

RAISING *Faithful* CHILDREN



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OCTOBER 4—RAISING FAITHFUL CHILDREN

More than anything parents want their children to love God and live righteous lives. How can we bring up faithful children? How can we help them to know and appreciate God? How can we help them to love God and serve Him? This program talks to parents about raising faithful children.

OCTOBER 11—KEEPING TEENS FAITHFUL

The turbulent teen years presents many parents with great challenges as they try to maintain faith in the midst of many temptations. Every parent wants to help their children to work through these challenges and to love God throughout life.

OCTOBER 18—LOVING BUT FIRM

What kind of parent are you? Many parents choose ways of dealing with their children that may hurt more than help. Parents, however, can adapt a style of parenting that helps their children avoid the pitfalls of life and growing to spiritual maturity. God's advice is the key.

OCTOBER 25—WHEN CHILDREN FALL

Even the best of parents face times when children disappoint them. How parents react to the troubles their children cause can affect a child's destiny. How does a faithful parent deal with an unfaithful child? God's word has an answer.

"RAISING FAITHFUL CHILDREN"

Our reading today comes from the book of Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4-9. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." That's from the New King James Version. Let's pray together. Oh, Lord we are grateful that you are our Father. And Father we are grateful for our children. Help us heavenly Father to be good parents, to teach them to love You with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. This we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

The inspired, apostle John wrote in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." We don't know whether the apostle John had a wife or became the father of any children of his own, but these were his spiritual children. Whether spiritual or physical, parents love their children and they want what is best for them. John rejoiced because his spiritual children were walking in the truth. They were living their lives in accordance with the truth that was revealed by Christ and His Holy Word. Christian parents want to know their children are pleasing to God. I have seen John's joy in other parents whose children were faithful and unfortunately I've wept with parents whose children strayed from the truth.

The Lord blessed Jackie and me with four lovely daughters. And with the birth of each child we felt the full responsibility of parenthood. God made us responsible to feed, to clothe, to train and to protect our children. We had been given charge of them physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually. And, from the first time we saw them, we loved them as our very own souls. We had such hopes and dreams for each of them. We wanted them to be happy, healthy, smart, and successful in life. And, more than anything else, Jackie and I wanted our children to be faithful Christians who were right with God. We wanted them to know God and to appreciate Him. We wanted them to respect God and obey Him. We wanted them to love God and to serve Him.

We hoped our children would follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Perhaps you remember the verse that described how Jesus grew up. Luke 2 and verse 52 says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." Well, we certainly hoped our girls would grow up like that. We wanted them to increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. And we pray they would make wise choices in life. That they would be healthy, and that they would find friends and be a friend to God. In all our dreams for our children, however, we tried never to forget the word of Jesus in Matthew 16 and verse 26, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

How can we bring up faithful children? How can we help them to know and appreciate God and the bible? How can we help them to love God and serve Him? Well, first, raising faithful children starts at the very beginning. When Christians learn they have a child on the way, they should begin praying every day for the child's welfare and for the wisdom to know how to raise the child. New parents don't get a child with an instruction manual, and every child is different. They need God's wisdom to help them know how to deal with each child in a way that will bless that child. The Bible says in James 1 and verse 5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach,

and it will be given him." Now this is not some special revelation but it is the everyday wisdom that we all need to live our lives faithfully.

Second, Christian parents should sing hymns with their children in their arms. A little child may not understand all the words that their parents say, but they do understand their tone of voice. They can sense the love of parents. Children learn to love God from their parents, and the best way to start out a new life is to sing hymns of love for God. If you want God to be in the life of your little child, then he must also be in your life. Some of the happiest memories that your child will ever have is of those precious moments as a little child singing songs of praise to God.

Third, from the very beginning decide that you are going to worship regularly with the church and take your children with you. The Bible says in the book of Hebrews chapter 10, verses 23-25, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the Day drawing near." Assembling with other Christians regularly keeps you strong spiritually. Your child will be influenced for good by loving and faithful teachers and Christian friends at church. If you want your children to love the Lord, then make sure they assemble with God's family regularly to worship and to learn about God.

