

CHAPTER TEN

DRAWING NEAR TO YOUR CHILD THROUGH PLAY AND AFFECTION

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Scripture Memory Verse— Ecc 3:1,4-5, 8

“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--

*...a time to laugh;
...a time to dance.
A time to embrace...
...A time to love,
...A time for peace.”*

Chapter Ten

Drawing Near To Your Child Through Play and Affection— Bible Study

And 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.

Lk 15:20

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of this series is to help you fulfill the responsibilities as laid down in the Word of God concerning your child's training and discipline while at the same time developing a deep love relationship with your child that will weather the storms of life. The latter is by far the heavier emphasis in terms of time and attention required. Conflict and discipline should be but a blip on the screen of your overall relationship with your child. It is, however, discipline that makes this possible. The respect and order obtained through discipline and training makes play not only a possibility, but a probability since **it is as a result of discipline that play becomes equally enjoyable** for both the child and the parent. Family times become more common; children are drawn to their brothers and sisters; parents seek out opportunities to include their child in their life. How much better this is than the ill-mannered, sulky child prone to temper tantrums whose parents, though bursting with love for this child, only play with him in controlled situations knowing there will be at least one scene. For the well-behaved child, all life opens up for opportunities for play as the parent realizes that the child can be safely taken into many and varied social settings. Play becomes more fun not only for the child but for the parent as well.

What follows is:

1. a brief study in the Word of God to aid you in understanding the subject matter of this chapter.
2. a manuscript is provided for you and your spouse to read and discuss.
3. a set of practical projects for discussion and application, provided to aid you in implementing those areas of the seminar that meet your needs as a parent.

Bible Study

KEYS TO SUCCESS

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection: **verbal affection**, **physical affection**, and **parental involvement**. As you read the following verses, write out the phrase from the verse which best represents the subject.

1. VERBAL AFFECTION

God the Father and verbal affection

Passage
Is 43:4

Phrases God uses to express His love

God the Son and verbal affection

Passage

Phrases God uses to express His love

God the Holy Spirit and verbal affection

Passage
Ps 107:1, 8, 15, 21

Phrases God uses to express His love

2. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

God the Father and physical affection

Passage
Is 40:11

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

God the Son and physical affection

Passage
Mk 9:36; 10:16

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

God the Holy Spirit and physical affection

Passage

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

Rom 5:5; Acts 9:31

3. PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

God the father and personal involvement

Passage

Dt 17:9

Phrases God uses to express His personal involvement

God the Son and personal involvement

Passage

Rom 5:8

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

God the Holy Spirit and personal involvement

Passage

1 Cor 3:16

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

GOD'S LOVE FOR US

This is a very important conviction for us, that God loves us.

According to Jn 3:16, how did God express this love?

According to Heb 12:6, how does God express this love?

What do you experience more of in life, God's graces or His disciplines?

Grace is defined as “receiving that which is not deserved,” and this is poured out upon us by God. As models of God to our children, how can we express Grace to them?

Does my child experience more grace or more discipline when it comes to our relationship? (Why)

Chapter Ten

Reshuffling the Deck: Drawing Near To Your Child Through Play And Affection

I. PRINCIPLES AT WORK

The ultimate goal of this series is three-fold:

First: to aid you as the parent in fulfilling the Biblical responsibilities placed before you by God concerning your child's training and discipline.

Second: To equip your child with the spiritual skills that are necessary for him to be both fruitful and fulfilled in life.

Third: That your child will grow up and leave home.

In doing this, we always want to preserve a balance between discipline and fun, between project and relationship. Notice that I did not say between discipline and love. Discipline is one of the highest forms of love. Rather, I am emphasizing the difference between discipline and fun. Again, notice that I did not say between discipline and interactive projects. For some parents, fun is just another project. I emphasize therefore the difference between projects and fun relationships. They are not mutually exclusive, but must be kept in balance. Some projects may be within the set of fun relationship building. However, for the child, not all projects are fun. Similarly, some forms of fun, which the child will really enjoy and appreciate, require a degree of project-orientation. All relationship and no project usually results in a child who looks back on parents who had good intentions but never got anything done. All project and no relationship results in a child who looks back at parents who were action-oriented in their leisure time, but the child still does not feel that close tie that only play and affection can bring. In other words, it wasn't really fun.

We are striving for a close love relationship with our child that will weather the storms of life. Physical discipline should be nothing more than a blip on the screen of your relationship with your children. It is only one tiny slice of the relational pie. Its true benefit is that the respect and order obtained through love (expressed in discipline and training) makes drawing near to your child through play and affection not only a possibility, but a probability. Now it's fun for the parent as well as the child to spend time together. What is fun for the person in charge will get chosen more often than not. If play is something that gives Mom and Dad a headache because of a whining, ungrateful, unruly child, then play will occur less often. With disciplined, thankful, well-behaved children, family times become more common and children draw closer to their parents and to their brothers and sisters. It is the same with the child. A child who cannot control his emotions, who is

*"... There is a time for every event under heaven...
a time to laugh...
a time to dance...
a time to embrace...
a time to love..."*

Eccl 3:1,4,5 & 8

"The key to drug free kids... teach them to play."

— Dr. White, (Moody Graduate School;
Wheaton Graduate School)

Megan and Liz were happily jumping on the trampoline. They were laughing, talking, giggling and having a great time together. I came out in the back yard and they cried out, "Look, daddy, look at what we can do." Then they began jumping and improvising all sorts of routines, as they laughed and laughed 'til they finally collapsed, ending up just a ball of intertwined bouncing giggles.

"That's great kids," I cried out, "you seem to enjoy this so much, why don't I try to find you a gymnastic class for the summer." The giggling stopped and both girls looked up at me and stared goggled-eyed, mouths open, as if I had just suggested that rather than go to Church camp they sign up for math and spelling at summer school.

I beat a hasty retreat, "Bad idea, kids, show me some more." Life returned to the trampoline and they did their next routine.

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selfish and unappreciative cannot really have interactive fun and play. This child cannot enjoy his relationships with other children, his siblings or his parents. To the degree that he is disciplined and well behaved, he can enjoy fun and play with others.

Keep in mind here that for many evangelical parents, denial is not just a river in Egypt. It can also be a refusal to compare your actions with that of the Scripture. Even in play, children are still required to be obedient to their parents and under their control. I have seen many children go wild at play. The parents smile or nod condescendingly and say, "What a precocious child," or "He is just so focused," as if being intelligent or gifted is an excuse for disobedient or wild behavior. Parents simply end up cheating themselves and their children. They cheat themselves because either consciously or unconsciously, they spend less time playing with their children if they are wild. They cheat their children because a wild, unruly, sullen child does not have many friends in or out of the home.

A. WHAT EXACTLY WE MEAN

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection: verbal affection, physical affection, and parental involvement.

We experience these in our relationship with God. Our children are prepared for this in their relationship with God, as we model God in our relationship with our children. The Word of God states in Ps 103:13, "*Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*" So our children will look back to the closeness we have with them, our affection, our love for them and relate that to their heavenly Father. Drawing near to your child through play and affection in these three areas—verbal affection, physical affection, and parental involvement—is a crucial element in helping your child to respond to God in these same three areas.

God Reveals His Love Through Verbal Affection

First, the Triune God is a loving, affectionate God in His verbal relationship with us. This is seen in Jeremiah's relationship with God the Father, where it states in Jeremiah 31:3 "*The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.'*" God the Father is not a distant, cold, closed, unexpressive God, but rather a close, self-revealing, verbally-affectionate God.

Jackie violently disagreed with me on this issue. "My child is simply a very, very focused child," she protested. "He just gets so engrossed in his play that he is not conscious of what is going on around him. It is not that he is wild, he is just a very focused child. I understand this and it does not hinder our relationship at all." I begged to disagree with Jackie on two points.

First on his being a "focused" child. By this, she means a highly-intelligent child who becomes mentally engrossed in his duties. Be it work or play, he loses track of what is going on around him. He may indeed be a "focused" child; this does not however give him the license to be a disobedient child. Nowhere in psychology or in the Bible is intelligence or concentration equated with disobedience. Instead, just the opposite is true. In fact, it is Jackie's responsibility to discipline her son so that he experiences all that his intelligence has to offer him. What many parents try to sell "focused" as just a way of their denying that their children ignore them!

Secondly, I know Jackie and have seen the dynamics of her family and her child's behavior does affect their relationship. True, Jackie is more conscientious than most in seeing that play takes place with the children, but two negative dynamics are at work. First, it is generally Jackie and her focused child. Her husband, Bill, wants little to do with the chaos that passes for play. Sure he can be coaxed in to it, but it is far less time than either of them are happy with. Secondly, what Jackie referred to as play time with her precocious, focused little darling was actually her standing back and watching while he did his thing with her periodically functioning as damage control officer. He played as she watched, and there was periodic conflict at first when she tried to keep his "focused" behavior in reasonable check and then as she tried to unfocus him or defocus him when it came time to leave.

Similarly, concerning God the Son, Jesus Christ, we have ample evidence of His verbal affection. In John 11:3, Lazarus's sisters sent for Jesus when he is sick, saying "*Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.*" In seeing from the Gospels how freely Jesus used the word "love," we can understand how freely the sisters used it in their petition. Jesus referred to His love for the disciples in His exhortations for them to love others, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another,*" (Jn 13:34). He does this again in John 15:12, "*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*" He also spoke freely of His intense love for the disciples as in John 15:9, "*Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.*" He exhorted them to revel in the intense love He had for them. Jesus was not bashful concerning verbal affection.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, constantly reinforces His love for us: "*and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" (Rom 5:5).

God Reveals His Love Through Physical Affection

In the parable of the prodigal son, God the Father has depicted Himself as a physically affectionate Father, "*And 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.*" (Lk 15:20).

And again, we find Jesus Christ, God the Son, as a physically affectionate God, both with children, as in Mark 9:36, "*And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them,*" and with the disciples, "*There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.*" (Jn 13:25).

The Holy Spirit is also a loving God, "*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase,*" (Acts 9:31).

God Reveals His Love Through Personal Involvement

The Historical books are filled with God the Father becoming personally involved with men, beginning with Adam, "*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man,*" (Gn 2:18, 22, 23).

He is also involved with Israel, "*the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid,*" (Dt 11:2-). He is involved with the Church, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows,*" (Mt 10:29-31).

Similarly, Jesus Christ is personally involved in the lives of the disciples, as He is with us. "*And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him,*" (Mk 3:14). The Holy Spirit is involved in our personal lives: "*Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*" (I Cor. 3:16)

Love expressed verbally, physically and through personal involvement is the normative, definitive love, as expressed in the scriptures.

Paul was very expressive in *verbal love*, “*Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*” (2 Cor 11:11), *physical love*, “*But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, ‘Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.’* And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,” (Acts 20:10, 37) and *personal involvement*, “*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*” (1 Thes. 2:7)

We must then express these three areas in the lives of our children. They are modeled by the triune God towards us, and they are normative in relationships within the Church. How much more should they be modeled by us to our children, and normative in our relationships with our children! When the Bible speaks of God the Father’s verbal affection, His physical affection, His personal involvement, what picture will yours, the earthly father and model conjure up in your child’s life? When the Bible speaks of the Christian’s verbal affection, his physical affection, his personal involvement in the lives of others, what modeling, what preparation will your relationship with your child be in terms of his ability to obey God in this area? When God tells your child to “enjoy,” will your child be able to within the boundaries set by God? All this is gained by drawing near to your child by play and affection.

“It is very hard for me to relate to the passages concerning God’s love for me and His desire for me to enjoy life. When I read the passages about God the Father, I think of my own father. He was a good provider, but was just not into expressing his love for us kids.”

University student
expressing to me her
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B. WHY PARENTS FAIL:

The first thing that comes to mind when I consider why parents fail in this area is just plain stinginess. Proverbs 18:6 teaches us that “*A man’s gift makes room for him.*,” and this is true in our relationship with our children. I have seen spiritual stinginess take many forms.

Selective Stewardship

In each case, the ministers with lay or full-time responsibilities practiced a highly selective form of stewardship. They were crippled in their ability to draw near to their children through play and affection by their own stinginess. You see they were loath to spend money on their family, but were more than willing for the ministry to bless them. This double standard, clear to their family, not only embittered their children toward them, but kept them from being able to take decisive action in this area on behalf of their relationship with their children.

I have seen this many times. The difference between stewardship and blessing is the difference between what they like and what they don't. There is a shotgun for Dad, but no Christmas tree, or at best a third-rate one for the family. There is a bird dog run, training, and all for Dad, but shop at Wal-Mart for Mom and the kids. There is a bass boat, depth finder and troller for dad, but buy shoes at Payless for Mom and the kids. Dad has a deer lease, but no baseball camp for Junior and no women's retreat for Mom. Dad takes a mission trip to southern England, but no family vacation. Just take it at home again this year. Several new business suits needed for work and ministry, but buy the rest of the clothes at yard sales.

David is a highly successful Christian businessman in my neighborhood. His success has given him the financial freedom to travel and minister as a layman in the denomination which he faithfully serves as an officer both on a national and international level. As such, he travels all over the world speaking for his denomination, doing great acts of charity. He is a blessing to his denomination, especially to its mission ventures.

When it comes to his own children, though, he is very tight-fisted. While he might stay in a four star hotel, his children must be content with a cheap artificial Christmas tree. While he might drop a couple of grand on an "evangelistic dove hunt," his kids must do without. He is very quick to preach his sermons on stewardship to his wife and children, and they do live very modestly and work hard.

David was constantly working while he was at home. I never saw him shooting basketball with his sons or engaging in play that they found exciting. It was always work and frugality at home. This would be a great testimony to his generosity to the work of God, except that on his mission trips and ministry activities, his generosity to others overflows lavishly on him, but not on his wife or children. David has often wondered why his children are not close to him and has spoken to me often of their worldliness and how he has tried to protect them from it. His children are all too aware that what is at stake is his stinginess towards them and not concern. David manifests a peculiar syndrome I see often in laymen and ministers alike; they have the ability to apply the Christian principles of liberality and forgiveness in lavish proportions outside the family but not within it.

Gary is a minister friend of mine. It would be poor stewardship to buy an expensive car, but when a congregant gave one to him, you could guarantee that it would be in his parking spot in the church while his wife and kids ended up in the clunker. Vacations were rare and bare-boned for the family, but you could guarantee that Gary was at every denominational function, staying in nice hotels in large cities. While Gary often met with businessmen in nice restaurants for lunch and never missed a denominational banquet, eating out was rare for the family. His home was frugal and thread bare, but you can bet his office was spacious, comfortable, and well-furnished. Gary practiced selective stewardship that included a form of spirituality that allowed him to present a picture to the world of sacrifice while, at the same time and at the expense of his family, he experienced all the world had to offer. It is no wonder his wife's countenance was fallen and his children were sullen and resentful.

It is not to say that buying clothes at yard sales, Wal-Mart or Payless is wrong. That's where the Mahon family shops. Nor is taking vacation time, but not actually going anywhere. Several times the Mahon Family has not had funds to take off for a week and has spent the vacation time on picnics, in parks and on a series of fun one-day outings. It is to say that in doing these things it has been a family financial situation. What's good for Mom and the kids has also been good for Dad. The variable here has been that while Mom and the kids live at one level, "practicing good stewardship," Dad, in business and the ministry lives at a completely different level. This is wrong.

Cliff was a missionary with a large family. They lived in a small house in a relatively poor neighborhood. In order to practice good stewardship they lived cramped, sacrificial lives. His wife looked years beyond her age and the kids looked like waifs. This was a sacrifice Cliff was willing to make, but only a few hours out of each day. You see Cliff's office in the ministry was spacious and well furnished. He rubbed shoulders with educators and businessmen. He was often downtown eating out, ministering, and visiting. Often, he would be at home just a few hours before leaving again at night.

What's good for Mom and the kids has also been good for Dad. The variable here has been that while Mom and the kids live at one level, "practicing good stewardship," Dad, in business and the ministry lives at a completely different level. This is wrong.

C. When parents are crippled by their own problems

Connie's mother was an alcoholic, and her father worked away from the home as much as possible. He moved in his job until he could secure a position that enabled him to be out of the home much of the time. As a result, Connie never had a childhood. She grew up cooking meals, cleaning house, getting her younger brothers and sister off to school, forging notes and permission slips for them, making excuses for Mom and even doing the shopping. Her mother was always, "sick," "too tired" from work or "suffered from migraines." When Connie got married, she did not know how to play with either her husband or her children. She saw her relationships suffering from this and her children suffering as well. She simply did not know what to do about it.

Tom grew up in a poor family and had worked all his life. He never had free time. His family lived on a farm and as long as he could remember life was either spent working on the farm or on jobs outside the farm if time permitted. He was the hardest worker I knew, but he did not know how to play. He could not get close to his kids, either. If it was not a project, if it could not be translated into a task, project or job, Tom did not know how to deal with it. His relationships all suffered, in the church, in his marriage, and with his children. Tom realized he did not have the relational standing with the kids to guide them through the difficult teen years. The one thing that would turn the corner, play and affection, he saw as weak and wasteful.

Claire was the most dynamic woman in the church. She had strong values and was devoted to the family. She would never hold a job other than wife and homemaker. Yet, Claire could not play. She home-schooled, ran a music conservatory for her kids, and offered volunteer lessons for every needy situation you could imagine. She "mentored" young mothers. She volunteered in the church. She was, in fact, a compulsive worker and totally project-oriented. She was able to get away with this by spiritualizing it, but the effects were the same. Her highly-trained and talented children had a very mechanical and functional relationship with her. Claire was at a loss as to why her teenage daughters sought solace in the arms of young men rather than at home.

In each case, parents crippled by their own emotional problems were unable to engage in play and affection with their children. As a result, both their marriage and children's spiritual safety suffered.

Poor Role Modeling by Parents

This is true, though in many areas. Children tend to idolize their parents and to do to their children what was done to them, without really sitting down and thinking through as to whether or not they were raised with distinctly Christian values. To reject a value or method of your parents is not to be disloyal or dishonoring but to simply recognize that they were not perfect. Just because it was always done in a certain way does not mean you have to repeat it in your family life. Good secure cross-parent communication is essential here. As parents we must be secure enough to listen to our spouse who often sees the chink in the armor or the fallacy in the method or tradition.

Darlene's father was a successful physician with a lucrative practice in a large metropolitan city. She had a checkbook all through college that she never balanced. She had credit cards that never seemed to reach their limit. Most important of all, Daddy, in an effort to make up for his absence, spared her no luxury.

Darlene went to nursing school and married a doctor who was just beginning his residency. Although he would one day make a comfortable living, he did not specialize beyond Family Practice. He was content to return to a small rural community, similar to the one in which he had grown up. By the time he had begun his practice, Darlene had the family so deep in debt they might never dig themselves out.

Darlene never stopped to question whether she could live with her new husband at the lowest point of his earning power as she had with her father at the highest, or if the financial freedom given to her by her father was even right. She just pushed on. The friction caused by her free-spending ways and lifestyle resulted in a debt that greatly hindered their ability to draw near as a family through play and affection.

Terrie had grown up in a family proud of its ethnic heritage. In her grandparents' culture, the boys ran wild, but the girls were disciplined and prepared for a life of service. It never occurred to Terrie to do it any other way until it was almost too late. Her daughter was a model of decorum and decency, but her four boys were such hellions that nothing was possible in the home while they were on the scene. Family outings were atrocious, church was a chore, dinner times were a disaster. As Terrie began to think back on her brothers lives, her own high school experience, and the boys she dated, she realized that the good girl/bad boy stereotype was not scriptural. She had almost sacrificed her relationship with her boys by blindly following it. Needless to say, her boys in this shape were not close to her.

Carl grew up in a competitive home with a very competitive family. He raised his kids the same way. Whether it was play wrestling, basketball or catch, it always ended up in a competition to see who was best. What Carl did not realize was that his children were not drawing near to him through play, and competition is certainly not affectionate. His four boys took one of two routes, they lived for the day when they could cram it down Dad's throat, like they had grown up with him doing to them, or they just opted out of the relationship. I can remember being at Carl's home now that his boys were in their late teens and early college years. One son stood on the sidelines refusing to play at all, while the other three ran Carl into the ground playing driveway basketball. Just as soon as they had thoroughly put it to him and he had limped away, only then did the fourth boy join in and the four boys together engage in actual play.

It is important for us to ask ourselves two questions. First, are the methods our parents used in this crucial area of our relationship with our children really Biblical in nature?

And second, did they really bring us close to them, allowing them to have greater influence over our success in life— both personal and spiritual?

Selfish ambitions

What we have fought, we have embraced. The desire for things has caused those in the modern evangelical family culture to accept and practice family methods our recent forefathers never thought possible, “*and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*” (Mk 4:19)

The restless desire for acquisitions is a powerful force within our culture. As a result, there are three modern philosophies that most evangelical couples accept without consideration as if they were Bible memory verses learned at early childhood, recited over the years and accepted without question. They are: the two-child family; the children cared for in day care and early education centers; and the mother returning to work while

In my estimation, nothing has impacted the Christian family more in terms of its ability to draw close through play and affection than the blind following of young evangelical couples to quickly have two children and then stop. This is followed rapidly by the mother pursuing a career in order for the young couple to acquire more and more material things, and go deeper and deeper into consumer debt. The willingness to allow strangers to care for their children in exchange for material acquisition is something unimaginable to Christian couples even a generation ago.

A Lifestyle of Emotional Distance

Lastly, parents fail to draw near to their children through play and affection for the same reasons they fail in their relationship with one another and with others in their sphere of influence.

It is always amazing to me that men, with few or no close friends, who are not on intimate terms with their wife, not close to their brothers or sisters, and have no intimate confidential friends in their church are amazed that there has been a communication breakdown with their children. Men who give themselves to their work, have no hobbies, have no outside pursuits, and have no deep relationships outside of their career-be it Christian or secular-are surprised that they do not have a close bond with their children.

It is a clear early childhood memory. It was 1959, the height of the Cold War and my fellow second-grade students and I were sitting attentively in class as we watched a movie. It was a Cold War propaganda film and the cornerstone of the message, the one thing that we all talked about afterwards, both in class and on the playground, were the stark pictures of Russian children, our age and even toddlers, being cared for and raised by institutional workers while their moms went off to work. The message was clear, only godless commies let strangers raise their children. We couldn't believe it. No mom at home. No mom to put on the Band-Aid. No mom to send us off to school with a kiss and a lunch. No mom to read us stories, put us down for a nap and be there for us when we got home. No mom to be homeroom mother, to work the holiday parties at school, to volunteer in the library and in the classroom. No mom to come and get us when we skinned our knees, fell in the mud, spilled our milk or came down with the flu. Yes, we all agreed, communism was indeed an evil, evil thing. We did not understand politics, but we did understand no mom.

the children are still at home.

