it is usually not difficult to recognize a special calling to be a preacher of the gospel in a child in the family. It's that child who *is* Pastor every time the children 'play church'. It is the child who reacts to family crisis by organizing the others to pray; usually he or she is not even the oldest

child. It's the child who will usually have words of encouragement, often bellying his age, to offer family members at apposite times. Sometimes, if the parents are praying people, God would have revealed to them quite early on His divine call in the live of their young one even without the need for, or in confirmation of these signs.

It cannot be overemphasized the point that you must learn to recognize the calling of God on each child because it is your responsibility to nurture and nourish it, and guide them to the fulfillment of their divine assignment on earth.

A lot of times, while the child is discovering and developing his gifts, it will be messy. Be patient with them. When I was growing up I had a lot of issues with papers. I was always playing with paper; cutting, tearing and making my own books. I exasperated my parents. But thank God they did not lose patience with me and kill my fascination for books. You may not have been reading this one!

Now when I see a young child in the family draw on *all*

the pages of her exercise book in one day (and so surprisingly well) I refrain from cautioning them or killing their enthusiasm. It would be such a shame to quench her talent just to save the books.

As your child enters his or her teenage years, you should have taken the pains to discover and nurture his or her confidence in using what gifts God has bestowed on him or her, helping them make the most of their gifts and graces.

The Bible teaches that no gift or calling should be spurned². Everyone is given something different, something that the world needs in his generation. Artists of different ages have given men and women immense pleasure with their works. Writers preserve events for scores of generations. Florence Nightingale used her gift of caring for people to ease the pains of others, nursing wounded soldiers during the Cremean War. History is replete with many more examples.

Learn to recognize the call of every child no matter how

insignificant it might first appear. A quiet and sensitive child can become an intercessor both in the family and the church, or medical personnel. A boisterous and bubbly child may well have a ministry in songs, or be a people's representative in the future, whereas a child who has the propensity to be insanely organized and analytical may well be a financial analyst or a scientist in the making. A child may be clever with words and another with figures; the one may be a motivational speaker and the other an accountant. No two destinies are completely identical nor should we expect the gifting and abilities for fulfilling them to be the same².

It may be that one child's gifts and abilities seem to outshine another's. This is of no moment if we recognize and teach them that all gifts are on the same pedestal of greatness so long as they are fulfilling exactly the purpose for which the individual has been placed on the earth³.

Recently, someone e-mailed me a column written by Regina Brett in which she outlines 45 lessons life has taught her (Brett

is a 90 year-old old). One of them is this: *Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.*

I think this about sums up splendidly the point that every human being is on a unique path in life.

Children should be taught to respect and esteem themselves and others and to walk their own paths confidently, courageously and thankfully.

Without exception, every child has a calling whether they recognize it or not. It is your place as a parent to find out what it is that God has wisely placed him or her on the earth to do, and then point, guide and help him fulfill it.

You are not the God of your family and so, it is important for you to recognize the headship of God in the family and in the life of your children.

2 Teach Them: Obedience

Have you ever observed a two year old child go against the will of his or her parents, doing over and over what he or she has been told not to do? Doesn't it make you wonder, like I do, where this root of rebellion springs from? What could this mean?

Obedience is not the natural response of fallen mankind to instructions, disobedience is.

Disobedience began with Adam. Interestingly, though, Adam was not formed with the innate disinclination to obey. It was not part of his nature to be rebellious. It was natural for him to obey God and unnatural to disobey. But he also had the freedom to choose to obey or to disobey.

For us, however, disobedience is inherited with our natural life through Adam. This disobedience is in its very essence rebellion against God and insubordination to His will. It is also called 'lawlessness.'¹

Obedience, then, is something we have to learn.

The Bible clearly states that children are to obey their parents in all things². As parents it is your duty to teach your children to obey you *in all things*, regardless of whether they understand it or not. For instance, the toddler who stretches his hand towards a hot surface has no idea that he will get burnt, but your normal reaction would be to protect the child by making him stay away from the source of danger, wouldn't it? In older children, however, we tend to overlook the fact that they are really just toddlers when it comes to certain things. We tend to see their size and forget that experience and wisdom do not come with size but with age.

Obedience to parents is God's rule and heaven's order for running a family. It stems from the fact that God has painstakingly taken you through many lessons in your years on earth and with each experience has equipped you with the needed insight and wisdom for life. Further, God has sharpened your instincts and provided foresight for reasonably

anticipating certain things with regards to bringing your children up. He now wants you to provide support and guidance for another person, until they have lived long enough and learnt enough to make decisions for themselves.

Obedience is admittedly not always an easy lesson to teach whether we are talking about a toddler or a teenager, but more so in the later case.

The reason for this difficulty is obvious. Every child is an individual (implying independence of will, thoughts, feelings, and leading to a behaviour which is peculiar to the child) but an older child is not just so in theory. He has begun to understand his individuality and to test it and as he develops confidence in the fact of his individual existence he will increasingly demand to be treated accordingly.

However, parents, as long as a child is under your authority, it is your duty to teach him subjection³. It is your responsibility to set rules for children, and theirs to obey.