Fourth, parents, you must assume the primary task, YOU must assume the primary task of spiritually training your children. Now you cannot leave that to others. God gave the charge to spiritually train the children He gave to you, and no one has a greater opportunity or responsibility than you do to help your child get to heaven. The Bible says to fathers in Ephesians 6 and verse 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Now, as the spiritual head of their homes, fathers can do much to influence their children to love and live for the Lord. It is a tragic thing that many fathers are absent. Many children, sadly, never know their fathers. Some are orphans, but more often than not the fathers are absent for other reasons. In those cases, mamas, mothers have to do all they can do to help their children know the Lord.

Now, mothers can do much to lead their children to the Lord. You remember that Timothy became the Christian man he was, because of the women in his life. The apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1 verse 5, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." You see, according to Acts 16 and verse 3, Timothy's father was a Greek. Now, it fell to his mother and grandmother to teach him about God; and their faith became Timothy's faith. Mothers if you do not have a husband to help you, or if your husband does not share your faith, don't let that stop you from doing all you can to bring your children up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Fifth, make the Word of God a part of your everyday life. Deuteronomy 6 verses 4-9 reveals a powerful key to raising faithful children. God said through Moses: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Now, according to Deuteronomy 6, verse 24 and 10 verse 13, God gave us the Bible for our good. When the words of God, the words of the Bible, live in our hearts, they help us in a multitude of

ways to grow in faith, to make right choices, and to avoid the moral pitfalls of life. According to Romans 10 and verse 17 “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Nothing, and I repeat, nothing is more important to your children’s spiritual development than a knowledge of God and His word, the bible. God’s word will nourish your children with the truth that they need to live a faithful life. It will teach them what to avoid and how to avoid it. It will keep their hearts tender toward God and shape their consciences for good.

The word of God teaches us how to treat our neighbor, and how to love our enemies, how to forgive the wrongs that we suffer. The word of God points people toward sacrifice instead of selfishness, toward a work ethic instead of laziness, toward responsibility instead of blaming others, toward authenticity instead of hypocrisy, toward love instead of apathy, toward kindness instead of passing by on the other side, and toward the truth instead of error. The Word of God teaches people that we are created in God’s image, not the product of random accidents. The Word of God explains to us where humans came from, why we are here, and where we will go after we die. Faith in God gives our lives identity, meaning and purpose. You cannot give your child anything more valuable than a knowledge of God in the Bible.

I shudder to think how empty and how sad our lives would be without God and His Word. Those who are trying to push God and the Bible out of our society are really enemies to your children. They are cheating your children out of the blessing of their Christian heritage. When Israel rejected God and turned to idols, God sent them prophets to bring them back. One such prophet was Hosea, and God said through him in Hosea 4 verse 6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge (that is knowledge of God), I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

Parents, the surest way to raise faithful children is to keep them reading and studying the Word of God, from the beginning all the way through; and the surest way to destroy your children’s hope of a better life is to reject the Word of God. Wherever the Bible is read and respected, people grow better and wiser. Wherever the Bible is ignored, life grows meaningless and evil. It turns inward, selfish, and immoral. The further people get away from God – the farther they get, the uglier they become to one another. When people get far away from God life becomes cheap, and people begin to abuse the old and the children. I don’t want a spiritually dark world without God for my children. I want them to walk in the light and the love of God.

Sixth, parents teach your children respect and reverence. Children who are respectful learn how to obey and in time how to discipline themselves. Children who do not respect their parents or God find their lives full of heartaches and failure. The parents also find their lives full of heartache over their children. Parents must establish loving authority over a child early in life. If they do, they will find their children happy and secure. But if parents don’t gain their children’s respect early, they will have a battle with their children for years; and no one will be happy. Proverbs 29 and verse 15 says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”

The Bible again says in Isaiah 33 verses 5-6, “The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure.” When children learn to respect and to revere God, they find life is stable and abundant. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Nothing is more crucial than knowing that we are accountable to God for the lives that we live.

Seventh, give them your love and blessing. Little children often come to understand their heavenly Father through their relationship with their earthly parents. If children have the security of their parents' love, they will learn to trust the heavenly Father's love. Children who never feel valued by their parents will find it hard to feel valued by God. Children who never find forgiveness from the parents have a harder time believing that God can forgive them. Children who have parents that reject them often think God might reject them too. Children can arrive at the wrong conclusions about God, when their parents don't love them as they should. I've known some children who had to wait until adulthood and they left home before they ever understood how much God loves them.

