

# RAISING *Faithful* CHILDREN



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# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

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*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **OCTOBER 6—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 13—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 20—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 27—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

How can parents lead their children to Jesus Christ? How do they raise them up to be faithful to God? Today, we are looking at the challenge of training children to be Christians. Scripture provides the answer both to simple questions and to our most challenging ones. If we want to train ourselves to be God's people and influence others, we have no better book than the Bible to train us for every good work, including the spiritual training of our children. If you miss what the Scripture teaches on any vital topic, you have missed the most valuable resource of life. Treasure your Bible!

The Lord blessed Jackie and me with four lovely daughters. We felt the full responsibility of parenthood. God made us responsible to feed, to clothe, to train, and to protect our children. God put us in charge of them physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. From the first, we loved them as our very own souls. We had hopes and dreams for each of them. We wanted them to be happy, healthy, smart, and successful in life. More than anything else, Jackie and I wanted our children to be faithful Christians who had a home in heaven. We wanted them to love, respect, serve, and obey God. We now have twelve grandchildren, whom we love and for whom we have the same desire that they be right with God.

I'm sure you have the same love and desire for your children, that they be right with God. While children are free to choose how they live, you can influence them to become Christians and to remain faithful all through life. You can't make decisions for them, but you can lead them to know the Lord. Proverbs 22:6 reminds us, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Our reading today comes from the Words of God through Moses, Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

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

The apostle John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4). We don't know whether the apostle John had a wife or became the father of any children of his own, but he was writing to his spiritual children. Whether spiritual or physical, parents love their children and want what is best for them. John rejoiced because his spiritual children were walking in the truth. They believed the truth and lived as the truth taught in God's Holy Word, the Bible. Christian parents want to know their children are pleasing to God. I've rejoiced with other parents whose children were faithful and wept with parents whose children have strayed from the truth.

Perhaps you remember the verse that describes how Jesus grew up, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). We certainly hope our children will grow up like that. We want them to increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. We pray they'll make wise choices in life, that they'll be healthy, and they can be a friend to God and have Christian friends. In all our dreams, we've never

forgotten the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:26, “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?” The souls of our children are the only thing that will survive when this life is over. So, it’s important to prepare the soul!

How can we bring up faithful children? How can we help them to love and serve the Lord? First, raising faithful children starts at the beginning. When Christians learn they have a child on the way, they should begin praying every day for the child’s welfare and for wisdom to know how to raise the child. New parents don’t get an instruction manual with the baby, and every child is different. So they need God’s wisdom to help them to know how to deal with each child in a way to bless the child. The Bible says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). This isn’t talking about some special revelation, but it’s the everyday wisdom that we all need to live faithfully.

Second, Christian parents can sing hymns with their children in their arms. A little child may not understand all the words that their parents sing, but they can sense their tone of voice and hear their heart. They can sense the love of their parents. Children learn to love God from their mommas and daddies, 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 are those precious moments as a little child singing songs of praise to God with you.

Third, from the very beginning decide that you will worship regularly with the church and take your children with you. The Bible says, “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 (assemble with the church) as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25). Assembling with other Christians regularly keeps you spiritually strong. Loving and faithful teachers and Christian friends at church can make a positive impact for good on your child. If you want your children to love the Lord and His church, then assemble with God’s family regularly and worship and learn about God.

Fourth, parents must assume the primary task of spiritually training their children. You cannot leave that to others. God gave you, as parents, the primary responsibility to train those children spiritually, and He gave them to you to do just that. No one has a greater opportunity or responsibility than you do to help your child get to heaven. The Bible says to fathers, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). As the spiritual head of your homes, fathers, you can do much to influence your children to love and to live for the Lord. It’s tragic in our time 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, mothers must do all they can to help their children to know the Lord.

Mothers can do much to lead their children to the Lord. Timothy became the Christian man that he was because of the women in his life. The apostle Paul told Timothy, “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” (2 Timothy 1:5). According to Acts 16:3, Timothy’s father was Greek. It fell to his mother and grandmother to teach him about God and the Scriptures. Their faith became Timothy’s faith. Mothers, if you don’t have a

husband to help you, or if your husband doesn't 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.

In many cases today, grandparents have the responsibility for their grandchildren. Grandparents can make a profound difference in the spiritual lives of their grandchildren. I've known many grandparents who regularly taught spiritual lessons to their grandkids and brought them to worship. They made a difference!