Children will have to take instructions not because they understand them but because they are emanating from the authority instituted by God Himself over them. You should set down strict codes of behavior for your children.

Granted, teaching obedience is not always an easy task. Some days it will seem like you are the Dictator General in your home and they won't like you very much at those times. You may even feel a little guilty (caughta!) wielding the iron fist rule in your home. You may wonder, *am I pushing them away?*

God is not unaware of your difficulty or how grievous it is for your children but He loves them more than you ever can. And, as usual, He is looking far ahead at the end result rather than the immediate discomfort of the situation. God is looking to the peaceful fruit of righteousness that obedience and discipline to come under authority brings.⁴ Moreover, Scripture admonishes you to correct children for your own sake⁵.

Training your child in obedience does not negate love.

Rather, it shows forth and perfects it⁶. Recognize the truth in this statement and you will feel better about it already.

Nevertheless, chastisement, correction and training in obedience is not a command to mistreat your children or make them become discouraged.⁷ It does not have to be all fists and small fire arms in your home. I would strongly advise that you listen to what they too have to say and honestly try to weigh in their own opinions. Yet, if after giving the matter some thought you are convinced that your decision is the better one, then you may want to let them know that it is your responsibility to take the final decision on the matter and you are convinced that it is the best, and that it is their duty to obey until you can explain to them better your reason, or until such a time as they can come to understand it for themselves. Reassure them that you love them.

I would like to tell you that they will smile and walk away soothed but I am afraid this will not usually be the case. There will be the period of sulking and tears, the silence, the anger,

but they're just a time and will soon pass over⁸.

Chances are that if your teenagers have the understanding that it is not a situation of the adult squad against the teen squad, but that the whole family is knitted together in love and share a common goal, and that the success of every member of the family is at the backbone of every decision, then even though they do not understand it, they will have to concede the truth that your motives are in line with what is good for everyone.

Finally, I must add that when your teenagers challenge your decisions and convictions, it is not a time to raise Cain but an opportunity to teach them based on God's principles *how* to take decisions themselves. They will learn that sometimes doing things God's way can seem grievous to us. They will learn the discipline of following a straight and narrow path, and they will learn that it always takes us to the desired destination.

Instructions *are* the way of life⁹ and obedience will cause a child to receive God's blessings.¹⁰

Training your child in obedience does not negate love.

Rather, it shows forth and perfects it

3 Teach Them: the Word of God.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness¹.”

It is important early on to let your child know the manual guiding your lives and to teach them the day-to-day relevance of God's holy words as contained in the Bible, His inspired

word. Children need to learn godly behavior as well as godly wisdom.

Godly behavior is teaching them what to do, and godly wisdom is teaching them the formulae for arriving at correct behavior. Both can be found in the word of God.

One way of teaching them the word is by basing your actions and reactions on it. Teaching them in this way establishes your belief in and reliance on the Bible as the authoritative word of God in the most practical way. It encourages them to hold a similar belief system and to always turn to the Bible for the last word on any matter.

It further establishes a standard of behaviour that will not change – you can count on its principles to direct your thoughts and actions in a consistent and dependable way to arrive at the same kind of conclusions and outcomes every time².

Other than teaching them by basing your action on the Bible, you also should teach them directly from the word. This

establishes your spiritual authority over them and your role as a mentor in their lives. There should be such a thing as family Bible study time where you gather together and teach them from the Bible³.

This implies that you yourself should be firmly grounded in God's word so that you might be unashamed to teach with authority and boldness⁴.

You may not be a leader in your local assembly; you may not have been called into any of the offices of the body of Christ as an apostle, a pastor, a prophet, an evangelist, a teacher, or even be engaged in any other ministry in your local church. In your home, however, as the authority figure, you are both pastor and prophet, apostle and bishop, evangelist and teacher. Think about it, if it is good for the church to meet these needs for their members through leadership, it must be good also for the home. After all, the home is the first place for building up people in the same way the church is for building

up people⁵, that is, to the end that those members ‘no longer be children’ but ‘grow up in all things’ and be equipped or provided tools for Christian living and ministry.⁶

In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he admonishes Timothy to ‘continue in the things which he has learnt and [has] been assured *knowing from whom he has learnt them.*’⁷ This tells us that it *does* matter from whom your child learns the Scriptures. Sunday school is good, sermons are great but you should make an effort to play a remarkable part in the religious instruction of your child.

Again, in the same place we glean further that Timothy had been so taught the Holy Scriptures from his childhood.⁸ This is by no means an attempt to play down or appropriate the role of the church in any way, or to engage the home-front in ‘playing church.’ For the avoidance of doubt, the significant involvement of yourself and your children in church life is very crucial and should not be compromised. For one, the church

provides a place for the members of God's extended family to meet together in the pleasantness and unity of fellowship with one another⁹, and an opportunity to practice love¹⁰ and to serve one another with their gifts¹¹. For another thing, it provides us with relations and friendships outside the home.¹² But more than all these, the Scriptures quite plainly instructs us not to forsake the assembly of Believers together.¹³

God's word is variously described as light (as of a beacon), making wise and having the ability to build up¹⁴ and it is only imperative to expose children to it.