When your child reaches the age where they know right from wrong, you must lead them to the Lord. Help them to understand God's will for their lives. God saves us, and we can't earn our salvation; but God gives us conditions for salvation. God expects us to love Him and to trust Him. And we are indeed saved by His grace through faith (Ephesians 2 and verse 8). And that faith and that love leads us to turn away from sin in repentance and to confess Christ as Lord. In penitent faith one who loves God will want to be baptized and have his sins washed away. And I pray that is what you wish to do and what your children will do.

"KEEPING TEENS FAITHFUL"

Our reading today comes from Proverbs chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones." That is from the New King James Version. Let's pray together. O Lord, help us to trust in You and not lean on our own understanding. We are thankful, Father, that You gave us Your Word to help us to be better parents with our children. O Lord, help us to be faithful to all that You ask of us. In Jesus' name, Amen!

God gave us the book of Proverbs to help us spiritually train our children as they grow older and begin to face the struggles of life. I think that being the parent of a teenager is perhaps one of the most difficult challenges of all life. But this book is a rich resource for parents who want to help their teenagers remain faithful to God. We know that God's Word in the Bible teaches us how to succeed in life as a follower of Christ. Solomon says, by inspiration, "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you."

I tell you, parenting is a lifelong role. And when God gives us children, we begin to consider what we will do to raise our children responsibly. As Christians we want them to be more than good citizens. We want them to live godly, committed lives in the service to God. Every godly parent has this great passion to see his or her children stay close to God. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance and understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2, verses 1 through 3).

I tell you, hands-on parenting begins at birth, but it lasts until the child has reached maturity; and even when a child marries and establishes his or her own home, you know a godly parent never stops having a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his children. Now, three of our four children are in their thirties; and my wife Jackie and I still watch for their souls. My 90-year-old mother still prays for the souls of all my brothers and sisters, and all of their children, and even though we ourselves as her children are grandparents. Loving our children means working to create in them a hunger for righteousness. We want to influence them to serve and obey God.

The first thing that you can do to influence your teenagers to serve the Lord is for you, parents, to lead the way. Parents, you have got to make a commitment to a daily walk with the Lord Jesus. You can't lead your children to serve the Lord, if you are not willing to serve Him. Now, if you are half-hearted as a Christian, or if you're a bit of a phony, or if you are only a one-day-a-week Christian, you won't be able to lead your children to be fully committed to Christ. There are no perfect parents, I understand that, but parents who put the Lord first in their lives have the best opportunity to reach their children for all of their lives. Solomon said to his son in Proverbs 23 and verse 26, "Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways." Parents, do your children delight in your ways as a Christian?

You see you have to set the example of the life that you want them to live. And if you want them to be moral, then model for them a moral lifestyle. If you want them to clean up their speech, then you must clean up your speech. If you want them to avoid bad habits that can hurt them, then you show them how to abstain from destructive behaviors. Your children will learn how to live and how to react to life from you. If you get angry often, why would it surprise you when your child gets angry? If you hold a grudge when your teenager misbehaves, how will he learn forgiveness? You see, your teen will live out his Christianity not only by how you live but also by how you treat him or her. Sadly, some teens quit the Lord because of the way their "Christian" parents treat them.

The second thing that you can do to influence your teens is to pray for them every day and to pray with them. Let them know that you pray for them. Let your teenagers know that they are important in your heart to the point that you will pray for them every day. Ask God for wisdom in raising your son or daughter. Now each child is different, and what works with one may not work with another; and you have got to love them all, and to love them properly you have got to know them and what they need. Now, a good way to get to know your children is to pray with them about the most important matters of life.

The third thing you can do is to keep the main thing the main thing. Don't let the distractions of life build a wedge between your family and God. Now, the Lord Jesus said, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6, verses 31 to 33).

