

Nurturing Our Children

**A Basic Introduction to
Raising Children for God**

Lessons 1-3



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P.O. Box 25520, Colorado Springs, CO 80936-5520, USA

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Course Introduction

Children. Every nation, city, and neighborhood has them. Some nations wish they had more children as they face negative population growth. In other nations it is illegal to have many children. In some nations children make up 30 percent of the population. Children cannot be ignored. Starting out innocent and helpless, they grow to become the influencers in their societies. How children are raised or grow up affects their family's, their city's, and their nation's success.

Nurturing Our Children is a course written for men and women who have children in their lives. Whether you are a parent, an aunt or uncle, a teacher, a friend, or a babysitter, this course will help you more effectively use your moments with children to influence them regarding God and life. For simplicity, the course most often refers to parents and children. If you are not the parent but are still carrying responsibilities for a child, know that this course also is intended for you.

In a mere few hundred pages, all the advice gained over the centuries cannot be adequately represented. This course is designed to be a basic introduction to raising children for God. It is designed to be studied in a small group where discussion and interaction can help interpret the information in a balanced manner. If you are facing particularly difficult situations with a child or children in your life, these principles can help. But if it becomes apparent that professional help is needed, may this course help you discern what kind of help you need to seek. Your fellow students may also be resources for finding the help you need.

The course is supplemented with appendices designed to give more information on specific topics. These appendices are optional, but they are recommended for further study.

Many excellent books have been written to help raise children. Be sure to make yourself familiar with those sources at the end of each lesson.

Each person comes to this course with his or her own presumptions and filters through which to interpret what is written. What one person interprets as strict parenting may seem lenient to another. What one parent interprets as loving may seem too permissive to another person. What may be traditional or accepted behavior in one culture may be unacceptable in another. Again, this is why the course is designed to be

studied in a group setting. Your fellow students can help balance your interpretation of the written material.

Contributions to Developing Character

This course is not designed to make you a perfect parent who produces perfect children. Living on this side of heaven makes that goal unreachable. It is designed to help you understand age-level characteristics of a child and how to identify and handle emotions, administer appropriate discipline, and prepare a child to leave the home. Learning and applying these key personal, emotional, relational, and spiritual concepts will lay the foundation for the development of Christian character. As you also learn and apply them, you will model Christian character to your children.

At the same time you will learn how to avoid common pitfalls and correct misconceptions or false beliefs regarding children. An open heart and willingness to examine yourself and your beliefs are critical. If a concept disturbs you, step back and examine what might cause this reaction: Is the issue something you wish you had as a child? Does dealing with this issue open a painful place for you? Does the issue trouble you because you now see you could have been wrong?

This course is for learners, not those who know all the answers. It is meant to encourage you by providing help and insights into child rearing and how to walk in the good paths God has prepared for you. With humility and faith, bring your regrets and painful memories to Jesus and let Him help you work through them.

Contributions to Acquiring Ministry Skills

The ministry skills of discipling, lay counseling, leading, and teaching find an important place in the area of child rearing. The very process of child rearing is a form of discipling. As you apply the principles in this course and thereby develop your skills as a parent, you will also develop your skills of discipling anyone, not just your children.

Likewise, child rearing is a form of counseling. Every interaction with your child will call upon your ability to counsel and will contribute to improving your skill in this area, both in the predictable daily times and in the sudden moments when life lessons are caught as well as taught. Learning and applying the principles in this course will prepare you to counsel your children and others knowledgeably in virtual all situations, both planned and unplanned.

The essence of leading is the ability to motivate and guide people to reach specific shared goals. The essence of being a parent is to lead. Developing that potential is a goal of this course as well. You will learn how to guide and motivate your child in the areas of physical, personal, emotional, and spiritual health.

Teaching involves both teaching your child about God, life, and personal growth, as well as teaching these concepts to others. Every moment of teaching at home helps you develop the skill of teaching others.

Being God's instrument to guide a child to maturity is a wonderful opportunity to develop these skills of discipling, counseling, leading, and teaching that can be used in any ministry situation.

Contributions to Developing Relationships

This course encourages you to think about the importance of relationships that you have with the Lord, your spouse, your children, and others. Personal Reflections are designed to encourage you to consider all these relationships in your life and to develop in the areas of caring for, loving, and serving your family and others. Assignments will provide you with opportunities for practical teaching in areas related to developing relationships, such as communication skills, forgiveness, and conflict resolution.

Helping children grow to maturity is rewarding work. They can be terrific, terrible, enriching, draining, encouraging, frustrating, and challenging all in the same day. May your journey through this course be blessed as you seek to understand these little ones whom Jesus cherishes.

Contributions to the Total Curriculum

Children are special gifts from God, addressed often in Scripture individually and as part of a family. Parents are entrusted with the joy and responsibility of nurturing their children to personal, emotional, and spiritual maturity. Nurturing children is a skill which needs to be developed. The Entrust curriculum is designed to develop skilled servant-leaders. This course, *Nurturing Our Children*, contributes to that goal by providing you with valuable scriptural principles and practical applications to make you skillful in guiding your children to godly maturity. In the process you will not only develop your own skills in discipling, counseling, leading, and teaching others, but you will prepare your children to be servant-leaders of the next generation.

Course Outline

Lesson 1: Biblical Foundations

Lesson 2: Personality Types and Parenting Styles

Lesson 3: Loving Relationships

Lesson 4: Dealing with Emotions

Lesson 5: An Overview of Human Development Plus Characteristics of Children
from Birth to Age Six

Lesson 6: Characteristics of Children Ages Seven to Twelve

Lesson 7: Characteristics of Adolescents

Lesson 8: Foundations of Discipline

Lesson 9: Discipline Methods

Lesson 10: Leading Your Child to God

Lesson 11: Challenges of Adolescence

Lesson 12: Releasing Your Child

Appendices

A. Suggestions for Family Devotions

B. Suggestions for Sex Education

C. Child Abuse and Neglect

D. Divorce and Separation

E. The Uniqueness of Boys and Girls

F. Practical Challenges

Course Objectives

When you have completed this course, you will be able to:

1. State a theology (with biblical references) of children as God sees them.
2. Define the values and principles you will teach to the children in your life.
3. Evaluate your own personality and parenting style and describe your strengths and weaknesses to a fellow student.
4. Recognize in times of interaction with children ways you can put maximum positive energy toward good behavior and effectively correct improper behavior.
5. List specific ways you can express love toward children in ways they can understand.
6. Describe the characteristics of the various age groups and how these characteristics influence your expectations of children and your interaction with them.
7. Explain the difference between goals and desires and formulate appropriate ones relating to raising children.
8. Define proper discipline and distinguish that from negativity or punishment.
9. Write and role-play a gospel presentation for a child.
10. Describe how to help adolescents who are struggling with personal autonomy.
11. Explain what steps you will take to help adolescents in your life become autonomous.

Assignments are meant to be answered fully before class time. Write out your answers as completely as you can. **Personal Reflections** are meant to lead you in personal evaluation. Write your responses as you might write in your personal journal. **Adorations** are invitations to a brief time of worship and thanksgiving to the Lord. Whether you put responses on paper depends on what is helpful for you to worship God and draw near to Him.

Children grow up fast. Now get going! There is no time to lose.

Lord, open our eyes, hearts, and minds to know **Your** heart and how we can represent You to the children in our lives. You created these children and You understand them. Give us insight to begin to know them and love them as You do. Amen.

Icons



Assignment: a question or study that focuses on course content. Written responses are required and are to be recorded in the student's notebook



Personal Reflection: an instruction to reflect on scriptural truths or character traits or both as they relate to one's walk with God. The focus is on personal application. A written response may be requested.



Adoration: an instruction to worship the Lord with reference to course content. The focus is on God. No written response is required.

Biblical Foundations

“Do you know about any really good, godly parents who had children who did not turn out well?”

Most parents have asked this question at one time or another hoping to find someone who can identify with their struggles. If we go back through the centuries to the first parent (God) and His children (Adam and Eve), we see children who did not turn out perfectly in spite of their great advantages: perfect environment, perfect genetics, godly heritage, unlimited potential, and unlimited God-given opportunities. If God’s children let Him down, is there hope for anyone’s children?

We learn from God’s relationship with Adam and Eve that He had an unending love and commitment to them in spite of their failure. God is in relationship with His children for life. He does not give up, even when they disappoint Him.

In fact, God designs the whole growing-up process to teach children and their parents more about Himself and themselves. The sleepless nights, interruptions, lack of control, and need for constant wisdom keep most parents looking desperately for help. It is no coincidence that a baby often starts to smile back at his parents by two months of age. Parents desperately need that encouragement after weeks of sleepless nights and exhaustion! Parents who are confident and secure in their parenting may only be in the eye of the hurricane. The storms have yet to hit hard. When the storms do come, dependence on God and His wisdom becomes the necessary key to survival.

God could have created all humans as adults and skipped the child stage. But He did not choose to do that. He chose for each of us to enter the world totally dependent on others for food, shelter, and care. And He chose fallible humans to be the agents to meet those needs. Imperfect children and imperfect parents. It sounds like a formula for disaster, or else a formula that requires close dependence on God for any measure of success. The goal in parenting can never be to produce perfect children. None of us is perfect. But with God’s help we can try to train our children in ways that encourage them to be mature individuals who love God and are a blessing to the people in their lives.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
Old Testament Glimpses of Parents and Children
 The First Family Relationships
 God's Attitudes toward Children
 Training: A Promise and a Prayer
 Parents' Responsibility to Teach Their Children
New Testament Glimpses of Parents and Children
Goals for Childhood Training
 Honesty
 Obedience
 Respect
 Self-Control
 Responsibility
 A Developing Conscience
 Proper Attitudes
 A Healthy Attitude toward Self
 A Healthy View of Sexuality
 Ability to Handle Failure
Biblical Case Studies of Parents and Children
Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Formulate a biblical theology of children that explains how God views children and how He wants adults to treat them.
2. Describe what God requires parents to do to train their children.
3. List and describe the most important things you are called to teach your children.
4. Evaluate your own childhood and point out positive and negative aspects.
5. Assess the effect your culture had on your childhood and the effect it has on your expectations for your children.

Introduction

God is so creative. He makes people with unending variety. There are cheerful, thoughtful, methodical, spontaneous people—often in the same family. Would it not have been easier for Him to make us all alike so we could have an instruction booklet for proper handling that would work for everyone? Unfortunately, it is not that easy.

No books and no guidelines exist to tell parents how to do things exactly right with their children. What encourages one child makes another child proud and self-centered. Discipline that motivates one child to do well in school makes another child feel discouraged and misunderstood. No formula will guarantee that children will turn out the way we want them to. But there are ways to view children that seem to express God's heart toward them.



(Define your personal objectives)

What do you hope to learn from this course?



(Analyze your own upbringing)

Write one page describing your childhood and your parents. What was good? What was not good? How did your parents treat you? How did they love you? How did they discipline you? How did you respond to your parents? Were you raised by both your birth parents? How did this affect you? How many brothers and sisters did/do you have? How did/does this affect you?



(Analyze your own upbringing)

When you were growing up, did you ever think about how you were going to do things differently than your parents did? What did you want to change about how you grew up?

If you are a parent of older children, what things do your children want to do differently than you did? If you do not know the answer to this question, ask them.



(Analyze your culture)

Looking back at your childhood, what influence did your culture have on how you were raised? Does your culture encourage displays of affection or not? What were some cultural customs that influenced your family life?

Old Testament Glimpses of Parents and Children

Children are important in the Old Testament. The birth of a child is a fulfilling, joyous event. Moses' parents risked their lives to protect his existence. Jacob's grief overwhelmed him when he thought his son Joseph had been killed. Sarah and Hannah grieved until they were able to conceive a child. Children are special and a sign of being blessed.

The First Family Relationships

Our first view of God and His creation of humans is in Genesis 1-3. Adam and Eve were created as adults, not as infants, yet we are allowed to see the relationship God had with Adam and Eve and His instructions to them.



Read Genesis 1-3 and answer the following questions:

1. What did God provide for Adam and Eve?
2. What kind of relationship did God have with Adam and Eve?
3. What choices did Adam and Eve make?
4. What were the consequences of those choices to Adam and Eve, and to God and their relationship with Him?

Adam and Eve walked in close relationship with their Creator and God, yet they chose to listen to other voices that wanted to destroy that relationship. Since then, we each have a daily choice to make about who or what we will listen to and follow. Adam and Eve's decision cost them, but it also cost God. Disappointment, grief, pain, and sacrifice have characterized God's actions as Redeemer. The story of the Old Testament and New Testament is one of God who is reaching out to redeem those He created and to bring them back into a healthy relationship with Himself.

God's Attitudes toward Children

Looking at Scripture is an accurate method to learn what God thinks. Fortunately, the Old Testament talks about children and their value. The verses in the next Assignment give insight into God's perspective on children.



How does each passage describe God's attitude toward children?

1. Psalm 127:3-5
2. Psalm 128

Other Old Testament passages confirm that God is intimately involved with children, even before they are born. Before birth He forms each one of us to be a unique person.



What does Psalm 139:13-18 say about God and children



In light of the wonderful truths in Psalm 139 of how God creates us and knows us intimately, spend a few minutes with God in worship and thanksgiving for those truths.

Training: A Promise and a Prayer

Another passage in the Old Testament regarding children is found in Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Does this mean that children who do not follow God were not trained properly?