“Well, I lost that one for sure.” Mary was sharing with me her conviction that she had just lost one of her charges. Mary took in one or two children each year to help make ends meet. She had four of her own, but took in one or two each year. She enjoyed this more and more as her own children began to be in school all day.

The problem? The child in question had begun to refer to her as “Mommy” while at home. And why not? Mary related to the child as “Mommy” while the mother related to the child as a day care worker. Mary was with the child all day, five days a week, while the “mother” was with her evenings and weekends. That evening, the mother had come to pick her up and she had cried for “mommy” when she had to leave.

Women who live for career and service organizations, who are too tired to relate to their husband when they get home, much less their children, who get a groggy child up, feed him “breakfast” in the car on the way to work, drop him off at dawn and pick him up at dinner time, are surprised that their children are not intimate with them. Women who view themselves as workers, even in the home, while others play, they cook, clean, host, anything but play, are surprised that others are closer to their children than they are.

Look at your life, it may very well be that the distance you feel from your children is just a slice of the distance you feel in all relationships. Begin at home, but don’t stop there. As you grow in all areas of relationships you will grow in your ability to draw near to your child through play and affection.

C. WHY PARENTS MUST NOT FAIL.

In our relationship with our heavenly Father, we are constantly reminded of His deep and sacrificial commitment to our well being, of His constant reinforcement, through His Word, of His love for us and the joy He takes in the relationship. It is a blessing, yes, it is fun to be a Christian, a child of God. Jesus Christ said it aptly enough, in John 10:10 “... *I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.*” Without this aspect of His involvement in our lives, this deep abiding love, the relationship would never survive the deep trials of discipline which invariably come our way. Of course, we should believe it simply because God says it, but in reality, we believe it because of the relationship, “*whom the Lord loves He disciplines.*” Because of the closeness of our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we believe that His discipline is an act of love.

“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”

Heb 12:6

This is equally true with the relationship of earthly fathers to their children. We must have a deep, close love relationship with our children to weather the storms of discipline produced by their inevitable disobedience and rebellion. The discipline then becomes a blip on the screen of the relationship, consumed by a sea of intimacy that is based on our personal involvement in their lives, a crucial aspect of which is drawing near to our children through play and affection.

This will also serve as their model for the spiritual discipline they will receive from God., “*Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*” (Ps 103:13) When God disciplines them, they will remember the deep relationship they had with their father and how he disciplined them out of love not in anger, not out of vindictiveness, not in jealousy, not out of hatred, but because of a deep and abiding love. It would be inconceivable that a father who drew so close to his children through play and affection could have these emotions, so it must be love. Nothing else is possible, and in the same way they will think of their heavenly Father.

Drawing near to your child through play and affection will serve then as an anchor to help the relationship weather the storms of life. It will cover a multitude of sins including the mistakes we will invariably make, and it will serve as a stabilizing force, the rudder of a sailing ship, the beacon light for the safe haven during the turbulent teen years.

II. Stages—Conception through Infancy:

“The first three years are just maintenance.” It was a cute cliché used by Stew to explain his indifference to his small children, his saddling of his wife with virtually all the responsibilities for the newborn and his preoccupation with the ministry. This utilitarian attitude revealed itself in one way or another throughout his relationship with his children.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The earliest years are an important time of bonding and relationship-building. Both parents should view their new child as a gift from God, and should enjoy this gift to the fullest.

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.

Ps 127:3-4

A. VERBAL AFFECTION

This begins, believe it or not, at conception. Begin to talk of the baby as a baby. Express love and thankfulness to one another and to the child. I really encourage you to avoid terms like “it” or “thing.” Pray for your new baby. Praise God for your new baby. Encourage the other children to say “night-night” to the new baby while the baby is in the womb and to give the baby night-night kisses and hugs. Lay your hands on the mother’s womb and pray for the child. Rejoice verbally to the child, to the Lord, and to one another for this great gift.

Once the child is born, make sure there is lots of holding and cuddling. No thought of discipline should be given for the first six to nine months. This is a time of love, affection, and bonding. Laugh, coo, express your love and affection to the child. The child’s brain is a giant sponge. Fill it with words and expressions of love. Sing to the child. Pray for the child. Worship God for the child and express, express, express your deep love for the child.

B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

This also begins at conception. Learn to stroke and kiss the child in the womb. Encourage the other children to feel the child’s movement, to hug and kiss the child. Once the child is born, hold, kiss, and caress the child. When your children read I Thessalonians 2:7, “*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children,*” they should be reminded of your behavior around their newborn brothers and sisters.

C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

This begins at conception and is done through the mother. At this point, serving the mother is serving the child. By taking an active role in prenatal care and the birthing process, the young father prepares himself for the entrance of the child into his life. Be willing to take one of the excellent birthing classes. Take an active role in the preparation of the baby’s living area.

Once the child is born, activities associated with play are many for the young father. Rock the baby to sleep, and hold the child while sleeping. Sing and laugh as you change the diapers and bathe the child. If Mom cannot nurse for some reason, then dad can take

an active part in feeding the child. Play little games with the child's limbs, cuddle games, tickle games, kissing games, hugging games, singing games, talking games, play, bond, play, love, play, kiss, play, pray, play, play, play. At every opportunity the young father should pick up the newborn and draw near to him through play and affection.

When young fathers are at home, they should ask themselves, "Why aren't I holding the baby?" and if they cannot come up with a good answer, they should go pick up their baby.

III. Stages— Toddler through Preschool:

At this stage, for the child, the definition of fun in life is quite simple, "Fun is having Mom or Dad do something with them." This, however, presupposes the training and discipline to make this possible. Of course, a foolish, scornful child will not hold to this definition of fun, nor will he be able to fully appreciate these relational activities. This child is foolish; he will want to be in charge. He will spoil his own activities. He will spoil his fun times with whimpering, whining, selfishness, and unmanageable behavior. A parent who loves his child will discipline and train the child in such a way that fun is possible, that play with the parents is true interactive play which bonds and draws them closer to one another and prepares the child for success outside the home.

A. VERBAL AFFECTION

This is essential for the young father. The cold, unexpressive father is no more acceptable here than in the marriage relationship. Just as in marriage, to fulfill the scriptural mandate, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,*" (Ephesians 5:25), the husband must be communicative, both in expressing himself and in listening. In this way, his relationship with his children will be an example of the heavenly Father's willingness to always be there, expressing love, affection and affirmation. The earthly father must be this example for his children.

The advertising media spends millions of dollars each week to convince your children that they are unattractive, unpopular, disappointing, and unintelligent. If your children will just spend lots and lots of money, the products advertised will fix their problems. The creation of a poor self-image in your children is the supreme goal of a multibillion-dollar world-wide industry, and it is our jobs as fathers to fight against this process. As a result, there are four phrases which I try to say daily to my children...

- "I love you."
- "You're pretty/handsome."
- "I am proud of you."
- "You're smart."

The constant reinforcement of these phrases cannot be over emphasized. They must hear it over and over again. In addition, spontaneous phrases of praise must be given...

- "You're special."
- "I am so glad God gave you to us."
- "I wouldn't change anything about you."
- "You make me the happiest daddy in the world."
- "You're the greatest child in the world."
- "You're the most wonderful child a father could ask for."

Nick names and terms of affection such as, "sweet heart," "little darlings," "honey," for the girls, and "best buds," "buddy," "tough guy," "super pal," for the boys are also important.

In the same way I shudder as I hear fathers berate and put down their children to lift their own egos. Nick names such as "monkey face," "pinhead," "goof ball," "squirt," "half pint," "pumpkin," "tubs," "toady," and the like are destructive and egotistical and should be repented of by the foolish and self-centered father. These not only create vulnerability and low self-image in the child, but often they create friction between husband and wife, between parent and other adult relatives, and between parent and child.

B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

This is equally important in terms of the young father's relationship with his children. Here, I recommend lots and lots of lap time. After dinner, in the car, in the home, in church, during leisure times, there should be lots of lap time. Of course, this presupposes "obey" and "no." A child who cannot obey, who cannot respond to the command "no," is being robbed by negligent parents of the opportunity to bond and be affectionate with his parents.

I have always had affectionate names for my children. Becca was "Becky Boo." "Sweetheart" was common. The two youngest girls have always been "the lil' darlin's." Sam has been "tough guy" and we were always "best buds" and "friends to the end." Sam, even though now in his early twenties, will come up to me and put his arm around my shoulder and say, "friends to the end" or "best buds, right Dad?" Becca, even in college, would refer to me as "Daddy" as would all the girls. "Oh Daddy!" is a common exclamation from the girls. One of the reasons I believe that we are all so close to each other is that El and I have always used affectionate terms with each other and with the children, and had a no-tolerance policy of the children being unkind in words to each other.

I always shudder when I hear children call each other names without being spanked. How foolish of them! Their parents will die. Their friends will all get married and move away. Pastors and teachers will move to new ministries. Many will find that their spouse has predeceased them. Their truly life-long friends, the ones who will always be by their sides, are their brothers and sisters. How foolish to call an ally such as this a name, and how tragic for a parent to allow it to happen.

"Hey, dork, tell Brother John your name."

"Wart Hog" beamed the toddler, and then his father laughed and laughed and laughed.

Embarrassed, I did not know what to do. This father, in his effort to play with his children, did not seem to know how to play, kid and show affection without the inclusion of some insult. Is it any wonder that they grew up estranged from their father? By the way, his wife never forgave him, even to this day, though the kids are all married and gone. She still has not forgiven her husband for teaching her little hero to respond to the name "Wart Hog."

It is foolish for a child not to want to be held and loved by a father. This foolishness is driven out by the rod. How sad that Jeff allowed this foolishness to remain and cheated his child out of the bond that comes from close, affectionate contact with the father. Unfortunately, to Jeff's as well as to many parents shame and dismay, children do not grow out of bad behavior, they grow into it. It is discipline that saves them, not time. Jeff's teens were no more able to draw close to him than were his toddlers.

Jeff strongly differed with me in this area. He did not discipline his children, and he was affectionate with them. But I differed with Jeff. His children could not be held at the dinner table during the after dinner conversation. For one, they would not stand for it. They would wiggle and make a nuisance of themselves 'til Jeff was glad to see them depart. Another problem was that if they were in his lap, they would be pulling the silverware, coffee, place mats and what-have-you onto the floor, or Jeff's lap. Elsewhere, if they were tired and of the right disposition, they would be held, otherwise they foolishly denied themselves of Jeff's affection and attention by wiggling and squirming and crawling all over Jeff, pulling his glasses off, taking his pens out, yanking at his hair and mouth until he finally let them go.

Having taught our children, "no," "obey," and "hush" by the time they were 12 months old, it was always a pleasure to have them with us at the dinner table. After dinner I would hold the small child in my lap as the family talked. I read the devotional or the older kids worked on their Scripture memory verses. The child quietly amused himself with my buttons, or a spoon, or the hair on my arms. If things got a little out of hand, a gentle "no" or "obey" or "hush" would restore order. If not, a spanking, that might last a few minutes, insured hours of intimacy. This early discipline in behavior, self-control and social etiquette served them well. As they matured, they were able to gain access to many of Eleanor's and my conversations that ill-mannered children are denied. They loved to sit and listen to us talk and were able, when we had visiting missionaries and dignitaries, to be privy to the inside "scoop," in terms of the mysterious working of adults. All simply because they had learned as a lifestyle, not to be rude.

Lots and lots of lap time is the name of the game. After dinner, have the child sit in your lap with you as you enjoy after dinner conversation and a leisurely cup of coffee. If your child is too unruly for this, your application is to deny yourself and your child this fun time together, or discipline your child so that his foolish behavior neither cheats you nor him out of this special time together. Duhh! I always enjoyed having the children in my lap in the car. Letting them play with the steering wheel, talk in an animated way, it was great fun. At home, my lap was always open territory for the children. I loved to have them sit in my lap as I read to them, told them stories, let them play with toys in my lap, etc. At church, I loved to have the children near me, falling peacefully to sleep in my arms or lap during the sermon. These are fun bonding times for the children, make lap time a habit.

I want to say here a word about toddlers and preschoolers in the car. With the advent of the understanding of driver safety and sophisticated car seats, many parents have taken to driving with the kids in the back seat. This I can understand, if the parent is convinced of its necessity for the safety of the child. What should not be necessary is for the mother to be relegated to second-class status by having to sit back there with the child. A child can ride in the car without screaming, crying, and always throwing his toys down on the floorboard.

I cringe when I see men driving confidently around town while their haggard wives are scrunched in the back seat, playing nanny to some little brat who will not let his mom have her seat of honor in the front. Even worse is the father and a child in front, while the mother is in back, by herself or with another child. Who do these kids think they are,

displacing Mom from the front seat by their rude and unmannerly behavior? And what kind of brains was this young father born with to allow this to happen? Of course, some fathers will reply that this is not an ego thing or a pecking order thing. They will insist that it is for safety, and that Mom likes being back there. It is good for her relationship with the child. Great! I have no problem with this. I presume then, that you, Dad, spend an equal amount of time in the back seat because it is such a neat bonding experience. No? Then I don't buy it.

On trips, I enjoyed riding with El in front, holding hands, talking and being together, away from the phone and pressures of ministries. I certainly wasn't going to let the kids rob me of her or of those special times. We had the wooden spoons in the glove compartment. I would stop anywhere, no matter the weather, no matter the traffic, no matter the part of town we were in, no matter where we were going or how late we might be. I would take that spoon out of the glove compartment, have those children lie over the back seat with their hands on their cheeks, and drive that foolishness right out of them. Because this was done first and thoroughly, at an early age, Eleanor was never forced to surrender her place of honor in the front of the car, nor was I, and we have wonderful memories of road trips as a family.

Along with lots of lap time, are lots of hugs and kisses. We never allowed our children to draw away and refuse a hug or a kiss from Mom or Dad, or one of their brothers or sisters. How foolish of a child not to rejoice and respond to the love of his family! One of the most foolish life skills parents allow their children to develop is that of using the deprivation of affection to manipulate or punish family members. We never, never allowed this. The shortest route to the wooden spoon was to deny Mommy, Daddy, Brother or Sister a kiss, a hug or affection.

The first thing the kids get in the morning is a hug and a kiss. At mealtime, for the kids to leave the table they had to pay the "Daddy tax". That meant, to come by my chair and give me a hug and a kiss. As I arrived home from school, Eleanor would have the kids waiting for me. "Daddy's home!" they would yell and then hugs and kisses all around. At bedtime, I would hold them in my arms as I read the "night-night story," then wrap my arms around them and pray with them. I would give them a good-night kiss and then linger just a moment, with a hug. During this time, they would often share something very close to their heart.

Gus was obviously depressed. "Boy, do I hate Christmas" he confided. I could not believe my ears. Gus certainly never struck me as a Scrooge. He was one of the most pleasant ministers I had ever met.

He went on to explain. "Christmas means a two day car trip to my in-laws and after two days in our car with my kids. I can preach on Hell for a month." I felt for Gus. He did not believe in spanking and his kids knew it. They would misbehave. He would threaten. They would misbehave. He would deny them (and by default he and his wife) fun. The children were selfish and unruly. If not hell, at least he could preach on depravity.

When I told him how our family looked forward every year to the two-day car trip to see my sister in Colorado, he simply did not believe it. I painted a picture of us playing games, singing songs, the children playing quietly in the backseat by themselves or with each other. I spoke of Eleanor driving and me taking a nap in the back seat while our toddler quietly played with toys on my back. I shared how everybody talked about the coming trip for weeks before we left.

He quite simply did not believe it. It was so far from the reality of his life, that he just would not believe. Sad for him, but true, happy for me, for it was indeed true. What about you?

As I prayed with Sam, I could see by his face that something was bothering him. As usual, we were hugging as we prayed, and I had to lean over him in bed to do this. "Sam, is everything alright?" He shook his head, no. "Are you sad?" Yes, he shook his head. "You can tell Daddy, tell Daddy what is wrong." I coaxed him. As I waited for him to share some deep secret or fear, he quietly replied. "You're leaning on me with your elbow in my stomach."

time, they would often share

From the early toddler stage, I have walked and held hands with the kids. For our children it was not a form of discipline, but of love. How sad for the family that must hang on to a child for the sake of discipline rather than love, with a child who is squirming, pulling, yanking, and complaining. A disciplined and obedient child is a joy to go for walks with, to go shopping with or to be with, as they quietly and affectionately hold your hand.

A preschool child, if your hands are full, can be told to reach up and put their hand in your pocket or gently hold the edge of your hem and walk along by you. They can be asked to place one hand on the basket or cart, and walk quietly with you as you shop. More importantly, they can gently and lovingly, give and receive affection as you walk hand in hand, without yanking, without whining and without running you ragged.

Isn't *this* how you imagined it? Shopping with your little darling and sharing special affectionate times together, walking hand in hand. Then, when she tired out you would take her in your arms. Taking little walks together, little strolls, sharing affection in this special way is something which only a parent and child can do. *Isn't this how you imagined it?* Well, don't let a foolish child or a screwed-up world cheat you out of this special time. It is what we had, and you can have it, too, if you will take the time to discipline and train your children so that they can experience the love and affection you have for them.

Another thing I always let my children do was "mess with me." My kids loved to comb my hair. They would make it stand up straight or change the part or make it as wild as possible. They loved to play with my hands, my veins, the skin on my hands which was not nearly as elastic as theirs, the hairs on my hands and my face. If I was napping on the couch, they loved to come and sit on me and play quietly on my back. All this is possible with a gentle, respectful child, who wants to do these things out of love, and to be near and familiar with their parents. This is unlike an impish child, who wants to see what they can get away with. They try to pinch, get something, bother or make fun of Mom or Dad. What a joy pleasant children are. How much easier it is to draw near to a child through play and affection when that child respects his parents and accepts boundaries of behavior.

C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

Someday your child will read in the Bible of the deep personal involvement that God the Father has and takes in his life. He will read of God's view of him as His son, of the Church as His Bride, and of all Christians as His children... children of God. He will read of God's deep personal involvement in, and commitment to, this family of God. It is at that point that he will begin to struggle for a frame of reference, for a context in which to

I could not believe my eyes, but there it was. A mother and father with their child, their only child was on a leash! I saw this first in the airport. Then it began to appear in grocery stores. Now it is everywhere. I can think of no greater shame, of no greater admittance of failure, of no greater conformity to the fallen world's view of a child as an animal, than to be reduced as parents to putting a child on a leash. I put my dog, Sugar, on a leash when we go for a walk. We pass others with their dogs on leashes. We even pass some whose dogs are so well-trained that they obediently walk beside them without the leash. These poor parents have decided that their children are on the same socialization scale as their dog, yet less able to be trained than dogs.

I have seen it many, many times. It is depicted on greeting cards. It is on posters. It is in the morning comics. And, it is live in the grocery stores, supermarkets, and malls of America. A poor frazzled mom, lines of wear under her eyes, hair disheveled and cloths unkempt, screaming baby in her arms, a toddler pulling one way and a preschooler the other, hangs on for dear life trying by physical force to control their movements.

understand and picture these great truths. He will turn to the only reality he has experienced: that of his own father, his own parents, and his own family. Our objective is that when this happens, a light will blink on in his soul and he will say, "Ohhh, so that's what it means, just like Mom and Dad's love for me and deep involvement in my life. They were always there for me. Just like Dad and Mom, God will always be there for me. Just like my own brother and sister, so kind, so supportive, always there for me, that is what brothers and sisters in Christ are to be. Just like our family: close, stable, and warm... that's the family of God. So that's what it means."

Reading:

Reading to and with your child is one of the greatest ways to draw near to your child through play and affection. Christian tapes are good and fine. There are many good Christian children's books that come with an audio cassette tape. There is a little chime that rings when it is time to turn the page and children love to look at the picture and turn the pages. This is great entertainment for a child, but *you* do not draw near to your child, as your child sits by the tape player, headphones on his head, isolated from the world, listening to a tape. It is good, and it is edifying. We loved them. Many good lessons and biblical truths are learned, **but it is not drawing near to your child.** There is virtually no personal involvement. It always amazes me to hear my Christian friends decrying the TV, talking about how it breaks up the family. Some don't even have their TV hooked up to receive signals. But their kids sit there listening to the book tape, or watching the video. These become mechanical babysitters so Mom and Dad can get on with their lives. These systems are great ways to entertain the children and to create an atmosphere conducive to learning truth. They are no substitute for the close love and affection expressed by the child sitting in your lap or arms as you read to them. You interact, ask questions, play little games and express your love. Your child equates the most fun in their lives being that special time you spend together.

Bedtime:

Bedtime is a great time to read, as is right before dinner. While Mom puts the finishing touches on things, Dad can read with the kids. Then, it is the bedtime routine. Children will be highly motivated to get their jammies on, get their clothes in the dirty clothes hamper, get their teeth brushed, get their clothes out for the next day, and get their lunch made for school, (*Oh, you do all these things for your child? You must be very tired*). When it is all done, Dad comes up to pray and read with them. These were special times in our family, and I did not allow for interruptions. I have had more than one supervisor or ministry leader upset with me when Eleanor told them, "Sorry, he can't come to the phone, he's reading to the kids." But that's the way it is. If I am reading to the kids, I only interrupt it for an emergency.

Dates:

Another great expression of personal involvement is taking the child on special dates. These do not have to cost you a thing. My preschoolers loved to go for walks, go to the park, go to the airport, go to the lake, go to the fire station, anywhere where they could laugh, run and play with me. We called them "dates" and they felt so grown-up. They knew Saturday night was "date night" with Mom, and it made them feel so special and

grown up when I would have a date with them. Usually, we would top it off with a ice cream cone or a stop at the supermarket to ride the mechanical horse.

Play:

Playing with the child is equally important. Each child has special activities, books, coloring games, board games, dolls, sports etc. that they particularly love. Play with the child down at his level, the way he wants to, with no rules and no competition, just fun.

Sure, competition is good. Sure, learning to lose is good. But, there are plenty of bumps and bruises out their for your children. For me, play is not a character-building project, but a way to draw near to my child by being personally involved in their play. My kids all grew up beating me at checkers, beating me at cards, beating me at play wrestling, beating me at tag, beating me at racing, beating me at thumb wrestling, beating me at Candy Land, Bingo, and beating me at Chutes and Ladders.

Liz loved to play cards with me. She was just barely old enough to hold them, she certainly did not know what the symbols meant or what they were. Each time we played, she got 8 cards and I got 6. We each laid down a card, the last one holding cards won. She always won! She loved spending time with Daddy.

Fun:

Whether tickling is fun is not decided by the person who wants to tickle, but the person who will be tickled. How much is fun? How long is fun? And where? etc. This is true, especially in an area of what could be considered physical, or one-sided fun, such as tickling. In reality, it applies to all play. The person you are treating gets to decide what is fun for them.