You may not be a leader in your local assembly; you may not have been called into any of the offices of the body of Christ as an apostle, a pastor, a prophet, an evangelist, a teacher, or even be engaged in any other ministry in your local church. In your home, however, as the authority figure, you are both pastor and prophet, apostle and bishop, evangelist and

teacher.

4 Provide Them Leadership

Leadership is the ability to motivate, influence and navigate a group of people towards a common goal or vision without resorting to intimidation or manipulation. It may also be defined as a response to responsibility.

Some set of facts stand out from these definitions:

One, Leadership is a relationship

A person cannot lead where there is no one following. The first step to leading is that you must be able to build a team in order to gain support and followership.

In the context of effective leadership at home, you should be congratulated on building a team successfully from scratch and of course, it begins with getting a vision for the family.

Two, Leading requires a destination

The destination is the common goal; the desired end, achievement or expectation of the group. This is the thrust of holding a godly vision for the family in the first place – your vision is your road map. A destination ensures that you put your current position in proper perspective and that you can measure your progress as well as appreciate your results.

Moses was a successful leader because he had a destination in view. Imagine that Moses had been leading the children of Israel *someplace* or *anywhere*, then the place where they found water might have seemed like an attractive enough place to stop¹, and the Wilderness of Sin where God fed them Manner and Quail might have seemed as good as paradise could get. Consider again that they wandered in the wilderness forty long years. Well, without a clear destination in mind, I imagine that they might have dropped by the way side for as

the Bible puts it, where there is no vision people cast off restraint.² However, no matter how attractive the places where Moses and the people with him sojourned or how long it took them to get to the promise land, they wouldn't stop just yet. They were on their way to Canaan!

As a leader, therefore, you must clearly define your destination (vision or goal).

Three, Leadership requires a transfer of the vision

As we have seen, leadership results from a relationship in which one person navigates other people towards achieving a common goal. This implies that a leader must be able to influence the others towards the goal or vision in such a way that it becomes a common destination for all.³

In essence then, not only must you have a vision for the family, you must be able to share and transfer this vision to them so that you can all be on the same course.

Four, Leadership is not intimidation or manipulation

True leadership does not result from intimidation or manipulation. A tyrannical father may get a child to act in the way he wants, a manipulative mother may exert unwanted, selfish influence on the child but by and large, neither communicates lasting principles or values to the child. They have not provided that child leadership and he or she will feel oppressed and intimidated. In the end godly behavior without godly wisdom is like a castle without foundations.

A true leader, on the other hand, does not only direct actions but influences thoughts and will. If the influence of such a leader is removed, the person who has been under the leadership can stand on the foundation of morals and values imbibed during the continuance of the influence. A true leader thus never has to worry about continual, direct involvement in the life of the other person. This should be a comforting thought in view of the fact that one day soon you will have to relinquish the control you have on your teenager. You want to know that when the bird leaves the nest it will not flutter a

while and plunge to its destruction.

The structure of the family is such that requires recognizable and clear leadership. In fact, strong leadership at home is one of the criteria for a man desiring the office of a bishop.⁴ As the parent of young adults, you should keep in mind that your children are not your peers. Now watch it. This statement does not contradict the equally important need to build family friendships. But love should never confuse your role: friendships within the family must be founded upon propriety of the available relationships. From the beginning children should have no doubt who the leader is.

Children need parenting, be the parent.

Jesus calls Himself “the good Shepherd” because He knows His sheep and is known by them.⁵ In His teaching on this subject He highlights the recognizable traits of a good shepherd to include the fact that the sheep recognize His voice, He calls them by name and *leads* them out, and when He

brings out His own sheep, *He goes before* them; and the sheep *follow* Him.⁶ This is the pattern for any good leader. He should be someone who goes ahead to show others the way.

As your teenager grows up he will be grateful to have a solid role model, someone to look up to for godly advice, a mould for building his own life.

Finally, the Bible declares that Christ is the Head *over all things* to His body⁷ and do you know how Christ exercises His Headship over the Church?

First, by dying for it; He sacrificially gave His own life for the Church and by His death He invested in our future and at a very high personal cost.⁸

Secondly, He met their needs; Jesus fed His disciples both spiritually and temporally.⁹

Thirdly, He protects and shelters it from harm; and He continues to do so through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

This is the way that parents ought to lead their children,

following after the Lord's example.

Leadership is the ability to motivate, influence and navigate a group of people towards a common goal or vision without resorting to intimidation or manipulation. It may also be defined as a response to responsibility.

5 Lead Them: by Example

If you are frequently drunk, come home late without a reasonable explanation or break your words ever so often, it should be no wonder to you if you raise teens who tell lies habitually, stay out late often and exhibit other ungodly behaviors. There is no trick to it; children learn best by imitation, association and example.

For instance, if on the other hand, you spend quality time at home and show them that it is your pleasure to hang around the home, your child learns to associate home with all the good

things that you have packed into their time there.