Families are so, so busy! They are busy with activities here and there, and you know what, they can so easily drift away from the Lord. There is school, and sports, and other events, and classes; and all these things can take up so much time that little is left over for the Lord or even for the family itself. Parents must learn to say no to what is wrong or to what crowds out God. My friend, if you love your children, and I know you do; love them enough to teach them the truth and to correct them. Love them enough to tell them what they most need to hear, and not allow all those things to crowd God out. You see, love means telling your teens what they need to hear and not just what they want to hear. Parents who try to be pals usually lose sight of what really matters. Parents who love God and love their children, they are not going to compromise their faith or their morals just to get along. And they are not going to let good things get so in the way of their service to God that they lose sight of who God is!

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to urge Timothy to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness"-- those six things. This is found in 1Timothy 6 and verse 11. You know if we spend all our energy on other things and give God only what's left over, we are going to miss what is really important. Some parents worry more about their children getting into a prestigious university than they do getting into heaven. Your high school student, parents, he knows that. And why then, will it surprise you that he'll think more about getting a good job than staying in church? What you pursue determines where you and your family will go. Where, my friend, do you want your children to go? The wonderful thing about Christian education is that a child can pursue his goals, educationally, in a Christian environment with Christian teachers.

The fourth thing that you can and must do if you want to influence your teenagers for the Lord is to teach and train them in the will of God found in the Bible. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word." That is from Psalm 119, verse 9. You see, the number one

thing young adults say kept them faithful to the Lord and His church through their twenties was the teaching and training they received growing up; that's teaching in the Bible. God urges us, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." That is from 1 Peter 2, verses 2 and 3.

Again, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6 and verse 4). You know much of the harder questions come when children get old enough to ask those difficult questions about life. Parents, you have got to continue to grow in your knowledge of God's Holy Word so that they, you parents, can help your children answer those harder questions. Have you ever wondered why God chose Abraham to be the father of the faithful? In Genesis 18 and verse 19 the Lord said to Abraham, "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." Well, that's a great promise and a great thing He has done for Abraham.

Now, as parents, let's consider our great responsibility of how to train our children to know and obey the Lord. We all have that responsibility. I have often thought about the prophet, who is also a priest by the way; his name was Ezra, and the Bible says that Ezra "set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." That's Ezra 7 and verse 10. Now, every godly parent should set their hearts to really study and practice God's teaching to train their youth in the Lord's way. One of the books that I would recommend to you is the book of Proverbs. Every parent needs to read through the book of Proverbs several times. And if I had a child who was a teenager at home I would have them reading through the book of Proverbs, too. You see, there simply is no substitute for reading and studying God's Word everyday! The Word will nourish and strengthen our hearts to know and to do what God wills.

You know parents must often think through again what God's teaching in a lot of important matters. They should know what God wants us to believe and they should also know why. And that is why I would say to you parents build a spiritual library. Get a concordance, get a topical Bible, get a Bible dictionary; get books about the existence of God and other Christian evidences. Parents should find books that will help them learn what the Bible says about the topics that come up each day. They should be like the noble-minded Bereans and receive "the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether those things were so." That is from Acts 17, verse 11. My friend, if your children, your teenagers, ask you a Biblical question, parents don't rest until you can find God's answer to that question. Don't discourage questions from your teenagers, because that's how they learn. Help them find answers that will sustain their faith.

The fifth thing that you can and should do is to get involved at church. Teens face tremendous spiritual and moral challenges today at school, from the media, and from their peers. And they need the encouragement of their parents and other godly teenagers. And I tell you, it helps to know that there are others who share their faith in Christ and moral values. God gave us the church and He gave us the Bible to help us through the challenges of life. Now, when Christians gather to worship, and to study, and to serve the Lord, their faith and their commitment grows much stronger.

It helps to know that many wise and highly educated people believe in things like intelligent design and the creation of the world. It helps teenagers to know that other people may say no to sin as well. Many people face an awful lot of temptation and it helps to know that there are other Christians, both adults and teenagers, who avoid sexually-explicit movies and drinking alcohol. And it helps to

hear Christians express their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the inspiration of the Bible. My friend, it helps to see love in action as the church serves those who need help.

