

PAUL CHAPPELL

MAKING
HOME
WORK

IN A BROKEN SOCIETY

BIBLE PRINCIPLES FOR
RAISING CHILDREN AND
BUILDING FAMILIES



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DEDICATION

*to Terrie,
the keeper and maker
of our home*

Pastor Paul Chappell is a great family man. I have admired his passion for helping his children, and now his grandchildren, to develop a heart for God. *Making Home Work* provides great wisdom and practical training helps for serious Christian parents.

—**Charles Clark III, Co-pastor, Solid Rock Baptist Church, Berlin, New Jersey**

In a world, nation, and culture that is increasingly hostile to our Saviour and our faith, Dr. Chappell refocuses parents on the practical, real life, and godly restoration of our challenges: a Christian family centered on and committed to God and His Holy Word.

—**Chad Connelly, National Director of Faith Engagement, Republican National Committee**

In these pages, Pastor Chappell builds completely upon biblical principles and is willing to share personal examples to help parents see how those principles can be put to work in their homes. There is an abundance of practical guidance and suggestions in dealing with the issues of modern life in the twenty-first century. I look forward to putting this into the hands of our church family and my own adult children as they seek to raise their children for the Lord.

—**Gordon Connor, Pastor, Greater Vancouver Baptist Church, Vancouver, Canada**

Pastor Chappell's book on parenting is a rich and insightful resource for those who want to follow a biblical pattern for raising children. The truths and principles articulated in these pages will serve as a guide to help parents face and overcome the challenges of bringing up children in today's culture.

—**Troy Dorrell, Pastor, Eastland Baptist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma**

Two thumbs up for Dr. Paul Chappell's new book. It is personal, powerful, and practical. This is a must read for Christian parents who desire their homes to magnify Jesus Christ.

—**Dr. Tom Farrell, Evangelist, Brevard, North Carolina**

From his heart as a Pastor, father, and grandfather, Dr. Paul Chappell writes with passion, giving principles and patterns to help God's people protect the institution that Satan has targeted as never before. Every reader will find promised hope and practical help for their life and family in this timely book.

—**Dr. John Goetsch, Executive Vice President, West Coast Baptist College, Lancaster, California**

Every page of this book introduces fresh and biblical insight into contemporary parenting issues faced by twenty-first-century families. It is bold, practical and interesting to read. The honest, humble, and sometimes humorous personal examples presented resonate and encourage the reader. Assimilating and implementing this exceptional guide to parenting will surely make the home work!

—**Dr. Paul Kingsbury, Pastor, North Love Baptist Church, Rockford, Illinois**

Dr. Chappell has written a book that is not full of unproven theories or hypothetical scenarios about how the Christian home should operate. Rather, it is packed with timeless truths from the Word of God presented with simplicity and candor. Dr. Chappell illustrates with stories, statistics, and personal experiences, and he applies truths directly to the overall and everyday struggles parents face of having a Christian home and raising godly children in today's challenging world. You will find that the "homework" assignments at the end of each chapter are themselves worth the investment in this book.

—**Pastor Shane Lewis, Pastor, Somerville Baptist Church, Somerville, Alabama**

Pastor Chappell has lifted timeless principles from the pages of God's Word, and, with the experience of a pastor and parent, he has given hope to every family. From purity to prodigals, from playtime to prayer time, this book covers every major subject your home could need. If you will commit to follow these biblical principles, your home will work.

—**Dean Miller, Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi**

We live in a generation which is experiencing a moral collapse. The definition of family has changed, and the foundation of the home is eroding away. Many parents have simply given up. But parents cannot neglect their responsibility to rear their children, only hoping for a successful outcome. This book will encourage and equip parents with tools that can once again make the home work. The principles laid out for parents are not only biblical but practical. Pastor Chappell shares truths which are founded in the Word of God and have been tested in his home as well.

—**Kerry Nance, Pastor, Southside Baptist Church,
Tampa, Florida**

I am so glad Dr. Chappell wrote this book. What you'll read in these pages is not only developed from Scripture, but it has been demonstrated in his home. Having had the privilege of being in the Chappell home frequently from the time the Chappells' children were young, I can say firsthand that this is a biblically-based family. It is no surprise to me that all four of Pastor and Mrs. Chappell's children are living for God and are, in fact, in full-time Christian work. I know the principles in this book will help you as you rear your family and counsel others as well.

