

PARENTING IS A MINISTRY SERIES
TRANSFORMATIONAL PARENTING
WORKBOOK

VOLUME 1 OF 4

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

Craig Caster



Discipleship
Individual Study
Small Groups

Transformational Parenting is volume 1
in the Parenting Is a Ministry series.

Other Titles in the Parenting Is a Ministry Series

Loving Communication (volume 2)
Train Up Your Children (volume 3)
Biblical Discipline (volume 4)
Leader's Guide

Other Workbooks by FDM.world

Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster
Discipleship Takes Vision and Strategy by Craig Caster
Forgiveness and Reconciliation by Craig Caster
Marriage Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster
Understanding Teens by Craig Caster

All FDM.world workbooks are recommended for individual study, for small groups, as discipleship tools, and in counseling.

Please note: All blank pages from the original workbook have been removed.
Some page numbers may be skipped for this reason.

Transformational Parenting

Parenting Is a Ministry Series

Volume 1

For Traditional, Blended, and Single-Parent Families

Craig Caster

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

Phone: (619) 590-1901

Email: info@FDM.world

Websites: www.FDM.world

Transformational Parenting, Parenting Is a Ministry Series, Volume 1, by Craig Caster

ISBN 978-1-7331045-6-2

Print and electronic version copyright © 2020 by Craig Caster. All rights reserved.

01052024 revision

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked AMPC are taken from the Amplified® Bible (AMPC), Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version, 1987 printing. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication—whether in printed or e-book format, or any other published derivation—may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without prior written permission.

Contents

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	ix
Prologue.....	xi
Lesson 1: Parenting God’s Way.....	1
Lesson 2: The Original Blueprint	7
Lesson 3: The Ministry of Parenting.....	11
Lesson 4: God’s Purpose for Parents	15
Lesson 5: Parenting Purposes	17
Lesson 6: A Strong Foundation.....	23
Lesson 7: Three Essential Ingredients.....	29
Lesson 8: True Priorities	35
Lesson 9: The Chief Cornerstone	45
Lesson 10: Your Amazing Transformation	53
Appendix Resources	61
Endnotes	79
About the Author	81
About Family Discipleship Ministries.....	83

Preface

Most parents would agree on at least two things: raising children can be wonderful *and difficult*. Adjustments must be made for the uniqueness of each personality, and keeping children entertained can be a challenge. But the real bummer is discipline. Couples must work as a team, single parents are working without backup, and every parent faces the challenge of protecting and training each child from birth to adulthood. *When, where, how, how much, how often, how long, and is this really working* are just a few of the questions crowding the thoughts of a parent staring into the face of a precious, disobedient child. The truth is, most parents today are not sure where to turn, believe their own parents did just an okay job, and feel poorly equipped themselves.

But there is help for those who will listen. God, the creator of all things, has not left us without guidance. He is the creator of the institution we call family and has given us clear instructions in His Word on how to be successful. We need to take this seriously because we have an enemy. The Bible tells us that the devil, Satan, is working against us and would love to break down the strength of the family, which is also an attack against the church, society, and our Christian witness to a lost world. But God, knowing all our needs, gives us both His Word and the Holy Spirit, which is enough to win any battle.

Sadly, most Christians are not aware that the Bible is relevant for raising children, so they turn to past experience or worldly philosophy for help. But now is the time to listen and seek God's wisdom and guidance to strengthen our families. If we are not willing to submit to our Creator, then what can we expect for the future? When we operate outside of God's will, the result is chaos and destruction. It may come slowly, so we hardly notice, but the end is pain.

The Parenting Is a Ministry series will help you learn God's plan for raising children. Whether you function as a traditional family, blended family, single-parent family, or grandparents raising grandchildren, God's parenting principles are effective and conclusive. We are all God's children, parent and child alike, and He would never leave us without the possibility of a joy-filled, successful life.

May God bless you through His wonderful, life-changing principles and bless your family as you allow Him to transform you into the parent He desires you to be.

Pray this prayer together.

Dear Lord Jesus, we are asking for Your help and wisdom to be parents who honor and glorify You. Please give us the faith to trust You and the grace to change those things we are doing wrong. Help us start doing Your will in the way we love and train our children. Amen.

Introduction

This workbook is designed to bring you onto the path of discipleship, which means walking in God's principles. When we use words like *walk*, we hope you understand that living in these principles is just as fundamental as learning to walk.