Fifth, make the Word of God a part of your everyday life. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 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."

According to Deuteronomy 6:24 and 10:13, God gave us His Word, His covenant, 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 the right choices, and to avoid the moral pitfalls of life. According to Romans 10:17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Nothing is more important to your children's spiritual development than a knowledge of God and His Word. 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, how to love our enemies, and 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 that God created us in His own image, and we aren't random accidents. The Word of God explains where humans came from, why we are here, and where we will go after we die. Faith in God gives children identity, meaning, and purpose. You can't give your child anything more valuable than the knowledge of God in the Bible, who they are and Whose they are.

I shudder to think how empty and 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 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. God said through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, 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" (Hosea 4:6).

Parents, the surest way to raise faithful children is to keep them reading and studying the Word of God; and the surest way to destroy your children's hope of a better life is to reject God's Word. 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 farther that people get away from God, the uglier they become to one another. Life becomes cheap, and people begin to abuse the old and the children and even the unborn.

I don't want a spiritually dark world without God for my children. I want them to walk in the light and in 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 don't respect their parents or God find their lives full of heartaches and failure. 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'll 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 29:15 says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother."

The Bible says, "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" (Isaiah 33:5-6). When children learn to respect, and 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, 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 in 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 their parents have a harder time believing God can forgive them, too. 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. Oh, parents, teach them early! Teach them well about God!

When your child reaches an accountable age, knowing right from wrong, you must teach them God's will and how to obey the gospel and become a Christian. Teach them what God expects of them when they become a Christian. God saves us by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8); and we can't earn our salvation, but God gives us conditions for our salvation. God expects us to love, trust, and obey Him. Teach your children to love the Lord Jesus. When they love the Lord Jesus, they'll find living for Him a joy! To persuade our children means teaching them intellectually, and also touching their hearts. Teach them facts, teach them about the Lord, and teach them to love the Lord Jesus. Teach them what He expects of them, but also how He is gracious and forgiving when they fail. Give your children hope that they can live the Christian life.

Faith and love move us to act according to God's will. It will lead us to turn away from sin in repentance and to turn to the ways of the Lord. Repentance gives up the old life of sin and turns to a life filled with love and service to God and others. Repentance heals our souls and gives us the desire to please God rather than ourselves. Faith and love mean we will confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as our Lord. One who loves God will want to be baptized into Christ and have his sins washed away. One becomes a Christian when God buries him and raises him up in baptism, forgiving his sins and giving him newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

## Keeping Teens Faithful

Being the parent of a teenager provides one of the greatest challenges of life. Today, we'll see what Scripture says about raising faithful teenagers. God's Word not only teaches truths to believe, it also teaches how to live righteous and fruitful lives for the Lord. No other book provides the wisdom, the spiritual insight, and the practical advice about relationships and life that the Bible provides. When you fail to study God's Word, you cheat yourself out of a treasure of wisdom. The Bible can give you the wisdom you need for your own journey of faith and can help you keep your children faithful as they mature into adulthood.

The Bible not only provides for us some of the best things we can do to help our children grow in their faith, it also helps us avoid the things that hinder faith. You can't lead your children to do what is right if you aren't practicing what you're teaching them. Your actions will speak louder than your words, and your teenagers are old enough to see whether you're genuine in your faith and devotion to God. Teens are looking toward the day when they can make their own decisions and live as they please. If they lack a solid spiritual foundation, or if they see hypocrisy and compromise, they'll likely fail to take the Lord and His Word seriously.

Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." Parents, devote yourself to the Lord and obey His Word. This will help your children trust in the Lord as well.

Our reading today comes from the wisdom of Solomon found in the book of Proverbs 3:1-8.

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. Do not let  
kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the  
tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God  
and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own  
understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths  
straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from  
evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.

That's a wonderful reading from God's Holy Word.

Psalms 119:9-11 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." The standard of all Christian devotion arises from the Scriptures, the Bible. Because of the Scriptures, we can come to know God, to know Christ, to know the truth, and to know the Christian life. We must not wander from the commandments but treasure them up in our hearts. This will keep us from sinning against God.

God gave us the book of Proverbs to help parents spiritually train their children as they grow older and begin to face the struggles of life. Proverbs is a rich resource for parents who want to help their teenagers remain faithful to God. We know God's Word, found 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" (Proverbs 3:1).