To use another illustration, let us say that you desire to teach your children to hold out a responsibility for accounting for their whereabouts so that other family members need not be unduly anxious about them. The best way to inculcate this is by doing it yourself. When you are running late, you should stop and call home so that they know that you are safe. In some families where dinner is a family affair (and it should be in every home), they'll need to know that they can go on with the meal (or any other family activity for that matter) without you. You may also need to explain why you are unavoidably absent. This kind of behavior communicates to your teenagers that they are an important part of your life and that you respect them.

When you are not physically home, you do not have to be both absent and distant. For example, you can ask what they are eating (if it is dinner you are missing) or what movie they are watching and if it is good (assuming it's a family movie

time) or what games they are playing and who is winning (if it's a family game you cannot attend). You should also endeavour to tell them about what *you* are doing. Example, "I'm in a terrible hold-up on M-street by Y-road. It's a trailer that's broken down in the middle of the road . . ."

These are just a few examples out of the many possible scenarios that may present themselves in real life. The point being made here is that you should communicate and cultivate a sense of responsibility to family in your children by modeling this kind of behavior to them. Then you can expect that when your teenagers begin to venture out on their own they'll see the need to call home if they are going to be late and you will be able to know where they are and what they are doing at all times.¹

Let us consider another way in which children learn by imitating the example of their parent. A parent who tells his child lies is subconsciously passing the message that lies are

sometimes necessary. A tacky situation is better handled by telling your child quite frankly that you cannot fully explain to the child what is going on at the moment and promising to do so at another date.

A parallel situation might be where you inadvertently train your child to tell lies by asking him to lie, say, to a visitor whom you do not want to see in the believe that there is no other way out. I urge parents to consider the moral training of their children too important to sacrifice for a brief respite. Do not put them in such a demeaning position to lie for you and even more importantly, do not let them see you opt for the easy way out of problems or avoid unpleasant situations by unscrupulous means. They are learning integrity from you. Just as an aside, you need not think that you owe the world the duty to always be available to them twenty-four/seven. In situations where you might prefer your solitude or privacy, the following words built into the child's vocabulary will prove very helpful: 'sorry', 'unavailable', 'indisposed', 'unable to see you at the moment',

‘inconvenient time’. Uttered with grace, these words should offend no one. And, you are teaching your child integrity.

Further, let your yes be yes and your no, no. Anything else is not of God and will bring His condemnation.² Remember, your child is learning integrity from you.

In leading by example is the imperative that you maintain the same standard of behavior that you expect of your teenagers. They will respect you if you meet and even exceed the standards you set for them. It will both motivate and encourage them to know that your expectations are do-able and not some unapproachable moral high ground.

Above all, show consistency. Children will be perplexed, confused and unable to meet up if the rules change frequently. However, this is not saying that you should do nothing about a bad or *laissez-faire* rule just because you will show yourself to be inconsistent or that it will baffle your children. If a change of rule becomes necessary, this should be explained. For example you can say that in the past a certain thing has not

been done in the proper way in which it ought to have been done and that you plan to correct the way in which you handle the matter henceforth. Then the change should be explained in clear terms, leaving no doubt as to what the new position or expectation is.

This brings us to an important point. Part of leading by example requires that you let your child see you make mistakes, learn from them and correct yourself. Let them learn the grace of God so that they will not be too hard on themselves and their walk with God will be easier and more honest.

You should communicate and cultivate a sense of responsibility to family in your children by modeling this kind of behavior to them

6 Lead Them: To Christ

Consider this soberly: once a person is born he or she will never again die or cease to exist. He will only *transit* from

this existence as we know it into the next. He will have to face eternity in heaven or in hell. Really, stop and think about that.

Coming to Christ is perhaps the most important decision that your child will ever make in life yet so many parents leave the variances of heaven and hell to Sunday school teachers, crusades and that lone old street preacher.

It is your responsibility and duty to God that you parent your child to the right decision – the decision that will determine his eternity's location, his eternal address.

You may ask the question, if you have brought up your child to believe in the existence of God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, is it still necessary to formally lead the child to Christ?

In my opinion, the brief answer is yes simply because it is the formal requirement of our Christian faith according to the Bible.¹ According to Romans 10:8-10, it is not believe alone that will save from condemnation. After all, the devils believe and tremble.² The prerequisite is that we must confess with our

mouth what we believe in our heart in order to lay a hold on eternal salvation.

I can think of at least a few virtues in doing this. Personal confession of the Lord Jesus places on the child the responsibility of his faith. It communicates that from that time on the child is now under the authority of Jesus in all matters. It is a coming of age, if you will. The scenario presented is much akin to a wedding ceremony where the bride's father would lead his daughter to the altar and hand her over to her soon-to-be husband. Now think of what you miss by leaving this most crucial and beautiful moment to someone else!

I barely remember who led me to Christ and I feel grieved about this loss of important history. Even though this was a deciding moment for me, it has been impossible to celebrate it. Unlike birthdays which always cause gratitude, honour and love for my parents to well up within me, this most momentous day of my life remains hazy in my mind.