Bible teachers remind us that the book of Proverbs is a collection of truths about life that are generally true. For example, Proverbs 10:3 says that the Lord does not let the righteous go hungry. Yet we know that many godly people who follow the Lord have suffered hunger, for example, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. But as a general principle, God provides for the needs of His people. In the same way, as a general rule, those children who have been properly trained will have the tools they need to follow the Lord for a lifetime. Even though some may have periods of doubt or rebellion when they are trying to make their faith their own, many of them will return to the faith of their upbringing.

Though not all children continue in the faith in which they were raised, most of us know individuals who have become more solid and more in love with Jesus than before their wandering. The following true story is one of a child returning to the faith in which she was raised:

My sister made a decision for Christ as a child, as did I and my brother. In fact, she even said at some point that she wanted to be a missionary when she grew up! All of us went to church together on Sundays and prayed at meals. Our parents were the old-fashioned type and rather strict. My sister, being four years older, got the brunt of it.

When she went off to college, she naturally was free of those restraints and lived as the others (not that she ever really talked about that at home).

She had a boyfriend, Mark. She brought him home to meet the family. He was a very nice young man but did not seem "born again." They married, lived a good, moral life and had two wonderful children. They did not go to church or show interest in spiritual things.

Many years later, my sister experienced some health problems, not life-threatening, but serious enough to end up in the hospital for awhile. It scared her enough to get serious with God and to seek Him. The Lord used that to bring her back to Himself. I am sure the Lord was answering the diligent prayers of our parents, especially our mom (our father died earlier). My sister started going to church, and her life changed so much that her husband Mark started attending also. He was a lawyer then, and he started reading books to answer the many questions he had about Christianity.

He was quite open about his search, talking to some of his non-Christian friends about it. The final push came when there was a crisis in his career which propelled him to place his faith in Christ and follow Him. (It is interesting how the Lord uses the problems of life to draw people to Himself as they realize that they can't make it on their own!) It was not too long after that, that Mark's kidney cancer was discovered.

Some of us feared what effect that would have on his new faith, but it just strengthened it. He and my sister became involved in a small church-plant, and he later became the pastor. Because he came to Christ later in life, he could really identify with non-Christians, and he had a very effective ministry. My sister also had a wonderful ministry in the church, especially in the area of prayer. They influenced many people's lives. Mark's father became a believer and was baptized when he was pretty old. Mark's eight-year battle with cancer brought him even closer to the Lord. There were times of remission, when it seemed like the Lord had healed him. His faith stayed strong, and his only regret in dying was that he had to leave his family. My sister continues strong in her faith and ministry to others.

In the above lives we see that the years of faithful training, and even more years of prayer, yielded fruit as not only the daughter but her husband came to a strong personal faith in God. The father did not live on earth to see the fruit of his example and godly leadership, but the mother had the joy of seeing her daughter love the Lord with her whole heart.

Proverbs 22:6 clearly admonishes parents to prepare their children early in life to walk with the Lord throughout their lives. The word “way” or “path” is found in most translations and is usually understood to refer to the way of wisdom found in Proverbs. The New English Bible captures well the point of this verse: “Start a [child] on the right road, and even in old age he will not leave it.”¹ Another helpful rendering is “Teach your children to choose the right path” (New Living Translation).²



Some scholars say that Proverbs 22:6 means that parents should train their children according to their individual God-given tendencies, characteristics, and weaknesses. Whether or not this is the better interpretation, it suggests practical advice to parents. Taking their unique personality and needs into account when training children will better equip them to serve God with their particular gifts for the rest of their life.

For example, if a child is very self-critical, the parent can ensure that the child understands the grace of God and forgiveness in Christ. That understanding will help the child desire to walk with God in the future. Ignoring that tendency toward self-criticism and instead emphasizing constant failure will discourage the child and make him or her feel God would never be accepting.

If children are gifted artistically in crafts and handwork, helping them to see how they can use that gift to glorify God will help them in their relationship with Him (Exod 35:30-36:1). Trying to make them into

teachers or missionaries might ignore those God-given gifts and make demands that require teaching skills they do not have. This could leave them frustrated and make them feel they cannot serve God acceptably. Understanding individual weaknesses and strengths and training children in light of those will help them develop a healthy relationship with God.

Parents’ Responsibility to Teach Their Children

Knowing the truth about God is vital to having a healthy relationship with Him. He created us and knows how we will function best. He has our best interests in mind and wants us to know the good paths He has designed for us (Eph 2:8-10), paths that keep us in close relationship with Him. Listening to God’s instruction is the best thing we can do for ourselves and our relationship with Him. That is why a key command in the Old Testament was given by God to Moses in Deuteronomy 6:1-9. God desires that

each generation of parents accurately pass on to their children a deep, complete love for God:

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.



Considering Deuteronomy 6:1-9 answer the following questions:

1. What is the benefit of listening to and following these commands?
2. What should be happening between parents and children according to these verses?
3. What are some modern-day situations in which we can teach our children?

God obviously loved the people of Israel and was watching their daily lives. He observed the relationships between parents and children. Therefore, He could make practical recommendations as to how and when parents could teach their children how to have success in life and to have God's blessing. How tender of God to make this so clear and practical. More important than the commands themselves, God wants His children to love Him in response to His loving them.

When the Old Testament speaks of children, it reveals an attitude that cherishes them, not one that resents them. The message in the Old Testament is clear: God loves His children and wants them to follow Him and love Him in response to His love for them. He wants a relationship that is a blessing to Him and to His children.

New Testament Glimpses of Parents and Children

Adam and Eve may have been created as adults, but Jesus came to earth as a dependent, vulnerable infant. He grew up with fallible parents. Luke 2 records the birth and early days in the life of Jesus. We also get a glimpse of His childhood in Luke 2:41-52.



1. What do you learn about Jesus from Luke 2:41-52?
2. What effect did Jesus have on His parents and other adults around Him?
3. How did Jesus grow, and why is that significant?

We can learn from Jesus' early life on earth. We can also learn more about children by observing how Jesus treated them. Jesus was extremely busy while on earth. He had the demands of the sick and dying as well as the need to train the disciples and teach the multitudes. Yet Jesus was intentional in His interactions with children.



Please explain what each passage tells you about Jesus' attitude toward children.

1. Matthew 18:1-14
2. Mark 10:13-16

As a very busy adult, Jesus took time during His demanding ministry to pay attention to children. The Father Himself listens to those angels who bring Him news about His children.

Not many specific commands for parents or children are found in the New Testament. We can assume that the guidelines set down in the Old Testament regarding children still apply in the New Testament. Here are a few verses from the New Testament specifically about children.



What do you learn about parents and children in each of the following passages:

1. Ephesians 6:1-4
2. Colossians 3:20-21

Children have a responsibility to obey their parents because usually that is best for themselves and their parents. But parents have the difficult task of listening to and understanding their children so that their expectations are reasonable. The later lessons

of this course will deal with reasonable expectations for children, plus training and discipline methods that are based on a listening ear and a proper understanding of each individual child.

Goals for Childhood Training

As Christian parents, teachers, guardians or grandparents, your responsibility is to train children to be the people God wants them to be, to inculcate Christian values in them, and to help them pursue the path of wisdom. Children do not become wise or mature overnight. They set forth on the path of wisdom taking one step at a time. They have much to learn before they will reach maturity. Yet parents should keep that ultimate goal in mind: that the child grows up to become a mature man or woman in Christ.

Along the way are other specific goals on which to concentrate at each age level. God has given us the Ten Commandments and moral guidelines in the Gospels and apostles' letters. From these sources this section will highlight the following training goals for children: (1) honesty, (2) obedience, (3) respect, (4) self-control, (5) responsibility, (6) a developing conscience, (7) proper attitudes, (8) a healthy attitude toward self, (9) a healthy view of sexuality, and (10) an ability to handle failure.

This list is not exhaustive. You may think of several other goals that you believe to be equally important. When you set goals for your child, do not expect every child to respond in the same way. Remember that each child is unique, with his or her own personality, gifts, and inner timetable for learning. What worked well with your first child may not work with your second, whose temperament is different.

Honesty

Honesty is the basis of society and individual existence. Honesty was a foundational issue in the Garden of Eden and God's communication with Adam and Eve. Satan tried to convince Eve that God was not being honest with them (Gen 3:1-6). Eve believed this lie, and the consequences continue to this day.

The Ten Commandments include the need to speak the truth (Exod 20:16). Proverbs are full of the need for honesty. God requires honesty in worshipping Him, not merely outward show (Jn 4:23-24). Truth came in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14, 17), and it is the truth that sets us free in Christ (Jn 8:32). The Helper, the Holy Spirit, is called the Spirit of truth by Jesus (Jn 14:16-17).

In the early church, God took swift action to expose the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In Paul's letters to the churches in the New Testament, believers are told to be truthful to each other. Above all, we are told to be honest with ourselves. David asks God, who knows everything, to show him truth about himself (Ps 139:1, 23-24).



What does each of the following verses teach about honesty?

1. Proverbs 11:1
2. Proverbs 12:19
3. Proverbs 12:22
4. Isaiah 29:13 (Mt 15:8-9)
5. Ephesians 4:14-15
6. Colossians 3:9

Honesty is a foundational issue in life and relationships. It is vital to model and teach honesty to children. We are to be honest in reporting our actions, perceptions, feelings, as well as honest about events we witness. Honesty should be encouraged and rewarded as you train your children. Willingness to be honest and uphold the truth is essential to the other values you want to teach your children.

Obedience

Interestingly, one of the first words little children learn is no. You may laugh at their obvious declaration of independence, but you must begin early to direct their natural tendency to defy parental authority. Children who are allowed, without correction, to raise their voices in defiance of their parents or to disobey their commands will find it difficult to respect, obey, or submit to authority.

Aim to teach children to obey parental authority with a willing spirit. Wholehearted obedience should be emphasized when they are still quite small, between ages two and four. Emphasize that God is pleased when children obey their parents and that the rules which you set in your home are for the child's well-being and safety. As the child grows, this teaching can be reinforced as, together with your child, you observe real life examples of the benefits of obedience.

Obedience brings blessing to the one who obeys. You can emphasize this when you teach a child to obey. Obeying the command to be honest saves a person from the unpleasant consequences of lying. Of course, the rewards are not always immediate; sometimes God will not reward us until we see Him in heaven. But He sees the little acts we do and hears the things we say to please Him, and His heart delights in our obedience.

You can also explain to a child that mother and father must obey God because He is our heavenly Father, and He instructs us how we must live to please and honor Him. Children need to hear often that their parents are accountable to God, that they desire to obey Him. When parents emphasize this to their children, they are beginning to prepare them for ultimate accountability to God. Children's obedience may be to please you, but stress that when they obey, they are also pleasing their heavenly Father.

Respect

A major step in children's moral development is learning to respect themselves and others. Parental authority is the very first "God-ordained" authority in their young lives. Children first learn to respect parents. Later, they will learn to respect teachers, bosses, and then ultimately their heavenly Father.

Children should be taught to honor their parents and to speak to them and others respectfully, without whining or screaming to get attention. They should be taught from an early age to have reverence and respect for the Lord and for the Bible. One of the ways a child learns to reverence and honor God is by honoring his or her mother and father (Exod 20:12; Eph 6:2).

It is important to teach respect without instilling fear. The word "fear" has at least two meanings in Scripture. In some contexts fear refers to a form of anxiety. At other times it is used in a positive way to mean respect or reverential trust. Christians are to have a reverential trust in God, but they should never be afraid of the Lord. Likewise, children should trust and respect their parents, but they should not be afraid of them.

They need to respect their parents, but respect must be earned; it cannot be won through sheer force. Showing respect does not mean that a child should not be allowed to express a contrary opinion or to share his or her own ideas. Parents should give children opportunities to express their feelings, but they should help them to do it in an acceptable form. Encourage them to talk calmly about what is bothering them and to use a respectful tone of voice, rather than yelling or venting their anger inappropriately.³

Children's concept of God is often based on their concept of their parents. Therefore, Christian parents need to reflect both authority and unconditional love, so that they might best represent the divine nature of God. Children will learn of God's tender mercies and forgiveness and grace through their parents. But our heavenly Father is also a God of divine authority. To represent God as love, without authority, is to misrepresent God. To represent God as an authoritarian being without love, compassion, and forgiveness is also a distortion.



Reflect on your own childhood training in the area of respect. Did your parents balance love and authority? What effect did the culture you grew up in have on the expectations for respect? How are you teaching your own children to have respect? What, if anything, would you like to change in your training?

An attitude of respect also extends to other areas of life, as a child learns to respect the rights and possessions of others. In simple ways small children can begin to learn

about the rights of others. For example, they learn that others are important too, when their parents encourage them to wait their turn to speak, rather than interrupting others whenever they feel like talking.

Parental example is probably the greatest teacher of respect. You need to ask yourselves as parents, do I interrupt, or do I wait my turn? Unfortunately, many adults are still trying to learn this lesson. Similarly, children learn that they are not allowed to deliberately break or abuse the possessions of others, and that they are expected to show respect for others by respecting their belongings.

Self-Control

Early childhood is characterized by self-centeredness. Infants know only their own needs, and they can be very demanding if these are not met. Only gradually do they begin to gain a measure of self-control; for example, they can wait a few minutes for their food when it is being prepared. They learn gradually to control their outbursts of anger. Some studies indicate that the ability to delay gratification is a bigger indicator of success in life than IQ or test scores.⁴

Self-control is an important goal of training at every stage of growth. While emotions are God-given and an important part of the human personality, they can cause many problems in life if they are not controlled. There is a balance between stifling or repressing emotions and letting them totally control us. Positive expressions of emotion, such as laughter, hugs, kisses, and crying when one is hurt, are normal. Emotions that can lead to destructive or aggressive behavior must be recognized, but they need to be properly expressed and controlled.

