Jesus & Parenting

Raising Sons and Daughters Under Christ

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JESUS & PARENTING
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This book is intended for Christian discipleship, parenting, and spiritual formation, helping families raise sons and daughters under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

Entrusted

A child changes the shape of a life.

Before children, time feels different. Responsibility feels different, and the future can seem distant, something to prepare for when the time comes. Then a son or daughter enters the story, and suddenly another life has been placed close enough to hold. There is wonder in that moment, and there is also weight.

A child depends upon others for things they cannot yet provide for themselves. Food, shelter, protection, direction, comfort, and truth become part of a parent's daily responsibility. As children grow, they learn to walk, speak, respond, trust, forgive, work, worship, and make sense of the world while watching the people closest to them. Parenting begins with the realization that another life has been placed within our care.

Our children have been entrusted to us.

The psalmist describes children as a heritage from the Lord, placing their lives within the generosity and purpose of God.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward."

Psalm chapter one hundred twenty-seven, verse three.

A heritage is something received. It carries value before we add anything to it, and children arrive with dignity because they have been created by God and bear His image. Their worth does not begin with their abilities, achievements, or the expectations others place upon them.

The opening chapter of Genesis establishes that dignity within the creation of humanity. God made human beings in His image, giving both male and female a place within His good creation.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Genesis chapter one, verse twenty-seven.

Before a child earns a grade, scores a goal, wins an award, develops a skill, or accomplishes anything

the world can measure, that child bears the image of God. Their worth rests in the One who made them. This truth should shape the way parents understand their sons and daughters from the beginning.

A son is more than a future man we hope will become responsible, and a daughter is more than a future woman we hope will make wise choices. They are people created by God, living before Him now, with minds, bodies, emotions, personalities, weaknesses, gifts, questions, and souls that matter. Their childhood is an important season of life in which they are already worthy of love, care, protection, and respect.

Jesus treated children with that kind of dignity. Mark records an occasion when people brought children to Him so He could touch and bless them. The disciples tried to stop them, apparently believing the children were interrupting something more important. Jesus responded by correcting the disciples and welcoming the children into His presence.

"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

Mark chapter ten, verse fourteen.

Jesus took the children in His arms and blessed them. He made room for them, received them, and gave them His attention. His response showed the disciples that children mattered within the kingdom He was announcing. That picture belongs near the heart of Christian parenting because our greatest desire is for our sons and daughters to know the Savior who welcomed them.

We teach them His words and show them His ways. We help them understand what is true, correct what is harmful, protect what is vulnerable, and make room for questions, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, worship, laughter, work, service, and growth. These responsibilities require our attention and faithfulness, but they also require us to recognize the limits of what parents can accomplish.

We cannot become Jesus for our children. We cannot force faith into their hearts, guarantee that every decision will be wise, or remove every difficult season from their lives. We cannot produce spiritual life through our own efforts, regardless of how carefully we teach or how consistently we lead. Jesus alone saves, forgives sin, and gives the new life we desire our children to know.

This truth brings both responsibility and freedom. Parents are accountable for the care, instruction,

protection, and example they provide, while their children's hearts and future remain beyond their complete control. We are called to remain faithful with what God has placed in our hands and to depend upon Him for what only He can do.

When Moses instructed Israel to love the Lord and keep His commandments, he described a way of life in which God's truth would be passed from one generation to the next. God's words were first to take root in the hearts of His people and then be taught diligently to their children.

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children."

Deuteronomy chapter six, verses six and seven.

Moses continued by describing parents speaking about the things of God while sitting at home, walking along the way, lying down, and rising in the morning. The instruction was meant to become part of everyday life. Parents were to carry God's words in their own hearts and teach their children through the ordinary movement of the family.

That pattern remains important for us today. Discipleship belongs at the breakfast table, in the car, on the way to practice, and at bedtime. It belongs during conflict, after failure, in celebration,

and while making difficult decisions. It belongs when a prayer is answered and when the family is still waiting for an answer.

These moments provide opportunities to teach children how to understand life before God. A difficult conversation can become an opportunity to practice patience, while disappointment may lead to a conversation about trust. A mistake can become an opportunity to confess wrongdoing, receive forgiveness, and consider how to respond differently the next time.

Parents will not always recognize these opportunities when they first appear. Some arrive during busy mornings, interrupted plans, and conversations we did not expect to have. Others develop slowly as children begin asking questions about things they have heard, seen, or experienced. Faithful parenting requires attention to what is happening in our children's lives and a willingness to bring God's truth into those moments with wisdom and care.

The church also has an important place in that formation. Pastors, teachers, grandparents, mentors, friends, and other faithful adults can become meaningful voices in a child's life. Children benefit from being known by a community of believers who encourage them, speak truth,

pray for them, and help them grow in their understanding of Jesus. Parents carry a distinct responsibility, but they were never intended to carry it in isolation.

The home still has a unique influence because children spend years watching what their parents actually believe. They notice how Mom responds when she is disappointed and how Dad handles pressure. They notice whether prayer is sincere, whether Scripture has authority, whether forgiveness happens, and whether the faith spoken about on Sunday continues shaping the household throughout the week.

Children also listen to the way their parents speak about themselves and one another. A daughter hears how her mother talks about her body, abilities, mistakes, and worth. A son hears how his father speaks about responsibility, weakness, work, success, and failure. They also hear admiration, gratitude, criticism, tenderness, and frustration in the language their parents use about each other.

Those conversations contribute to the environment in which a child begins learning about identity and relationships. A daughter may learn something about how to view her body by listening to her mother, while a son may begin forming his understanding of manhood by watching how

his father handles responsibility. Children receive influences from many places, but the adults living closest to them often carry unusual influence during their early years.

That responsibility reaches beyond the example we intend to set. Children also learn from the way we respond when we get something wrong. Every parent will lose patience, misunderstand a situation, speak too quickly, or make a decision they later recognize should have been handled differently.

Those moments can become part of faithful parenting when we respond with humility. A child who hears a parent say, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" is learning that authority does not remove accountability. When confession is followed by changed behavior, the child learns that forgiveness and growth belong together in the life of someone following Jesus.

Parenting must begin with the parent.

Paul understood the relationship between the life of a teacher and the people being taught. He wanted those who learned from him to see a life shaped by Christ, and he called them to follow his example only as that example reflected the Savior.

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

First Corinthians chapter eleven, verse one.

Paul's instruction carries particular weight within a home. Parents are always modeling something through the way they speak, respond, handle authority, disagree, work, rest, resist temptation, and care for others. Children eventually recognize whether the lives of their parents reflect the truth they are being taught.

A parent may teach patience while responding with anger or speak about the importance of forgiveness while holding onto resentment. Those inconsistencies can become confusing for a child trying to understand what following Jesus means. The example we provide gives weight to our instruction when our lives increasingly reflect the truth we teach.

Our response to this responsibility should be humility before the Lord. No parent can achieve perfection, and no parenting method can remove the reality of sin. We will need grace throughout the years of raising our children, just as our sons and daughters will need grace as they grow. The Holy Spirit must continue His work in us while we participate in the formation of those entrusted to our care.

As we follow Jesus, we learn to receive correction while correcting our children. We learn patience

while teaching patience, live under God's authority while teaching obedience, and practice self-control while helping our sons and daughters develop it. The virtues we desire to see in our children must first be taken seriously in our own lives.

Parents can begin teaching their children while they are still growing in spiritual maturity themselves. Growth continues throughout the Christian life, and children benefit from seeing that process lived honestly. A father who is learning to control his anger can model repentance as he grows. A mother who is learning to trust God through uncertainty can show her children what dependence upon the Lord looks like when life becomes difficult.

Our children need to see adults who are willing to keep following Jesus.

Throughout this book, we will consider how that commitment shapes the practical responsibilities of parenting. We will explore the character children need to develop, how parents can offer clear direction, and how correction can lead toward growth and restored relationships. We will also consider the importance of preparing children for responsibilities and situations they have not yet encountered.

We will examine what children believe about God and how their understanding of themselves

develops. The words we speak, the habits we practice, and the environment we create influence the way our sons and daughters interpret the world around them. As they grow, they will need guidance for questions, temptation, pressure, disappointment, and the increasing responsibility that comes with making their own decisions.

These responsibilities extend beyond childhood behavior. A well-behaved child can still have a heart far from God, and a successful child can remain uncertain about who they are. A child may learn the right answers without learning to trust the Lord who gives them meaning. Our desire is that sons and daughters will come to know Jesus, receive His grace, and learn to walk faithfully with Him.

That kind of formation takes time. It develops through instruction, correction, prayer, example, and repeated opportunities to practice what is true. We want children who grow in wisdom, courage, humility, self-control, compassion, resilience, and faith. We want them to learn how to listen, speak truthfully, accept responsibility, repent, forgive, pray, serve, and remain faithful when obedience becomes difficult.

Most of this formation happens gradually through thousands of ordinary moments. It happens in a conversation before school, a correction at the

dinner table, a prayer beside a bed, or a difficult truth spoken with gentleness. It happens when a parent puts down a phone and listens carefully or takes time to explain why a particular decision matters.

It also happens when a father blesses his son, when a mother speaks courage into her daughter, and when parents demonstrate that the people in their home deserve attention and care. Children learn from the way a family handles money, responsibilities, conflict, hospitality, and service. These daily experiences provide a setting in which biblical truth can be demonstrated and practiced.

Over time, those experiences help shape the kind of home a child remembers. A home becomes one of the first places where children learn what love, truth, authority, grace, responsibility, forgiveness, and faithfulness look like. What seems small today may become part of what a son or daughter carries for years to come.

Parenting also involves preparing for a day when our children begin carrying more of their own decisions. As they mature, the distance between our voice and their choices will grow. They will enter rooms we cannot enter, have conversations we cannot hear, encounter pressures we cannot

prevent, and make decisions we cannot make for them.

This growing independence belongs to the responsibility of raising children. We hold them closely when they are young, providing protection, instruction, and boundaries appropriate to their age. As they mature, we gradually entrust them with greater responsibility while continuing to offer wisdom, encouragement, correction, and prayer.

Eventually, every parent must learn to release.

That moment may come gradually through small decisions or become more visible when a son or daughter leaves home. Either way, parents discover that their children were never meant to remain dependent upon them forever. They were entrusted to our care for a season, and part of our responsibility is preparing them to live faithfully before God beyond that season.

Our deepest hope cannot rest in our ability to control their future. We may provide wise instruction and still watch a child make a painful decision. We may pray faithfully and continue waiting through a difficult season. Those experiences remind us how much we need the Savior to whom we have been pointing our children all along.

The same Jesus who welcomed children still welcomes them. The same Jesus who formed disciples continues to form people who belong to Him. He restored Peter after failure, received Thomas in the midst of his questions, and called ordinary people to follow Him through circumstances they could not fully understand. He remains able to meet our sons and daughters in places we cannot reach.

So we parent with open hands. We take seriously what has been entrusted to us, teaching clearly, correcting faithfully, loving deeply, protecting wisely, and praying consistently. We remain responsible for our example and our decisions while trusting God with the things that remain beyond our control.

Our children need parents who know where to turn when they fail, where to seek truth when they are confused, and where to find grace when they have fallen short. They need to see that following Jesus is a life of continuing trust, repentance, obedience, and dependence upon Him.

We have been entrusted with sons and daughters for a season. Receive both the responsibility and the joy of that calling. As we teach them, correct them, encourage them, and prepare them for the

life ahead, may they see in us something of the Savior we are calling them to follow.

Faithful parenting begins with following Jesus.

And inviting our children to walk with us.

Chapter One

Live It Before You Lead It

Children learn long before they understand that they are learning.

They watch, listen, and notice patterns in the people closest to them. Over time, they begin forming ideas about love, work, bodies, marriage, authority, anger, money, faith, failure, and themselves through thousands of ordinary moments that no one planned as a lesson. Much of what children come to understand about life begins with what they observe at home.

This is one of the great responsibilities of parenting. We are teaching even when we are not trying to teach. Our children notice how we respond to disappointment, how we treat the people around us, and whether our actions reflect the values we

say matter. The example we provide becomes part of the instruction they receive.

Jesus understood the influence that teachers have upon those who follow them. In Luke chapter six, He warned His listeners about the importance of whom they follow and the kind of character being formed through that relationship.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

Luke chapter six, verse forty.

Formation has always involved imitation. A disciple learns through instruction, but the life of the teacher also gives shape to what is being taught. Words matter, and the way those words are lived eventually becomes visible to those who are watching.

This was evident throughout the ministry of Jesus. His disciples heard Him teach about prayer, and they watched Him pray. They listened as He spoke about serving others, and they saw Him kneel to wash their feet. His instruction about compassion, obedience, truth, sacrifice, and trust in the Father was demonstrated through the way He lived.

Jesus could call people to follow Him because His life perfectly reflected the will of His Father. His

disciples were learning more than principles they could remember and repeat. They were watching how He responded to people, how He carried authority, and how He remained faithful when obedience was costly. His teaching and His example belonged together.

Parents carry a responsibility to live consistently with the truth they teach, even though our example will never be perfect. Children hear what we tell them, but they also watch what happens when the conversation ends. They notice whether the standards we establish for them are standards we willingly live under ourselves.

A parent may tell a child to be patient while living in constant frustration. A father may instruct his children to honor their mother while speaking to his wife with contempt. A mother may tell her daughter that beauty comes from within while regularly criticizing her own body. Children notice these differences, even when they do not yet have the language to explain what they are seeing.

Faithful parenting therefore requires more than establishing rules, providing correction, or explaining biblical principles. It begins with a willingness to examine the life of the person doing the teaching. Parents are responsible for leading

their children, but they remain disciples who must submit their own lives to the authority of Christ.

Paul recognized the importance of this relationship between instruction and example. He wanted the believers who learned from him to see a life being shaped by Jesus, and his invitation to imitate him was grounded in his own commitment to follow Christ.

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

First Corinthians chapter eleven, verse one.

Paul was directing attention beyond himself. He understood that Christian leadership should help others see what obedience to Jesus looks like in practice. His example was valuable only as it reflected the character and teaching of the Savior he followed.

Parents should desire the same thing. We want our children to see how we tell the truth, treat our spouse, respond when we are wrong, and handle pressure. We want them to recognize where we turn when we are afraid and how we return to Jesus when we fail. Our lives should help them understand that faith belongs to ordinary decisions as much as it belongs to worship and prayer.

This responsibility does not require parents who never make mistakes. Weakness will become visible, pressure will expose impatience, and exhaustion will sometimes reveal attitudes we have allowed to remain unchallenged. Every mother and father will eventually face situations they wish they had handled differently.

Those moments can become important opportunities for growth. When a parent fails and refuses to acknowledge it, the child learns something about authority and responsibility. When an adult blames someone else, protects an image, or acts as though being in charge removes the need for repentance, the child receives an example that may be repeated later in life.

A different lesson is taught when a parent returns with humility and says, "I was wrong. I spoke harshly, and I should not have treated you that way. Will you forgive me?" The child sees that strength can acknowledge wrongdoing and that authority remains accountable to God. When those words are followed by changed behavior, repentance becomes something the child can recognize in everyday life.

An apology matters, but it does not remove the responsibility to address harmful patterns. A parent who repeatedly loses control of their anger may

need to seek wise counsel, change familiar habits, or receive help from others. Children benefit when they see adults take responsibility for their actions and pursue lasting change.

In this way, the parent continues learning while teaching the child. Our failures can expose areas where we need the grace and correction of Christ. As we respond to Him, our children can witness the connection between repentance, forgiveness, and a life that is being changed.

Children are also listening to the words we use about ourselves. In Luke chapter six, Jesus explained that the words coming from a person's mouth reveal something about the condition of the heart. He was teaching His listeners to recognize that what is spoken outwardly is connected to what has taken root within.

"For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Luke chapter six, verse forty-five.

Our words often reveal gratitude, fear, pride, shame, insecurity, contentment, anger, or trust. Parents may assume that comments about themselves are harmless because they are not directed toward their children. Yet those words still

become part of what children hear as they begin learning how adults understand themselves.

A mother may stand in front of a mirror and speak with disgust about her appearance. A father may make a mistake and declare that he cannot do anything right. A parent may complain about growing older, gaining weight, losing strength, or failing to measure up to someone else's success. These statements may seem casual to the adult speaking them, but they can carry greater meaning for a child who is still developing an understanding of personal worth.

Children begin forming their self-image through many influences, including the people whose lives surround them. They listen to how Mom talks about being a woman and how Dad talks about being a man. They notice whether their parents approach their bodies with gratitude, shame, neglect, obsession, or responsible care.

A daughter who repeatedly hears her mother criticize her body may begin believing that a woman's appearance determines her value. A son who hears his father measure himself through income, strength, accomplishment, or recognition may begin connecting manhood with performance. Neither parent may intend to teach these beliefs,

but repeated words and attitudes can influence how children understand themselves.

A healthier pattern begins with gratitude for what God has made. Psalm 139 recognizes God's intimate knowledge of human life and His care in forming each person. The psalmist responds to that knowledge with praise.

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Psalm chapter one hundred thirty-nine, verse fourteen.

These words invite us to receive our lives with gratitude and humility before our Creator. Our bodies are worthy of responsible care because they are part of the life God has given us. Physical abilities and appearance will change, but those changes do not remove the dignity of a person created in God's image.

Parents can model this perspective through ordinary decisions. We can exercise, eat wisely, rest, and care for our health without making appearance the measure of our worth. We can acknowledge weakness, illness, aging, and limitations without speaking with contempt about ourselves. Children can learn stewardship without obsession, modesty

without shame, and health without constant comparison.

The same principle reaches into our relationship with work. A father who speaks as though his value rises and falls with his career may unintentionally teach his son that achievement determines worth. A mother who continually minimizes her abilities may influence her daughter to question the gifts God has given her.

Children need to see adults who work hard without allowing work to become the center of their identity. They can learn that meaningful work deserves diligence and that using our abilities well is part of faithful stewardship. They also need to see that disappointment, financial difficulty, or an unexpected change in employment does not determine a person's worth before God.

A parent can take satisfaction in good work and remain humble about success. We can acknowledge mistakes, learn from them, and continue carrying our responsibilities without treating failure as the measure of our lives. The way we approach work can teach children to use their gifts faithfully while remembering that their deepest identity cannot rest in what they accomplish.

The way husbands and wives speak about one another also shapes what children learn about relationships. A son listens when his mother speaks about his father, and a daughter listens when her father speaks about her mother. Children notice whether marriage is described with gratitude or constant disappointment and whether men and women are treated with respect or ridicule.

This does not require parents to pretend that marriage is free from difficulty. Children will eventually recognize that husbands and wives have weaknesses, misunderstand one another, and sometimes disagree. They need to see those difficulties handled with honesty, appropriate boundaries, and respect for the dignity of both people.

A father can recognize his wife's wisdom, compassion, courage, or faithfulness where his children can hear him. A mother can express gratitude for her husband's character, service, patience, or growth. These expressions of appreciation remind children that people should be valued for more than their appearance, accomplishments, income, or what they provide.

A daughter who hears her father value her mother's character learns something about the qualities worthy of respect. A son who hears his mother

recognize his father's faithfulness receives an example of how honor can be expressed. The specific words matter, but the larger lesson comes through the atmosphere of respect being cultivated within the home.

The opposite pattern can become harmful. Sarcasm may begin as humor but gradually become the normal way family members speak to one another. Repeated criticism can weaken trust, while public humiliation teaches children that another person's mistakes provide an opportunity for ridicule. A home where people regularly diminish one another creates an environment in which contempt can begin to feel ordinary.

Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesians addresses the responsibility believers carry for the words they speak. He calls them to put away language that harms others and to use speech that serves the good of those who hear it.

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up."

Ephesians chapter four, verse twenty-nine.

That instruction belongs within the home. Parents can address wrongdoing and speak difficult truths without using words intended to shame or diminish another person. Correction may be necessary, but

contempt does not make correction more faithful. Our speech should reflect the same grace and truth we desire our children to practice.

This responsibility extends beyond marriage. Children listen to how parents speak about neighbors, pastors, teachers, coaches, relatives, strangers, and people with whom they disagree. They hear gossip from the back seat, criticism at the dinner table, and conversations after leaving church.

When children begin using disrespectful language, parents may need to consider where that pattern developed. Sometimes a child is repeating words or attitudes that have become familiar through the adults around them. Recognizing that influence can be uncomfortable, but it also gives parents an opportunity to make meaningful changes.

Parenting has a way of bringing our own hearts back before Jesus. We begin with the responsibility of forming a child and discover that God is continuing His work within us. Impatience, anger, fear, and the desire for control may become more visible as we carry responsibilities that require daily sacrifice.

A parent who recognizes a habit of speaking with contempt can begin changing that language. A father who notices that work has taken priority over his family can reconsider how he uses his time.

A mother who recognizes that fear is shaping her responses can bring those concerns before the Lord and seek wise support.

These changes require more than recognizing a problem. The Holy Spirit continues forming believers through the truth of God's Word, leading us toward repentance and strengthening us to practice what is good. Parents remain dependent upon that work as they seek to reflect the character of Christ within their homes.

Children also watch how we respond to emotion. They need to learn patience and self-control, yet instruction becomes difficult to receive when the adults providing it respond to every frustration with anger. A child who is corrected for shouting may struggle to understand why the parent is allowed to shout during the correction.

A child who is told to wait patiently may be confused when the same parent treats every inconvenience as unacceptable. Parents have different responsibilities from children, but those responsibilities never place us above the standards of love, patience, and self-control found in Scripture.

God has entrusted parents with authority to lead, instruct, protect, and correct. That authority should serve the good of the child. It must never become

permission to humiliate, intimidate, or use another person's vulnerability to establish control.

Jesus taught His disciples that greatness in His kingdom is expressed through service. He demonstrated that teaching through the way He cared for others and through His willingness to take the place of a servant. His example challenges parents to consider how they use the authority entrusted to them.

A parent can be firm without cruelty, clear without manipulation, and patient without surrendering responsibility. Appropriate correction may still bring disappointment, and necessary boundaries may be resisted. Faithful leadership does not require avoiding every difficult response from a child. It requires exercising authority with wisdom, consistency, and concern for the child's good.

Our children will also observe our relationship with God. They notice whether Scripture shapes our decisions or remains something we only tell them to read. They see whether prayer is part of our dependence upon the Lord and whether worship extends into the way we live throughout the week.

This does not require turning every experience into a formal lesson. A parent may acknowledge needing wisdom before making a difficult decision. A father may explain that he has been worried and

has brought his concerns before God in prayer. A mother may recognize an unexpected provision and invite the family to give thanks.

These responses allow children to see faith practiced within ordinary responsibilities. The family may face a disagreement and turn to Scripture because they genuinely want to understand what obedience requires. A parent may confess a wrong attitude and seek forgiveness because the teaching of Jesus has challenged the way they responded.

Faith becomes more understandable when children see it practiced in real life, including when life becomes painful. Families experience disappointment, illness, broken relationships, financial strain, and prayers that seem unanswered. Children may face rejection, struggle with friendships, or fail at something they wanted badly. Parents cannot prevent every difficult experience, but they can show their children how to bring those experiences before God.

A parent who grieves honestly while continuing to trust the Lord demonstrates that faith does not require pretending pain is insignificant. Children can learn that sadness, disappointment, and uncertainty are experiences they may bring to God in prayer. They can also learn that His goodness

remains worthy of trust when circumstances are difficult to understand.

These lessons become especially important as children grow older. They will eventually face situations in which their parents cannot immediately provide an answer or remove the problem. A foundation of lived faith can help them recognize where to seek wisdom, encouragement, and truth when life becomes uncertain.

What we repeat gradually becomes part of the environment of our homes. A household where criticism is constant teaches something about relationships. A household where no one acknowledges wrongdoing teaches something about responsibility. A home where achievement determines approval or fear controls every decision can shape the expectations children carry into adulthood.

The same influence can be used for good. A home where truth is spoken with grace, forgiveness is practiced, and family members honor one another creates room for healthy relationships to develop. When parents treat their bodies with dignity, work with faithfulness, and seek God through both joy and disappointment, children receive a living picture of the values being taught.

Our example will never be complete or perfectly consistent. Children will see weakness alongside growth and moments of failure alongside faithful decisions. What matters is that our lives continue moving toward Jesus and that we respond honestly when our actions fail to reflect His teaching.

The four words we will consider later in this book begin taking shape here. Obedience becomes meaningful when children see parents living under God's authority. Self-control becomes credible when adults take responsibility for their reactions. Honor is strengthened when practiced throughout the family, and patience becomes visible when parents respond wisely to circumstances they cannot control.

These virtues must be cultivated in the parent as well as the child. We cannot simply demand them from our sons and daughters while treating ourselves as exceptions. The call to follow Jesus reaches every member of the household, including those entrusted with leading it.

As parents, we will spend many years teaching our children what is right. We will explain, correct, encourage, and prepare them for responsibilities they do not yet understand. Our words will matter, but the lives accompanying those words will give them meaning.

Live what you want to multiply. Let your children watch you follow Jesus so that, when you ask them to walk in the same direction, they will have already seen the road.

Chapter Two

Children Are Received

Every child enters a family with a story already beginning.

Before parents know what personality will emerge, what gifts will develop, what struggles will come, or what dreams will take shape, God already knows the child. He knows the body He formed, the mind that will grow, the questions that will eventually be asked, and the days that will unfold. Parents spend years discovering someone God has known from the beginning.

Psalm 139 describes this intimate knowledge of God. David recognizes that his life was formed by the Lord before anyone else could see or understand what was taking place.

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."

Psalm chapter one hundred thirty-nine, verse thirteen.

A child is known by God before a parent fully knows that child. This truth gives parenting its proper order because parents carry real authority and significant influence, yet they are never the authors of a child's worth. They receive someone God has already created, and their responsibility begins with recognizing the dignity of the life entrusted to them.

This is why parenting is stewardship. A steward cares faithfully for something entrusted by another, exercising responsibility while recognizing that ultimate ownership belongs elsewhere. Parents have a unique relationship with their children, but that relationship remains under the authority of the God who gave them life.

Psalm 24 describes the Lord's authority over the whole earth and everyone who lives within it. Nothing in creation exists independently of Him, and no human relationship removes His rightful place as Creator.

