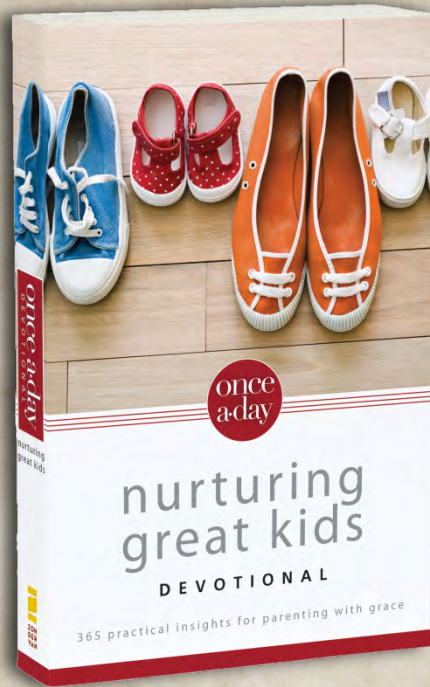




**Be a Strong Christian Role Model
By Parenting with Grace**



Raising children brings incredible joy and fulfillment, as well as frustration, uncertainty, and stress. Fortunately, God gives us guidance on how to be godly parents. This 21-day reading plan helps you bring God and His Word into your parenting. Devotions are selected from the *Once-a-Day: Nurturing Great Kids Devotional* by Zondervan.



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Day 1: It's Up to the Lord

Our children need to know that the Lord will do what he wants to do. He is almighty. He is sovereign. Proverbs 21:30 tells us that no plan of ours will succeed against God—even if we think we are right and he is wrong, even if we don't understand his motives. We don't always fully grasp this thought because we cannot reconcile the bad things that happen with our knowledge that God is good. We want to ask why. It's worth noting that after all of Job's trials and even with the lessons God taught him about life, God never told him why he was suffering. It's enough to say that God doesn't have to answer to us or explain anything.

As you accept this eternal principle, you must also teach it to your children. They will work to understand these concepts as they mature and grow, but you can assist them in the process by setting the example of complete submission to God. You will sometimes have to say, "I can't explain that." What you do know and can explain is that the will of god will always prevail. We can pray to him for understanding and guidance through all the "what ifs" and "whys" of life.

But in the end, his way is not our way. Accepting this truth will be to the benefit of your family.



Day 1 Scripture

Proverbs 21:30

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.

Parenting Principle: God is God and I am not!

Points to Ponder:

- What examples of submission to God do your children see in your life?
- What plan have you created that you now see was not necessarily God's plan?
- How can you learn to accept God's plan more readily in the future and to teach your children this skill?

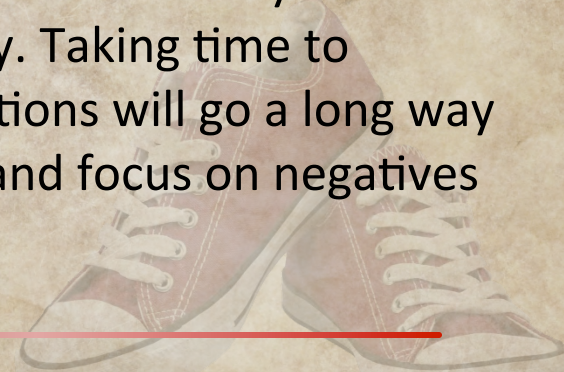


Day 2: More Is Less

It's so easy to point out the flaws in our children. They seem obvious, especially when they're little or they're teens. When they become adults, they still seem obvious. It's always been true that focusing on the negative is easier than the positive. If you don't believe me, just watch the evening news.

Our challenge as parents is to focus on the positives in our children and to give credit where it's due as we recognize those positives and realize it's in our power to act. Even if you have a child who is disobedient most of the time, point out, celebrate and reward those times when they do obey and their attitude is positive.

Every home needs a little bit of celebration. If your natural tendency is to focus on the negative, your children will react accordingly. Taking time to remind them that you will also key in on their positive actions will go a long way in unlocking tension in the relationship. Celebrate more and focus on negatives less.



Day 2 Scripture

Proverbs 3:27

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.

Parenting Principle: Maintain a healthy balance between celebrating the positive and needing to point out the negative when it's helpful.