—**Dr. R.B. Ouellette, Pastor, First Baptist Church of
Bridgeport, Bridgeport, Michigan**

Making Home Work reveals Dr. Chappell's heart as a father, grandfather, and pastor. He shares practical instructions and helpful insights for parents raising children in a society which has by and large rejected God's order and design for the family. I believe this book will provide every reader confidence and competence to be a better parent and grandparent. It is required reading for all who are seeking to improve their skills in building their families as Christians.

—**Pastor Tim Rabon, Beacon Baptist Church, Raleigh,
North Carolina**

I appreciated the comprehensiveness that covers virtually every area of parenting. I love the practical homework projects for each chapter. Most of all, I was encouraged that biblical parenting can still be done in today's culture.

—**Dr. Jim Schettler, Vice President, West Coast Baptist College, Lancaster, California**

Making Home Work is informative without being complicated and practical without being trite. Regardless of the age of your children, you will find this book to be richly profitable. I know that I did.

—**Kurt Skelly, Pastor, Harvest Baptist Church, Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania**

I humbly predict that this book will be greatly used. Dr. Chappell not only writes from a wealth of scriptural principles but from a life that has proven successful in the rearing of their four children. Now as a grandparent he and Terrie can look back with joy as God led them through the various phases of child rearing.

This book is not just a how-to manual but a very helpful tool, transparently sharing the biblical principles that have assisted Dr. and Mrs. Chappell in their life and ministry. It would be a great read for any couple. I personally am purchasing a copy for all the couples in our family.

—**Dr. Don Sisk, President Emeritus, Baptist International Missions, Inc.**

Making Home Work is a wonderfully practical book filled with tremendous insights and is extremely relative to the day and time in which we live. As a father, I strive to continually read books that will help me become a better dad. This is probably the most helpful book on the subject that I have read to date. I highly recommend this book to every parent concerned about rearing godly children whose lives will glorify God.

—**Dr. David H. Snyder, President/General Director, Baptist International Missions, Inc.**

Making Home Work is a well-needed book I wish I had when Cheri and I were first married. Like Pastor and Mrs. Chappell, we too have four children, but we raised ours mostly in a foreign country. These biblical principles work in any country because God's Word does not change. The loving experiences and practical direction that is given in this book is truly shared from the heart of a pastor and father. It gives tremendous insight so that we do not just raise children to adulthood, but really invest to make our homes work in the midst of a crooked and perverse world. Do not just read it, but meditate on each chapter and do the homework at the end of each chapter. It will truly bless your home.

—**Dr. Bryan L. Stensaas, Missionary, Uganda, Africa**

The destructive forces of secular thinking have not only affected family life in our country but tragically the majority of families in good, Bible-believing churches. Dr. Chappell's book will be a great help to get God's people back to a scriptural view of the family and the specific responsibilities of parents. His biblical, practical teaching and applications will give the direction that many sincere parents are seeking. I am thankful for his willingness to confront modern culture and give us straightforward biblical answers.

—**Dr. Wayne Van Gelderen, Pastor, Falls Baptist Church, Menominee Falls, Wisconsin**

Making Home Work is the best comprehensive book on parenting that I have ever read. Many parenting books give answers to a few questions, while leaving parents in the dark on so many relevant topics. Pastor Chappell has done a masterful job in covering the most important topics relating to Christian parenting.

I plan on making this book available to both our church family and Christian leaders that we touch.

—**Scott Wendal, Pastor, Valley Forge Baptist Temple, Collegeville, PA**

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Preface

THE BOOK I WAITED TO WRITE

When the Lord allowed me to begin a writing ministry two decades ago, I had just one book in mind—*A Heart for God*.¹ But in the years that followed, as I continued to write, I found that there is always a growing burden in my heart for the next book—what it will be about, which of the several topics burning in my heart I should get into print.

Each book goes through several stages—beginning with an idea (often born of a need) that grows into a passion. By the time I’m wrestling through the chapter outlines, I can’t *not* write it.

This book is different simply because the “can’t not write” stage has lasted for some twenty years. As a pastor of thirty years, I have labored in preaching, praying, and counseling to equip parents in raising their children to love and honor God. As a father of four, I know firsthand the challenges of raising children in today’s culture.

So why did I wait? Because in the first stage—the idea stage—I sensed I should wait to write until our own children were

grown. While the principles from Scripture that you'll find in these pages are as accurate today as they were when I was preaching them twenty and thirty years ago, I understand them better experientially today than I did then. They have only solidified in my heart and expanded in my understanding over the years.