A preacher friend of mine said he wanted to do something to help the church. And he asked me what I thought he could do. Well, churches have always been proud of their Bible classes and youth programs, and I'm thankful for them. But God didn't give the preacher, the youth minister, or the Bible class teacher the primary responsibility for spiritually training your children. He gave that responsibility to you parents, and especially to fathers. Well, the church's responsibility is not so much to replace the parent. Rather the church should train the parent in how to train their children spiritually. Church leaders, I'm speaking to you. If you want to help the church, train parents in how to train their children spiritually.

We must all help our teens to know the Lord and to love the Lord. The church is always just one generation from falling away from God. Parents, start early training your children. Devote yourselves to the task of leading your children to trust in and to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls, with all their strength, and with all their minds. Children who love the Lord like that will gladly repent of their sins, and when that time comes they will confess the name of Christ before others, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. And they will stay faithful to the Lord and they will live with Him forever. Oh, my friend, nothing else could be so important than to see your children to love the Lord, to want to obey Him, and to live with Him forever and ever. Let's pray together. O Lord, we are so grateful that You in Your grace have given us our children. Help us, heavenly Father, to be good parents and to help our children through the toughest times of their lives as they grow into adulthood. Father, help us and be with us and give us the strength to do what is right. In Jesus' name, Amen!

"LOVING BUT FIRM"

Our scripture reading today comes from Psalm 127, verses one through five. "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate." This reading is from the New King James Version. Let's pray together. O Lord, we are so thankful for our children and for the blessings that they have given to us through the years. And, Father, we pray that you will help us all to be better parents and grandparents through the blessings of our children that you have given to us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, our Lord, Amen!

God's gift of children is such a blessing. We can only be thankful for every son or daughter that God gives us. But children also provide a challenge. The doctors who delivered our children didn't have an instruction manual. Jackie and I took classes on how to physically care for our children; but, you know, dealing with a child's spirit and personality is another matter. Like other parents we faced many challenges with our children. They were mischievous sometimes, rebellious sometimes, and little angels at others. We loved them and wanted to give them the very best home we could. We made some mistakes, but the Word of God, the Bible, was our best guide.

Parents have different styles of dealing with their children. You know, some parents believe in being permissive; others think that they ought to dominate their children. Still other parents, unfortunately, neglect their children's greatest needs. You know, each of these styles of parenting has serious consequences for children. Children do indeed live what they learn; and how parents deal with their children will profoundly influence how a child sees and reacts to life.

Permissive parents tend to be warm and supportive, but they are weak in establishing and enforcing rules and limits for their children. They often allow their children to misbehave without any consequences. We've all seen children who were really, really naughty and then had parents who did absolutely nothing to stop their misbehavior. Such a child is a terror. He knows that he can do what he wants and get away with it. He grows to understand that rules and limits are not really firm, and he can bend the rules to suit himself. Unfortunately, because he has never been controlled by his parents, he has a hard time controlling himself. The Bible says in Proverbs 29 and verse 15 that, "The rod and the reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." Again, Proverbs 29, verse 17 says, "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart."

God expects parents to give their children the rules and the limits that they need to keep them from hurting themselves or others. In his final exhortation to the Israelites Moses said, "Take to your heart all the words which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life" (Deuteronomy 32, verses 46 and 47). My friends, we must teach our children to take the word of God seriously. They will take God seriously when they learn to take you, parents, seriously. This begins early in life.

Perhaps you remember the old priest Eli who had two worthless sons, who didn't know the Lord. Well, these younger priests took larger portions of meat than they should and they were immoral with women. You remember that Eli said to them, "Oh, why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! It's not a good report that I hear; the people of the Lord,

they are spreading all these things abroad. You know if someone sins against a man, he said, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But, you know what; they wouldn't listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death. (1 Samuel 2, verses 22 to 25).

When children don't listen to the voice of their parents early in life, they won't listen to other authorities either. We have to all learn to obey. Tragically some children grow up thinking the rules don't apply to them. They learn that from their parents. A disobedient child will defy his teachers, the police, his employers, and anyone else who tries to exercise authority over him. The breakdown in authority in our society reflects first of all the breakdown of authority in the home. God says to children, "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Colossians 3 and verse 20).