Children should gradually learn to control their tempers and to ask for things politely, rather than grabbing what they want. They should learn that throwing tantrums will not accomplish their purposes. How should a tantrum be handled? The best method is to ignore a tantrum, if possible, or to remove the child to a room where he or she can be alone to scream until the tantrum is over.

If Mary sees that having a tantrum eventually gets her what she wants, she will learn to scream louder and longer next time. For some children, even a parent's negative response to a tantrum, such as spanking or scolding, rewards them with something they desperately want—attention. The best way to squelch a child's tantrums is to pay no attention to them. This can be hard for parents, particularly when a child has a tantrum in public. Children will soon stop these emotional displays when they see that they gain nothing from them.

Responsibility

Children at age three or four should begin to have a few tasks to do at home to teach them responsibility: hanging up their coats when they come in, putting their shoes

away, and helping to put their toys away before bedtime. Having tasks to do makes them feel that they are contributing to the family. They gain the satisfaction of doing their tasks regularly. At the same time they learn what it means to be faithful. This is another area where children often learn by example. They may learn from a parent's faithfulness to a dull or tedious activity that God desires us to be faithful in the smallest tasks. As the child grows, responsibilities can be increased, preparing the child for the responsibilities of adulthood.



1. Review with your spouse the list of your child's responsibilities at home.
2. If you do not have such a plan, set one up.
3. Discuss whether the responsibility is appropriate for the age and abilities of the child.
4. Draw up a simple checklist of the child's jobs at home. You may want to reward the child with stars or stickers for faithful performance.

A Developing Conscience

A child generally develops a sense of right and wrong during the first five years of life. The values that you have in your home will be the tools that God uses to develop the conscience of your children. As parents you are the primary influences on their developing conscience. What standard are you writing on your child's heart? Are you teaching him or her early to have reverence and respect for God and His Word and to desire to do what pleases God? These are some of the most important things you can teach your child.

When parents are good models and place a positive emphasis on encouraging their children to do right, children usually develop a healthy sense of right and wrong. They learn to feel a sense of guilt when they break the standard that has been set for them and to feel pleasure and a sense of contentment when they make a right choice. In order for their consciences to develop, they should be attracted to obedience, instead of concluding that obeying is simply a way to avoid punishment.

A child can be taught that an objective standard of right and wrong is in the Bible, a standard that was given by God. Small children can be taught that God is with them wherever they are, that He protects them whatever they are doing, and that they can talk to Him at any time. They can learn to desire to please God by their behavior, as you emphasize that God is pleased when they choose to do what is right.

As they grow older, you can encourage them to do what their mothers and fathers want them to do, even when mother and father are not there. Eventually, they must learn to be accountable to their own inner sense of right and wrong and to desire to please God because they love Him.

Proper Attitudes

Controlling a child's behavior is only one aspect of rearing children. On a deeper level, children also need to develop proper attitudes: attitudes toward God, toward others, and toward themselves. It is possible for them to obey or to conform outwardly to your parental standard, but to do it sullenly or resentfully, and to fail to internalize the values you want to teach them. Such children often obey merely to avoid punishment. Later, when they are out of their parents' reach, they may not obey at all. Even worse, they may reject their parents' values when they are old enough to choose their own way.

Thus, it is important for parents to encourage small children to develop proper attitudes. Positive methods, such as praise, appreciation, and sometimes even a small reward, can convey to the child that the path of obedience is the best path to choose, a path that leads to joy.

Parents have to be discerning to know what attitude a child has, especially with a child who does not express feelings openly. Do you sense that your children are obeying grudgingly at times? Encourage them to talk about how they feel, and then discuss their feelings without belittling them. Do not lecture but try to be sure that they are not harboring resentment or negative feelings when they have been forced to obey.

In teaching, emphasize verses that show that God is pleased when they give cheerfully, obey willingly, and do things that are right without grumbling and complaining. Encourage them to think about how their actions affect others. It may help to use hypothetical situations to help them understand how another child might feel in a similar situation. For example, you might ask, "How do you think Sarah will feel if you say you never want to play with her again?" Make use of "what if" questions to help them feel what the other child may be feeling and to gain empathy for others. For example, "How would you feel if you went to John's house and he would not share his toys with you?"

A Healthy Attitude toward Self

One of the areas often overlooked in training is helping a child to develop a proper self-concept. We all have learned to think of ourselves in certain ways. Sometimes the image is good; sometimes it is bad. Our self-concept is shaped early in life and is often hard to change later. Much of our behavior, even as adults, is guided by our self-esteem. The same is true for children. When children have a poor self-image or think of

themselves as “bad,” they will often act that way. Conversely, when they think of themselves as “good,” they often try to live up to that image or reputation.

One of the ways children can develop a poor self-concept is when they learn early in life that they can never please their parents or that their parents’ love for them is dependent on their obedience. Children soon discover that other people are constantly evaluating their performance, watching to see how they perform in sports, school, music, or art. When a child’s parents and others are genuinely pleased with him or her and communicate this, the child generally develops a healthy self-esteem. It is important to help your child build a good and proper sense of self-worth. God places an extremely high value on your children and loves them unconditionally in spite of their failures. You want them to have God’s unconditional love as well.



Think about your relationship with your children. Are you more prone to praise or criticize them? Do you add a “but” each time you praise? For example: “You colored very nicely, **but** you went out of the lines over here.” Write down what is worthy of praise in each of your children. Determine to say something encouraging and uplifting to each of your children each day for a week.

A Healthy View of Sexuality

In a warm and loving family, parents are laying the foundation for children to have a healthy view of human sexuality, to be comfortable with their own sexual nature. With the prevalence of sexual information and messages in the media and culture, it is important that parents be the ones to communicate godly perspectives concerning sexuality. Certain attitudes and simple explanations can be given to even small children to lay a firm and godly basis for sexual understanding later.

When children ask questions about sex, parents should treat these questions as casually as they do questions on any other subject. Children are curious about everything, and they think in literal, concrete terms. Give them a clear, matter-of-fact answer, but do not tell them more than they really want to know. One mother launched into a detailed explanation of reproduction when her daughter asked, “Where do I come from, Mommy?” only to find out that the child simply wanted to know where she was born!

To explain sexual reproduction plainly to small children, you can introduce them to the world of plants, animals, and insects. Explain the story of creation—how God created everything as male and female, plants and animals and insects, and how everything He made was good. God fashioned every living creature with seeds inside

it to reproduce itself: apples from apple seeds, chickens from eggs, kittens from the mother cat.

Small children will inevitably ask, “Where do babies come from?” It is best to answer simply and truthfully, saying something like, “A baby grows in a special place inside the mother.” You can explain that a baby grows from a tiny seed that is inside the mother. At age three or four you need not try to present a detailed explanation of sexual intercourse to a child.⁵ Explain that babies grow inside mothers, where they are nurtured and protected until it is time for them to be born. If you have the opportunity, let your children be present when a family pet or farm animal gives birth. Explain the miracle of birth as being “God-designed.” Always bring God’s plan into your teaching.

Young children often display an awareness of and interest in the physical differences between boys and girls. They may sometimes play “doctor” or “nurse” in order to express their natural curiosity about the opposite sex. Do not make a bigger issue of this interest in physical differences than is necessary. That could convey to the child that the human body is in some way nasty or dirty, laying the foundation for sexual inhibitions. You should, however, explain clearly to your children that only doctors or parents are allowed to see them in the nude and that no one should touch them in their private parts, the parts of their bodies covered by their bathing suits.

To summarize: your most important asset in teaching children about sex, love, and marriage is having a healthy attitude toward these subjects yourself. This begins by viewing your sexual nature as a God-given gift which, when expressed within the bonds of marriage, is good. It is meant to foster intimacy and bring great pleasure to both husband and wife.

Some Christians are uncomfortable when it comes to sexual training. The facts are, however, that your children will hear about sex from someone. Is it not better to hear it from you under controlled conditions, with the important emphasis on moral principles included, than to hear it from some other source? Human sexuality is a part of life, an aspect of moral training which should be undertaken by parents. Appendix B is included to help parents discuss this subject with their children.



Reflect on your home life as a child. How do you think your attitudes toward sexuality were influenced by your home training? How does your culture influence the way you think about sexual matters? What attitudes are you communicating to your children? How have you handled the subject of sexuality?

Ability to Handle Failure

Children will see you fail, and you cannot expect them not to fail. Fortunately, God has made provision for human failure, and He loves us in spite of our failures. In Hebrews 5:1-2 we are reminded that the high priests that God chose to represent Him to His people were not perfect. They were able to deal gently with the ignorant and misguided because they also had weaknesses. Children will fail. But they need to know that there is forgiveness in Christ. In fact, if we pretend that we have never failed, we are only fooling ourselves. We are promised (1 Jn 1:9) that if we admit our sin and failure and bring it to God, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us. Then we can move beyond the failure and continue our journey in the good paths God has prepared for us.

A child who can try again after a failure is a child who will not be immobilized by fear of failure. In fact, Peter tells us that we should be pursuing good qualities of the divine nature like diligence, faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. If we do not have evidence of these characteristics, we are told it is because we have forgotten our purification from our sins (2 Pet 1:3-11). God has provided a remedy for our failure. To be all He wants us to be, we need to take His provision and then walk in His strength. As children learn this, they can live life to the fullest without being burdened with past shortcomings. While Satan would try to hinder us with reminders of past failure, God means for us to live in His strength and forgiveness.

These values are just a few of the things you should teach your children. Many passages of Scripture discuss these and other important values and character qualities. In fact, a simple Bible study for family devotions is to take a short passage of Scripture and to ask: What does this teach me about God? What does this teach me about how I should live? There is real freedom in knowing and walking in the righteous path that God has laid out for us.

Biblical Case Studies of Parents and Children

Assignment 5 looked at Jesus' early years. Here are other biblical glimpses of parents or adults interacting with, or on behalf of, their children. Choose two out of the four passages in Assignment 10 to study and answer the questions.



- A. Hannah and Samuel: 1 Samuel 1-3
1. What kind of a relationship with God did Hannah have?
 2. What was her deepest desire?
 3. What did Hannah do after Samuel was born?

4. How did Hannah influence Samuel when he was in the household of Eli, an environment that had negative influences? How did God provide?
 5. Describe Samuel's relationship with God.
- B. Moses and his mother: Exodus 1-2
1. What difficult situation did Moses' parents face?
 2. How did they deal with it? What risks were involved?
 3. What happened to Moses? How did God provide?
 4. What happened to Moses' mother?
- C. Timothy and his mother: Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:1-7; 3:14-15
1. What heritage did Timothy's mother give him?
 2. How did Timothy's mother influence his faith?
- D. A son and wisdom: Proverbs 6:20-29; 10:1
1. What are the warnings here?
 2. Why should the son listen?
 3. What will happen if the son does not listen?
 4. What blessing is there if the son does listen?

Conclusion

This first lesson has briefly looked at Scripture relating to children and the values parents and teachers should pass on. The following lessons will give more specifics on how to carry this out. God is the model of a loving parent reaching out to have a close relationship with us.



God is worthy of our worship and deserves our praise for allowing us to have a relationship with Him. Let us learn from Him to be effective influences in children's lives so that we can join with the psalmist:

Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised,
And His greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall praise Your works to another,

And shall declare Your mighty acts (Ps 145:3-4, emphasis added).

Spend time now praising God for His unsearchable greatness and good works toward you.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Start” is a good understanding of the Hebrew word because it is usually used in the Old Testament of dedication/initiation (see, e.g., Deut 20:5; 1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5).

² See Appendix A for helpful information on leading children in the way of the Lord.

³ The three preceding paragraphs are based on Bruce Narramore, *Help! I’m a Parent* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 46-48.

⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam, 1995), xii.

⁵ Narramore, 415.

Personality Types and Parenting Styles

A family with parents who loved each other had four young children. As the mother went off to the hospital to give birth to the fifth child, she gave her children hugs and told them she would be home soon. Unfortunately, she never came back home. The delivery of the fifth child had complications, and she and the child died in childbirth. The father was devastated. The wife he loved and cherished was gone. The father stumbled through his days in a fog of sorrow. Thus, he hardly saw the four little children, who were also in agony over this tremendous loss. The father also started drinking to numb his pain.

Unfortunately, the children were too young to fully comprehend what was happening to them. They had lost their mother by death in childbirth, but now they also lost their father through grief. In a sense they were orphans. As the father tried to survive, the children had to raise themselves. They lived outdoors in the neighborhood doing as they pleased. They had no one to tell them to come in and do their chores or that they should finish their homework. No one was there to give them advice or keep them from bad behavior. As they grew up, their drunken father was no example for them to follow. How could they be good parents if they had never seen one?

Lesson Outline

- Description of Godly Parents

- Personality Types

 - Dominant Behavior Type

 - Influencing Behavior Type

 - Steady Behavior Type

 - Conscientious Behavior Type

- Parenting Styles

 - Balanced Parents

 - Authoritarian Parents

 - Permissive Parents

 - Neglectful Parents

Characteristics of Parenting Styles

Single Parenting

Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Describe the four main personality types.
2. Determine your personality type.
3. Identify your children's personality types.
4. Explain the four main parenting styles.
5. Determine your parenting style.
6. Select several specific ways you will, with God's help, improve your parenting or teaching style to be more balanced and biblical.
7. Identify ways you individually, or along with your church, can support single parents.