"The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."

Psalm chapter twenty-four, verse one.

Our children are included in that truth. They belong first to God, and the responsibility we carry toward them exists within His greater authority. This does not weaken the bond between parent and child. It gives that bond greater significance because the people we love so deeply have been entrusted to us by the One who knows them completely.

Parents can easily forget this distinction. A child's behavior may begin to feel like a reflection of our competence, and their accomplishments can become evidence that we have succeeded. When they struggle, make mistakes, or choose a direction we did not expect, we may feel embarrassed or threatened because we believe their decisions say something about us.

Without recognizing what is happening, a parent can begin carrying a child's life as though that child's story exists to validate the parent. A son may feel pressure to fulfill the dreams his father never accomplished. A daughter may feel responsible for becoming the woman her mother always imagined she would be. Children can begin measuring their worth through expectations they were never meant to carry.

Those expectations place an unnecessary burden on both parent and child. We should want our

sons and daughters to grow in wisdom, develop their abilities, and live responsibly before God. Their achievements and choices matter, but their lives do not exist to establish our identity or prove that we have parented successfully.

Faithful parenting requires us to carry responsibility while surrendering the outcome to God. We teach what is true, establish boundaries, correct wrongdoing, develop character, provide safety, and prepare children for increasing responsibility. We do these things diligently because God has placed them within our care, while recognizing that their lives remain under His authority.

Hannah provides a meaningful picture of this kind of stewardship. First Samuel describes a woman who deeply desired a child and brought that longing before the Lord in prayer. When God gave her Samuel, she remembered both the gift she had received and the promise she had made.

"For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him."

First Samuel chapter one, verse twenty-seven.

Hannah received Samuel with gratitude and understood that his life belonged to the Lord. She later brought him to serve before God, fulfilling the particular vow she had made. Her circumstances

were unique, and Scripture does not instruct every parent to repeat her actions. What her example reveals is a posture of receiving a child with love while recognizing the greater claim of God upon that child's life.

That posture protects parenting from becoming possession. A possessive parent begins to believe that a child's future should fulfill the parent's plans and expectations. A faithful steward seeks to understand the child God has entrusted to them and takes responsibility for helping that child grow in wisdom, character, and obedience to Him.

Children are not blank pages waiting for parents to determine everything about them. They arrive with differences that become clearer as they grow. One child may move quickly toward people while another needs time to observe. One may speak every thought while another carries things quietly, and one may approach unfamiliar situations confidently while another needs time to become comfortable.

Parents gradually discover strengths, weaknesses, interests, fears, abilities, and patterns in each child. Wisdom pays attention to those differences without allowing them to become permanent definitions. A child's temperament can help a parent understand how to teach and encourage, but it should never

become an excuse for wrongdoing or a limit placed upon the child's capacity to grow.

A strong-willed child still needs to learn obedience. A quiet child still needs opportunities to develop courage. A child who experiences strong emotions can learn self-control, while a naturally cautious child can grow in trust. The parent's responsibility is to understand the child being formed and provide the instruction, encouragement, and correction that child needs.

Jesus demonstrated remarkable attention to the people He encountered. His conversations with Peter were different from His conversations with Thomas. He spoke with Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, while His encounter with Zacchaeus addressed a man whose response to Jesus became visible through repentance and generosity. His words reached the people before Him with truth suited to their circumstances.

Parents will never possess the knowledge Jesus has, but we can learn from His attentiveness. We can listen before assuming, observe before labeling, and ask questions before deciding what is happening in a child's heart. Sometimes a behavior reveals disobedience that needs correction. At other times, a child may be struggling to understand

something, communicate a fear, or manage a responsibility that has become overwhelming.

Careful attention helps parents respond wisely. It also protects children from being defined by labels they may carry for years. A parent might casually describe one child as difficult, another as dramatic, another as shy, and another as naturally gifted. What begins as a convenient description can become something the child believes about who they are.

A son who constantly hears that he is difficult may begin assuming conflict is simply part of his identity. A daughter repeatedly praised for her appearance may begin believing that beauty is what earns attention. A child recognized only for athletic or academic achievement may begin connecting approval with performance.

The words parents use contribute to the environment in which children learn to understand themselves. Families need ordinary conversation, honesty, humor, and the freedom to speak plainly about strengths and weaknesses. Parents should also be willing to identify sinful behavior clearly. The important distinction is between describing an action truthfully and allowing that action to define the person.

A child can lie without being permanently labeled a liar. A child can act selfishly without selfishness becoming the final word about who they are. A child who refuses to obey should be told clearly that the behavior was disobedient. Naming wrongdoing matters because repentance requires honesty about what happened.

Formation then points the child toward a faithful response. The child may need to tell the truth, repair something that was damaged, apologize to someone who was hurt, or practice the response that should have been given. Parents can hold children accountable while helping them understand that their failures do not remove their dignity or make growth impossible.

This requires remembering that children are still developing. Luke's Gospel gives a brief description of Jesus' growth during His childhood. After the account of His visit to the temple at twelve years old, Luke describes His continued development.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

Luke chapter two, verse fifty-two.

Jesus is unique because He is the sinless Son of God. His growth must not be understood as correction from moral wrongdoing or spiritual

failure. Yet this account reminds us that childhood involves genuine development as a person matures physically and grows in understanding within the ordinary conditions of human life.

Children mature over time. Their bodies grow, their understanding develops, and their capacity for responsibility increases. Their ability to manage emotions, think ahead, recognize consequences, and understand difficult truths changes across the years. Faithful parenting respects this process while continuing to teach what is right.

A four-year-old and a fourteen-year-old need different kinds of instruction. The truth does not change, but the way parents explain and apply that truth should reflect the child's maturity. Young children often need immediate direction, simple explanations, and close supervision. Older children increasingly need opportunities to understand reasons, weigh consequences, and practice sound judgment.

This is one reason parental control cannot become the ultimate goal of parenting. Control may produce outward order for a season, especially when children are young and require significant structure. It cannot create genuine faith or establish the inward convictions needed for a lifetime of obedience to God.

A young child may obey because Dad has given a clear instruction. As that child matures, obedience should become connected to a growing understanding of responsibility and the authority of God. A child may initially tell the truth because dishonesty brings consequences, but the deeper goal is to help that child become someone who values truth.

The same process applies to boundaries. A teenager may respect a curfew because Mom has established it, but eventually that young person must make decisions without a parent standing nearby. The purpose of the boundary includes preparing the child to recognize danger, consider consequences, exercise self-control, and choose wisely.

Parents begin with external guidance and gradually help their children develop internal responsibility. That process requires patience because children will sometimes make poor decisions while learning. Parents must determine when to provide direct instruction, when to allow appropriate freedom, and when a consequence can become an opportunity for learning.

Control can feel safer because it allows parents to establish visible limits. Monitoring a phone, setting curfews, restricting access, and establishing

consequences may all be appropriate at different ages. These measures can serve the child's protection and development when they are used wisely. Yet even the most carefully structured home cannot give parents complete control over what their children believe or choose.

Eventually, sons and daughters will enter places where their parents are absent. They will hear voices their parents cannot evaluate in advance, encounter temptations they must learn to resist, and make decisions that no one immediately sees. The instruction they received at home will matter because they are being prepared to carry responsibility for their own lives.

That preparation begins with small things. Putting a toy away, telling the truth, waiting for a turn, speaking respectfully, finishing an assignment, and taking responsibility after doing something wrong may seem like ordinary childhood expectations. Each provides an opportunity to practice habits that will become increasingly important as the child matures.

Jesus taught His disciples about faithfulness with what had been entrusted to them. In Luke chapter sixteen, He connected the way people handle small responsibilities with their faithfulness in greater matters.

"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much."

Luke chapter sixteen, verse ten.

Jesus was speaking within a larger teaching about stewardship and the use of wealth. The principle also helps us understand the value of responsibility in everyday life. Children who are taught to care faithfully for small responsibilities are receiving preparation for the greater responsibilities they will eventually carry.

This is also why parents must resist doing everything for their children. Love naturally wants to help, especially when a child is struggling or facing disappointment. Sometimes, however, our desire to protect becomes a habit of stepping in before the child has an opportunity to learn.

A child forgets something important, and the parent immediately fixes the problem. A teenager makes a poor choice, and the parent removes every reasonable consequence. A young adult encounters a challenge, and the parent takes over before the son or daughter has considered possible solutions.

There are circumstances in which immediate help is necessary. Children need protection from danger, support when responsibilities exceed their abilities, and guidance when the consequences of a mistake

could be serious. Faithful parenting requires discernment rather than a rigid commitment to allowing every problem to run its course.

At other times, love means remaining nearby while the child works through something difficult. Parents can offer guidance without taking over, encourage effort without guaranteeing success, and allow an appropriate consequence to teach what another lecture might not accomplish. The purpose is to help children become increasingly capable of carrying responsibility.

God has entrusted parents with children who will one day become adults. That future should shape the way we approach ordinary parenting decisions today. We are teaching more than bedtime routines when we establish rhythms of rest and responsibility. We are teaching more than how to finish homework when we encourage diligence and follow-through.

When we guide children through disagreements, we are helping them learn how to listen, speak honestly, and respond when relationships become difficult. These ordinary moments matter because childhood preparation reaches beyond the circumstances in front of us. Parents are gradually helping their sons and daughters develop the judgment and character they will need when the

structure of the home is no longer directing their daily decisions.

This perspective also changes how we understand success.

The world offers families many ways to measure achievement. Grades, sports, awards, college acceptance, appearance, popularity, career opportunities, and income can become signs that a child is doing well. Some of these accomplishments reflect meaningful effort and deserve encouragement. Children should be taught to develop their abilities, pursue excellence, and receive opportunities with gratitude.

Yet accomplishment cannot carry the responsibility of defining a human life. Jesus challenged His listeners to consider what ultimately matters when earthly success is placed beside the eternal condition of the soul.

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

Mark chapter eight, verse thirty-six.

Jesus spoke these words while teaching about the cost of following Him. His question exposes the danger of gaining what the world considers valuable while losing what matters eternally. That truth

should influence the hopes parents carry for their children.

A child can achieve publicly while struggling privately with fear, pride, or dishonesty. A student may earn impressive grades without learning how to treat others with compassion. A talented athlete may receive recognition while lacking self-control, and a young adult may become successful in a career without understanding the deeper purpose of life before God.

Parents need a fuller understanding of what it means for a child to flourish. We should rejoice when our children tell the truth even when doing so costs them something. We should recognize compassion toward someone who cannot offer anything in return, perseverance through difficulty, and a willingness to receive correction with humility.

These qualities deserve attention because they reflect character being formed. We should encourage children who use their gifts responsibly, work diligently without demanding applause, and begin developing convictions grounded in God's truth. Such growth may never appear on a résumé, but it matters deeply.

Stewardship also changes the way parents handle disappointment.

Every mother and father carries hopes for their children. We hope they will be healthy, form meaningful friendships, discover abilities they enjoy using, and build relationships marked by love and faithfulness. We naturally imagine possibilities for their future and wonder what their lives may become.

Sometimes those hopes become more specific. We may picture a particular career, sport, college, ministry, or path in life. There is nothing wrong with having dreams for our children, but those dreams need to remain open to the possibility that God may lead them somewhere we did not expect.

A child's strengths may develop in areas we never anticipated. An opportunity we assumed would be available may close, or a son or daughter may face a struggle that changes the direction of life. These experiences can test whether we are willing to see our children as people entrusted to our care rather than extensions of our own plans.

Open-handed parenting remains active and responsible. We continue teaching, encouraging, correcting, protecting, listening, and praying. We help children evaluate decisions through Scripture and grow in the wisdom needed to carry responsibility. We also remember that God's work

extends beyond what we can presently understand or control.

That perspective gives parents room to carry the responsibility of today. We do not have to determine every part of a child's future. We have been given opportunities to love, instruct, bless, correct, and prepare the person standing before us now.

The child entrusted to us bears the image of God. That dignity belongs to every human being and remains true regardless of age, ability, achievement, or spiritual condition. Each child also needs the saving grace of Jesus Christ, because bearing God's image does not remove the reality of sin or establish reconciliation with Him.

When a son or daughter comes to faith in Christ, Scripture speaks of forgiveness, reconciliation with God, adoption into His family, and new life. These blessings are received through Jesus. Parents should teach the gospel clearly, invite their children to respond in faith, and pray for the Holy Spirit to work within their hearts.

We must keep those truths distinct. Every child possesses dignity as someone created in God's image, and every child needs salvation through Christ. Growing up in a Christian home provides opportunities to hear the gospel and observe a life

of discipleship, but it does not replace personal faith in the Savior.

Our responsibility is to remain faithful with the opportunity God has given us. We teach our children who He is, help them recognize their need for grace, and show them what it means to follow Jesus. We trust Him with what remains beyond our power to produce.

Children are received, loved, and formed over years of ordinary life. As they grow, parents gradually place greater responsibility into their hands. We continue providing wisdom and encouragement while preparing them to live faithfully before God beyond the daily direction of the home.

Through every season, we remember whose child stands before us. We lead with care, learn who they are, speak truthfully, correct what needs correction, and develop what God has entrusted. The authority we exercise remains accountable to the One who gave that child life.

Understanding this responsibility also changes the way we honor our children and the honor we teach them to show. We can guide them faithfully because we recognize the dignity of the people God has entrusted to our care.

That is where honor begins.

Chapter Three

The Way of Honor

Honor is one of the first things God teaches children about relationships.

Before children understand careers, leadership, marriage, or much of the responsibility they will one day carry, they begin learning how to live with other people. They discover what it means to listen, respond to instruction, recognize authority, and consider the needs of someone else. They also begin learning whether their own desires must always come first.

These lessons begin in the home, where children experience some of their earliest relationships and responsibilities. Parents provide care, establish boundaries, offer instruction, and correct behavior that needs to change. Through those ordinary experiences, children begin

developing an understanding of authority and how they should respond to it.

God gives particular importance to this relationship in the Ten Commandments. When He instructed Israel concerning their life before Him and one another, He included the responsibility of children to honor their parents.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Exodus chapter twenty, verse twelve.

This commandment was given to Israel within the covenant God established with His people. It included a promise connected to their life in the land He was giving them, and it established the importance of honoring parents within the order of family and community life. The New Testament continues to affirm that honoring parents belongs to faithful Christian living.

Paul returned to this command when instructing the believers in Ephesus about relationships within the household.

"Honor your father and mother."

Ephesians chapter six, verse two.

Paul identified this as the first commandment with a promise. His teaching recognizes the responsibility children have toward their parents while placing family relationships within the larger call to live faithfully before the Lord. Honor matters because humility, teachability, and respect influence relationships far beyond childhood.

These qualities eventually shape friendships, work, marriage, church life, leadership, and the way a person responds to God. Someone who cannot receive instruction may struggle to learn from others, while a person who treats every correction as an insult can become difficult to teach. A child who begins practicing honor is developing habits that will matter throughout life.

Honor reaches deeper than obedience.

Obedience concerns what a child does in response to an instruction, while honor also involves the attitude expressed through that response. A child may complete a task while communicating contempt through tone, delay, eye-rolling, muttering, or deliberate resistance. The requested action eventually happens, but the child's response reveals an opportunity for further formation.

Parents recognize this difference. A child may say, "Fine," while making it clear that the instruction

has been received with resentment. Another may complete the task only after arguing long enough to make the interaction exhausting for everyone involved. In both situations, the child may have obeyed outwardly without learning to respond with honor.

Children need help understanding what an honoring response looks like. They are still learning how to manage disappointment, receive direction, and communicate respectfully when they would prefer something different. Parents can explain these expectations, demonstrate them, and provide repeated opportunities to practice.

With a young child, the lesson may begin simply. When a parent gives an instruction, the child learns to stop what they are doing, give appropriate attention, acknowledge what was said, and respond. A simple answer such as "Yes, Mom" or "Okay, Dad" can help establish a habit of listening and responding.

The particular words are less important than the purpose behind them. Requiring a phrase without helping the child understand honor can eventually become an empty routine. The goal is to teach children that when someone responsible for their care speaks, they should listen and respond

rather than dismissing the person or forcing the instruction to be repeated.

Over time, children can learn that honoring someone involves recognizing that the other person's words and responsibilities matter. They begin developing the humility to listen even when they would rather continue doing something else. This is a small lesson with implications that extend into every relationship they will eventually carry.

Proverbs connects the fear of the Lord, humility, and honor within the development of wisdom.

"The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor."

Proverbs chapter fifteen, verse thirty-three.

Humility makes room for instruction because it recognizes that we do not know everything. Pride assumes that personal preference should determine the response and that correction threatens our importance. Humility allows us to acknowledge that someone else may see something we have missed or understand something we still need to learn.

Children need help recognizing this difference. Pride rarely announces itself clearly. It may appear through arguing over every instruction, insisting

on having the final word, refusing to acknowledge someone who is speaking, or becoming angry whenever a parent says no.

Those moments provide opportunities to teach honor. A parent might explain that disagreement is allowed, but contempt is not an acceptable way to express it. The child can learn that having an opinion does not remove the responsibility to listen and that receiving correction does not mean their dignity has been taken away.

Parents should want children who can think carefully, ask questions, recognize wrongdoing, and eventually make wise decisions for themselves. We are preparing sons and daughters for adulthood, where they will need courage and discernment. Teaching honor should strengthen those abilities rather than silence them.

Biblical honor does not require children to become passive or afraid to speak. A child can respectfully explain what happened, and a teenager can acknowledge a parent's concern while expressing a different understanding of the situation. A son or daughter can ask why a particular decision has been made and receive an explanation appropriate to their maturity.

The important question is how that disagreement is carried. Children need to learn that they

can express themselves without insulting others, demanding control of every conversation, or treating a different opinion as a personal attack. Respectful communication makes room for both conviction and humility.

James gives believers a pattern that is especially useful when emotions begin rising.

"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."

James chapter one, verse nineteen.

James was instructing believers about receiving God's Word and living faithfully in response to it. His teaching also provides wisdom for how people approach difficult conversations. Listening before speaking and exercising restraint before responding in anger are practices that serve relationships within the home.

Children often need repeated instruction in these habits because adults struggle with them too. We may begin preparing our defense before another person has finished speaking or allow frustration to determine our tone before understanding what happened. The responsibility to grow in careful listening belongs to every member of the family.

When a child learns to pause, listen, and consider another person's words, that child is developing more than polite behavior. These habits help someone receive coaching, consider correction, resolve disagreements, and understand perspectives different from their own. Listening becomes part of the wisdom needed to live well with others.

The life of Jesus gives us a remarkable example of honor within the family. Luke describes an occasion when Mary and Joseph found Jesus in Jerusalem after searching for Him. Following that encounter, Jesus returned with them to Nazareth and continued living within the ordinary responsibilities of their household.

"And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them."

Luke chapter two, verse fifty-one.

Jesus was the eternal Son of God. He possessed perfect wisdom, remained without sin, and did not need correction for moral wrongdoing. Yet during His earthly childhood, He willingly lived within the family relationship into which the Father had placed Him.

His submission did not diminish His dignity or authority as the Son of God. It demonstrated that

living faithfully within an appropriate relationship of responsibility is consistent with strength and obedience to the Father. Jesus fulfilled the responsibilities of His earthly life without pride or contempt.

We must understand this example within the uniqueness of Christ. Jesus is our sinless Savior, and His relationship with Mary and Joseph cannot be reduced to a simple parenting technique. His life nevertheless shows that humility and appropriate submission are consistent with faithfulness to God.

That truth challenges how the Christian home approaches authority. Parents are entrusted with real responsibility, and children are called to honor them. Yet every member of the household remains under the authority of Jesus Christ.

His character provides the standard for how that authority should be exercised. Parents must lead with truth, love, and righteousness. When parents misuse their responsibility, they need correction and repentance just as surely as their children do.

This distinction is especially important because biblical words such as honor, obedience, and submission can be misused when separated from the character of God. Honoring parents does not require children to obey sinful or unsafe instructions, keep harmful secrets, or remain silent

when someone violates appropriate boundaries. No parent or other adult possesses authority that places them beyond accountability.

Children should know they can speak when something is wrong. If someone harms them, frightens them, crosses a boundary, or tells them to conceal wrongdoing, they need to understand that telling the truth is appropriate and necessary. Parents should help children identify trustworthy adults who can listen, provide protection, and respond responsibly.

These safeguards protect the meaning of biblical honor. Godly authority does not fear truth, and faithful leadership does not require secrecy to conceal harm. Children should learn that respect and personal safety belong together, even when telling the truth requires challenging the actions of someone older or more powerful.

Parents must also learn to discern what may be happening beneath a child's response. Sometimes dishonor comes from straightforward disobedience. The child understood the instruction and decided that personal desire mattered more. That behavior should be addressed with appropriate correction.

At other times, something more complicated may be happening. A child may feel embarrassed,

confused, overwhelmed, exhausted, afraid, or unable to explain what they are experiencing. Their response may still be inappropriate, but understanding the circumstances helps parents address the behavior wisely.

Jesus repeatedly demonstrated the ability to recognize what was happening within the people He encountered. He identified pride, unbelief, fear, grief, confusion, and hardness of heart without excusing sin. His understanding allowed Him to speak truth that reached beyond outward behavior.

Parents need to cultivate that kind of attentiveness. There will be times to tell a child to repeat an answer with greater respect. There will also be times to ask what is happening before deciding how to respond. Wise parenting recognizes that the same outward behavior may require different kinds of instruction or support.

This is why correction should not begin with a parent's wounded pride. A disrespectful response can feel personal, especially when a parent has made sacrifices and is already exhausted. We may become so focused on how the child spoke to us that we lose sight of what the child needs to learn.

Parents should address disrespect without allowing personal offense to control the conversation. Sometimes the lesson concerns receiving an

instruction without arguing. At other times, a child needs to learn how to express disappointment, disagreement, or frustration without contempt.

When the goal remains formation, parents can approach correction with greater patience. They are helping a child learn how to relate to people rather than defending their own importance. The standard remains clear, but the parent's response is shaped by wisdom and concern for the person being taught.

It is also important to recognize honor when children practice it. Parents can become highly attentive whenever something goes wrong while overlooking the moments when a child responds well. A son who receives correction without arguing or a daughter who expresses disagreement respectfully is demonstrating something worth acknowledging.

A parent might say, "You handled that with honor," or "I noticed how carefully you listened." When a child is frustrated but still responds respectfully, parents can recognize the self-control it required. These words help children understand what faithful behavior looks like in ordinary life.

Acknowledgment should remain sincere and specific. Children do not need constant applause for every appropriate action, and honor should never

become a performance designed to earn parental affection. They do benefit from knowing that their efforts to listen, respond wisely, and treat others respectfully have been noticed.

Honor becomes visible in the way we answer, listen, disagree, speak about absent people, and receive correction. These habits develop through repeated instruction and practice. They gradually shape how children approach relationships beyond the home.

A young adult who cannot receive instruction may struggle at work. Someone who must always win an argument may find marriage and friendship difficult. A leader who has never learned to honor others may misuse authority when people eventually become responsible to them.

The habits formed around the kitchen table travel into other relationships. A child who learns to listen well is developing qualities that will serve them as a friend, spouse, employee, parent, and leader. The ability to receive correction without humiliation and express conviction without contempt becomes increasingly valuable as responsibility grows.

Jesus taught His disciples that leadership in His kingdom is expressed through service. When they struggled with their desire for position and greatness, He redirected their understanding of

authority toward the responsibility of serving others.

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

Matthew chapter twenty, verse twenty-six.

Leadership under Christ never moves beyond the need for humility. Those entrusted with responsibility must continue listening, receiving correction, recognizing authority, and honoring the people they serve. A child who is learning to respond faithfully to others is being prepared for responsibilities that may one day include leading them.

Parents should remember that this formation takes time. A four-year-old may need many reminders to stop and listen, while a nine-year-old may understand the expectation but still test it when disappointed. A teenager may struggle to express growing independence while remaining respectful toward the parents who continue carrying responsibility for their care.

The standard remains, but the way it is taught should mature with the child. Younger children may need simple, concrete instruction about listening and responding. Older children need guidance in disagreeing respectfully, receiving difficult

feedback, understanding legitimate authority, and expressing convictions without arrogance.

As children grow, honor becomes less dependent upon a particular phrase and more visible through the character of their relationships. They learn that respect is possible even when agreement is not, that speaking truth does not require contempt, and that receiving correction does not diminish their worth.

Eventually, parents are preparing sons and daughters to live directly under the authority of Christ. Their adult lives will involve decisions that parents cannot make for them, relationships their parents cannot manage, and circumstances in which they must choose whether to receive God's instruction.

Parental authority belongs to a particular season of life. The lordship of Jesus does not end when a child becomes an adult. This should humble parents and give purpose to the years of teaching honor within the home.

We are helping children learn that listening is a form of humility, receiving correction can be an expression of wisdom, and respecting another person does not require surrendering dignity or truth. These lessons prepare them to respond faithfully when obedience to God is costly or when

His direction differs from what they would naturally prefer.

Honor begins with the fear of the Lord and grows through humility. It becomes visible through the way we listen, speak, respond, and carry responsibility toward others. Parents teach these habits through instruction, correction, encouragement, and the example of their own lives.

Our children will need this posture long after they have left our homes. They will face moments when God's Word challenges their desires, when wisdom calls them to listen, and when obedience requires a response they do not yet understand. The habits of honor formed during childhood can help prepare them to receive truth with humility.

Teach your children to listen carefully, respond respectfully, and receive correction with wisdom. Give them room to ask questions, grow in understanding, and practice the responsibility that comes with maturity.

And let them see you live with the same honor you are teaching them to show.

Chapter Four

Four Words That Form a Child

Parents repeat certain words for years.

Some are practical words connected to ordinary life: shoes, backpack, homework, bedtime. Others carry greater weight because they begin shaping the way a child understands responsibility, relationships, desire, authority, and eventually discipleship. The words we use repeatedly become familiar, and familiarity creates opportunities for those words to take on deeper meaning.

Four words deserve a permanent place in the language of a Christian home: obey, self-control, honor, and patience.

These words are simple enough for a young child to understand, yet meaningful enough to follow that child into adulthood. They provide parents with a

common language for instruction, correction, and encouragement. As children grow, the words begin connecting everyday decisions to the character God calls His people to develop.