Parenting is a lifelong role. When God first gives us our children, we begin to consider what we will do to raise our children responsibly. As Christians we want them to become more than

good citizens. We want them to live godly, committed lives in service to God. Every godly parent has a 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 of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3). Godly parents want that wisdom for their teens.

The first thing you can do to influence your teenagers to serve the Lord is for you, parents, to lead the way. Parents, you must make a commitment to a daily walk with the Lord Jesus. You can’t lead your children to serve the Lord if you aren’t willing to serve Him yourself. If you’re half-hearted, or if you’re a phony, or if you’re 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 openly put the Lord first in their lives have the best opportunity to reach their children for life. Solomon said to his son, “Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways” (Proverbs 23:26). Parents, do your children delight in your ways as a Christian?

You must set the example of the life that you want them to live. 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 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 shows anger? If you hold a grudge when your teenager misbehaves, how will he learn what it means to be forgiven? 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 treated them. Others quit the Lord because they saw compromise and hypocrisy in their parents’ spiritual lives. If you want your children to be devoted to the Lord, then you must devote yourself. You must show yourself an example in “speech, conduct, love, faith and purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Don’t let your children look down on you.

The second thing you can do to influence your teens is to pray regularly for them and with them. Pray for them to become like Christ. Pray for them to overcome the temptations they face. Pray for them to find godly friends and pray for their friends. Let them know you pray for them. Let your teenagers know that they are important in your heart to the point that you will pray for them daily.

When you pray, ask God for wisdom to guide you in raising your son or daughter. Each child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. You must love them all, but to love them properly means you must know them well and what they need. Since children go through phases of life, you need to keep watch through each phase. A good way to keep track of 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. 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 6:31-33).

Families are so busy with activities here and there, they can easily drift away from the Lord. School, sports, and other events can take up so much time that little is left for the Lord or for the family itself. Some families have no time for a spiritual life. Parents must learn to say no both to what is wrong and to what crowds out God. If you love your children—I know you do—love them enough to teach them the truth and to keep them involved in a spiritual life. Love them enough to tell them what they most need to hear. Love means telling your teens what they need to hear, not what they want to hear.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to urge Timothy to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). If we spend all our energy on other things and give God only what’s left over, we’ll 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 knows that. Why then will it surprise you that he’ll focus more on getting a good education and a good job than staying in church? If your child conquers the world but loses his soul, what good will all his accomplishments be?

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” (Psalm 119:9). That is, the Word of God. The number one thing that young adults say kept them faithful to the Lord and to His church through their twenties was the teaching and training that they received growing up. No matter what age your children are, they must continue to study God’s Word diligently. The Bible provides enough challenge that a lifetime is not enough to know it thoroughly. 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” (1 Peter 2:2-3). Again, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

We should get rid of the notion that we can entertain and pamper our teens into the faith. Some churches spend huge amounts of money to provide activities that they think will keep their children involved. Some of these activities are fun but have little spiritual value. Some teens get so involved in their youth group that the youth group replaces the church. When these teens get too old for the youth group, all of a sudden they feel out of place with the whole church. Our youth need to know that they need the church for life. We cannot entertain young people into Christ; we must get them involved in serving the Lord as part of the whole congregation. We must train them for a life of service.

Many of the harder questions come when children get old enough to ask those questions. Parents must continue to grow in knowledge of God’s Word so they can help their children answer hard questions. Have you ever wondered how it is or why God chose Abraham to be the father of the faithful? In Genesis 18:19 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.”

Parents must be able to give their children reasons why they believe in God, why they believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, why they believe the Bible, and why they should be members of the church. Parents must often restudy God’s teaching. They should know what

God wants us to believe and why. Parents should build a spiritual library. They should find books that help them learn what the Bible says about the moral and spiritual topics that arise as life passes. They should be like the noble-minded Bereans and receive “the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). If your children ask you a Biblical question, don’t rest until you find God’s answer in scripture. Don’t discourage questions because that’s how they learn. Help them find answers that will sustain their faith.

As parents, let’s consider our great responsibility to train our children to know and to obey the Lord. The prophet and priest Ezra “set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Parents too must set their hearts to study God’s Word, to practice it, and to teach it to their children.