For the most part, children do not create problems; they reveal them. Parents who cannot discipline themselves usually cannot discipline their children. If a father and mother are not under authority themselves, they cannot exercise authority over others. It is only when parents submit to the Lord that they can exercise a properly balanced spiritual and physical authority over their children. Children, also, are happiest and feel most secure when they have parents who lovingly give them firm rules and guidelines to keep. These children have a greater sense of identity and purpose in life. They see the value in doing what is right. Loving discipline blesses children.

The Bible says in Hebrews 12, verses 5 to 11, "My Son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the LORD loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they (that is our earthly fathers) disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He (that is God) disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, (the Bible says) afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Second, other parents sometimes tend to be too hard on their children without giving them the love and the support that they need. They frequently will give their children unbending rules with no explanation. These children often get punished, and sometimes abused, and they don't always know why. Some children grow up never able to satisfy their parents. And when parents expect more out of their children than the children are able to do, the child grows up feeling like a failure; and he is small in his own eyes. Well, this harshness either leads the child to withdraw in fear or to rebel against the parent. Some children become so angry at their parents, they reject anything that has to do with the parent. Often that rejection includes their faith.

God said through Paul to the Colossians, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart" (Colossians 3 and verse 21). You know, too often parents automatically say no to their children whenever their children are asking for something; and the parents then really should listen carefully and evaluate each request. Parents often change their minds and they create problems for their children, who never know what to expect from their parents. Fathers and mothers should encourage their children, not discourage them. Discouraged children are fair prey for Satan and the world. You see, when a child does not get the love that he needs at home, he is going to seek it elsewhere.

If a home is truly Christian, it's a place of encouragement. In such a home, the child finds refuge from the battles of life, and he finds the strength to fight those battles and to carry the burdens of just growing up. He finds a loving heart, a watching eye, a listening ear, and a helping hand in his parents. He doesn't want any other place because home meets his needs. It's in this kind of home, that it is natural for a child to learn to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and to want to live for Him.

Third, some parents simply neglect their children. Perhaps the saddest phenomenon of our day is the "absent father." Four of every ten children born in America are born to unwed mothers, and we have to ask where are the fathers? Many children today don't even know who their father is. Then there are homes where dad lives there but is unavailable to his children. He is just too busy with his job to have time for his children. A survey in one town, not long ago, indicated that fathers spent only thirty-seven seconds a day with their small sons! Parents, spend time with your children. They need you. Children long to know that their parents, even as busy as they are, have time for them.

What kind of parent ignores his children? The Bible in Proverbs 4, verses 1 through 9 tells us how a parent should teach his children. Listen to the word: "Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, for I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son (the Proverbs' writer says) I was a son to my father; I was tender and the only son in the sight of my mother; then he taught me and he said to me, 'Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forget her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.'"

Parents, our actions speak louder than our words. When we make time to train our children and help them to grow, they will appreciate it. Children learn values, morals, and priorities by observing how their parents act and how they react to everyday life. If parents show a deep love and respect for God, their children will soak in that spirit. But how can your child know how you love God, if you don't tell and show them by spending time with them. The greatest blessing you can bestow on your children, parents, is a deep heritage of love and respect for God.

So, the best way to raise children is to provide for them a firm but loving Christianity. Provide one that doesn't bend to the pressures of the world but remains full of love and compassion. A good father says what the Bible says in Proverbs 23 and verse 26, "Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways." If you want your children to love you and to love the Lord, you must win their hearts with firm but loving Christianity. And when you love your children and live a model life for them, they will delight in your ways.

Parents need to listen and be patient as their children talk to them. I tell you, a listening ear and a loving heart always go together. I think about the child who said to her father, "You took time to have me, but you won't take time to listen to me!" Men, your children will evaluate you not on the basis of your ability to "father a child" but on your willingness to raise them. Life is not easy for children, especially Christian children. Their problems might seem small to you, but they are huge to them! Christian parents must listen carefully, and share the feelings and frustrations of their children, pray with them, and seek to encourage them. Make home the happiest place on earth!