My wife, Terrie, and I rejoice to see our own children walking with the Lord. As the Apostle John said of his spiritual children, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). Terrie and I will be the first to tell you that we aren't perfect parents. I've made some really dumb mistakes. (My sons delight in sharing these—you know, as "illustrations"—when they preach in my pulpit.) So it really is only by God's grace and to the credit of the principles found in His Word that all four of our children and their spouses are walking with the Lord and now raising their children for the Lord.

This is what I desire for you—grown children who love the Lord, walk with the Lord, and live out His purposes for their lives.

As a parent, it's easy to see only the moment in front of you—to just want to get through the struggles of your child's current "stage." I pray this book gives you immediate encouragement and practical help—the kind that comes from God's Word. But more than that, I pray it gives you a goal for the future—that your child would enter adulthood walking in truth. That, my friend, will give you the greatest joy.

Yes, you have big challenges in front of you. But you have a big God with real grace and real truth. May these pages lead you to both.

Paul Chappell
Lancaster, California

Introduction

CAN THE HOME WORK?

Children are greatly neglected in our society today.

- 24 million children in America (1 out of every 3) live in a home without a father.²
- 40 percent of all babies born in the United States in 2011 were born to unmarried mothers.³
- As many children are being cared for by grandparents as are by single dads.⁴

In an article titled “There Is No Longer Any Such Thing as a Typical Family,” TIME Magazine went so far as to suggest, “Pretty much everyone agrees that the era of the nuclear family, with a dad who went to work and the mom who stayed at home, has declined to the point of no return.”⁵

Families are under attack today, and children are the innocent sufferers—often, the casualties.

It's not just in the population at large. Even among Christian families, parents often fail to invest in training their children in the application of God's Word in their daily lives. As a result, today's churches are seeing many young adults—as high as 70 percent—leave the faith of their parents.⁶

But is there nothing that can be done?

Is your home destined to disintegrate, and are your children destined to flounder?

No.

Emphatically *no*.

You and I, as parents, have been entrusted by God to care for our children—to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), and God has given us the resources we need to make it happen.

Specifically, He has given us His Word to guide us and His grace to enable us.

That doesn't mean the job will be easy or that it will happen on autopilot. It isn't, and it won't.

Actually, parenting requires a tremendous amount of work. Not just the work of providing for a child's physical needs, making sure she does her homework, or cleaning up after him, but the kind of work that is heart-level engagement. Christ-like parenting requires love and vigilance, time and influence, care and involvement. It requires personal growth in your own walk with God as you direct the hearts of your little ones to the Heavenly Father.

So yes, it takes work to make the home work. But by the grace of God and through obedience to His Word, it is possible.

And this goes for *you*. No matter what your family looks like—whether you are a mom and dad reading this book as a

couple, or you are a single parent struggling to play two roles and grappling with fears about how you can do it, or you are a Christian parent married to an unsaved spouse, or you are a new Christian or...anywhere in between—God’s principles are for *you*. I encourage you to believe them and apply them.

I write these pages, first of all, as a father. Terrie and I have had the joy of raising four children, all of whom are actively serving the Lord as adults along with their spouses. We praise the Lord for His grace in their lives and for what He taught us along the way about parenting.

I write also as a grandfather. All four of our children now have children of their own whom they are striving to raise for the Lord. If I thought that it was tough parenting young children twenty-five years ago, it’s even tougher now. When I look at the future through my “Papa eyes,” I’m concerned for children growing up today in a culture that is actively resisting biblical truth. The blessing is that God’s Word is timeless, and His principles for the home still apply. But it seems to me that parenting today requires more diligence and vigilance on the part of today’s parents.

Finally, I write as a pastor who desires to see moms and dads embrace biblical truth and raise their children for the Lord. Over the course of thirty years pastoring the same church, I’ve had the privilege of performing the weddings and baby dedications for young couples who years earlier I dedicated to the Lord with *their* parents. The longer I pastor God’s people, the greater my desire grows to encourage families and to equip parents with truths from God’s Word to love, lead, and nurture their children in the ways of the Lord.

The truths we’ll look at in these pages are not parenting hacks. They’re not little “tricks” to have well-behaved kids. They

are biblical truths and principles that require dependence on God, submission to His Word, and obedience to the Holy Spirit. They also require application.

The home, as God designed it, does work. But the home requires *homework* to work. To emphasize practical application, I'm including *homework* assignments at the conclusion of each chapter. These are opportunities for you to evaluate your parenting in light of biblical truth and make practical adjustments.