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

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 and your teens. He gave that responsibility to you, parents, first and foremost, and especially to fathers. The church’s responsibility is not 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. You will bless every family within the congregation!

The church is always just one generation from falling away from God. The book of Judges speaks clearly about how generations change. One generation can be faithful, while the next is unfaithful. Sometimes children turn out to be devoted to God in spite of their parents. Decide that you’re going to be a help to their faith and not an obstacle! Take up your cross! Lead your children to follow Jesus Christ.

Parents, start early with training your children. Be consistent! Don’t wait until they’re teens to begin teaching them essential Scriptures, Christian attitudes, respect for God, and about reasons to believe, are important. Devote yourselves to the task of leading your children to trust in the Lord and to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls, with all their strength, and with all their minds. You have no greater task and no greater responsibility than to bring your children up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Have you become a Christian? Have your children put on Christ? As teenagers, your children are ready to confess their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to regard Him as their Lord. They are now old enough to become children of God by repenting of their sins and by putting on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27. Baptism is when God unites us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection according to Romans 6:3-7). Baptism is an immersion in water, but it leads us to the blood of Christ (Romans 6:3). Baptism is when God washes away our sins (Acts 22:16) by crucifying us with Christ and freeing us from sin (Romans 6:6). God wants to free you from sin and to make you His child; why not obey Him, today?

## Loving But Firm

Every child needs parents who are both loving and firm. Today, we're exploring God's teaching on how to be a godly parent. God's Word provides a library full of wisdom in how to deal with others, and that includes how to be a good parent to our children. God, the Father, is the best example of a good parent. Some children are easy to love and are compliant, while others rebel and fight for their independence. God asks parents to both love and provide the spiritual discipline that they need to grow in faith and love.

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 give us an instruction manual. Jackie and I took classes on how to care for our children physically, but 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 other times. We loved them and wanted to give them the very best home we could. We made some mistakes, but the Word of God, and the example of God our Father, was our best guide.

We can all improve as parents by looking to God and to Scripture. The best parents are those who love and serve God. Though we're all imperfect and prone to mistakes, we can learn from God's Word and start today being a better example and a better parent. When you grow more like Christ, the members of your family will see it. They will appreciate your changes and will thank God. The closer you draw to God, the better opportunity your children will have to know the Lord.

Our reading today is from the book of Psalms 127:1-5; a psalm of Solomon.

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
The watchman keeps awake in vain.  
It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To retire late,  
To eat the bread of painful labors;  
For He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep*.  
Behold, children are a gift of 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.  
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;  
They will not be ashamed  
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Parents have different styles. Some parents believe in being permissive; others think they ought to dominate their children. Still other parents, sadly, neglect their children's greatest needs for love and guidance. Each of these styles of parenting has serious consequences for children. Children do indeed live what they learn, and how parents deal with 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 naughty and had parents who did nothing to stop the misbehavior. Such a child is a terror. He knows 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, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15). Again Proverbs 29:17 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 limits that they need to keep them from hurting themselves or others. Moses said, "Take to your heart all the words with 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 32:46-47). We must teach our children to take the Word of God, the Bible, seriously. They will take God seriously when they learn to take their parents seriously. This begins early.

Perhaps you remember the old priest Eli who had two worthless sons who did not know the Lord. These young priests took larger portions of meat than they should and were immoral with women. Eli said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:22-25).

When children refuse to listen to the voice of their parents early in life, they refuse to listen to other authorities as well. We must learn to obey. Tragically, some children grow up thinking the rules don't apply to them. They learn this 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 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 3:20).

For the most part, children don't create problems; they reveal them. Parents who cannot discipline themselves often cannot discipline their children. If a father and mother are not under authority themselves, they cannot exercise authority over others. It's only when parents submit to the Lord that they can exercise properly balanced spiritual and physical authority over their children. Children are happiest and they feel most secure when they have parents who lovingly give them firm rules and guidelines to keep. They 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, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor faint when you are reprov'd 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 disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. Now all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Second, other parents tend to be too hard on their children without giving them the love and support that they need. They frequently give their children unbending rules with no explanation. These children may get punished and do not know why. Some children grow up never able to satisfy or please their parents. When parents expect more out of children than they are able to give, the child grows up feeling like a failure and small in his own eyes. This harshness either leads the child to withdraw in fear or to rebel against the parent. Some

become so angry at their parents that they reject anything that has to do with the parent. Often that rejection includes their faith.