Loving and firm parents usually have a clearly defined set of rules and limits that they expect their children to mind. They take the time to tell their children why they make these limits and they give them clear warning when a child has gone too far. They are not afraid to discipline their child

appropriately for his misbehavior, because they know the value of discipline. And they also give strong support and encouragement to their children. They show that physical affection and spend time with them. The loving and firm parent provides a healthy and balanced combination of control and compassion.

Now a child who is blessed to have such parents usually listens to his parents and all authorities. He learns to love God and to believe in God. He learns to communicate with his parents and find the help that he needs in difficult times. He knows what is right and wrong and the underlying reasons why; and from this he learns self-control.

Oh, it's true! Loving parents who train their children spiritually have given them the key to a happy and meaningful life. The Bible says in Proverbs 3 and verse 13, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; and in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast."

My friend, believing and loving God is the most important thing in life for you and your children. Give your heart to the Lord, trust him, repent of your sins, confess his name, and be baptized so that your sins will be forgiven. And then live according to God's Word. The best thing you can do for your children is to live the Christian life. Let's pray together. O Lord, help each parent to do the very best that he can, to live a good life before his children, and to help them, Father, to know You. In Jesus' name, Amen!

"WHEN CHILDREN FALL"

We are reading today from 2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 22 to 26. "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." This is from the New King James Version. Let's pray together. O, Lord, help us to be good fathers and good mothers; who love our children and with compassion reach out to them to bring them to You, our Father. This we pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord; Amen!

I once heard a psychologist say he felt being the parent of a teen was the most difficult task of life. Well, the challenges facing our children touch all of us. It seems that the devil uses every trick and scheme that he can to throw at our youth to lead them astray. He tells them that they are the products of evolution rather than created by God. He tells them not to worry about God and introduces them to the pleasures of sin. He slanders what's good and makes sin appear cool. He uses the media to seduce them into ways of thinking and behaviors that end up ruining their lives. Parents often worry about what their children see and who their friends are. Oh, it's tough to be a young adult today!

The moral downfall of America affects families and always hurts our youth the most. Four in ten children born in America are born to unmarried mothers and fathers. We are told half of all American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Millions of children live in single parent or blended families. School teachers aren't ever sure the last name of a child is the last name of the parents. Children who grow up in homes with both natural parents often have both parents working and only a limited time for their children. The "traditional" home, that is where dad worked and mom stayed home with the kids, is rare these days. It is no wonder that young adults begin to stray early in life.

Now, parents who love their children, they do all they can to keep their children active in church, but many young adults wander away from the faith when they go to college or move out on their own. People fall away from the church for a variety of reasons. Some get their feelings hurt by a church member, and this experience leads them to go astray. Some see people that they thought were mature Christians living sinful lives and they think the whole church may be full of hypocrites. Others get caught up in their own sins and simply drop out, because they are ashamed. Others go to college with professors who don't believe in Jesus Christ and it causes the young people to stop believing. Still others fall away because they are angry with their parents, and they know quitting church will hurt the parents.

Well, when children fall away, parents have to figure out what's caused the problem and then take steps to bring their children back. Sadly, people do as they choose, and you can't make children come back. That doesn't mean, however, parents, that you are helpless. You can do something to help. The Scripture says in the epistle of Jude, verses 20 to 23, "But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."

First, you can “build yourselves up in your most holy faith.” Whether your children are teenagers or adults, I know that you parents take the souls of your children seriously. You want them to remain right with God and to live with God forever. The best thing you can do for your children is to remain strong in your faith. Live what you believe consistently; be true to the Lord and to His cause; and when your faith is true and sincere, you’ll stay close to God. And you will also show your authentic faith to your sons and daughters. They’ll respect you for being genuine in your faith.

Second, love them. Everybody needs love. Love doesn’t mean that you condone or excuse their sins; it does mean that you won’t give up on them. Loving them means letting them know you care for them in spite of the life that they are living and you want what is best for them. Now, while parents must stand firm against what is sinful, that doesn’t mean they can’t love their child. Many young adults need to understand that love doesn’t necessarily mean approval of every behavior. God can love us as his children and yet hate our sinful behavior. Jesus hated the sins that we all commit, because he knew how destructive they are to us; but He loved us all, and He loved us enough to go to the cross for us.