Since it was mentioned as an example, here is good time to say a word about tickling. We have never been big ticklers. All the kids liked to be tickled and I would tickle them. One game we would play was called "Piano". I would place them on my lap, lying down, and begin to play the piano dramatically like a concert pianist. Their squeals of delight would be the music. Another would be "The Magic Jell-O Trick." I would say, "Want to see me turn someone into Jell-O?" They would all run and squeal, "No, no, not me, him, him." The girls always banded together to offer up Sam as the sacrifice. Finally, when they saw that I would not do it if they said "no" even in jesting, one would say, "Do me! Do me!" At that time, I would place them sitting in my lap and say, "Abracadabra, turn into Jell-O" and as I tickled them they would squirm out of my lap like a loose bowl of Jell-O onto the floor.

The last game was the dreaded pit probe. The child would form my hand into a play gun, thumb up, forefinger out and others held to the palm. They would activate the probe by turning the thumb. I would make a humming noise, touch the fingers together and make a sparking sound. Then the special tickle pit probes would tickle them in their arm pits. The children would activate them and go running around the room squealing gleefully, "Pit Probe, Pit Probe!"

Now the reason this was fun is that we had some rules. First, no one is tickled who does not like to be tickled. Second, whenever anyone says stop, the tickling stops. Third, no one is embarrassed by the tickling. A basic rule of all fun and all relationships is this, the person receiving the stimulus gets to define the stimulus.

Walks:

Walks are a great treat for children. Just remember, the objective is to draw near to your child through personal involvement in a fun or play activity. This means, a walk where the child wants to go, at a pace the child enjoys, talking and visiting with the child. Stopping to investigate along the way. A fun walk with a child is entirely different animal than a fun walk for an adult. The objective is for the child to have fun and to draw near to you. Where you go, the pace, and the activities should be inconsequential to the parent. The child is everything.

I could fill this whole book up with stories of my walks with the children. They loved to go for walks. Even now, when my college-age kids come home and see me in my sweats, ready to go on my exercise walk, they will come along. I slip my verse pack quietly in my pocket and concentrate just on them. I can always do my verses another time. Walking is a great way to draw near to your children, children of all ages.

Errands:

Errands are another way to draw near to your child through personal involvement and play. Now I know that at the time, going on an errand with Dad was not my child's first choice. But now that they are grown, the repetition of memories. Over a period of time, the child becomes convinced that Dad just likes me and likes to be with me.

Chores:

Believe it or not, for a preschooler, doing house chores with Dad is great fun. I always had a little plastic lawn set for the kids. I had a play hammer and tools as well. I would give them something to do as I worked around the

Becca and I loved to take walks. We would talk, stop, and pick some "flowers" (usually flowering weeds) for Mommy. Sometimes we would look at the dogs or just watch the cars. Some days she would walk very quietly. Other days, she would chatter nonstop. On this day, she was very philosophical for a four-year-old.

"Daddy, did God make the ground?"

"Yes, dear"

"Daddy, did God make the trees?"

"Yes, dear"

"Daddy, did God make the flowers?"

"Yes, dear?"

I was wondering where this was all headed when suddenly, Becca stopped and pointed to an elderly lady all in white. She had long white hair, a white sun hat on her head, very white skin, and she was kneeling by a little bed of flowers around a freshly planted tree in her front yard, digging gently in the garden, with white gloves on. Becca whispered, "Daddy!!! Is that God!?"

Sam loved to go for walks with me. One of his favorite places for me to take him was the local Agricultural College to go walking among the pens, looking at pigs. On the way over one day, it began to rain. By the time we got there, it was coming down so hard we did a U-turn and headed home. Sam was happy to play an inside game instead, but was disappointed in missing his walk among the pigs. As we drove out of the parking area, he was able to get up on his knees in the front seat and just clear his eyes above the edge of the door to see adult and baby pigs out in the rain and the mud having a good time. Trying to be positive, he plopped back down on the seat and shared philosophically, "Well, dad, it's a good day for pigs."

of this time has created a wealth of

As I walk through the house on the way to the car, I always check for the kids. If I ever see one idly watching TV or hanging around, or even reading or playing by themselves, I draft that child to go with me. I keep the radio off, so that we can talk. Many times, the child will not talk. It is not because they are mad, just that they will sit in the silence and safety of the car with Dad and simply think. Slowly, if you will keep that stupid radio off, they will begin to let these thoughts out, and you will have a great talk together. I always stopped for a little "treat" as part of the errand. It pays off to run an errand with Dad.

house. Yes, it is a little messier and a little more trouble, but not too much if your children are obedient and respectful. Shaving? I always kept a play shaving kit for the kids to shave with me. Whatever you are doing, with a little creativity, your child can join in.

Now if your response is, "You don't know my kid, I could never get anything done with him around." My response is, "Yes, yes... I do know your child." I have seen him in the supermarkets and malls of America. I have seen him at the preschool department at church and at parties in homes. Your spoiled, sullen, disrespectful child would make work impossible. Now, can you think of any better reason to change your child-raising philosophy? Your present course has eliminated an entire area of your life, and a major one at that, from aiding you in drawing near to your child through personal involvement. How many more areas are eliminated, either consciously or subconsciously, by the behavior of your child? Why continue to cheat yourself and your child of a close intimate and yes, fun, relationship?

The Key— Child:

You can see that much (if not all) of this presupposes a child who is well-behaved and self-controlled. It is an absolute rule of thumb: the better behaved the child, the more creative the play and affection can be. The poorer the behavior of the child, the more restricted and less spontaneous the play and affection can be.

Whether you accept it or not, your instinctive reaction, either positive or negative, towards opportunities to do something with your child is governed by your basic subconscious survival guidance system. The system immediately asks the question, "What will my little darling behave like in that situation?" The more disciplined and well-behaved your child is, the more times your subconscious will respond, "Fine. Go ahead. Go for it! You will have a fun time together." The more ill-mannered and ill-tempered your child is, the more frequently you will decide against it. So many times, in fact, that you have stopped thinking in the positive about any type of play except highly-structured play.

The Key— Parent

It is also important to remember at this stage of the game that what is fun for the child will probably bore you to death. What is fun for you will probably be equally as boring for the child. If your objective is to draw near to your child though personal involvement in his life, and you do not make the changes so that his involvement is fun, then you will accomplish the exact opposite. True, your fun and the child's fun are not mutually exclusive, but it is also true that for the parent the joy must be in the child, not the activity.

Be There:

Finally, you can just rip this whole section out and throw it away, along with most of the

Jacob was a fine young businessman who had recently immigrated to the US. Both he and his wife, Sarah, had advanced degrees and were reveling in the prosperity that these brought them in their newly-adopted country, the good ole US of A. In order to allow Sara to work, they had opted for a nanny, rather than a preschool program. One day Jacob asked me, very sincerely, what I thought of this arrangement and I answered him honestly.

I told him that he and Sarah were well-educated and strong Christians. They had and excellent vocabulary and were articulate in speech, and gracious in their social etiquette. They were well-dressed and very sophisticated. In fact, they were model Christen professionals. Their children, however, were being raised by someone on the lowest end of the economic and educational social strata. (Don't kid yourself, no body goes to college to become a nanny or preschool worker). Their children spent most of their time around this person. As a result, their children reflected this in their actions. They used poor grammar and they had poor social skills. They had adopted some of the superstitions of their nanny, and were left to themselves much of the time.

Their nanny, though truly loving the children, could give them none of the social and educational and spiritual benefits with which God had provided Sarah, their mother. They were, in fact, stunted in their social, spiritual, and cultural growth. Jacob and Sarah took this to heart. When I saw their children one year later, I would not have recognized them, their behavior, or their speech. The variable, the mom, whom God had specifically gifted and prepared to raise them, was now making the difference.

do not want to take responsibility for him, but would rather get back to work as quickly as possible. Do not be surprised when your child begins to act out his anger and his loneliness.

Now I know that in some cases of divorce, abandonment or tragedy, the mother is forced, for survival reasons, to place the child in the care of strangers and go back to work. I also know that in the majority of cases, this is not the situation. The mother returns to work out of a desire to exchange her relationship and responsibility to her child for adult relationships at work and for material acquisition. It may be because she is bored with the child and just does not see the nurturing, raising, and care of her child as important as her "job." Whatever the reason, you can be sure that the child quickly realizes it and acts accordingly.

Jimmy shared a story with me without asking for comment and editorial, so I did not give him any. His daughter, Tricia, was in a daycare/ preschool program. When it was time to go in the morning, she threw a fit, but when he went to get her in the evening, she again threw a fit because she did not want to leave. "Wasn't that funny?" Jimmy mused, "She just doesn't remember from one day to the next how much fun it is." Now this was the greatest job in self-denial that I had heard in a long time. A child who got a shot a year ago, still hates the doctor. A child that went to the dentist 6 months ago, still never wants to go back. The same child wants to go to McDonald's every day and wants to hear the same tape in the car, yet can't remember what she thinks about preschool from day to day. I believe they call it Specific Infants Alzheimer Syndrome, or, more specifically, Parental Stupid Reasoning Breakdown. Tricia put up a stink everyday because she hates being stuck with a bunch of strangers while her mom goes off to live her own life. In the same way, she puts up a stink in the evening to punish her father for dumping her off every day.

IV. The Elementary School Years

Things change when your child goes to school. The child becomes a social being with a conscious life apart from Mom and Dad. Your child learns about the world, and about his social likes and dislikes. At first, like in preschool, play and fun is doing anything with Mom and Dad. Slowly, though, play and fun begin to take on a meaning of their own.

The child begins to have favorite things he likes to do, and a way of doing them. Similarly, he develops feelings about things he does not enjoy.

Part of the child's spiritual and emotional development will be in the area of still being able to have fun, to be gracious socially, even when engaged in activities that are not his favorite. Nevertheless, it behooves you as the parent, to discover those favorites and to structure your fun time around those activities in order to draw near to your child through play and affection.

A. VERBAL AND PHYSICAL AFFECTION:

Here, it is the same as in the preschool years. The child needs constant reinforcement of your love, pride and confidence. The harsh realities of the world will take care of themselves. If you do not take care of verbal and physical affection, it will not get done.

Now that the kids are in school, don't fall into Satan's trap of having a conflict, fight or giving the child a scolding every morning before they leave for school. Have the child prepare their lunch (yes, a first grader can prepare his lunch). Have them put up their old clothes, lay out their school clothes, (and find the shoes and socks the night before, not one minute before it is time to leave). Have them lay out their books and school supplies all neatly the night before. Then, the morning can be a truly pleasant time together before they walk out the door.

The last thing they should hear is praise and love. The last thing they should remember is a hug and a kiss. On their return, the first thing they should hear is praise and thanksgiving. The first thing they should receive is a hug and a kiss.

Mothers of young school-age children make a big mistake in returning to work right away. It is very important to the young child to have Mom available during these early years. Pants get ripped. Earaches develop. Spills soil clothes. Children fall down and get cut. A hundred and one little tragedies occur that call for Mom to be on the scene. It has been my observation, that during the school hours, after about third grade, children begin to handle themselves pretty well in school and Mom is pretty much on her own during these hours. I have no problem with her working outside the home, as long as either Mom or Dad are at home, waiting for the child when he returns from school. No elementary or junior high child should return to an empty home. As the child enters high school, things change a little. There are after school activities, sports, jobs, church committees, and youth meetings. Your child often does not come home after school or keep regular hours. I can certainly

I asked Tammy how it was working out, caring for the neighbor's child in her home. Her neighbor wanted to go back to work. Tammy was committed to staying at home with her children, and they could really use the money. Tammy confided that the mother had moved her child to a group-care situation. This surprised me, since the child was not yet two years old. "What happened?" I queried. "Well, she came to get her baby, and her baby didn't want to go. She kept clinging to me and crying. She left with her child, screaming, 'No! No! Me want Mommy!' Tammy's neighbor realized the problem. The solution, of course would be for her to stay home and assume the personal responsibility of her child. Rather than do that, she placed the child in an even more impersonal environment. The application being, "You can't have me for a mother, true, but you sure aren't going to have anyone else either."

"I am sorry to ask you again Mrs. Mahon, but we really are desperate for a mom to be there for this activity. You see, all the other moms work outside the home. Could we impose on you just one more time."

(One of many teachers, recounting the same plea to Eleanor one of countless times.)

make allowances here, but those preschool, elementary and junior high years are very important times for the parent and the child. The child needs to know they are coming home to a refuge.

B. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

Again there are many similarities here with the preschool years. Many parents make the mistake of passing up valuable opportunities for drawing near to their child, simply because the child is able to do the activity himself. The child can read. The child can get their homework done. The child can get themselves ready for bed and go to bed. The child can feed himself. As the child matures through the elementary years, he becomes increasingly able to care for himself. This does not mean that he does not need the care of the parents, nor that you have to pass up a lot of shared fun memories simply because of the growing self-sufficiency of the child.

1. Reading to the child

Many fathers cease to read to the child once they can read themselves. I would caution you against falling into this trap. Be an internal part of the reading process. Your child will love it, and it is a great way to have fun with your child on his level.

Of course, that little note was sent in a tongue-in-cheek gesture. I knew Mrs. Johnson well, and knew she would get a kick out if it. It does serve as a reminder though,

As a general rule, when the kids are learning to read, I like them to read to me every school night before they go to bed whether they are required to by the teacher or not. In addition to this, at bedtime I read to the children through the elementary years.

I would read the Bible and religious stories, but I would also read to them the classic tales which every child should read. This is great fun for the child and you will enjoy it as well. When Sam and I were reading, "Men of Iron," "Silver Chief," "Robinson Crusoe," "The Lord of the Rings," and the biographies of great statesmen, we both equally looked forward to my reading to him. In addition, we would read the Bible, Christian biographies and Christian books. I encourage you to read Christian books to your children. There are however many good and wholesome books, written by Christians or moral men and women, which give great lessons of life, which are not necessarily "Christian" books. Neither are they pagan. These are great works of literature which have stood the test of time. Read these to your

Dear Mrs. Johnson, I love to read with Sam in the evenings. I think it is great the way they get a star for every story they read. Sam loves to read and he loves to try and get the most stars. If, though, I have to listen to "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" one more time I will go bonkers. Please send him home with reading books that do not have this in them. I would be greatly appreciative

Sincerely, Rev. J. S. Mahon

"Wow, Dad, when you read the battle scenes, you really get into it."

Sam, after I read to him a particularly exciting chapter of "Men of Iron."

"You pick the book, Daddy. You always read longer when you pick it out."

Megan, as she snuggled up against me for our evening reading.

"I want to become a Christian and a missionary, just like Friday did. Daddy, can I become a Christian now?"

Sam, to me, after finishing the chapter where Robinson Crusoe leads the native Friday to Christ and he returns to his tribe as a missionary.

children. The quality and genius of the author will raise your child's standards and make movies and TV seem like the mush they are.

We made our home a library, and we made reading fun. Even now, one of the most enjoyable times for us is to sit together in the living room and read, and be together as a family. We are reading, working on homework, doing projects, talking now and then... just being together. This is all greatly helped by the "no TV after 6 P.M. rule, (or dinner which ever comes first.)"

Recently, I recommitted myself to reading in the living room. I had been fatigued from some speaking commitments and had gotten in the habit of going in my room and watching TV in the evenings. I found that if I would stay in the living room and read, the kids would end up there as well. More importantly, I was visible and there was much more spontaneous discussion and give-and-take in the relationships.

2. Lunch at school

One of my kids' greatest memories is the time I would take each week to eat with them at school. Very few men eat at their desk at the office, or on the job site. Most go somewhere to eat. If at all possible, eat with your child one day each week, right there at school. If not, take time off from work, at least once each quarter, and eat with your child. You do it for the dentist, and eating with your child is a lot more fun. I used to bring my child a happy meal from McDonalds and, later, a burger, fries and drinks. It was a real hit. Then I would bring extra fries for the other kids. Having Liz's dad for lunch on Fridays was a real hit and all the kids looked forward to it.

"Someday I am going to be a missionary to India, just like Amy Carmichael."

Becca, after we finished reading her biography. Becca, later went on to adopt an orphan through World Vision, and gave babysitting money each month for her care, until the little girl left the orphanage. Then, while in college, she went with Campus Crusade for Christ to the mission field for the summer. It all began with our reading the biography of Amy Carmichael together each night.

"Mr. Mahon, open my milk for me, pleeeease."

Whenever I ate with the kids, all of a sudden, these independent children needed a helping hand.

"I get to sit by Lizzy." "No, me." "No, me." "My turn, you did last week."

How to make your child popular: eat with them at school once a week; eat with them at school.

"Rev. Mahon, you're the only father I know who is regularly in this building with his child."

Liz's principal

Afterwards, take time out to walk your child back to class or out to recess. It will make your child a star. When they had class afterwards, I would walk back to class with them, holding my child's hand and then let them show me their desk and any work they were doing. They were so proud. If they had recess, I would go out with them and let them beat me at tetherball, or time the kids at races for a few minutes before I had to leave. Sam's class would always check out the football when I came on Fridays. The guys loved to get down on one end of the field and have me kick it and they all scrambled to catch it. Even now, with Sam in college, it brings a smile to my face as I think of this.

"Dad will you come have lunch with me this week?" I had taken Becca up on her offer to eat with her three weeks in a row. She was in the first grade and loved for me to join her once each week. "No darling, we have 12 years to eat together, once or twice a month is fine, I don't want you to get tired of it." Ahhh, the naïveté of inexperienced. I thought we would be eating all through elementary, junior high, and high school. Little did I realize that there comes a time when it is not cool to have Dad sitting across from you at the lunch table. That day when Becca said, as kindly as she could, that she was too old to have a parent eat with her, was a real wakeup call. I never again turned down an offer to eat with the kids. I established the routine of weekly lunches as long as they wanted to, alternating among them for as long as they would have me.

to catch it. Even now, with Sam in college, it

"Dad will we be having lunch together this week?" Megan was in high school, but we were still having lunches. The difference was that I was now picking her up, checking her out of school during lunch and taking her to a fast food restaurant. These were great times together and although it may not be cool to have your Dad sitting across from you in the cafeteria, it certainly is cool to be able to go out for lunches on Fridays...

3. Dates:

Continue the tradition of dates and let the kids choose. Sam and Becca always wanted to go by themselves. Megan and Liz wanted to go together. Sam wanted to go to see some action, like the fire station, the airport, or go fishing, then ice-cream afterwards. Becca wanted to go window-shopping and then have a light snack. Megan and Liz, when they were little, loved to go the park for a little picnic and play time. These were very special times together and we all remember them with fondness. Remember, too, that after a really fun time, as you drive back in the silence and safety of the car, it is often those last few minutes, right before you get home, that your child will begin to really share his heart with you.

4. Play:

Play begins to be more complex and your child will begin to be more particular. Oh, for the days when a Popsicle and a push on the swing was as good as Disney World. The child will begin to have preferences in games and sports. Entertainment becomes more complex. Movies, cultural events and sporting events all make great dates. Once the child reaches puberty, the time for tickling is well past. For us, it was before then.

Rough housing is for boys only, and then with affection. Remember, he will be larger and stronger than you are in just a few short years. You will be stronger than him for about the first 20 years and then for the rest of your life, and his, he will be stronger than you. Do not instill a root of bitterness or a taste for revenge through the way you play with your child—especially in rough housing, or playing sports— with your

Your beauty...should be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God

1 Pt 3:4, teaching that young girls must learn the feminine attributes of a gentle, quiet spirit

sons. Do not develop a harsh sense of competition and a lack of consideration for the weak. Instill the attributes of mercy and patience in the way you play with your children. You can be sure that you will reap this later on.

In terms of roughhousing with other adults or relatives, teach your children to be sensitive to both the appropriateness of the situation, and to know when enough is enough. As far as the girls are concerned, it is especially important that restraints be put on roughhousing. Between the kids, if one of the girls is hurt, and Sam is involved, he always gets in trouble. Young men must learn to deal with women in a tender and compassionate way,

Play within the family should be fun, but not competitive. Competition brings with it the possibility that either side, if driven by enough will and determination, might win. This is not true with your child. He will never beat you on a level playing field. I was the coach, the friend, the haven, the loving father, the safe refuge, the team mate, the best buddy, but never the enemy. I tried to make sure the way we played did not develop character attributes in my children which they would one day regret and have to undo.

5. Activities:

Walks become adventures and you can begin to include biking as well. Errands, too, can still be a fun way to spend time with each other as long as you make it fun. As long as you leave time for your child and a little spontaneity in your life. Work can be fascinating for your child at this age. You can include yourself more and more in your child's "career," his school, his sporting events, and his hobbies.

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered

1 Pt 3:7

Eleanor and I wanted to learn to country western dance. We also knew that this was the big thing at the school dances. The local community college offered a course, so each Wednesday night we went for our lessons and took Sam and Becca along as well. We all learned to dance together, had great fun and drew really close through the experience. At first, we had to make Sam, but he later appreciated it and really warmed up to it.

Again, all this presupposes a child who is well-behaved and under control. It presupposes a child that has learned to control his emotions to a degree and enjoys the relationship he has with his parents. It presupposes a parent, and in all probability, a father, who places the worth of the child above the activity or project. It presupposes a father who genuinely loves his children and wants to spend time with them so much that the activity pales before the relationship. This mixture maximizes the opportunities for drawing near to your child through play and affection during the elementary school years.

V. The Transition Years Into Adolescence

A. VERBAL AFFECTION

How will your children react when they reads this verse? Will they say, "Yeah, I can relate to that. My dad was my greatest coach. He was a great encourager, my greatest fan, he was so proud of me and never stopped believing in me. Even now I can hear his voice." Verbal affection and encouragement is so critical at this crucial age.

Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

(1 Thes. 2:11, 12)

The world has three objectives for your children:

If she is a girl, it is...

1. She is ugly, and needs to spend lots of money to be pretty.
2. She is inferior, and needs to spend lots of money to be popular.
3. She is dumb, and needs to spend lots of money to keep from being laughed at.

If he is a boy, it is...

1. He is not a “boy”... he is a “person” and he should spend his money without consideration of his masculinity.
2. He is inferior, and needs to spend lots of money to get ahead in life.
3. He is dumb, but if he spends lots of money he can still entertain himself.

Your children hear these messages over and over again a thousand times a day in a thousand different ways. No matter how wrong we all agree this is, it is true. No matter what kind of community you are attached to, there are only two people in the world who have both the motivation and the opportunity to counteract this onslaught, and that is you, their parents. If you will not take an active and verbal role in their lives, then you give them up to these messages without a fight.

Your children should constantly hear...

“You’re pretty” “You’re handsome”

“You’re so lovely” “You’re a real man, a tough guy”

“We are so proud of you, we would not do anything to change you..”