Description of Godly Parents



Before you read this lesson, describe a godly, healthy parent in your own words. Who or what family models (good or bad) influence your description?

In Lesson 1 you learned that a family as God designed it is one in which the children obey the parents, and the parents guide and support their children. Parents love their children and appreciate how God created them. Parents train their children to love and worship the Lord (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21). Parents work together. Working from a healthy husband-and-wife relationship, they deal with their children consistently and with understanding. In spite of a busy schedule, children are valued (Mk 10:13-16; Mt 18:10-14), and time is spent with them, which also involves listening to them. Parents are loving and therefore willing to give instruction and correction. Parents are a model of a love for God that involves their heart, soul, and mind, and this model is attractive and imitated by their children.

God designed the family in such a way that children need parental love, but they also need guidance and discipline. It would be much easier to be a healthy family if we did not have to deal with sin. But unfortunately, Adam and Eve made choices that took away that option. Sin, wrong decisions, bad attitudes, and selfishness are only a few of

the obstacles to healthy living that have to be confronted, not ignored. Loving parents do the hard work of facing these defects in themselves and their children.

Being a good parent is a balance between the two sides of love: (1) gracious listening and understanding, and (2) setting and enforcing limits and rules. God gives each of us a unique personality, so the expression of those two sides of love may vary. The next section will briefly look at four personality types (based on the DISC behavior model) that may affect your parenting type and your child's behavior and response:

1. The **D**ominant behavior type
2. The **I**nfluencing behavior type
3. The **S**teady behavior type
4. The **C**onscientious behavior type

All of these types are healthy, and it is helpful to have personalities of all these types on a team or in a family. They each have their strengths and weaknesses, and they each can provide an essential part for the proper functioning of the whole. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul talks about how important it is that each part of the Christian body of believers functions properly. Christ calls various kinds of people into His family, uniquely equipping them in different ways.

Variety is part of His plan. God never planned for all of us to look and behave the same. As these different personality types function properly, they contribute to the effective functioning of the whole family. Each member of your individual family is created by God to fill uniquely an important role. God's creative variety may mean it is more difficult for us to understand each other, but that variety enriches our lives as we struggle to live in harmony.

Personality Types

First, consider four main categories of healthy personalities:¹

1. The **D**ominant behavior type
2. The **I**nfluencing behavior type
3. The **S**teady behavior type
4. The **C**onscientious behavior type

Your personality not only affects your parenting type, but a child's personality also affects how a child responds to love and discipline. What follows is a very brief description of the personality types. Refer to the sources at the end of the lesson for more detailed discussion of this subject. The DISC behavioral model is based on work first developed in the early twentieth century by William Moulton Marston, Ph.D. Since

then it has been modified and used as a basis to better understand families, teams, and work situations.

Characteristics of each of these personality types are in each person. The difference comes when some characteristics are more dominant than others. Most people have a main personality type. Another may be evident but may not hold as much influence over their actions. People may display variations of their combination of personality types depending on the environment they are in. For example, a person who has a Dominant and Steady personality type may display more characteristics of the Steady personality type if he or she is in an administrative support role, and more characteristics of the Dominant type while leading a specific work project.

People grow and are influenced by their daily experiences. So also their weaknesses and strengths are being modified. It is not helpful to put these individuals into a category and then judge them and keep them in that category forever. But it is helpful to use the personality types as a means to better understand and love yourself and those around you. As you read the description of these four ways of understanding behavior, try to identify your behavior type or types.

Dominant Behavior Type

Individuals with the Dominant behavior type are leaders and are task- and results-oriented (instead of being people-oriented). They solve problems and challenges and are direct in their interactions with others. They are determined, decisive, demanding, and ambitious. They are goal-oriented, self-confident, responsible, competitive, and they take charge. They tend to be energetic and fast-paced, and they want to get things done well and quickly. They have clear expectations and expect others to live up to those expectations. Pioneers have a strong portion of this behavior type. The apostle Paul exhibited many of the characteristics of the Dominant behavior type. Paul was hard-driving, he spoke directly, he was not intimidated, he had quick answers, he was decisive, and he had little patience for those without his passion. He also had ambitious goals for his life, and it took a direct intervention by God to redirect him from his youthful, misguided path to the purposes God had for him (Acts 9:1-30; 13:1-52; 16:6-11).

Dominant parents usually have clear rules for their children, and they enforce them well. Children know what the expectations are. Children are urged to reach high and develop their talents. They are given many opportunities to be involved in tasks and activities. On the negative side, the Dominant behavior type in a parent can become dictatorial. This parent can have a hard time listening to other opinions, and he or she may lack patience. Children of this parent may feel unloved because their feelings and opinions are either not given a chance to be heard, or they are dismissed. The parents may even be so busy with tasks that they neglect the child. These parents may have unrealistic expectations for their children. The children may feel like they can never be

good enough. Children of strongly Dominant parents may lack self-confidence because they feel they can never meet the standards set for them.

Children with this Dominant personality can be a delight as they take responsibility for their own schoolwork and do their chores well. But they can be a challenge when they want their own way. They are often active to the point of exhausting their parents, and they do not give up their own opinions without a fight. They may intimidate their more sensitive parents, siblings, or classmates. They may defy boundaries they do not like. Children with a Dominant personality can be discouraged if they are repeatedly scolded for being bossy and not encouraged to use their leadership abilities appropriately. They may think something is wrong with them if they sense that their high activity level is an irritation to their parents.

Influencing Behavior Type

Influencers are people-oriented (more than task-oriented) and active individuals. They have ideas for projects, conferences, parties—any excuse for getting people together. They love to be with people and do things with people. They are very expressive of their emotions, very warm and personable, enthusiastic, encouraging, trusting, and optimistic. They use their well-developed people skills to persuade others. They are confident and socially sensitive. They are usually well-liked individuals because they try to please others, and they are fun-loving people.

Peter, one of the twelve apostles, was probably of this personality type, although he may have had some Dominant behavior type also. He had a quick answer and wanted to please Jesus. He caved in to peer pressure when he denied Jesus, but Jesus reinstated him as His servant. Shortly thereafter Peter became a beloved leader in the early church.

On the negative side, Influencing parents may find it hard to enforce limits because they want their children to like them. They may schedule too many activities and people-centered events that exhaust a more sensitive or quiet child. They may interpret a shy child's need to read quietly in his or her room as being lazy or uncaring. These Influencing parents may have trouble following through on their own commitments.

The Influencing type in a child can result in someone who wants to please you and be with you. These children talk (sometimes too much) and express themselves well. But they need encouragement and praise, and they do not handle criticism or disapproving silence well. They are vulnerable to peer pressure. They may want to spend so much time with friends that their responsibilities are neglected. They may start a project with good intentions, but they lose focus or motivation to finish.

Steady Behavior Type

The Steady behavioral types are steadfast and team players. They may not have quite as many friends as the Influencer, but they have good friends and are loyal and

warm toward them. They are more people-oriented than task-oriented. They serve other people and would prefer not to be the leader. They tend not to want much public attention. They are very practical. They do not want a fast, busy life-style. When taking on a project, they prefer to know what the whole process will look like before they start. They like security and stability and do not like sudden change. They tend to be less emotional than Dominants or Influencers, and they also tend to be more predictable and consistent.



Steady and supportive parents provide security for their children. They are attentive to their children and serve them, even if it means personal sacrifice. On the negative side, Steady parents can attempt to provide too much security for their children. They can be overly protective to the point that children feel smothered. Or they can come to their children's rescue so often that the children are not faced with the consequences of their own bad choices. Steady personality parents can be taken advantage of by their children. One Influencing child said to her Steady mother, "I want a new dress tomorrow, so you can just stay up tonight and sew and have it ready for me in the morning."

Steady personality children need a home environment that is stable. They enjoy routine. Routine is not boring to them like it is to the Dominant or Influencer. Steady

children need explanations of how to do things and freedom to make their own decisions. They need gentle encouragement to experience new situations and challenges. Steady personality children need help to overcome their fears. They need help establishing boundaries so that others do not expect more from them than is reasonable.

Conscientious Behavior Type

The Conscientious behavior type is task-oriented more than people-oriented. Accuracy and precision are important values. These individuals are cautious and like to follow rules and regulations and structure. They do high quality work and are neat, systematic, accurate, careful, yet diplomatic. They are very sensitive to criticism. They need quiet time alone. They are self-disciplined and analytical. They can read situations and people well since they think a lot and observe and gather facts. When they have thought things through thoroughly, they tend to think their way of doing things is the best. They are not highly emotional people. They do not prefer being up in front of people leading. They are very organized. They plan ahead for possible needs that might arise.

Parents who are the Conscientious behavior type teach their children to strive for excellence. They like “head,” or analytical conversations more than emotional conversations. They may have trouble expressing their love for their children. Because of their attention to detail, they may tend to lecture their children. They may come across as distant. They may expect near perfection, so the children may feel they can never measure up to the required standards. Parents with this behavior type have trouble being spontaneous, a trait much needed for parents of active children.

Conscientious children are serious and well-organized, but they can sometimes have standards for themselves that are too high. They may have little patience for others who do not do things their way. Their analysis of situations may offend those who have not taken the time to observe the same things. To find out what they are thinking and feeling takes time and gentle prompting. They need to have time alone to process things. When they seek a place to be alone for long periods of time, it is usually not because they are antisocial or lazy. They need uninterrupted time to complete their tasks to their satisfaction. Read and consider the following case study:

Cathy is a very involved mother. She wakes up each morning with sunshine in her spirit before the sun is even up. She loves life and wants to get the most out of it. She has considerable energy and does not want to miss any opportunities that might come her way. She loves to be with people and has no trouble initiating new relationships. She gets much work done, but people come first. Her house is not always in order, but it is good enough. Her front door is always open to neighbors and her children’s friends. She is glad to help out if you need it but sometimes may forget to whom she promised what.

Cathy has many activities planned for her three children, and usually the neighbor kids come along too since no one wants to miss a fun time. If she cannot supervise an activity, Cathy arranges for her children to do fun things with others. Every day after school something is going on. Cathy's philosophy is that if you keep your children busy, they will be happy and will not get into trouble.

Janice is Cathy's second daughter. Janice displayed remarkable artistic talent early in life. She loves to read, but lately she falls asleep before she gets the reading done that she loves. Cathy is concerned because Janice is so withdrawn. When participating with the family in the after-school activities, Janice seems to be in another world. She is not defiant, but she is not enjoying herself either. Cathy jokes with Janice trying to get her to join the conversation, but Janice does not appreciate that kind of attention. Janice is happiest when she has lots of time alone in her room or a solitary place.



Evaluate the above case study.

1. What type(s) of personality does Cathy have?
2. What type(s) of personality does Janice have?
3. What understanding would help develop a closer relationship between Cathy and Janice?



1. Write a case study similar to a situation in your home (or church), including the interaction you have had with your child or children (or student or students).
2. Evaluate your case study with a fellow student in this course, and try to identify the personality types represented.
3. Role-play your case study and see if your classmates can identify the behavior types.



Using the four behavior types discussed in this lesson, which type(s) describes you the best? Which type(s) describes your spouse? Which type(s) describes each of your children?



God was intentional when He gave you your personality. Talk with Him about it and thank Him.

Parenting Styles

The different personality types discussed above are uniquely expressed through your parenting approach. These four parenting styles are commonly identified as: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. This lesson, however, will identify them as:

1. Balanced parents
2. Authoritarian parents
3. Permissive parents
4. Neglectful parents

Of these four styles balanced parenting is the healthiest style. Authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting all have unhealthy aspects for children. Though there may be some cultural variations, there are four main types of parenting styles.²

Overlapping some of the above categories are nagging parents, manipulative parents, inconsistent parents, and the child-oriented parents. The worst kind of parent is the inconsistent parent who bounces from one style to another.

Parenting styles are influenced by behavior types. A Dominant behavior type may tend toward the imbalance of authoritarian parenting. Or an Influencing behavior type may tend to be permissive. But more factors are involved than behavior types. A father who has a Dominant personality type as the head of his business may be very diplomatic and democratic in the household because of his deep love for his children. A mother who is careful and meticulous as an accountant may be very reasonable with her expectations of her children because of a good understanding of each of her children and their needs. As you understand yourself and your children better, you can be a better parent or teacher. All of the four personality types should maximize the strengths of their personality and work on their weaknesses, in order to aim toward balanced parenting.

Some Dominant or Influencing behavior type children need balanced parenting that has more authority and rules, while some Steady or Conscientious children would find the same rules smothering. The important issue is to know yourself and your children and how your parenting style is affecting them. We want to bring out the best in our children to enable them to reach their God-given potential.

The following section describes one good model parenting style (balanced parents), and three ineffective parenting styles (authoritarian parents, permissive parents, and neglectful parents). As you read through this section, try to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your parenting style. If you do not have children but are involved in teaching children through your church or school, evaluate how your style affects the relationships you have with these children in your life.

Balanced Parents

Balanced parents express love, warmth, and grace in their home. They verbally and physically express appropriate love for their child, and they spend personal time with each child. They have a healthy relationship with their children. They have realistic but age-appropriate expectations for obedience from their children. Rules and the consequences for breaking rules are firm and clear. Balanced parents monitor their child's behavior to make sure instructions are carried out. Yet there is dialogue, love and warmth in the relationship between the parents and children. They provide the child with decision-making opportunities. Children are free to develop self-esteem and healthy independence, and they make age-appropriate choices.

Balanced parents help children think about the consequences of their behavior and help them set personal goals that motivate them. They try to catch their children doing good deeds and reinforce this good behavior, rather than focusing on failures. These children experience the consequences of bad choices, and they do not expect their parents to rescue them. Children of balanced parents tend to have respect for authority, self-respect, and good relationships with their peers. They tend to do well in school and group activities.

Authoritarian Parents

Authoritarian parents set high standards and rules, but they can be too restrictive, rigid, and punitive, and may be too demanding considering the age of the child. Explanations for the rules may be lacking. Warmth and understanding of the child may be missing. To these parents the most important thing is outward obedience. Internal compliance may be ignored. Children in this home have few choices. Failure is noted, but success may be taken for granted and not celebrated. Scolding and punishment may be more common than words of encouragement and understanding. The atmosphere of the home from the child's point of view may be demanding, negative, or confining. Communication in this family may be very confrontational. This type of parent may make most of the decisions for the child. Reward and punishment are used to control the child's behavior. Children in these homes may be aggressive and rebellious and reject their parent's beliefs or values.

Permissive Parents

Permissive parents let their children make most of the decisions, even if they are not old enough to handle the responsibility wisely. There are few rules, and those that do exist may be enforced inconsistently. Control, boundaries, and order may be lacking. The parent may show no disappointment toward the child even when the child is clearly disobedient or defiant. Permissive parents may be afraid of disappointing their child. Permissive parents may need their children's approval before they feel like they are

good parents. Often permissive parents so desire that the child like them that they do not enforce rules for fear of losing the child's love.

In reality, children do not respect parents who can be manipulated, and it is hard for children to love parents whom they do not respect. Permissive parents may be slaves to their children. They may do things for their children that the children should do for themselves. Children of permissive parents tend to be irresponsible and to blame others, rather than taking personal responsibility for failures. They tend to expect to get their own way with peers. They have trouble obeying authority, and they may tend toward misbehavior, low self-control, and low achievement in school.

Neglectful Parents

Neglectful parents neither set consistent rules nor express love and warmth toward their children. They may be too busy in their occupations to pay attention to their children, or they may be dealing with so many personal emotional issues that they cannot see their children's needs. They may even see children as an interruption in their life and do not want to be bothered with the needs or concerns of children. Children in these homes may see babysitters or day care workers more than their parents. They may come home from school and take care of themselves because the parents are gone. Even if parents are home, there may be little communication. Television or videos may be the child's companion instead of a parent. The parents' needs may take precedence over the child's needs. The basic needs for food and shelter may be met, but the need for guidance, love, encouragement, direction, and understanding may be ignored. These children may feel they are not worth having anyone spend time with them. They may have trouble trusting adults.

Characteristics of Parenting Styles

The following chart summarizes the characteristics of the four parenting styles. This summary should be followed loosely, not rigidly. Variations in personality can greatly affect behavior. But in general, these tendencies have been observed as a result of the various parenting styles.

Parenting Style	Children's Characteristics
<p><i>Balanced Parent</i></p> <p>Warm, involved, responsive; shows pleasure and support of child's constructive behavior; considers child's wishes and solicits his or her opinions; offers alternatives.</p> <p>Sets standards, communicates them clearly, and enforces them firmly; does not yield to child's coercion; shows displeasure at bad behavior; confronts disobedient child.</p> <p>Expects mature, independent, age-appropriate behavior.</p>	<p><i>Confident-Friendly Child</i></p> <p>Cheerful.</p> <p>Self-controlled and self-reliant.</p> <p>Purposive, achievement-oriented.</p> <p>Shows interest and curiosity.</p> <p>Maintains friendly relations with peers.</p> <p>Cooperates with adults.</p> <p>Copes well with stress.</p>
<p><i>Authoritarian Parent</i></p> <p>Shows little warmth or positive involvement.</p> <p>Does not solicit or consider child's desires or opinions.</p> <p>Enforces rules rigidly but does not explain them clearly.</p> <p>Shows anger and displeasure; confronts child regarding bad behavior and uses harsh, punitive discipline.</p> <p>Views child as dominated by antisocial impulses.</p>	<p><i>Conflicted-Irritable Child</i></p> <p>Moody, unhappy, aimless.</p> <p>Fearful, apprehensive; easily annoyed.</p> <p>Passively hostile and deceitful.</p> <p>Alternates between aggressive behavior and sulky withdrawal.</p> <p>Vulnerable to stress.</p>
<p><i>Permissive Parent</i></p> <p>Moderately warm.</p> <p>Glorifies free expression of impulses and desires.</p> <p>Does not communicate rules clearly or enforce them; ignores or accepts bad behavior; disciplines inconsistently; yields to coercion and whining; hides impatience, anger.</p> <p>Makes few demands for mature, independent behavior.</p>	<p><i>Impulsive-Aggressive Child</i></p> <p>Aggressive, domineering, resistant, noncompliant.</p> <p>Quick to anger but fast to recover cheerful mood.</p> <p>Lacks self-control and displays little self-reliance.</p> <p>Impulsive.</p> <p>Shows little achievement orientation.</p> <p>Aimless; has few goal-directed activities.</p>

<i>Neglectful Parent</i>	<i>Neglected Child</i>
Self-centered, generally unresponsive, neglectful.	Moody, insecurely attached, impulsive, aggressive, non-compliant, irresponsible.
Pursues self-gratification at the expense of child's welfare.	Low self-esteem, immature, alienated from family.
Tries to minimize costs (time, effort) of interaction with child.	Lacks skills for social and academic pursuits.
Fails to monitor child's activity, whereabouts, companions.	Truancy, association with troubled peers, delinquency and arrests, precocious sexuality. ³
May be depressive, anxious, emotionally needy.	

Be careful not to interpret the above chart rigidly or use it to judge yours or other people's children. When describing the personality of children, some healthy children are more pensive and quiet and do not totally fit in the above category of "confident-friendly." What is "confident and friendly" for a more melancholy child may be different from what a gregarious child naturally expresses. What is "confident and friendly" may also look different in different cultures and settings. The above chart is only meant to provide generalities, and individual personalities and tendencies must also be considered. Keep in mind that the child's behavior is not only affected by parenting styles. Children make choices that affect their personality and development. As you saw in Lesson 1, God was the perfect parent, but His children did not turn out perfect.

Culture can also influence parenting styles. Children raised in a war zone will need more rigid rules and authoritarian control in order to feel safe and secure and to develop and be healthy. Children raised in a quiet country setting can be allowed looser controls. Also, what looks like balanced, loving control in one culture may look rigid and restrictive in another.

Some of us can easily define what balanced parenting is. Others are not so sure. Each of us takes the definitions and descriptions we hear and interprets them through what we have experienced. Consider the following case study:

When her children were very young, Johanna attended a child-rearing class in which the leader spoke about the importance of instant obedience the first time a request or command was made. She understood that a child trained to obey immediately would surely be safer, for example, when told not to enter a busy street. But in less urgent situations the leader did not seem to allow for any discussion or consideration of the child's needs at the time the command was made.

Johanna was trying to understand when and how instant first-time obedience should be employed. She visited the home of a friend in the class who had three preschool

boys. Johanna asked her what she thought of the lesson they both had heard. The mother of the three boys said it was excellent, and she tried to apply first-time obedience all the time. Johanna was surprised because she saw the three boys running around with very little control. The mother of the three boys came from a permissive background, and what she interpreted as first-command obedience was a lot freer than what Johanna, coming from a stricter upbringing, understood it to be.

It is hard to judge another person's child-rearing methods, and you need to let the Holy Spirit guide you in understanding and applying the instructions you hear from others or from books you read.



Regarding the four parenting styles in this lesson:

1. What biblical principles are being followed or not followed?
2. Which biblical concepts might be twisted into something unbalanced that Scripture does not say?

Most parents want to be good parents who properly care and provide for their children. We all want our lives to evidence the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and to be maturing in Christ (2 Pet 1:5-11). Much pressure is placed on the family and on parents. There is the struggle to make a living to provide for the physical needs of the family. There is the struggle to understand the various personalities and individual needs that exist within the family. There is the struggle to protect children from the negative influences of society, as well as actual physical dangers in the environment. There is the spiritual pressure to be active in a local church and maintain spiritual priorities. Academic competition can be intense as information explodes, and it takes more energy just to stay current. In light of all these pressures, it is sometimes difficult to know the best thing to do when daily challenges require action.

A person who is leaning too heavily toward enforcing rules and regulations may become too authoritarian, justifying it by claiming to be upholding God's laws. Sometimes the daily pressure of life pushes a parent toward being too lax and permissive in the name of love (1 Cor 13), overlooking problems and giving too many second chances. Sometimes parents are just too busy to notice, and they become neglectful. They are trying to honor God by working hard at their job, but they have no energy left to put into the family. The times the family needs focused attention are often the same times that an employer is asking for more effort at work.

It is helpful to bring these things to God in prayer. It also helps to stay in communication with Christian brothers and sisters. They can help you discern if you are staying balanced in your parenting style or if you are losing sight of balance and leaning in an unhealthy direction. You must maintain a balanced, sober view of Scripture, as well as a realistic view of your parenting behavior. It is helpful to have

Christian brothers and sisters who care and can support you in maintaining a clear vision of the path you should follow.



Which characteristics of balanced parenting describe you?

Which of the three inadequate parenting styles include weaknesses of your parenting style?

Which style characterizes how you were raised?

How has the culture you live in influenced your parenting style?



Select several weaknesses in your parenting style that you would like to change with God's help. Think through some possible scenarios that would allow you to express this new way of dealing with the situation.



This is one of the most important Assignments in this lesson:

A. Personal preparation

1. Think through the four parenting styles.
2. Develop a three-to-five-minute role-play for each of the four types of parents.
3. Include two to four characters (parent[s], child, adult relative, etc.) in each role-play.

When you have completed the home preparation portion of this assignment, you will have developed four short dramatic sketches.

B. In-class enactment (guided by the facilitator):

1. Divide your class into four groups.
2. Write the four parenting styles on individual slips of paper.
3. Have a representative from each of the four groups draw a slip of paper and reveal the parenting style only to those in his or her group.
4. Give each group ten to fifteen minutes to develop a three-to-five-minute role-play of this type of parent, which they then will perform in front of the other groups.
5. As the performing group presents the three-to-five-minute role-play, have the observing groups try to guess which parenting style is being enacted.

Single Parenting

Single parenting by its very nature has many more challenges. There is limited opportunity for feedback from another set of observing eyes. There is no one with the same level of concern and interest as you have in the details of your children's lives. Time and energy are limited. Often it is exhausting just to survive, with no time left over to evaluate and improve child-rearing methods. Single parenting is a daunting task.

Many difficult questions may trouble the single parent: How will I make decisions? How does one person function as a father and mother? How can a man add a woman's perspective to child rearing, or a woman add a man's perspective? Where does the energy come from to do the job? What keeps a person going? What do I do when my child is sick and I still have to earn a living? Who will do a good job of caring for the children when I am at work? Will my authority be undermined in the home by those who care for my children? The list goes on and on.

Although the family in the case of the single parent has been redefined, the needs of the family do not change. The purpose, roles, and spiritual dimensions of a family still exist. Thus, it is all the more important for the single parent to be aware of and ready to act upon these needs. But fulfilling two roles, each of which can be overwhelming, is daunting. The solution is not a call for a heroic last stand on the part of the lone parent. Outside help should be sought.

Single parents should first turn to their family for help, and the family should be ready and willing to help, if possible. But it may be that the family cannot fill some crucial needs, especially if family members are not Christians or if the family lives far away. Then the single parent should look to others, and to the church in particular, for help. Support should come from the local body of believers who are aware of the situation and who should be willing to help in any practical way possible.

Today both men and women often work, and material help may not be the most pressing need in some single families. But emotional support is often critical for a man or woman struggling to raise a family alone. A man raising children alone is just as much in need of emotional support as is a woman. If he has daughters, they can especially benefit from the attention of a woman who serves as a surrogate mother, a female figure with which a young girl can identify. Likewise, boys raised by a single mother need the example of a man, a father-figure, to pattern themselves after.

God can fill the gaps in the lives of the children of single parents through other believers who are committed to serving as role models or surrogate parents in place of the absent father or mother. Christians should consider taking on the role of an adopted aunt or uncle, grandmother or grandfather, for a child from a single-parent home. Christian families are often very busy and may not feel they can afford the extra time it takes to reach out to a single parent. But if possible, the children from a single-parent

family can be invited to attend already-scheduled activities of the two-parent family. Seeing the interaction of parents and children in a two-parent family can also provide a model for the single-parent children invited into family activities.

As with any parent, it is important that single parents live in close relationship with God. Frustrations, anger, confusion, hopelessness, and depression may affect single parents and their children. Single parents, however, need to set priorities to deal with these issues, to seek God’s wisdom in the Scriptures, to have friends to confide in, and to get outside help when needed.

Single parents should be wary of getting into another relationship as a means of solving current problems. Before committing to any romantic relationship, they need to be emotionally and spiritually healthy. The last thing children of a single parent need is a stepfather or stepmother, or stepbrothers or stepsisters, who make life even more difficult.