Obedience teaches a child to respond to rightful authority. Self-control helps a child recognize that feelings and desires do not have to govern every decision. Honor shapes the way a child treats others, while patience develops the ability to wait, endure, and trust when circumstances do not move according to personal preference.

Together, these qualities prepare children for responsibilities that extend beyond the home. Their fullest meaning becomes clear as sons and daughters learn what it means to follow Jesus and bring their lives under His authority.

Obedience is often the first of these lessons because young children begin life under significant parental direction. They have not yet developed the wisdom, experience, or maturity necessary to manage every decision. Parents carry the responsibility of protecting them, guiding their behavior, and helping them understand what is right.

Paul addressed this relationship when he instructed Christian households in Colossae. Within his teaching about living under Christ, he connected

the obedience of children to their relationship with the Lord.

"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."

Colossians chapter three, verse twenty.

The final phrase gives the instruction its deeper purpose. Christian parents teach obedience because responding rightly to appropriate authority belongs to a life lived before God. Children need to learn that instructions matter, that parents are responsible for their care, and that personal preference does not determine every decision.

A young child cannot always understand the full reason behind an instruction. A parent may say, "Do not run into the street," "Put that down," "Stay close," or "Come when I call you," because the adult recognizes something the child cannot yet see. In these moments, obedience may be necessary before understanding is complete.

This provides an early opportunity to teach trust. Children gradually learn that appropriate parental instructions are intended for their protection and good, even when the reason is not immediately clear. As they mature, parents should explain those reasons more fully and help their children develop

the wisdom to recognize what makes an instruction right.

Jesus demonstrated perfect obedience to the Father throughout His earthly life. In John's Gospel, He explained that His mission was governed by the will of the One who sent Him.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."

John chapter six, verse thirty-eight.

Jesus' obedience was unique because He is the sinless Son of God, perfectly united with the Father's will. His obedience also reveals the faithfulness toward which Christian discipleship directs us. We learn to trust God and respond to His will even when we do not fully understand what obedience will require.

That is the deeper direction of obedience within a Christian home. Parents begin by teaching children to respond when they are instructed, but the goal reaches beyond behavior that changes only when consequences become visible. We want sons and daughters who increasingly understand that obedience is connected to truth, trust, and responsibility before God.

First-time obedience can be an important training principle, especially with younger children. When a parent gives a clear and appropriate instruction, the child should learn that responding does not require repeated warnings, rising volume, or the threat of punishment. The purpose is to develop responsiveness while helping children understand that the words of a responsible adult deserve attention.

Children also need to know that parental authority has limits. They should never be taught to obey instructions that are sinful, abusive, or unsafe simply because an adult gives them. Teaching appropriate obedience includes helping children recognize wrongdoing, communicate concerns, and seek protection when necessary.

Clarity matters throughout this process. Children cannot consistently obey expectations they do not understand. Parents should give instructions that are simple, direct, and appropriate to the child's age, then follow through when the instruction matters.

Repeated commands without meaningful follow-through can teach children that instructions are optional until a parent becomes angry. At the same time, every delayed response should not be treated as rebellion. Sometimes a child is

distracted, confused, overwhelmed, unable to hear, or uncertain about what is being asked. Faithful parents seek to understand what happened while continuing to teach responsibility.

Obedience begins teaching a child how to respond to direction. Self-control addresses what happens when emotions, impulses, and desires begin competing with what the child knows is right.

Paul includes self-control among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter five. He describes the character produced through the Spirit's work in those who belong to Christ.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Galatians chapter five, verses twenty-two and twenty-three.

Self-control is closely connected to spiritual formation, but children also begin learning its practical habits before they fully understand its spiritual significance. Parents help them practice restraint, recognize consequences, and respond wisely to emotions. These lessons provide opportunities to explain the deeper work of God as children grow in their understanding of faith.

Self-control does not mean a child never becomes angry, disappointed, excited, afraid, or frustrated. God created human beings with emotions, and those emotions can help us recognize what is happening within us. The responsibility comes in learning how to respond rather than allowing every feeling to determine what happens next.

A child can feel angry without hitting, disappointed without becoming disrespectful, and embarrassed without deciding to lie. A child can strongly desire something without taking it or demanding immediate satisfaction. The feeling may be real, but the response still requires wisdom.

Proverbs illustrates the vulnerability of a life without self-control through the picture of a city whose defenses have been broken down.

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

Proverbs chapter twenty-five, verse twenty-eight.

Ancient city walls provided protection against danger. When those defenses were broken, the city became vulnerable to what approached from outside. The proverb uses that image to show the consequences of lacking restraint over one's impulses and responses.

Children need help developing that protection. They must learn that anger does not require an angry action and that disappointment does not justify disrespect. Parents can begin by helping children recognize what they are feeling and giving them appropriate language to express it.

A parent might say, "You are angry because the game did not go the way you wanted," or, "You are disappointed because I said no." Naming the emotion can help a child understand what is happening without excusing the behavior that followed. The parent can then explain, "You are allowed to feel disappointed, but you are not allowed to speak that way."

This approach recognizes the child's experience while maintaining the standard. It also creates opportunities to practice a better response. A child may need to pause, lower their voice, tell the truth, apologize, or return to a conversation after becoming calm enough to listen.

Parents should remember that self-control is difficult to teach through a loss of control. If a father screams at a child for yelling, the instruction becomes confused. If a mother responds to a tantrum with her own emotional outburst, the parent and child are now both being governed by the moment.

The adult carries the greater responsibility because the adult has greater maturity, experience, and authority. Parents will still experience anger and frustration, but those emotions must not become permission to wound. Children need correction that is clear and appropriate, delivered by someone seeking to remain governed by truth.

Paul's instruction in Ephesians acknowledges that anger can be experienced without becoming sinful.

"Be angry and do not sin."

Ephesians chapter four, verse twenty-six.

The surrounding passage warns believers about the danger of allowing anger to remain unresolved and become an opportunity for further sin. The same principle matters in parenting. A parent may need to respond firmly and immediately to harmful behavior, but firmness does not require cruelty or uncontrolled anger.

A serious consequence can be given calmly, and a firm boundary can be maintained without contempt. Children should understand that wrongdoing matters without becoming afraid that their parents will lose control. Jesus experienced grief, compassion, righteous anger, sorrow, and anguish during His earthly ministry, yet remained perfectly obedient to the Father. His life helps

us understand that spiritual maturity involves responding faithfully in the presence of real emotion.

The third word, honor, builds upon what children have already begun learning about relationships.

We considered honor more fully in the previous chapter because it reaches beyond completing an instruction. Honor shapes the way children listen, disagree, receive correction, and treat the people around them. Here the emphasis is on helping children practice that understanding in moments when their responses fall short.

A child may complete a task while rolling their eyes, speaking with contempt, or making sure everyone knows how unhappy they are. The requested action has taken place, but the attitude expressed still needs attention. Parents can help children recognize the difference between doing something and doing it with honor.

A simple phrase can be useful: "Try that again with honor."

A parent does not need to provide a long explanation every time a child responds poorly. Sometimes the most helpful correction is an opportunity to repeat the moment differently. A child speaks harshly, ignores an instruction, or uses

a disrespectful tone, and the parent invites the child to stop, listen, and respond again.

This kind of practice works best when the child understands what is expected. Parents can demonstrate a respectful response, explain why particular words or actions were inappropriate, and provide another opportunity to practice. Over time, repeated instruction helps children develop habits that become increasingly natural.

Parents should also notice when honor appears without being demanded. When a child listens the first time, receives correction well, speaks respectfully to a sibling, or handles disagreement with maturity, it is worth acknowledging. A parent might say, "You handled that with honor," or, "You were frustrated, but you still responded respectfully."

These words help children recognize the qualities they are learning. If parents become attentive only when something goes wrong, their children may hear much more about failure than about the growth taking place. Thoughtful encouragement gives children language for recognizing a faithful response and understanding why it matters.

Honor also requires humility. Children eventually need to learn how to acknowledge wrongdoing without immediately explaining why someone

else was also responsible. This can be difficult because pride often wants to defend itself before considering what needs to change.

Jesus addressed the danger of pride when He confronted religious leaders who loved recognition and positions of importance. He warned that self-exaltation and humility lead in different directions.

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Matthew chapter twenty-three, verse twelve.

Parents can help children practice humility by teaching them to take responsibility for their own choices. A sibling may have acted wrongly, a friend may have provoked the situation, or the child may have been tired, embarrassed, or frustrated. Those circumstances may deserve attention, but they do not erase responsibility for the child's response.

A parent can say, "Your brother made a poor choice too, but we are talking about your choice right now." Another time, the response might be, "You were frustrated, but you are still responsible for what you said." These conversations help children acknowledge wrongdoing without allowing blame to replace repentance.

Honoring others does not mean pretending their actions are always right. It means carrying responsibility for our own conduct while recognizing the dignity of the person before us. Children who learn this distinction are better prepared to handle disagreement, correction, and relationships in which several people may share responsibility for what happened.

The fourth word is patience.

Patience may seem quieter than obedience, self-control, or honor, but it reaches into nearly every area of life. Children spend much of childhood learning what to do when something they want cannot happen immediately. Waiting becomes part of the daily experience of growing up.

Modern life can make that lesson more difficult. Entertainment begins instantly, answers appear in seconds, and devices fill empty moments before boredom has an opportunity to become creativity. Children can begin expecting that every desire should receive an immediate response.

Parents need to make room for waiting. A child may need to wait for dinner, take a turn after a sibling, remain patient while a parent finishes a conversation, or save money for something they want. These experiences provide opportunities to

learn that discomfort and delay do not have to become emergencies.

Proverbs connects wisdom with restraint, particularly when a person feels wronged or provoked.

"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."

Proverbs chapter nineteen, verse eleven.

Patience creates space between desire and demand. It helps children recognize that wanting something does not mean receiving it immediately. Sometimes another person goes first, sometimes the answer is later, and sometimes the answer is no.

These small experiences prepare children for larger seasons in which waiting cannot be avoided. They may eventually wait for healing, employment, direction, restoration, relationships, answered prayer, or understanding. Those circumstances will require more than the ability to tolerate a short inconvenience.

Paul connects patience to Christian hope in Romans chapter eight. He describes believers awaiting the fullness of what God has promised while continuing to trust Him in the present.

"But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Romans chapter eight, verse twenty-five.

Paul was speaking about the future redemption for which believers wait. His words give patience a deeper spiritual setting than ordinary delays and frustrations. Christian hope rests upon what God has promised, even when the fulfillment has not yet become visible.

Parents can begin preparing their children for this kind of trust by teaching patience in the responsibilities of daily life. Waiting in line, allowing someone else to finish speaking, and accepting that a desired purchase must come later are small opportunities to practice restraint. As children mature, those habits can become part of a larger understanding of perseverance and dependence upon God.

Patience also strengthens relationships. Children will eventually be irritated by siblings, friends, coworkers, spouses, and people who understand the world differently than they do. Someone who believes every irritation deserves an immediate response may struggle to maintain healthy relationships.

Patience helps a person slow down, consider another perspective, and recognize when a small offense can be overlooked. It also creates room for understanding before conflict grows unnecessarily. Parents can model this by refusing to make every inconvenience or disagreement a major problem.

Some situations require a direct conversation or clear boundary. Patience should never be confused with accepting mistreatment or refusing to address wrongdoing. Wisdom helps us distinguish between small irritations that can be released and serious matters that require attention.

Parents need patience because children develop slowly. Obedience, self-control, honor, and patience will not become established character simply because they have been explained once. A parent may teach obedience on Monday and address the same issue again on Thursday.

Self-control may appear strong in one situation and become difficult under different pressure. A child who has been responding respectfully may struggle during a new season of growth. These experiences do not automatically mean that instruction has failed. Formation involves repeated opportunities to learn, practice, receive correction, and mature.

Parents can become discouraged when progress is difficult to recognize. We may expect a child to

understand a lesson because we have explained it clearly, forgetting how long it has taken us to develop similar qualities. Our children need patient instruction from adults who recognize that growth often comes gradually.

The character of God gives us reason to approach this responsibility with humility. Psalm 103 describes the Lord's mercy toward His people and His patience with human weakness.

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Psalm chapter one hundred three, verse eight.

God's patience does not mean sin is insignificant or that correction is unnecessary. His character reveals mercy and faithfulness as He deals with His people. Parents should reflect something of that patience as they continue teaching children who still have much to learn.

We can respond promptly without responding harshly, maintain a boundary without contempt, and require obedience without humiliation. The responsibility to correct remains, but the manner of correction should reflect the love and wisdom of Christ.

As children grow, these four words begin strengthening one another. Obedience without honor can become outward compliance accompanied by resentment. Honor without obedience can become respectful language that never develops into faithful action. Self-control helps a child govern the immediate response, while patience strengthens the ability to remain steady when difficulty or delay continues.

Together, they help children hear what is right and respond, recognize that desire does not have to rule, carry relationships with humility, and endure frustration without allowing it to determine their conduct. These qualities develop through instruction and repeated practice, but their deepest spiritual meaning belongs within a life formed by Jesus Christ.

Parents must keep that distinction clear. A child can learn impressive behavior and still need the gospel. Christian parenting is not an attempt to make sons and daughters good enough to earn God's acceptance. Every child needs the forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life found in Christ.

The four words serve the greater responsibility of discipleship. Obedience ultimately directs us toward the lordship of Jesus. Self-control belongs among the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit, honor

grows from reverence for God and love for others, and patience deepens as believers learn to trust the Father.

Parents should use these words consistently while allowing their meaning to develop with the child. When we say "obey," we are teaching a response to rightful authority. When we say "self-control," we are helping children recognize that emotion can be real without governing the next choice. When we say "honor," we are teaching that words, attitudes, and relationships matter. When we say "patience," we are reminding children that waiting can develop strength, wisdom, and trust.

Over time, these words begin carrying history. A teenager hears "self-control" and remembers years of learning to pause before reacting. A child hears "honor" and recognizes something deeper than politeness. A son hears "obey" and understands that responsibility involves more than avoiding consequences, while a daughter hears "patience" and remembers learning to wait through disappointment.

Parents will continue needing these qualities too. We obey Christ when parenting becomes difficult, practice self-control when frustration rises, honor the child God has entrusted to us, and remain patient with the work of formation taking place over

time. The lessons we teach our sons and daughters continually call us back to our own responsibility before Jesus.

These four words begin as lessons within the home, but their purpose reaches toward a lifetime of following Jesus. We teach them carefully, demonstrate them faithfully, and provide opportunities for our children to practice them as they grow.

Chapter Five

Four Paths to Wisdom

Every parent wants a child who can make wise decisions.

We want sons and daughters who can think clearly when pressure rises, listen when another person speaks, recognize when to say no, and carry enough courage to act when something needs to be done. We also want them to know how to enjoy life, speak honestly, receive joy, and remain open to the people who love them. These qualities help children carry responsibility as they grow and encounter situations their parents cannot always manage for them.

Wisdom develops over time. Children gain understanding through instruction, experience, correction, and opportunities to practice what

they are learning. Their judgment grows as they discover that decisions have consequences and that a faithful response often requires them to consider more than what they want in the moment.

Scripture places wisdom within our relationship with God. Proverbs teaches that wisdom begins with reverence for the Lord and an understanding of who He is.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

Proverbs chapter nine, verse ten.

Biblical wisdom reaches beyond intelligence, information, or the ability to make efficient decisions. A person can be capable and knowledgeable while remaining foolish in the way they live. Wisdom learns to see life under the truth of God and respond in ways that reflect His character and instruction.

This is why parents should care about more than whether a child succeeds academically, performs well in sports, or develops useful skills. Those accomplishments can be good, and children should be encouraged to use their abilities responsibly. Yet wisdom reaches into how they speak, listen, handle relationships, respond to pressure, make plans, and decide what deserves their attention.

Four practical paths can help children develop these habits. They provide language parents can use during ordinary conversations, moments of correction, and opportunities for encouragement. Each path develops a different part of wise living, and together they help prepare children for increasing responsibility.

The first path is to think before speaking, plan more, and prepare earlier.

Children often live in the immediate moment. They say what they feel, begin something without considering what comes next, and wait until the last possible moment to prepare. Some of this belongs to the normal development of childhood, but maturity gradually brings a greater ability to look ahead and consider the consequences of a decision.

Proverbs connects wisdom with careful speech. The person who understands what is right learns to consider words before speaking them.

"The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips."

Proverbs chapter sixteen, verse twenty-three.

A thoughtful pause can protect a relationship from words that cannot easily be taken back.

When a child becomes angry with a sibling, the immediate desire may be to say something painful. A teenager who feels embarrassed may respond sharply before considering how those words will affect a friendship.

Parents can teach children to slow their response long enough to consider whether their words are true, necessary, kind, and appropriate. With a younger child, the instruction might be, "Think about what you want to say before you say it." An older child may need to hear, "You do not have to answer right now. Take some time, pray, and decide what needs to be said."

Thinking before speaking does not mean avoiding difficult conversations. Sometimes wisdom requires us to speak honestly about something uncomfortable, challenge wrongdoing, or express a concern that another person may not want to hear. The purpose of thoughtful speech is to communicate truth faithfully without allowing the first emotion of the moment to determine the response.

Planning and preparation develop a related kind of wisdom. Responsible people learn to consider what tomorrow may require before tomorrow arrives. They recognize that thoughtful preparation can

make room for greater attention, steadiness, and faithfulness when the moment comes.

Jesus used the example of a person preparing to build a tower when He taught about the cost of discipleship. He described someone who first considers what the project will require rather than beginning without understanding the commitment.

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost?"

Luke chapter fourteen, verse twenty-eight.

Jesus was calling His listeners to consider what following Him would require. The illustration also assumes an ordinary truth about wise decisions: significant responsibilities deserve thoughtful preparation. Acting without considering what lies ahead can create difficulties that careful planning might have prevented.

Children can begin practicing this wisdom through simple habits. They can prepare a backpack the night before school, look ahead at the coming week, study before the final evening, and think about what they will need before leaving the house. As they mature, those habits can grow into managing schedules, preparing for conversations, planning expenses, and anticipating responsibilities.

Preparation can also reduce unnecessary anxiety. A child who knows what to expect may enter an unfamiliar situation with greater confidence. A teenager who has considered how to handle a difficult conversation is less likely to be governed entirely by the emotions that arise when the conversation begins.

Yet preparation has limits. Parents should not teach children that careful planning will remove every uncertainty or guarantee a favorable outcome. A person can become so committed to controlling the future that planning itself becomes an expression of fear.

Proverbs reminds us that human responsibility exists under God's authority.

"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

Proverbs chapter sixteen, verse nine.

We make plans because preparation is wise, and we hold those plans with humility because God remains Lord. Children need to learn how to prepare responsibly while accepting that circumstances may change. A canceled event, unexpected difficulty, or altered opportunity can become a chance to practice flexibility and trust.

The second path is to slow down, learn to listen, and consider others.

This lesson can be difficult in a world that constantly competes for attention. Children are surrounded by screens, entertainment, opinions, notifications, and opportunities to respond before considering what they are hearing. It can become normal to move quickly from one thought to another without giving a person the attention needed to understand them.

Listening asks something different of us. It requires the humility to recognize that another person may know something we do not, feel something we have not considered, or see a situation from a perspective we have overlooked. Listening carefully allows us to understand before deciding how to respond.

James instructed believers to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. His teaching appears within a discussion about receiving God's Word and responding faithfully to it.

"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."

James chapter one, verse nineteen.

Being quick to hear is an unusual kind of speed. Parents often ask children to move faster when

getting ready, finishing chores, or completing responsibilities. When it comes to understanding another person, however, wisdom frequently requires us to slow down.

A child who learns to listen well is developing an ability that will strengthen relationships throughout life. Listening helps someone recognize another person's concerns, receive instruction without immediate defensiveness, and consider whether their own understanding may be incomplete. It also makes room for compassion.

Parents can develop these habits through ordinary family conversations. After conflict between siblings, we can ask each child to explain what happened and then consider what the other person may have been experiencing. A parent might ask, "What do you think your sister was trying to tell you?" or "What do you think made that difficult for your brother?"

These questions help children recognize that their own experience is not the only one that matters. They begin learning that another person's feelings and concerns deserve consideration, even when they disagree about what happened.

Paul connects this posture with humility in his letter to the Philippians. He calls believers to resist selfish ambition and consider the good of others.

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Philippians chapter two, verse three.

Considering others does not require us to believe everyone else is right. It means recognizing that another person deserves to be heard and treated with dignity. We can disagree firmly while remaining attentive to the person before us.

Jesus demonstrated this kind of attention throughout His ministry. He noticed people others overlooked and received those who approached Him with grief, confusion, sickness, questions, and need. His compassion never required Him to surrender truth, and His commitment to truth never made Him indifferent to the people He encountered.

Parents can reflect that posture through ordinary acts of attention. Put down the phone when possible, look at the child who is speaking, and listen long enough to understand what is being said. Resist the temptation to begin correcting every statement before the child has finished explaining it.

Children who experience being heard begin learning what it means to hear others. They

discover that listening communicates value and that a thoughtful response is often more helpful than an immediate answer. The experience of being listened to becomes part of how they learn to listen.

This becomes particularly important as children grow older. A teenager may need room to describe something confusing or painful without receiving a lecture before the concern has been fully expressed. Parents still carry responsibility to teach and correct, but understanding the child's experience often helps them identify what instruction is needed.

A home where questions can be asked and concerns can be expressed becomes a place where truth has room to be received. Listening strengthens that environment because it demonstrates that the relationship matters even when correction will eventually be necessary.

The third path is to learn to say no, toughen up, and act now.

The phrase "toughen up" can be misunderstood. It should never mean that children must ignore pain, bury emotion, pretend weakness does not exist, or endure harmful treatment without seeking help. The strength children need is the ability to face difficulty with wisdom, courage, and an appropriate response.

Life will bring circumstances they cannot control. Children will lose games, experience disappointment, be left out, fail at something important, and encounter situations that test what they believe. As they grow, the challenges will become more complex, and they will need the resilience to remain faithful when an easy answer is unavailable.

Paul encouraged Timothy to remain courageous in carrying the responsibility entrusted to him. He reminded Timothy that fear did not define the resources God had given for faithful service.

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Second Timothy chapter one, verse seven.

Paul was addressing Timothy within the responsibilities and difficulties of ministry. His instruction also demonstrates the relationship between courage, love, and self-control. Biblical strength does not require hardness toward others, and courage does not eliminate the need for wisdom.

Parents can help children develop resilience by allowing them to face difficulties appropriate to their age and maturity. A child may forget an assignment and experience a reasonable

consequence. A teenager may work hard and still fail to make the team. A friendship may become painful, or learning a new skill may require more effort than expected.

Our desire to protect children can make it tempting to remove every disappointment. There are times when intervention is necessary, particularly when safety, serious harm, or responsibilities beyond the child's ability are involved. In other circumstances, a parent may serve the child best by remaining nearby, offering encouragement, and allowing the child to work through the challenge.

Resilience develops as children discover that difficulty can be faced without surrendering to it. They learn to ask for help when help is needed, evaluate what happened, accept disappointment, and continue taking responsibility for the next step.

That strength also includes knowing how to say no.

Jesus taught His disciples to speak truthfully and plainly, without attempting to make dishonest words more convincing through elaborate promises.

"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'."

Matthew chapter five, verse thirty-seven.

The immediate teaching concerns truthful speech and the misuse of oaths. Its principle also reminds us that clear and honest words have value. Children need to learn how to give a truthful answer without allowing pressure from others to determine what they say.

A wise no can protect a life. Children do not have to follow every invitation, satisfy every friend, accept every challenge, enter every conversation, or give every desire permission. They can refuse something harmful even when the people around them consider it acceptable.

As children mature, this becomes especially important. They will encounter pressure involving dishonesty, cruelty, sexual behavior, substances, online relationships, and other decisions that require conviction. They need to know that refusing what is wrong may disappoint someone else and that the fear of rejection should not become the authority governing their choices.

The ability to say no also depends upon knowing when a yes is required. Some children hesitate because they fear making a mistake, while others delay because responsibility feels uncomfortable. A task may be clear, yet the child continues waiting for a more convenient moment.

Parents can teach a simple principle: when the right thing is clear, take the next faithful step.

That may involve apologizing, beginning an assignment, telling the truth, helping someone, making a difficult call, or completing a responsibility that has been neglected. These actions do not always require further discussion. Sometimes the child already knows what needs to be done and needs encouragement to act.

The Gospels repeatedly show Jesus calling people to follow Him. Those who responded entered a life of movement, obedience, and growing responsibility. They did not understand everything their future would hold, but following Jesus required them to respond to His call.

Children need to learn that some situations require prayerful patience while others require action. Wisdom develops as they begin recognizing the difference between waiting because further discernment is needed and delaying because they are unwilling to carry a responsibility.

The fourth path is to loosen up and open up.

A home can become so focused on correction, schedules, performance, responsibilities, and getting everyone where they need to go that joy gradually disappears. Parents may become

highly effective at managing the household while losing the delight of being together. Children need instruction and discipline, but they also need laughter, affection, celebration, and rest.

Proverbs recognizes the value of joy and the effect of a discouraged spirit.

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

Proverbs chapter seventeen, verse twenty-two.

Joy belongs in a healthy home. There should be room for play, friendship, celebration, gratitude, beauty, and the enjoyment of the life God has given. Children should see that following Jesus produces a life in which goodness can be received with thanksgiving.

Scripture includes feasts, songs, celebrations, worship, friendship, and delight in God's provision. These experiences remind us that joy is not opposed to responsibility. A family can take obedience seriously while still enjoying the people and moments God has placed within their care.

Parents can make room for that through simple choices. Play the game, take the walk, spend time outside, laugh at yourself, or celebrate something that may seem small. Sometimes the best response

to an ordinary moment is to enjoy it rather than turn it into another lesson.

There is a difference between making room for joy and believing every moment must be entertaining. Children still need to complete responsibilities, accept disappointment, and participate in the work of family life. They also need to learn that enjoyment and diligence can exist together.