“You’re so smart, you are a real whiz”

“We love you and will always love you”

Look at this list. Are these things you purposefully say on a regular basis to your children? Copy them down on an index card and put them on your mirror, the fridge, or the dash. Get in the habit of praising your children, of “exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children”— since you are, after all, the parent.

B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

At this time in your children’s lives they will alternatively either crave or abhor physical affection and you need to take it as it comes. Every now and then, the tough guy needs a hug or cuddle with his mom. That sophisticated young lady needs to sit on Dad’s lap again and be his little girl. *It would be unhealthy for*

“Do you know what Sam did on the way to class today?” I could tell by the inflection that this was going to be interesting. Eleanor continued, “I dropped him off at school, gave him a kiss, and then as he walked away, do you know what he did?”

I reached up and nonchalantly wiped my cheek.

“That’s it! He wiped my kiss off!”

“No, hon,” I countered, “Not your kiss..., your lipstick. He’s just scared to death of facing his buddies waiting outside for the bell to ring for class with a big red set of lips on his cheek. He loves you, it’s the lipstick that’s got him.” From then on Eleanor got a kick out of watching Sam wipe his cheek. For the rest of his time at home, on the way to school, being dropped off for the big game, she played this little game. What made it cute was that Sam was careful not to reject his mother’s affection, or hurt her feelings. That was settled a long time ago with the wooden spoon, so he would just sneak that grubby little hand up there just to make sure there was no lipstick.

“I am not wiping it off, I’m rubbing it in.”

Sam’s reply to his mother’s observation.

you to promote this regression, but in the same way do not reject this sharing of affection by your children as they hearken back to special memories of their childhood. The child, as I have said before, does not get to reject the parents' affection. It is not honoring to a parent for the children to act embarrassed at the affection shown them. The parents can be sensitive to the social needs of the children, but, in any case, the child should never reject genuine parental love.

C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

During the transition years, you begin to realize that you just have five or six more years with your child at home. The unfortunate thing is that many parents who fail to begin to make the transition with their child into adulthood maintain a controlling attitude in their personal involvement with their child. As a result, from their child's perspective, they are just not that much fun to be around. I have seen it over and over again; I call it the Rudeness Permission Syndrome. It is at work in the husband and wife relationship, with spouses who would never dream of speaking or treating their friends and co-workers in a rude or manipulative manner consistently giving themselves permission to treat their spouse that way. The same is true for parents of pre-teens and teens. They would never dream of being as bossy, picky or condescending to their children's friends as they are to their own children.

Your child is moving into adulthood with adult emotions and adult memories. If you want your child to enjoy being around you and to want to be a part of your life, then you will have to begin making the transition in your behavior patterns to give your child the dignity and respect you give others of the same age. Ask yourself, "If my child was an employee and was not doing his job right, how would I address him?" Then, think of the way you discuss with your child his failure to work around the house. What kind of dignity and respect is he getting?

As parents, we face the same dilemma as we do as spouses. Many married couples receive affirmation, respect and dignity on the job and in the work place. They come home to be treated like no one has treated them or spoken to them since they were pre-teens. Then their spouse wonders why they spend so much time away from home. Your teen is treated with respect on the athletic field, in his youth group, at work and at school. More and more, the outside world is affirming and reinforcing his growth into

Bill was obviously panicking as we talked over a cup of coffee. All of his life, his career had come first. He worked long hours, traveled, and kept the cell phone always at his side. The financial rewards had been great, but he realized the family had suffered. Now, he was cutting back and he wanted to make it all up. The problem was, when he was really needed on site, to be in control, to be the rock... he was gone. His wife has grown in her independence and ability to care for herself. His children, now teenagers, were wanting to grow up and leave home, not re-entrench. I have seen it played out many times. When the family wants to huddle, Dad is away. When the family begins to disperse, Dad decides he wants to be at home and be in charge of the family.

He really had two choices. He could have been a part of the process of letting go and accept the fact that he had cheated himself out of a big part of parenting. Or he could have been a part of the process of letting go and talk his wife into having another family so that he can legitimately enjoy the role he now craves.

One option was not his, yet it is the one he was taking. He cannot roll back the clock. This action is responsible for conflict with his wife, and turmoil with his kids. He chose to relate to the family as if his three teens were in their elementary years and the family was consolidating and bonding in its early formative years.

scenery. When that got old, I pulled out a box of baseball cards I bought for him. He opened them all up, sorted them out, sorted out the Cardinals and had a great time with the rest. We pulled into St. Louis and did some sights. That night, we stayed with an old college friend, got up the next morning, went into town, did some more sights and then showed up at the game as soon as they would let us in. Sam loved watching batting practice, and tried to shag balls hit to the outfield with the other boys. Later, he went down and tried to get autographs, toured the stadium, took in the game and then home we headed. It was Baseball Safari and a yearly ritual we shared.

adulthood. More and more, he is being given emotional space and growing room. Fewer and fewer liberties are taken on the basis of age. Yet, at home he is in a time warp. It is as if he is still a kid. He feels so grown up and respected outside the home and so repressed emotionally in the home. Does this sound like a place he will want to hang out? No doubt he is a lot younger and more immature than he feels or wants. No doubt he is a lot older and more mature than you feel or want. But the objective is for him to leave, while at the same time wanting to come back for visits. So, the envelope must be pushed in that direction, not in yours. The objective is to draw near to your child through play and affection, especially in the area of your personal involvement, as the child leaves.

There are a host of activities you can do with your child to draw near to them through play and affection. The main thing to remember is the two key parts, “drawing near to your child” (*remember this is what you are trying to do*) “through play and affection” (*it is important to remember that your are playing and, at the same time, being affectionate with your child*).

For play, develop mutual sports or activities with your children. Find something they like to do, and do it with them. If it is puzzles, then become a puzzle nut. If it is baseball, then take up the game. If it is horses, perhaps, like me, you can’t buy one, but splurge and go horseback riding at a stable or take your child to a horse farm. Look at a book on horses with them. Help them select a ceramic horse for their collection. Each of our children has something special they liked. For Becca, it was pigs. Sam liked fishing lures or baseball cards. Megan liked ceramic horses or elephants, and Liz liked ceramic bunnies, dogs or anything to do with tea sets. Whenever I was out of town, or for a little special treat, I would turn to this list I kept in my wallet. Treats do not always have to be food.

Megan loves horses and has a giant scrap book of horse pictures she has collected over the years. Every once in a while, we can afford to go riding at the stables for her birthday or a special event. Once or twice we could afford Horse Camp with the "Y" or a local Christian Camp, but mainly we share this love for horses with her by being willing to sit with her on the couch and look at her scrapbook of horses. It is true, I find this really tedious. But, it is also true that nothing gives her more joy or makes her willing to spend more focused time with her dad, than to sit with her scrapbook and go over each horse, the characteristics, the breeding, and the history. Megan loved horses, and if I wanted to get really close to her, then I had to share in this love.

The Navigators run a Christian youth camp in Colorado Springs called Eagle Lake. When I discovered they had added a “Horse Camp” to this, I checked to see about summer volunteer workers. It turned out that with Megan’s experience she qualified, and was able to spend six weeks working with the horses as a junior wrangler, joining in on the Bible study and messages and using her free time to ride and receive training in horsemanship. What a wonderful experience this was to Megan. If we had not honored her desires as best we could, she would not have been qualified for God to open this special door to her.

Walks:

Walks with children can easily turn into play, and then, shared exercise. It is important, though, to do it on their terms. The objective is to spend time with them and, when it is all over, for them to still want to spend time with you.

forgot the goal. It was not “Putting pagans in their place,” but “Leading pagans to Christ.” Thus, the goal is for the pagan, if he does not receive Christ, to want to talk again. This same mindset goes with parental play with pre-teens and teens. It starts off well, then there is conflict as the parent wants to take over, or begins to act condescendingly to the child.

All of a sudden, there is a fight. The parent wins. The thing is done the parent’s way and the teen resolves to pass up any future opportunities of this sort. The parent forgot the objective. It was not “Establishing the child’s position, so that he would know his place” but “Drawing near to the child through play and affection.” Thus the goal is for the child, whether or not there is a break through in the relationship, to want to talk again, to do this again.

Family Night:

Lucky, my Brittany Spaniel, and I love to walk. We have a four-mile course. She gets to think she is hunting and I get to burn calories and work on my scripture memory. It is a great 45 minutes together several times each week. One day, Becca asked if she could go along. She was taking freshman PE, and felt the need to get in shape. Becca wanted to talk. Becca wanted a more scenic route. At first, Becca wanted a slower pace. For the next three months, my scripture memory took a nose dive as my relationship with Becca soared. Soon she was ready to run. We would walk a mile, and then she would run a mile or two while we continued to walk (here I could sneak in verses) until she would show back up to walk again. I learned quickly how precious these times were and to adjust myself to Becca. We grew very close during these times. You can always find time to walk the dog or work on verses. Your teenage daughter grows up and leaves all too soon.

Megan wanted to walk with Lucky and me. Now Becca was off to college. Megan is quieter. She did not want to talk. She wanted me to talk and ask her questions. Bye, bye verses once again. I have to admit, with Becca, I could daydream a little as she talked and talked. With Megan it began to be mental work. First, to talk and then, to walk in silence and yet not work on my verses. This was very important to Megan. Also, Megan liked to walk arm in arm or hold hands part of the way. True, the pace decreased, but Megan showed no interest in running. I remembered my lesson with Becca. You can always find time to walk the dog or work on your verses; your teenage daughter grows up and leaves all too soon.

Family night is also a great time for play. We instituted family night early in our family experience and included all the children. I can remember playing cards with the two older children. The third, too young to play, was given her own set of cards and could join in as best she could. The youngest was given a set to chew on. We all had a great time together. As they got older, we did not require Family Night once they were past 6th grade. Sometimes, they would join in. Sometimes, they had a big game or other activity. Other times, they would want to hang out on the couch or the fringes while we played, waiting for the food to appear. In any case, it was a great time for the family and we kept it up until Liz was out of the sixth grade. Even into high school, sometimes Megan and Liz will still want to do "Family Night" when there is a lag in their church or social activities. When Becca and Sam come home from school for the weekend, they will remember with fondness the "Family Night" and will often ask, "What are we doing as a family tonight?"

A big mistake many parents make is not finishing off strong. Especially if they have more than two children. When the older two have gone, they begin seeing light at the end of the tunnel. Family night peters out before the youngest is ready for it to do so. Dad begins traveling again before the youngest is really ready. Mom returns to work before the youngest is really ready. Vacations and entertainment are upgraded before the youngest is really ready. Family dinners peter out and chores are neglected before the youngest is really ready for them to do so. With your children, be sure and finish strong. Give your youngest the same attention, when she is the last at home, that you gave your oldest, when she was the first at home.

It is a common complaint of the youngest child. On the wall, in the photo album you can find plenty of pictures of the older children, but in the business of life, the younger one just got overlooked. Unfortunately, this often extends far further than the camera.

Errands:

Believe it or not, errands and chores are a great time to draw near to your pre-teen or emerging adolescent. Most children this age have a real awe of their father's work and just exactly what he does and how he acts. Take them on a business trip. Take them on a business errand. Take them when you make some calls, and include something to make it special. Open your life to your child. When the other

I have seen it over and over again. *Take, for instance, people learning how to witness. The goal is to lead someone to Christ. Yet, in their early witnessing encounters, they get in arguments. In the end, not only will the person not be interested in talking with them again, but will not want to talk with any Christians. They With Sam, I made a mistake. Sam was working out with a weight set to build his upper body strength for baseball. It was a rickety set he had bought from an older boy in our church. To do his bench presses he needed me to spot for him. His set was in the garage. It was night and I was tired. It was cold. I would spot for him, but did not take the time to really get into it and share with him. In fact, after about a year and a half, I found a great weight set at a sports store. It was a great combination, the maker was going out of business and the store was having an end-of-year sale. I could afford the double markdown and got it for him. He loved it and it was a mega jump in quality. Now, he did not need a spotter.*

As I look back, I passed up an opportunity to spend quality time with Sam. You can always find time to spend a quiet evening at home. Like your teenage daughter, your teenage son grows up and leaves all too soon.

"This is neat; my family does not have any pictures of me."

A high school friend of our youngest child, Liz, visiting in our home. Almost all the children who visit will gravitate toward the hall where we have our family pictures on display, taken over the years.

Now my dad was a salesman and he used to do this with me and my brother, but not exactly for the right reason. He was showing us the high life that can take place when you are on the road, or he wanted us to run errands for him while he made contact calls. Even so, we had a perspective of work few junior high schoolers had. I have always tried to do this with my children. When possible, especially during the summer and winter vacations, I try to take them along when the possibility permits. A junior high schooler is old enough to behave responsibly when you are preoccupied, and the excitement of being on the "inside" is immeasurable. Choose the right occasion, and it will draw you very close to your child.

kids say, “I don’t really know what my dad does,” your child can share things they never dreamed of.

Memories:

In all of this, you are building memories that will help you weather the storms of life that invariably come with the teenage years. What you want, is for your overall history to be one of closeness. For your child to look back and realize that the focused times have not been primarily ones of conflict, but of success and enjoyment. When it comes time to choose between family and the subculture of the good times with the bad kids, that though the draw is very real and the pleasures very appealing, the relationship will win out and, ultimately, the child will not trade the closeness, love and fellowship of the family for the passing pleasures of sin.

VI. Conclusion

Your child is now growing up. At age twelve, he has, at the most, six more years at home. What most parents do not realize is that although they are living at home with their junior and high school-age children, if they are healthy spiritually and emotionally, you are seeing less and less of them. During this time, relationship and, as a result, leisure interaction, becomes more and more important while authority and structure begins to diminish. You now have six years to prepare your child to leave. If you have not laid the foundation of being near to your child through play and affection, then when your child leaves, there will be nothing left of the relationship. Some attempt to start at this late date to share in these leisure areas, or worse and, sadly, all too common, to fight to retain the relationship based on a childhood model of authority, even though the son or daughter is no longer a child.

Your authority will slowly diminish whether you like it or not. It picks up speed until finally, you will see the child only at their decision. It is at this point that you will want to be sure you are already best friends. It is at this point that your relationship with the child is everything.

True, the early discipline and training on the basis of authority is both needed by the child and commanded by the Scripture. It is not, however, the basis of any type of healthy, long-term relationship with the child. That basis is found in this chapter. *Draw near to your child through play and affection.* Much of the information found in the other chapters will play out, but not play and affection.

Don’t be mislead. Without discipline and authority, the groundwork for play and affection cannot be lain. Do not be equally mislead, however. Without the diminishment of discipline and authority until it finally and completely plays itself out, the foundation of play and affection cannot be built upon and the long term relationship is sacrificed.

It is the deep relationship play and affection make possible, coupled with your own willingness to let go, that allows for the change in emphasis from “Obey” to “Honor,” as your child moves through adolescence and into adulthood. This transition process is covered in the next chapter.

VII. Summary

I. Principles At Work

The ultimate goal of this series is three-fold:

First: to aid you as the parent in fulfilling the Biblical responsibilities placed before you by God, concerning your child's training and discipline.

Second: To equip your child with the spiritual skills that are necessary for him to be both fruitful and fulfilled in life.

Third: That your child will grow up and leave home.

A. What exactly do we mean?

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection:

Verbal Affection

Physical Affection

Parental Involvement

B. Why parents fail:

The first thing that comes to mind when I consider why parents fail in this area is just plain stinginess.

Prv 18:6 teaches us that “*A man's gift makes room for him...*” and this is true in our relationship with our children. I have seen spiritual stinginess take many forms.

C. Why parents must not fail.

For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. (Heb 12:6)

II. Stages- Conception through Infancy:

A. Verbal

B. Physical affection

C. Parental involvement

III. Stages— Toddler through Preschool:

A. Verbal

B. Physical

C. Parental Involvement

IV. The Elementary School Years

A. Verbal And Physical Affection

B. Parental Involvement

V. Conclusion

It is the deep relationship play and affection make possible, coupled with your own willingness to let go, that allows for the change in emphasis from, “Obey” to “Honor” as your child moves through adolescence and into adulthood. This transition process is covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TEN

What follows are a number of projects which you and your wife can complete. Some are to be done separately, and then the results compared. Others are to be done together. The goal is to come to an agreement on the discipline needs of your child, and then work on them together as a team. Remember, the general rule in decision-making in this area is to yield to the more conservative of the couple in arriving at a decision.

Scripture Memory Verse— Lk 15:20

And 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.

Last Week's Verse— Eccl 3:1,4-5,8, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—a time to laugh... a time to dance. A time to embrace...a time to love,...a time for peace.”

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: PLAY AND AFFECTION

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Eccl 3:1, 4, 5

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Lk 15:11–24

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Lk 15: 25– 32

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: PLAY AND AFFECTION

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Eccl 5:18– 20

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Eccl 3:11– 13
How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Ps 127:3 & 4
How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Goals

Go back over chapter 10. Review the appropriate age-level activities for each child you have. Write out areas you can begin to work on in terms of drawing nearer to your child through play and affection.

Specific Applications

Isolate three things you can begin to work on in each area with your child. Make them specific and immediately applicable.

I. ***Verbal Affection:*** three things I will begin saying to my child on a daily basis:

II. ***Physical Affection:*** three ways I can begin expressing my love for my children on a daily basis.

III. ***Personal Involvement:*** three areas for each child that I can be personally involved in, e.g.– three things the child likes to do that I can begin doing with him or her on a regular basis.

IV. ***Modeling This With My Spouse:*** Changes I need to make in my relationship with my spouse to integrate these into our relationship as well.

Date Night / Family Night

Discuss with your spouse two very important rituals:

- 1.) A regular date night for the two of you
- 2.) A regular family night shared with the children.

In the space below come up with a plan for each.

Date Night: What, When, Where and How

Family Night: What, When, Where, and How

Reflecting Back

Think back on your own childhood memories. Was play and affection part of your family tradition? What will you do the same, what will you do differently?

My Family:

I will do the same:

I will do differently:

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRANSITION YEARS— ADOLESCENCE AND BEYOND

- Bible Study: pp. 503– 507
- Lecture: pp. 508– 542
- Summary: pp. 543– 544
- Post-Study Projects: pp. 545– 551

Scripture Memory Verse— Mk 1:19, 20

“And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.”

Chapter Eleven

The Transition Years — Adolescence And Beyond— Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

The transition years from adolescence and beyond are just that— transition years. Although adolescence, culminating in graduation from school and independence, seems to be thrust upon us by the school system, it should and can be anticipated and transitioned into over a period of several years. For many parents, training and control have become so natural that it seems like it should never end, but it should. Others, preoccupied in the early years with their own careers and pursuits, suddenly find themselves with children who are becoming adults, yet they are undisciplined and unprepared for the life ahead. Prepared or not, they are going to leave. Whether it seems fair or not, God does not give you the authority or the ability to control the transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. *Rather, your role is to facilitate it.*

By this I mean your government and society will in many ways dictate the transition years. This is in God's hands not yours. It is now that the child/adolescent begins to make his own decisions. Slowly, these options will increase. What you must understand is that at age thirteen, entering the 7th grade, your child will be just five years away from 12th grade and graduation. Your job, now, is to help your child successfully make this transition. It is no use going back or trying to slow it down; it is happening. The best thing you can do for your child (as well as for yourself) is help the transition along rather than fight against it. **It is, after all, our desire for our children to grow up**, and leave home as disciples of Christ. They should be leaving Father and Mother, brothers and sisters, to lead a fruitful and fulfilled life in his service, while still maintaining a loving relationship with his parents.

What follows is:

1. A brief Bible study to aid you in understanding the subject matter of this chapter.
2. A manuscript for you to discuss and study with your spouse.
3. Practical projects for discussion and application are provided to aid you in implementing those areas of the seminar that meet your needs as a parent.

*And another of the disciples said to Him,
"Lord, permit me first to go and bury my
father."*

*But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and
allow the dead to bury their own dead."*

Mt 8:21, 22

The Freedom to Choose

It is a frightening thought for most parents that the carefully engineered environment is not being recreated or chosen by the child. Further, the friends, and the atmosphere so carefully chosen is not being continued. There is a temptation to lash out, "Well, if you can't make the right decisions then I'll just keep you as a child." But in doing this, you'll in all likelihood sacrifice the relationship while at the same time hurting both yourself and your child emotionally.

The Prodigal Son— A Study in Letting Go

Please read Lk 15:11-32

When, in verses 12 and13, his son was ready to leave home, what did the father do?

A. How have you experienced this in your relationship to your heavenly Father?

B. How and when will you extend this same principle of freedom to make mistakes to your children, as they begin to transition into adulthood?

Why did the father allow his son to do this? Why didn't he stop him?

During this period, in what ways did the father try to blunt the force of the child's willfully wrong decision?

What good came out of this boy's experience (verse 17)?

- A. How has God allowed you the freedom to learn from your mistakes?**
- B. How will you apply this same principle-the freedom to make mistakes- to your children as they begin to transition into adulthood?**

What was the father's response to the child after he had learned from his mistake (verse 20– 24)?

- A. How did he respond verbally?**
- B. How did he respond physically?**

In a situation like this, who is teaching and training the child, the father or God?

- A. What role does the father play?**
- B. What if the father had intervened and blunted the consequences of his son's irresponsibility?**

From the parable of the prodigal son...

- A. What can you learn of the freedom God gives you?**
- B. What can you learn of the freedom a father gives his son as he begins to transition into adulthood?**

Children vs. Sons and Daughters

Our child will always be our son or daughter, but our son or daughter will not always be a child. They will not stay a child, but grow into adulthood.

What is the admonition in Eph 6:1? “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

A. To whom is this directed?

B. How is a child defined in our culture?

By contrast, Ex 20:12 is addressed universally to all sons and daughters. **What is the admonition in this verse? “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.”**

Are you prepared for your child to make the transition from “obey” to “honor”?

A. Given your child’s current behavior, will he honor you when the time for obedience is over?

B. What are you doing to prepare your child for the transition from obedience to honor?

To what degree is your security tied to your child’s?

A. Remaining a child

B. Obeying you.

At what age do you feel your child will be when he fully makes this transition? _____

When your child reaches the transition point and moves from obey to honor, what will a situation look like where he chooses not to obey you, but in an honoring way?

Chapter Eleven

The Transition Years: Adolescence And Beyond— Lecture

I. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS.

There is a marked contrast between the relationship of parents to children and parents to adolescents and on through adulthood. It is true that your children will always be your children, but it is equally true that your children will not always *be* children. They become sons and daughters. The terminology is tricky and it is easy for parents, since they refer to their sons and daughters as their “children,” to forget that they are not children. Focusing in on key terms, goals, objectives, and the context of our ministry to our children as they pass into adolescence and adulthood, can help us as parents to make that transition.