Obviously, I'm writing to Christian parents who know the Lord and accept His Word as authoritative in their lives. If you do not know Christ as your personal Saviour, if you are not 100 percent certain that you are a child of God, I'd encourage you to flip back to Appendix A before beginning Chapter 1.

Otherwise, if you are a Christian parent who wants to see God's blessing on your home, let's get started!

PART 1

1

GUARDIANS OF GOD'S HERITAGE

Jim Watson had been on the job for less than six months when he became a hero. An hour earlier, a three-year-old boy had been abducted from the public library by a stranger. His mother's—and every other parent's—worst fear had been realized. His mother turned her attention from her son for a moment, and when she looked back, he was gone.

Jim was a bus driver for the county's public transportation. When a man carrying a small boy boarded the bus, Jim noticed a tear in the boy's eye. As he pulled the bus from the curb, he remembered the police alert he had read minutes earlier.

Needing a closer look at the pair and not willing to wait for the next bus stop, where the pair would have a chance to disappear, Jim did some quick thinking. He pulled the bus over and asked passengers if they had seen a missing backpack. As he

walked down the aisle, he saw that the child's plaid pants and red shoes matched the police description.

No backpack was found, and Jim proceeded to the next stop, calling 911 on the way. The next time the bus stopped, there were officers waiting. Jim had been right, and his responsiveness saved the day.

The city police chief couldn't say enough about Jim: "The bus driver is a hero. An absolute hero."¹

But Jim, a parent of two, had a different take: "I did what any father would do."²

As a parent, you know the absolute conviction of your heart that you would do *anything* to protect your child. You are, after all, his *guardian*.

A Child Is a Treasure

When our first child was born, the hospital staff made me wear a mask and gown before holding her.

The precaution made sense to me. I was mesmerized by my new daughter—stricken with awe and responsibility at this tiny bundle Terrie and I called *Danielle*.

She was so...perfect. And yet, so vulnerable. As a new dad, my heart swelled with pride as I examined her tiny features. Inwardly I vowed to protect her from every form of evil imaginable. And it just so turned out that the most immediate threat was—germs.

For the first week after we brought Danielle home, I made guests who came also wear a mask and disposable gown before being allowed to hold our new treasure. No joke—although my wife Terrie thought it should have been. But it made perfect sense to me: if Danielle needed to be protected from germs in the hospital, she needed to be protected in our home as well. (I can't

remember now if the practice wore off because Danielle grew or if guests stopped coming to visit.)

Truly, children are treasures from God. In biblical words, they are the “heritage of the Lord”: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3).

A child is a privilege and a responsibility all wrapped into a single, unique person—a person whom God has entrusted you to raise for Him.

A sober responsibility indeed.

On Loan

The understanding that children are gifts from God goes against the grain of our culture in which there is a general disdain for children—a sense that they are burdensome and responsibilities to be dreaded.

Neither Terrie nor I will forget the day of her first prenatal visit when she was expecting our fourth child. When she called the hospital for an appointment, she was shocked by the receptionist’s first question: “Do you want to keep or terminate this pregnancy?”

I arrived home from the office that day to find Terrie teary-eyed. She told me of the chastising comments from the doctor about the irresponsibility of one couple having four children.

Several months (and one doctor) later, our youngest son was born. We named him Matthew, which means “gift of God.”

Yes, children are a gift from God. But these treasures do not belong to us. They aren’t ours to hoard or to neglect. They belong to God. They are *His* heritage—His trust. And He has a purpose for their lives.

As parents, we dream for our kids. We want them to be successful. Recognized. Happy. Perhaps wealthy.

But God dreams for our kids too. He has a purpose for their lives even before they are born. One of the most tender expressions of this truth in the Bible is when God revealed to Jeremiah his life's calling: "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Even before Jeremiah was in his mother's arms, God had big plans for his life.

This is true of the child in your home as well. Your daughter is a gift from God with a special purpose stamped on her soul. Your son is on loan to you from God to raise for Him. Your job, then, is not so much to make sure your kids have worldly success. It is to steward these gifts of God, bringing them up for the Lord and in the ways of the Lord.

This doesn't mean that our goal for our children should be that each one be a preacher or a missionary—because that is not *God's* goal for every child. It does mean that our goal is that each child in our home follow God's purpose for his or her life, that we raise them to honor God and serve Him in whatever capacity they sense His calling.