I quite appreciate that for some people it was their pastor or

some other recognizable figure and I thank God for them. But how much better if your child has *you* to thank for leading him to the Lord. You will never be transferred to another parish nor will he lose your contact number so he can always consult with you on spiritual matters through the years.

The next relevant question in the light of all these suggestions would be, at what age should a child be led to the Lord?

My answer is, when the child is ready; mentally appreciates the implication and significance of what he is doing, understands the essence of this commitment and the responsibilities of the relationship. It really completely depends on the child's spiritual and mental maturity.

Not only should you personally lead your child to Christ, but I further suggest that this occasion can be made into a special family celebration for each child who has come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a special gift given to mark the occasion.

Through the years this special day will become a milestone, a day to stop and reassess their walk with Jesus, and to look

back to and be thankful for.

Personal confession of the Lord Jesus places on the child the responsibility of his faith. It communicates that from that time on the child is now under the authority of Jesus in all matters.

It is a coming of age.

7 Regard Them

Family has never been man's idea but God's. And contrary to popular misconceptions, having children was not God's 'Plan B' after losing the fellowship and intimacy of His relationship with Adam. Adam and Eve were never made to occupy God's created world alone – forever. How do I know this? He said to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth....”¹ Again, He said those same words to Noah after the deluge which extinguished human existence save for Noah and his family.²

This tells us that God's original plan – His only plan –

was that man should reproduce his own kind, in his own image and likeness, and that *all* His creatures should enjoy personal and fulfilling relationships with Him.

Thus, even though God could have created every man in a very direct way (and He possesses enough resources to have done this), He rather instituted a partnership, in a manner of speaking, so that a unique relationship was forged: God created the first man and woman, the man and woman were given the ability and responsibility to *create* other men and women and all exist through Him and for Him³. This creative ability is what we generally refer to as procreation.

Consequently, your role as a parent is always in the context of a relationship, one that is ordained by God, who is the Father of all⁴.

The realization of this awesome truth should naturally affect the way in which you relate to your children. And the heart of that truth is this: we are *all* children of the Most High

God⁵.

When God said: ‘all souls are mine’, He was drawing on the truth that each person is an individual and is important in his own right to the scheme of things. He was endorsing the right of every one of God’s children to be treated as such, to be accorded the respect of individuality. More importantly, He was demonstrating to us *the way in which He sees His children* – not as clumps or clusters of our parents’ personalities or as out-growths of their existence but as people He places tremendous value on. Should we view ourselves and others any differently than through the eyes of the Creator?⁶

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we are heirs of God and joint heirs *with* Christ and *through* Him⁷. Well, if our Lord Jesus, who is God, would equate Himself with us pertaining His relationship with the Godhead and for the purpose of sharing with us His kingdom, then it cannot be difficult to see that God truly desires for all of His creatures to have a humble and modest esteem of themselves in their

relationship to one another and to Him⁸.

Categorically, children deserve to be treated with respect as members of God's family of valuable persons. As parents we should see them as people of promise and potential, having in them the seed of continuity of God's plan for the earth.

The task to which you are called as parents is by no means a light one. It is a different training you give a child from, say, how you train your Mastiff; It involves finding the delicate balance between godly discipline and child abuse, the pre-eminence between God's interest and yours. It is simply quite serious and requires God's help to execute.

Oftentimes in our own experience as children, we have had our parents instruct us on things we found hard to take in. But when we grew up we found these teachings to be apt and needful to our stage of development then. For a long time this baffled me. I thought that parents and their children were limited from understanding each other because of some real or

imaginary chasm in generational gaps. But God's word has opened up my understanding to what might have been lacking those times. And it comes down to spurning the instructions from the Book!

That parents sometimes fall short in relating correction and discipline *in love* is true. The result usually is that they create distrust and suspicion and children are unable to receive their well-intended counsel and instead rebel against them.

In his letter to the church where Paul admonishes children to obey and honour their parents, he also enjoins parents not to provoke their children lest they become angry and discouraged⁹. This is a noteworthy saying. It touches on the point that your *method* for training a child can be the very reason he embraces the instructions and lays a hold on the blessings of a good and long life, or rejects it and loses out on it.

I do not believe that Paul means for parents to go about the job of parenting their children walking on eggs, afraid to

ruffle them or make them angry. I reason that he was speaking here of holding them in godly regard.

There are several ways in which you can demonstrate your regards for your children. One of such ways is by being fair in your discipline and instructions. Also, you should choose the words of rebuke carefully so as to correct and judge, restore and not damage, bring to repentance and not make to become reprobate. These are all tough balances to strike but with the help of God they are possible.

When it comes to the physical side of the adolescent years, parents should be sensitive to physical and emotional changes in their teenagers. Adolescence can be a very baffling time for both boys and girls. It is heralded by puberty, those days of raging hormones playing with their moods. The most important of their needs at this time is understanding and tact. It helps to know that the physical and emotional changes they are experiencing are quite normal and tact is required in dealing with them without causing them embarrassment or shame.