Remember that growth is something that happens. We do not make it happen, and hopefully we do not retard its happening. We simply cooperate with it. If you are not ready for your child to be a teenager, your child will still turn 13. If you do not think your child is ready to be a teenager, (translated, you have not prepared your child to be a teenager), your child will still be 13. The same is true for 14, and then for 15. In fact, it is just five short years from 13 to 18, and total independence. It is time to stop talking about how fast it is all happening, how society makes our children grow up too fast, how your child is not as emotionally ready as other children, and how society does not prepare our children adequately for all the freedom and responsibilities independence brings.

It is time to stop talking about all this and start preparing your children to live on their own. In America, at 17, a child can leave home and you cannot report that child as a runaway. In the eyes of the law, an adult has left home. In most states, in three weeks, you can turn in the name to missing persons, but not to a truancy officer or child protection department. In America, at age 17, your child can join the Marines, get married, or join the Merchant Seaman’s Union, board a ship and leave the country. Remember: growth, birthdays, aging... the passage of time, is something that is happening and we, as parents, must cooperate with it.

A. KEY TERMS FOR CONTRAST

Irrespective of the actual words you use, what do these terms mean in your heart? Are you making the transition in the way you think and talk, with and about your children, your sons and daughters? When you think of what the Bible says about the Family, are you making the transition in terms of what verses are shaping your relationship with your child and the biblical terms you use in shaping your expectations of your children?

1. “Children” (Eph. 6:1) vs. “Sons and Daughters” (2 Cor 6:18):

Discipline your self to think of your offspring, not as children, but rather as sons and daughters. This is a big one. The Bible clearly states certain commands for children that do not apply to adult sons and daughters. Both phrases are in Scripture, “children” and

“sons and daughters,” but both carry with them very different relationships with the parents.

Do you still see your adult sons and daughters as children? Some parents hate to think of themselves as being as old, like they remember their parents being when they began to move into adolescence and adulthood. The solution for these parents is denial that their children are now no longer children but young men and women, sons and daughters. “If the kids don’t grow up, then I don’t get old.”

Most of us have very clear memories of our junior high, high school, and college years. With equal clarity, we remember how old our parents were at that time. Well, the future is now. Remember how old you felt? Now remember how old you were. You were indeed a lot older than your parents treated you. You knew this because of the way other parents, your boss, your teachers and your friends’ parents treated you and by the way your parents treated your friends. “Why don’t they treat me like they treat strangers my age?” is a valid question and one I am sure your own children ask.

Think of your relationship with your own parents. Do you consider yourself their “child” or their son/daughter? Sure you are their genetic child, but you are not a child; you are an adult. Think of all the conflicts you have had with your parents since you began the process of growing into and living as an adult. How many of these have been typified by their trying to put you back in the old mold of childhood? Now think of your relationship with your own children. What decisive actions will you take, in terms of how you think of your children, to keep this from happening?

When you read the Word and pray for your children, are you still falling back on the verses directed at parents with children who are indeed children or are you making the transition to emphasizing those verses written for parents whose children are not long children but yet are their sons and daughters? ***Discipline yourself to think of your offspring, not as children, but as sons and daughters.***

2. “Obey” (Eph. 6:1) vs. “Honor” (Mt 19:17-19)

Discipline yourself to require honor from your sons and daughters, rather than obedience. One of the key ways to tell if you are making this transition is if you are beginning to move from the phrase “Obey”— “I will obey Mommy quickly the first time...” to “Honor”— “I will honor my parents by prayerfully considering their wishes and feelings as I pray through and come to an understanding of what God would have me do.”

The Bible clearly says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right...” and when a son or daughter is no longer a child this passage no longer applies. On the other hand, one of the Ten Commandments is for sons and daughters to, “Honor your father and mother.” This aspect of our relationship will always be true. As my children grew into adults, I did not require them to obey me, but respect or honor was always necessary in our relationship.

The parent must always be asking himself, “Was respect or honor lacking here because of my child, or was the issue that I embarrassed or shamed my child by treating him like a child?” The child must always be asking himself, “Did I react like that because I was really hurt, or because I was disrespectful?” “Do I treat my own parents with the same honor as I do other adults?”

I do not know how many times I have sat down with my teens, as wonderful as they are, and explained that they must treat their mother and me with the same honor and respect that they treat other adults in positions of authority.

This transition comes gradually, but by the time they leave for college, you want it to be complete. It is hard for parents when our children reach adolescence. We have known them as a young adult for only a short time. Our clearest memories are those of their childhood and this is our primary reference point. In contrast, the other adults in their lives— their teachers, their Sunday school teachers, their parents friends— all have known them almost exclusively as adults and treat them as such. Consider if you will why you often treat your children's friends with more respect than your own. What would happen if you used the same tone of voice and condescending speech toward their friends that you often do with them? At thirteen, the incremental steps must begin and proceed on for the next five years. Are you making this change?

Discipline yourself to require honor from your sons and daughters, rather than obedience

3. “Under control” (1 Tm 3:4) vs. “Glad heart” (Prv. 23:15; 27:11)

Discipline yourself to begin rejoicing in your sons' and daughters' accomplishments as they grow in independence, rather than continuing to require that they be under your control.

The time is now past for your children to be completely under your control. You must begin to let go. Now is the time to begin rejoicing in their independence. You do not want to raise children who cannot exist outside your sphere of control. If this is the objective, to raise children who are successful and independent of you, then you must now begin the transition.

If you are unable to let go and begin to rejoice in your child's transition into adulthood, then some serious soul-searching must now take place. If the decisions your child is making in their growing independence

Becca and I had just finished having a long talk. We had had another run-in, and she was just two days from leaving for the spring semester of college. She really wanted to work it out. "I just don't feel like you are treating me like an adult..." and the conversation continued. As I listened to Becca, I could remember well my own feelings of frustration when I was this age. My parents were basically missing out on all the changes in my life, as I was away at college. In addition, others, who did not know me as a child, accepted me as an adult. I found myself slipping back in to old roles when she was at home. I could empathize completely with Becca. When she finished I promised to try to be more understanding and shared with her my own experiences.

Then I shared with Becca, "I think you are right, Becca. We are in transition and we do not treat you as though you are as old as you are or as others treat you. We need to work on this, but I think it is equally true that you do not treat us as though you are old as you are." Becca wanted more on this, and I went on to explain that in our relationship she treated us in ways she would never treat her friends' parents, her coworkers, or adults in school and church. Just as we needed to adjust to her maturity in our treatment of her, so she needed to adjust to her maturity in her treatment of us. This conversation was a real breakthrough in the dynamics of our relationship, on both sides.

At thirteen, the incremental steps must begin and proceed on for the next five years. Are you making this change?

"We don't go to childraising seminars. All they do is make us feel bad about all the things we have done wrong."

—Local pastor relaying the response of missionaries as to why they are not joining the nationals in coming to the childraising seminar.

"I have here a plan for my daughter that takes her into her thirties. She is not cooperating. You are not cooperating, I will have my way!"

—Senior missionary yelling at me as he shakes an outline he had developed for his daughter's life in my face, while demanding to know why his college-age daughter is not following his plan for her life.

are poor ones that bring you shame, it is too late to wind back the clock and protect them from their independence by re-exerting your control over them, or only now beginning to exert control over them.

Your child is growing into an adult. Your child will be completely independent by age 18. Your child will be in many ways beyond your control by age 15. Good or bad, sink or swim, your control is waning and will soon end. You can transition graciously, communicating with your child as you go along, or you can fight all the way, alienating your teen as you go along. Either way, it will happen and you will lose your control over your child. ***Discipline yourself to begin rejoicing in your sons and daughters accomplishments as they grow in independence, rather than continuing to require that they be under your control.***

"We suggest that you give your child total freedom their senior year of high school. Give them all the freedom they will have their freshman year of college—no curfew, no room checks, no nothing. Let them make all the mistakes they are going to make under your roof, so that you can be there to help them if they need it."

—Advice of ministry couple whose children all had vibrant walks with God, throughout their college years and beyond.

B. GOALS FOR CONTRAST

Your long-term goal is for your child to live in a fruitful and fulfilled manner, independent of you. This is easy to understand, this is constant. The short-term goals, however, change along the way. The very goals that are necessary for the success of a child are completely counterproductive for the success of an emerging young adult and vice versa. What are the goals of childhood and how do they change as the child transitions into adulthood?

1. Training vs. Cheering

Training— building a foundation for the child which will serve him in the future.

Cheering— the future is now, encouraging and motivating the young adult to step out on his own.

Our new goal is to encourage and reward good decision-making as the child grows in independence from us. The time for training has come to an end. Slowly, your child will grow in resentment of unsolicited advice until he resents it just as much as you do this behavior in your own parents. Slowly, but surely, your child's response to unsolicited involvement will go from appreciation to irritation. Rather than being seen as a parent who is training their child for success, you will be perceived as a parent who is always sticking his nose where it does not belong.

"The problem with the child raising techniques in this culture, is that they treat kids like responsible adults, giving them total freedom when they are irresponsible children, and, then, when they move into adulthood, they try to control them like they were kids. They don't lay a finger on them when they are children and then get in fistfights with them when they are teens. They have the whole thing backwards."

—Missionary expressing his frustration on the childraising philosophy of his culture, which is all too quickly being assimilated by our own.

"The trouble is, when Jim was really pliable and I could control him, I did not know anything. Now that I am old enough to really have the wisdom to help him out, he is trying to get out of the house as fast as he can."

—Parent confiding in me his own frustration in raising his son.

Encouragement is always appreciated. Everyone likes a cheering section. Compliments and thoughtful words are always welcome. They are the keys to the invitation for involvement. A controlling, nosy, critical parent, in the end, is separated even further from their child's life than they would be normally. Come now. Tell the truth. Do you really appreciate people butting in and setting you straight? How do you think your emerging young adult feels? ***Our new goal is to encourage and reward good decision-making as the child grows in independence from us.***

2. Nurturing vs. Letting Go

Nurturing—to protect and care for.

Letting go—allowing the child to learn to fend for himself.

Our new goal is to slowly, yet consistently, grant children the freedom to fail, to learn from their own mistakes in the school of hard knocks. Just as the mother eagle pushes the bird out of the nest, so we, as parents, must prepare our children to leave the nest. The time for nurturing is coming to an end. Is that still your objective, to nurture and care for your child? Are you preparing yourself and your child for the day when he will lead a fruitful and fulfilled life apart from you?

At some point your child will have to learn to take the knocks of life, to survive both physically, emotionally and spiritually in a harsh environment. The best way to do this is by degrees, and the only way a child can experience this by degrees is if the parent will begin letting go by degrees. Are you letting go by degrees? ***Our new goal is to slowly yet consistently grant children the freedom to fail, to learn from their own mistakes in the school of hard knocks.***

C. OBJECTIVES FOR CONTRAST

Have you thought through on how your objectives for the methods you are applying will change now that your child is transitioning to adulthood? With this change of objectives, will a change come in methods and manner on your part?

"I was sitting at my office window watching the mother eagle care for her young. It had been a dramatic spring and summer, and I watched with fascination. First, I watched her build the nest on the cliff of the Erie, and later I watched the pair of eagles hatched and cared for. I watched with a sense of disbelief, mixed with horror, as the mother eagle inched one of her young to the edge of the nest and deliberately pushed it over the side. The young eagle fell and fell when, suddenly, like a flash, the mother lifted it up and then dropped it again, only this time the young bird began to fly."

—Minister from Colorado relating his experience in watching eagles with childraising.

"I guess you don't think too much of homeschooling your kids during the college years."

—Parent, during question and answer time.

Becca was adamant about wanting to go to the party. We were equally as adamant about her not going. We felt that no good would come of it, and wanted her to stay home. Becca pointed out that we could not "stop her," which was true. If she really wanted to go, she could sneak out, or she could lie and say she was going somewhere else. If push came to shove, I was not about to resort to force against my own daughter to keep her from going, nor was I going to get into a shouting match in the front yard in front of all our neighbors. Becca was aware of all of this, as were we.

I pointed out to Becca that we all make hard decisions for the sake of the family. I come home everyday driving past scores of strip joints and porno shops. Mommy comes home from work rather than going out bar hopping with the other teachers. We all face the same temptations and struggles and, for the family to work, we all have to give.

Finally Becca said, "OK, I will not go, but it is not because I think it is wrong, it is not because you can, or, are making me stay home, I am not going to go because it will cause a rift in the family and I don't want to do that."

1. To obey quickly the first time vs. to think through and make the proper decision

Our new objective when giving our child guidance and advice is for our sons and daughters to discern the will of God for their lives, as a result of the principles that have been built into their lives. Now this was fine with me. Becca, recognizing her own independence, recognizing her own empowerment, thought through and made the right decision. Many fathers would still not be happy. They would not be happy unless the child had obeyed in subjection to their will and authority, but this was fine with me. I wanted Becca to begin to do right, not because I could will her into it, but because she could think through and make the right choice, on her own. Also, it was not essential to me that Becca be happy or have the right attitude in making proper decisions. When I have to make a right decision that is hard or that I do not like, do I always have the right emotions to go with them? How much harder for the emerging adult! The key to the young adult in having the right attitude is for this attitude to change as a result of your continuing praise, both public and private, of the fact that they made the right decision. If they make the right decision and then are jumped on for their attitude, then they might as well have made the wrong decision in terms of your response. **Your praise will affect their emotions far more than your lecture.** I cannot think of one time when I have been told how I ought to feel that, in mentally understanding it, I could then *feel differently*. No, my feelings often changed with how I was treated, not by what I was lectured about.

A child, in order to learn right from wrong, in order to live safely in the world, in order to develop correctly, must learn to obey their parents quickly the first time. This is not healthy, though, for our sons and daughters as they mature into adulthood. We want them to be able to think through and make the right decision.

I have two people in my life from whom I cannot ask advice. One is a relative, and the other is a man who had a strong spiritual impact on me early in my Christian life. The reason is the same for both. In each case, if you ask for advice and do not follow the response to the letter, then you are perceived as being disrespectful and disloyal. “If you’re not going to take my advice, then why bother to ask?” is the hurt reply from both camps when the decision is finally made. If you want your child to ask you for advice, then allow them to make a different decision without it impacting the relationship or your self-worth.

“I am the mediator before God for my children. God has placed me as head of the home. I am responsible before Him for the family. God is the hammer, I am the chisel and my children are the rough-cut stones. I am the organ of their sanctification.”

I could barely keep my mouth shut as I listened in astonishment to my friend sharing his new-found conviction after attending a popular parenting seminar.

I was in shock for two reasons. First, this man was a mature Christian who knew very well 1 Tm 2:5 “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This same man could argue effectively the universal priesthood of the believer, and would never submit to anyone serving in a mediatory role in terms of God’s will in his own life. Yet, he was now declaring himself the High Priest, the Biblical Patriarch of his family.

I always like to point out to these men, especially when they are in my ministry, that the word “obey” in chapters five and six of Ephesians, as it refers to wives and children submitting to the father as head of the home, also appears in the thirteenth chapter of Romans to refer to a man’s submission to his government, and the twelfth chapter of Hebrews to refer to his relationship to me as a spiritual leader and elder. It is great to see them choke on these verses. Remember, Dads, there is only one mediator between God and your child and it is not you, it is Jesus Christ. I went so far as to suggest to one zealous, black-and-white thinking father, that he put an index card on the mirror in his bathroom that would be just above his face every morning when he shaves, with the inscription, “This Is Not Jesus Christ.”

I cannot think of one time when I have been told how I ought to feel that, in mentally understanding it, I could then *feel differently*. No, my feelings often changed with how I was treated, not by what I was lectured about.

When your child is away at college, you do not want them calling home every night to see if they are making the right choices or to get your guidance. You want them to grow up, to leave home, to learn to make right choices on their own, to acquire new spiritual leaders and for you to settle into the role of the loving parent who is one of many counselors, but primarily a cheerleader. *Our new objective when giving our child guidance and advice is for our sons and daughters to come to the correct conclusion as a result of the principles that have been built into their lives.*

2. To develop specific convictions and life-styles vs. To apply convictions in the crucible of life.

Our new objective in the atmosphere we create in the home is for our sons and daughters to have an environment where they can learn to apply their convictions in the real world, yet have a haven to return to and grow in.

As your child moves from junior high to high school and then on to college or the work force, it is time to begin to incrementally wind down the training program and turn it over to God and those who will ultimately minister to and lead your child when they leave home. We all learn for a lifetime, but there comes a time when, good or bad, win, lose or draw, the training process is over. Whether or not they are ready for the crucible of life, it is time for them to tumble in and make their way. The home becomes a haven where the child can sort through and discuss those things he is learning. It is time to learn by doing. This assumes a certain amount of freedom. It is time to be able to discuss the impact of the world on their lives. This assumes a certain communication level with the parent that is only possible when the parent extends to the child the dignity and respect that is due any adult in interpersonal communication.

Think for a moment about the people you don't like to discuss things with. They are pushy, they are emotionally manipulative, they are judgmental, they jump to conclusions, they interrupt you, the list may vary from person to person, nevertheless, because of their failure to treat your opinions with dignity, you do not like to discuss issues with them. Now, when it comes to your own children, as they enter adulthood, don't do the same thing. It is important in our relationship with our children that we think through when the training program will end. When will our children be on their own? Then, begin transitioning at the appropriate time.

Vic could not understand it. He was losing touch with his son. It wasn't that his son was having problems, far from it. He was a leader in his youth group at church, on the national honor society at school, and served as an officer of his senior class. Yet, his son was making many crucial decisions without Vic's input, except where Vic intruded into his son's life.

This hurt Vic. He knew his son was getting and following counsel taken from counselors at school, from the church staff and from his adult friends at church. He jealously coveted that type of access to his son's life.

Yet Vic had long since sacrificed that access on the altar of control. His son was for so long a project with him, that he could not imagine life without the training program. So, his son just stopped asking for advice.

One of the goals we set for each of our children their senior year of high school was not to correct them, except for very major issues. I would say over and over to myself, "This problem will take care of itself." In other words, the child will be out of the house in nine months. At this point, it might be helpful to ask yourself, "If he were a friend's child living with us or an exchange student, how would I be treating him differently in terms of my verbal and nonverbal communication?" Remember, many children do not like to go home from college, simply because their parents force them back into old behavior modes that they left behind in high school. They like to be treated as an adult and find their parent's inability to make this change distasteful. Allowing the child to live his or her own life, with you as coach, while you maintain the relationship is the goal, but the change will not take place over night. ***Our new objective in the atmosphere we create in the home is for our sons and daughters to have an environment where they can learn to apply their convictions in the real world, yet have a haven to return to and grow in.***

"You don't have to marry me." Guy looked totally relieved as I shared this phrase with him. Guy wanted help with his family, with his marriage, and his walk with God.

He had sought that in the previous city where he had lived and realized that after entering into the training relationship, it would take a divorce to extricate him.

I assured Guy that he did not have to marry me. We would work on this for a year, and after that time, we would always be friends. Unless there was some other way I could serve him, the training would be over.

I knew the man Guy was talking about. I knew that to be trained by him meant to enter into a relationship that was almost impossible to free oneself from, and I knew about this man's relationship with his children. They felt the same tension and despair that Gus did. In their father's eyes, they would never grow up and leave home.

yet have a haven to return to and grow in.

D. THE CONTEXT OF THE MINISTRY

1. Parents, home, and those to whom the parents expose them vs. Church spiritual leaders and peers.

The new context of the ministry shifts from the home to the Christian community as our sons and daughters successfully leave home and live apart from the parents on their own. The last transition that every parent has to address is the context in which they perceive the ministry to their child taking place. As parents, it is important for us to visualize and plan for the day when our children are cared for spiritually and emotionally outside the home. You certainly do not want your child to remain in the context of your home until you die. Beyond that, when is a child seen as successful in terms of leaving home? It is always surprising to me to hear men who in no way planned for their children to leave home based on how they raised them, then verbalize their resentment of the fact that their children in no way plan to leave home. They may leave. They may not. They may leave and come back, but they are not planning to leave.

"I had six brothers. On the day after graduation, my dad went through the routine with each of us. We went down to the Navy recruiter. He went through the process with us, making sure we would come out with a good marketable skill and a good college scholarship program, and then shook hands with the recruiter and said, 'Send him back a man.' Then, he would give us a bear hug and kiss and say, 'You're always welcome for a visit.' It never occurred to me to ever think of living off my father."

—Successful Minister shaking his head as we discussed the phenomenon of children who will not leave home.

I believe the two most important decisions Eleanor and I made, in terms of our teenagers' spiritual development were to not criticize the youth minister at the church and to encourage them to seek and follow counsel outside the home, in terms of important decisions in their lives. This enabled them to do this with ease once they were away from

home at college. Seeking and receiving spiritual guidance was now a necessity, but the skill was developed before it became a necessity. This made all the difference in the world in their spiritual development.

As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, there is a marked contrast between the relationship of parents to children and parents to adolescents on through adulthood. It is true that your children will always be your children, but it is equally true that your children will not always be children. They become sons and daughters. The terminology is tricky and it is easy for parents, since they refer to their sons and daughters as their "children," to forget that they are not children. Focusing in on key terms, goals, objectives and the context of our ministry to our children as they pass into adolescence and adulthood, can help us as to make that transition. I would encourage you to think through these areas in an honest and open manner. Discuss them with your spouse and with your son or daughter. If your child knows that there is an end in sight, that the process of you recognizing their adulthood has indeed begun and is progressing, that you are working toward a goal, then much of the friction of these transition years can be avoided.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel," I kept stressing to my high-school children. "It looks like an eternity to you, but look, each year you get more and more freedom and then finally you will be on your own." In saying this, I would map out their growing freedoms, not based on their conduct, but based on the reality of their age. This did not eliminate conflict in our relationship, but it greatly reduced the tension. I was constantly seeking to defuse the trapped feeling that all teens get. This is based on the fact that though they have adult minds, adult bodies and adult emotions; they have no history in this to put things in context. Thus, for the teen, time is still forever and today is everything, just as with a child. Helping the teen develop a sense of continuity and time in the departing process is a great gift, and one from which you both will benefit.

II. Eight Questions I Can Ask Myself To See Whether I Am Making These Transitions.

It is not that I don't trust you. It is just that I know how difficult these transitions can be. I will, therefore, list a series of questions. Reflect truthfully on your relationship with your teen and the answers, not just the ones you would give, but run them by your spouse and yes, your teen. If your children are in the preteen years, now is an excellent time to begin dealing emotionally and spiritually with these issues. Do this before they reach the teenage years, while you are still rational, clothed, and in your right mind.