More Than Intuition

The same chapter that tells us our children are the heritage of the Lord opens with these words: "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it..." (Psalm 127:1).

In other words, it is possible to build a home that is *not* guided by God. A home that is shaky. A home that will not withstand the pressures and the storms of life. And this might take place even with our *best* efforts.

Many parents are under false assumptions of what it means to have a “Christian home.” Please understand, a Christian home is not merely one in which a parent self-identifies as a Christian. First, being a Christian has nothing to do with claiming a label and everything to do with personally placing your trust in Christ for salvation. (If you are unsure what that means or have never made this decision, please see Appendix A.) Second, a true Christian home is not simply a home that happens to have Christians in it, but a home that is guided according to God’s Word—a home built by God.

When it comes to building your home, you cannot afford to trust your intuition. Your best intentions and most careful efforts are not enough to build a home that will last. Storms will come. Winds will blow. Unexpected temptations, disappointments, marital strain, teenage rebellion, health crises—all kinds of troubles that surprise, confuse, and overwhelm us. They come.

Sometimes the winds are driven by a hostile culture, sometimes by the stresses of life in general, and sometimes they have the icy breath of the devil himself behind them. But regardless of the source, every family faces them.

We must build, then, on a foundation that is storm-proof. Jesus Himself identified this foundation for us—His Word.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the

winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.—**Matthew 7:24–27**

In coming pages, we'll look at difficult decisions parents face and tough issues today's culture throws at our kids. But before we address any of these, I want to underscore that *every* aspect of raising your child must be based on God's Word. As we tackle family needs and topics, our questions won't be, "What feels right to me as a parent?" but "what does Scripture say about this issue? How can I follow God's leadership in directing the heart of my child?"

Without God building our homes, we might do all right for a while, but when the storms come, we'll find that our work has been in vain. On the other hand, when we build on the foundation of God's Word, we'll still encounter storms, but our homes will have something solid on which to stand.

A Practical Blueprint for a Christian Home

So what does this Christian home—a home built on God's Word—look like? What are its components? And how are we, as guardians of God's heritage, to protect our children?

Even as a physical house guards us from the elements and weather, so the home you provide for your children is to guard their hearts and minds, providing physical, emotional, and spiritual protection as they mature.

Think about this protection in the context of the actual structure of a house. In terms of the protection godly parents must provide for their children, we could picture the safety we provide like this:



Let’s take a brief overview of what these five components look like in the daily routines of family life.

Foundation of Scriptural Truth

If you’re like me, watching a building being constructed is a very slow process—especially in the beginning when most of what is happening doesn’t bring in visible results. But for a solid above-ground structure, much work must go into the foundation.

The all-important foundation for Christian homes is the Word of God. I know I already said that, but truthfully, I can’t say it enough. In too many homes, the Bible is a book that sits on the coffee table and comes with us to church on Sundays. But it’s not part of our *daily* foundation for life.

Colossians 3:16 instructs, “Let the word of Christ *dwelt in you* richly in all wisdom....” This is not merely speaking of cursory knowledge of the Bible or of making sure your kids attend Sunday school. It is speaking of God’s Word being integrated into the fiber of your life and the routine of your days.

Scripture tells us that the home is where this biblical foundation is to be laid—diligently taught by parents: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine

heart: *And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children...*" (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). The most practical way I know to obey the instruction to teach God's Word diligently to your children is to read the Bible with your children daily. We'll look at the practical how-tos of having family devotions in Chapter 2.

Foundation of Loving Acceptance

One of the most vital needs of a child is to know he is loved—not for what he does, but for who he is.

Paul expressed the kind of love that should be present in every home in 1 Thessalonians 2:7: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." Is there a gentleness that permeates your home and your relationship with your son or daughter? Are there verbal affirmations of love?

Many parents have told me that they struggle to communicate love to their children because their father or mother never showed love to them. My wife has a beautiful testimony of turning this difficulty into a help.

Terrie grew up in an abusive home with an alcoholic father. She was saved as a thirteen-year-old through a church bus ministry. As we dated in college and then after we were married before our first child was born, she would often tell me how she looked forward to establishing a Christian home. And the greatest aspect she noted? Love. She'd say, "I look forward to giving the kind of love to my children that I always wanted to have from my parents."