Points to Ponder:

- How do you acknowledge negative behavior without building animosity?
- How do you celebrate positive behavior?
- How could you do a better job of celebrating accomplishments?



Day 3: Choosing Friends

Do you remember how you chose friends in high school? I'm guessing righteousness wasn't on your checklist or the first thing you considered. So be patient as you see your children begin to choose their friends. They will definitely become like the people they hang out with, so help them see the pitfalls of having friends who don't make wise choices.

However, don't beat yourself up if they make some poor decisions. It's part of the maturation process and a natural function of growing up. Our goal as parents is to expose our children to as many nuggets of truth as they can receive and accept. Then pray they will own these beliefs as they align their lives with God's Word and God's will.

The key words in that last sentence are "God's will." We can often set our agenda and goals for our children ahead of God's will even in this area of friendship. Be careful not to judge your children's choices based on the choices you made at their age. This is an easy pitfall for parents—so be careful!

Day 3 Scripture

Proverbs 12:26

The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Parenting Principle: Choose good friends and your children will benefit from your example.

Points to Ponder:

- What have you learned about making good choices in friends?
- What type of choices in friends are your children making?
- What are some things you can do to continue to guide your children in this area?

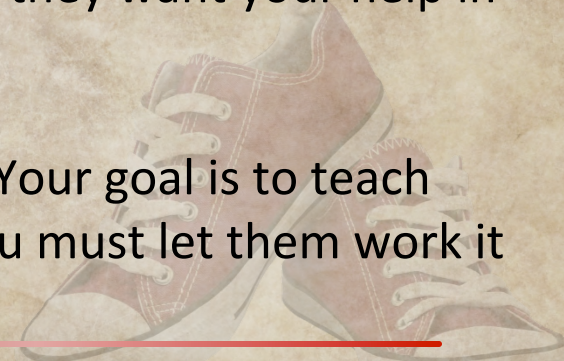


Day 4: Work it Out

If we take this verse literally and apply it to family life, we can see the importance of teaching our children to love each other and be understanding. We can mandate this behavior for the first few years, but there comes a point when they will have to make their own decision to be careful and not wrong each other. To be absolutely conflict-free would be almost unthinkable. But to expect your children to forgive each other and not allow disagreements to ruin their relationship is a fair ask.

When they are young, help them settle their disputes. As they age, give them the skills to handle them on their own. Help them understand each other's personalities—a biggie! Don't label your children with descriptive terms that put them in a box and make this reconciliation process difficult! If you see walls being built up against each other, be sure to help or ask if they want your help in leveling these walls.

Life will give siblings plenty of opportunity to disagree. Your goal is to teach them resolution skills, and then as they become adults you must let them work it out on their own.



Day 4 Scripture

Proverbs 18:19

A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city; disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.

Parenting Principle: Help your children work it out and work yourself out of it.

Points to Ponder:

- How capable are you at resolving conflict between siblings?
- How did you learn the skills you have?
- Are there differences now that you need to resolve?

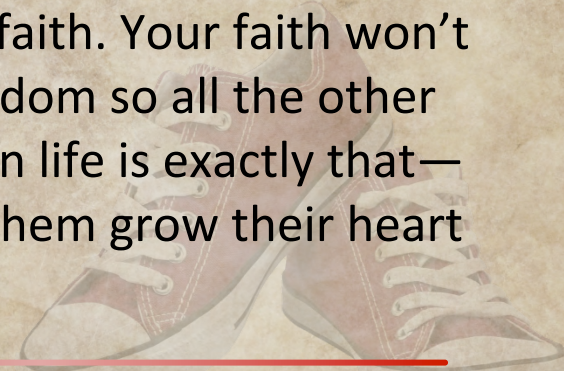


Day 5: A Matter of the Heart

There will be a stage in parenting when you will wonder what's going on with your child—good and bad. You may observe them doing something that is very caring and sensitive and you will be amazed wondering where it came from. Proverbs 27:19 tells you. It came from their heart. Those moments cause parents to smile in their souls.

It's also likely that a time will come when you can't believe your child's behavior. They will embarrass you and show no remorse. They will say and do things that you are sure you have told them to refrain from. You will wonder if everything you said went in one ear and out the other. This too is a reflection of their heart. What's inside will always come out.