The Bible says in the book of Romans chapter 5, verses 6 through 8, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ acted out of love to forgive sinners. He wanted them to be saved and was willing to bear the cross so they could come out of their sins.

Some people have the mistaken belief that Jesus’ death on the cross allows them to find grace, but find it without change or repentance, but this is not the case. When Jesus rescued and forgave the woman caught in adultery for instance in John 8 and verse 11, He said to her, “go, and from now on sin no more.” Young people have to learn the grace of God is not some license to stay in sin but that God expects us to change our lives to conform to His will. Some young people think condemning sin, as the Bible does, is mean-spirited, but nothing could be farther from the truth.

You see, the Scripture says in the book of Titus chapter 2, verses 11 to 14, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” God doesn’t save us to leave us as He found us. He saves us to help us become better as people. God’s way is to bless us and not leave us in destructive lifestyles.

Third, you can pray for your children. You know, some folks must go through hard times before they see where their sins are leading them. Pray that your children will come to their senses. Pray they will remember the love and grace of God. Pray that they will see the need to repent. Pray their hearts will be open to the Word of God. Pray they will see the error of their ways. Pray every day and don’t stop praying. We never know all that God is doing to answer our prayers, but we know that God listens and wants every person to do what is right.

The Bible says in 2 Peter 3 and verse 9, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” No, He won’t twist your son or your daughter’s arm; but God can use all kinds of circumstances to wake people up to their spiritual condition. Your son or daughter has a conscience, and who knows what will prick that conscience to turn their lives around.

Fourth, you can talk with your children and encourage them to come back to God. The Bible says in Galatians 6 and verse 1, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are

spiritual restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Parents, your attitude toward your young adults may be the real key in winning back their hearts. If you become self-righteous or you get mad, angry, you'll certainly end any meaningful communication with them. But if you gently and humbly approach them in love, they may listen to you.

Approaching other people to lead them back to God is not an easy task. It takes humility, gentleness and patience. God said through the apostle Paul this inspired advice that he gave to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, verses 24 to 26, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Parents read this passage and be God's servant in reaching out to your wayward child.

Fifth, help them find the answers to their doubts. When children are small they borrow from your faith; but when they grow older, they must work through the great questions of life to possess their own faith in Christ Jesus. Don't rebuke your children for asking hard questions; rather help them find the answers to their questions and doubts. Now, no problem that you'll ever face is greater than God and you together.

The God of the Bible is still the God of creation and the Ruler and Sustainer of the Universe. And nothing has changed that. The Bible is still the inspired Word of God and it's utterly trustworthy. The problems people face in life, however hard they may be, does not mean God doesn't care or He won't help. The questions people ask about God, or Christ, or the Bible, or about suffering do have good and solid answers. They are in God's Word, the Bible, and they can give comfort and assurance to parents and children alike.

Well, how does a faithful parent deal with an unfaithful child? Well, God's word has an answer. You have probably heard the story of the Prodigal Son. Well, here is what the Lord Jesus said in the book of Luke chapter 15, verses 11 to 26; it reads: "And He said, 'A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and he went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving him anything.

But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and I will go to my father, and I'll say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I'm no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."'

So he got up and he came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and he ran and he embraced him, and he kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But he didn't finish; the father interrupted him and said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

Oh, friend, just as God forgives His children when they return home spiritually, so parents long for the day when their children come home to the faith. If you're a prodigal, come home to the Lord. If you are a parent of the prodigal, keep an eye out for your son or daughter. They may be going through a tough time and may need you and the Lord. Listen to me carefully, people can and do repent. Pray for that day and be constantly ready.

Your child may come home; and when he or she does, forgive that child and bring out the best robe. He or she probably came home because you and your faith are the only haven that he or she has left. God extends His grace to us as a magnificent blessing; and grace should open our hearts to forgive when people return penitently. God is in the saving business. And when we come to Him in love and faith, repenting of our sins, and willing to obey, God receives us with an open heart. In baptism God washes away our sins. Oh, God is waiting for the prodigal to come home, and parents you can do no better than to imitate the father of the prodigal son. Let's pray. O Lord, help us all to love everyone and especially, Father, to love our children. And, Father, we pray that if we have those wayward children that they will come back to You. In Jesus' name, Amen!