If you struggle with showing love because you didn't receive it, I commend you for recognizing that struggle. But I also caution you against allowing it to define your parenting. Even if you did

not receive loving affirmation from your parents, you must give it to your children. Thankfully, as Christians, we have a heavenly Father who consistently affirms His love to us in His Word. As we receive His love, we are capable, then, of passing it to our children.

Sometimes as parents *we* know we love our children—that we’d do anything for them, in fact—but we don’t demonstrate that love in a way they can understand.

For instance, I’ve know Christian parents who had strong, biblical standards and a loyalty to true doctrine and who assumed their children would naturally embrace those same beliefs. Yet, as parents, they didn’t demonstrate a consistent heart of love to their children. What their children heard was, “If you have these beliefs and these standards, you are okay. If not, I will be ashamed of you.” In the heart of a child, that kind of conditional acceptance is devastating.

You’ve heard it said: Rules without a relationship breed rebellion. While I believe in establishing boundaries for the safety of our children, I also believe that strong rules must be combined with strong affirmations of love. If your children are assured of your love and acceptance, they’re more likely to receive the instruction and direction you give to them.

Children need loving acceptance, not as an accessory, but as the very foundation of the home.

Pillar of Time in Nurture

Could I tell you how children spell *love*? T-I-M-E.³

Yet, the average parent spends less than thirty-six minutes per day with their children, including time spent in front of the television.⁴

Every parent faces demands on their time. I understand how difficult it is to come home dog tired, walk through the door hardly able to stand up, and be assaulted with “Daddy, look at this!” “Daddy, will you...?” But you *must* make time for your children. If you need a few minutes in the shower to freshen up and pull yourself together, take them. But don’t brush off your children.

God commands us as parents to nurture our children positively: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture...of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Often times children are provoked to anger by a father (or mother) who is angry, absent, or abusive. Ignoring your children’s need for love—the kind of love that is spelled T-I-M-E—creates resentment, and eventually anger, in their hearts.

Dads in particular, if you’re not careful, you can be a strong disciplinarian but not a nurturing influence. There’s no doubt that children need discipline and strong authority, but without the twin pillar of nurture, discipline produces anger and discouragement.

If you brush off their requests for your time and attention when they’re small (“Go on and play, Mommy’s busy.” “Let’s do it later. Can’t you see Dad has something important to do right now?”), they will not only develop resentment toward your instruction, but they will learn to live without your input. When they are teens, you’ll want more than anything for them to open up and talk to you. But they may not know how.

Your children are a gift from God; make time for them. And I’m not talking about spending time watching television together—but actually *living* together. Have family dinner. Ask about their day. Go fishing. Clean out the garage together. Work on a project. Interface in one another’s lives.

Pillar of Loving Admonition

Perhaps you noticed that in the previous point about nurture we missed a word in Ephesians 6:4: “...bring them up in the nurture *and admonition* of the Lord.”

We are commanded to instruct our children in the ways of God. *Nurture* speaks to an environment of encouragement, while *admonition* speaks to specific instruction.

Your children need to see firsthand that the Christian life is real to you. There is nothing that brings a greater disconnect in the heart of a child—especially a teenager—than a mom or dad who appears to be a great Christian at church but is strangely inconsistent at home.

Even as neglect or absenteeism provokes anger in the heart of a child, so does inconsistency. Notice again the warning of Ephesians 6:4: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

That anger does not always evidence itself in bold outbursts. Sometimes it is turned inward in the form of depression, cutting, or eating disorders. Some reports indicate that as many as one in seven teenagers in America suffers from depression.⁵ I can’t speak to individual situations (and I always encourage parents to get whatever medical help may be necessary), but I can tell you that in the vast majority of instances when teenagers in families I have counseled have suffered from intense depression, cutting, anorexia, bulimia, or similar disorders, there has been a lengthy difficulty of a serious nature in their homes. Perhaps it’s been parents who had their act together at church but fought constantly at home, or who had a ruptured relationship with their teenager, or who had entrenched ongoing hidden sin in their lives. If you

want to help your child who is struggling emotionally, begin with evaluating the stability and authenticity of your home and your relationship with your child.

None of us are perfect, and thankfully, our children are forgiving. But there is a difference between imperfection and inauthenticity. Make sure your faith is real if you want your son or daughter to embrace it as well. (We'll develop this more fully in Chapter 2.)

In addition to making your words and life match, allow your children—especially as they reach their teen years—to be influenced by other godly adults. Outside of my family, the most influential man in my life in high school was my basketball coach—and I will forever be grateful for his godly influence. Young people need additional mentors in their lives who share your values. We'll come back to this thought in Chapter 4.