The goals of our workbook are:

1. to show you that God provides principles for parenting,
2. to equip you with tools and applications for applying these principles, and
3. to guide your family into the forgiveness, healing, and unity that comes through obedience to God.

Family Discipleship Ministries exists to help educate the body of Christ in vital areas. Failure in discipleship is directly related to failure in parenting. And how do we know this? By what we have seen, experienced, and found in proven statistics today.

The Process

The study is divided into four volumes. Start with volume 1 and continue through each volume in order. Skipping to a volume or section that sparks your interest is tempting but not advised, because each volume and lesson build upon one another. For example, you really want to master disciplining your child so you move ahead to that study, but there are biblical principles that must be learned before you can discipline in a godly way. Work toward completing one lesson each day for five days. Building daily study with consistency is a key to spiritual success.

These principles have been tried and proven successful. I have experienced it in my own life, my own family, and through the lives of countless people in counseling and parenting classes. Please understand, this is *not* a "Five Easy Steps to Parenting" manual. Biblical discipleship is challenging work and will require you to change some of your attitudes and behaviors. The process will require commitment and sacrifice to successfully implement the principles.

Starting Each Day

- View each daily study as time spent with your God, and expect Him to speak to you through His Word.
- Start each day with prayer, asking God to reveal where you need to change and to empower you to apply what you are learning.
- Have a reflective mindset. Do not rush through the material just to say you finished it. Give God time to speak to you, and meditate on what you learn.

Things to Note

- This work is a new priority and will require dedicated time. The lessons are to be done daily. If you miss a day, *do not skip it*, but work to complete all lessons in order.

- At times we start projects and do not finish. Consider the importance of your parenting responsibility and make a decision to faithfully complete this study. Pray about your priorities and what you are placing ahead of this commitment. Enlist the help of an accountability partner for prayer and study if necessary.
- If married, your spouse is an essential partner in this effort. Study together or separately, but always discuss what you have learned as it relates to marital and parenting issues and changes.
- Lessons may vary in the amount of information presented. After you complete each one, look ahead to the next lesson to plan your time with God and get the most out of it.
- Space is provided for answering questions and recording your thoughts and prayers. If you have downloaded and printed this workbook, we suggest you put it in a three-ring binder and include additional paper for personal journaling and notes.

DIG DEEPER

This section marks an opportunity to read Scripture and relate it to the subject being presented. During this discipleship process you will become more familiar with the Bible, biblical principles of parenting, and what God expects from you as a parent.

Self-Examination

As you study biblical principles, this section provides time for self-examination, finding areas where personal improvement is needed. Space is provided for listing insights, confessions, and prayers for strength and wisdom to make those changes. One aspect of the discipleship process is personal accountability. If God reveals that you have sinned against your spouse or children, confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness. Practice this regularly even if it is not noted to do so.

FACT FILE

Boxes like this one provide definitions of words or phrases from the Bible. We have taken great care to use well-known, theologically sound Bible dictionaries and commentaries for clarity, referenced when possible. Many of these definitions appear in *Appendix T: Glossary*.

ACTION PLAN

After you study the biblical principles, this section challenges you to take action and apply what you have learned to your life. To be true disciples we must understand that God not only desires that we grow in knowledge, but He also requires that we live it out.

Appendix Resources

Please take advantage of the appendices at the end of the workbook. They are there for your growth, and we refer to them throughout the workbook. Before you begin this wonderful journey, please fill out *Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter*.

Leader's Guide

A leader's guide is available at FDM.world under Free Ministry Downloads. All materials on our website focus on discipleship and are provided free of charge.

Prologue

His Precious Gifts

I have three children, and I love them all and want the best for them, but I have fallen so short in love as compared to God's love for me. At times while raising my children, I did not always have the best attitude toward them. In ignorance I thought, *Oh my gosh! God, I think you made a mistake. This one is defective.* But I have come to understand that God does not make mistakes, and not one of my children is defective. In fact, each unique child is a gift that God knew I needed.

We learn in Psalm 127 that our children are gifts from God. So my question to you is not, *What are the gifts God has given you, but, Who are the gifts?* And what have you done with those gifts? Think about how you have valued them, and realize that God has seen the way you have handled, or mishandled, the gifts He has given to you.

Good Thoughts

In the past, I thought God was always disappointed with me. Every time I would consider what God must be thinking about me, I feared He was thinking, *Craig, you ding-dong. When will you get it together?* And then, *Okay, that's it. That's the last time, Craig.* I had a terrible idea of how God viewed me because of the things I had done in my life. I thought He was downright upset with me all the time. Eventually I learned that this thinking was a lie from Satan.

If you scooped up sand with both hands at the beach, the grains in your grasp would outnumber the *seconds* you would live for the rest of your natural life. In His Word, God says that all His thoughts toward us are good, and they outnumber all the grains of sand in the entire earth (Psalm 139:17-18). With all these good thoughts, when can our Creator have a bad thought about us?

God predestined all our days, including the bad days and the difficult trials that will touch our lives. God knows people are not perfect and parents make mistakes. But He uses all our mistakes, trials, and difficulties to reveal Himself and bring us into a closer relationship with Him. Within His providential permission, God allows us to do some foolish things, and there will always be consequences. We see this in many families today, non-Christians and Christians alike, because parents often lean on their own understanding to raise children. This has created such pain and confusion, which has resulted in a lack of peace, joy, and blessings for both parents and children.

But praise God! He does not leave us or forsake us when we do such foolish things with His precious gifts (Hebrews 13:5). God will *never* leave or forsake (abandon) His children (us). Let us receive the discipline of our Lord so we can experience His peace and righteousness in our homes. Remember, God knew every single one of us before time itself began, including the good, the bad, and the ugly (Psalm 139:1-18), and He still chose us to be His children. Thank God for that!

In the Luke 15, Jesus spoke to a mixed group of believers and nonbelievers, commoners and elitists, about a relationship with His children. What Jesus said to them, and to us, is, "Listen to Me and I will teach you how My Father in heaven looks upon His children." It is glorious when we come to know and understand our relationship to the living God.

Prodigal Behavior

In Luke 15:4–7, Jesus began with the parable of the lost sheep, showing how God lovingly pursues us when we go astray. In Luke 15:8–10, Jesus continued with the parable of the lost coin, which reveals the value God places upon each one of us, how precious and unique we are to Him. In Luke 15:11–24, the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus taught about the gifts God has given to His children. God has given each one of us gifts that He says are uniquely personal. This is the same perspective He tells us to have about our spouse and children, to consider them very special gifts from God.

A prodigal son is someone who takes the inheritance his father gives to him, then misuses and abuses it according to his own desires. Even when we foolishly abuse God's gifts, just like the prodigal son, He does not condemn us. In His foreknowledge, God already knew we would do the things we have done. Truly we cannot understand His love and mercy. The Word tells us, "My ways [are] higher than your ways" (Isaiah 55:9). We also are told to listen, believe in the love God has shown us in Jesus, and follow His wisdom rather than our own understanding. Jesus came so we could know the Father and begin to experience the miracle of His lovingkindness toward us.

In Luke 15:11–13, Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living." Notice it was the prodigal son speaking to his father, asking for his portion of goods and then going his own way. As God's sons and daughters, this message is meant as an example to us.

When the prodigal son says, "Give me the portion of goods that falls to me," he is asking his father for all that is legally coming to him. He is not asking for more, just what's coming to him. In a sense, this is us saying to our heavenly Father, "I want it all, God. Give me those blessings you promised me." Do you want all the gifts He has for you? It is not wrong to ask, "God, give me all You have for me." He loves it when we want it all. The sad reality is that most of us treat the gifts He gives to us recklessly. When we don't look upon all His gifts as blessings, we treat them incorrectly.

How many of us have treated our spouse or our children, who are God's gifts to us, carelessly and inappropriately? How many of us do not know what to do with the gifts He has given to us? By the time my oldest son was three, I wanted to wrap that gift up and send it back. Even at such a young age, there was no other human being on the earth who could make me so angry. He was a mere eighteen pounds to my two hundred, and I was praying, "God, where can I go and trade this one in? I think you made a mistake! This one is broken."

Praise God, much has changed since then. One of the greatest transformations in me is my attitude toward this strong-willed child. God penetrated my frustrated mind with the understanding that my son is His gift to my wife and me. My anger problem was not my son's fault or responsibility; the problem was within *me*. God used this strong-willed child to reveal my selfish, foolish heart and to bring me to my knees. As I began to pray, fast, repent, and study, pleading, "God, help me," He began to transform me according to His promise.

That's the purpose of having trials in raising our children. God brings us to the point where we say, "Lord, I need help. I don't know what I'm doing here. You say my son (daughter) is a gift, but he (she) doesn't seem like a gift." That's when God says, "He (she) is a very special gift, and, if you come to Me, I'll show you how to treat him (her). I'll show you how to take care of him (her)." God had to do some real surgery to transform my heart and mind and teach me how to properly value and treat His precious gifts.