Some parents may need this reminder more than others. We can become so focused on preparing children for adulthood that we forget to enjoy the people they are today. Childhood moves quickly, and the daily responsibilities of parenting should not cause us to overlook the gift of sharing life with our sons and daughters.

Ecclesiastes recognizes that human life contains different seasons and responsibilities under God's sovereign ordering of time.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."

Ecclesiastes chapter three, verse one.

The passage describes a world in which joy and sorrow, work and rest, beginnings and endings all have their place. Parents cannot make every season

easy, but they can learn to receive the good that belongs within the present one.

Opening up matters just as much as loosening up.

Some children speak easily about what they are feeling, while others carry their thoughts quietly. Neither personality is automatically healthier than the other. Every child, however, needs to know that questions, concerns, and difficult emotions can be brought into the light without immediately being met with ridicule or unnecessary shame.

Parents can create room for these conversations through better questions. Instead of asking only whether school was good, ask what was difficult, what made the child laugh, what felt disappointing, or what they have been thinking about lately. The questions should communicate genuine interest rather than become another way to inspect the child's behavior.

Then give the child time to answer.

A son who believes every difficult admission will result in an angry lecture may become reluctant to speak honestly. A daughter who feels dismissed whenever she expresses concern may begin keeping important experiences to herself. Parents may need to correct what their children

reveal, but correction becomes more thoughtful when the parent has first listened carefully.

Jesus frequently used questions to draw people into a deeper understanding of truth. He asked His disciples who they believed Him to be, and He asked people to express what they desired or needed. His questions invited responses that revealed what was taking place within the person.

Parents can use questions with a similar desire to understand. A child may need an opportunity to explain why something feels frightening, disappointing, or confusing. The conversation may reveal a misunderstanding that needs correction or a concern that requires protection and support.

Opening up also means giving children language for their emotional experiences. A boy should be able to acknowledge that something hurt without believing strength requires silence. A girl should be able to name fear without learning that fear determines her identity or ability to act faithfully.

Children need language for grief, disappointment, joy, anger, confusion, gratitude, and hope. They also need guidance in understanding those experiences before God. Their emotions deserve attention, but they must gradually learn that feelings do not always provide an accurate picture of what is true or determine the right response.

An open home makes room for these conversations while retaining appropriate boundaries. Parents remain responsible for instruction, correction, and protection. Their willingness to listen helps those responsibilities be carried with greater understanding.

The four paths belong together because wisdom rarely develops in only one direction.

A child needs to think before speaking and prepare for what lies ahead. That same child must also slow down enough to listen and consider what another person may be experiencing. Wisdom requires the courage to refuse wrongdoing and the willingness to act when responsibility becomes clear.

It also leaves room for joy, honest conversation, and meaningful relationships. Planning without flexibility can become a desire for control. Listening without conviction can leave someone afraid to disagree, while strength without compassion can harden into indifference. A person who is open with everyone but lacks discernment may expose themselves to unnecessary harm.

Jesus demonstrates the fullness of wisdom. He knew when to speak and when to remain silent. He listened with compassion while remaining faithful to truth, withdrew to pray when appropriate, and acted decisively when obedience required it.

He endured suffering without becoming indifferent to others and received the joys of ordinary life without losing sight of His Father's will. His life shows us wisdom expressed through perfect faithfulness to God.

That is why these four paths must remain connected to discipleship. Parents can teach habits, provide instruction, establish boundaries, and create opportunities for children to practice wise responses. Yet wisdom cannot be reduced to a system of better decisions or a set of techniques for avoiding difficulty.

True wisdom begins with knowing and revering God. As our sons and daughters mature, they must learn to seek His direction rather than depend entirely upon the judgment of their parents.

James encourages believers who lack wisdom to bring that need before God with confidence in His generosity.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach."

James chapter one, verse five.

James wrote to believers facing trials and the need for steadfast faith. His words encourage them to seek the wisdom necessary to respond faithfully

within those circumstances. That invitation belongs near the heart of what parents hope their children will eventually learn.

There will be moments when our sons and daughters do not know what to do. They will face questions we have not answered, responsibilities we could not fully anticipate, and situations in which no parent can immediately tell them the right response. They will make mistakes and sometimes discover that their first understanding was incomplete.

Our task is to prepare them for those moments through faithful teaching and example. We want them to think carefully, prepare responsibly, listen closely, stand firmly when conviction requires courage, and remain open to truth, joy, correction, relationship, and grace.

As these habits develop, we continue directing them toward the One who gives wisdom. Parents will not always have every answer, and children will eventually need to make decisions without us standing beside them.

Teach them how to seek the Lord, receive His Word, and walk faithfully with Him. The path of wisdom begins with Jesus, and He will remain worthy of their trust long after they have moved beyond our daily guidance.

Chapter Six

Correction That Leads Somewhere

Every parent corrects. The deeper question is what that correction is producing.

A parent can become skilled at stopping unwanted behavior without helping a child understand what should happen instead. Raising a voice, removing a privilege, or ending an argument may bring an immediate result, but the child may leave the experience knowing only what was wrong. Faithful correction should provide something more.

Biblical correction has a destination. It identifies what needs to change and directs the child toward what is true, wise, loving, and obedient. Parents are teaching their sons and daughters how to recognize wrongdoing, accept responsibility, and choose a

better response when the same situation appears again.

Proverbs connects the responsibility of raising children with the importance of training them in the way they should go. The language of training reminds us that formation involves instruction, practice, and continued attention over time.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Proverbs chapter twenty-two, verse six.

This proverb communicates wisdom about the importance of early formation. It should not be treated as an unconditional promise that every child raised faithfully will always make wise decisions or continue following the Lord. Parents are responsible for teaching and preparing their children, while recognizing that the future remains beyond their complete control.

Training carries movement. A trainer identifies mistakes, but also demonstrates a better response, provides opportunities to practice, and reinforces what is right. The person being trained gradually develops habits that make wise decisions more familiar.

Parents are doing something similar. We are helping children learn how to walk faithfully through the responsibilities and relationships God has given them. That requires correction, but it also requires a clear picture of where the correction is leading.

A home can easily become filled with instructions about what children should stop doing. Parents may spend much of the day saying, "Stop that," "Do not do that," "Quit arguing," or "How many times have I told you?" Sometimes an immediate command is necessary, especially when someone is in danger or harmful behavior needs to stop.

Yet a child who hears only what should stop may remain uncertain about what should begin. The behavior has been identified, but the child still needs help recognizing the appropriate response. This is where Positive Direction gives children a clearer path.

Instead of saying only, "Stop being mean to your sister," a parent can say, "Speak to your sister with kindness. Try that again." When a child complains, a parent might respond, "You can be disappointed, but tell me what you need with gratitude and respect."

A parent might replace "Why are you always so messy?" with "Take responsibility for what you used

and put it back where it belongs." The expectation becomes specific and understandable, giving the child an action that can be practiced.

The difference matters because correction that merely condemns behavior leaves the child focused on failure. Positive Direction identifies the better response and helps the child move toward it. The parent remains clear about wrongdoing while making the next faithful action visible.

Proverbs recognizes the importance of wise speech and the influence words carry when chosen carefully.

"The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness."

Proverbs chapter sixteen, verse twenty-one.

The way parents speak can help children understand and receive instruction. Wise words give direction, making expectations clearer without relying upon humiliation or fear. This does not mean every instruction will be welcomed, but thoughtful language can keep attention on what needs to be learned.

Parents sometimes assume children already know what the better response should be. Adults have lived through thousands of situations that taught

them how to recognize social expectations, manage responsibilities, and respond to disappointment. Children are still developing that understanding.

A five-year-old may genuinely need someone to demonstrate what to say when another child takes a toy. A ten-year-old may need help learning how to disagree without becoming disrespectful. A teenager may understand that anger is not permission for cruelty while still needing guidance in expressing frustration honestly.

Direction makes expectations visible. A parent can say, "This is how we handle this," or "This is what honor sounds like." The child receives language for a response that may not yet come naturally.

Repeated practice then becomes part of correction. Children need opportunities to try again, especially when behavior involves speech, listening, self-control, or relationships. A better response may initially feel unfamiliar, but repetition helps develop habits that become more natural with maturity.

Parents should also learn to recognize what they want to multiply. It is easy to notice wrongdoing because problems interrupt the day. A slammed door gets attention, a harsh word changes the atmosphere, and disobedience can delay everyone else's plans.

Faithful behavior is often quieter. A child waits patiently without complaining, a teenager tells the truth when dishonesty would have been easier, or a sibling shares something without being asked. Another child receives correction and responds without arguing, showing the kind of growth parents hope to encourage.

Paul encouraged the believers in Thessalonica to build one another up as they continued walking faithfully before the Lord.

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up."

First Thessalonians chapter five, verse eleven.

Encouragement helps children recognize character as it develops. A parent might say, "I noticed that you waited patiently," or "You could have argued, but you showed self-control." When a child admits wrongdoing despite knowing a consequence may follow, the parent can acknowledge the courage it took to tell the truth.

This kind of encouragement differs from empty praise. Children do not need exaggerated approval for everything they do. They benefit from sincere recognition of choices that demonstrate humility, honesty, diligence, patience, compassion, and responsibility.

Thoughtful encouragement also keeps correction from becoming the only time a parent gives concentrated attention. If children receive considerable attention whenever something goes wrong but little acknowledgment when they respond well, family life can gradually become organized around failure.

Positive Direction helps parents recognize what they hope to see more often. They teach a better response when correction is necessary and acknowledge that response when it begins appearing in ordinary life. Over time, the child receives a clearer picture of what faithful character looks like.

Every parent still encounters moments when behavior must be addressed promptly. A child may hit a sibling, speak disrespectfully, disregard a boundary, or make a choice that requires direct correction. Those situations can become difficult when the parent is already tired, distracted, disappointed, or frustrated.

The IDEAL Response provides a simple pattern for approaching those moments: Immediate, Direct, Even, Actionable, and Loving.

These five words remind parents how correction should be carried. They help us consider timing, attention, tone, direction, and relationship. Their

purpose is to support wise parenting rather than turn every situation into a rigid formula.

Immediate means addressing behavior while the connection between the action and correction remains clear.

Young children especially benefit when instruction follows closely enough that they understand what happened. If a child strikes a sibling or speaks with contempt, the parent should respond while the behavior is still recognizable. Waiting too long can make correction confusing or allow an important concern to remain unresolved.

Paul's instruction to believers in Ephesians connects the experience of anger with the responsibility to avoid sin and prevent unresolved anger from continuing unchecked.

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger."

Ephesians chapter four, verse twenty-six.

The passage concerns anger and the need to address it faithfully. In parenting, it also reminds us that unresolved conflict should not be allowed to grow unnecessarily. Problems need attention, but attention should be governed by wisdom rather than the intensity of a parent's immediate reaction.

Immediate correction does not mean impulsive correction. There are moments when the parent needs to pause before speaking. A father may recognize that his frustration is becoming too strong, or a mother may realize that exhaustion is influencing her response.

In those moments, the parent can say, "We are going to deal with this, but I need a moment first." A short pause can prevent the conversation from becoming something the parent will later regret. The correction still happens, but the adult takes responsibility for approaching it with greater self-control.

Direct means correction should involve the child personally.

Parents sometimes attempt to correct behavior from another room, across the house, or while continuing to look at a screen. Instructions are repeated, voices become louder, and consequences are announced before anyone has stopped to understand what happened.

Direct engagement brings attention to the moment. A parent moves toward the child, makes sure the child is able to listen, and addresses the behavior clearly. With younger children, that may mean getting physically closer and speaking at

an appropriate level rather than sending another instruction across the room.

The parent might begin with a simple question: "What happened?"

That question can reveal information the adult did not know. Sometimes the child will minimize wrongdoing or shift responsibility. At other times, the child may immediately recognize the mistake or explain something important about the situation.

Listening does not require accepting every explanation as an excuse. It allows the parent to understand what is being addressed before deciding what correction is appropriate. A child who feels heard may become more willing to recognize wrongdoing, especially when the parent considers the whole situation.

Jesus regularly engaged people personally during His earthly ministry. He asked questions, spoke directly to individuals, and gave attention to circumstances that others might have overlooked. His care for people did not weaken His commitment to truth.

Parents can learn from that attentiveness. Correction becomes clearer when the child recognizes that the parent is addressing a person who matters. The behavior needs correction, but

the child remains worthy of dignity and careful attention.

Even means keeping the parent's tone steady.

This can be difficult because correction rarely arrives at a convenient time. The family may be running late, the parent may be tired, or the same problem may have appeared several times already. Frustration can rise quickly when a child seems unwilling to respond to an expectation that has been explained repeatedly.

Proverbs describes the effect words and tone can have when conflict begins to develop.

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Proverbs chapter fifteen, verse one.

Gentleness does not require weakness. A steady voice can communicate serious concern because authority does not depend upon becoming louder than the child. Yelling often gives children something else to focus on, drawing their attention toward the parent's anger instead of the behavior that needs correction.

A parent can say, "This was wrong. You knew the expectation, and you need to make this right," without turning the conversation into chaos. A clear

and even response gives the child an opportunity to understand the seriousness of what happened.

This is also where parents model the self-control they are teaching. The child observes how the adult responds when disappointed, frustrated, or challenged. Correction becomes a living example of what it looks like to remain responsible for our actions when emotions are strong.

There will be times when immediate intervention requires a firm voice, especially when safety is at risk. Protecting someone from danger may require an urgent command. Evenness concerns the parent's steadiness and self-control, not a requirement to speak quietly regardless of the circumstances.

Children need to learn that strength can remain controlled. Authority can be clear without intimidation, and truth can be spoken firmly without cruelty. Parents who respond this way help keep attention on what is right rather than making fear of the parent's reaction the central lesson.

Actionable means correction needs to lead toward a better response.

Children should understand what responsibility looks like after wrongdoing has been identified. If a child speaks disrespectfully, allow an opportunity to

answer differently. If something was taken, it should be returned. If something was damaged through carelessness, the child may need to help repair it.

If another person was hurt, the child should learn what it means to acknowledge the harm and begin making things right. The particular response will depend upon the child's age, understanding, and the seriousness of what happened.

Proverbs connects confession with turning away from wrongdoing. It describes the difference between concealing sin and acknowledging it honestly before seeking a different way forward.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

Proverbs chapter twenty-eight, verse thirteen.

Confession recognizes what happened. Forsaking wrongdoing involves turning toward a different response. Children need guidance in both, because acknowledging failure without learning what should change can leave the same pattern untouched.

An actionable correction begins by identifying the responsibility that belongs to the child. The parent can ask what needs to be learned, what must be repaired, and what response should be practiced.

These questions help determine what comes next instead of focusing entirely on how severe a punishment should be.

A consequence may still be necessary. Consequences can reinforce responsibility, protect another person, and help children understand the seriousness of a decision. Their purpose should remain connected to instruction and accountability rather than becoming revenge for frustrating the parent.

Chapter Seven will consider discipline and restoration more fully. At this point, the important lesson is that correction should provide a direction. The child needs to understand what faithfulness requires next.

Sometimes the next step is as simple as trying again.

A child demands, "Give me that," and the parent asks for a better response. The child tries again with something like, "Can I please have that when you are finished?" The second response gives the child practical experience in speaking with honor.

A child storms away after being corrected. Later, the parent might explain, "You can take space when you are upset, but you still need to communicate that respectfully. Let's practice what you could say next time."

The purpose is to develop a better response before the next difficult moment arrives. Correction becomes instruction supported by practice, helping children recognize what to do when a familiar situation appears again.

The final part of IDEAL is Loving.

Correction should preserve the security of the parent-child relationship. A child may need to face a consequence, acknowledge wrongdoing, or repair harm, but that experience should never communicate that parental love disappears whenever the child fails.

Hebrews describes the Lord's discipline within the relationship He has established with those He receives as His children.

"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves."

Hebrews chapter twelve, verse six.

The passage teaches that God's fatherly discipline is connected to His love and His work in the lives of His people. Parents should approach their responsibility with the same seriousness about the relationship between love and correction, while remembering that human parental authority is limited and imperfect.

Children need to know that wrongdoing matters and that love remains. After correction, especially with younger children, an appropriate expression of affection may help communicate that truth. A hug may be welcome, a hand on the shoulder may be enough, or the parent may simply say, "I love you. We dealt with it, and we are moving forward."

The child's comfort and readiness for physical affection should be respected. Some children need a little space before returning to closeness. The parent's responsibility is to remain available and loving without demanding an immediate emotional response.

As children grow older, this security becomes especially important. A child who believes acceptance disappears whenever performance fails may begin concealing mistakes. Hiding can appear safer than honesty when someone expects every failure to threaten the relationship.

Parents want to cultivate a home where the truth can come into the light. That requires consistent expectations and a willingness to address wrongdoing, along with the assurance that a child remains loved while responsibility is being carried.

John describes Jesus as the eternal Word who became flesh and lived among us. In introducing his

Gospel, John connects the glory of Christ with the grace and truth revealed through Him.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John chapter one, verse fourteen.

Grace and truth belong together in the person of Jesus Christ. His grace does not require Him to overlook sin, and His truth is never separated from His holy character. Parents cannot reflect His perfection, but His example directs us toward correction that is both truthful and loving.

Children need truth that identifies wrongdoing and grace that makes room for repentance. They need accountability and the continuing assurance that their failures do not remove them from the family. Correction should serve the child rather than protect the pride of the parent.

Positive Direction and IDEAL help parents approach this responsibility with greater clarity. Positive Direction teaches children what a faithful response looks like. IDEAL helps parents address wrongdoing through prompt attention, direct engagement, steady leadership, a practical next step, and love.

Neither approach depends upon shame. Both are intended to help children recognize what is right and practice it more faithfully.

This will require patience because children need repeated instruction. They may respond maturely one day and struggle with the same expectation later. A child may understand the correct behavior but fail to practice it when tired, disappointed, embarrassed, or distracted.

Parents should not interpret every repeated mistake as evidence that nothing is being learned. Growth often develops unevenly, and familiar challenges can return in new circumstances. Continued correction is part of the responsibility parents accepted when they received a child into their care.

The familiar question, "How many times do I have to tell you?" often rises from genuine frustration. In parenting, the answer may be many more times than expected. Scripture itself shows God's people receiving repeated instruction, warnings, correction, and reminders because human beings often forget what they have been taught.

Parents will repeat lessons too. The challenge is to keep repetition from becoming contempt. Correction should grow clearer with time instead of becoming more humiliating.

A parent can remain firm while believing growth is possible. "I know you can handle this differently," or "You made a poor choice, but we are going to learn from it," gives the child hope without excusing what happened.

Children often need adults to believe they can grow before they recognize that possibility in themselves. Encouragement helps them see that one moment of failure does not determine what every future response must become.

Parents will also need to apply these lessons to their own mistakes. There will be moments when correction comes too quickly, a parent's tone becomes unnecessarily harsh, or a consequence proves inappropriate. Our authority does not remove the responsibility to acknowledge what happened.

When we fail, we can model the same honesty we are teaching our children. We can tell the truth, take responsibility, seek forgiveness, and change what needs to change. The child sees that even the parent remains accountable to God.

Correction ultimately points beyond the immediate behavior. It teaches children that wrong choices can be acknowledged, harmful responses can be changed, and responsibility can be carried with

humility. It helps them understand that truth and love remain necessary when life becomes difficult.

Jesus remains the center of this work. He exposes sin, calls people to repentance, and gives the grace through which sinners can be reconciled to God. His saving work is greater than anything a parent can accomplish, and the new life He gives cannot be produced through parenting techniques.

We correct because children need direction. We teach because they are still learning. We love because God has entrusted them to our care, and we remain dependent upon Jesus as we carry that responsibility.

Faithful correction should always lead somewhere. It should help our sons and daughters understand what happened, recognize what is right, and take the next step toward wisdom, responsibility, and obedience under Christ.

Chapter Seven

Discipline That Ends in Restoration

Correction should have an ending.

A child does something wrong. The parent addresses what happened, establishes responsibility, and determines whether a consequence is necessary. The child may need to acknowledge the choice, repair something that was damaged, or practice a better response. These moments are part of raising sons and daughters who understand that their decisions matter.

Yet faithful discipline should carry a child beyond the moment of wrongdoing. When correction ends with punishment alone, a child may understand that an action was unacceptable without knowing how to move forward. The behavior has been addressed, but the relationship may remain

unsettled and the opportunity for deeper formation unfinished.

Discipline should lead toward restoration.

The writer of Hebrews describes discipline as something that may be painful in the present while producing a lasting result in those who have been trained through it.

"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Hebrews chapter twelve, verse eleven.

This passage describes God's fatherly discipline toward His people. His purpose is their holiness and growth in righteousness, and His correction belongs within His loving relationship with those He has received as His children. Human parents are imperfect and cannot exercise discipline with God's complete wisdom, but His character helps us understand why discipline should have a constructive purpose.

The goal is greater than making an uncomfortable moment stop. Parents are helping children learn how to face wrongdoing honestly, receive correction, take responsibility, and return to healthy

relationships. That requires attention to what happens after the behavior has been identified.

Consequences can teach that choices carry weight. A broken object may need to be replaced, a privilege may be restricted, or a responsibility may need to be completed. These responses can help children understand accountability, but consequences alone cannot teach them how to confess wrongdoing, seek forgiveness, receive encouragement, or rebuild trust.

Those lessons require relationship.

Three movements help parents carry discipline through to restoration: accountability, encouragement, and forgiveness. Each has a distinct purpose, and together they teach children how to respond when something has gone wrong.

Accountability tells the truth about what happened. Encouragement helps children recognize that failure does not have to determine what happens next. Forgiveness opens the way toward peace and a relationship in which responsibility has been acknowledged.

These movements belong together because children need both truth and grace. They need to understand the seriousness of wrongdoing while learning that honest repentance makes a

different response possible. Their failures should receive appropriate attention without becoming the permanent measure of who they are.

Accountability begins with telling the truth.

Children often learn how to explain their behavior before they learn how to take responsibility for it. When something goes wrong, their first instinct may be to point toward a sibling, a friend, an unfair circumstance, or anything else that makes their own responsibility seem smaller. This response is familiar because adults sometimes do the same thing.

Proverbs connects confession with the willingness to turn away from wrongdoing. It describes the difference between concealing sin and bringing it into the light.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

Proverbs chapter twenty-eight, verse thirteen.

Accountability requires us to recognize what happened and identify the responsibility that belongs to us. Parents can begin teaching this through simple questions that help children

examine their choices. What happened? What did you choose? What part of this belongs to you?

Imagine two siblings fighting. One child immediately says, "He started it," and the parent may discover that the statement is true. The other sibling may have provoked the disagreement, taken something without permission, or acted unfairly before the conflict began.

That information matters, and wise parents should consider it. Yet the original wrongdoing does not automatically excuse the response that followed. One child may have provoked while the other responded with cruelty, leaving both responsible for different choices.

A parent can explain, "We will talk with your brother about his choice too. Right now, I want you to tell me about yours." The statement keeps accountability personal without dismissing the child's concern about what happened. It teaches that someone else's wrongdoing does not give us permission to abandon responsibility for our own conduct.

This lesson becomes increasingly important as children grow. A teenager may encounter a friend who betrays trust, a coach who makes an unfair decision, or a teacher who misunderstands a situation. Later in life, a spouse, employer,

coworker, or neighbor may act in ways that create genuine difficulty.

Wisdom still requires us to consider what belongs to us. That question does not excuse injustice or require a person to accept responsibility for another person's actions. It helps us recognize what we can acknowledge, correct, or change without waiting for everyone else to act first.

Parents should make accountability specific. A child needs to understand the difference between a general feeling of having disappointed someone and a clear recognition of wrongdoing. "You lied about where you were," identifies dishonesty. "You spoke disrespectfully to your mother," identifies harmful speech. "You broke something because you were careless," connects an action to its consequence.

Clear language gives children something they can understand and address. They may still disagree with the correction or feel disappointed by the consequence, but they should know what responsibility is being placed before them.

Shame speaks differently.

Statements such as "What is wrong with you?" or "You always ruin everything" move beyond identifying an action and begin making

claims about the child's person. Instead of teaching responsibility, these words may leave children believing that something about them is permanently unacceptable.

Accountability says that a particular choice was wrong and must be addressed. Shame can communicate that the person who made the choice has become the problem. Those messages may produce very different responses.

Children need to recognize wrongdoing. A conscience that remains indifferent to sin or harm is not developing wisely, and parents should never minimize serious behavior simply to protect a child from discomfort. Yet appropriate conviction should lead toward responsibility and repentance rather than humiliation.

Shame often makes hiding seem safer.

The opening chapters of Genesis show how hiding entered human experience after Adam and Eve sinned. They attempted to cover themselves and withdrew from the openness they had previously experienced before God. When the Lord confronted them, blame became part of their response.

Children may demonstrate similar patterns when they have done something wrong. They hide what happened, tell only part of the story, deny

something they know is true, or hope their parents never discover the choice. Sometimes the fear of a consequence contributes to that response, while at other times the child fears humiliation or rejection.

Parents have an opportunity to teach something their children will need throughout life: truth is safer than hiding.

This does not mean honesty removes every consequence. A child who confesses dishonesty may still need to rebuild trust, and a child who admits damaging something may still be responsible for repairing it. Confession does not make wrongdoing insignificant, but it allows the truth to be addressed.

Parents can acknowledge the courage involved in telling the truth while remaining clear about the seriousness of what happened. This helps children understand that bringing wrongdoing into the light is part of taking responsibility.

Parents should also be careful about describing a child's character after failure. Sometimes we try to encourage by saying, "That is not who you are. You are better than that." The intention may be loving, but Scripture gives us a deeper foundation for understanding both sin and grace.

Our children are human beings who bear God's image and need His mercy. They are capable of sinful choices, just as their parents are. We should teach them that sin is serious and that every person needs the forgiveness made possible through Jesus Christ.

A child can learn to say, "I made that choice. It was wrong. I need to make it right." Those words acknowledge responsibility without turning failure into a permanent identity. They also prepare the child for the deeper meaning of confession and repentance before God.

Once accountability has been established, encouragement becomes important.

Correction can leave a child feeling embarrassed, disappointed, or discouraged. They may have experienced a consequence, admitted something they tried to hide, or recognized that their choice harmed someone they love. That moment deserves attention because the child is beginning to understand what happened and what needs to change.