If we're going to give loving admonition to our children, we must teach them with our words, our attitudes, and our actions. Children hear all three—and they usually hear the last two with more clarity than the first.

Rooftop of Biblical Authority

Even as an overly-authoritative or angry parent can wound a child, an overly-permissive parent can also create a lack of acceptance. A child *expects* you to give him direction. God gave you to your son or your daughter to be the protective authority in their lives.

Furthermore, God instructs children to obey: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1).

If you have been a parent longer than six months, you know that kids don't always obey our authority, which is why we must be

consistent in setting and holding to boundaries. This consistency is vital whether your children are preschool age or teenagers. Do children need to learn how to make choices? Absolutely. But they need to learn how to do it within the perimeters set by authority.

Some years ago, I came across a study that highlighted four types of parenting styles—neglectful, permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative.⁶ I’ve observed over the years that most parents—at least as it relates to how they exercise authority—do tend to lean toward one of these four types. Which kind of parent are you?



NEGLECTFUL



PERMISSIVE



AUTHORITARIAN



AUTHORITATIVE

1. Neglectful: low in love, low in control—Hands down, the neglectful parent dominates the parenting landscape in America today. This parent avoids or flees his children. He finds it easier to say, “Ask your mother” and continue watching a ballgame than to engage in opportunities to spend time with his children. He avoids setting boundaries and ignores the precious few boundaries that are broken.

Unfortunately, children discern the neglect. Even as they take advantage of the relaxed rules, they translate the lack of

attention as a lack of love. Proverbs 29:15 describes the dangers of this parenting philosophy: “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”

2. Permissive: high in love, low in control—This parent allows his children to lead him rather than leading them. He fears his children and is reluctant to say “no,” afraid that administering discipline will break down their relationship. (Harsh discipline with little love, as described in the next point, *will* have this effect; but discipline with love will not.) While being your child’s friend is important, remember that you are his only father (or mother). Be your child’s true best friend by fulfilling your role as his parent.

The book of Proverbs is full of Solomon’s admonition to his son to listen to and heed his father and mother’s instruction: “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 6:20). Solomon knew that he could give Rehoboam advice and instruction that would help him live a successful life.

3. Authoritarian: low in love, high in control—This parent pushes his children to conformity, rather than leading them to maturity. He focuses on the external behavior rather than nurturing the heart in growth. Parents who lean toward this parenting philosophy should remember a verse we will glean wisdom from throughout this book: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The goal for Christian families is not to raise well-behaved children; it is to mature Christlike adults. To do this, you must reach your children’s hearts. Discipline and instruction are necessary, but never forget that heart strings are tied with cords of love.

4. Authoritative: high in love, high in control—This is the parent who accepts and fulfills his role as a parent by lovingly nurturing his child’s heart with love while training him in obedience. He sees the big picture and ultimately directs his child’s heart to the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). While retaining the role of a parent, he is able to fellowship with his child, spending quality and quantity time together.

It is God’s design that an earthly father display an accurate representation of the heart of our Heavenly Father: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13). Authoritative parenting that maintains a balance of committed love and caring control gives children a picture of their Heavenly Father, and it creates a hunger in their hearts to know Him.

The rooftop of authority is vital for the protection and growth of your children. Pre-school aged children need to learn the freedom of submission and obedience. As they become elementary-aged, the exact nature of the boundaries change, but they still need a mom and dad willing to hold a line for their benefit.

Even teenagers need biblical authority. They need to know what is expected. Teens need their parents to define boundaries clearly (and, at that age especially, the reasons behind the boundaries) and to hold them to predetermined limits.

You should know and care about your children’s whereabouts, friends (including online friends), and activities. As a parent, you are responsible for the precious gifts God has entrusted to your care; guide these young hearts and lives responsibly.

God has ordained our homes to be a safe place for our children—a guarded house in which they can be protected

and nurtured. And He has given us the blueprint in His unchanging Word.

Arrows into the Future

As Psalm 127—the chapter that tells us we are guardians of God’s heritage—comes to a close, it shifts to another analogy, that of an archer warrior who carefully crafts his arrows and then releases them into enemy lines: “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:4–5).

Archers in Bible days hand-crafted their arrows with care and precision. A crooked shaft or a dull tip could make a life or death difference in the success of that arrow once released. The weight, balance, and straightness of the arrow’s shaft would determine how accurate and effective it would be in battle.