This is why your children need to be strong in their own faith. Your faith won't transfer to them. Their heart needs to seek first God's kingdom so all the other things of life will fall into place, including their actions. Then life is exactly that—their life. It's our responsibility to do what we can to help them grow their heart toward God because one day they will be on their own.



Day 5 Scripture

Proverbs 27:19

As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart.

Parenting Principle: You can make your child look good, but only God can help them be good

Points to Ponder:

- What does your own life reflect?
- What does your child's life reflect as an indication of what is in their heart?
- How can you pray for their heart?



Day 6: Fear the Lord

The idea of being untouched by trouble is appealing to a parent. However, Proverbs 19:23 doesn't say we won't have trouble, it says we will be untouched by it. In other words, trouble will not affect who we are in Christ.

When we hear the phrase “fear the Lord” we might retreat with almost a hand up for protection from his wrath. That's a misunderstanding of the concept. God should be feared out of respect for his encompassing power. Use this analogy: If I told you I fear lawn mowers, it would mean I don't stick my hand underneath one while it's running. But

I don't cringe every time I see a lawn mower. I just respect its power.

When we have a healthy fear of God and teach what that looks like to our children, we help them have a good life—a life that may include trials but that recognizes God's power even in the midst of those trials. Our children can rest content knowing God is God. Period!

Continue to the next page for the rest of this devotional

Day 6 Scripture

Proverbs 19:23

The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

Parenting Principle: Fear the Lord and rest content for that is God's intent.

Points to Ponder:

- How have you come through a time of trouble, yet are untouched by trouble in the long-term?
- Are your children learning to rest content? How?
- What is one way you can help your children develop a proper fear for the Lord?



Day 7: Drink It In

Let's put this verse in the context of parenting. When you receive news that your child has been a blessing to others or that they have been a good student in class—it's like a refreshing drink. It lightens your spirit and encourages you to press on in this parenting journey. We certainly need that, as parents don't usually receive a lot of accolades.

As parents, we may become so consumed by our own need for a “cool drink” that we forget our children need it as well, regardless of their age. When we bless our children with words of encouragement or we find a quality in them worthy of celebration—we become like a fresh drink to their spirit.

It's easy to think that we do enough for them already. But that can't be our attitude. We must stay in the mind-set that our words and deeds are seen as kind and uplifting to them. If you continue to foster this spirit, you can help bring them peace in the tough times and help build a good rapport between you.



Day 7 Scripture

Proverbs 25:13

Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master.

Parenting Principle: A fresh drink will quench your children's thirst and refresh their soul.

Points to Ponder:

- Who has been a refreshing drink for you?
- How could you be more refreshing to your family?
- How can you teach your children to be refreshing to others?

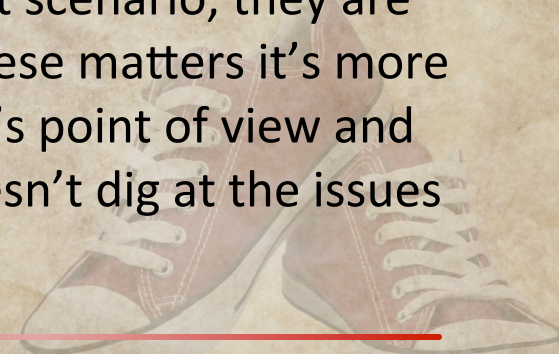


Day 8: Not Too Deep

At first glance, Proverbs 25:27 seems to say that shallow thinking is wise. But a closer look reveals a much more significant thought. The matters referred to are those things that, when sought out and uncovered, accomplish nothing.

The best way to illustrate this is to think about those times when you disagree on an issue with either your children or your spouse. Nobody is necessarily wrong but everybody is frustrated. When you spend all your time trying to get the other person to think your way, you are wasting everyone's time and causing division in the home.

Often one person will just want to be understood, which is good, but forcing another individual to think like them is destructive. In that scenario, they are delving too deep and it's not productive for anyone. In these matters it's more gracious to search deep enough to appreciate each other's point of view and then let it go! That is a depth everyone can share and doesn't dig at the issues that should be left alone.



Day 8 Scripture

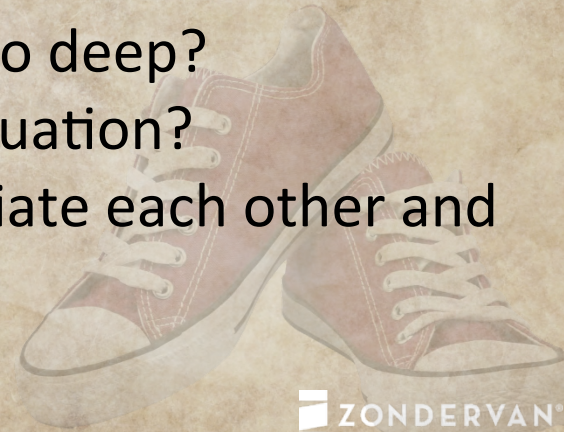
Proverbs 25:27

It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to search out matters that are too deep.

Parenting Principle: Dig deep enough to hit water but don't keep digging and ruin the well.

Points to Ponder:

- What do you want to discuss too often and too deep?
- How could you back off a bit in a particular situation?
- How can you help your family see and appreciate each other and your differences?



Day 9: Seek Advice

We can't build a strong family by acting on our own! Going to God for advice and then seeking others to come alongside us as we follow that advice is a recipe for a good, healthy family.

Here is some advice for building a strong family: Establish some guidelines that everyone in the family can follow. You need to communicate these early on in your children's lives so they have a clear understanding of your expectations. This should help eliminate surprises or claims by your children that you are inconsistent or that rules are constantly changing. By setting these unswerving, basic rules from the very beginning, you have laid a foundation that can be built upon. Remind your children of this when they try to dodge compliance by asserting unfairness. That won't happen if you are reliable in your application.

Needless to say, the advice you seek for creating these guidelines is critical. Seek wise people and wise principles that are supported by the Bible, not opinions. It's not necessary to reinvent the wheel when solid instruction is already available. The most respected parents are the ones who stick to their standards when the going gets tough.

Day 9 Scripture

Proverbs 20:18

Plans are established by seeking advice; so if you wage war, obtain guidance.

Parenting Principle: Plan today to prevent issues tomorrow!

Points to Ponder:

- How do you go about seeking advice?
- Who can help you establish a good family plan?
- How and when will you communicate this plan to your children?



Day 10: Listen and Soften

A soft heart is a parent's dream. When our children display a teachable spirit, we can celebrate as parents. If their heart begins to harden, our home can become a very difficult place to be.

When your child develops a hard heart, first try and find out the reason. Usually you'll find it's something they are hiding or getting involved with that's causing this shut down. If they won't talk to you, then seek the advice of a pastor or professional counselor.

Dealing with hard hearts is not unusual. It's part of family life. You simply don't want to see it grow into a deeper issue and then cause more problems in the house.

One of the keys to getting our children to soften their hearts is by displaying a soft heart ourselves. Even if at some point if they do develop a little hardness in their heart, it will hopefully soften again if they see that in you.

Notice Hebrews 3:7–8 says “If you hear his voice.” This means we must be listening to Christ for direction in our lives. Teach your children to seek Christ as they face issues, and he will keep them soft and teachable.



Day 10 Scripture

Hebrews 3:7-8

So, as the Holy Spirit says:
“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the wilderness

Parenting Principle: When God speaks, listening is learning.

Points to Ponder:

- How have you made your heart soft and teachable?
- What causes your heart to harden?
- How are you helping your children develop soft hearts?

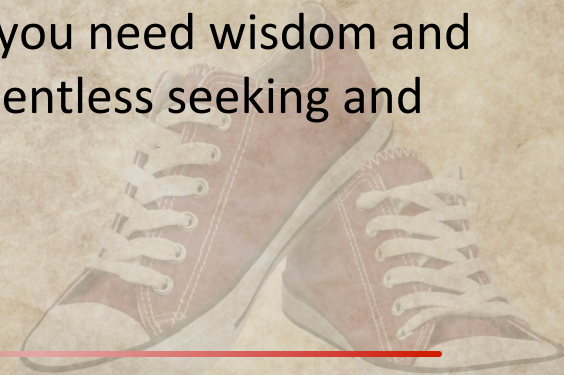


Day 11: The Giver

How comforting to know that God does not base his giving of wisdom on our perfection. He assures us that if we need wisdom, he will be faithful to give it to us. In fact, he emphasizes it will be provided with great generosity.

This helps us make a shift from not knowing what to do with an issue our child is experiencing to knowing that God wants us to bring him our issues. He created us so he knows exactly the piece of advice we need. As we seek him in prayer, we will find peace and a sense of direction. There may be times when you seek God and don't feel anything, but don't give up. God will be faithful.

Just as you want to meet the needs of your children, God wants to meet your needs and exceed your expectations! Focus in on an area you need wisdom and pursue it like you would air if you were drowning. Your relentless seeking and asking will result in his relentless guidance and direction.



Day 11 Scripture

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Parenting Principle: Where there is a will there is a way.

Points to Ponder:

- What is an area you lack wisdom because you have failed to ask God?
- Are you quick to want an answer or quick to give up asking?
- How have you taught your children to seek God for wisdom?



Day 12: Keep Perspective

There are usually two types of people in every family. Those who like to hash everything out and those who like to let things pass. Although there are times when discussion and a deeper understanding will be profitable, there will be other times when the “let it go” philosophy will be best.

How often has something trivial in your family grown into something huge? Your children have witnessed this and have learned from that example. Use discernment to determine when an issue is really big enough to take center stage. Otherwise, know when it’s profitable to say you’re sorry and learn to let it go. If you ask older people what they wish they would have done more of in their life, they will often say “let things go.”

Everyone should learn this early on in their family life because of how it will benefit their home. Teach your children to forgive each other and to not bring those issues back up later after they’ve been resolved. Be willing to grow if this is your weakness as a parent. You might be frustrating your children to no end with your constant bombardment of an area you always focus on.

Day 12 Scripture

Titus 3:9

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Parenting Principle: Know when to say when!

Points to Ponder:

- What is the useless area you “beat like a drum”?
- How can you change this?
- How are your children at letting things go?



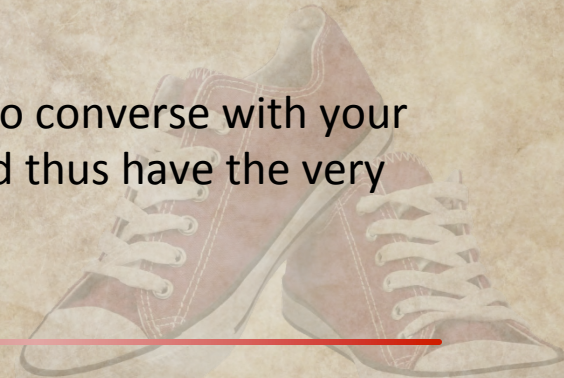
Day 13: Just be There

Step one to a good relationship with your child is to be quick to listen. When your child reaches the age where they can tell you things about their life or issues they are dealing with—listen. Please understand that you might not ever need to respond. The tendency for every parent is to feel like you need to supply all their answers, but often times it is most helpful to simply listen and learn.

If step two is needed, it is wise to be slow to speak. Measure your response. If it's defensive or attacking, reconsider what you plan to say. When your child listens to you, make it worth their while. If you develop this type of relationship, they will probably pursue you often with issues.

Third, don't allow your conversation to take an angry tone. The moment this happens, you have lost any chance of making a point or making a difference. Sadly it happens too often.

Determine today that you will begin to improve your ability to converse with your child by practicing these three steps—steps that are Biblical and thus have the very foundation of truth.



Day 13 Scripture

James 1:19

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Parenting Principle: Wise parents open their ears more than their mouths.

Points to Ponder:

- How would you rate yourself as a listener?
- How can you prevent your conversations from turning angry?
- How can you improve communication with your children overall?



Day 14: You are Special

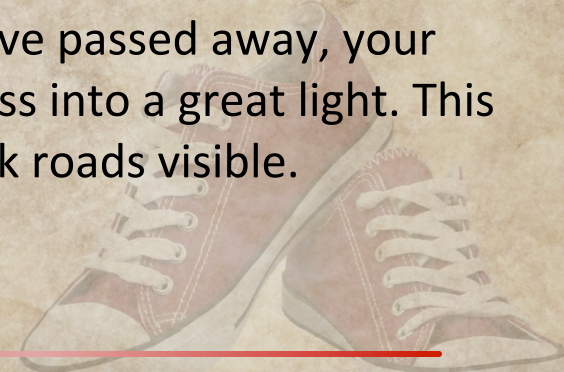
With six plus billion people on earth, it's easy to think we might not be very special as individuals. But because of Christ's love for us, we are exceptional. He makes us unique and important in light of eternity.

Teaching your children their importance in Christ will have a lasting purpose. When their best skills are all they rely on, it won't be enough. There will always be someone who can run faster, jump higher or get better grades. While it's important to teach children to strive for their best performance, their reason for significance must rest in Christ alone.

When their human successes fall away, their value will be sure and secure in Christ.

Let this principle guide you as you parent. Then after you've passed away, your legacy will live on. Remember, God called you out of darkness into a great light. This light will guide your way, guard your heart and keep the dark roads visible.

Rely on God for all things including your self-worth.



Day 14 Scripture

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Parenting Principle: We are special to Christ for no special reason except that he created us.

Points to Ponder:

- When don't you feel special to Christ?
- How do help your children know they are special to Christ?
- How has God's light kept you on track as a parent?

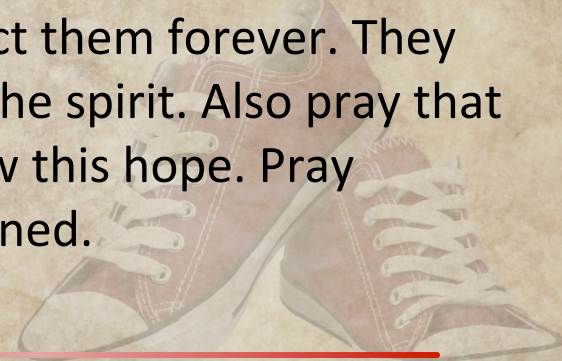


Day 15: Finding Hope

Parents, dedicate yourself to praying that your children's heart and soul will be aware of God's hope. That they will know it for themselves. That their experiences with places and people of faith will ultimately call them to God and not turn them off to faith.

When they understand this from their own soul, they will experience hope. Without hope, this is a pretty tough world. Because of technology, our children will be exposed to more negative news than we ever were. If you do much blogging or read threads on websites, you can see how critical people can be. It's easy to hide behind a computer screen and write hurtful comments.

That's why their soul needs to be secure in the hope that only Christ can bring and why we need to pray this for them. We cannot protect them forever. They must learn how to defend themselves with the sword of the spirit. Also pray that they will be a positive influence on others who don't know this hope. Pray Ephesians 1:18 over your children so they will be enlightened.



Day 15 Scripture

Ephesians 1:18

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

Parenting Principle: When Jesus gets their soul, he'll take full control!

Points to Ponder:

- What do you pray daily for your children?
- How can you be more specific in your prayer life?
- Where do you see your children discovering their hope in Christ?



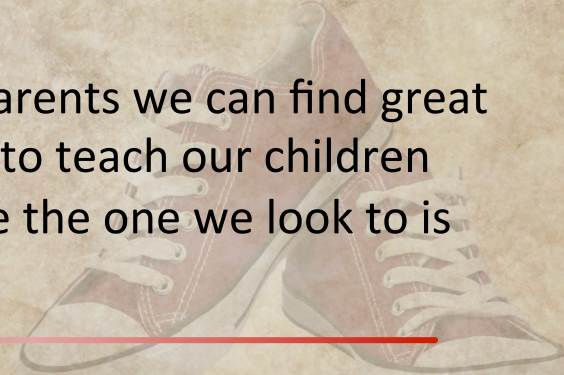
Day 16: He Holds Things Together

What ultimately holds a family together? The obvious things like time together, love, patience and kindness come to mind, but the real super glue that helps a family stick together is by loving and believing in Jesus Christ.

Look around. There are families falling apart everywhere. There are neighborhoods disbanding because of divorce and the residual effects from it. That in turn is causing communities and countries to suffer.

And the one thing that would help in holding people together is Jesus Christ. It sounds simplistic, but he is where we can find hope and healing. If your family can maintain their integrity to the cause of Christ, then your family has great potential to make a difference for Christ. If other families are inspired by your example, then family by family we can turn the tide—start a revolution if you will for Christ!

He is before all things, in all things and after all things. As parents we can find great comfort in Colossians 1:17 because it gives us the confidence to teach our children what we believe about Christ. We can remain faithful because the one we look to is faithful!



Day 16 Scripture

Colossians 1:17

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Parenting Principle: He holds you when you can't hold things together!

Points to Ponder:

- How does Christ hold you together?
- How is he helping you hold your children together?
- Where do you need to recognize his holding strength?



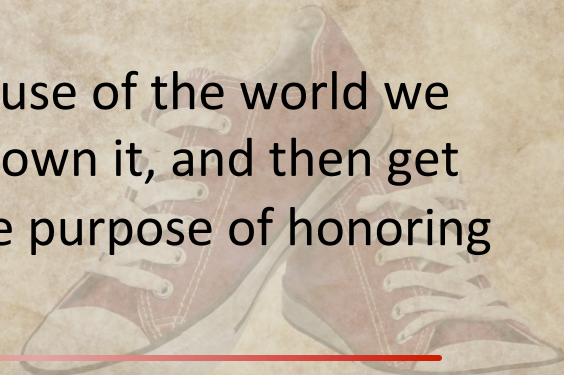
Day 17: Twinkle Twinkle

Most parents dream that their children will shine like stars. Chapter two of Philippians is all about the reflection of Christ's example in humility and servanthood. The end result is a "shining" moment when Christ became the savior of the world because of his willingness to die to self.

If we want our children to shine like stars, it won't happen because they make the final cut in American Idol. It won't be because they're the best player on the soccer team or the brightest student in school.

It will come from helping them live a deep life in Christ and helping them see the difference between God's idea of stardom and our society's definition of it.

It's easy to get caught up in man-made stardom because of the world we live in. But when you see yourself falling into that trap, own it, and then get back to the business of raising your children for the sole purpose of honoring Christ. In other words, help them shine like stars!



Day 17 Scripture

Philippians 2:15-16

So that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

Parenting Principle: When you shine like a star in God’s kingdom, the light is more radiant.

Points to Ponder:

- How can you train your children to be stars for Christ?
- What examples can you use to show them the difference between God’s stars and man’s?
- How are you fooled by earthly stardom?

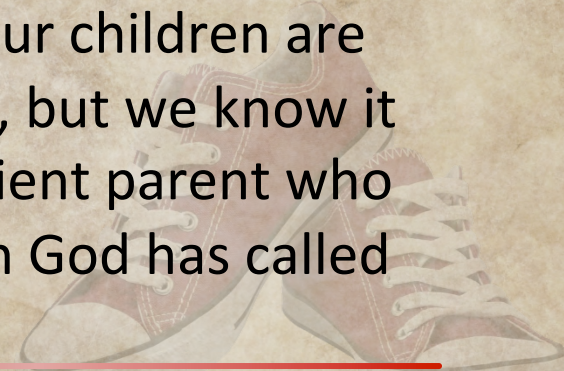


Day 18: Hit the Target

As parents, we can leave a lasting legacy for our children if we live as Paul suggests in Colossians 2:6–7. Our goal, however, should be to reach far beyond the day to day issues that arise with our children and look at the big picture so we can see our lives from an eternal view.

Our target should be to introduce our children to the Bible and pray they will be built up by his Word. We must show our children faith, not simply through our words, but in our actions. Lastly, we need to model gratefulness by speaking thanksgiving over everything in our life, no matter how small.

Most of us would love to see this happen while our children are growing up in our home, and it can to some extent, but we know it takes years to learn the lessons of Christ. It is a patient parent who understands this and daily toils to fulfill the mission God has called them to.



Day 18 Scripture

Colossians 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Parenting Principle: Once the target is set, you know where you're trying to get.

Points to Ponder:

- What have you done to keep your eye on the goal of this verse?
- How have you seen your family grow in Christ?
- How do you keep a spirit of thankfulness in your home?



Day 19: He Has Overcome

Great news! Christ has won the battle over all the issues that we might have as a family.