1. Are there any single-parent families in your church or circle of acquaintances? Prayerfully consider if and how you might help.
2. What are appropriate things you can do to include other children in your family’s activities?
3. What current activities in your church would provide opportunities to interact with the lives of children from single-parent homes?

Conclusion

Even though we love our children and are determined to be the best parents we can, we all make mistakes. In fact, some of our best efforts can affect our children adversely, as seen in the following case study:

Diane had a very conscientious, goal-driven daughter, Renae. In hopes of relieving some of the stress Renae felt from self-imposed high standards, she said, “Renae, it is OK. Just do the best you can. That is good enough. You do not have to get perfect grades.” Diane was understanding of Renae, took the time to verbalize her thoughts, and tried to lessen the pressure that Renae felt.

Diane’s words would have helped most children know that their parent accepted them and was allowing them to relax their own expectations of themselves. But this was not the case with Renae. Years later Renae explained to her mother, “Mom, when you said that it was good enough to just do my best, it did not help me. I knew that the best I could do was better than I was doing. I was just so busy; I was taking so many difficult classes, and I could not do my best in each one. There was not enough time in each day to do my best. When you said it was OK if I just did my best, it made me feel

even more pressure.” Diane’s best effort to understand and encourage Renae instead put her under more stress.

As parents we need to admit our shortcomings and rely on God to make up for what is lacking in our parenting. Our children do not have perfect parents, but they do have a perfect heavenly Father. Since He made them and knows them perfectly, He will deal with them accordingly.



Please take time now to read and meditate on Psalm 139. Then worship and thank Him for the way He has made you and your children and for the intimate way He knows all of you and is always with you.

Fortunately, we serve a big and miracle-working God. The ending of the true story from the beginning of this lesson is a happy one. After years of growing up on the streets with no direction, each child in this story became a Christian as he or she came face-to-face with God and His mercy. They turned to Him for strength to live life. One of them became a missionary with a heart for evangelism, another became a pastor, and another became an active layman in his church. They all married Christian spouses. In fact, God’s mighty, saving power was clearest when the situation was most dismal. Even in the absence of godly parenting, God can bring redemption. To Him be the glory!

ENDNOTES

¹ This section on personality types is based on material in Charles F. Boyd, *Different Children, Different Needs: Understanding the Unique Personality of Your Child* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1994), especially chaps. 4-8; Ken Voges and Ron Braund, *Understanding How Others Misunderstand You: A Proven Plan for Strengthening Personal Relationships* (Houston, TX: In His Grace, 2005); Wikipedia, “DISC assessment,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DISC_assessment, accessed October 1, 2009.

² The information on the four parenting styles is based on “Authoritarian Parenting Style,” <http://www.consistent-parenting-advice.com/authoritarian-parenting-style.html>, accessed May 8, 2009; “Authoritative Parenting Style,” <http://www.consistent-parenting-advice.com/authoritative-parenting-style.html>, accessed May 8, 2009; Tim Clinton and Gary Sibly, *Loving Your Child Too Much: Staying Close to Your Kids Without Overprotecting, Overindulging, or Overcontrolling* (Franklin, TN: Integrity, 2006), 6-31; Nancy Darling, “Parenting Style and Its Correlates,” http://www.kidneeds.com/diagnostic_categories/articles/parentcorre02htm, accessed May 8, 2009; Jon Henshaw, “What Parenting Style Is Best?” <http://www.familyresource.com/parenting/parent-education/what-parenting-style-is-best>, accessed May 8, 2009; Mavis E. Hetherington and Ross D. Parke, *Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint, 5th ed.*, rev. Ross D. Parke and Virginia Otis Locke (Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 470-475; Kevin Leman, *Have a New Kid by Friday: How to Change Your Child's Attitude, Behavior and Character in 5 Days* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 58-60; “Parenting Styles,” http://pediatrics.about.com/od/infantparentingtips/a/04_pntg_styles.htm, accessed May 8, 2009; “Parenting Style and Its Correlates,” <http://athealth.com/Practitioner/ceduc/parentingstyles.html>, accessed May 8, 2009; “Permissive Parenting Style,” <http://www.consistent-parenting-advice.com/permissive-parenting-style.html>, accessed May 8, 2009; Thomas Phelan, “Do You Know Your Parenting Style?” <http://www.brainy-child.com/article/parenting-styles.shtml>, accessed May 8, 2009; Phil McGraw, *Family First: Your Step-by-Step Plan for Creating a Phenomenal Family* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 82-113; Jay Reeve, “The Three Styles of Parenting,” <http://www.lifespan.org/services/childhealth/parenting/styles.htm>, accessed May 8, 2009; Gary Smalley, *The Key to Your Child's Heart: Raise Motivated, Obedient, and Loving Children* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 31-45; “Uninvolved Parenting Style,” <http://www.consistent-parenting-advice.com/uninvolved-parenting-style.html>, accessed May 8, 2009; Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parenting_styles, accessed May 8, 2009.

³ This chart is adapted from the chart in Hetherington and Parke, 473, created by them from the following sources: Baumind, *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75 (1967): 43-88; idem., in Cowan and Hetherington, eds., *Family Transitions* (1991), 111-164; Hetherington and Clingernpeel, *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 57 (1992); Maccoby and Martin, in *Socialization, Personality, and Social Development*, vol. 4, *Handbook of Child Psychology* (1983).

Loving Relationships

Remember when you were a child? Put yourself back to about age nine. Which of the following words from your parents would you prefer hearing at the start of your day?

Scenario A:

“Chris, it’s time to get up, and I mean now! You ignored your wake-up call yesterday and made us all late. I won’t let that happen again, so get up now. Your backpack is still by the front door, so I guess that means you didn’t touch your homework last night either. You should have turned off the TV so you wouldn’t be so tired this morning. Get up, lazy head. The day won’t wait for you. I set your breakfast out on the table, and don’t you dare complain that you don’t like it. Be thankful that you have food to eat. Don’t roll over and ignore me. Get up now or else. You won’t like the consequences if you aren’t ready to go out the door in thirty minutes.”

Scenario B:

“Chris, good morning! Hey, I see that eye open; that is a good sign. It takes energy to get up and tackle another day, and getting your eyes to open is a good start. I saw that you put your shoes away yesterday, and that will save you time this morning. Good job. You have your backpack by the front door ready to grab as you leave. That is being prepared, doing your part to help get us out the door on time. I really appreciate that. I look forward to seeing you at the breakfast table after you get dressed. It makes my day start off great when I can eat breakfast with the people who are precious to me.”

Do any of these words sound familiar? Have you said or heard them before? Do your attitudes and words as a parent have much influence? This lesson will explore the topic of attitudes and relationships between adults and children.

Lesson Outline

God’s Example

What Children Need

Self-Esteem and Your Child

What the Bible Says about Self-Esteem

What the World Says about Self-Esteem

Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

Emotional Bank Accounts

How Children Experience Love

Positive Eye Contact

Time with Focused Attention

Touch

Special Times and Celebrations

Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Explain how God values you.
2. Describe the basic needs of emotionally healthy children.
3. Define a godly self-esteem and explain how it can be fostered.
4. List the ways you can show appropriate unconditional love that fits each of your children's needs.
5. Plan individual time with each of the children in your life.

God's Example

From the first verses of Genesis to the final verses of Revelation, we see evidence of God moving toward the people He has created—loving them, providing for them, teaching them, redeeming them, preparing a place in heaven for them. God is the ultimate example of a sacrificing, loving, correcting, caring heavenly Father. Consider the following thoughts:

What would it be like to be loved by someone whose love for you is not influenced by anything you ever did, are now doing, or will do; whose love could never weaken or fluctuate? You **can** know what it would be like! For God's love for you is not influenced by anything you ever did or will do . . . His love is unconditional. God chose to love you, and the moment He did, His personal love and happiness became identified or "tied up" with you (Ps. 104:31). You became the object of His affection, "the apple of [His] eye" (Ps. 17:8). Love does not exist in a vacuum. It must express itself, so God desired to express Himself to you through a personal relationship made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The love God has for you will never change. He loves you as much today as when He gave His Son for you . . . and He will keep on "giving" in love to you (Rom. 8:32). God's love will never weaken or

fluctuate, for in Him “there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). His personal love for you is eternal; thus, He loved you before you had any being, with a love that is everlasting (Jer. 31:3).¹



Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8, Romans 5:8, Galatians 2:20, and 1 John 4:9-11.

1. What do these verses say about God’s love?
2. Why does God love us?
3. How has He demonstrated that love?
4. Now write a short paragraph about how God’s love for you affects your love for your mate and your children. Then share your paragraph with someone else to see how they respond to your thoughts.

This everlasting love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Now that you have the capacity to love the way God loves, He wants you to use that capacity to "love one another" (1 Jn 4:11). And “one another” definitely includes your teenager!

What Children Need

In the busyness of life it is easy for a parent or caregiver to focus on the pressing, urgent needs of children for food and shelter and to have very little time left to listen to a child’s emotional and spiritual needs. Too often, much communication with children is corrective, not relational. Several authors have said that rules with relationship lead to respect, but rules without relationship lead to rebellion.² Children need to know that at home they are accepted and wanted just as they are, unconditionally. They can be themselves. This acceptance builds their sense of being valued, their self-esteem. Without a foundation of unconditional love, children cannot appropriately respond to correction and discipline.



Think about the supervisors and colleagues you have worked with. How did they treat you? What did they think of you? What kind of supervisor is easiest to work with? If you are a homemaker, think about your volunteer activities. What kind of leader is easiest to work with?



Read Mark 1:9-11 (see also Mt 3:13-17; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:32-34; 2 Pet 1:16-18).

1. What did God say about His Son?
2. Why do you think He chose these words?

God was careful to communicate with His Son, Jesus, while He was on this earth.³ Evidence of the Father’s love and acceptance of Jesus is seen in these words from Mark 1:11, as well as in Matthew 17:5. What God said about Jesus seems to be a basic need of all of us:⁴

“This is My Son”—acceptance (sense of belonging)

“Whom I love”—affection (respect)

“Listen to Him”—affirmation (Jesus is worth listening to); useful skills, including social ones

God the Father felt it was important to publicly affirm and communicate to His perfect, holy Son these definite, deliberate words of acceptance, love, affirmation, and encouragement. How much more do your children (and you yourself) need to hear the same from those who represent God to you. God communicates those things to you through Scripture. John 3:16 is just one of the many passages that tell of His love for you. What a great foundation for children’s lives to hear words of love and encouragement from godly parents.

It has been demonstrated that “children who feel their parents’ love and support are better protected from the threats of youth violence, antisocial behavior, drug addiction, premature sexual activity, adolescent suicide, and other social ills. Studies reveal that children who feel respected and valued in their families do better in school, have more friendships, and live healthier, more successful lives.”⁵

God loved His Son well. May we follow in our Father’s footsteps. This honors Him and helps our children lead lives that are pleasing to God and fulfilling to themselves.

Self-Esteem and Your Child

Why should a course on raising children discuss self-esteem? Because how you think about yourself is crucial for receiving love from God and others and for living a healthy life:

Self-esteem is essential for psychological survival. It is an emotional *sine qua non*—without *some* measure of self-worth, life can be enormously painful, with many basic needs going unmet.

One of the main factors differentiating humans from other animals is the awareness of self: the ability to form an identity and then attach a

value to it. In other words, you have the capacity to define who you are and then decide if you like that identity or not. The problem of self-esteem is this human capacity for judgment. It's one thing to dislike certain colors, noises, shapes, or sensations. But when you reject parts of yourself, you greatly damage the psychological structures that literally keep you alive. . . .

Hundreds of researchers have quizzed thousands of people of various ages and situations, trying to see what causes self-esteem, who has the most of it, how important it is, how it can be increased, and so on.

Studies of young children show clearly that parents' style of child-rearing during the first three or four years determines the amount of self-esteem that a child starts with. After that, most studies of older children, adolescents, and adults share a common confusion: what is cause and what is effect?

Does academic success foster self-esteem, or does self-esteem foster academic success? Does high social status cause high self-esteem, or does high self-esteem help you gain high social status? Do alcoholics drink because they hate themselves, or do they hate themselves because they drink? Do people like themselves because they do well in job interviews, or do they do better in interviews because they like themselves? . . .

The fact is that self-esteem and your circumstances are only indirectly related. Another intervening factor determines self-esteem 100 percent of the time: your thoughts.

For example, you look in the mirror and think, "Boy, am I fat. What a slob." This thought clobbers your self-esteem. If you looked in the mirror and thought, "Well, all right, it looks good to wear my hair like this," the effect on your self-esteem would be the opposite. The image in the mirror remains the same. Only the thoughts change.⁶

Obviously, we need to fill our minds with what God says about us rather than the lies that the enemy tries to get us to believe. As you train your children, you should help them think godly thoughts about the world they live in, but especially about themselves.