Paul encouraged the believers in Thessalonica to strengthen one another as they continued living faithfully before the Lord. His instruction recognizes that encouragement belongs within the shared life of God's people.

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

First Thessalonians chapter five, verse eleven.

Encouragement does not remove accountability. It helps someone continue forward after acknowledging what is true. In parenting, it can provide the reassurance a child needs to accept responsibility without becoming overwhelmed by discouragement.

A parent may say, "Thank you for telling the truth," even when the truth reveals something serious. The wrongdoing remains wrong, and a consequence may still be necessary. The parent's words simply recognize that honesty was the right response.

Another parent might say, "I know that was difficult to admit. I am glad you owned what happened." These words help children understand that confessing wrongdoing is better than defending it, even when telling the truth involves personal cost.

This distinction can influence whether children continue bringing difficult things into the light as they grow. If every confession is met with an explosion of anger, humiliation, or rejection, children may begin weighing whether honesty is worth the risk. They may become more skilled at

concealing their actions than at taking responsibility for them.

Parents should want something better for their families. We want sons and daughters who understand that truth can be spoken and wrongdoing can be addressed. Coming forward should become an important part of maturity, even when the conversation will be difficult.

Encouragement may sound like, "This was a poor choice, but I believe you can learn from it." A parent may recognize progress by saying, "You handled that consequence better than you would have a year ago." At another moment, the most helpful words may simply be, "I love you, and we are going to work through this."

These statements communicate hope without suggesting that the behavior was acceptable or that responsibility has disappeared.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians includes a specific warning for parents. After instructing children to obey and honor their parents, he addresses the way fathers exercise their responsibility.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Ephesians chapter six, verse four.

The instruction joins parental responsibility with a warning against provoking children. The authority entrusted to parents is meant to serve the child's formation under Christ. Discipline should be carried with care because the manner of correction can either support or interfere with the lesson being taught.

Children may struggle with the same behavior many times. Dishonesty, impulsiveness, anger, laziness, disrespect, or another pattern may require repeated attention over several years. Parents can become weary when progress seems slow, especially when they believe a lesson should already have been learned.

Children can become discouraged too. A child who repeatedly hears about failure may begin assuming that change is unlikely. A teenager who has struggled with the same habit for years may wonder whether anyone believes growth is possible.

Parents do not need to offer praise that is unsupported by reality. Saying a child is doing wonderfully when serious problems remain may confuse rather than encourage. Honest encouragement recognizes genuine effort,

meaningful improvement, and the opportunity to respond differently.

A parent might say, "I know this has been difficult for you, but I have seen you grow." Another response might be, "You did not handle this well today. Tomorrow gives you another opportunity to practice what we have been learning."

Those words preserve the truth while making room for hope. They remind children that failure requires attention, but it does not determine every choice that follows.

Parents also need to model the encouragement they hope their children will eventually offer others. A sibling who acknowledges wrongdoing should not be mocked for admitting it. A child who apologizes should not hear the same failure brought up as a weapon every time another disagreement occurs.

If confession repeatedly becomes ammunition, family members may become reluctant to confess. They begin protecting themselves from the possibility that honesty will be used against them later. When a matter has been confessed, repaired, and resolved, parents should help the family move forward rather than allow the failure to become a source of repeated humiliation.

The final movement is forgiveness.

Accountability names what happened, and encouragement helps a child see the possibility of growth. Forgiveness addresses the broken relationship and opens the way toward peace.

Jesus gave forgiveness a central place in the life of His disciples. He taught them to forgive others, warned against an unforgiving spirit, and demonstrated the mercy of God through His ministry. The New Testament repeatedly connects the forgiveness believers extend to others with the grace they have received through Christ.

Paul expressed that connection in his instruction to the Ephesian church.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Ephesians chapter four, verse thirty-two.

Christian forgiveness begins with the grace of God. It grows from what He has accomplished through Jesus rather than from a person's ability to earn acceptance through a sufficiently convincing apology. That truth must remain central whenever parents teach children about confession and forgiveness.

A child does not earn God's forgiveness by saying the right words after misbehavior.

Reconciliation with God cannot be accomplished through household rules, parental approval, or a well-practiced apology. Every person needs the saving grace provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First John teaches believers to acknowledge their sins honestly before God and trust His faithfulness to forgive and cleanse them.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

First John chapter one, verse nine.

Confession involves agreeing with God about what is true. His forgiveness rests upon His righteous provision through Christ. Parents can use moments of wrongdoing to help children understand these truths without reducing the gospel to an explanation of how to behave better.

Children need to learn that sin matters because God is holy and that forgiveness is possible because Jesus has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him. This message reaches beyond the particular mistake being addressed. It directs the child toward the Savior every person needs.

Children also need instruction in seeking forgiveness from people they have harmed. An apology may sound simple, but learning to apologize with honesty and humility is an important part of growing in responsibility.

A forced "sorry" can become another form of compliance. The child says the expected word, hoping the conversation will end, while having little understanding of what was wrong or how the other person was affected. Parents can help children develop language that expresses genuine responsibility instead.

A meaningful apology identifies the wrongdoing. A child might say, "I am sorry I spoke to you that way." The explanation can continue by acknowledging the responsibility involved: "I was angry, but that did not give me the right to say those things."

The child can then ask, "Will you forgive me?"

These sentences teach humility because they require the child to acknowledge what happened without shifting blame. Parents may need to demonstrate the language, especially with younger children who are still learning how to express themselves.

An apology such as "Sorry you got mad" does not acknowledge the speaker's behavior. Neither

does "Sorry, but you started it." The other person's actions may need to be discussed, but they should not become a way to avoid recognizing one's own wrongdoing.

Children benefit when parents explain these distinctions patiently. Sometimes a young child can repeat appropriate words before fully understanding them. As understanding develops, parents should help the child connect those words to honest reflection and meaningful action.

Parents must practice this themselves.

A father may recognize that he was right to address his child's wrongdoing but wrong in the way he responded. He can return and say, "I needed to correct what happened, but I spoke harshly. That was wrong, and I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

A mother may discover that she acted on an assumption that was not true. She can acknowledge, "I did not understand what happened before I responded. I am sorry I made that decision without listening."

These conversations teach children that authority does not place anyone above truth. Parents remain responsible for their conduct, and acknowledging wrongdoing is part of the faithful example they are called to provide.

Trust can grow when children see honest repentance. They learn that forgiveness belongs within relationships where everyone remains accountable to God. They also see that a parent can recognize personal failure without surrendering the legitimate responsibility to lead.

Forgiveness does not always remove every consequence.

A broken object may still need to be replaced. Trust damaged through dishonesty may take time to rebuild, and a privilege may remain restricted after an apology has been received. The consequence should remain appropriate to what happened and serve a legitimate purpose in teaching responsibility.

A child may ask, "But she forgave me. Why am I still grounded?" The parent can explain that forgiveness and consequences address different parts of what happened. The personal offense may have been forgiven while a necessary consequence continues to reinforce responsibility or protect someone who was affected.

This distinction becomes especially important when wrongdoing has damaged trust. Forgiveness opens the way toward peace, but trust often needs to be rebuilt through consistent faithfulness. A person may sincerely forgive while still needing time,

appropriate boundaries, and evidence of change before a relationship can return to the way it was.

Children should learn to forgive, but they should not be pressured to pretend that serious harm has disappeared. A sibling may need some time before wanting to play again, and a friend may need to see changed behavior before feeling comfortable restoring the same level of trust.

Where abuse, violence, coercion, or other serious harm is involved, protection and appropriate intervention must take priority. Forgiveness never requires a child to remain in danger, conceal wrongdoing, or resume an unsafe relationship. Parents and other responsible adults must take necessary steps to protect those who have been harmed.

Children need to understand that love and wisdom belong together. Mercy should be practiced generously, while access and trust are handled responsibly. Restored trust depends upon more than spoken promises when significant harm has occurred.

These lessons will become increasingly important throughout life. Children will eventually need them in friendships, marriage, employment, church relationships, and community life. They will

encounter situations in which forgiveness is necessary and trust must be rebuilt carefully.

One of the dangers in discipline is ending the process too early.

A parent addresses wrongdoing, establishes a consequence, and sends the child away. The behavior has been confronted, but everyone remains angry. The child may carry embarrassment or resentment, and the parent may continue feeling frustrated long after the immediate situation has ended.

Sometimes the next step is simply to return to the conversation after emotions have settled. The parent can ask whether the child understands what happened, what responsibility remains, and whether anything still needs to be repaired. The child may need another opportunity to speak honestly or receive an explanation that was difficult to understand during the original correction.

Parents should help children move through accountability, encouragement, and forgiveness as the situation requires. The goal is not to force an immediate emotional resolution, but to complete the responsibilities necessary for the family to move toward peace.

Then the moment should be allowed to end.

This matters especially in homes where several children live together. Siblings will disappoint one another, compete for attention, speak carelessly, and sometimes cause genuine hurt. Parents need to address those moments without allowing the family to become a place where old failures are continually brought into new disagreements.

When wrongdoing has been confessed, addressed, forgiven, and repaired, parents should resist keeping it available as a weapon. Repeatedly reminding a child of a past failure can weaken the very growth discipline was intended to encourage.

Paul's description of Christian love in First Corinthians includes a commitment to perseverance and hope.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

First Corinthians chapter thirteen, verse seven.

Paul was teaching the Corinthian church about the character of love within the life of God's people. His words remind us that Christian love does not abandon hope when relationships become difficult. It continues seeking what is good while remaining grounded in truth.

Parents need this kind of hope. A child who struggled yesterday can make a wiser choice today. A son who has resisted correction may eventually begin receiving it with humility, and a daughter who has repeatedly made poor decisions may grow in understanding and responsibility.

That hope does not guarantee a particular outcome or remove the need for wise boundaries. Children remain responsible for their choices, and some consequences will continue long after an apology has been offered. Yet parents should never allow discouragement to become the final word over a child's future.

God continues His work in people over time. Parents should remain faithful in teaching, praying, correcting, encouraging, and providing the support their children need. We can leave room for growth while remaining honest about what still needs to change.

Discipline under Christ should tell the truth about sin without surrendering hope. It establishes accountability without humiliation, provides encouragement without minimizing wrongdoing, and teaches forgiveness without treating grace as permission to continue harmful behavior.

These lessons will follow our children far beyond the home. They will need the ability to accept

responsibility when pride urges them to defend themselves and the courage to tell the truth when shame urges them to hide. They will need to offer forgiveness, seek forgiveness, and recognize when a relationship requires both grace and appropriate boundaries.

Most importantly, they need to understand these truths within their relationship with Jesus.

Sin belongs in the light because God is holy. Repentance is a faithful response to the truth He reveals. Forgiveness is possible through Christ, and grace calls believers toward a changed life rather than leaving them comfortable in wrongdoing.

Parents have the privilege of teaching these truths through ordinary family relationships. Every opportunity to acknowledge wrongdoing, encourage growth, and seek reconciliation can help children recognize what it means to live honestly before God and others.

Accountability tells the truth. Encouragement keeps hope alive. Forgiveness opens the way toward restored relationship.

And when those responsibilities have been carried faithfully, the family can move forward, knowing that discipline has served its purpose by helping truth, grace, and love shape what comes next.

Chapter Eight

Prepare Before the Moment

Some of the hardest parenting moments begin before anyone realizes they have begun.

A child enters a store already tired. A family arrives at a gathering without discussing expectations. Screen time ends suddenly, or bedtime arrives while a child is deeply involved in something they enjoy. A teenager walks into a difficult social situation without having considered the choices that may be required.

Then the pressure arrives. The child reacts, the parent responds to that reaction, and what might have been a manageable situation becomes a conflict. Everyone leaves frustrated, often wondering why something so ordinary became so difficult.

Parents need to know how to correct, but they also need to know how to prepare.

Many challenging moments can be handled more wisely when children know what is coming, understand what is expected, and have time to prepare themselves before pressure rises. Preparation gives parents an opportunity to teach while everyone is still able to listen. It also helps children begin developing the judgment they will eventually need when their parents are no longer beside them.

God gave Israel a pattern for this kind of ongoing instruction. In Deuteronomy chapter six, Moses called the people to keep God's words upon their hearts and teach them diligently to their children.

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children."

Deuteronomy chapter six, verses six and seven.

Moses continued by describing instruction woven into the ordinary rhythm of the household. Parents were to speak about God's commands while sitting at home, walking along the way, lying down, and rising in the morning. The picture reaches beyond correction after failure into a life of consistent teaching and preparation.

Christian parents can learn from that pattern. Discipleship belongs within the regular movement of family life, where conversations, expectations, reminders, and decisions provide opportunities to teach what is true. We do not have to wait until something goes wrong to help our children understand how to respond faithfully.

One practical way to do this is through the Pre-Game Talk.

The name comes from something familiar in sports. Before a game begins, a coach gathers the team to explain the plan, identify what matters, and remind the players how to respond when pressure rises. The coach knows that preparation is more effective when it happens before the game rather than after everyone has already made their decisions.

Parents can apply the same principle to everyday situations. Before entering a restaurant, store, family gathering, church service, practice, or friend's house, take a moment to talk about what is coming. The conversation does not need to be formal or lengthy. Often, a short and thoughtful reminder will be more helpful than a long explanation.

A parent might say, "We are going into Grandma's house. I want you to say hello when we arrive, use good manners at dinner, and speak respectfully

while we are there. If you need something, come find me."

The child now has a clearer understanding of what the parent expects. General instructions such as "Be good" may seem obvious to adults, but young children may not know what those words mean in a particular setting. Clear direction helps them recognize the response they are being asked to practice.

Before entering a store, a younger child might hear, "Stay near the cart. We are buying what is on the list today, so we are not going to ask for extra things. If you need my attention, use your words instead of pulling on me."

An older child may need a different conversation. Before a gathering, a parent might explain, "We will be around people you do not know well tonight. Make an effort to greet them and participate in the conversation. You do not need to be the loudest person in the room, but I want you to put your phone away and spend time with people."

These conversations provide direction without requiring a parent to control every detail of the child's behavior. The goal is to help children enter situations with understanding and responsibility. As they mature, they should increasingly recognize

what a wise response looks like without needing every expectation explained.

An effective Pre-Game Talk includes four elements: clear expectations, checking for understanding, encouragement and vision, and connection before action.

Clarity comes first. Parents should identify the few expectations that matter most rather than attempting to explain every possible rule. When a child is given twelve instructions in thirty seconds, the conversation can become difficult to remember and even harder to apply.

Checking for understanding comes next. With a younger child, a parent might ask, "Tell me what you need to remember when we go inside." This is more useful than simply asking whether the child understands, because most children will quickly answer yes.

Asking the child to explain the expectation provides an opportunity to discover whether the instruction was clear. If the child misunderstood, the parent can explain it differently before entering the situation. That small conversation may prevent a much longer correction later.

Encouragement and vision help establish the tone. A parent might say, "I know you can handle this,"

or, "You did really well with this last time." An older child may benefit from hearing, "You have been growing in the way you speak to people. Keep practicing that tonight."

These words remind children that their parents are preparing them for success rather than expecting failure. Encouragement can strengthen confidence and help children recognize the abilities and character they are developing. It should remain sincere, grounded in what is true, and appropriate to the child's maturity.

Connection before action completes the conversation. Parents should give the child enough attention to make the instruction meaningful. A reminder shouted while everyone is distracted may not accomplish much, especially when the child is already worried or uncertain about what lies ahead.

Taking a moment to look at the child, listen, and make sure the conversation is understood communicates care. It can also reveal concerns the parent had not considered. A child may admit that they do not know anyone at the gathering or that they are nervous about seeing someone with whom they recently had a disagreement.

Those concerns may change how the parent prepares them. A younger child might need reassurance that they can remain close for a

while. A teenager may need help considering how to respond if an uncomfortable conversation develops. Expectations remain important, but wisdom considers the person being asked to meet them.

A child can be nervous and still learn to act with courage. A teenager can anticipate an awkward interaction without allowing fear to determine every response. Parents can help their children recognize both the difficulty of a situation and the responsibility they have within it.

Proverbs describes wisdom as the ability to recognize approaching danger rather than walking into it without consideration.

"The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it."

Proverbs chapter twenty-two, verse three.

This proverb commends foresight. Wise people pay attention to what may lie ahead and respond appropriately rather than ignoring obvious risks. Parents can help children develop this awareness through preparation that considers what is likely to happen and what a faithful response may require.

If crowded stores regularly overwhelm a young child, prepare before entering the store. If bedtime

has become a daily struggle, address the transition before everyone is exhausted. If leaving a friend's house frequently produces conflict, explain the plan before arriving.

Older children face pressures that require a different kind of preparation. A teenager may encounter alcohol, sexual pressure, dishonesty, bullying, gossip, or an invitation to conceal something dangerous. Parents should not wait until after those situations occur to begin discussing how to respond.

The Pre-Game Talk changes as children mature. A five-year-old may need instruction about remaining near the cart, while a sixteen-year-old may need help considering what to do when friends begin making choices that violate biblical convictions. The situations become more complex, but the purpose remains the same.

Parents are helping children think clearly before pressure makes clear thinking more difficult.

Jesus regularly prepared His disciples for what lay ahead. He told them that following Him would involve opposition, suffering, and situations they would not immediately understand. His instruction gave them truth to remember when their circumstances became difficult.

Luke records a particularly personal example involving Peter. Before Peter denied knowing Jesus, the Lord warned him that serious testing was coming.

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat."

Luke chapter twenty-two, verse thirty-one.

Jesus understood the spiritual danger Peter would face. He also knew that Peter would fail, despite the disciple's confidence in his own faithfulness. His warning revealed that the coming pressure was serious and that Peter needed a deeper understanding of his weakness.

Preparation did not prevent Peter's failure.

That distinction matters for parents because preparation is not a technique that guarantees obedience. A child may understand an expectation and still make a poor choice. A teenager may know what Scripture teaches and respond differently when fear, desire, or social pressure becomes strong.

Preparation gives children truth and understanding to carry into a situation. It cannot remove their responsibility to choose how they will respond.

Jesus also spoke words of hope concerning Peter's future.

"But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Luke chapter twenty-two, verse thirty-two.

Jesus prepared Peter for both testing and the work that would follow his failure. The passage reveals Christ's care for His disciple and points toward the restoration Peter would later experience. Parents cannot possess Christ's knowledge of the future or fulfill His unique ministry, but they can learn from His attentiveness.

We prepare children because temptation and difficulty are real, knowing that they will sometimes fail. When that happens, the truth previously taught may help them acknowledge wrongdoing, return to what is right, and seek forgiveness and restoration.

Preparation also matters in less serious moments. Children need help learning how to move from one activity to another, particularly when they are deeply involved in something they enjoy. These transitions can create unnecessary conflict when parents assume that children should be able to shift immediately without any warning.

A child may be happily playing outside when a parent suddenly announces that dinner is ready. The instruction may be reasonable, and the child remains responsible for responding. Yet from the child's perspective, an enjoyable activity has ended without warning.

Wise parenting recognizes that transitions can require practice.

The Five-Minute Warning is a simple way to help children prepare for those changes. Before an activity ends, the parent provides a brief reminder that the next responsibility is approaching.

"Five more minutes, then it is time to come inside."

"In five minutes, screens are done."

"Five more minutes at the park, then we are leaving."

"We have five minutes before we need to put this away and get ready for bed."

These reminders do not change who carries authority. The parent still determines when the activity ends, but the child receives an opportunity to anticipate the transition. That small amount of preparation can help a child finish what they are doing and begin adjusting to what comes next.

This approach communicates respect without surrendering leadership. It recognizes that children are still developing their understanding of time and their ability to move between responsibilities. Parents are helping them practice a skill they will eventually need to manage independently.

Ecclesiastes describes human life as taking place within different times and seasons under God's providence.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."

Ecclesiastes chapter three, verse one.

The passage speaks about the varied experiences of life, including beginnings and endings, joy and sorrow, work and rest. Its larger teaching reminds us that people live within seasons they cannot completely control. Learning to receive and navigate change is part of human maturity.

Children encounter smaller versions of this reality every day. Playtime ends, meals begin, school starts, and bedtime arrives. They gradually learn that an enjoyable moment can end without making the next responsibility unfair or unreasonable.

The Five-Minute Warning provides a practical opportunity to begin developing that

understanding. A child can learn to finish a game, put something away, or prepare to leave while recognizing that another responsibility is approaching. The parent is gradually teaching the child to take ownership of the transition.

Eventually, this preparation should produce greater independence. An older child may recognize that practice begins in thirty minutes and begin getting ready without being reminded. A student may look ahead to a Friday deadline and choose to begin an assignment earlier in the week.

The warning used during childhood can become part of a broader habit of planning. Children learn to consider what is coming rather than depending entirely upon someone else to interrupt them at the proper moment.

Consistency is important, however, because warnings can become negotiations if parents do not follow through.

When a parent repeatedly says five more minutes and then extends the time because the child complains, the warning may begin teaching a different lesson. Instead of preparing for the transition, the child learns that the announced ending is the beginning of bargaining.

Parents should remain compassionate and reasonable, especially when circumstances change or a child needs additional support. Yet ordinary expectations become clearer when words can be trusted. A five-minute warning should generally mean that the activity will end when the announced time arrives.

When the time comes, the parent can calmly say, "Time is up. You knew this was coming. Let's go."

The child may still feel disappointed, and that disappointment can be acknowledged without changing the expectation. Over time, consistent follow-through helps children recognize that preparation is meant to assist obedience rather than delay it indefinitely.

Not every situation allows advance notice. Families are living relationships, and unexpected needs, emergencies, or changing circumstances sometimes require immediate action. The Five-Minute Warning is a useful practice rather than a rule that must govern every transition.

The broader principle is to lead ahead of the moment whenever possible.

As children move into adolescence, the particular tools may change while the need for preparation increases. A teenager may no longer need a

countdown before leaving the park, but that same young person needs greater wisdom for decisions involving relationships, technology, independence, and personal safety.

Parents should prepare children for situations they hope will never occur. What should a teenager do if someone sends sexually explicit material? What happens if friends begin drinking or pressuring others to participate in something dangerous? Who should a child contact if an adult violates a boundary or demands secrecy about something harmful?

These questions require age-appropriate conversations long before a crisis develops. Children should know which adults they can trust, how to ask for help, and what to do when they feel unsafe. The time to establish that understanding is before fear and confusion make the situation harder to navigate.

A parent may tell a teenager, "If you are ever somewhere you feel unsafe, call me. We will make sure you are safe, and then we can talk through what happened."

That promise creates a pathway for seeking help. It does not remove accountability for poor choices, but it communicates that safety and honesty matter more than avoiding an uncomfortable

conversation. A young person who knows where to turn may be more willing to reach out before a difficult situation becomes dangerous.

Parents can also help teenagers practice responses before pressure appears. They can discuss how to decline an invitation, leave an unsafe gathering, resist an inappropriate request, or tell a trusted adult when something serious has happened. These conversations are meant to provide wisdom, language, and a clear response when the need arises rather than create fear about every possible danger.

Children often depend upon familiar habits when they are under pressure. Preparation gives them opportunities to consider a faithful response while they are calm enough to think. Those practiced responses may become especially valuable when a decision must be made quickly.

This is why preparation belongs alongside correction and discipline. Correction helps children recognize what happened and learn a better response. Discipline addresses responsibility and restoration after wrongdoing. Preparation considers what lies ahead and helps children approach it with wisdom.

Each serves the larger work of formation. Parents teach before difficulty, correct when necessary,

help restore what has been damaged, and return to preparation as children continue growing.

Scripture repeatedly shows God instructing His people before they encounter difficulty. His Word warns about sin, teaches wisdom, calls for obedience, and reminds believers of His faithfulness. The Lord's instruction prepares His people to recognize what is true when circumstances challenge their understanding.

Jesus also prepared His disciples before sending them into ministry. He warned them about opposition, corrected their misunderstandings, and taught them to remain dependent upon Him. His preparation reached beyond the immediate situations they faced toward the responsibilities they would eventually carry.

Christian parents cannot reproduce the perfect wisdom of Jesus. We do not know every circumstance our children will encounter, and we cannot prepare them for every possibility. We can, however, follow His example of thoughtful instruction, truthful warnings, patient encouragement, and care for those entrusted to us.

Preparation requires us to pay attention. We learn what situations challenge our children, recognize the responsibilities approaching in their lives, and consider what guidance may be helpful before

those moments arrive. As they mature, we begin inviting them to participate more fully in that process.

A parent might ask an older child, "What do you think will be difficult about tomorrow?" or, "How do you want to respond if that happens?" These questions help the child begin identifying risks, considering expectations, and developing a plan rather than waiting for someone else to provide every answer.

The goal is increasing responsibility under Christ. We prepare children while they are young so that they can begin preparing themselves as they grow. Eventually, they must recognize what faithfulness requires when their parents are not present to explain it.

There will come a day when Mom or Dad is no longer available to give the Pre-Game Talk. The child will enter a room, face a difficult conversation, or encounter a moment of pressure without a parent standing nearby.

We want our sons and daughters to carry more than memories of household rules. We want them to know how to seek God's wisdom, remember His Word, consider what is right, and respond with faithfulness.

So before the gathering, talk. Before the transition, provide a warning when possible. Before temptation, teach the truth. Before a difficult season, help children consider what faithfulness may require.

Then give them opportunities to practice what they are learning.

Preparation cannot guarantee the choices our children will make, but it can give them wisdom to carry into moments when responsibility becomes their own. Parents continue pointing toward Jesus, who remains faithful when our ability to lead directly has reached its limits.

Our hope is that, when those moments arrive, our children will have learned to ask a question deeper than what Mom or Dad would want them to do.

They will begin asking what faithfulness to Jesus requires of them.

That is where preparation has always been leading.

Chapter Nine

Teach Them Who God Is

What a child believes about God will eventually shape almost everything else.

Those beliefs influence how children understand themselves, interpret suffering, respond to failure, recognize truth, and approach obedience. Long before they can explain theology or understand everything Scripture teaches, they are beginning to form a picture of who God is. That understanding will continue developing as they grow and encounter experiences that challenge what they believe.

Parents have an important place in that formation. We cannot give our children saving faith or produce spiritual life within them. We can teach what is true, answer questions honestly, open Scripture

together, and demonstrate through our lives what it means to trust the God we are teaching them to know.

Jesus placed the knowledge of God at the center of eternal life. In His prayer to the Father recorded in John chapter seventeen, He spoke about the relationship for which He had come to redeem His people.

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John chapter seventeen, verse three.

Knowing God involves more than knowing information about Him. It means coming to Him through Jesus Christ and living in the relationship made possible through His saving work. Christian parenting should continually direct children toward that relationship, helping them understand the God who has revealed Himself through Scripture and through His Son.

Children need a true understanding of God's character because mistaken beliefs about Him can influence everything built upon them. A child who believes God is pleased only when people perform perfectly may struggle to understand grace. Another who assumes God's love means

wrongdoing carries no consequence may fail to recognize the seriousness of sin.

Our responsibility is to teach what Scripture reveals, trusting the Lord to work in the hearts of our sons and daughters. Ten foundational truths can help parents carry that responsibility through the ordinary years of raising children. They belong together and should gradually become familiar through conversation, prayer, worship, instruction, and daily life.

The first truth is that God is good.

David's invitation in Psalm 34 calls people to experience the goodness of the Lord and recognize the blessing of taking refuge in Him.

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"

Psalm chapter thirty-four, verse eight.

Children will eventually experience circumstances that do not feel good. They will face disappointment, lose something they wanted, experience rejection, and discover that life does not always unfold according to their hopes. Some will encounter suffering that neither they nor their parents can easily explain.

Those experiences can raise difficult questions about God's character. A child may wonder why something painful happened or why a prayer was not answered in the way the family hoped. Parents should make room for those questions without rushing to provide explanations Scripture has not given.

God's goodness does not mean every circumstance will be pleasant. It means His character remains holy, wise, faithful, and trustworthy even when we cannot understand what He is doing. His goodness provides a foundation for trust without requiring us to pretend that suffering is insignificant.

A parent might say, "I do not know why this happened, but I know God is good." Another time, the more appropriate response may be, "I know this hurts. We can bring that pain to Him." Children need to see that trust in God can coexist with grief, uncertainty, and honest questions.

The second truth is that God loves them, and His love is most clearly revealed through Jesus Christ.

Children often encounter approval through achievement and performance. Good grades receive recognition, athletic success brings applause, and responsible behavior earns encouragement. These responses can have a proper place in childhood, but they should never

become the foundation of a child's understanding of God's love.

Paul explained the depth of God's love by directing attention to the death of Christ for sinners.

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans chapter five, verse eight.

The gospel begins with God's gracious action toward people who could not save themselves. Christ died for sinners, revealing a love that does not depend upon human achievement or worthiness. Parents should help children understand that God's love is greater than the approval people receive for successful behavior.

This teaching requires care. We can speak truthfully about God's love for children without implying that everyone automatically belongs to Christ or that sin does not matter. God's love is holy, and the salvation He provides through Jesus calls people to repentance and faith.

When a child fails, parents have an opportunity to explain this distinction. We can identify wrongdoing clearly while reminding the child that Jesus came to save sinners. A parent might say, "What you did was

wrong, and Jesus invites us to bring our sin into the light and turn to Him."

Our children should never believe that becoming good enough is the condition for approaching the Savior. They need to understand that Christ came because we need forgiveness and grace. His love gives hope to people who recognize that they cannot make themselves righteous before God.

The third truth is that God made them intentionally.

Psalm 139 describes God's intimate knowledge of human life, including His work in forming a person before birth. David responds to that knowledge with gratitude and worship.

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Psalm chapter one hundred thirty-nine, verse fourteen.

Children will eventually compare themselves with others. They may compare bodies, intelligence, athletic ability, popularity, personalities, possessions, and opportunities. As those comparisons become familiar, some children begin questioning whether they have enough value or whether becoming more like someone else would make them worthy of acceptance.

Parents can answer those pressures by returning to the dignity of human life. Every child bears God's image and possesses worth because of the Creator who made them. Their existence is not an accident, and their value does not depend upon how closely they resemble another person.

This truth should not be used to suggest that every desire, attitude, or personal inclination is automatically good. Humanity lives within a fallen world, and every person needs redemption and continuing formation under God's truth. Being created by God gives a person dignity while also establishing responsibility before Him.

Parents can help children recognize their gifts with gratitude. A son may demonstrate creativity, courage, patience, or an unusual capacity to solve problems. A daughter may show compassion, leadership, curiosity, perseverance, or a particular ability that becomes clearer as she grows.

These gifts deserve encouragement, but they should never become the child's ultimate identity. We recognize what has been entrusted while directing gratitude toward the Giver. Abilities may develop, change, or become limited through circumstances beyond our control, yet a person's worth remains grounded in God.

Purpose is also larger than discovering one perfect career or assignment. Our children may eventually serve through business, teaching, medicine, skilled trades, farming, parenting, ministry, the arts, or work we cannot yet imagine. Their responsibilities may change many times, while the deeper calling to know God, love Him, and serve others remains.

The fourth truth is that God's Word is true.

Children will encounter many voices claiming authority over what they should believe. Friends, teachers, coaches, entertainment, social media, and the surrounding culture will influence how they understand right and wrong. Some voices will affirm biblical truth, while others will challenge it.

Paul reminded Timothy of Scripture's divine origin and its usefulness in forming those who belong to God.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

Second Timothy chapter three, verse sixteen.

Scripture provides the foundation for understanding God's character, His purposes, the human condition, and the salvation He has accomplished through Jesus Christ. Its authority

reaches beyond personal opinion or changing cultural expectations because its origin is in God.

Children need to know where their family returns when important questions arise. We return to Scripture because we desire to understand what God has said. We study His Word carefully, consider its context, and seek wisdom for applying it faithfully.

Parents must submit themselves to the same authority. Scripture should never become a collection of verses used to win arguments or silence questions. Children should see their parents open the Bible because they genuinely need its instruction and are willing to change when God's Word corrects them.

Questions belong within that process. A child may ask why God gave a particular command, how a passage should be understood, or why Christians sometimes disagree. Parents do not need to pretend they know every answer.

Sometimes the most faithful response is, "I do not know yet. Let's study that together." Such honesty can demonstrate respect for Scripture and a willingness to keep learning. Children discover that their questions can become opportunities for deeper understanding rather than reasons to hide uncertainty.

The fifth truth is that God hears when His people pray.

Prayer should become a familiar part of Christian family life. Children should know they can bring fear, gratitude, confusion, excitement, shame, loneliness, and uncertainty before the Lord. They need to see that prayer belongs to daily dependence upon God rather than being reserved for emergencies or formal religious gatherings.

John connected confidence in prayer to the will of God when writing to believers about their relationship with Him.

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

First John chapter five, verse fourteen.

The promise is connected to God's will. Prayer is not a method of forcing God to produce the outcome we desire, and carefully chosen words do not give us control over His decisions. We pray because He invites His people to depend upon Him and because we trust His wisdom.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father, honor His name, seek His kingdom, ask for daily provision, confess sin, forgive others, and

seek protection from temptation. These priorities give children a pattern they can begin learning long before they understand every theological implication of prayer.

A young child may begin with simple words: "God, help me," or "Thank You for today." Another prayer might be, "Please forgive me," or "Help my friend." As children mature, their prayers can become more thoughtful, reflecting a growing understanding of God's character and their responsibility before Him.

Let children hear their parents pray when wisdom is needed. Pray before difficult conversations, during seasons of uncertainty, and after receiving something good. When a prayer is not answered as expected, help children continue trusting God rather than assuming He was absent or unwilling to listen.

Prayer teaches dependence. We bring our needs before the Lord because we recognize that we cannot carry life faithfully through our own understanding and strength.

The sixth truth must remain unmistakable: Jesus is the only way to the Father.

Christianity cannot be reduced to teaching children kindness, honesty, self-control, or other worthy qualities. Those responsibilities matter, but they

cannot reconcile sinners to God. The gospel announces what Jesus Christ has accomplished for people who could never save themselves.

During His final conversations with the disciples before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke directly about His identity and the only way of coming to the Father.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John chapter fourteen, verse six.

Every person has sinned and needs reconciliation with God. Good behavior, religious activity, church attendance, family heritage, and personal achievement cannot remove that separation. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ, who lived in perfect obedience to the Father, gave His life for our sins, and rose from the dead.

Parents should explain these truths clearly and return to them throughout childhood. Children need to understand who Jesus is, why His death was necessary, what His resurrection accomplished, and why He calls people to repent, believe, and follow Him.

A child may know familiar Bible stories and still need help understanding the gospel. Another may repeat Christian language without yet recognizing

the personal significance of trusting Christ. Parents should make room for those conversations rather than assuming that growing up in a Christian home is the same as belonging to Jesus.

Our deepest prayer reaches beyond wanting children who adopt our values or maintain familiar religious practices. We want our sons and daughters to know the Savior, receive His grace, and follow Him throughout their lives.

The seventh truth belongs beside the gospel: the Holy Spirit lives in those who belong to Christ.

Christian discipleship cannot be sustained through determination alone. Believers need the continuing work of God's Spirit as they learn to understand Scripture, resist sin, grow in holiness, and live faithfully under the authority of Jesus.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit, whom they had received from God.

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

First Corinthians chapter six, verse nineteen.

This truth must be taught in connection with faith in Jesus. We should never tell every child automatically

that the Holy Spirit dwells within them simply because they are young, attend church, or have Christian parents. Scripture connects the indwelling Spirit with those who belong to Christ.

For a son or daughter who has trusted Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit is a remarkable gift. God has not left His people to follow Him through their own strength. His Spirit continues working within believers, producing fruit, convicting them of sin, strengthening faith, and helping them walk in truth.

Parents should also teach discernment. Every strong feeling, personal desire, or sudden thought should not automatically be described as the leading of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is holy and does not contradict the truth He has revealed through Scripture.

Children can learn to pray for wisdom, examine their desires, respond to conviction, and seek counsel from mature believers. They should be encouraged to depend upon the Holy Spirit while remaining grounded in God's Word. His presence gives comfort and help without removing the responsibility to test what they believe.

The eighth truth is that God can be trusted with the future.

Children naturally begin imagining what lies ahead. They wonder where they will live, what work they will do, whom they will marry, what opportunities they will receive, and whether the future will unfold the way they hope. As they grow older, those possibilities may become sources of excitement or anxiety.

Jeremiah recorded God's promise to His people while they were facing the difficult reality of exile.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Jeremiah chapter twenty-nine, verse eleven.

These words were spoken to God's covenant people within a particular historical circumstance. They assured the exiles of His continuing purposes despite the suffering and uncertainty they were experiencing. They were not a promise that every individual believer would enjoy an easy life, financial prosperity, or the future they personally imagined.

The larger truth about God's faithfulness remains important. He is sovereign, sees beyond our limited understanding, and remains able to accomplish His purposes through circumstances we would never have chosen.

Parents should help children learn how to approach the future with responsible planning and open hands. Instead of asking only what they want to become when they grow up, we can also ask how they might faithfully use what God has given them.

A child may eventually become a teacher, business owner, tradesperson, physician, farmer, missionary, artist, coach, parent, or something the family never anticipated. These assignments matter, but none of them carries the responsibility of giving life its ultimate meaning.

Our children need to know that the call to follow Jesus remains even when circumstances change. They can work diligently, make thoughtful plans, seek counsel, and trust the Lord when doors open or close. Faithfulness matters in every season, including those that turn out differently from what they expected.

The ninth truth is that God calls His people to love and serve others.

Children naturally begin life depending upon others to meet their needs. As they grow, maturity helps them recognize that the people around them also have needs, burdens, and responsibilities. Learning to serve becomes part of learning to love.

Jesus gave His disciples the clearest example of service when He explained the purpose of His coming and the kind of leadership that should characterize those who follow Him.

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark chapter ten, verse forty-five.

Jesus' service reached its highest expression through His sacrificial death. His life was given as a ransom, accomplishing a saving work that no other person could provide. The same passage also challenges His disciples to turn away from self-centered ambition and learn to serve others.

Parents can begin teaching service within the ordinary responsibilities of the home. Children can help a sibling, carry something for a grandparent, clean a shared space, welcome someone who feels excluded, or offer assistance without expecting something in return.

These habits help children recognize that life involves more than meeting their personal desires. They are learning to notice people, respond to needs, and use their abilities for the good of others.

As children mature, their understanding of service can expand. They may serve in the church, help

neighbors, participate in community needs, or discover opportunities to care for people in other parts of the world. Parents can encourage them to recognize needs across the street and across the sea.

Service becomes an expression of discipleship when love moves toward another person. We serve because Jesus has loved us and calls His people to reflect His character through the way they live.

The tenth truth is that God does not abandon His people.

Every parent eventually discovers the limits of their physical presence. A young child goes to school without us, a teenager begins driving, and a son or daughter gradually builds a life that is no longer organized around our daily direction. We cannot enter every room, hear every conversation, or remain beside our children through every difficulty.

God's presence provides a deeper source of confidence for those who belong to Him. Hebrews draws upon the Lord's enduring faithfulness to encourage believers to live with contentment and trust.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Hebrews chapter thirteen, verse five.

The promise rests upon God's faithfulness to His people. It does not mean Christians will never experience loneliness, disappointment, grief, or fear. It means that the Lord remains present and faithful through circumstances in which human support may be limited or absent.

For the child who belongs to Christ, this truth provides lasting encouragement. God remains faithful when friendships become difficult, when fear rises, when circumstances change, and when a believer must return to Him after failure.

Parents cannot provide that kind of presence. We can remain available, offer wisdom, pray, and encourage our children throughout their lives. Eventually, however, they must learn to depend upon the Lord in ways that reach beyond what we can provide.

This is one reason teaching children who God is matters so deeply. Their understanding of His character must become larger than the immediate experience of home. We want them to know the One who remains faithful when our ability to guide them directly has reached its limits.

These ten truths should become part of the language and life of the home rather than another checklist children must memorize to earn approval. Each truth gives families something to return to

when ordinary experiences provide opportunities for instruction.

Talk about God's goodness when life becomes disappointing. Return to His love when failure brings shame, and remind children of His design when comparison begins shaping how they see themselves. Open Scripture when questions arise, pray when wisdom is needed, and keep Jesus central when Christianity begins feeling like a collection of rules.

Teach children about the Holy Spirit as the One who helps believers walk faithfully with Christ. Encourage trust when the future is uncertain, practice service when selfishness would be easier, and remember God's faithfulness when someone feels alone.

Most importantly, live these truths.

Children notice whether parents speak about God's goodness while responding to every difficulty as though He cannot be trusted. They notice whether Scripture is treated as authoritative only when its teaching supports what the parent already wants. They also recognize whether prayer, repentance, worship, and service are genuine parts of family life.

Parents do not need to manufacture a picture of perfect faith. We need to remain faithful disciples

who depend upon Jesus. Let children see us return to Scripture because we need its truth, seek forgiveness because we have sinned, and pray because we need wisdom beyond our own understanding.

As our children grow, they will begin examining what they have been taught. They will encounter competing beliefs, difficult questions, and experiences that challenge their understanding of God. Parents cannot determine every conclusion their children will reach or make the decision to trust Christ on their behalf.

We can teach them the truth about God as He has revealed Himself, answer their questions honestly, and build a home where His Word is taken seriously and His grace is received with gratitude.

The God we teach our children to know is good, holy, loving, truthful, and faithful. He has made Himself known through Scripture and most fully through His Son, Jesus Christ. He calls sinners to repentance and faith, gives His Spirit to those who belong to Him, and leads His people into lives of obedience, love, and service.

Teach these truths and live beneath them.

Keep bringing your children to Jesus, because before they understand who they are, they need to know who He is.

Chapter Ten

Tell Them Who They Are

Every child is learning a story about themselves.

They are learning whether they are valuable, whether they are wanted, what makes them worthy of attention, and what they should do when they fail. They are discovering what strength looks like, what beauty means, and whether their bodies are gifts to receive or problems to solve. They are also learning how much importance to place upon the opinions of other people.

Parents are among the first voices helping shape that understanding. Long before friends, teachers, coaches, social media, and the surrounding culture become powerful influences, children are listening at home. They hear what is said directly to them, but

they also hear what parents say about themselves and one another.

Self-image develops through these experiences. A child gradually begins forming beliefs about personal worth, ability, appearance, and belonging. Those beliefs can influence the way the child approaches relationships, accepts responsibility, responds to failure, and understands the future.

Scripture recognizes the extraordinary influence words can carry. Proverbs connects speech with consequences that reach far beyond the moment in which something is said.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

Proverbs chapter eighteen, verse twenty-one.

Words can encourage, correct, comfort, strengthen, embarrass, or wound. The things children hear repeatedly can become familiar ways of understanding themselves and the people around them. This places significant responsibility upon parents, whose words often carry unusual weight during a child's earliest years.

Parents cannot determine everything a child will eventually believe about themselves. Children will encounter influences outside the home, interpret experiences differently, and make decisions their

parents cannot control. Yet the language of the home can provide a foundation that helps them recognize what is true when those other voices become louder.

Children begin carrying questions of identity before they know how to express them. Am I valuable? Do I belong? Is something wrong with me? Do I have what it takes? What makes someone worthy of love?

They look for answers through the attention they receive, the praise they hear, and the way adults respond when something goes wrong. A child notices whether affection remains steady after disappointment and whether failure becomes an opportunity to learn or a reason for humiliation. Children also observe what their parents admire in other people, revealing which qualities seem to matter most.

Perhaps one of the most influential things children hear is the way adults speak about themselves.

Jesus taught that our words reveal something about what has taken root within the heart. In Luke chapter six, He connected the things people say with the condition of their inner lives.

"For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Luke chapter six, verse forty-five.

A mother may look in the mirror and criticize her body without realizing her daughter is listening. A father may make a mistake and immediately call himself stupid or say that he never does anything right. Those comments may disappear from the parent's mind within minutes, while the child continues remembering them.

A daughter may begin believing that a woman should constantly evaluate whether her appearance measures up. A son may begin thinking that a man's worth rises and falls with competence, strength, success, or the ability to avoid failure. Neither lesson may have been intentional, yet the child's understanding is being shaped.

Healthy self-talk does not require pretending everything about ourselves is wonderful. It means learning to speak truthfully about ourselves before God. Parents can recognize weakness, acknowledge mistakes, and pursue growth without treating those realities as evidence that they have lost their worth.

A father might say, "I wish I had handled that differently, and I am going to learn from it." A mother can care about her health without speaking hatred over her body. Both can recognize personal limitations without allowing those limitations to determine their identity.

Humility makes room for an honest assessment of ourselves, while gratitude recognizes the goodness of what God has given. These qualities belong together because we have reason to acknowledge weakness and reason to receive our lives with thankfulness. Children benefit from watching adults practice both.

Psalm 139 provides a foundation for understanding human life through the work of the Creator. David responds to God's intimate knowledge and care with praise.

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Psalm chapter one hundred thirty-nine, verse fourteen.

This truth gives children something deeper than confidence. Every human being possesses dignity because every person has been created by God and bears His image. Worth begins with the Creator rather than with the approval, accomplishments, or abilities of the person He has made.

The opening chapter of Genesis establishes that dignity before any human achievement enters the story.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Genesis chapter one, verse twenty-seven.

A child does not earn human dignity through grades, athletic ability, personality, appearance, popularity, intelligence, usefulness, or good behavior. That dignity remains when abilities change, accomplishments disappear, or others fail to recognize the person's value. It belongs to every human being because God made humanity in His image.

Parents should speak from that foundation. Tell your children that God made them and that their lives have value before Him. Teach them to receive their bodies as gifts and to recognize that the opinions of other people do not determine their worth.

These truths become especially important as children grow up surrounded by messages about appearance. They will see bodies compared, edited, displayed, judged, celebrated, and criticized. They may begin evaluating themselves according to an image that changes with whatever happens to be admired.

The home should teach something different. Our bodies are gifts to steward, and health, food, movement, rest, and personal care deserve responsible attention. None of these should become the foundation of a person's identity.

Parents can encourage healthy eating without creating fear around food. A family can value exercise without making physical appearance the measure of success. Children can learn to dress with dignity and care without believing that clothing determines their worth.

The example parents provide becomes important in these ordinary decisions. If every meal includes anxiety about calories, a child notices. If exercise is continually accompanied by expressions of hatred toward the body, a child notices that too. When appearance becomes the first thing praised or criticized in other people, children begin learning what the adults around them consider valuable.

A different pattern grows through gratitude. Parents can speak about food as provision, movement as an ability to receive thankfully, and rest as a necessary part of caring for the life God has given. They can acknowledge physical limitations without treating their bodies with contempt.

Personal presentation also communicates something. Getting dressed, practicing good

hygiene, and preparing responsibly for the day can teach children that caring for themselves is worthwhile. These habits need not become vanity or pressure to look perfect. They can express a desire to steward what God has entrusted.

Children need that balance. They should learn neither obsession nor neglect, developing healthy habits without allowing outward appearance to become the center of their lives. Character carries greater weight than style, and dignity remains when someone does not meet the standards of beauty promoted around them.

Proverbs describes this distinction when celebrating the character of a woman whose life is marked by wisdom and faithfulness.

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."

Proverbs chapter thirty-one, verse thirty.

The passage does not teach that physical beauty is evil. It directs attention toward the lasting significance of a life lived in reverence for God. Parents can help children appreciate beauty without confusing it with the qualities that make someone worthy of respect.

This becomes particularly important in the way parents speak to daughters.

A girl watches her mother and listens to how she talks about her body, aging, abilities, responsibilities, emotions, and worth. Her mother's example may become one of the first pictures she receives of how a woman understands herself. If that example is marked by continual criticism, the daughter may begin learning the same language.

A mother who lives with gratitude, humility, strength, and grace offers another picture. She can work diligently, care for herself, acknowledge difficulty, and remain willing to learn. Her daughter sees that becoming a woman does not require flawless appearance, constant achievement, or pretending that weakness does not exist.

A daughter is also listening to her father. She notices what he praises in women and how he treats her mother. If his comments focus almost entirely on appearance, she may begin believing beauty is what makes a woman valuable.

A father can communicate something deeper by honoring his wife's wisdom, compassion, courage, faithfulness, humor, perseverance, and strength. Those expressions help his daughter recognize qualities that deserve admiration. They also teach

his son something about how women should be valued.

A father has opportunities to speak those same truths directly to his daughter. Tell her she is beautiful, but also recognize when she demonstrates wisdom, kindness, creativity, courage, endurance, conviction, or compassion. Encourage what is developing within her rather than allowing appearance to become the most familiar subject of affirmation.

His words matter, but they must eventually direct her toward a foundation stronger than parental approval. A father cannot become the source of his daughter's ultimate identity. His love and affirmation should help her recognize the dignity God has given her and encourage her to seek her deepest security in Him.

The same responsibility takes a different shape with sons.

A boy often watches his father to understand what becoming a man might look like. He observes how Dad carries responsibility, what happens when Dad succeeds, and how he responds when something does not go as planned. He also notices whether strength is used to serve others or to demand recognition.

When a father measures himself continually by income, influence, winning, physical strength, or accomplishment, his son may begin believing manhood is something that must always be proved. Failure becomes threatening because it seems to challenge the person's value rather than reveal something that needs attention.

A father can offer another picture. He can work hard without making work his identity and carry responsibility without pretending he has no weakness. He can provide faithfully while acknowledging that God remains the true Provider.

He can admit when he needs help, confess wrongdoing, and demonstrate that strength and humility belong together. His son begins recognizing that manhood involves faithful responsibility rather than the need to appear impressive.

A mother also influences the way a boy learns to understand himself. He hears how she speaks about his father and the qualities she recognizes in men. Her words can contribute to an understanding of manhood marked by either contempt or dignity.

A mother who expresses gratitude for her husband's faithfulness, service, integrity, courage, patience, or sacrifice demonstrates honor before her children. She need not pretend that her

husband has no weaknesses or avoid speaking truthfully when something is wrong. Respect and honesty can exist together within a healthy relationship.

The same is true in the other direction. A husband who speaks about his wife with gratitude helps his sons understand how women should be honored and gives his daughters an example of how healthy love can sound. Children begin learning about themselves while listening to the language their parents use about one another.

Marriage language often becomes identity language within the home. Children notice the characteristics their parents admire and the weaknesses they treat with contempt. Those attitudes can influence what sons and daughters eventually believe about becoming men and women themselves.

Parents must also be careful about the labels they place upon their children.

A family may begin describing one child as the smart one, another as the athlete, another as the shy one, and another as the difficult one. These descriptions may begin casually, but repeated labels can become expectations children believe they must fulfill.

The smart child may become afraid to fail because intelligence has become a source of approval. The athletic child may wonder who they are when an injury ends a season or their abilities no longer distinguish them. A child continually described as difficult may begin expecting conflict because everyone seems to have decided what kind of person they are.

Even positive labels can become burdens when they begin carrying identity. A child may feel pressure to remain the responsible one or the successful one, fearing that an ordinary mistake will threaten the place they hold within the family.

Parents can describe behavior without making it the permanent name of the person. "You handled that irresponsibly" is different from "You are irresponsible." Saying, "You told a lie," identifies wrongdoing without insisting that dishonesty is the child's final identity.

"This is something you need to grow in" provides a clear expectation while leaving room for formation. Children still need correction, and parents should never minimize serious behavior simply to protect a child's feelings. The goal is to address wrongdoing truthfully without allowing yesterday's failure to become tomorrow's expectation.

Jesus encountered people whom others had reduced to their reputations. Tax collectors were known through the contempt of their communities, sinners were often approached through public judgment, and Peter's denial could have become the defining event of his future. Jesus did not treat wrongdoing lightly, yet He called people to repentance, restored the fallen, and invited them into a life that could be changed through His grace.

Parents can learn from this pattern. Tell the truth about what happened and help children take responsibility. Then continue pointing toward the faithful character they are being called to develop.

There is another distinction that must remain clear when we teach children about identity.

Every child bears the image of God. Every child therefore possesses dignity and deserves love, protection, and respect. That truth applies before a child has responded to the gospel and remains true regardless of personal abilities, circumstances, or accomplishments.

Scripture also describes blessings that belong specifically to those who have received Jesus Christ through faith. Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, adoption into His family, union with Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit are not

automatic consequences of being raised in a Christian home.

John makes the relationship between receiving Christ and becoming a child of God clear within the opening chapter of his Gospel.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

John chapter one, verse twelve.

Parents should not tell their children that they are saved simply because their family follows Jesus. Nor should children be given assurance of new spiritual life apart from the repentance and faith to which the gospel calls them. Our responsibility is to teach the truth clearly and invite them to respond to Christ.

We can explain that they were made by God and bear His image. Their lives possess dignity because He created them, but sin is real, and every person needs a Savior. Jesus came for sinners, lived in perfect obedience, died for our sins, and rose again.

Through Him, those who believe are forgiven, reconciled to God, and welcomed into His family. This is a stronger foundation than generic self-esteem because it reveals the truth about our Creator, our need for grace, and the new life made possible through Christ.

For a child who belongs to Jesus, identity begins settling somewhere deeper than performance.

Paul describes the believer's new life as belonging securely to Christ.

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Colossians chapter three, verse three.

The Christian child's deepest identity is not athlete, musician, student, popular child, outsider, achiever, failure, or the gifted one. Those descriptions may speak to abilities, experiences, or circumstances, but they cannot carry the full meaning of a life that belongs to Jesus.

Success can be received with gratitude without becoming identity. Failure can be faced honestly without becoming the final word. The opinions of other people may deserve consideration, but they should never become the ultimate authority over who a person is.

Even the words of Mom and Dad must eventually take their proper place.

Parents should bless, affirm, encourage, and speak truth. Their words can strengthen a child's understanding and help establish healthy confidence. Yet the goal is to help children stand

upon something stronger than the continuing approval of their parents.

A daughter should be grateful for her father's affirmation without requiring his praise to believe she has worth. A son should value his mother's respect without depending upon it as the final measure of who he is. The words parents speak should become bridges toward the truth of God's Word.

This becomes important as children grow and encounter new questions. Who am I when I fail? What happens when someone rejects me or when my body changes? Who am I when I am no longer the best at something I once did well?

These questions become more personal as children begin making decisions and carrying responsibilities beyond the home. Parents cannot answer every version of them in advance, but they can provide a foundation through the truth they teach and the example they live.

Tell your children they were created by God and bear His image. Teach them that their bodies are worthy of stewardship and their abilities are gifts to receive rather than gods to serve. Their failures can be brought into the light, and their achievements cannot save them.

Above all, teach them their need for Jesus. If they belong to Christ, their deepest identity rests in Him, and the responsibilities of life can be carried from that foundation.

Then live those truths before them.

Let a daughter hear her mother speak about herself with gratitude rather than contempt. Let a son watch his father acknowledge failure without collapsing into shame. Let children hear Mom and Dad honor one another while remaining honest about the responsibilities and difficulties of family life.

Show them that bodies deserve care without being worshiped, that work deserves diligence without becoming identity, and that success can be enjoyed without becoming the measure of a person's worth. Let repentance, gratitude, grace, and the gospel remain familiar within the ordinary language of the home.

Children will spend years hearing voices tell them who they should be. Some will offer useful instruction, while others will invite comparison, fear, pride, or confusion. The voice of a parent will not always be the loudest, but it can give them truth to recognize and return to.

Tell your children who God made them to be, and keep pointing them toward the new life found in Jesus Christ.

Their worth begins with their Creator. Their deepest security, if they belong to Christ, rests in their Savior.

Chapter Eleven

Prepare Them for When

There are conversations parents wish they never had to have.

We would rather believe our children will never encounter pornography, face sexual pressure, be offered something harmful, or be asked to lie for a friend. We hope they will never question what they believe or make a decision that leaves them deeply ashamed. Those hopes come from love, but faithful parenting cannot be built upon the assumption that difficult moments will never arrive.

Our children are growing up in a fallen world. They will encounter things that are wrong, confusing, tempting, and sometimes frightening. Some of those experiences will find them before they go

looking for them, and others will arise as they begin exercising greater freedom and responsibility.

Wisdom prepares children before those moments arrive.

Proverbs describes the importance of guarding the heart because what takes root within us influences the direction of our lives.

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Proverbs chapter four, verse twenty-three.

Guarding the heart requires awareness and discernment. Parents can establish boundaries, supervise technology, know their children's friends, and make thoughtful decisions about what enters the home. These responsibilities matter because children need protection while their understanding and judgment are still developing.

Eventually, however, they will stand in places where those protections are not immediately present. Someone may show them something inappropriate, invite them into a dangerous situation, or pressure them to violate a conviction. A desire may arise, a difficult question may appear, and a decision will need to be made without a parent standing nearby.

The deeper work of parenting prepares them for that moment.

This is why some of our most important conversations should begin with when rather than if. When you encounter something sexually explicit, here is what you should do. When someone pressures you to participate in something wrong, here is how you can respond. When you make a mistake, here is where you can turn for help.

The same approach applies to spiritual questions. When you begin wondering whether something you have been taught is true, bring that question into the light. When you experience confusion or doubt, you do not need to hide it from the people who love you.

These conversations communicate something important. Temptation and difficult questions do not mean a child has become uniquely bad or that something has gone terribly wrong simply because a struggle has appeared. They are opportunities to seek wisdom, respond faithfully, and depend upon God.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that temptation was part of their shared human experience. He warned them against overconfidence while directing their attention toward God's faithfulness.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."

First Corinthians chapter ten, verse thirteen.

Temptation is real, and it reaches people in different ways. Jesus Himself experienced temptation during His earthly life, yet He remained without sin. His example establishes an important distinction between being tempted and yielding to temptation.

Children need to understand that difference. A thought can appear without becoming an action, and a desire can arise without determining the response. Someone may encounter an inappropriate image accidentally or experience pressure without choosing to participate in what is being offered.

If children confuse temptation with already having failed, shame may begin before wrongdoing has occurred. A teenager might experience attraction, curiosity, fear, or an unwanted thought and immediately believe something is wrong with them. That conclusion can make honesty more difficult and encourage secrecy when guidance is needed.

Parents can offer a better response. Bring the concern into the light, speak truthfully about what happened, and seek wisdom about the next step. When something is drawing a child toward sin, help

them recognize how to move away from it and toward what is right.

Paul's teaching about temptation continues by reminding believers that God's faithfulness provides a way to endure rather than surrender.

"But with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape."

First Corinthians chapter ten, verse thirteen.

The surrounding passage calls believers to take temptation seriously while trusting God's faithfulness. It does not promise that every difficult circumstance will disappear or that faithful choices will always feel easy. It teaches that temptation does not leave God's people without the responsibility or possibility of resisting sin.

This promise must not be applied to a person being abused, exploited, threatened, or harmed. Temptation to commit sin and suffering harm through another person's wrongdoing are different experiences. A child who is harmed has not failed to find a promised escape, and responsibility belongs to the person who committed the harm.

When children face temptation, a wise response may involve remembering Scripture, praying, seeking counsel, or recognizing that a particular

desire conflicts with God's Word. At other times, the appropriate action is remarkably practical.

Leave the room. Put down the phone. Block the account. Call Dad. Text Mom. Find a trustworthy adult. Refuse to get into the car. Come home.

Wisdom learns to recognize the exit.

Parents should help children identify those responses before they need them. This is especially important when discussing sexual temptation and inappropriate material, which children may encounter much earlier than parents expect.

Exposure can happen through another child, a phone, an unexpected message, an online search, a social platform, or something that appears accidentally. The child may not have been seeking the material and may not understand what they have seen. The experience can produce curiosity, confusion, fear, embarrassment, or a desire to look again.

What happens afterward matters.

A child who believes disclosure will lead to humiliation may decide that hiding is safer. Secrecy can allow confusion and shame to grow, and it may create circumstances in which repeated exposure or harmful behavior continues without guidance.

Parents should establish one message long before such an encounter occurs.

You can tell me.

That assurance does not mean there will never be boundaries, accountability, or difficult conversations. It means a child should never believe that bringing a troubling experience into the light will cost them the love and protection of their family.

A parent might say, "If someone shows you something sexual, or something inappropriate appears on a device, come tell me. You do not have to understand everything you saw, and you do not have to carry it alone. We will talk about what happened and help you know what to do."

The words should be simple enough for the child's age and sincere enough to be trusted. Parents must then honor the assurance they have given by responding with attention and wisdom when a child comes forward.

If the exposure was accidental, the child should not be treated as though they deliberately sought wrongdoing. If a pattern of intentional behavior has developed, parents need to address it honestly and establish appropriate boundaries. In either circumstance, the goal is to understand what

happened, protect the child, and provide truthful guidance.

Children also need to understand the dignity of their bodies and the importance of personal boundaries.

We have already considered the body as a gift from God. That truth has implications for how children treat themselves and how other people are permitted to treat them. Their bodies deserve care, protection, and respect.

Paul's instruction to the Corinthians treats sexual sin with particular seriousness.

"Flee from sexual immorality."

First Corinthians chapter six, verse eighteen.

Sometimes faithfulness requires leaving rather than remaining near temptation while assuming we can resist indefinitely. Children need to learn that moving away from harmful situations can be an expression of wisdom and strength.

As they grow, parents should teach honestly about God's design for sexuality. Within the biblical understanding of marriage, sexual union belongs within the covenant relationship of a husband and wife. It involves the body, desire, intimacy, trust, vulnerability, and the possibility of creating life.

Scripture treats sexuality seriously because it is significant. Parents do not need to communicate that sex is dirty or shameful in order to teach purity. God created the human body and established marriage, and His instruction calls people to honor His design.

These conversations should mature with the child.

Young children need understandable language about their bodies, privacy, appropriate touch, and personal boundaries. They should know that no adult or older child has permission to violate those boundaries or demand secrecy about inappropriate contact. They also need to know whom they can tell when something makes them uncomfortable or unsafe.

Older children need honest instruction about puberty, attraction, sexual desire, pornography, technology, and the importance of wise boundaries. They should understand that curiosity is not a reason to abandon discernment and that material encountered online may distort their understanding of intimacy and relationships.

Teenagers need increasingly direct conversations about dating, physical boundaries, emotional intimacy, consent, coercion, pressure, and the responsibility to treat other people with dignity. They should understand that another person's

body is never theirs to use or control and that no relationship gives someone permission to violate another person's boundaries.

These discussions should be truthful, age-appropriate, and ongoing. Parents should avoid communicating unnecessary fear while also refusing to leave important questions unanswered. Silence does not protect children when it allows other voices to become their primary teachers.

Children also need to understand that responsibility belongs to the person who commits wrongdoing. If someone has been pressured, exploited, touched inappropriately, or abused, that harm is not the child's fault. Their immediate need is protection, reassurance, and appropriate help, rather than a lesson about how they should have responded differently.

Parents must make that distinction unmistakably clear. Biblical teaching about purity must never become a reason to blame someone who has been harmed or to conceal abuse within a family, church, or community. Safety, truth, and proper intervention take priority.

The same careful preparation is needed for peer pressure.

Every child eventually experiences the desire to belong. Friendships provide companionship, encouragement, and opportunities to grow, but the longing for acceptance can also make it difficult to stand apart when others choose what is wrong.

A teenager may understand that an action violates biblical convictions and still feel drawn to participate because saying no could cost a friendship or social standing. The fear of being excluded can become powerful when belonging feels closely connected to personal worth.

Paul called the Roman believers to resist being shaped by the surrounding world and instead be transformed through the renewal of their minds.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Romans chapter twelve, verse two.

Following Jesus will sometimes place our children out of step with the people around them. They may encounter moments when everyone else laughs at something cruel, participates in dishonesty, or chooses behavior they know is wrong. Faithfulness may require them to make a different decision.

Parents should explain this before the pressure arrives. Children can learn that disagreement does

not require arrogance and that conviction does not authorize contempt. A teenager can refuse something wrong while continuing to treat others with dignity.

Sometimes the clearest responses are also the simplest.

"I'm not doing that."

"I'm leaving."

"That's not something I want to be part of."

Children can practice saying these words aloud. A response that sounds simple during a family conversation may become difficult to find when friends are watching and expectations are rising. Practice makes the language more familiar before it is needed.

Parents can ask, "What would you say if your friends wanted you to do this?" Allow the child to answer, consider whether the response is clear, and practice again when necessary.

This is another application of the Pre-Game Talk. The circumstances are more serious, but the principle is familiar. We identify what may happen, explain what faithfulness requires, and give children an opportunity to consider their response before the moment arrives.

A plan for leaving is just as important as knowing what to say.

Teenagers should understand that their safety matters more than avoiding an uncomfortable conversation with their parents. If a situation becomes dangerous, they need a clear way to reach someone who can help.

"If you feel unsafe, call me."

"If someone has been drinking and is supposed to drive, do not get into the vehicle."

"If things begin happening at a gathering that you were not expecting, leave."

"If you need me to come get you, I will come."

These assurances establish an order of responsibility. Get safe, tell the truth, and then work through what happened. There may still be consequences if the teenager made poor choices, but those conversations should follow the immediate work of protection.

Parents need to mean what they say. A promise of help becomes less useful if a child believes that reaching out will produce a response so frightening that remaining in danger feels safer.

Children should also know which adults they can approach when Mom or Dad is unavailable. A grandparent, teacher, pastor, coach, family friend, or ministry leader may become part of that circle, provided the adults are genuinely trustworthy and appropriate for the responsibility.

Parents should identify those people intentionally rather than assuming children already know whom to contact. Discuss how to reach them and what to do if the first person does not answer or respond appropriately. Children should understand that they may continue seeking help until someone takes their concern seriously.

Preparation also matters when children begin asking difficult questions about faith.

Parents sometimes fear doubt because they assume every question signals the beginning of unbelief. Yet questions may arise from confusion, intellectual growth, painful experiences, or a genuine desire to understand what has been taught.

Children may wonder how we know God exists, why He allows suffering, or whether Scripture can be trusted. They may ask why Jesus is the only way to the Father or why the Bible teaches against something that seems natural or acceptable to the people around them.

These questions should not automatically be treated as rebellion.

Scripture contains examples of people bringing uncertainty, grief, and honest questions before God. Thomas struggled to believe the testimony of the resurrection, and Jesus met him in that struggle. Another man approached Jesus while wrestling with the weakness of his own faith.

"I believe; help my unbelief!"

Mark chapter nine, verse twenty-four.

The father was asking Jesus to help his suffering son while acknowledging his own struggle to believe. Jesus did not require him to pretend his faith was stronger than it was. The encounter shows the importance of bringing need and weakness directly to Christ.

Parents can cultivate a home where questions may be spoken honestly. Sometimes the faithful answer is, "I don't know yet, but we can study that together." At other times, parents may need to seek guidance from a pastor, a knowledgeable teacher, or another mature Christian who can help address the question carefully.

Children should learn that Christian faith need not avoid honest investigation. Scripture invites serious

study, and parents do not need to pretend that every difficult question has an easy answer.

There remains a distinction between a genuine desire for understanding and questions used primarily to avoid obedience. Some children may resist a clear teaching because they do not want to follow it. Others may be struggling to reconcile an experience with what they believe Scripture says.

Wisdom listens carefully enough to recognize the difference. Parents should avoid assuming rebellion before understanding what the child is actually asking. The goal remains to guide the child toward truth and encourage a sincere response to Jesus.

Preparation must also include failure.

This may be one of the most important conversations a family can have. When our children sin, make a serious mistake, or become involved in something they know is wrong, what should they do next?

Scripture does not leave room for the assumption that human beings will live without sin. Paul explained the universal need for God's grace in his letter to the Romans.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans chapter three, verse twenty-three.

Our children will make wrong choices. Some will be relatively small, while others may carry consequences that cannot quickly be repaired. Parents should prepare themselves for that reality without assuming that every mistake represents a failure of their entire approach to parenting.

Children need to know the road back toward truth and responsibility. Tell the truth, bring what happened into the light, accept responsibility, receive correction, seek forgiveness, and return to Jesus.

These responses connect with what we have already considered about correction and restoration. The IDEAL Response matters, as do accountability, encouragement, and forgiveness. The atmosphere parents have cultivated around confession will influence whether children believe they can speak honestly when something serious happens.

Imagine a teenager coming home and admitting a decision that carries significant consequences. The parent may immediately experience fear, disappointment, frustration, or anger. The child may already understand that what happened was serious and may be afraid of what the parent will do next.

The parent's first response can influence whether that teenager is willing to bring another difficult truth into the light. We do not need to pretend that the situation is small. A parent can respond, "Thank you for telling me the truth. This is serious, and we are going to deal with it together."

That statement holds truth and relationship together. The child knows the behavior will be addressed and that the parent has not withdrawn from them. Additional questions, consequences, changing boundaries, and rebuilding trust may all be necessary as the family works through what happened.

The first responsibility is to understand the situation and make sure everyone involved is safe. Parents can then address wrongdoing with clarity rather than allowing shock to determine every response.

This is where parents must understand the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt can recognize, "I did something wrong," and that recognition may lead toward confession, repentance, and a changed response. Shame can become a deeper conclusion that says, "Something is wrong with me, and if people really knew, they would reject me."

When shame begins governing a child's response, hiding may feel safer than honesty. The child focuses on preserving an image rather than addressing the sin or harm that has occurred.

The gospel directs us toward the light.

John wrote about the connection between walking in God's light and living in fellowship with one another.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."

First John chapter one, verse seven.

John's teaching continues by directing believers toward cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ. Walking in the light includes honesty before God, fellowship with His people, and dependence upon His grace.

Children need to see that pattern within the home. Wrongdoing can be acknowledged, truth can be spoken, consequences can be addressed, and relationships can begin moving toward restoration.

This is not permissiveness. Grace is never strengthened by pretending sin is insignificant. Faithful parenting tells the truth about wrongdoing while refusing to use shame as an instrument of control.

Parents should be careful with statements such as, "You have embarrassed this family," or, "What will everyone think?" Those words can redirect the conversation away from repentance and toward protecting the parent's reputation.

A child who hears that family image is the primary concern may become skilled at managing appearances. The deeper responsibility is to understand what happened, who was harmed, and what needs to be done now.

Parents can ask, "Tell me what happened," followed by, "What do you think needs to happen next?" These questions provide room for honesty while keeping responsibility before the child.

There may also be disclosures that parents did not anticipate. A son or daughter may reveal something involving sexual behavior, pornography, substance use, dishonesty, an unsafe relationship, or another struggle they have been afraid to discuss. Some disclosures may concern wrongdoing the child committed, while others may reveal harm committed against the child.

Parents must not treat those different experiences as though they are the same. A child disclosing abuse needs protection, reassurance, and appropriate intervention, not correction for another person's actions.

The parent's face, tone, and first words matter. A reaction of immediate disgust, accusation, or uncontrolled anger can close a conversation that required considerable courage to begin.

You do not need every answer during the first discussion. Listen carefully, thank the child for speaking, and ask enough questions to understand any immediate safety concern. Avoid pressing for a detailed account of possible abuse, and seek appropriate professional or protective assistance when needed.

Some situations require help beyond what parents can provide alone. A pastor may offer spiritual counsel, while a qualified counselor, physician, safeguarding professional, or appropriate authority may be needed to address other concerns. The nature of the situation should determine the kind of help sought.

When abuse or exploitation is disclosed, parents must prioritize protection and any applicable reporting responsibilities. Serious harm should never be treated merely as a private spiritual problem or resolved through a demand for forgiveness.

Seeking appropriate help is an expression of wise responsibility. Parents can remain loving and

involved while recognizing that they do not possess every skill or resource their child may need.

Above all, children need to understand what Jesus does with people who fail.

Peter provides a powerful picture. He promised faithfulness to Jesus, yet when fear came, he denied even knowing Him. His failure was serious, and he recognized the weight of what he had done.

After the resurrection, Jesus met Peter by the water. He spoke directly with him and entrusted him with the responsibility of caring for His people. Peter's denial was real, but it did not become the final chapter of his life.

Jesus restored him.

Children need to understand this gospel hope without minimizing sin. Christ went to the cross because sin is serious, and His saving work is the only foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. His grace does not teach us to hide wrongdoing or dismiss its consequences.

It invites sinners to repent, receive forgiveness, and follow Him.

Peter's restoration did not erase the memory of his denial or make the failure meaningless. The grace of Christ gave him a future in which faithfulness could

continue. That truth provides hope for parents and children alike.

When temptation comes, children can look for the way out. When pressure rises, they can remember whom they follow. When something troubling enters their world, they can bring it to a trustworthy adult without assuming they must carry it alone.

When questions arise, they can ask them honestly. When they sin, they can tell the truth, accept responsibility, and seek forgiveness. When someone harms them, they can seek protection and help without carrying blame for what another person has done.

Parents cannot walk every road for their children. Eventually, sons and daughters will enter situations we cannot see and face decisions before we know those moments are happening. That reality makes preparation important, but it also reminds us of the limits of our responsibility.

We are preparing children to live faithfully within the world rather than teaching them to fear everything they may encounter.

Jesus prayed for His disciples as He prepared them for the responsibilities and opposition they would face after His departure. He did not ask the Father to remove them from the world.

"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."

John chapter seventeen, verse fifteen.

Jesus' prayer belonged to His unique care for the disciples and the mission He had given them. It also reveals a truth Christian parents should remember. Faithfulness does not require withdrawing from every difficult circumstance, and discipleship prepares God's people to live under His care while remaining present in the world.

Our children need truth they can carry, Scripture they know how to return to, relationships where honesty is safe, courage to say no, and humility to ask for help. They need parents who speak clearly about wrongdoing while remaining ready to listen when difficulty arrives.

Most importantly, they need Jesus.

Prepare them for when temptation comes, when pressure rises, when questions appear, and when they fail. Teach them where to turn, whom to trust, and how to respond when the path ahead becomes difficult.

Then continue pointing them toward the Savior whose grace is sufficient for sinners and whose truth remains trustworthy in every season.

Our deepest prayer is that when the moment comes, they will know where to stand and where to return.

Chapter Twelve

Clothe Them in the Armor of God

Eventually, your children will stand somewhere without you.

They will enter rooms where you cannot guide the conversation, make decisions without asking permission, and face pressures you cannot remove. They will encounter voices that challenge what they believe and situations in which the right response may come at a personal cost. The years of direct parental guidance will gradually give way to greater responsibility.

This is one of the deeper purposes of Christian parenting. We are preparing sons and daughters to live faithfully when Mom and Dad are no longer close enough to make every decision for them. The

lessons of childhood are meant to become wisdom they can carry into adulthood.

Paul understood the importance of standing faithfully when life becomes difficult. In his letter to the Ephesians, he instructed believers to recognize the spiritual nature of their struggle and depend upon the strength of the Lord.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."

Ephesians chapter six, verse ten.

The strength Paul describes begins with God. Christian strength is greater than confidence, determination, toughness, or the ability to handle difficult circumstances alone. Scripture calls believers to depend upon the Lord and remain faithful through the power He provides.

That distinction matters because parents can unintentionally teach children that maturity means becoming entirely self-sufficient. We want our sons and daughters to take responsibility, exercise sound judgment, and become increasingly capable. Yet Christian maturity also involves recognizing that we were created for dependence upon God.

A child who can make decisions independently still needs the wisdom of Scripture. A teenager

who has learned to resist pressure still needs prayer, community, and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Our goal is to prepare children to carry responsibility while remaining dependent upon Jesus.

Paul continues by describing the armor God provides for His people.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

Ephesians chapter six, verse eleven.

Scripture teaches that spiritual opposition is real. Believers face temptation, deception, accusation, and the influence of sin within a fallen world. The Christian life requires discernment because the forces that oppose God's truth are not always immediately recognizable.

Children should understand these realities without becoming afraid of everything around them. Not every difficult day represents a spiritual attack, and not every person who disagrees with them is an enemy. Disappointment, conflict, illness, and ordinary human weakness should not automatically receive dramatic spiritual explanations.

We can recognize the reality of evil without becoming consumed by fear. Parents should help

children understand that God remains sovereign, Christ has overcome sin and death, and believers are called to remain watchful while trusting Him. Spiritual awareness should deepen dependence upon the Lord rather than produce anxiety about every circumstance.

The armor Paul describes gives Christians a picture of what faithful standing requires. Each part directs attention toward truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and Scripture, followed by his instruction to pray. Together, these truths help explain the kind of spiritual maturity parents are seeking to cultivate.

Paul begins with truth, describing the belt fastened around the believer.

"Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth."

Ephesians chapter six, verse fourteen.

Children will spend their lives surrounded by competing claims about what is true. Some will be obviously false, while others will sound reasonable and appeal to desires they already carry. They will hear messages about identity, relationships, success, pleasure, morality, and the purpose of life that require careful discernment.

This is why Scripture must become more than a book children occasionally hear discussed at church. They need to understand how to return to God's Word when they are confused. They should learn to recognize what Scripture actually teaches rather than depending entirely upon what another person claims it says.

When culture speaks about identity, children need the foundation of creation and the gospel. When desire promises satisfaction through wrongdoing, they need God's instruction concerning holiness and wisdom. When shame suggests that failure has become the final word, they need to remember the forgiveness and restoration available through Christ.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of Scripture when He faced temptation in the wilderness. Rather than surrendering to the suggestions of the tempter, He answered by returning to what God had spoken. His responses revealed complete faithfulness to the Father and the authority of God's Word.

Our children need to learn that same commitment to truth. This does not mean turning Bible memorization into another competition or measure of achievement. A child may memorize many verses

while remaining uncertain about their meaning or how they should be applied.

Teach Scripture so children learn to understand and use it faithfully. When a child is afraid, help them discover what the Bible teaches about fear and trust. When a teenager struggles with temptation, explore what Scripture says about holiness, self-control, grace, and turning away from sin.

Ask questions that develop understanding. What does this passage teach about God? What was happening when these words were written? How does the teaching relate to Jesus, and what would obedience look like in this situation?

Over time, children should become increasingly capable of opening Scripture for themselves. They may begin by asking Mom or Dad what a passage means, but they should gradually learn how to read carefully, consider context, and seek wise guidance when something is difficult to understand.

Truth becomes an anchor when children have learned where to find it.

Paul next describes the breastplate of righteousness. The image brings attention to another essential part of Christian life because

righteousness concerns both our standing before God and the way we are called to live.

Children need to understand this distinction carefully. Our choices matter, and Scripture calls believers to turn from sin and pursue what is good. Yet we must never lead our sons and daughters to believe they can make themselves righteous enough to earn acceptance before God.

Paul explains the saving work of Christ in his second letter to the Corinthians.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Second Corinthians chapter five, verse twenty-one.

Jesus lived without sin and gave Himself for sinners. Those who belong to Him receive the benefits of His saving work through grace, not through a lifetime of sufficiently good behavior. That foundation gives Christian obedience its proper place.

Parents should protect children from two opposite misunderstandings. One is legalism, in which a child begins believing that God's acceptance rises and falls with personal performance. The other is indifference, in which grace becomes an excuse to treat obedience as unimportant.

The gospel gives us something better. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, and that grace calls believers into a life increasingly shaped by His character. Holiness becomes the response of someone who belongs to Jesus rather than a means of earning salvation.

Parents can connect this truth to ordinary choices. We tell the truth because God is truthful, practice self-control because our desires should not govern us, and treat people with dignity because they bear His image. We resist sinful behavior because Christ calls His people toward a life that reflects His holiness.

Children need to learn that righteousness involves real decisions. Their words, relationships, habits, and actions matter. Yet when they fail, they must know that their hope rests in the Savior who forgives and restores rather than in their ability to maintain an impressive record.

Paul then describes feet prepared with the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

Children may not immediately associate peace with strength. The world frequently presents strength as dominance, volume, influence, or the ability to win an argument. Jesus reveals a different kind of strength through humility, truth, sacrificial love, and reconciliation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He described the character of those who belong to His kingdom.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Matthew chapter five, verse nine.

Peacemaking does not require passivity or an unwillingness to confront wrongdoing. A peacemaker may need to speak difficult truth, challenge harmful behavior, or maintain appropriate boundaries. The difference is that the person seeks what is right without unnecessarily increasing hostility.

Children can practice this responsibility early. They can refuse to spread gossip, avoid adding another insult to an argument, and learn to listen before responding. When conflict occurs, they can acknowledge wrongdoing and seek reconciliation rather than making every disagreement a battle that someone must win.

Parents should model these habits. Children notice whether a disagreement becomes an opportunity to understand another person or a reason to attack their character. They learn from how adults respond to criticism, speak about people who are absent, and address differences within the family.

The gospel of peace reaches deeper than good relationships. Through Jesus Christ, sinners can be reconciled to God. Those who have received His peace are then called to live in ways that reflect His reconciling grace toward others.

We want our children to carry that peace into the places they go. Their friendships, classrooms, workplaces, marriages, churches, and communities will all provide opportunities to practice the courage and humility required to seek what is right.

Paul continues with the shield of faith.

Faith becomes especially important when children cannot see what God is doing. There will be prayers that seem unanswered, circumstances that remain unresolved, and seasons when obedience feels costly. Another path may appear easier, or suffering may raise questions that cannot be answered quickly.

Hebrews describes faith in connection with the promises of God and the confidence His people place in what they cannot yet see.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Hebrews chapter eleven, verse one.

Faith is not pretending to know the outcome of every situation. It is trusting the God who has revealed Himself as faithful even when circumstances remain uncertain. Believers can acknowledge unanswered questions while continuing to depend upon His character and promises.

Parents teach this through more than explanations. Children watch when money becomes tight, someone receives a difficult diagnosis, a relationship changes, or an opportunity unexpectedly closes. They notice how adults respond when life refuses to follow the plan.

We do not need to pretend that these experiences are easy. A parent can admit fear or disappointment while continuing to pray and seek wisdom. A family may grieve an unexpected loss without concluding that God's goodness has disappeared.

A father might tell his children, "I don't know how this will turn out, but I know we can trust God." A mother may explain, "This is difficult, and we are going to keep praying while we do what is responsible."

These conversations give children a picture of faith that can remain steady through uncertainty. They learn that trust in God does not remove the need for action, wise counsel, medical care, or practical

responsibility. It shapes how those responsibilities are carried.

The shield of faith reminds believers where confidence belongs. Our children will encounter situations larger than their understanding or strength, and they need to know that the Lord remains trustworthy when the path ahead is unclear.

Paul then names the helmet of salvation.

The mind is one of the places where children may face some of their deepest struggles. They will wonder whether they are enough, whether other people accept them, and whether a failure has changed their worth. Some will fear that their mistakes are beyond forgiveness or question whether God could still welcome them.

These questions can become especially difficult when identity has been built upon performance. A child who believes achievement determines worth may be deeply shaken by failure. Another who depends entirely upon approval may become anxious when a friendship changes or someone expresses disappointment.

The gospel gives believers a foundation stronger than those changing circumstances.

For the child who belongs to Jesus, salvation does not rest upon maintaining a flawless record. Christ saves, forgives, reconciles, and receives those who come to Him through faith. The believer's deepest identity is found in Him.

Parents must make this distinction clear. Every child has dignity as someone created in God's image, and every child needs the saving grace of Jesus. We should not give children assurance of salvation simply because they were raised in a Christian family or have learned to behave well.

Teach them the gospel and invite them to respond to Christ. When they belong to Him, help them understand the security and responsibility that accompany that relationship. Their identity in Jesus becomes a source of hope when success, relationships, or circumstances change.

Children need to hear the gospel throughout their lives because other voices will continue making claims upon their identity. Achievement will offer one kind of worth, appearance another, and popularity still another. Talent, sexuality, wealth, and approval may each become places where a young person is tempted to seek ultimate security.

Salvation provides something deeper. Those who belong to Christ can live with gratitude for their gifts without worshiping them and acknowledge failure

without surrendering hope. Their lives rest in the One who has redeemed them.

Paul then describes the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Scripture exposes lies, corrects distorted thinking, reveals the character of God, and calls believers back when they wander. It also provides instruction for living faithfully in a world filled with competing beliefs. Children need to learn how to use Scripture rather than merely possess a Bible.

Help them search for answers. Help them understand what a passage means within its context and how it fits within the larger story of redemption. Teach them to distinguish something Scripture actually says from something Christians may frequently repeat without careful examination.

These habits become increasingly important as children grow. At first, a young child may believe something primarily because Mom or Dad said it. Eventually, that child needs deeper roots and a growing understanding of why the family believes what it teaches.

What does Scripture say? Why do Christians believe this? What does the passage reveal about God? How does the teaching of Jesus shape our understanding?

These questions can strengthen faith because they encourage children to examine truth thoughtfully. Parents should welcome that development rather than expecting their sons and daughters to depend indefinitely upon parental explanations.

The goal is not to produce children who merely repeat familiar answers. We want them to recognize the authority of Scripture and learn how to bring their choices, convictions, and questions under it.

Paul's description of the armor leads directly into prayer.

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

Ephesians chapter six, verse eighteen.

Prayer keeps believers dependent upon God. Every part of the armor directs attention toward what He provides, and prayer expresses the continuing need for His strength and wisdom.

Parents can help children develop the habit of praying throughout everyday life. When fear rises, they can pray. When a decision becomes difficult, they can ask for wisdom. When temptation appears, they can seek God's help, and when something good happens, they can respond with gratitude.

These practices begin in small moments. A child is nervous before school, and instead of offering reassurance alone, the parent says, "Let's pray." A teenager faces a difficult choice, and the family seeks God's wisdom before deciding how to respond.

When good news arrives, parents can invite their children to give thanks. When someone fails, prayer can accompany confession and repentance. Over time, dependence upon God becomes a familiar response rather than something reserved for moments when every other possibility has been exhausted.

Prayer should also remain honest. Children do not need to perform or use impressive religious language to approach the Lord. They can speak about their fears, confess their sins, express gratitude, and ask for help while learning to bring their desires under His will.

Standing faithfully also requires resilience.

Parents naturally want to protect their children from disappointment and pain. We may want to solve the problem, make the call, speak to the coach, fix the grade, replace what was lost, or remove the obstacle before our child experiences much discomfort. Sometimes intervention is necessary and right.

At other times, love remains close while the child carries an appropriate difficulty. A disappointing result, a challenging assignment, or an uncomfortable conversation may become an opportunity to develop perseverance and responsibility.

Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to remain watchful and steadfast in the faith, expressing courage and strength within their Christian calling.

"Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."

First Corinthians chapter sixteen, verse thirteen.

The passage calls believers to steadfastness. Its application to parenting should encourage both sons and daughters to exercise courage, faithfulness, and perseverance while depending upon Christ.

Children develop resilience through practice. They need opportunities to face disappointment without treating every setback as a disaster and to work through challenges without expecting immediate rescue. When they make appropriate mistakes, consequences may become part of learning how to carry responsibility.

Resilience must never become a demand to suppress emotion or endure harm without help. Jesus demonstrated remarkable strength while also experiencing grief, sorrow, and the desire for companionship. In Gethsemane, He acknowledged the weight of what lay before Him and asked His disciples to remain near.

Biblical strength does not require pretending pain is insignificant. It allows people to recognize difficulty, seek support, and continue responding faithfully. A child can be courageous while admitting fear and responsible while acknowledging the need for help.

Parents should help children learn that distinction because they will face seasons when standing requires both perseverance and community.

God has given His people the church.

Trusted pastors, mentors, grandparents, teachers, coaches, friends, and other mature believers can become important voices in a child's life. Parents should welcome those relationships when the people involved demonstrate wisdom, faithfulness, and appropriate care.

The goal is not to make Mom and Dad the only adults a child trusts. We want children to know people who will encourage them, answer questions, pray with them, and point them toward Jesus. Those

relationships can become especially important as children grow in maturity and begin developing greater independence.

A son may eventually find it easier to begin a difficult conversation with a trusted mentor. A daughter may seek counsel from a mature Christian woman before knowing how to speak with her parents about something personal. These relationships can become gifts when they are safe, trustworthy, and consistent with biblical truth.

Christian discipleship was never intended to be lived in isolation. The church provides fellowship, accountability, encouragement, worship, teaching, and opportunities to serve. Children need to discover that belonging to the body of Christ extends beyond their immediate family.

Parents can help cultivate these relationships through meaningful participation in a local church and by allowing trustworthy adults to become part of their children's lives. The relationships should remain appropriately accountable, with children's safety and well-being always taken seriously.

Children should also understand that standing faithfully involves more than defending themselves against temptation.

The Christian life is larger than avoiding wrongdoing. Jesus calls His people to love their neighbors, serve others, make disciples, and live as witnesses to His grace and truth. Spiritual maturity turns attention outward toward the people God has placed around us.

Jesus explained that service belonged to the very purpose of His earthly ministry.

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."

Mark chapter ten, verse forty-five.

Jesus continued by explaining that He would give His life as a ransom for many. His sacrificial death accomplished something no other person could provide, and His example also reveals the servant-hearted life He calls His disciples to follow.

Children who learn to stand should also learn to serve.

Begin at home. Help because you belong to the family, notice when someone is carrying a difficult responsibility, and serve a sibling without expecting recognition. These ordinary acts begin forming the understanding that love involves attention to another person's needs.

Then allow that vision to expand. Children can serve a neighbor, participate in the life of the church, notice a lonely classmate, or care for someone others have overlooked. They can learn to give their time, attention, energy, and abilities for the good of another person.

Parents can also invite children into meaningful service beyond their immediate community. As they encounter believers from different places and cultures, they begin recognizing that the family of God is larger than their familiar surroundings. Following Jesus reaches across the street and across the sea.

Service and worship belong together because faithfulness reaches into the whole of life.

Paul urged the Roman believers to offer themselves to God in response to His mercy.

"Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Romans chapter twelve, verse one.

Worship includes singing, prayer, and gathering with the church, but it does not end when a service concludes. Believers are called to honor God through the ordinary responsibilities and relationships of life.

A child can honor God by telling the truth when a lie would protect an image. A teenager can worship through obedience when compromise seems easier. Sons and daughters can serve through generosity, purity, gratitude, courage, compassion, and faithful work.

Their lives become places where love for God is expressed.

This gives children a vision greater than simply surviving temptation. They have been given abilities to develop, opportunities to steward, and relationships in which their presence can make a difference. They will enter schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, churches, and communities where faithful discipleship matters.

Parents should help them recognize that calling. Their courage can protect someone vulnerable, their compassion can move toward someone who is hurting, and their work can serve others. Their words can speak truth, and their gifts can be used for purposes larger than personal recognition.

Standing faithfully is not about becoming impressive. It is about remaining faithful to Jesus and allowing His grace to shape the way we live among other people.

Jesus has shown us what that faithfulness looks like. He resisted temptation, remained obedient to the Father, spoke truth, served others, prayed, loved, and gave His life. His obedience remained complete even when the cost was suffering and death.

Then He rose from the grave.

Our children do not stand through their own strength. They need the Savior who has overcome sin and death, the Spirit who forms His people, and the truth God has given through His Word. Every lesson we have taught should continue directing them toward that foundation.

There will come a day when Mom and Dad cannot provide an answer before every decision. That should not surprise us because we have been parenting toward it. We have been helping our children recognize what is true, understand their responsibilities, receive correction, and learn how to respond when pressure arrives.

Now they must begin carrying those lessons with increasing independence.

We want them to stand in truth when lies are easier, pursue righteousness when compromise is available, and carry peace into conflict. We want them to trust God when the outcome remains uncertain, remember the salvation found in Christ,

and return to Scripture when competing voices become difficult to distinguish.

We want them to pray, serve, worship, and remain part of the community of believers. These practices will not remove every difficulty, but they will help our sons and daughters continue following Jesus wherever He leads.

And when they fall, they need to know where to return.

Peter failed, and Jesus restored him. Thomas struggled to believe, and Jesus met him. The disciples scattered in fear, yet the risen Christ gathered them again and continued His work through them.

Standing faithfully does not mean believers never stumble. It means their hope remains in Christ rather than in a record of uninterrupted success. His grace calls sinners into the light, restores those who repent, and strengthens His people to continue following Him.

Our deepest hope for our children cannot rest upon their ability to navigate every challenge without failure. We have taught them faithfully, but our teaching cannot take the place of the Savior they need.

So continue preparing them, equipping them, and praying for them. Give them opportunities to carry responsibility, welcome wise people into their lives, and gradually release the authority that belonged to their childhood.

Trust the same Jesus who has been forming you to continue His work in them.

One day, they will stand somewhere without you. Our deepest prayer is that they will know they are never beyond the reach of the Savior who calls them to follow Him.

Conclusion

Release Them to Jesus

Parenting begins with receiving.

A child is placed into your arms, your home, and your care. For a season, that child depends upon you for almost everything. You provide food, protection, comfort, instruction, boundaries, correction, and a thousand things no one else may ever see.

Then something slowly begins to change.

The child who once needed your hand to cross the street begins walking ahead of you. The little voice that asked permission for everything begins expressing opinions, making decisions, and discovering a world larger than home. The child who once depended almost entirely upon your guidance begins listening to teachers, coaches, friends, pastors, and eventually people who will become part of a life beyond your daily care.

Parenting contains release from the beginning. We may not recognize it during the early years, when children require so much attention and responsibility, but the work has always been moving in that direction. We receive someone who needs our care and gradually prepare that person to carry responsibilities we once held on their behalf.

That can be difficult because love naturally wants to hold close. There is nothing wrong with that desire. Children need protection, affection, presence, and parents willing to carry responsibilities they are not yet mature enough to manage themselves.

Yet faithful parenting was never intended to keep every responsibility permanently in the parent's hands. As children grow, we gradually entrust them with greater opportunities to choose, act, serve, and take responsibility. The relationship remains important, but the way we carry it must change.

The psalmist describes children as a gift received from the Lord.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward."

Psalm chapter one hundred twenty-seven, verse three.

A heritage is received with gratitude and cared for faithfully. Children are not possessions to keep under control or extensions of the dreams their parents never fulfilled. They are human beings created in God's image and entrusted to a family for a season of care, instruction, protection, and preparation.

That truth changes the way we understand success. Our greatest responsibility was never simply to produce children who behave well while living under our roof. We are seeking to raise sons and daughters who increasingly recognize what it means to live faithfully before God, including when we are no longer present to direct their decisions.

This begins with parents willing to live under the leadership of Jesus themselves.

The home reveals things we might otherwise overlook. Impatience surfaces when the same instruction must be repeated. Fear becomes visible when a child begins making independent decisions. Pride appears when their behavior embarrasses us, and our desire for control may grow stronger as their choices become more significant.

Parenting exposes places where we still need Christ. That exposure can become an opportunity for grace when we are willing to receive it. Rather than hiding weakness or defending every mistake, we

can acknowledge what needs to change and allow our children to see us return to Jesus.

Our sons and daughters do not need a performance of perfect parenting. They need to see adults who recognize their need for the Savior. They need parents who tell the truth about failure, receive correction, seek forgiveness, and continue growing in obedience.

Paul understood that discipleship involves a life worth observing. Writing to the Corinthians, he invited them to follow his example as he followed Christ.

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

First Corinthians chapter eleven, verse one.

That is a significant invitation for a parent. We want our children to recognize the direction of our lives and understand that we are seeking to follow Jesus. Our example will never be perfect, but it can remain honest, repentant, and faithful.

The lessons we teach our children must continue forming us too. We cannot faithfully teach patience while excusing uncontrolled anger in ourselves. We cannot demand honor while treating others with contempt or encourage dependence upon God while pretending we possess every answer.

The same Jesus we want our children to follow is still forming their parents. Through the responsibilities of family life, He reveals places where we need greater humility, courage, love, and trust.

As the years pass, we begin to understand that the influence we have exercised was never meant to replace the work only God can accomplish.

We can teach Scripture and help children understand its meaning. We can pray with them, invite them into the life of the church, and demonstrate what following Jesus looks like in ordinary circumstances. We can establish wise boundaries, provide correction, and help them recognize what is true.

But no parenting method can save a child.

A well-organized home cannot produce saving faith. Family devotions cannot guarantee devotion to Christ, and clear rules cannot regenerate a heart. A child may become familiar with the language of Christianity while still needing to understand the gospel and personally respond to Jesus.

John describes the blessing given to those who receive Christ through faith.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

John chapter one, verse twelve.

Every child bears God's image and possesses dignity because of the Creator who gave them life. Every child also needs the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. The blessings of forgiveness, reconciliation, and adoption into God's family cannot be inherited simply through belonging to a Christian household.

We can explain these truths faithfully, but we cannot believe on behalf of our sons and daughters.

Jesus once asked His disciples a question that would reveal what they understood about Him.

"But who do you say that I am?"

Matthew chapter sixteen, verse fifteen.

Our children will eventually need to consider that question for themselves. They may know the familiar stories, remember the Scriptures they learned, and understand the convictions that shaped their home. Yet they must come to recognize who Jesus is and what it means to receive His grace and follow Him.

That should not make parents passive. It should make us faithful in teaching and persistent in prayer.

We pray when our children are small enough to sleep in our arms and when they begin taking their first uncertain steps. We pray as they enter school, develop friendships, and discover that the world extends far beyond the people and places they have always known.

We pray as adolescence brings new responsibilities, temptations, relationships, and questions. We pray when they begin making choices we cannot control and when they eventually leave home to build lives of their own.

Prayer remains one of the ways parents continue loving after direct control has ended. We bring our children before the Lord because His knowledge, power, and presence extend into places we cannot reach.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His disciples. He knew they would face opposition, confusion, and responsibilities far beyond what they presently understood. Within that prayer, He asked the Father to form them through His truth.

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

John chapter seventeen, verse seventeen.

Jesus was praying for those He had called and was preparing for the mission ahead of them. His prayer

reveals the central place of God's Word and His sanctifying work in the lives of His people. Parents can draw encouragement from that truth as they pray for their own sons and daughters.

We can ask the Lord to form in our children what we cannot manufacture through effort or instruction. We can pray that they will recognize His truth, grow in holiness, and remain responsive to His Word. We can continue praying even when we are uncertain how their stories will unfold.

There may be seasons when that responsibility becomes especially difficult.

A child may wander from convictions taught throughout childhood. A son or daughter may question what the family believes, resist instruction, or make decisions that bring disappointment and pain. Some choices may affect relationships, responsibilities, or opportunities in ways parents cannot easily repair.

Those experiences can cause mothers and fathers to revisit the past. We may wonder whether we missed an important conversation, handled a situation poorly, or should have recognized something sooner.

Honest reflection has value. Parents should remain humble enough to acknowledge wrongdoing,

repair damaged relationships where possible, and learn from mistakes. Faithfulness never requires pretending we have carried every responsibility perfectly.

But parents should not carry responsibility for decisions that ultimately belong to another person.

We were called to teach, protect, love, correct, and prepare our children. We were never given the power to control their hearts. As they mature, our sons and daughters become increasingly accountable for how they respond to the truth they have received.

Recognizing that distinction does not remove the pain of watching someone we love make a harmful decision. It gives us a way to continue loving without confusing faithfulness with control.

We can remain available, speak truth when appropriate, and continue praying. We can keep the door toward relationship open whenever wisdom and safety allow, while recognizing that some circumstances require boundaries and time. We can entrust our children to the Lord without pretending that every choice they make is good.

This is not resignation. It is surrender.

Parents need that same surrender when their children are walking faithfully.

A son may grow into a man who loves Jesus, carries responsibility wisely, and serves his family and community. A daughter may become a woman of conviction, compassion, strength, and faithfulness. Our children may develop meaningful relationships, pursue worthwhile work, and build lives marked by generosity and service.

Receive the joy of those moments with gratitude.

Then remember whose grace has been at work.

The gifts came from God, and the opportunities were received through His provision. Parents had the privilege of participating in their children's formation, but the Lord remains the One to whom our gratitude belongs.

This perspective changes how we understand legacy.

Legacy is often measured through what people leave behind. Money, property, a business, a family name, or something built through years of work may carry real value. Those things can provide opportunities to serve future generations, but they cannot become the deepest measure of a Christian life.

The more lasting question concerns what our lives have pointed toward.

A father follows Jesus and gives his son a picture of faithfulness. That son may eventually become a husband, father, or mentor who carries the same truth into another home. A mother speaks dignity and grace over her daughter, who grows into a woman able to encourage others with similar love.

A family practices confession, forgiveness, prayer, hospitality, generosity, Scripture, and service until those things become familiar ways of living. As children mature, they carry what they have learned into relationships and communities their parents may never enter.

Formation can become multiplication.

Paul recognized the influence of generations when he wrote to Timothy about the faith he had witnessed within his family.

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice."

Second Timothy chapter one, verse five.

Timothy's faith was his own, yet the faithful example of his mother and grandmother had been part of his formation. Their lives had provided a witness that

continued bearing fruit beyond their immediate circumstances.

Faith cannot be inherited automatically, but it can be demonstrated. Truth can be taught, and a life can provide an example that another person remembers long after the original conversation has ended.

Parents can establish a home where following Jesus becomes visible through ordinary habits. Our children may remember how we prayed during uncertainty, treated someone who needed help, spoke about another person, or acknowledged a mistake. They may recall the ways we celebrated, served, forgave, and trusted God when life became difficult.

Eventually, they must choose what to do with that example.

That is part of the responsibility of release.

As children become adults, the parent-child relationship continues, but its shape changes. Direct instruction gradually gives way to counsel. Daily supervision becomes less appropriate, while prayer, encouragement, and a willingness to listen remain important.

Parents begin learning when to offer advice and when to wait until it is requested. They discover that loving an adult son or daughter does not require involvement in every decision. The responsibility that belonged to the parent during childhood increasingly belongs to the grown child.

This transition requires wisdom because many parental habits were developed during years when children genuinely needed close supervision. The same level of involvement may no longer serve them well.

An adult child may choose a different career, community, church, household routine, or approach to parenting. Some decisions may be different from what Mom or Dad would have chosen while remaining thoughtful and responsible. Difference should not automatically be treated as rebellion.

The deeper concern remains faithfulness to Christ, and even when parents believe a decision is unwise, they must consider how to speak with love and respect. Their influence may be strongest when their children recognize that counsel is offered for their good rather than as an attempt to regain control.

Parents remain parents, but healthy relationships make room for adulthood.

The hands that once held a child close eventually open.

And open hands can continue to bless.

Tell your children what you see developing in them. Recognize courage, kindness, perseverance, compassion, responsibility, humility, wisdom, and faithfulness when those qualities appear. Speak words that communicate gratitude for the people they are becoming.

A father can tell his son that he sees growing integrity and a willingness to serve. A mother can tell her daughter that she recognizes courage and compassion. Parents can encourage the abilities God has given their children without making those abilities the source of their worth.

Do not wait for a milestone, a celebration, or a distant day to speak words of love and blessing.

Tell them you love them. Tell them you are grateful God entrusted them to your care. Let them know when you recognize growth, and continue offering encouragement as their responsibilities change.

When they fail, remind them where to return.

Jesus.

That is where the journey of Christian parenting has been leading from the beginning.

The Gospels describe people bringing children to Jesus so He might bless them. When others treated the children as interruptions, He welcomed them and revealed the importance of receiving the kingdom of God with humble dependence.

Parents continue doing something similar. We bring our children toward Jesus through prayer, Scripture, instruction, correction, worship, service, and the examples of our own lives. We teach them what we know, acknowledge what we do not understand, and seek to remain faithful with the opportunities entrusted to us.

Then, as the years pass, we gradually open our hands.

Our children were never ours to keep under permanent control. They were entrusted to us for a season of love, preparation, and formation. We cannot enter every place they will go, prevent every mistake they may make, or determine the outcome of their lives.

We can trust the One whose reach extends beyond our own.

You were never called to become the center of your child's life. You were called to keep directing your son or daughter toward the One who is.

So love them deeply and teach them faithfully. Correct with wisdom, forgive generously, and continue making room for truth. Prepare them carefully, bless them often, and pray through every season.

When the time comes, release them from the responsibility of fulfilling your dreams or proving that you were a good parent. Release them from the expectation that their story must unfold exactly as you imagined.

Allow them to carry the responsibilities of their own lives before God.

Release them to Jesus.

Then continue following Him yourself.

The invitation that shaped the beginning of parenting remains the invitation that carries us through every season. Follow Jesus, and for as long as God gives you influence, keep showing your sons and daughters the way.