As parents, we are to give attention to the upbringing of our children. We are to shape their hearts, lives, and consciences carefully and biblically.

In Proverbs 4:1–2, King Solomon pleads, “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.” Unfortunately, the instruction Solomon gave his children was not consistent with the example he left them.

Are you intentionally—and biblically—shaping your children? Are you helping them develop hearts for God and a foundation in His truth? Are you investing time in nurture and admonition in their lives? Are you providing godly authority by way of boundaries?

Arrows, of course, not only require shaping. They also require guiding. When the archer draws back his string, he directs the arrow toward a target. Unfortunately, many children today are directionless. You see it in their expressions, their mannerisms, their demeanor. They need a godly parent with a vision for their success to give them direction—to point their hearts first to Jesus and then to a life lived for Him.

Our son, Matthew, was the strongest willed of our four children. From the time he was a toddler, you could sense his intensity and determination. As a teen, his will and mine sometimes rubbed. Sometimes they clashed. We worked through these times with patience (mostly), insisted on open communication, and tried to keep a close relationship.

As a sophomore in college, Matt seemed to me to be floundering in his sense of purpose. He was as strong-willed as ever, and he knew what he *didn't* like, but I didn't sense he knew what he *did* want, or for that matter, what God wanted. He had a girlfriend he had dated since the first day of his freshman year of college, and I felt like I was always asking him to slow down the relationship. I was frustrated, and he was too.

Finally, Terrie and I asked him to go on a summer missions trip to spend time with a dear friend and faithful missionary to the Philippines, Rick Martin. Matt agreed to go, and the Lord worked deeply in his heart during those six weeks.

When Terrie and I picked Matt up from the airport and asked him about his trip, he had already formulated two definite take-aways. “I decided two things: I’m going to marry Katie, and I want to go into full-time ministry.” And within two years, he had done both.

Today, as a husband, father, and youth pastor, Matt is passionate and intense in his focus to invest in his family and the teens in his care. His strong will has become one of the greatest assets of his life.

As the guardians of God's heritage, our job is not to change who God made our children to be, but to shape and direct their lives toward the purposes God has for them. We are to provide protection that nurtures and develops them so when the time comes that they leave our homes—and believe me, it comes all too soon—they have a solid foundation and a straight direction.

Value this time. Steward it wisely. Pour yourself into the young life God has entrusted to your care by providing protection and direction. Before you know it, you'll be releasing them for big targets and godly success.

Homework

For the home to work, we must be willing to work at it. Thus, at the close of each chapter in this book, I’m including homework—suggested assignments that will help you put the principles from each chapter into practice. If you are reading this book as a couple, I suggest you go through the homework sections together. Unlike your high school assignments, collusion is allowed and even recommended.

1. **Make a definite decision—if you have not already done so—to dedicate your children to the Lord and yourself to raising them for the Lord.** Many parents desire a particular kind of success for their children. Sometimes it is to see them follow their footsteps, sometimes to be prestigious or wealthy or just very happy. Recognizing your children are on loan to you from God, make a commitment now to raise them to love, honor, and follow Him. Sign your name and record today’s date (or a previous date you’ve already made this commitment) below:

Recognizing that a child is a treasure from God—the heritage of the Lord—I commit myself to raising my child(ren) for the Lord, following His Word and doing my best to provide the physical and spiritual protection of a Christian home.

Parent: _____

Parent: _____

Date: _____

2. **Express positive encouragement daily to your children.** Make it your stated goal to express some form of positive encouragement every day to your child—a note, a word of

affirmation, a hug, praising her in her hearing to someone else, etc.

3. Plan a special weekly night with your family. One of the most practical ways to make time for nurture in your home is to schedule a weekly family night. Plan an activity—a game, a trip to the park, a time to laugh together and listen to each other, a time to encourage your children and build a relationship with them. Get out your calendar and plan which night of the week this will be for the next three weeks.

4. Identify which of the four types of parents you are. If you're reading this book as a couple, ask your spouse which type he or she thinks you are. (We tend to judge ourselves by our intentions, while those close to us see us by our actions.)

How can you lean further into being an authoritative parent, expressing both love and boundaries? Are there boundaries you've been neglecting? Are you clearly communicating love? Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, and determine two or three specific changes you should make.

5. Take a few minute to dream for your child's future. In what areas do you need to give shaping and direction to send him into the future God has for his life? Write down three specific areas you hope to grow as a parent through reading this book:
