

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

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TEN KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARENTING

It starts with love

Things Every Parent Should Know

But shouldn't have
to learn the hard
way

Growing Together

Relationship with
God



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

KIDS AND PARENTS: A JOURNEY

When browsing a previous issue of *Activated*, I came across the following quote by Dr. Bob Pedrick: “In the parable that Jesus told about the prodigal son,¹ do you remember how the father acted when the boy returned home? Did he run up and sniff his breath to see if he had been drinking? Did he comment on how poorly he had cared for his clothes? Did he criticize his straggly hair and dirty fingernails? Did he inquire about the balance left in his checking account? Of course not. He hugged the boy—the hug of loving acceptance.”

Most of us remember the parable's general message of the prodigal son's repentance and his father's forgiveness, but this quote describes something even more powerful. The father actually runs to greet and embrace his son *before* his son has the time to apologize or to try to explain his appearance. At no point does the father show any interest in dwelling on these things, or even trying to draw a lesson from his son's misfortunes—to help him do better next time, *of course*.

Through this story, Jesus was issuing a call to all of us who've drifted away from God to return to His side, but He was also describing the love a parent should have—unconditional and complete—even in the tough times, and even when our children have grown into their own lives and are responsible for their own choices.

The changing relationship between parents and children is covered in an interesting way via two articles by frequent contributor Marie Alvero on pages 14 and 15 of this issue. The first article was written 15 years ago when Marie and her husband were young parents, and the second one was written a few months ago.

I had a similar blast from the past when I came across a reflection I'd written on my daughter's first birthday party.² Reading it again, it's amusing how I thought *one* year had gone by so quickly. Today that shy little toddler in a pink dress is now a brilliant tween, and I'm left wondering where *12* years went. Parenting is a work in progress, and we're always going to wish we were better at it, but hopefully I can continue to improve and become more like the prodigal son's father in the story.

With God's help, I know I can. And so can you!

1. See Luke 15:11–24.

2. See <https://activated.org/en/parenting/articles/parents/my-princess/>.

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THE TIES THAT BIND

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

WHEN TWO OF MY GROWN CHILDREN RECENTLY HAD THEIR OWN FIRST BABIES, it confirmed something I'd known for years: Parenthood brings out the best in people. New parents feel the impact immediately, both emotionally and physically—the love bond that happens at first sight and grows stronger by the day, and the interrupted sleep and other schedule and priority adjustments. But there are also subtler changes that others are usually the first to notice—that special glow that God reserves for new parents and the maturity that comes from stretching and sacrificing to meet their baby's needs, for example.

I was sure that bringing home a new baby would be my proudest moment, and it was each time. Now I would say that comes in a close second to becoming a grandparent, because each time that happens (I have 11 grandchildren) I'm *doubly* proud—proud of my new grandchild and proud of their parents.

So now that you know I'm a grandfather, you may wonder what grandfatherly advice I might have for young

parents, so I'll tell you. Besides the usual “big three”—love your children unconditionally, tell them often that you love them, and make quality time with them your top priority—I think one of the best things parents can do is to let their children be themselves.

If you're like most parents, you want your children to excel. It's good to try to help them reach their full potential, but there is often a fine line between that and expecting too much of them or yourself. Neither you nor they are ever going to be perfect, so learn to celebrate the successes and not worry about the rest. Strive for love and trust rather than perfection, and you'll form lifelong bonds that will keep you together through anything. Happy parenting! And for those doubly blessed, happy grandparenting!

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED'S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

10 TEN KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARENTING

BY ALEX PETERSEN

THE SECRET TO RAISING HAPPY, well-behaved, and well-adjusted children is actually quite simple—love. It’s knowing how to apply that love that isn’t always so straightforward or easy. Here are ten tips that can help.



1 LEAD YOUR CHILDREN TO JESUS. There will be times when the natural love God has given you for your children won’t be enough to satisfy your child’s needs. Your children need their *own* connection with the source of all love, God Himself, and they make that connection by receiving Jesus.

Explain to your children that when they invite Jesus to come into their hearts, He will become their best Friend, forgive them when they make mistakes or misbehave, and help them to be happy and live close to Him. Then lead them in a prayer like this one: “Dear Jesus, please forgive me for sometimes being bad. Please come into my heart and be my best Friend both now and forever in heaven. Amen.”

2 INTRODUCE YOUR CHILDREN TO GOD’S WORD IN THE BIBLE. What could help your children more than teaching them to find faith, inspiration, guidance, and answers to their questions and problems in God’s Word?

1. Romans 10:17

“Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.”¹ Daily time connecting with God through His Word is the key to spiritual progress at any age.

If your children are quite young, you can read to them from a children’s Bible or Bible storybook, or watch Bible-based media with them, explaining things when needed. Be consistent and make it fun, and your children will grow in faith and be less likely to be led astray by ungodly influences or search elsewhere for answers, because their lives will be built on the rock-solid foundation of God’s Word.

3 TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO BE MOTIVATED BY LOVE. God wants us all to do what’s right, not out of fear of punishment but because we love Him and others and therefore *want* to do what’s right. If you’ve led your children to receive Jesus and taught them to love and respect Him and others, they will develop that loving motivation over time if given enough positive reinforcement.

You can teach your children from a very early age to put love into action by being unselfish and considerate of others’ feelings and needs. Jesus summed it up in Matthew 7:12, in what is now known as the Golden Rule. The following paraphrase makes a great starting



place in teaching little ones to be motivated by love: “Treat others the way you would like to be treated.”

4 PROMOTE HONEST, OPEN COMMUNICATION. If your children know that they can expect you to react calmly and lovingly no matter what, they will be much more likely to confide in you. And if you build a relationship of mutual trust and understanding while your children are small, they will be more likely to keep that line of communication open when they reach their preteen and teen years when their emotions and difficulties become much more complex.

5 PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CHILDREN’S PLACE. Try to relate to your children on their level and not expect too much of them. Also remember that children tend to be more sensitive than adults, so it’s important to be extra considerate of their feelings. We all know how demoralizing it is to be embarrassed, hurt, or slighted by others, so realizing that such unpleasant experiences can be even more traumatic to children should cause us to do our best to spare them from such incidents.

2. Matthew 7:7
3. James 1:17

6 SET A GOOD EXAMPLE. Be the best role model that you can be—not by trying to appear perfect in your children’s eyes, but by being loving, accepting, patient, and forgiving, and by striving to demonstrate the other virtues and live the values you want your children to have.

7 SET REASONABLE RULES FOR BEHAVIOR. Children thrive when they know their boundaries and those boundaries are lovingly and consistently enforced. A demanding and irresponsible child becomes a demanding and irresponsible adult, so it’s important that children learn to take responsibility for their actions. The goal of discipline is *self*-discipline, without which your children will be at a great disadvantage later in school, the workplace, and social settings.

One of the best methods of establishing rules is to get your children to help make them, or at least to agree to them. It takes more time and patience to teach them to make the right decisions than it does to punish them for their wrong ones, but it goes a lot further.

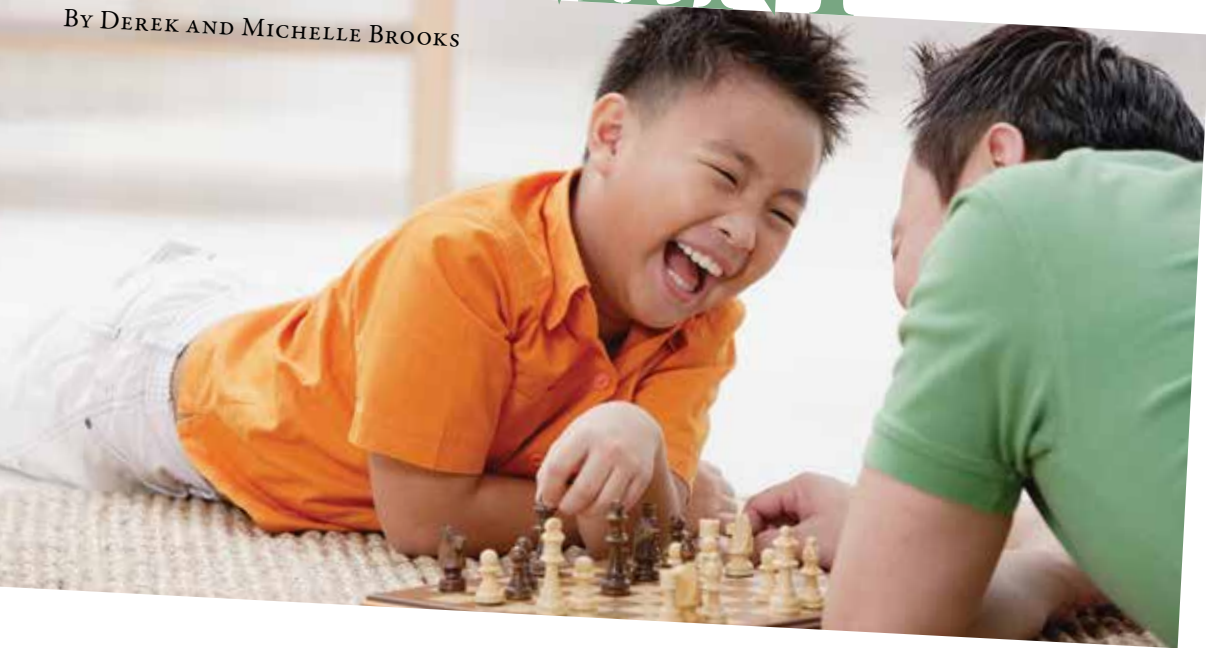
8 GIVE PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT. Like the rest of us, children thrive on praise and appreciation. Build their self-esteem by consistently and sincerely commending them for their good qualities and achievements. Also remember that it’s more important and bears far better results to praise children for good behavior than to only scold or correct them for wrong behavior. Try to always accentuate the positive and your children will feel more loved and secure.

9 LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY. God never gives up on us or stops loving us no matter how far we’ve strayed, and that’s the way He wants us to be with our children.

10 PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN. No matter how hard you try or how well you do at everything else, some situations will be beyond your control or require more than you have to give—but nothing is beyond God’s control or His power. Tap into His limitless resources through prayer. He has all the answers and can supply every need. “Ask and it shall be given.”²² “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.”²³ ■

A PARENT'S BEST INVESTMENT

BY DEREK AND MICHELLE BROOKS



YOUR CHILDREN WILL NEVER FORGET THE SPECIAL TIMES THEY SPEND WITH YOU. Just like the rest of us, children thrive on personal attention, and if they don't get it, they feel bad, unimportant, or even rejected. You don't always have to spend a great deal of time with children to make them know you love and appreciate them, but you do have to spend *some*—and the *quality* of that time is just as important as the *quantity*.

Time spent with your children is not only the greatest gift you can give them, it's also the greatest investment you can make in them. Nothing else will make a more lasting difference in their lives. As someone once wisely said, "Your children need your presence more than your presents." Play games with your children, read with them, hug them, encourage them, enjoy being with them. Go for walks or just sit around together and talk. Ask questions and listen to their answers—*really* listen.

If you're like most parents, you have more demands on your time than you can possibly meet, and time with your children gets crowded out when emergencies come up. You rationalize that there's always tomorrow for them, but your children need you today. If a genuine emergency

happens, you may need to *reschedule* your time with your children, but don't *cancel* it.

In addition to the time you spend with your children, you also should set aside some time to pray for them. Praying for your children is a wonderful way to gain a better understanding of them. God is able to show you things about them that you could never learn any other way.

Many parents of grown children will tell you that their greatest regret is that they didn't spend more time with their children when they were small. You'll have to sacrifice other things to do it, and in the beginning, you may feel it isn't the best use of your time, but keep it up and you won't be sorry. Every minute you give your children is an investment in the future. The rewards will last for eternity.

Being there for your children makes a great difference in their lives, even when you don't think you are doing a lot for them or accomplishing much.

ADAPTED FROM KEYS TO KIDS, BY DEREK AND MICHELLE BROOKES, WHICH CAN BE READ IN FULL STARTING HERE: [HTTPS://ACTIVATED.ORG/EN/BOOKS/PARENTING/KEYS-TO-KIDS/KEYS-TO-KIDS-INTRO/](https://activated.org/en/books/parenting/keys-to-kids/keys-to-kids-intro/). ■



DAD AND I

BY SIMON BISHOP

LAST YEAR, Father's Day happened to coincide with my father's birthday. He passed away in 2002 when he was 57, after spending close to 28 years in a wheelchair because of an accident where a car fell on him while he was repairing it. Shortly before this accident he'd accepted Jesus into his heart, which completely changed his life: he stopped taking heroin and other drugs, as well as his thieving and petty criminal activities to support his habits. All of this also saved his marriage, which had been falling apart. He decided to dedicate the rest of his life to trying his best to help others who were also struggling, and despite his accident he was faithful to his commitment until his passing. I'm thankful to have had him as a father and for the example he was to me and everyone who knew him.