Mothers should leave intimate talks about becoming a man to fathers and vice versa. At the same time, neither father nor mother should insult them by pretending not to notice, for instance, that their daughter is becoming a woman physically, or that their son's voice is breaking to become more masculine. Parents should not be afraid to talk about these freely, but without painful or grievous teasing or adding to their discomfort.

Another area which often bears out your regard for your teenager's person is in your communication. Without a doubt, whether you are aware of it or not, you are communicating on a daily basis; by your words or silences, actions and inactions. I urge you therefore to make communication between yourself and your teenagers a conscious and focused exchange of ideas, thoughts and feelings. Learn to use communication as a positive medium of expression and avoid the alternative – passive, negative and often ambiguous communication of messages, thoughts and feelings.

Being open to communicate with your teenagers and allowing them to air their own opinions says to them that you regard them and believe them capable of a meaningful exercise of their thinking faculties and intellect. Ask their opinions (and you'll be surprised they have plenty of those) about different subjects. Be willing to learn and talk about everything that affects them: their school, their friends, boys and girls, the books they read, the movies they favour – everything. The world's viewpoint is different and popular and catches on very fast. Encourage sharing each other's life in the family in order to detect and catch a wrong viewpoint on its insidious way into your home. Remember that you cannot save a drowning man standing on the bank. Get into their world to know what it takes to bring them out of possible danger.

I cannot possibly exhaust all the ways in which you can show your regards for your children but I trust that the Helper will take you through every situation as it comes up if you turn

it over to Him. What you need to understand most at this point is that you should be aware that there's a standard which is expected of you in your unique relationship with other of God's creatures.¹⁰

There are several ways in which you can demonstrate your regards for your children. One of such ways is by being fair in your discipline and instructions.

8 Build Friendships in the Home

That no man is an island is a time-proven truism. Friendships are an indispensable and important facet of life. They add value to existence¹.

The values of friendship are eternal.

Friends talk freely to one another.

They tell you the truth whether you want to hear it or not. They'll risk hurting you to your own advantage rather than walk on eggs around you to your downfall. The Wise Man called the wounds that friends inflict "faithful", whereas referring to the kisses of an enemy deceitful.²

Friends influence each other.

They share together and influence each other to become all that they were created to be. Friends do not limit one another but encourage and cheer for one another along life's

path. Friends give each other the important, priceless and valuable gift of laughter.

True friends love continually³;

When you are rich and when you are poor, when you are winning and when you are losing, in sickness and in health. Friends love you even through your transgressions. And we know from scriptures the qualities of love; that love is long-suffering and not judgmental, envious, boastful or puffed-up. It does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not easily provoked, nor does it think evil. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails.⁴

David and Jonathan were friends who typically exemplify these qualities. When Jonathan had every reason to envy the one whom God named king after his father instead of him, he didn't. Instead, he protected him from harm and stuck with him all his days as a fugitive in caves and under rocks.

David on his own part kept his covenant of friendship to Jonathan even after his death. His love for Jonathan did not fail even when there was no one to hold him accountable.

Well, if you look again at the above list curled from the First Book of Corinthians, I'm sure you'll find more than enough motivation for building friendships at home because these are all values that make up the building blocks of the family itself: selflessness, acceptance and forbearance, believing, hoping, and enduring together.

Here's just one more thought: friends don't keep things from one another⁵. (Now, if you are going to influence your children through good leadership, you need to be able to get them to open up to you as you will need to be open to them.)

Family provides a natural opportunity for friendships to develop.

While you should encourage healthy friendships outside the home, do not thereby neglect to cultivate and build friendships inside the home among family members.

Jesus Christ had friends: Lazarus of Bethany and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, and many others but he also had friends in his family fold. His disciples were his adopted family; His brothers and sisters⁶, yet He called them His friends.⁷

Cultivate your children's friendship and help them to cultivate meaningful friendships with one another.

A big part of the problems most parents have with their growing children, especially their teenagers, is that they fail to recognize that their relationship is changing significantly. The time swiftly comes when they will have to hand their children's life over to them, having spent many years training, equipping and preparing them for handling it.

The frustration of letting go of the control over the child takes on an unreal dimension because parents fail to accept that their role in their adult child's life is slowly but surely transforming.

The reality, though, is that someday your relationship

will progress to become a matier one. Whereas at a time you set all the rules and made all the decisions for the child, now your opinion is just that – your (hopefully, respected) opinion – and it behooves on the young adult to interpret it and apply it as he sees fit. Yes, someday you'll even need their advice (oops!) about certain matters; and their significant inputs in family decisions.

Changing roles in the family is not a monumental disaster. It is the perfect will of God for He created your child to be a person; not an outgrowth or extension of your own person but an individual with a responsibility to live his own life. With this outlook, you will be more relaxed about gradually relinquishing control, little at a time, as your child shows preparedness to take it.

A good perspective on this role change will ensure a smooth transition and keep things balanced and objective. It will help you preserve a good relation with your child, knowing that one day soon (sooner than you know!), not much will

remain of your ‘fierce dominion’ over the child.

Family friendships are like bridges in this regard. It will help you move easily through the awkward stages of changes in your relationship with your child.

Family friendship is also like taking out an insurance policy for the future of your family relationships, that something to fall back on during the coming years.