Whatever it is that hurts your relationship with your children, Christ has already overcome. That is where we put our hope! He did so by triumphing over death through the cross. In him we have and hold victory.

Victory will not always look like we won. We need to help our children come to grips with understanding what this means. They will need the power of the cross to overcome some of the difficult situations they will encounter. We will want them to understand that only Jesus has the ability to disarm the power and authorities of this world.

Teach your children how to grow in the Lord daily and spend time with Christ on their own so they can uncover his power for themselves. The ultimate goal is that our children will discover the discernment and wisdom that we have gained over the years. Pray they will see it in us and then find it themselves.

Day 19 Scripture

Colossians 2:15

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Parenting Principle: We are not the final authority—he is!

Points to Ponder:

- How has Christ triumphed over circumstances in your life?
- How are you helping your children discover his power?
- What is one step you can take to help your children grow in Christ?



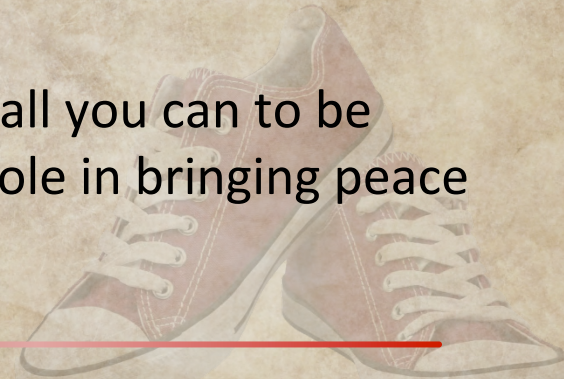
Day 20: Sibling Rivalry

First John 2:10 is referring to our brothers and sisters in the Christian family, but it certainly can apply to our biological family as well.

Every parent has the dream that their children will grow up to love each other. Those dreams get crushed when one sibling or another makes decisions that hurt the family. Children become protective of their parents, siblings lose patience with each other and all sorts of chaos can ensue.

As a parent, you will have to mediate at times among your children, which can be very tiring. The best response a parent can offer is to encourage your children to repent of any sinful behavior and value one another. Your children may not be best friends but they can still show respect.

Make it your mission to live a life pleasing to God. Do all you can to be peaceful, and pray your children also understand their role in bringing peace to the family.



Day 20 Scripture

1 John 2:10

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

Parenting Principle: You are not responsible to make your children get along—they are!

Points to Ponder:

- How well do you get along with your siblings?
- How do you see your children growing in relationships with each other?
- Where do you see your children struggling in their sibling relationships?



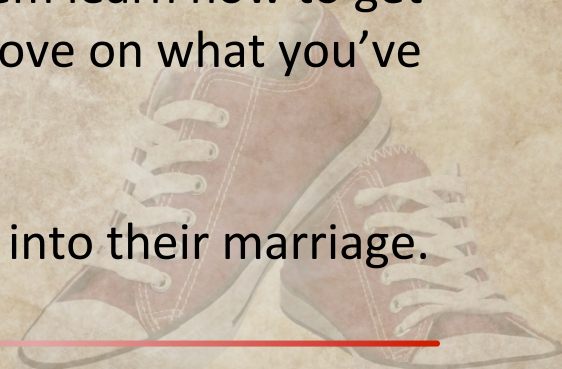
Day 21: Choose Wisely

Our children need to hear early and often that who they marry is a really big deal. They might not understand it at a young age, but it's important to have it in their mind.

Help them recognize how their spouse can either be a delight and helper to their life or they can have a potentially harmful effect on their life. The example your marriage is currently setting for your children will be very influential in their future. They will either want to emulate your example or do things different because they don't like what they've seen in your marriage.

Make sure you use your marriage, complete with all the winning and losing moments to let them learn so their relationships will be even better. Be open with your children in the areas that you know will help them learn how to get along with their spouse. Tell them you want them to improve on what you've shown them.

Do what you can to help them keep decay from settling into their marriage.



Day 21 Scripture

Proverbs 12:4

A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Parenting Principle: Keep the decay out of your bones and you keep the joy in your home.

Points to Ponder:

- Do you see any signs of family decay?
- Are you a crown of disgrace to your spouse?
- What are your children's views for a healthy marriage?