- 1. Do I think of my adolescent as a child, or as a son or daughter?**
- 2. Am I satisfied with honor, or do I need obedience?**
- 3. Does their questioning of my beliefs, convictions and philosophies seem stimulating, or do I feel threatened and need to demand conformity?**

"Dr. Lynch never forgave me for disciplining his son." The words sounded strange as they rolled off my tongue. I was trying to explain why one of the foremost theologians of the age felt such animosity toward me.

You see Dr. Lynch was first and foremost a Calvinist. As such, in his brand of Calvinism, you did not engage in aggressive evangelism. As you prayed and worked hard in life, God brought the elect to you. His son, Russell, was in my ministry and had grown in his gift of evangelism to the point where he was in charge of the evangelism program at the University where I was ministering. His views, as a successful campus witness and evangelist were now quite different from those of his father and, thus the statement: "Dr. Lynch never forgave me for disciplining his son." This is exactly true.

The fact that Russell now held a different theological view was intolerable in his eyes, and I was to blame.

4. Do their mistakes seem positive or do I still need to protect and nurture them?

"I let my children learn from all the mistakes that I do not have to live with." I made this statement, off the cuff in response to a question early in this seminar's career, but, in a nutshell, it did sum up my philosophy of learning from your mistakes. For instance, Sam chose not to play summer baseball after his freshman year and as a result lost his starting position on the team, which he had to work very hard to reclaim. He never forgot that lesson. Later, after his junior year, he had the opportunity to work at a Christian summer camp. He now knew the consequences of missing summer baseball, but this time was able to prayerfully think through and make the decision he felt God wanted him to. Again, he lost the starting job, but this time with his eyes open and after much prayer. There were some mistakes, though, which we aborted in their early stage. These were priority choices that would have cost Sam his opportunity to get key scholarships upon graduation. The reason being that I would bear the brunt of that mistake and not Sam.

Becca was at a difficult time in her education. She was in the 7th grade and just did not see the importance of a foreign language. Making a good grade in 7th and 8th grade Spanish or French made the difference in which high school you were admitted to, and there was no comparison between the two.

We intervened because of the emotional price we knew we would pay if Becca did not get in the preferred school. We would all pay for her mistake for the next four years, thus we stepped in. We let our children learn from the mistakes we do not have to live with.

5. Am I taking positive steps to prepare them to leave me, or am I hanging onto every bit of authority that I can?

With each of our children we have encouraged an increasing independence during the high school years. This ranges from camp jobs where they spend six weeks or more away from home, to a savings account where they can save up for college while coming into a little spending money as well. Keeping in mind that it takes time, money and anonymity to get into trouble, we never allow our children to buy a car with their money and they keep only a certain percentage for their own, the rest going into their savings account. This finally culminates their senior year with having almost no restrictions at all. They have no curfew, don't have to keep their room clean or answer prying questions. We try to give them the freedom they will have in the dorm while we are still around to pick up the pieces.

Young men and women do not lack for situations where they can be youthful, but going places where they begin to be treated like an adult and, as a result, think of themselves like an adult, is a different matter. John Crawford, a retired missionary, gave me some advice that was very useful. He told me, as Sam and Becca entered their high school years, not to always take them to the arcade or whatever thing was popular for high-schoolers at that time. Sometimes, take them to do what you like to do. Put them in your world—the adult world—and treat them there like they were adults, before the others. The growing awareness of what it means to put behind childish things will grow in them, and the realization of just how others treat them will begin to affect your behavior and view of them.

6. Am I developing and promoting a spiritual authority for them outside the home, or does this threaten me?

"Well, I have some good news for you," Jeff said in that sarcastic, half-serious, voice he always used when God was teaching him something he wasn't too thrilled about.

"What's that?" I queried. "Well, I went home this weekend and decided to let my dad know about all the things you were doing wrong."

This caught my interest. Jeff's father was a successful minister, in another denomination, whose doctrine and methodology were quite different. I was just waiting for him to pull the reins in on Jeff's involvement.

"And my dad says to me, 'Jeff, you prayed about it and felt God was calling you to this ministry. I think you should quit complaining to me about your campus leader. From now on, if you have a complaint you should take it to him. God has put him in charge of the ministry, not me.'" I was impressed by the maturity of his response and prayed that when the time came, I would exhibit the same maturity and faith.

7. Am I preparing them to be able to choose God's will over my will, or do I equate the two?

Eleanor and I were struggling with Becca's decision to go to California with Campus Crusade for Christ to a summer training program. She felt keenly that it was God's will, and that He would provide for her education. We weren't so sure and hoped she was right. Could she at this age really determine God's will on so crucial an issue?

This scenario was later to repeat itself when she wanted to go to a closed Islamic country for a summer mission project. That really tested my faith. It helped for me to look back and remember how important these times were to the students in my campus ministry, to remember how puzzled I was by the response of Christian parents who so vehemently opposed their children's priorities when it came to their walk with God.

The future was now and I needed to allow my children to choose God's will over my own and not equate the two. "Sweetheart, we spent the first 15 years of our ministry career separating children from their parents. You really didn't expect us to do anything different for you, did you?"

1 Tm 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...

8. Do I look forward to the day when my children are living separate lives from us, or am I threatened by this and seeking to delay it?

"Hey, John, don't sweat it. You're going to get your wife back." Ron was helping me work through my separation anxiety with my first child. This phrase clicked and gave me hope, "That's right." It suddenly dawned on me, "I am going to get my wife back." And it was true, with each child, I got 25% of my wife back, and it was glorious. Of course, that presupposes you have maintained your marriage...

"We're going to have two more children." Dr. Clayton said this with a straight face but I nearly fell out of my chair. His oldest son was in college and his second was soon to follow. "My wife doesn't feel we will have anything to do without kids and I tend to agree with her. We are going to have a couple more." They did just that and postponed their divorce another 15 years.

With each of our children, we tried to help the transition for leaving home by arranging for them to spend part of their summer away from home both their sophomore and junior years of high school. The whole senior summer was devoted to work and getting ready to leave. It was our thought and intention that in so doing the move from home would not be such a shock for them. In the protected environment of a Christian camp or mission project, they would begin to make these adjustments. We found out that it was just as important to us to get used to their being gone as it was for them.

III. Correlations With Infancy

I have often reflected on the fact that the teen years have much in common with the transition out of infancy. I have nothing to base this on, other than casual observation. Perhaps they both have to do with the anxiety of separation on the part of both the parents and the children. During this leaving stage, you may sometimes wonder if you are back caring for an infant again, only this time he is gigantic. Now, however, the “infant” wants to wear all your clothes, drive your car and is eating you out of house and home.

Routines: Several things do correlate. One is the desire on the part of the teen for boundaries and structure, especially in the area of routines. Now they may not want to be a part of the routine, but in the chaos of life, they like to have a home that has routines. These include: a regular mealtime; Mom and Dad home at night; a father who is stable rather than experiencing his second childhood; a mother who is stable rather than abandoning her children emotionally as she “discovers herself;” regular places to sit at the table; roles and relationships which reinforce stability in the home. All these come together to create a sense of stability for the teen.

Praise: Another area that correlates with infancy is the need for constant verbal reinforcement. “I love you,” “I am proud of you,” “You’re so handsome,” “You’re so cute,” “We’re so glad God gave you to us,” are all phrases need to be repeated over and over again. It is important to remember that your teen needs to hear these things. This is not factual, but emotional. The difference between factual information and emotional information is the difference between appliances and food in the kitchen. Factual pieces of information are the appliances. You buy one set and it stays there forever. You buy a fridge and next week you don’t go out and buy another. It is done and you can forget about it. Factual information is your office phone number or what time the family meal is.

Emotional information is like food. It is a consumable item that you constantly need to partake of for your health. You can’t say, “OK, I’ve eaten dinner. Now I know what it’s like. When it changes, or I forget it what it was like, I will eat it again.” Been there, done that, it’s over. No. No matter how much you liked the meal, no matter how much time you spent on it, in a few hours you will need to eat again. If you do not, it will affect your health.

It is very important for parents to realize that praise is the food of the teen’s emotions. No matter how lavishly you heap it on, in a few hours your teens will need more and if denied, it will affect their health. The Word of God says in Prv 16:24 *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”* Pleasant words and praise are food to the soul. They are like a honeycomb, rich in energy-producing foods. They are a delicacy. They have a healing quality for both the body and soul. The need for this type of spiritual food will not go away. The sooner you recognize the difference between factual and emotional information, the sooner you will begin the spiritual healing process in your teen’s life. Healing from the wounds the world inflicts on him throughout the day.

Physical Affection: A third area which correlates with infancy is the need for physical affection. Fathers tend to be the worst about this. As soon as a child passes through puberty and begins to mature into adulthood, many fathers become reluctant to express physical affection. This can be very confusing to the teen. I would encourage all the fathers to continue to give their children hugs and kisses at the appropriate times. Not in a way that embarrasses them, but in the same way you expressed your love to them when they were infants.

Emotional outbursts: "Becca, I know you don't agree with us, and I know you are growing up, but one thing we must insist on is that you treat us with respect." I don't know how many times we said that to Becca and our other teens as they were growing up. Emotional outbursts are very common for teens as they move towards adulthood. They are not used to functioning as adults, and a true gift that you can give them is to discipline their tongue, and their anger, while dealing with authority.

Helping the teen to see his relationship with you in the context of his maturing social network will help him change his behavior. Your children must understand that it works both ways. We would tell our teens, "You don't have to like it. You don't have to agree with it. You don't even have to like us, although this would make us very sad, but what you do have to do is treat us with respect." Another talk we would have is, "With which of your friends' parents, your teachers, the adults in Church or at work, do you, in a disagreement, raise your voice, stomp out of the conversation, and then slam the door behind you?" You have to begin treating them as if they were adults, and they have to begin treating you as if they were adults.

It is also important for you to understand that shouting with your teen will accomplish nothing. Many parents use excellent coping skills when dealing with any adult but their own sons and daughters. They then resort to functioning not as if their child were an adult, but as if they were a child. Demand honor, but do so in an honorable manner. One

*Then he said, "At this season next year **you shall embrace a son.**"
And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant."*

2 Kgs 4:16

*...A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; **A time to embrace,** and a time to shun embracing.*

Ec 3:5

*Then his father Isaac said to him, "**Please come close and kiss me, my son.**"*

Gn 27:26

*And did not allow me to **kiss my sons and my daughters?** Now you have done foolishly.*

Gn 31:28

*And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "**Please let me kiss my father and my mother,** then I will follow you....*

1 Kgs 19:20

***Greet one another with a holy kiss.** All the churches of Christ greet you.*

Rom 16:16

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city."

Prv 16:32

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."

Prv 15:1

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you."

Ex 20:12

they were adults, and they have to begin treating you as if they were adults.

of the best ways to do this is not get in to circular arguments with your teens. Set consistent, definable expectations on their behavior, with consistent, definable consequences that are not left up to anger or emotions. For example: Freedom is linked to grades. If you are responsible in your grades, then you have the freedom to decide your evening schedule. If not, then you do not have this freedom. You must be home on weekday evenings, studying, until you have brought up your grades. Another example: From now on, every time you shout, "I hate this family," you will have to clean all the toilets in the house.

Interacting: The last area I have seen that correlates with infancy is that, like with toddlers, the opportunities to spend time with your teen must be taken as they present themselves. Just as a toddler's sleep, feeding and temperamental cycles of life restrict when you can have fun times, so a teen's busy schedule and temperamental attitude do the same. You have to take opportunities as they come, pretty much on their terms. This does not mean that you are at the teen's beck and call. What it means is that you, unlike the teen, recognize that the life you are living together, will not go on forever, and that you have the wisdom and maturity to make use of opportunities together, even if the teen does not. Later, they will regret their own missed opportunities, but be thankful for the ones that *you* did not miss.

IV. Preparing For Adulthood in Five Years

You have been called in to the office of the President of the United States and you cannot believe your eyes. Before you stands an alien from another planet. The president explains, "This alien had the ability to transform himself into any shape. He has come to learn our culture and customs, to make his way in our land. Unfortunately, he is totally unprepared. We are entrusting him to you for five years. He will assume the identity of a teenager. You have five years to prepare him, after that he will function as the emissary of his planet to ours. That is all." You have five years and then must report back to the President. What will you do?

You are out shopping and you notice a pay phone ringing. You pick up the receiver and the voice at the end of the line is Tom Cruise. "Welcome to the Mission Impossible team," and you hear theme music, tum, tum, da, da, tum, tum, da, da..." You look around for its source but find none.

Tom continues, "Look under by the phone, you will see a small tape recorder. Listen to it and be aware that it will self-destruct." Click. The phone goes dead. You pick up the small recorder and press "play." Again ,the theme music. Am I on candid camera? Is this being taped for incredible home videos? Slowly the music subsides, and you hear Tom's voice again. "Welcome to the Mission Impossible Team. Each year, thousands of children enter their teen years and then in five short years find themselves living alone, far from home, making decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Your mission, if you decide to accept it, is to take your children and prepare them for this. You have just five years, good luck!"

The tape goes up in smoke. The clock is now ticking; you have five years to prepare your child to live on his own, as a fully responsible adult. What will you do?

One thing you won't do, or at least shouldn't do, is put off the preparations for independent decision-making until the summer of your child's senior year. Each set of parents must come up with their own plan for this exciting adventure that they and their

son or daughter are about to embark upon. Many aspects will vary, but we have found a few things that are very helpful in this process.

A. ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL LEADERS AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY OUTSIDE THE HOME.

One of the things Eleanor and I have done, beginning with the entrance of our children into a Youth Group at Church and on through the college years, has been to work very hard at helping our children transition smoothly, and without conflict, to spiritual leadership outside the home. That means we have had to begin letting them make decisions in this area, both wrong and right. In my life, I often learn more from the wrong decisions I make than the right ones. I am often unaware of the value of right decisions and sometimes unaware that I have even made a right decision. But I am very aware of the wrong decisions I have made and their consequences. Remember that the objective is not to minister to your child right up until they leave for college. The objective is that, by the time they leave for college, they can wisely choose a Christian environment in which to be ministered to and can minister to themselves as well.

"And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."

1 Jn 2:27

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

Eph 6:1 (Passage in author's prayer notebook for children up through the 6th grade)

"I have no greater joy than this: to hear of my children walking in the truth."

3 Jn 1:4 (prayer notebook passage after 7th grade)

B. DEVELOP THE APPRECIATION OF WORK, SAVINGS AND THE VALUE OF MONEY.

I don't know of any way a young adult can learn the value of money without working for it himself. With each child we went through the ritual of getting a job, setting up a savings account, deciding on a missionary to give to, and then putting together a savings plan for college. Two thirds of the paycheck goes into savings. One third can be held back for personal use. It does not take long for the child to learn the value of money.

"He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully."

Prv 10:5

My dad taught me not to gamble. For him, it was a simple thing. He had spent his formative years losing his money in crap games on the troop ships of World War II, and had no great regard for the supposed sport of gambling. His technique was simple. He would say, "Want to play monopoly?" We would all excitedly chime in, "Yes!" Once the board was set up and we all had our money, he would divide up the property cards. Wow, we all had property. Then he would say, "Want me to teach you to gamble?"

This was fantastic! The only thing better he could have said was, "Want me to teach you to sneak cigarettes and smoke them?" We all excitedly gathered around. "OK, this game is called craps. I am the house—the gambling hall. You guys are the gamblers. After explaining the rules, we would commence to lose all our money and property.

"Well," he would say, "looks like I've won. Sure beats working for a living. Game's over, suckers!" and he would put the game up, explaining that that is just how a gambling casino works. After a few times, he would say, "Want to gamble first?" and we would look at him like he lost his mind and say, "No!"

Becca sounded a little agitated on the phone. Upon asking her about this she said, "My psych teacher gave us another walk today in class. That really burns me, Dad. I just figured out how much I have to pay for every class. He is cheating me out of my money. I paid for that class!" Only a child who has saved for college through the high school years, who has worked consistently to learn the value of money, will resent a class being called off. The rest of her classmates, foolishly unaware of the value of money and the fact that the professor was working for them, thought they were getting a good deal.

It was an exciting time in Becca's spiritual life. The little girl she adopted through World Vision was graduating from high school and leaving the orphanage. My sister worked at World Vision when Becca decided to give her tithe to an orphan from India. She selected a girl about Becca's age and Becca faithfully sent in her money each month and wrote the girl, sending her ribbons and small gifts. The girl would write Becca back, and we would have someone from the University translate the letters for her. Only through saving and giving can a child understand the value of money and the spiritual ministry that good financial planning makes possible.

"See that guy filling up that car with gas, son?" He nodded yes. He knew what was coming. "See that guy sitting in that Buick while he does it?" He again nodded yes. "Do you know what the difference is between these two men?" He replies, "A college education." "That's right, son. Make those grades or pump gas. That's your choice."

"How'd you like to dip ice cream for the rest of your life?" Sam looked at me like I had lost my mind. He had just come in from working the third shift, he was tired... it was dark. He smelled like old ice cream and was sitting down to the dinner that Eleanor had left for him. I continued, "Well, just flunk out of Chemistry, and you will get to do that or something just as exciting, for the rest of your life." Sam now knew what menial labor was. He knew the difference between giving orders and taking them, and he definitely did not want to dip ice cream for the rest of his life. Making a good grade in chemistry took on a whole new meaning. You can only focus your son or daughter on this reality in the crucible of life.

C. CREATE QUALITY MEMORIES WHICH CAN BE RELIED ON IN TIMES OF STRESS.

The only way conflict can be the exception to the rule in your relationship with your teen is if you purposefully create memories to counterbalance them. My work schedule

Sam jumped into the car grinning. "What are you so smug about?" "Well," he replied boastfully, "Everybody in second period was complaining that their dads never check them out of school just to eat with them. It's pretty cool being special, Dad."

permitted me to take my teen out to lunch each week. I would check them out, run them over to the nearest fast food restaurant, have lunch with them and get them back before the lunch bell rang. Perhaps your schedule does not permit this. Another thing I have done is to take them to school once a week and stop at the local doughnut shop for a treat along the way. Think about it, what can you build in to your weekly routine so that when Satan whispers in your teen's ear, "They don't care about you. All they do is fight with you all the time," the Holy Spirit can shout back, "Wait a minute, what about..."

When push comes to shove, you want a relationship that your child is just not willing to trade off for the passing pleasures of sin.

As Megan got out of the car to return to school, she still had the cup with her from her soda. We had eaten at a local fast food restaurant, and I had assumed she wanted to finish it on the way.

"Here, honey," I offered, "I'll throw that away for you." "No thanks, Daddy. I like to show off that you took me to lunch today."

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;"

Heb 11:24-25

"When I was a son to my father, still tender and the only son in the sight of my mother..."

Prv 4:3

"Give me your heart, my son..."

Prv 23:26

D. BE THERE FOR QUALITY TIME

Just being there, what for want of a better term can be called quantity time, is the greatest thing you can do to prepare your children for adulthood. Just being around, modeling the stable Christian life, being available to answer questions, being on the scene, reinforcing by your presence that you are committed to the family and to the family's well-being. This is laid down like coats of varnish. No one coat is significant. Each coat is laid down, allowed to dry, sanded, and then the process is repeated. Slowly, over a period of time, a work of true craftsmanship emerges. That is what being there is all about.

Keep in mind, the same people who will willingly allow you to give every waking moment to the ministry, who will praise you as a sacrificial man of vision, whose capacity for the work of God is seemingly endless, will sit around the Fellowship Hall or Conference Center, drink coffee and say things like, "I wonder what the deal was with ole Jones. Can you believe what the stories are about his kids? Why can't these guys learn to stay at home and just take care of the basics?" The rest of your former cheering squad will nod soberly and

"My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding;

Prv 5:1

"In discipleship, more is caught than taught."

—Lorne Sanny, past president of The Navigators

drink coffee and say things like, "I

"Gold watches don't have grandkids, and sales awards don't come home for Christmas."

—My advice to every young career man I meet

wisely in agreement. I give this scenario to every young, full-time Christian worker I meet.

E. PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN ON A DAILY AND SPECIFIC BASIS

I have literally bathed my children in prayer. Every morning, I pray for them in my quiet time. Claiming specific verses and praying for specific areas in their lives. Then I pray with them, and bless them before they leave for school. Every evening Eleanor and I pray for our children as the last thing we do before falling to sleep at night. While they were in the elementary years, the last thing they did at night was to pray with their father before falling off to sleep.

There is no fifth grader on the face of the earth who will pass up the opportunity to have a special, quiet time alone with Dad-no one else, just the child and dad-if dad will just make it special. Put together a little special routine and incorporate the Word and Prayer. Something simple that takes about ten minutes and something that makes the child feel special. Start at the age when they will do it with you and keep it up as long as they are willing to do it with you voluntarily. When I have my quiet times with my children, I try to always do three things: keep my answers as simple or simpler than theirs; praise them for their spiritual insight; and find something that they share to which I can say, "Wow, that's really good. Can you repeat that thought so I can write it down?"

And it came about, when the days of feasting had completed their cycle, that Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job 1:5

"Daddy, are you ready for our special quiet time together."

—Megan, my ninth grader, calling me to our 6:30 a.m. quiet time.

"Dad, if it is all right with you, I want to have my quiet time alone with God. I just need this focused time with God in the morning." "Son, there is nothing that will make me prouder."

—Brief exchange when Sam began meeting on his own with God rather than with Megan and me.

V. Shifting Gears

A. DISCIPLINE

As we move into the transition years the issue of a change in the methodology of discipline comes into play. During the ages of nine months to three years the job should pretty well be taken care of. From three to the start of school, the need for spanking will gradually diminish with the growing wisdom of the child, (remember that the last thing you want to do is send a foolish child away to school). As your child matures through Kindergarten to the fourth grade, you will build upon this, but the child is not with you on a constant basis as he was before. With the transition into adolescence (fifth grade or puberty, whichever comes first) discipline must change with the child. Physical discipline, spanking by the parent, ceases and moves to other forms of training which will produce success. Physical discipline, the rod, passes from the hands of the parent, to the hands of God.

A parent who will not pass the rod to God does all the damage in a child's life that is associated with man's unwillingness to surrender to God his rightful place. I have seen this damage done in the ministry by pastors who are not willing to admit that their church belongs first to God. I have seen this damage done by willing to admit that their careers belong first to God. I have seen this damage done in marriage, by husbands who are not willing to acknowledge that their wife belongs first to God. I have seen this damage done in child raising by both fathers and mothers who are unwilling to admit or face the fact that the child is a creation of God and that we are stewards, not owners.

Are you preparing your child to live under the leadership and discipline of Jesus Christ? The first step in this process is to turn the rod over to God. I would suggest an actual decision on your part where you gather up the rods, lay them before God, commit this ministry to God and dispose of them.

Once the child begins moving into adulthood, God has new assignments for all involved.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

Psalm 23:1, 4

done by businessmen who are not

"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."

Heb 12:7-8

"And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him."

Mt 4:21-22

1. COACHING DURING THE LAST STAGES OF DEPARTURE FALLS TO THE PARENTS.

We are now preparing our children to leave. Here in Houston, the whole city becomes excited when a space shuttle launch nears. As it nears liftoff, a checklist is prepared and the entire focus is getting ready for the launch. If there is a delay, there is great disappointment and a sense of failure among the team of engineers assigned to that particular launch. When it does proceed, the launch itself is accompanied by cheers of excitement. It is the same way with us, as parents. Our job is not to see how long we can stall and delay the launch, but to work at launching our children into adulthood smoothly and on schedule. The engineers, as the shuttle begins to roll to the pad, do not begin at that time to contemplate the construction of the materials, or the manufacturing process. Their concentration is totally on the proper functioning of what is put together, and a successful launch.

In this same vein, there comes a time when the basic construction and discipline of our child is past. Now is not the time to be considering if we should go back and try to redo or undo things that belong in childhood years, but rather prepare the child for launching and to concentrate on this task. Ours is an engine with a timed fuse. It will launch, and there is nothing we can do about it. The best thing for us to do is accept this fact and work toward a successful launch. When the shuttle is launched, the responsibility shifts from the team of engineers who have followed it from construction to the launch pad in Cape Canaveral, to the mission control specialists here in Houston. These engineers are trained in the mission itself. The first set return to Houston and serve as advisors and a backup team, in case of an emergency. In the same way, we as parents must be prepared

to pass off the primary responsibility for our children as they launch from our primary care into college, and independence as adults. We are there as a back up team in case of emergency, but God has provided mission control specialists for our children. These are all under God's direction, just as we were. In God's eyes, the child is leaving one set of specialists, the parents, and going to another, in stewardship of the child. He never viewed the child as exclusively ours, but as exclusively His.

2. INSTRUCTION PASSES TO THE CHURCH AND OTHER CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIPS.

One of the teams God has put together to care for the newly launched son or daughter is the Body of Christ, comprising local churches and support organs which manifest themselves in Christian organizations and fellowships. A child who has been prepared for life independent of the parents will become involved in such a ministry, and the job of admonition, instruction and training is assumed by them. The biggest mistake I have seen as a college minister is that most parents make a black-and-white shift with their children. They basically have their children grow intellectually and socially at a transitional pace, but in terms of spiritual authority, they are functioning in basically the same mode as they did in elementary school, until they leave for college.

Eleanor and I encouraged growth in this area in a number of ways, so as to prepare our children for this inevitable transition. First, we tried never to contradict or criticize the Youth Minister or Pastor in front of our children. Second, when they were facing an important decision we would ask, "Have you talked with Brother Donny about this?" or "Have you talked this over with your Sunday school teacher?" Many parents, who encourage their children to talk with high school counselors on selection of their future university and career, do not bother to encourage them to seek the same type of guidance from their youth pastor and Sunday school teachers.

Next, we tried to get our children jobs, away from home at a youth camp, or in some type of Christian service for a half summer or summer before they started their senior

"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

1 Cor 12:7

Blake was visibly shaken. Bill, his 17-year-old son did not want to go to their church. It was a smaller church. Its membership was older, and there were few young people that his son Bill could relate to. On the other hand, his friend Tim went to an active church with a vibrant Youth Ministry and several full-time staff devoted to them. I tried to help Blake see this clearly, "Hey, it is not like he wants to join a motorcycle club or a cult. He wants to be actively involved in a church. Let him do it. It will be a great experience for him to choose his own church, involve himself in his own spiritual identity and, all the while, you can be praising him for his wise decisions. Then, when he goes off to college, you will have the confidence that he knows how to make this transition."

I wondered if Blake had thought through on what his attitudes and actions were teaching his son, and how that would affect their relationship and his ability to coach him during the college years. Nine months of forcing your son to go to a church he does not want to and the tension associated with this is not the foundation to be laid for the first year away from home.

Eleanor and I encouraged growth in this area in a number of ways, so as to prepare our children for this inevitable transition.

"Actually, Sam and Becca think I am a little bit uncommitted." My listener was more startled by the fact that I viewed this as a good thing than by the fact that my children would think such a thing. "You see, my ministry with the Navigators precludes me from Wednesday and Sunday night Church and Monday night Evangelism Explosion. My kids go to all of these activities, and to tell you the truth, if they were completely honest about it, they feel I should be more committed. This is a good thing."

I went on to explain, "They are there because of their commitment and by comparing their activities with their own, it tells me they are viewing themselves and their spiritual pursuits independently of my own."

year. We wanted them to go into their senior year with the confidence that they could indeed live away from home and maintain their walk with God. Lastly, we encouraged spiritual activity outside our realm, so that they would have the confidence of their own spiritual identity apart from us.

3. DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT PASS TO GOVERNING SOCIETAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ORGANS.

During the transition years, the parent begins to hand over the reins of discipline and punishment to governing social organs, so that by the time they leave home this aspect of the relationship is completely severed.

Now this does not happen overnight. There is plenty of room for parental discipline during the next five years, but there should be definite transition points. It is one thing to ground an eighth-grader for a poor progress report, but if, by the senior year, you are still having to check homework and discipline the child for study habits, you had better face the fact that you have not transitioned with your child in this area and that you are both in for a rude awakening in a few short months. It is one thing to schedule a parent-teacher conference to undo some wrong your seventh grader has committed and get him back on track. It is another thing to still be stepping in and helping him to avoid the consequences of his actions his senior year.

"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and God establishes those that exist. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil."

"Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

Rom 13:1-4

Basic rule of thumb for disciplining a teenager:

The first priority, take away any privilege that creates opportunity for them to get into trouble, be it friends, possessions, money, time, freedom, whatever it is—this goes.

The second priority, take out whatever cultural influences that are definite detriments to your child? If he has an activity he is involved in that you do not like, TV, Radio, certain friends or hangouts—out they go.

The third priority, give him something to do that he hates.

The fourth priority, give him work to do that you hate doing.

Examples: Cleaning the bathroom; cleaning the kitchen stove or floors; cleaning the windows; and weeding the garden. All parents should have a list of things they hate to do nearby, so they can use it for disciplining their teens.

4. THE ROD OF DISCIPLINE PASSES PERMANENTLY TO GOD.

The key in all this is to view the consequences that sin brings from governmental, institutional, societal organs and natural consequences of actions, and all such hardships as discipline from God.

For God, discipline is a way of life. He intends to always have organs of discipline at his disposal for our good. For the first seventeen or so years, the primary source of this discipline is the father, as head of the house, in concert with the mother, as his wife and helpmate.

After this there will be for the child some fifty, sixty, even seventy years of the discipline of God, completely separate from and without reference to the parents. It is best to use these last five years to prepare the child for the next fifty, than to reinforce a type of relationship that is rapidly coming to an end, and that by the will of God. Parents who refuse to hand over their children to God, fight Him, not their children.

For whom the Lord loves He reproves, Even as a father, the son in whom he delights.

Prv 3:12

For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life,

Prv 6:23

But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord and stay there forever."

And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the Lord confirm His word."

So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh, although the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the Lord. For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord." And he worshipped the Lord there.

Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.

1 Sm 1:22– 28; 2:11

VI. Creative discipline through the transition years, seventh to twelfth grades

A. WHAT SEEMS TO WORK.

You have now handed over the role of applying physical discipline to God. He can use His sovereignty over physical circumstances, the state, or the Body of Christ in fulfilling this role. Whatever He decides, this role has definitely passed now out of your hands. You still have the role of trainer and coach. As such, there is much work still to be done. The question then arises, “Since it is no longer my role to spank my son or daughter, what options are left to me as the parent/trainer/coach in the area of disciplining my children as I prepare them for a fruitful and successful life outside the home?”

My answer is simple and to the point, “Hit ‘em where it hurts them the most, helps them the most and helps you the most.” By keeping this in mind, a kind of hierarchy has

developed in our discipline selections. As a result, we have come up with five simple tests or models to determine the discipline to be applied.

First: What does it take for a kid to get in trouble?

Free time, money, transportation and anonymity. Since we know this, then the discipline will affect one or all of these areas. For free time, you can ground the child. In terms of money, cut off his allowance or institute fines. In terms of transportation, you can ground them from the car. As for anonymity, this takes time, money and a car. As a result we told all of our children, that if, during their junior year of college, they were actively involved in a Christian ministry in a leadership position then we would buy them a car. Otherwise they would have to buy it. We also told them that if they had money to buy a car, they could use that money first for college and living expenses, then when those were all met, the extra money could go to the car.

For different children different issues get their attention. For our daughter Becca, being grounded for a day was like an eternity. She hated it. She cannot stand boredom or inactivity and learned very quickly from it. For Megan, she enjoyed being in her room and reading. This had very little effect on her, so for Megan we included work around the house that she hated. (When we ground, we ground from everything, TV, Radio, Telephone, going outside to play or sun bathe. The only type of entertainment we allow is Christian media or books and usually, since they are around the house anyway, we give them plenty of work to do).

Second: What cultural influences are definite detriments to your child?

The first thing to go is in the area of secular media: TV, Radio, Videos and Movies, the wrong friends and certain cultural gathering places and fashion styles which open the door to the wrong friends. As far as the other two areas, we do not let our children enter these areas in the first place, so discipline from these areas is not an issue. Think through on your child's life. Is there some activity or group of friends that seems to be associated with rebellion or disobedience on their part? If so, devise a discipline that kicks in on that behavior and eliminates the opportunity for that influence.

For me, it was a simple trade off. TV and secular music for a clean room. We told our kids, if you do not have your bed made and your room clean before you leave for school, then no TV or secular media for a 24-hour period. Our kids usually chose cleaning their room over these

Whenever I go to the mall with Eleanor, shopping or to a movie, I am continually amazed at the kids I see hanging out, loitering and getting into trouble. If idleness is the devil's workshop, then the things produced there are distributed at the local mall.

Up until the junior year of high school, the mall is a place where you go to do things but not a place to spend the idle hours. The key to this is to be the person who picks up. Most kids are tempted during those idle hours when the irresponsible parent is late. If the movie is over at 9 P.M., be there waiting at 8:45 and don't trust Dorothy's mother to this job, as she may show up closer to 10. If they want to go shopping with a friend and you agree that two hours is enough, have Dorothy's mother take them and you be there waiting 15 minutes early.

Now, I say until their junior year of high school because, by then, they have their driver's license and the opportunities at the mall seem tame to the world that is now open to them. The mall is the trap of the pre-teens and teens who want a place to hang out, but don't have wheels. It is a large place you can roam in and maintain a level of anonymity.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Prv 4:23

forms of entertainment, and I could not have been happier. They were choosing to eliminate one of the most harmful influences on their lives. A messy room will not permanently damage them, but continual input from secular media will. As time went on, they were less and less sophisticated in the area of secular media. As a result they were corny to the bad kids. Thus, they had a double protection.

Third: What do they hate?

Is it cleaning the toilet? Then, that is the first thing they do whenever they talk back. Is it picking weeds? Then, out they go. Every child's nature rebels against certain everyday tasks. Figure out what these are and put them at the top of the list. It will be great training for them, as well as a great discipline tool for you.

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Sam enjoyed being outside and engaging in physical exercise. In fact, he would trade off the outside chores with his sisters for his inside ones, and they gladly agreed. As a result, having Sam do outside work for discipline might inconvenience him, but it was not discipline. On the other hand, he hated cleaning toilets, or any other grimy domestic duty. Now, here was a discipline that would get his attention. On the other hand, for Becca, Megan and Liz there was nothing worse, nothing more terrible, than to be sweaty and hot and, worse yet, visible to others in this state, as they did what to them was the most menial of jobs... yard work. You guessed it: that was at the top of the discipline sheet for the girls.

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Connie looked at me wryly, "Mr. Mahon, guess what I have been doing this month?" I hated to ask. Her parents had spent a long evening with me, seeking suggestions on how to help her with a smart mouth. One of the things she had gotten in the habit of saying is, "You're wicked!" when someone crossed her, and in a surly and vehement manner. I had suggested that they make June, "Wicked Month." Every time that (or any other similar phrase) came out of Connie's mouth, she would have to clean one of the four bathrooms in their house. With a house full of boys, those bathrooms were a sight to behold. So, I bit. "What's that Connie?" She smiled a little knowing and sarcastic smile, as she got up to get some milk, and purred, "I've been cleaning the bathrooms all month." I hate it when the parents clue their kids in on where these ideas come from.

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Fourth: What needs to be done around the house that you hate?

This is also a great tool. When your kids misbehave just ask yourself, "What needs to be done around the house that I hate to do?" *and there is your list!* Eleanor and I have an agreement, since each of us has a very different list, the one who is disobeyed or

When I was growing up we had a brick back porch. Little sprigs of grass and weeds would grow up through the bricks. The job I hated most was being down on my hands and knees, working my way among the bricks in the hot summer heat, pulling up little sprigs of grass and weeds. (This was in the days before herbicides and weed eaters.)

Another great pastime of my father's was fruit trees. He always planted fruit trees. Mom was not too keen on canning or serving fruit with worms in them, so there was always plenty of nauseatingly sweet, rotting fruit at the base of these trees. This was the other job I hated. Down on my hands and knees, picking up rotted fruit, with fruit flies, gnats, sweet bees and wasps buzzing around.

If my parents wanted to get my attention, all they had to do was mention one of these two tasks. Your job is to simply discover their equal in the lives of each or your children.

dishonored is the one who gets blessed with eliminating something from their list. Sometimes, I will bless Eleanor by forgoing something on my list for hers. This is great indoor sport, and takes the edge off having to be around a teen in one of their surly, sour moods.

As I write this, I have to confess that the car really needs to be vacuumed, washed and waxed. I have been putting it off because I do not like this job, and have been counting on one of the kids to blow it. No such luck so far. In fact, I think they sense that there are several juicy chores like this coming up now that spring weather is here and are really watching their step. One good temper tantrum, sibling argument or curfew violation is all I ask of them, then I won't have to face the car this weekend.

Fifth: Let the punishment fit the crime.

The goal is for them to remember what they did, why it was wrong and to grow successful and independent by not repeating this sin or error. To the degree that the infraction and the discipline can be associated, this should be done (though it is not always possible), or that particular discipline will be too easy or ineffective.

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Becca went through a stage when she would get into a surly mood, tell me off, and then want nothing to do with me. Respect was not an option, and for Becca, the discipline of choice in these circumstances was to spend a day working with me in the yard. Not only did she hate the work, but she was stuck with me. This was agony because Becca is really a sociable and sweet kid. The only thing that could be worse than doing yard work alone, was doing it with someone, who if you were reconciled to, would make it fun and go fast. Since you weren't, it was worse, and went sooo slow. It was always worth it to Becca to reconcile herself to me and at least have a conversational work-mate than to go on in brooding silence, all day in the summer heat.

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In terms of chores, the punishment fit the crime method was in its stride. If you don't do your dishes and someone else has to do them, then you have to do theirs for the next three days. If you don't do your chore, which keeps someone else from doing theirs, then you have to do both. For instance, if your job is to clear the table but you take off without doing it, and the person who does the dishwasher dishes can't do their dishes, and the person who does the hand wash dishes can't do theirs, then when you get back you have to do them all. On the other hand, if we want them done, we will say, "Who wants to do Sam's dishes?" And then you have to do theirs and yours for the next three days.

If someone has to do your work, then you can do theirs triple. Why should anyone have to do your work?

B. WHAT DOES NOT SEEM TO WORK

One thing Eleanor and I never did was punish the child by denying them spiritual input. The problem is the wrong input, thus the key to creative discipline is to deny the wrong input, create an atmosphere where the right input is maximized, and then let the natural spiritual process take over.

Prv 4:23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Prv 23:7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

Lk 11:34– 36 The lamp of your body is your eye; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you may not be darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it shall be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illuminates you with its rays.

Mt 15:18,19 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

It is just like the old computer term, “garbage in, garbage out.” Spiritually, what goes in, must come out. We never stop the good stuff from going in as a form of discipline, only the bad. Thus, you are grounded from the phone, but you can call your youth leader to talk about it. You are grounded from music, except, of course, Christian music. You are grounded from all activities, except, of course, church activities. You have to go to bed early, unless you want to stay up and read the Bible. The list goes on. Just remember the simple rule—if you have an opportunity to stop the bad stuff from going in, do it. But never stop the good stuff from going in.

In the same vein, we never use spiritual pursuits as a form of punishment—e.g. memorize these verses, read these passages, write this essay on this Bible verse. The Bible is neat. The Bible is fun. The Bible is life. The Bible is love. It is a privilege, and it is not a tool for punishment. **You do not want your child growing up associating the Bible or spiritual activities with punishment.**

It goes without saying, there are certain manipulative emotions that will work temporarily, but as your child matures, he will begin to resent that you have used them to his detriment. Things like shouting, hitting, isolation, berating, guilt, comparisons and the like will bring about a temporary short-term change, but do long-term damage to your child and your relationship with him.

In creative discipline, don't be too cute for your own good. It needs to be discipline, not just poetry.

Another cute trick teens use is to use their behavior to punish their brothers and sisters, or the family as a whole. Don't allow them to punish rest of the children or the family by a surly or bitter attitude, and don't have their punishment inflict punishment on the whole family. “Well if you have such a sour attitude, then we just won't go to the mall.” It may be an even worse punishment for little sister, and they all know this but you. In the same way, do not let them cast a shadow of gloom over a family night out. Sit down and make it very clear to them that they will be pulling weeds and cleaning toilets until Jesus

I remember as a youth playing with matches. We fooled around with them until we finally burned a vacant field down. I got a good spanking with my dad's old razor strap and that was the last I had anything to do with matches. The other three boys were condemned to light a gazillion matches in their driveway. My dad walked me down to see it, and there they were laughing and striking those matches under the watchful eyes of their parents. On the way back, my dad clued me in on the fact that that first spanking was only the tip of the iceberg, which I believed, but back to the illustration. These guys did eventually get bored with lighting matches, and it got dark, and they whined appropriately and assured their moms and dads that they had learned their lessons. In they went, but you can bet the next day they all knew exactly how many matches they each lit. The ones who lit the most were bragging, but they were all held in awe, just by the sheer number of times they had lit the forbidden sticks.

comes, if they even hint at spoiling this time for the rest of the family, and then stick to it. In addition to this, the child should quickly learn that it is simply not worth it to embarrass you in front of your friends or to ruin family gathering or night out with another family. Early in the family life, every child should come to the conclusion that although you claim there is not an unforgivable sin, the punishment that goes with this type of behavior seems to indicate the possibility of its existence.

It is almost always futile to attack their bad friends, or kids that you do not like. They will almost always come to their defense. As a parental lifestyle, however, you can actively engage in a constant passive resistance to the bad and an active promotion for the good in terms of what you have time to do. There are some kids I just never seem to have time to pick up. It never seems the right time to have them spend the night. The car just never seems to be free. The budget seems to always be tight when they are involved. On the other hand, for church activities or the that kids I do actually like, the car seems always to be ready, the funds seem always to be available. Young teens generally take the path of least resistance, and will slowly be nudged in the right direction.

The silent treatment will always do more damage than good. I can tell you of parent after parent who uses this tool to punish their children and then complains that their children never talk to them. Never use an action as discipline that you want to discourage in your child's behavior. Never **PROMOTE** behaviors that damage your relationship with your child.

In closing, maintain communication and love at all times. As my good friend John Crawford used to say, "Your teenagers are not the enemy. Satan is the enemy. Your teenagers, however, are not the enemy." Keep lines of communication open at all times. Talk. Touch. Hug. Talk some more. Your teen may not seem to like it, but it is hard to alienate yourself from someone who loves you. It is possible, but it really has to be worked at.

C. BOUNDARIES

1. Take the high ground and don't sweat the small stuff.

Remember, to a teen, if everything is wrong, then nothing is wrong. One of the biggest problems parents face in helping their children through the transition phase is confusing their own convictions based on their life experience with what the Bible says.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

1 Cor 15:33

And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

Is 30:21

"It's too bad he's your son, Cliff, and not just some visitor in the Church."

Cliff gave me one of those looks he so often gives me, since he is still not sure I am from the planet earth. "What are you talking about?" He demanded.

Cliff had been whining about his teenage son's behavior and how he felt like disinheriting him. He said that he was so ashamed, he didn't even look forward to having him in the home.

"Well, if he was some visitor in the Church, you would look at him as a ministry project. You would set out to first win his heart and then win him to the Lord. I have seen you do it many times Cliff. If anyone can apply the verse, 'to the weak I become weak, so that I can win the weak,' it is you. Yep! If he was some stranger, you would have mercy on him. You would see his sin and alienation as a challenge. You would work to save him. But, since he's your son, you won't have a thing to do with him."

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.

Mk 7:8

Keep in mind that your child is old enough now to read. If you have been faithfully telling him certain behavior patterns are practiced by your family because, "God says so" and God doesn't say "no" in the Bible, then your credibility will come into question in other areas as well. Be honest with your emerging adult child. Be honest with the divisions from your lifestyle, which exist in the church, even among like-minded members of your church and among your friends.

Joe belonged to a denomination with a strong history of adult believers' baptism. He was a lay leader in his church, and a strong advocate of this. I was grieved to see him estranged from his grandson with whom he would hardly talk. His grandson was going to a conservative Presbyterian Church (PCA). In every way, their life and their convictions meshed. Their deep devotion to God and their belief in the inerrancy of the Word meshed. However, because his grandson had come to the "wrong" conclusion from the Word of God on this one issue, that of infant baptism, he could hardly even speak to him. It was that same old phenomenon, better to be a stranger than a member of the family. Joe had worked closely with members of PCA in Promise Keepers, in the Billy Graham Crusade and other city Christian initiatives, but could not bring himself to allow his own grandson to think through and come to his own conclusions in this area.

*D*on and Kathy were very pleased with themselves; they were staunch believers in abstinence from alcohol. Concerned that their children would not share their convictions, they arrived at what they felt to be a great solution. They were helping Uncle Gus move out of his apartment when they came upon a case of old warm beer. The boys, one in sixth grade and the other in eighth, showed an interest. So, Don said, "Sure, go ahead, you can drink it, but you have to drink the whole thing." Both boys selected a can of old warm beer and began to drink and before they were even into it, both boys were sick to their stomachs and in the bathroom, retching.

Now, they proudly shared with me that the boys get nauseated just at the sight of a beer commercial. "What will be their feelings toward you be the first time a fraternity brother or guy in the dorm laughs at them openly, tells them that that's the oldest trick in the book and offers to prove it to them? All they have to do is take one sip of a really good-tasting mixed drink, just a teensy taste, just enough to prove your deceitfulness," I asked.

They both looked at me like I was wearing the mark of the beast. "You know of course that is the oldest trick in the world. Before they are out of high school, they will have been ribbed and chided by their buddies for falling for it and begin to really wonder what a good cold beer tastes like. When they find out, what do you think they will think of this method you have employed?"

"You're not saying we should teach our children to drink? You're not saying it is all right to drink?" The stream of rote responses poured out, ending with, "Well, what did you tell your kids?" I told them, and will tell you:

The Lord says: "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men.

Is 29:13

And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

Mt 23:4

The drinking of wine occurs throughout the Scripture. Jesus drank wine. The Apostles drank wine. It is in the New and Old Testaments. The Bible does say, though, that getting drunk is wrong and a sin. We know you will have to decide for yourselves someday. You should know, though, that in both your grandparents' family history there is alcoholism, so you must be very, very careful if you do decide to drink in moderation. We hope you will not decide this, but it is your decision. That decision, though, is far off. For now, you cannot drink because it is against the law. People drink because it tastes good and makes them feel good. We are not saying this is not true.

Many fine Christians drink for the same reason, and you will no doubt meet some in our church, in your friends' churches and in campus ministries when you go to college. But, it is still against the law, just like shoplifting or driving without a license. You can shoplift items because they taste good or make you feel good. You can sneak out at night and steal our car or another for the same reason. You don't do it because it is wrong; it is against the law. You may think that you should be able to take something. You may think you should be able to drive. But you can't. It is the law. For the same reason, we are asking you not to drink until you are 21. It is the law, and we are asking you as a fine Christian and as our child, to respect the law.

I might add, at this point, that Don and Kathy found this totally unacceptable... too risky. What if their children decided to drink? This was in spite of the fact that I have seen Don and Kathy, at weddings, toast with a glass of wine. They are not total abstainers. In fact, they had a glass of wine on their anniversary dinner, which they invited us to. I mentioned this to them and asked, "Since you do drink wine on special occasions, will you one day sit down and share a glass of wine with your sons on your anniversary, just like you did with us?" Now they knew I had the mark of the beast.

My point is this. Teaching your children traditions which are not Scriptural and which you may not even totally follow, as if they are the Word of God is unhealthy for you, for the child and for your relationship with each other. There are enough divisions among you and your friends over what the Word does require, without adding the burden of what the Word doesn't. You are not the final authority on Christian polity and ethics. You are doing some things wrong. Your children will do some things right where you are wrong, and wrong where you are right. The objective, the goal, is not to trick your children into walking with God. Our goal is for them to think through and make the right decision, based on their walk with God— their walk, not yours. If they do this, they are a success whether they agree with us or not.

Areas my children disagree with me and yet we live in harmony and fellowship:

- ⊕ **Election:** Eleanor and I, yes; Kids, no
 - ⊕ The role of the institutional church: Eleanor and I, moderate; Kids, Staunch conservatives
 - ⊕ Denominational affiliation: Eleanor and I, independent Bible; Kids, Southern Baptist
 - ⊕ Worship: Eleanor and I, neo-traditional; Kids, Hard Rock Christian
 - ⊕ Scripture Memory: Eleanor, myself and Becca, yes; Sam, Megan and Liz, no
 - ⊕ Translations: Eleanor and I NASB; Kids, NIV
 - ⊕ Evangelism: Eleanor, Sam and I, Bridge; Becca, Four Spiritual Laws; Megan and Liz, E.E.
 - ⊕ Christian Organizations: Eleanor and I, The Navigators; Sam The Navigators; Megan and Liz, SBC and the Christian Student Union; Becca, Campus Crusade
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2. Practice saying "Yes." Remember, you have to say "No" to so many things, say "Yes" whenever you can.

In our house we have a dog, two rabbits, two birds, an iguana and a snake. We have had crabs, rodents, ducks, and a cat. Why? Because the Bible does not say "no." The Bible does say no to lots of things. My kids don't sniff glue, they don't shoplift, they don't see R-rated movies and they don't go to parties where there is drinking, and they don't... the list goes on. Hey, everything can't be "no." Loosen up. Begin saying yes to as many things as you can. (*One note, when you go, the pet goes with you; Eleanor laid down this law when Sam got his snake.*)

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Prv 13:12

3. Begin to lay down boundaries early, don't wait until you get there.

By this I mean, don't make such black-and-white transitions. If your child is going to have to work their way through college, don't wait until college to have them start a savings account, get a job and budget their own money. If your child is not going to be able to date until their junior year, don't spring this on them when their secret crush all through elementary and middle school finally asks them to the junior high football game. If you are not going to let your daughter pierce her ears, then don't announce this the day they are all going to the mall to have it done. The problem is that many parents are just reacting, just saying "no," rather than sifting through and deciding on what are really Biblical convictions and then coaching their children to think through and make the right decision.

4. Slowly lengthen the boundaries as the teen adjusts, while at the same time preparing for your new life without children.

Be careful not to fall into the two extremes. The first: not transitioning so that your child is unprepared for the newfound freedom of the collegiate experience. The second: too much freedom too soon, because the parent has moved on to being a childless couple before the last child has left home. It requires just as much discipline to be a parent as it does to be a teen.

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

Ec 7:8

5. Finally, for good or bad, give them their freedom, commit them to God, and get on with your life.

Actually, it is as important for the parent as the teen that there be a transitioning out of the parenting phase. Again, there are two extremes. One is not letting go because you are not transitioning. The other is not letting go because you realize that there is so much you didn't do, so now you are repenting and going to do it all the last four years. Better to go on, face the fact you did the best you could, and begin weaning both of you, parent and child, for the newly found freedom you will experience. Many is the child who messed up his grade point average and credit rating, because he was not ready for freedom. Many is the parent who messed up his relationship with his child and spouse, and his own social life, because he was not ready for the newfound freedom of life without children. Parenting was a very important part of your life, but now it is coming to an end. To your youngest child, who is in the ninth grade, the next four years seem an eternity, but you

know that four years will pass swiftly by. Better to prepare yourself, your child and your marriage, than to live in denial until all three hit.

D. ISSUES THAT ARISE DURING THESE TRANSITION YEARS.

1. Social:

One of the first issues you will face is transitioning in the area of dating. Many parents come to this time with contrasting experiences, so good communication is important here. For the Mahon family the transition went something like this:

- Up to seventh grade— no boy/girl parties or activities outside of church, the family or scholastic events (*such as an honors banquet, etc.*)
- Eighth grade— boy/girl parties or meetings, but no group or one on one dating.
- Ninth grade and tenth grade— Group and solo dating, but no car dates. Car must be driven by a parent, and you must be in the house by 10:30 (*This keeps the older boys from dating your daughter*).
- Eleventh and twelfth grade— Car dates in town but no out of town dates and in by 11:30 P.M. (*Dear parent, please do not be foolish. Nothing but heartache occurs in a car with two teenagers in it after 11:30.*)

Parties, sleepovers, slumber parties, etc. are another issue. We did not allow for any unsupervised sleepovers. When in doubt, we checked with the parents. In terms of parties, it pretty much followed the dating rules laid down in the previous section. We always checked on the movies to be shown, the degree of supervision by the parents and where the chaperoning parents would be. Parents who say they are chaperoning a pool party, but then on further investigation are going to be in the second floor game room of the house, getting drunk with other parents, are not actually supervising the party.

This brings up another question. Will alcohol be consumed on the premises? If yes, even by parents, then the answer is no. No. No. No. Your child will get very tired of no. “Can’t I ever go to any parties?” “You don’t like any of my friends,” and the list goes on. One way to diffuse this issue is to have your own parties. Soon the bad kids will all think it is corny and the good kids’ parents will love you.

If your kids are not making church friends, then contact the Sunday school teacher, the Department head and the Youth Leader. Stress to them that you would like to begin hosting parties and after-church socials, etc. Get specific dates on the calendar and then make sure there is lots of food.

We cheated Becca out of going to a Halloween party her sixth grade year. By the time we realized that the parties being given were unacceptable, it was too late to put one on. From that time on, we have had Halloween, Christmas and end-of-school parties non-stop.

Liz: “Daddy, Tammie’s mom wants to know if I am going to have another Halloween party this year?”
Dad: “Sure, if you want to, but why does Tammie’s mom want to know.”

Liz: “Well, she wants Tammie to go to ours, because of the atmosphere and all, so she won’t let Tammie accept a Halloween invitation until we decide.”

Movies:G until they are in the fifth grade; PG until 14; PG-13 after that. We ask the kids not to go to R-rated movies or to watch them at parties, out of respect for us, until they are out own their own.

Friends are a little trickier. Parents can't control whom their child socializes with, but the parent can do things which will influence their decisions, their options and the type of people to whom they are attractive. For the emerging adolescent, clothes, hair and make-up determine the social strata to which they have entry. Your child must not be the nerd who is the last girl to shave her legs or transition from little girl clothes to that of teens, but neither should they be on the cutting edge. My son had a young man's haircut all the way through high school. Hair is an entry tool into certain social groups, but it is also a block. Do not compromise on hair. If he is being excluded from certain social groups because of his hair, good.

Be an involved parent. Be steadfast in your strict enforcement of dating and party rules. The bad kids will have nothing to do with a child of an involved parent with a high profile.

Do subtle things that control the environment. Be the one who picks up at social events. Make an appearance when you drop off the child at the party. Say something like, "It would be rude of me not to personally thank the Smiths for having this party at their house." Now your child, but almost as important, the Smith parents, know you are involved. Open your house to the study sessions and project nights. Be willing to host the impromptu movie nights, sleepovers, etc.

Have magnets around the house which will cause the kids to want to hang out over at your house. We have an area where the kids can be kids without being pestered by us. We have a basketball goal and a trampoline for them to burn energy on. We have increased our tolerance of the noise level of music so long as it is Christian, and most, most, most important, we have a part of the pantry, stocked with junk food, that is completely open to our children when they have friends over.

Magnets allow you to control the environment where the kids hang out. The kids have to be at someone's house. Why not yours? Food, basketball goal, gadgets the kids like to play with, *the wish list that every kid wishes his parents would provide so the guys would hang out at his house*. Go for it! When things are a little chaotic, just be glad it's because of all the healthy normal kids at your house, and not because of dope, alcohol or worse.

"If pagans from the most immoral and decadent industry in America have decided that something is inappropriate for children, then please explain to me why Christian parents are allowing this movie to be shown at a church sleepover?"

—The author, in his usual sensitive way, to the education minister, concerning a PG- 13 movie that was shown at a youth lock-in at Church.

Famous quote, which all my kids know by heart to the plea, "But Daddy, you just don't understand."

Infamous reply: "Yes, darling, I do understand. If I did not understand I would let you do it, but it is precisely because I do understand that the answer is no."

"Dad, one of the reasons my friends like to come over is that you just look them in the eye and talk to them like they were real adults, not dweezels, like all the other parents do."

—Sam

"Dad, do you know what they call us at school?"

"What?"

"The Brady Bunch."

The reason was later explained; we sat down and ate as a family for evening meals (and held hands and prayed!!!!); we took family outings together on weekends; and I, as the father, did weird retro things, like bringing a tray of popcorn and cokes up the kids room when they were working on a school project over at our house.

2. Spiritual

Discipling becomes someone else's job— kind of. What I mean by this is that the transition is gradual and you will still have much input into their lives during the early stages of the transition period. The key to discipling another person is time alone with that person and authority. Now you've got half of what it takes.

But now, when your child most needs your presence and the stability of mature parents in their lives, Mom's career is just getting going again and Dad's is shifting into high gear. Moms are leaving too soon and dads are becoming preoccupied with things outside the home.

Notice, I said presence and not participation. During the transition, the child both needs and wants your presence. The child wants you there to provide boundaries, advice, love and stability, which are all very important during this period in the child's life. But within these parameters, the young adult also wants his own life.

In the spiritual development of the child during this period, most parents forget that the child is leaving and that it is possible to lose the child. As with discipling an adult, **the relationship becomes more important than the issue.** Remember that it is possible to win the argument and lose the child. More and more you must begin looking at the big picture as a mentor rather than the micro-management that was possible when you were dealing with a child.

Also, it is important to remember that there are now spiritual professionals who, by nature of their gifts, calling and experience, can actually do a better job of discipling your son or daughter than you can. You must now resign yourself to the reality that although no one knows your child better than you, there are many professionals, called by God, who know young adults better than you do, and know how to minister to young adults better than you do. To our consternation, they know how to communicate to our own children better than we do. Face it. In six to seven years, another is destined to assume the spiritual care of our child and we must work to ensure the transition is both smooth and complete.

There are several keys to this:

First, a church youth program must have a competent and mature leader at its helm. When we look at a youth program we look for a mission emphasis over camp. Not that they do not go to youth camp, but that their emphasis— their big program— is the mission trip. The big picture: is it entertainment, or is it ministry? We always want to see a service-entertainment emphasis in a youth program. Summer mission projects, weekend service projects, evangelism and ministry projects all point the selfish teen outward and begin to mature him as a disciple. All these entail time away from home. Yes. It's true. Our children seem to spend more and more time away from home, but it is also true that you are, as well. Isn't that really what you want, for your kids to leave and for you to get your wife back? Neither of you can have your youth back. Cherish the memories, but by all means, let go for both of your sakes.

Second, cooperate in creating an environment for success. Give them the freedom to immerse themselves in church activities. After all, when it comes right down to it, when they leave home, don't you want them to get involved with church? Give a little on grades and let them pursue the Lord. In the same way, don't you minister at the expense of your child's social standing.

I always caution parents not to minister through their kids— “Johnny, lets have your friends and their parents over for a barbecue and then we can invite them all to Mom and Dad’s Bible study.” Invite your own friends over. Don’t embarrass your kids because you don’t want to run the risk of being embarrassed by the same activity if it was your own professional acquaintances.

Make vacations real vacations. I have seen too many of my children’s friends become embittered by the fact that the family vacations were really opportunities for professional development or networking, either secular or spiritual. Dad worked the whole time while Mom handled the family end. You might as well just send them off and stay at home. At least that would be honest. (No pager, no cell phone, no laptop, no portable fax— this is a *vacation*).

Give your teens experiences that will compete with their peers back at school. And remember the statement, “Boy, I wish my Dad would do that with me,” is greater than any experience where the child knows, in the back of his mind, that he is being packed off once again, so Dad can get some work done.

In closing, the lesson to be learned is, “Don’t let the world sell you a bill of goods on adolescence that is not supported by Scripture.” In reality, that is the theme of the entire seminar. In obedience to God, we are preparing our children for the future-to leave home and live successfully apart from us, while at the same time we are fulfilling our responsibilities before God as parents, and all in conformity to His Word.

VII. GRADUATION:

It is over— at some point a parent has to come to the conclusion that his job of parenting is indeed over. This happens for us at high school graduation. It is at this time that the child needs to leave home and take on a life of his own. This can take many forms. They may leave for college, get an apartment and start working, join the military, or begin short- or long-term mission work. For financial reasons, the son or daughter may stay at home for a year and work or go to a local community college. If this is the case, I would still encourage you to charge rent and have him pay his own way. For a short time you may forgo this just to get him on his feet, but there needs to be a savings program and a schedule for getting out of the house.

Your children need to know that when they leave home, the house will always be open to them but it will never again be their home. *They may come and visit whenever they wish, but they no longer live with you.*

When our children return from college or work we have a basic rule. They can stay for two full weeks as a guest but, starting with the third week, they begin to take on household chores and responsibilities.

Should they find themselves in a situation where they need to come home, they need to come with a plan to leave. The unwillingness of a parent to treat the son or daughter as a responsible adult, learning the consequences of his own behavior only hurts the child, strains the marriage and stunts the further growth and development of the family into its next stages.

At this point it is time to face up to the reality that your son or daughter will best learn the lessons of life from the discipline and instruction of God and that you as a parent are only getting in the way. Success at this stage is measured in that your son or daughter wants to come and visit you because of the deep love relationship, but then wants to leave

and get back to their life as an independent, fruitful and fulfilled adult, apart from the parents, yet maintaining a love relationship with the parents.

VIII. Summary

I. The Difference in The Relationship Between Children And Adolescents.

A. Key Terms For Contrast

1. “**Children**” (Eph. 6:1) vs. “**Sons and Daughters**” (2 Cor 6:18): Discipline yourself to think of your offspring, not as children, but rather as sons and daughters.
2. “**Obey**” (Eph. 6:1) vs. “**Honor**” (Mt 19:17– 19): Discipline yourself to require honor from your sons and daughters rather than obedience
3. “**Under control**” (1 Tm 3:4) vs. “**Glad heart**” (Prv. 23:15; 27:11) Discipline yourself to begin rejoicing in your sons and daughters accomplishments as they grow in independence, rather than continuing to require that they be under your control.

B. Goals for Contrast

1. **Training**— building a foundation for the child which will serve him in the future vs. **Cheering**— the future is now, encouraging and motivating the young adult to step out on his own. *Our new goal is to encourage and reward good decision making as the child grows in independence from us.*
2. **Nurturing**— to protect and care for vs. **letting go**— allowing the child to learn to fend for himself. *Our new goal is to slowly, yet consistently, grant children the freedom to fail, to learn from their own mistakes in the school of hard knocks.*

C. Objectives for Contrast

1. **To obey quickly the first time** vs. **To think through and make the proper decision** *Our new objective when giving our child guidance and advice is for our sons and daughters to discern the will of God for their lives, as a result of the principles that have been built into their lives.*
2. **To develop specific convictions and life-styles** vs. **to apply convictions in the crucible of life.** *Our new objective in the atmosphere we create in the home is for our sons and daughters to have an environment where they can learn to apply their convictions in the real world, yet have a haven to return to and grow in.*

D. The Context of the Ministry

1. **Parents, home and those to whom the parents expose them** vs. **Church spiritual leaders and peers.** *The new context of the ministry shifts from the home to the Christian community as our sons and daughters successfully leave home and live apart from the parents on their own.*

II. Eight Questions I Can Ask Myself To See Whether I Am Making These Transitions.

1. Do I think of my adolescent as a child or as a son or daughter?
2. Am I satisfied with honor or do I need obedience?
3. Does their questioning of my beliefs, convictions and philosophies seem stimulating, or do I feel threatened and need to demand conformity?
4. Do their mistakes seem positive or do I still need to protect and nurture them?
5. Am I taking positive steps to prepare them to leave me or am I hanging on to every bit of authority I can?
6. Am I developing and promoting a spiritual authority for them outside the home or does this threaten me?

7. Am I preparing them to be able to choose God's will over my will or do I equate the two?
8. Do I look forward to the day when my children are living separated lives from us or am I threatened by this and seeking to delay it?

III. Correlations With Infancy

IV. Preparing For Adulthood in Five Years

1. Creation of quality memories which can be relied on in times of stress.
2. Just being there, quantity time, is the greatest thing you can do to prepare your children for adulthood.
3. Praying for your children on a daily and specific basis cannot be over emphasized.

V. Shifting Gears

1. Discipline
2. Coaching during the last stages of departure falls to the parents.
3. Admonition passes to the Church and other Christian Fellowships.
4. Discipline and punishment pass to governing, societal, and institutional organs.
5. The Rod of Discipline passes permanently to God.

VI. Creative discipline through the transition years, seventh to twelfth grades

A. What seems to work.:

1. What does it take for a kid to get in trouble?
2. What cultural influences are definite detriments to your child?
3. What do they hate?
4. What needs to be done around the house that you hate?
5. Let the punishment fit the crime.

B. What does not seem to work

C. Boundaries

1. Take the high ground and don't sweat the small stuff
2. Practice saying "yes." Remember, you have to say "no" to so many things, say "yes" whenever you can.
3. Begin to lay down boundaries early. Don't wait until you get there.
4. Slowly lengthen the boundaries as the teen adjusts, while at the same time preparing for your new life without children.
5. Finally, for good or bad, give them their freedom, commit them to God and get on with your life.

D. Issues that arise during these transition years.

1. Social:
2. Spiritual

VII. Graduation

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Post-Study Projects

What follows are a number of projects which you and your wife can complete. Some are to be done separately and the results compared. Others are to be done together. The goal is to come to an agreement on the discipline needs of your child, and then work on them together as a team. Remember, the general rule in decision making in this area is to yield to the more conservative of the couple in arriving at a decision.

Scripture Memory Verse— Mk 10:29

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

Last Week's Verse— Mk 1:19, 20 *And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.*

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE TRANSITION YEARS

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Lk 15:11– 12

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Mt 4:21– 22

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Mt 19:29

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE TRANSITION YEARS

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: GEN 2:24

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: EPH 5:31

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 Sm 1:19–28; 2:11

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Our Expectations In The Face Of The Transition Into Adulthood

The project below lists key terms for contrast. To the left at point 0 is the expectation we have of a small child. To the right, at point 10, is that of a young adult transitioning into full adulthood. Place an **X** where your expectation is, and a **C** where your child actually is. For more than one child feel free to use 1X, 1C, etc. Sometimes, we are treating a child like a transitioning adult. Sometimes, we are treating our transitioning young adult like a child. Be sure to discuss this with your spouse.

<i>Child</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Sons and Daughters</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>Obey</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Honor</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>Under Control</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Glad Heart</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>Train</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Counsel</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>Nurture / Bond</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Let Go / Leave</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>To Obey Quickly The First Time</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>To Think through And Make The Right Decisions</i>
<u>0</u>		<u>10</u>
<i>To Acquire Convictions</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>To Apply Convictions And</i>

And Lifestyles

0

To Make Choices

10

Remember, it is just as damaging to expect a child to think through and make the right decision, as it is for a young adult to obey Mommy quickly the first time. This chart is applicable no matter the age of your children. As you reflect on the results of this chart, what adjustments need to be made?

Are you accepting and preparing for the future changes your family will be experiencing?

Parents Of Teens and Older Children

Although this project is specifically geared for the parents of teens and older, those of you with younger children can still think through on your emotional response to these transitions, how your own family handled your transition years, and how you will do things differently. For those with very young children, how your family treated you will probably be the most helpful aspect of the discussion. It is probably unrealistic for young parents of preschoolers or young elementary age children to be giving a lot of thought to this issue, much less to begin to prepare for the transition years to adulthood.

Do I think of my adolescent as a child, or as a son or daughter?

Am I satisfied with honor, or do I need immediate obedience?

Do their questioning and mistakes seem positive, or do I still need to protect and nurture them through the bumps and bruises of life?

Am I taking positive steps to prepare them to leave me, or am I holding on to every bit of authority I can?

Am I developing and promoting a spiritual authority for them outside the home, or does this threaten me?

Do I look forward to my children and I living separate lives, or am I threatened by this and seeking to delay it?

Reflect back now on your answers. What adjustments, if any, need to be made or prepared for in your life? Do either you or your spouse struggle with a particular issue?