A few years ago, I read a survey where they found that one of the common denominators in successful people's upbringings was that they had parents who read to them and instilled in them a love of reading. One of my earliest memories is of reading time with my dad, which happened almost every evening before bed. My dad was never far from tears, and he would often cry when reading something that touched him. In addition to children's stories and simple classics, he read through the four

Gospels several times over. This made a huge impact on my life, as I can still recall large portions of the Gospels by heart, and most importantly, I'm sure they've become a part of my soul.

I remember my dad and I hitchhiking often, as he didn't drive, and public transport back then was rarely adapted to the needs of the disabled. Strangers would help to fold his wheelchair and place it in the trunk of their car, then I would get in the back seat and listen to the adults' conversation. My dad loved to share his life story and how God had saved him and changed his life. He often hadn't gotten very far by the time we would arrive at our destination, so the drivers would usually pull over to the side of the road so that they could keep talking. More often than not, they would end up praying with my dad to receive Jesus. I never got tired of hearing my dad talk about his life and God's love and power to transform each one of us, no matter how sad or lost we are. Although I miss my dad, I credit him as one of the main reasons I decided to dedicate my own life to helping others find Jesus.

SIMON BISHOP DOES FULL-TIME MISSION AND HUMANITARIAN WORK IN THE PHILIPPINES. ■



When parents aren't perfect

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: As my children grow older, it's getting harder and harder to be the good parent I want so much to be. The issues are more complex, and my inadequacies are more apparent to both me and my children. What advice can you give me?

A: Parents know from the start that they don't know all the answers and aren't perfect, but babies and small children are so innocent and trusting that they don't even notice. That changes a few years later, especially when the children become teenagers. The solution is not in striving to reach the unattainable standard of "perfect parent," but rather in learning to use your imperfections and inabilities as steppingstones. Here are three advantages of that approach:

First, when you know you are weak and insufficient in yourself, you are quicker to seek and accept God's help. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."¹ When we are weak, then He is strong in us and for us.² Dependence on God will equip you with strength and wisdom that you could never attain on your own.

Second, weakness helps to keep you humble. When you are humble, you are more patient and understanding with your children. You are also usually more open to suggestions from others who, being a bit removed from the situation, can sometimes see things more clearly.

Third, you set a good example by showing your children that you know you are weak and fallible and in need of God's help, just like they are. This also puts you in a position to develop a closer relationship with them.

So don't let a few weaknesses discourage or hold you back. You can be your weak, imperfect, human self and still be a great parent. In fact, that's the only kind of great parent there is.

That said, the best way to know what your children need and how to help them is to ask Jesus. Next to having His love, the most important thing that you as a parent can do is to learn to ask the Lord for guidance in each situation. He always has the answer you need. Having Him as a parenting partner lifts a great deal of the load off of you. For example, if your child is in a difficult phase and you're losing patience, ask Jesus for help. His Spirit will calm your own, bring solutions to your mind, and help you to ride out the storm of difficulties that may arise. He can fill your heart and mind with His love, which enables you to have patience beyond your own abilities. Or if your child has a habit of talking back, ask Jesus to show you why the problem started and how to best correct it. He understands your child inside and out, and He can guide you to the answers you seek. ■

1. 2 Corinthians 3:5

2. See 2 Corinthians 12:9.

TOOLS for LIFE

BY SALLY GARCÍA

MARIA MONTESSORI WAS BORN IN ITALY IN 1870. As a young adult, she had an inquisitive mind and was on a path that would open the door for modern education. Within her study of medicine, she branched out into the fields of pediatrics and psychiatry and began work designing learning aids for children with special needs, many of whom were later able to pass public school exams.

In 1906, Maria began work in the Casa dei Bambini, a school for the children of working parents in the industrial district of Rome. This is where she developed her theory that learning begins at birth, and that between the ages of 0 and 6 is when the foundation for all future learning is built.

When I began teaching in 1973, my first experiences were in Montessori schools. We used teaching aids designed for individual exploration, and the kids could pick and choose their activities using their freedom and self-discipline. The smaller children loved the “practical life” section of the classroom, where they learned to fold, pour, tie, buckle, sweep, and clean—using tools that fit their tiny hands.

Later, I taught in schools with a more classical learning philosophy, but I found that the guiding principles of the Montessori method adapted to any learning situation—in the classroom as well as the home. Following are two principles that have been pillars for all of my teaching practices through the years.

Maria Montessori believed that a teacher’s role was that of a facilitator, someone who guides the children into discoveries and exploration. As a teacher, it’s easy to overexplain, but when I hold back a bit and only help as



Maria Montessori,
1913

needed, this enables the student to take their own step toward figuring something out and becoming an independent learner. Letting children have autonomy to research and learn for themselves—though under supervision—helps them develop an invaluable skill for life.

When children are still learning to master a task, Montessori describes it not as *doing it wrong*, but rather as *learning to do it right*. To her, education went far beyond the classroom subjects, into the areas of self-control, respect for oneself and others, autonomy, inquisitiveness, and creativity.

My most rewarding times as a teacher have been when I see a student get over a mental block and turn their most-dreaded subject into one that they love, when I see happy, independent learners who like to research, experiment, and aren’t daunted by new challenges. That’s when I feel I have given them tools for life and hopefully have contributed in some way to make the world a bit better.

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

WHEN HEADING OUT OF CAPE TOWN TOWARD THE DU TOITSKLOOF MOUNTAINS, you go through a tunnel that was cut out of a mountain. This tunnel makes any journey in that direction quicker and safer than the old road that winds up and through the mountains. We took the road with the tunnel mostly when going on vacation.

For as long as I can remember, my siblings and I have played a game where whoever first saw the end of the tunnel would yell out “I see the light!” as fast as they could. Recently I passed that way with my mother, and as we drove through the tunnel, I reminded her of the game we used to play. Of course, she remembered and we laughed together over how seriously we took the game of being the first to “see the light.” Then I began to wonder about the origins of the game, and I couldn’t recall who had invented it. “I did!” she said. “You all seemed nervous the first time we went into the tunnel, so I told you all to look out ahead and play that game. When you focused on that, nobody was scared of the stuffy, dark ride anymore, and the tunnel became one of your favorite parts of the journey.”

I don’t think that I would have ever remembered the fear that had prompted the game’s invention. I only remember how much fun we had in the tunnel, waiting for the light. When Mom told me how it came about, I couldn’t help but notice the strength of the analogy.

When you’re in your darkest, most suffocating and uncomfortable place, it almost seems foolish or trite to say something like “There’s always a light at the end of every tunnel.” But it’s true. You can abandon yourself to the fear and worry that comes from focusing only on the “now” of a tough situation and miss the “and then” part. But that seems foolish when you know for sure that there is light coming and we have promises to hold on to—we will wait for our God, and He will save us!¹

I believe that focusing on the light empowers me to rebrand the times of anxious distress to times of hopeful holding on. Knowing the dark tunnel serves a purpose, I eagerly wait to see the wonderful light at the end.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE SHE IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



1. See Isaiah 25:9.



Lessons from a child

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

MANY YEARS AGO, I was very bitter about a recent miscarriage. I had ignored the warning signs and I was heartbroken over the loss of my first child. I tumbled into an abyss of doubts and despair, and I was especially sensitive whenever someone mentioned my lost pregnancy.

One day, I was riding on a bus to meet up with my husband and found myself wallowing in grief and upset with God for bringing this loss into my life. I began counting the reasons *not* to trust Him. I could feel Him trying to comfort me but I resisted the urge to let Him.

Then I looked up. Several seats ahead of me a toddler stood up in his mother's lap. He looked at me and smiled as our eyes met. His smile was so big and warm and loving that I felt God's love through him, and immediately, my hope was renewed. I prayed and peace filled my heart. Less than a year later, I welcomed my own son into my life, but I've never forgotten that baby on the bus.

I remembered him the other day when my 16-month-old granddaughter scrambled onto my lap and kissed my

face. It was so sweet, so pure, so loving. I'd been having a hard day and had been struggling to smile. Then her kiss turned my day around. All the love I'd shown her during the previous 16 months returned to me when I needed it most.

The Bible says "a little child shall lead them."¹ Little children teach us beautiful lessons of faith. They show us that when we give abundantly, we will receive abundantly. They help us focus on the simple things of life. We enjoy their innocent songs and stories, and it reminds us of a less complicated time. A little one's smile can change our lives.

I am thankful for the blessings I've received through caring for little ones who taught me to stay simple, to be grateful, to stay positive and to have faith in my Father in heaven.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■

1. Isaiah 11:6



GROWING TOGETHER

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

THE GREATEST DISCOVERY THAT ANY OF US CAN MAKE IN LIFE IS THAT WE CAN HAVE A CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR HEAVENLY FATHER THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS. That relationship connects us to God's love, eternal life, truth, and the real meaning of life.

You can enter into relationship with God by praying a prayer to ask Him to come into your life, such as: "Jesus, I need You. Come into my heart and life. Forgive me for my sins, and be my Savior, my ever-present companion and counselor, my unfailing help. Amen."

Asking Jesus into your heart and life is only the start. Like any other meaningful relationship, it develops and matures over time, and it grows the quickest through daily interaction. As you learn to turn to Him in prayer and get to know Him and His plan better through reading the Bible, you will come to understand how deeply He loves you personally, how much He wants to see you grow in faith and live up to your full potential, and how directly He wants to be involved in your life. You will be amazed at how ready, willing, and able He is to supply not only love and understanding in trying times, but also practical solutions to the problems you face.

For parents, the only thing more wonderful than having that kind of personal relationship with God themselves

is knowing that it's just as freely available to their children. "The promise is to you and to your children."¹

Families that share that common connection with God, who the Bible calls love itself,² often are closer, more loving, more unified, and have fewer serious problems among themselves than families that don't. Why?—Because they have the most important things in common, besides a clear standard of right and wrong—the spiritual guidance and support they need to make the right decisions and stick to them. ■

If you want more for your family and haven't yet discovered Jesus, receive Him and start growing together by praying the following prayer.

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for me. Please forgive me for the wrong things I've done. Come into my heart, and give me Your gift of eternal life. Teach me more about Your love, and fill me with Your joy and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Acts 2:39

2. See 1 John 4:8.

Things every parent should know

POINTS TO PONDER



We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today.—*Stacia Tauscher*

Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.—*Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)*

There's nothing that can help you understand your beliefs more than trying to explain them to an inquisitive child.—*Frank A. Clark (1860–1936)*

There are no seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child. There are seven million.—*Walt Streightiff (1906–1978)*

Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories.—*Author unknown*

To bring up a child in the way he should go, travel that way yourself.—*Josh Billings (1818–1885)*

It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it myself.—*Joyce Maynard (b. 1953)*

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.—*Robert Fulghum (b. 1937)*

If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others.—*Haim Ginott (1922–1973)*

If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.—*C.G. Jung (1875–1961)*

Children have more need of models than of critics.—*Joseph Joubert (1754–1824)*

Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children.—*Charles R. Swindoll (b. 1934)*

In bringing up children, spend on them half as much money and twice as much time.—*Author unknown*

What's done to children, they will do to society.—*Karl Menninger (1893–1990)*

You have a lifetime to work, but children are only young once.—*Polish proverb*

Kids spell love T-I-M-E.—*Author unknown* ■



THE EVOLUTION OF A MOTHER

BY MARIE ALVERO (WRITTEN IN EARLY 2008)

WHEN MY HUSBAND SEAN AND I HAD ONLY ONE CHILD, I thought I had a handle on parenting. I needed to adapt and bend and give up some of my independence, but not too much. I was absolutely on top of Chris' appearance, and he never wore dirty, stained, or soiled clothes. Chris was very "portable," and we toted him with us wherever we went. When something needed to get done, we calmly set out to do it and got it done. I knew things would get harder as we had more children, but I wasn't worried; I was pretty good at this.

Briana arrived next. She was an angel of a baby, waking only to gurgle and coo, and putting herself back to sleep. I had gained less weight during that pregnancy, so I was back in shape in no time. If I could ace it with two, I reasoned, I could handle anything. I was at the top of my game.

Enter Zoey. Exit all parenting confidence. It's not that Zoey was difficult on her own, but suddenly "spontaneous" meant 45 minutes later. I often had kids crying in three different parts of the house. Doing anything as a family required the painstaking planning and execution of a mission to the moon. We began hearing comments like, "Just watching you wears me out!" But babies aren't babies forever (before you can brace yourself, they're toddlers!), and we learned to work with it. We learned that we didn't have to be perfect. Neither did our kids.

At this point I think I started to better understand that being a mother goes far beyond giving birth and caring for my children physically; it means living my life through my children—not by imposing my ideas and dreams on them, but by rejoicing at and taking pride in their triumphs. Everywhere we went, people would tell us, "Enjoy them while you have them. They will grow up so quickly!" That truth started to sink in.

Four kids. Emily is every bit as special as her brother and sisters. Spontaneous now means at least an hour. We still have to plan everything, of course, but we only plan one activity a day, max. We have lots of play clothes and just a few "special" clothes. Once when Zoey got blue marker on Chris' shirt just as we were finally ready to go out, I found myself thinking, *Well, at least it's on a blue shirt. It almost matches.* We are a spectacle, but a happy spectacle that people seem to enjoy watching.

I'm continuing to learn about love in ways that are slowly changing the most stubborn parts of my nature. Each child and each day reshape me a little more, but I wouldn't have it any other way. It's fun to be a family!

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■



THE TEENAGER

BY MARIE ALVERO (WRITTEN IN LATE 2022)

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF BOOKS AND BLOGS ON RAISING CHILDREN. You can find umpteen ways to sleep train your baby, wear your baby, feed your toddler, teach kids to read, and dozens of techniques on how to motivate them. But start looking for books and tips on how to handle your *teenager*, and the market thins significantly. I think I know why too. We parents of teenagers don't want to draw a lot of attention to ourselves, lest it become unbearably obvious that we don't know what we are doing! I have a decade of teenage parenting behind me, and three teenagers in my house, yet I still feel unqualified on the subject.

What I can say is that in this final season of “childhood,” I’ve felt God work a gentle overhaul in my heart, as He shows me that I’m not the piece that holds this all together, whether through my kindness or my wisdom or presence. I’m also not the destroyer of their futures through any of my lacks. It’s less and less up to *me*.

It’s unsettling to transition from the mother of little ones whose literal survival depended on my daily presence to more of a coaching role. Sometimes my heart is in my throat as I watch them struggle or hurt while resisting help or advice. Sometimes I cringe at the things they say or do, knowing those may come back to bite them, but I cannot protect them from life’s lessons, nor do I want to. Most of the time, of course, watching

them achieve, succeed, learn, mature, and grow is wonderful!

I hesitate to call these tips, because I’m not suggesting I know anything more than someone else, but here are some of the things that are helping me today:

- **Pray.** Prayer is my safe place. I can work out my fears and hopes and dreams, and ultimately surrender everything to Jesus.
- **Let go.** I try not to get stuck on any of my kids’ lives looking any particular way. There are lots of twists and turns.
- **Come alongside.** They still need a coach, a guide, and a cheerleader. I can be that.
- **Give time.** Time translates to love. Spending time on their needs goes a long way. Clean their room once in a while, learn a bit about something they’re interested in, talk with them (even if they mostly want to do it late at night).
- **Communicate trust.** Showing confidence in their ability to figure stuff out, and letting them know they have the freedom to fail and learn and try again is so important.
- **Lead them to Jesus and God’s Word.** He doesn’t stop being faithful and true just because their faith gets wobbly. Ask me again in a year, and I’m sure I’ll have more to say—and maybe something to recant. But I’m learning, and maybe more importantly—I’m learning how to learn. Good luck to us all. ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

JUMP-START

The surest way to help your loved ones get off to a great start each day is by starting the day with love. Easier said than done, you might say, when you're just waking up yourself! But if you pray for that extra oomph you need and give it a try, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Don't just eat breakfast together in silence, staring at your phone. Consider these tips: Count your blessings together. Thank Me for the things I'll do that day in answer to prayer and because I love you. Read a short passage from the Bible. Pray for each other and the different challenges you expect to face that day, and claim a promise from My Word.

I am love and light, My strength is unfailing, and all things are possible for Me. Focus on Me first thing, and you and your loved ones will be ready for any challenge the day may bring your way.

Those few minutes you have together in the morning are also a great time to give encouragement. Tell her how nice she looks. Tell him you're sure he's going to do great in school. Give a parting hug that conveys, "I can't wait to be with you again!"

Start the day with love, and love will carry you through the day.