Finally, friends share with one another.

That is, they have something to offer each other. Find out how you can relate with each child in a constructive way. Find out what you have to offer each other and work at bringing in your own part. But keep the circle of friendship open to other members of the family – do not form cliques in the home.

Do not let the most important and intimate relationships of your teenagers be those with people outside the home. Vie for the best spot in each other’s lives. As the years roll by, gradually lean more on making your family relationships those

of friendships and respect than in insisting on holding onto control.

Family provides a natural opportunity for friendships to develop. While you should encourage healthy friendships outside the home, do not thereby neglect to cultivate and build friendships inside the home among family members.

9 Pray for them

The word of God says that your children are ‘the heritage of the Lord’ and a ‘gift to you’.¹

When you pray for your children you are recognizing that there is a higher authority over them. You are vocalizing your belief that the child ultimately belongs to God. And, you are professing your limitations as earthly parents.

Praying for them takes them out of your sole power and places them under the sovereign power of the Almighty God. Prayer also gives us the right perspective regarding the relationship between God, ourselves and our children. It brings us to acknowledge that God values us all equally and allows us to see and appreciate the unique role we have, as parents, in relationship with God’s other children. It is a humbling realization that we are all *children* of the Most High God.²

Prayer is the one circumstance in which we are permitted to relinquish our control of and responsibilities to our children

absolutely over to some other being – God. It is such a relief to know that we are not the omnipotent in the lives of our children (a comforting thought indeed).

The Bible abounds with examples and situations in which people in authority over others exercised this authority in prayer. David prayed for his son Solomon,³ Moses prayed for Aaron and also for the nation of Israel,⁴

Jesus Himself prayed for His disciples and for all of us⁵. He prayed for Peter's soul. This particular prayer makes a very interesting point because of the nature of the request. Peter had just made a bold declaration that he would follow Jesus to prison and even die for Him. Peter believed that he was in a good place in his faith. But Jesus knew better *because He was open to hear from God concerning those under His authority*. The Father had revealed to Jesus what satan planned to do with Peter!⁶

This tells us something very important. It tells us that as

parents, and therefore people entrusted with the care of our children, we should not be dead to what is happening to our children both physically and spiritually.

Still speaking about praying people in the Bible, we encounter Paul's prayer for the Saints⁷. He opened most of his letters to the church with prayers. He also taught the Saints to pray always⁸. There is another important lesson for parents here. As you pray for your children, teach them to pray for themselves, for one another and for you, their parents.

You should know that the best way to teach this lesson is by praying yourself & letting them see you pray. Pray openly for one another.⁹

Remember that Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray *after* they had observed His own prayer life.¹⁰ Praying will always get the attention and interest of your children and they will learn from you best in this way.

How should you pray for your children? Pray for them

together and individually. Mention each of them by name. Thank God for specific things in their lives and ask Him to meet specific needs for each one of them. This exercise requires that you know a sizable lot about each child – their hopes, fears, dreams, aspirations and daily activities. It means that you must stay involved in their lives and keep a faithful eye on the radar screen of their day-to-day engagements. It requires also knowing the will of God for them and His purpose for each one of them if you are to pray according to God's will.*

As you pray like this, you are charting the course of their lives in an informed and inspired manner.

Prayer is the one circumstance in which we are permitted to relinquish our control of and responsibilities to our children absolutely over to some other being – God.

10 You Need a Role-Model

“Learn from me,” Matt. 11:29

Does reading this book give you the sense that raising children is serious business and is not to be taken lightly? I hope that it does. I pray that you also see that it is not something you can achieve successfully all by yourself. As you must have discovered, raising godly teens is a really big order to fill.

You need a role-model.

Jesus did; and, He had one – God the Father. Several times He said that He did and said only what He saw the Father do and say¹.

The apostle Paul said: “Be imitators of God as dear children”². As grand as this instruction might sound, it is not impossible to do when you follow through with how Paul proposes you

achieve this feat.

Paul breaks this statement down to its essence when he says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

Now, we also know specifically that Paul had not been with Jesus in the flesh, so how could he say that he was an imitator of Christ? We are led to the one conclusion that the witness which he received from the Holy Spirit must have guided him.

It is true that God is a Spirit and we cannot see Him with our eyes. But we *see* Jesus³ who lived among men. These men have borne witness and they left us His words. This Jesus left His Holy Spirit to teach and guide us*. If we are open to His Spirit and also take the trouble to know the contents of His words sufficiently to be able to make our choices by them, then we do imitate God.

There is a lot to be learned from God in the matter of parenthood as in every area of life. He is called *El Shadai*, a term which alludes to His attributes as both a Father and a

Mother; a protector and a nourisher⁴ .He is thus the quintessential Parent.

You also need wisdom and guidance.

The Bible says these about wisdom:

“Do not be wise in your own eyes:” - Proverbs 3:6-7

“If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach (resenting or belittling you)⁵, and it will be given to him”

James 1:5

“For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;”

Proverbs 2:6

Finally . . .