What the Bible Says about Self-Esteem

How is the subject of self-esteem dealt with in the Bible? Is all this concern about self-esteem warranted? Certainly, Scripture emphasizes some important points about "self":

1. The Bible emphasizes selflessness. Philippians 2:1-11 is a key passage on the humility of Christ, who set the example for us by taking on the form of a servant. The New Testament urges us to serve one another in love (Gal 5:13); to look out for the interests of others; not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to but to regard one another as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4). Many New Testament passages make clear that self-sacrifice is to be the norm for the Christian. One of the dangers of becoming too concerned with our self-concept is that we may forget this biblical emphasis and become self-centered. Yet until we know who we are and appreciate who God has made us, we cannot properly give ourselves to love and serve others.
2. The Bible emphasizes two things concerning humans:
 - a. By nature we are sinners. We are lost without Christ. We cannot measure up to God's holy standard, and our self-produced righteousness is compared to filthy rags (Rom 3:10-11, 23; Isa 64:6).
 - b. Every individual has been created in the image of God, though that image has been marred by sin's entrance into the world. The image of God in us proclaims the sanctity of human life and the intrinsic value of every human being. The Bible further declares that God loves us unconditionally and accepts and forgives us. He regarded us highly enough to send His only Son to die for us, that He might win us back to Himself. When we receive the gift of salvation through His Son, the image of God is restored in us. We will not, however, experience the fullness of God's image until the resurrection, when the corruptible body puts on incorruption. Yet even now, as believers we stand before God as being in Christ, complete in Him.

Ephesians 1 and 2 list the blessings which are ours, not as a result of our own merit but as a result of Christ's loving sacrifice for us. He became poor that we might become rich. We are rich in His blessings; we are children of the King. **Understanding who we are in Christ is the basis of a proper self-worth.**

“When we rest in God's unceasing love, acceptance, and forgiveness, we are set free from society's standards to become exactly who God created us to be.”⁷ We learn to accept our uniqueness, to see how special we are to Him. We learn to capitalize on our strengths and refine them, as gifts He has given us to use. Finally, we learn to develop the areas in which we are weak by relying on His strength. Instead of belittling ourselves because of our shortcomings, we begin to understand that God can use even our weaknesses and insecurities to exhibit His glory through us (2 Cor 12:9).

Having a proper concept of who we are does not result in pride. Rather, it makes us humble; we recognize that what we are is by God's grace. It does not mean that we gloss over sin in our lives but that we deal with it, confess it, and accept God's forgiveness. Paul exhorts believers not to “cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or

your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given” (Rom 12:3 Phillips). This “sane estimate” is essential for building healthy self-esteem in any adult or child.⁸



Summarize your own self-concept. One suggestion is to begin with the words, “I am . . .” and formulate ten responses. Look at your self-evaluation. Where did you form this view of yourself? Review the material above and see how your thinking about yourself corresponds to what you have read. Are you in need of a new perspective on yourself?

Now that the framework of a proper basis for self-esteem has been established, the next section will look at the false basis for self-esteem and then at some suggestions for how to build proper self-esteem in children.



Stop for a moment to adore God for who He is and how worthy He is of the highest esteem.

What the World Says about Self-Esteem

False values about human worth exist in every society, past and present. In every generation, people have tended to value physical appearance, beauty, power, and wealth or possessions. The ideal of beauty varies from one culture to the next and changes somewhat with each new generation.



Read 1 Samuel 16:1-7 to see what God has to say about the importance of external appearance.

1. What was important to God?
2. What was not important?

One of the first steps to building proper self-esteem is to recognize the false values that your particular society holds. Do the wealthy, handsome, tall or powerful people have an advantage? Is any one of these false values predominant in your culture?



1. What values are most prevalent in your culture? List five to ten.
2. Write down any Bible verses you can find that pertain to this value.
3. How should you and your children respond in relation to this value?

Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

Despite the prevailing trends in your society, you can take some specific steps to build proper self-worth in your children. The following seven actions will contribute to building self-esteem from infancy onward:⁹

1. Encourage proper values in your own home. In a very real sense, parents are products of their society. While we may condemn many of society's values, we have sometimes accepted them without realizing it. We have unconsciously learned to worship beauty, intelligence, athletic prowess, or money just like everyone else. The first step must be to examine the values in your home to see whether you have adopted God's perspective on human worth or if your value system needs to be redesigned.

A common mistake that parents make is being too critical of their son or daughter. If all a child hears is criticism and negative evaluations, he will soon come to believe what he hears. He will eventually think of himself as a bad child.¹⁰

But negative evaluations are not the only cause of a poor self-concept. Many factors in a home situation can affect a child's self-esteem. For example, a younger boy may find it difficult to compete with an older sibling who can run faster or climb higher. He may feel stupid or inept, particularly if his older sibling is allowed to tease him. Embarrassing family characteristics, such as having an alcoholic father, can also produce undeserved feelings of inferiority in children. Even disease and financial hardship can affect the way they look at themselves, particularly when they compare themselves with others.¹¹

Sensitivity is the key word to remember when it comes to building self-esteem. You need to be attuned to the thoughts and feelings of your children so that you are aware of their emotional needs. Then you need to make a conscious effort to build their self-esteem, rather than tearing it down.



1. Write down some of the factors in your own life and upbringing which probably harmed your self-esteem and confidence.
2. Did any of these factors come from your culture? If so, which ones?
3. Do any of these factors apply now to your own children?

4. What specific things do you think are most affecting your child's self-esteem in a negative way? In a positive way?
5. Be prepared to share some thoughts on this at the next seminar.

2. Convey unconditional love and respect to your child. If it is true that parents or teachers can make children think they are worthless, it is conversely true that they can make them feel their worth by showing them unconditional love. This means to accept children fully, no matter how they act. However, unconditional love does not mean approving the negative things a child does.

When children disobey, we discipline, but we shouldn't attack their character. We may say, "That is wrong"; "You are not to do that," or "That's a bad thing to do." But we shouldn't say, "You are bad," or, "You're a dirty child." We should focus on the misdeed, not on our children's sense of worth. In this way we teach them right and wrong while maintaining their self-esteem.¹²

You should also remember that a person needs to hear many words of encouragement in order to be able to take words of correction well. It is best to focus and comment on the positive things a child is doing rather than always pointing out errors. At times it is essential to correct your child, but you must make sure that before and after this incident you have given many positive comments.

When children are convinced that they are loved and respected by their parents and teachers, they are inclined to accept their own worth as a person. A child, like an adult, needs respect. Many children know intuitively that they are loved by their parents, but they do not believe they are held in high esteem by them. A child can conclude, "Sure, they love me because I'm their child—I can see that I'm important to them—but they are not proud of me as a person. I'm a disappointment to them. I've let them down. I didn't turn out like they had hoped."¹³

It is very easy to convey love and disrespect at the same time. A child can know that you would actually give your life for him, if required, and yet your doubts about his acceptability show through. . . . [For example,] you reveal your frustration when you are trying to comb his hair or make him 'look nice' for an important event. He knows you think it is an impossible assignment. . . . These subtle behaviors are signals to the child that . . . he must be supervised closely to avoid embarrassing the whole family. He reads disrespect in your manner, though it is framed in genuine love. The love is a private thing between you—whereas confidence and admiration are 'other' oriented, having social implications to those outside the family. . . .

Loving your child, therefore, is only half of the task of building self-esteem. The element of respect must be added if you are to counterbalance the insults which society will later throw at him. Unless *somebody* believes in his worth, the world can be a cold and lonely place, indeed.¹⁴



Take time to examine the emotional life of your home and your own set of values. Do your actions and words contribute to self-confidence or self-degradation? Does your family life meet the child's basic emotional needs, or does it leave them unsatisfied? Does your home life reinforce the best values or the worst? These questions are all critical to the sense of self-worth your children will develop.

3. Build your child's confidence through praise. Many problems with low self-esteem arise in families where praise is lacking

As Christian parents, you need to limit criticism as much as possible, building, instead, your child's confidence through praise and encouragement. Praise should characterize your words as parents. Praise should reinforce positive, constructive behavior and be specific in nature, rather than general. "I liked the way you straightened your room today" is better than "You have been a good girl," which is vague and does not reward specific behavior. Parents should always watch for opportunities to offer genuine, well-deserved praise to their children. But avoid empty flattery. Your child will quickly learn that your words have no meaning if your praise is insincere and unearned.

There are many opportunities in a day that offer a reason to give a good comment:

- "You got up and are dressed and ready for breakfast."
- "You remembered to take your lunch."
- "You found your shoes easily today because you put them away properly yesterday."
- "Thank you for taking your dish to the sink when you finished eating."
- "You sat respectfully during the prayer."
- "You did not poke your brother even though he poked you first."
- "You greeted your friend at school with a smile and happy tone of voice."
- "You brought your homework assignment home."
- "You changed your school clothes before going out to play."

- “You ate politely and participated in the meal conversation.”
- “You patiently waited for your sister to get out of the bathroom so you could brush your teeth.”
- “You did not argue when I asked you to let the dog outside.”
- “When you were disappointed that you could not watch TV, you did not get angry and throw a tantrum.”
- “When you came home from school tired and hungry, you asked for something to eat politely without demanding it.”



Make a list of twenty positive things you could say to your children about an ordinary, everyday action they do or about an attitude that they express that is good.



Reflect on your own family upbringing. Was your home a place of praise or criticism? Think of an incident or two involving praise or criticism that affected you. Write these down in your notebook in summary form. Take a few minutes to pray that the Lord would help you praise the members of your family more often.

4. Teach your child not to criticize. Parents can set a positive tone in the family that can be contagious. Establish a rule in your home that ridiculing others is not allowed. Encourage your children not to criticize themselves or others. Healthy families should be able to laugh together but not at the expense of others being hurt.

Children ages seven to twelve become increasingly adept at all forms of teasing, ridicule, name-calling, and even outright ostracism of certain children who for one reason or another are not acceptable to them. As adults, you know that this stage will pass, but you must not forget how much it can hurt to be called “Fatty” or “Frog” or “Elephant Ears.” You need to help your own children to avoid labeling and ridiculing others. Praise, rather than criticism, should characterize your words as parents and should be reflected in how your children treat each other.

5. Teach confidence by giving responsibility. Everyone needs to feel important. We want to feel that we contribute and that we belong. By giving children responsibilities, you can build their self-esteem. When Martin takes out the trash each day, he feels important. It is good for his self-concept to do something useful to help the family.

This does not mean he will necessarily enjoy taking out the trash. He may even try to get out of doing it, but when his parents calmly explain, “We each have important tasks to do, Martin,” and set a logical consequence for failure to do it, he will usually respond. You are not doing a child a favor by relieving him or her of all responsibilities in the home and allowing play instead. Work is one of the ways in which we gain an inner sense of fulfillment as we carry our share of the load.

Even young children need opportunities to achieve simple tasks on their own. A child who grows up feeling inadequate to perform certain tasks may carry this sense of inadequacy throughout life. “When a child completes a task, satisfaction and confidence result. Achievement builds feelings of success, providing concrete evidence that the child is capable.”¹⁵

Sometimes you need to define the task to be more age-appropriate. If a four-year-old girl has trouble picking up her toys at the end of the day, maybe she has too many toys. It will be more manageable if she has a smaller box of toys to play with. Excess toys can be put away where only adults can reach them. When the number of toys that she plays with is equal to the number of toys she is able to put away at the end of the day, she can feel successful at accomplishing her assigned task, and the parent can be relieved of the frustration of the toys not being picked up.



Recall your own childhood upbringing. What tasks were you assigned, or what responsibilities did you bear in the home? What effect, if any, do you think this had on your sense of self-worth? What responsibilities does your culture expect of boys? of girls?

6. Help your child compensate. Parents often long to shield a child who is ridiculed, rejected, or ignored at school. Yet “the human personality grows through mild adversity, *provided it is not crushed in the process*. Contrary to what you might believe, the ideal environment for your child is not one devoid of problems and trials.”¹⁶

Children learn to cope with problems and frustration and disappointment through confronting them.

The well-rooted tree becomes strong and steady against all assailants. This illustration applies to our children, as well: those who have learned to conquer their problems are more secure than those who have never faced them. Our task as parents, then, is not to eliminate every challenge for our children; it is to serve as a confident ally on their behalf, encouraging when they are distressed, intervening when the threats are overwhelming, and above all, giving them the tools with which to overcome the obstacles.¹⁷

One tool that can help a child is compensation.¹⁸ To compensate means to counterbalance. A child can learn to counterbalance weaknesses by capitalizing on strengths. Bobby Fischer, the former world champion chess player, was once asked where he got the ambition and motivation to excel in chess. He replied, “It was some people thinking maybe I wasn’t as good as they were when I was a kid.”¹⁹ Many people have been propelled by the need to prove something about their adequacy. While compensation has a negative side, because those involved may be struggling to prove something to their parents or to themselves, it has a positive side as well.

Essentially, compensation is a tool that provides a child with concrete proof of his or her value. Children find it difficult to think of their value in abstract terms. Developing skills or natural abilities in a particular area can bolster a child’s confidence and self-esteem.

Compensation is one of the best weapons against inferiority. In order to help children compensate for their perceived weak areas, you should make a careful assessment of their strengths and select a skill that has the possibility for success and enjoyment. It may be music, art, gymnastics, athletics, or any other area. See that the child gets through the early stage of learning this skill. Later, if you discover that the child has no aptitude for that particular skill, start over on something else. In any case, you need to help your children learn something in which they can excel, but most importantly that they can enjoy. One daughter may not be as talented a piano player as her sister is, but if playing is something she enjoys, encourage her in it.



1. Make a list of your child’s greatest strengths, as well as areas of weakness.
2. Write down one or two ideas on how you might help him or her compensate for weak areas.
3. If you have no children, ask a friend or relative to share some observations about their children regarding perceived weak areas and methods they have used to help their children compensate.