God said to the Colossians, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart” (Colossians 3:21). Too often parents automatically say no when their children ask for something when the parents should listen carefully and evaluate each request. Parents often change their minds and 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. When a child does not get the love that he needs at home, he’ll seek for it elsewhere.

If a home is truly Christian, it’s a place of encouragement. In such a home, the child finds refuge from battles, and yet strength to fight the battles and carry the burdens of growing up. He finds a loving heart, a watching eye, a listening ear, and a helping hand. He doesn’t want any other place—home meets his needs. In this kind of a home, it is natural for the child to trust Christ and want to live for Him.

Third, some parents simply neglect their children. Perhaps the saddest phenomenon of our day is the “absent father.” More than forty percent of the children born in America are born to unwed mothers. 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’s too busy with his job to have time for his children. A survey in one town 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, as busy as they are, have time for them. Love is spelled T I M E, time.

What kind of parent ignores his children? The Bible tells us how a parent should teach his children: “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 to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and 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 forsake 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’” (Proverbs 4:1-9).

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 that you can bestow on your children, parents, is a deep heritage of love and respect for God.

The best way to raise children is to provide for them a firm but loving Christianity. Provide one that doesn’t bend to worldly pressures but remains full of love and compassion. A good father repeats Proverbs 23:26, “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. When you love your children and live a model life for them, they will delight in your ways.

Parents should listen and be patient as their children talk to them. A listening ear and a loving heart go together. “You took time to have me,” one child said to her father, “but you won’t take time to listen to me!” Men, your children won’t evaluate you based upon your ability to “father a child” but on how you’ve raised them. Life isn’t easy for children, especially Christian children, these days. Their problems might seem small to you, but they’re huge to them! Christian parents must listen carefully, share the feelings and frustrations of their children, pray with them, and seek to encourage them. Make your home the happiest place on earth!

Loving and firm parents usually have clearly defined rules and limits. They expect their children to mind their instructions. They take the time to tell their children why they make these limits, and give a clear warning when a child has gone too far. They’re not afraid to discipline their child appropriately for his misbehavior because they know the value of discipline. They also give strong support and encouragement to their children. They show physical affection and spend time with their kids. The loving and firm parent provides a healthy and balanced combination of control and compassion.

A child blessed with such parents usually listens to his parents and all authorities. He learns to love and believe in God. He learns to communicate with his parents and find the help that he needs in difficult times. He knows right from wrong and the underlying reasons why. From this foundation, he learns self-control.

It’s true! Loving parents who spiritually train their children give them the key to a happy and meaningful life. The Bible says, “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; In her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways 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” (Proverbs 3:13).

My friend, loving and serving God is the most critical thing you can do for your family’s sake. Loving and serving God will lead you to become a better father and mother, a better spouse, and a better brother and sister. Love your family, care for their needs, really listen to them, support them, and guide them as a faithful and loving spouse and parent. You must walk the walk as well as talk the talk. When you live close to God, you open the way for your children to live close to God as well. If you live a worldly, careless life, don’t be surprised if your children follow your ways rather than your teaching.

There’s no substitute for being a genuine Christian. We can’t fool our children if we only pretend to believe but privately live worldly lives. First John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

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 for you to become a Christian and for you to live the Christian life faithfully. Why not start serving God today!

## When Children Fall

We'd love for our children to live Christian lives, but many fall away from God. Today, we're thinking of what we can do when children fall away. The Lord God gives us a great example of how to deal with our disappointments, how to forgive others, and how to live faithful lives.

I once heard a psychologist say that being the parent of a teen was the most difficult task of life. The challenges facing our children touch all of us. The devil uses every trick and scheme he can to lead young people astray. He tells them they're products of evolution rather than created by God. He tells them to ignore God and introduces them to the pleasures of sin. He slanders what is good and he makes sin attractive. He uses their peers and the media to seduce them into ways of thinking and behaviors that ruin their lives. Parents often worry about what their children see and who their friends are. It's tough to be a young adult today!

The moral downfall of America hurts our youth the most. More than four in ten children born in America are born to unmarried mothers and fathers. Half of all American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Millions of children now live in single parent or blended families. School teachers can never assume that the last name of a child is the last name of its 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 where dad worked and mom stayed home with the kids is rare these days. It's no wonder our children are morally and spiritually confused. This is why many young adults stray early in life. We need Christian parents!

Our reading today comes from the book of Proverbs and deals with a father's instructions to his son. Proverbs 4:1-6.

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 to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and 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 forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you."

This is good sound advice, one that we need to heed.

Parents who love their children 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 the experience leads them to stray. Some see people they thought were mature Christians living sinful lives and think the whole church is full of hypocrites. Still others get caught up in their own sins and simply drop out because they're ashamed. Others go to a college with professors who do not believe in Jesus Christ and they stop believing themselves. Still others fall away because they're angry with their parents, and they know quitting church will hurt them.

When children fall away, parents have to figure out what has caused the problem and take steps to bring their children back. Sadly, people do as they choose and you can't make them do what is right. That doesn't mean that you're helpless, however. You can do something to

make a difference in your child's life. Scripture says, "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" (Jude 20-23).

First, you can "build yourselves up in your most holy faith." Whether your children are teenagers or adults, I know you parents take the souls of your children seriously. You want them to remain right with God and to live with him 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. When your faith is true and sincere, you will stay close to God. You'll also show your authentic faith to your sons and daughters. They will respect you for being genuine in your faith.

Second, love them. Everyone 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're living and want what is best for your children. While parents must stand firm against what's 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; and He loved us all enough to go to the cross for us.

The Bible says in Romans 5, verses 6 to 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 that 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 without change or repentance; but this is not the case. When Jesus rescued and forgave the woman caught in adultery, He said, "go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Young people have to learn the grace of God is not some license to stay in sin, but 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.

The Scripture says, "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" (Titus 2:11-14). God does not save us to leave us where He found us. He saves us to help us become better people. God's way is to bless us and not leave us in destructive, sinful lifestyles.

Third, you can pray for them. Some folks must go through hard times before they see where their sins are leading them. Pray they'll come to their senses. Pray they'll remember the love and grace of God. Pray they will see the need to repent. Pray that their hearts will be open to the Word of God, the Scriptures. Pray they will see the error of their ways. And 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 He wants every person to do what is right.

The Bible says, "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" (2 Peter 3:9). He won't twist the arm of your son or daughter; 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 and turn their hearts. They still can turn their lives around.

Fourth, you can talk with them and encourage them to come back to God. The Bible says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Parents, your attitude toward your young adults may be the real key in winning back their hearts. If you become self-righteous or get angry, you will certainly end any meaningful communication. 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. When we recognize our faults, it opens the door for others to recognize theirs. The apostle Paul told Timothy, "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" (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Parents, read this passage, study it, and meditate upon it as you strive to be God's servant in reaching out to your 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. There are answers. No problem you'll ever face is greater than God and you.

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

So how does a faithful parent deal with an unfaithful child? God's Word has an answer. You've probably heard the story of the Prodigal Son. Here is what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 15:11-26. "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 went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered (wasted) 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 his 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 anything to him.

“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 go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’”

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and 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 the father 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.”

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’re a parent of a 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 him and bring out the best robe. He 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. Grace should open our hearts to forgive others when they return penitently. God is in the forgiving and saving business when people humble themselves in penitence. Psalm 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

When we come to God 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. 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.

Millions of people have stopped worshiping at church and living the Christian life. Are you one of them? I’m grateful that you watch this program; and that means you still have some spark of a spiritual life. But you need the Lord and the fellowship of other Christians to keep your spiritual life strong and healthy. If you’re living your life without the help of God, think about your spiritual condition. Would you want to stand before God as you are?

Many young adults return to church when they marry or start having children. But if you haven’t returned, you might consider how God can help you face life’s challenges. You can face life with God’s love and blessing or you can face life without God. The prodigal son had to learn the hard way that he needed God. I’m grateful that he came home, and I can’t help but think that there are many prodigals who also need to come home.

If you haven’t yet become a Christian, place your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and repent of your sins. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life. It means leaving the ways of sin and following the Lord Jesus. And upon the confession of your faith, be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you’re immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ, God will add you to His church; He’ll make you His child; and raise you up to a new life in Christ. I hope you’ll be baptized today if you’ve never been! If you became a Christian several years ago but have wandered away, come home! Confess your sins and repent of them. Ask God to forgive you, and get involved with the church.