I pray for you, “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;”

Colossians 1:9-10

There is a lot to be learned from God in the matter of parenthood as in every area of life. He is called *El Shadai*, a term which alludes to His attributes as both a Father and a Mother; a protector and a nourisher⁴. He is thus the quintessential Parent.

Endnotes

1. Find Out the Purpose of God for Their Lives 1. Proverbs 22:6

2. A calling is to be distinguished from a vocation. A calling is a life assignment designated to a person by God whereas a vocation is what a person has been trained to do. Although the two ought to intersect ideally, they more often than not exist separately – a person may be a lawyer by training and a preacher by calling (Paul was a tentmaker by vocation but not by calling), whereas another can be a lawyer by both calling and training. When these two meet in one, it always represents the highest level of fulfillment for a person. It is on this premise that I have placed vocation and calling in a seemingly random manner, that is, in the understanding that the situation need not be an either/or one.

3. 2 Timothy 2:20-21

2. Teach Them: Obedience

1. 1 John 3:14

2. Exodus 20: 12, Leviticus 19:3, Colossians 3:20

3. Galatians 4:1-20

4. Hebrews 12:9-11

5. Proverbs 29:17
6. John 14:15
7. 1 Colossians 3:20, Ephesians 6:1
8. Ecclesiastics 3: 4
9. Proverbs 6: 20-23
10. Leviticus 3: 32, Proverbs 1:8, 19:27, 1 Peter 5:5

3. Teach Them: the Word of God

1. 2 Timothy 3:16
2. Psalm 34:11
3. Psalm 119: 89
4. 2 Timothy 2:15
5. Ephesians 4:11
6. Read further, Ephesians 4: 13-15
7. 2 Timothy 3:14
8. Read verse 15
9. Psalm 133, Acts 2:42, Ephesians 2:19, Romans 12:5
10. Hebrew 6:10, 10:24, John 15:12
11. 1 Peter 4:10, Romans 12:1-8
12. Scriptures censures friendship with the world. If we are to intentionally turn our backs on the world then the imperative is for Christians to pursue healthy social relations within the community of the Church.
13. Hebrew 10:25

14. Psalm 119:105, 19:7, 2 Timothy 3:15, Acts 20:32

4. Provide Them Leadership

1. In Elim, where Israel camped just before they came to the Wilderness of Sin, there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. This picture is one of abundance especially given the circumstances of the dessert. The very fact that the writer includes this detail indicates that it is noteworthy, more so in view of the point we are making here – the place was attractive and it must have taken a very strong will for the Israelites to continue towards a more “uncertain” place that God had promised to give to them.

2. Proverbs 29:18

3. Habakkuk 2:2

4. Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:4

5. John 10:14

6. Read generally, John 10:1-8 for lessons on the Good Shepherd.

7. Ephesians 1:22

8. John 10:11

9. Jesus had a very keen sense of responsibility for His followers; Luke 18:41-42, Matthew 20:32-33, John 1:38-39, Luke 5:1-11, Matthew 17:27, Mark 8:1-9, Matthew 15:32-39, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-14, Mark 6:35-44, Matthew 14:15-21, note verse 16.

10. Matthew 8:23-27, Acts 5:18-19

5. Lead Them: By Example

1. Proverb 29:17
2. Matthew 5:37, James 5:12, 16

6. Lead Them: To Christ

1. Romans 10:8
2. Mark 9:18

7. Regard Them

1. Genesis 1:28
2. Genesis 9:1
3. Colossians 1:16
4. Malachi 2:10, Ephesians 4:6
5. Psalm 82:6
6. Ezekiel 18:4; In fact this Scripture emphasizes the fact that God views each individual as equally important to Him and as having an extrinsic kind of dependence one on the other (that is, supplied externally rather than intrinsically).
7. Romans 8:17, Galatians 4:7
8. Matthew 11:29
9. Colossians 3:20-31, also see Ephesians 6:1
10. Ephesians 4:29 shows what kind of verbal and non-verbal

communication that is acceptable to God.

8. Build Family Friendships

1. Proverbs 27:17
2. Proverbs 27:6
3. Proverbs 17:17
4. See the full text of 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13
5. John 15:15
6. Matthew 12:48-50
7. Luke 12:4

9. Pray for Them

1. Psalm 127:3, 128, Genesis 33:5
2. Psalm 82:6
3. Psalm 72
4. Deuteronomy 9:19-20, 9:26-28
5. Luke 22:31-32, John 14:16, 16:26, 17:9-26.

Now, we know that Jesus is in heaven praying (interceding) for us. Yet isn't it awe-inspiring that while in the flesh He prayed for us even before we were born into the world and into His kingdom? This suggests to me that there is legitimacy in praying for children who are yet unborn.

6. Luke 22:31-32
7. Ephesians 3:14-21, 1 Corinthians 1:9-15
8. 1 Thessalonians 5:17
9. James 5:16
10. Luke 11:1

10. You Need a Role-model

1. John 8:26, 28, 38, 12:49-50
2. Ephesians 5:1
3. John 14:9, 19
4. *El Shadai* literally means 'strong and breasted One'.
5. Parenthesis added by me.