7. Teach your child to have a spirit of thankfulness. The spirit of our age is certainly not one of thankfulness. The world around us complains and compares, and it is not thankful toward God for His daily sustenance. As Christian parents we need to teach our children to have a spirit of thankfulness. This process begins when they are very small. We can pray spontaneously with a child, “Thank you, God, for making the flowers.” These prayers are a natural outflow of children’s appreciation of things that God has created. As children grow older, remind them that they, too, are God’s creation

and that in His plan He gave each of them the particular physical features, abilities, and gifts that they possess.

When we complain about how we look or about our lack of a certain ability, we are really complaining against God. God wants us to thank Him for who we are and for what He chooses to give us, recognizing His loving purpose in our lives. You can help your child have a healthy self-concept by cultivating this spirit of thankfulness in your home.



Stop now and thank God for the person you are. Praise Him for the person each of your children is.



1. Do your children demonstrate a thankful spirit? Why or why not?
2. Think of one way to encourage your children to have a thankful spirit this week.
3. Put this idea into action and record the results.

Emotional Bank Accounts

The Bible tells us repeatedly how much God loves and values us. We feel good about ourselves more easily when those around us feel good about us. Children are not born assuming that they are wanted and loved. They need to hear and feel that. Words and actions of encouragement, affirmation, and understanding make deposits into your children's emotional bank accounts. Criticism, discipline, stress, conflict, smothering protection,²⁰ anger, indifference, and stern correction are withdrawals from their emotional bank account. It is easier for them to behave well when their emotional bank account is filled with unconditional love. Sometimes children are so unruly that it is difficult to be positive with them. It takes extra effort to create situations where they can be affirmed or find something they are doing right so you can say something positive to them. Sometimes a child's misbehavior is a cry of, "Do you love me unconditionally, as I am?"

Filling an emotional bank account takes effort, while depleting it is easy when the parent is distracted, tired, angry, or frustrated. Filling an emotional bank account takes attentiveness, listening, understanding, and specific action and speech. Discipline that does not consider the emotional needs of a child may seem to produce obedience when a child is young. Anger and resentment may, however, be building and become evident in adolescence or young adulthood.²¹ It is crucial that before discipline is administered,

you are sure that you are listening to the needs of your children. Their emotional bank account must be healthy before they can respond properly to correction or discipline. They need to see actions from you that are evidence of your love.

Children are affected by more than your interaction with them. If they had a difficult day at school or if their friends spoke critically of them, they may come home with a depleted emotional bank account. Their bad or defiant attitude or sarcastic comments may have nothing to do with you as parents. You must have the maturity to recognize when they need love and acceptance.

A True Story

In a Sunday school class that included children from many cultures, the different needs of the four-year-olds were multiplied. Some of the children had been teased during the week in their preschool classes because they were just learning the host country's language or they looked different or they were foreigners. When they came to Sunday school, they misbehaved out of anger for how they had been treated during the week. They would have preferred to be with their parents than be put in another class. The children were difficult to deal with. If every misbehavior drew a reprimand, there would have been no time for a Bible story.

It quickly became obvious to the teacher that these children had empty emotional bank accounts. Instead of scolding or banishing them, the teacher picked up a misbehaving boy as she told the Bible story and held him on her lap. Soon the tension in his body relaxed, and he basked in the positive attention. She gave the boy a picture to show the other children so she could thank him for doing something positive.

Over time, the other stressed children relaxed and were able to participate as members of the group. Even the well-behaved children found this approach helpful because they could express how they felt. One little girl, who was a model of good behavior, raised her hand and said, "Teacher, I need something. I need a lap." The teacher promptly held her on her lap and gave her an opportunity to help tell the Bible story. Without a "fill the emotional bank account" approach, the teacher would not have known of this child's need. Being sensitive to what each child needed and showing them a glimpse of the love Jesus had for them turned the class from a babysitting nightmare to a positive expression of God's love.

But how do you fill your child's emotional bank account? Even though each child is different, children have some common needs. The next section gives specific examples of how to fill a child's or adolescent's emotional bank account.

How Children Experience Love

Most parents love their children, but the children may not believe it. Though children are unique and different things touch their hearts in different ways, the following are ways of expressing the love that each child needs.

Positive Eye Contact

How many times do angry parents demand that their children look at them so they can be forced to listen to a lecture or scolding? This should not happen. Eye contact needs to be reserved for loving interaction. Children should look into a parent's eyes and see acceptance and love.²²

An infant searches for the eyes of its parents from its early days. The smile, joy, and delight that the infant sees draw him or her to search for those eyes again. Looking at someone directly may have different meanings in different cultures (e.g., in some cultures it is a sign of respect for a child to bow the head and not look an elder in the eyes). Most children, however, in the safety of their home are comforted by a loving look or watchful eye or approving glance. The eyes tell the story of acceptance or rejection, approval or disapproval, love or indifference.

Eye contact is crucial in healthy relationships. Your children need to be safe in your approving, loving eye contact with them. Eye contact is a crucial way to communicate safety and security and unconditional love. You can look at them approvingly as they tell about their day, as they show a picture they drew, as they see you watching when they learn to ride their bike. God's eye is on us (Prov 15:3), and you represent His loving care when your eyes are on your children and your eyes meet theirs.

Time with Focused Attention

Sometimes children's misbehavior is a cry for attention.²³ If parents have been too busy to notice when they do things right, children will do things wrong to get attention. Any attention is better than being ignored. Spending time with each child is especially difficult in a family with multiple children. But in the end you will save time and heartache if you deliberately spend time with each of your children. The time spent should be of good quality (without distractions) as well as sufficient in length.

Children need to know that you are listening to them and hearing what they are thinking and feeling. A busy parent may give Sophia a quick hug as she comes in the door from school. If Sophia has something to say but the parent is too busy to listen, the hug will feel empty or even false. Taking time to draw the child out, putting down your project and waiting patiently to listen, can tell your child that you love them. After Sophia has been heard, she might be more able to receive a hug or other physical expressions of love. Sometimes it is difficult to give this love gift. Often teenagers seem unwilling to let you hear what they are thinking. You need to be alert for listening moments. Sometimes those moments may come late at night when you are very tired and would rather go to sleep. But you need to be ready to listen, even if it is not convenient.

One single dad was very busy caring for his two sons. He barely had time to keep them fed and their clothes clean, in addition to his full-time job and long commute to

and from work. One evening his oldest son was invited to spend time with friends. It would have been tempting to use the evening to get caught up on laundry and household chores. But this dad had a thought, why not use the free evening to focus on my younger son? He probably feels left out.

So, the father took his younger son to a local ball game. They had time to talk, to comment on the plays and players, to cheer their local team. After the evening, the son said to his father, “Daddy, that was the best day of my life!” A comment like that makes all the struggle of being a parent worthwhile. The investment that evening made a memory the father and son can cherish for years to come. That boy felt loved and special.

You need to set aside positive time each day to be with your child. This time should be undistracted so you can focus on your child’s interests. The time should not be used to punish the child, as in, “If you don’t behave, we won’t have our special time today.” It may be that special time together is just what the child is asking for, and time together would calm and help him or her be more obedient. This is a time when the child knows that you care and are paying attention.

The activity should be one that the child enjoys. Children are different. One child loves sitting close to you and reading a book together. Another child would be restless reading a book but would love to build something with blocks or draw a picture. The child should direct the time. This is not a time to lecture or give commands. This is a prime time to observe your child and take mental notes of how she is developing or what inclinations or talents he is displaying. Afterwards, it would be good to write a few notes about what you learned about your child, or things you can pray for your child.²⁴

Derek loves to cuddle close and hear stories. His emotional bank account can be filled by snuggling and listening to his mother read a story book. It really does not matter what the story is about, as long as he can snuggle and be the focus of attention.

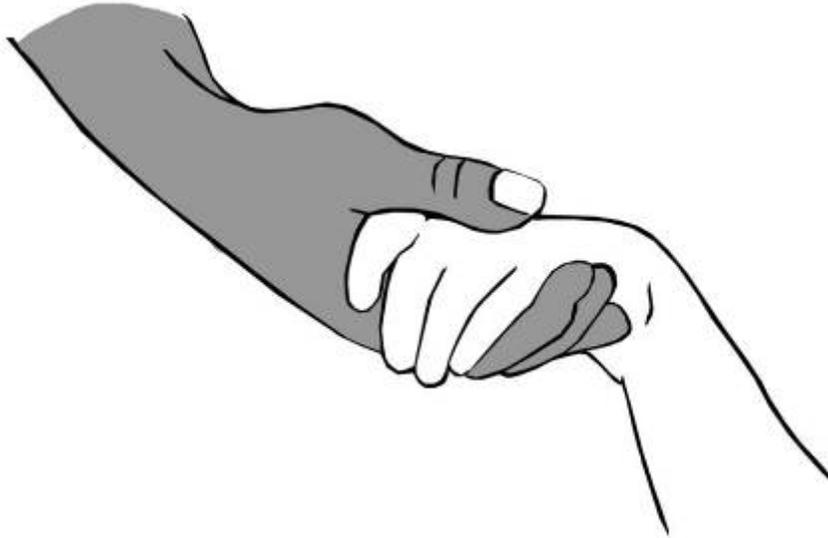
His brother Charlie, however, is bored with reading. His love is airplanes, and his delight is telling his parents about different types of airplanes and having them listen and ask questions about the airplanes. They do not have to say much, but just be with him.

Sandra, on the other hand, loves to work with her hands. To her it is a joy to have her mother help her sew an outfit for her doll. As the article of clothing takes shape, there is a sense of bonding. The mother’s focus on Sandra and her sewing project makes Sandra feel loved.

Rhonda loves to be outdoors. To jog with her dad and experience his company is a highlight of her day. Those are the times when she opens up and asks his opinion on the issues she is facing.

Touch

God knows the importance of touch because He created us with skin that is soothed by massages, calmed by gentle stroking, comforted by tender hugs. Isaiah 40:11 says that God Himself holds us in His arms.²⁵



Some children want more touch than others, but touch is important to everyone. Those who pull away from touch may have been wounded by inappropriate touch or lack of touch in their early years. Be sensitive to gently give them the touch they need. Holding hands while taking a walk, giving a foot rub after a cross-country run, giving a hug to a child who comes home from school sad, holding hands while saying a prayer before a meal, putting a caring hand on a shoulder, offering a congratulatory hand shake (or, for boys, an appreciative punch on the shoulder!)—all these gestures communicate affection.

As young girls mature, fathers sometime feel awkward about expressing physical attention to their daughters. But it is still important for fathers to show appropriate physical attention: a quick hug, a kiss on the cheek or forehead, a “high five.” Otherwise, the daughters may seek inappropriate affection from other young men in their lives.

Special Times and Celebrations

Birthdays and holidays are special times to create memories that can fill an emotional bank account. Again, children are different in how their needs are met. Some may want to be the focus of attention with all their friends and relatives present. Others may want more quiet celebrations. One child came home from kindergarten and exclaimed, “What a horrible day. Johnny had a birthday, and the teacher made him stand in the middle of the room while everyone sang ‘Happy Birthday’ to him. How awful! Can I stay please home from kindergarten on my birthday?” Birthdays and holidays are opportunities to say, “You are special. I am so glad you are my child.”

You should celebrate those occasions in a way that your child appreciates, not the way you think it should be celebrated.



Think through this past week. How much time did you spend with each child? What happened during that time? How did you express your love to each of your children?



1. What are ways you can make time to be with each of your children?
2. When is the best time of the day?
3. What kinds of things does each child enjoy doing with you?
4. What expressions of affection would each of your children appreciate?
5. After answering each question, plan specific actions that you can do with each of your children this next week to show them you love them unconditionally.

Conclusion

Our children are people created by God for relationships. God values them, and so should we. With God's help may we be messengers of acceptance and love to energize them to be all that God has created them to be, and to help them think of themselves as valuable individuals created by Him. May we remember to give them our full attention, to touch them lovingly, and to look at them approvingly. May we show them love in the ways that communicate well to them. Then, as healthy young people they will be able to pass that love on to others.

ENDNOTES

¹ Myrna Alexander, *Behold Your God!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 20-21 (emphasis added; “[His]” in the original).

² Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, *Loving Your Child Too Much* (Franklin, TN: Integrity, 2006), 74.

³ Fred A Hartley III, *3Things Kids Need the Most: Parenting at Its Best*, Spire ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2009), 22.

⁴ Hartley, 25.

⁵ John Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1997), 30.

⁶ Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning, *Self-Esteem: A Proven Program of Cognitive Techniques for Assessing, Improving, and Maintaining your Self-Esteem*, 3d ed. (New York: MJF Books, 2000), 1-3 (emphasis in the original).

⁷ Paul Lewis, *Dads Only* (unable to locate exact issue).

⁸ Donna Foster, *Building a Child's Self-Esteem* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1977), 5.

⁹ The following seven points and comments are adapted from James Dobson, *Hide or Seek*, rev. ed. (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1979), 59-84, and Bruce Narramore, *Help! I'm a Parent* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 111-24.

¹⁰ Narramore, 116.

¹¹ Dobson, 53.

¹² Narramore, 116.

¹³ Dobson, 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-61 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁵ Foster, 9.

¹⁶ Dobson, 79 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁸ This material on compensation adapted from Dobson, *Hide or Seek*, 80-84.

¹⁹ Dobson, 81.

²⁰ Clinton and Sibcy, 162.

²¹ Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Child* (Wheaton IL: Victor, 1992), 92-93.

²² Adapted from Campbell, 39-40.

²³ Adapted from Campbell, 57.

²⁴ Clinton and Sibcy, 67.

²⁵ Adapted from Campbell, 47-48.