In Luke 15:12, when the son asked his father for his portion, he was saying, "Okay, I'm ready, father. I'm ready to take care of all the things I own. I do not need your help to take care of them anymore. I can do it on my own." Then he went out on his own and wasted his possessions with prodigal (reckless, wasteful, selfish) living. This son did not value his father's blessings. Rather he wasted them according to his own desires. He took the gifts that were coming to him and foolishly said, "You know what? I am not going to follow your way, Dad. I don't want your help anyway. I don't need your support. I am going to take these gifts and use them the way I want to."

This is the first part of the message of the prodigal son. When somebody receives gifts from God and then treats or uses those gifts in a different way than God intended, they are living as the prodigal son—recklessly, wastefully, selfishly, and foolishly. Why are so many within the body of Christ living as prodigals? Many are blind to their spiritual condition, living by their own understanding or following worldly advice, plus many are neglecting the gifts God has offered us through His Word. And some of us are simply in rebellion.

Gifts from God

Have you ever looked at your spouse and children as gifts from God? The divorce rate in America is staggering, but did you know some have reported that approximately one-half of all divorces occur in churched couples claiming to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Divorce is terribly painful and devastating for children. If we do not look to Jesus for wisdom and strength, then we will begin to think and act selfishly, becoming foolish like the prodigal and possibly lose our gifts. Numerous Christians today are even now on the statistical path to divorce, while others are living in a strained, unfulfilling relationship and suffering continuously.

Tension can enter the marriage relationship when dad and mom do not agree on methods for parenting. Friction with the children also develops through frustration because the church and or other believers do not make parents aware of the biblical instruction God has provided on this very topic. Or maybe dad and mom do know the facts yet continue to indulge in yelling, disrespecting each other, arguing, manipulating, and inconsistency. When I finally realized the presence of an angry, selfish condition in myself, I cried out, "Lord, please help me!" And in His mercy, He did not turn me away.

Going back to the prodigal son, what does he eventually realize amid his circumstances? In verse 17 we read, "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'" There are some very important principles in this verse. The son came to his senses (yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit) and thought, *Of course I should go to my dad. He's the one who had the gifts. He's the one who gave them to me. He knows how to take care of them. I need to go back to him.* This shows that he had come to the end of himself—his self-will—doing things his own way.

Many people on plan 999 refuse to admit that they are at the end of themselves. Their marriage lacks true companionship, love, and unity. And their relationship with the children is strained and out of order. Instead of coming to the Lord, they devise yet another inferior plan. They decide on their own to get “help” from a friend or read some book of worldly counsel, embarking on their “new” surefire plan without God, the One who gave them the gifts. The prodigal son went to the world, and the world had nothing for him. When will we also realize the world cannot help us? There is only One who can. The prodigal son had to come to the end of himself before he would return to his father. What crisis will it take before we admit to being at the end of ourselves and go to our Father in heaven for help?

Why, for so many, does it take a huge crisis before we go to our Savior and say, “Lord, help me”? God wants us to come to Him, but Satan is working to convince believers that the Word of God is not applicable to these areas of our lives. Satan has convinced many that God is uninterested, unconcerned, unable, or unwilling to help us. Few would outright admit this, but look at the condition of the body of Christ. We are saying it with the choices we make in our daily lives.

It’s by God’s grace alone that we can take care of His gifts. Did you know that in every area of your life where you are not experiencing the power, peace, and understanding of God, it is because you have not truly brought it to God? What will it take before you turn to Him for the information and power that will enable you to take care of your spouse and children? Proverbs 3:5–6 tells us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Do you know what the word *all* means? Nothing is excluded. Everything is included. Are you ready to look to Him and say, “God, please help me,” and then be willing to follow His instructions?

Wake Up to Reality

The prodigal son woke up to reality in Luke 15:18–19 and declared, “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’” He wasn’t trying to make a deal with his father.

Some of us try to negotiate a deal, but repentance is not about negotiating with God. When you examine your attitudes and behaviors, what are they telling God?

- Okay, God, I’ll love my child, but if he does not do this or that, forget it.
- Lord, if you don’t give me what I want, then I don’t have time for You.
- I’ll go to church on Sunday, but I am too busy to spend time with you each day.
- When my son quits acting this way, then I will quit screaming and yelling at him.
- If my daughter starts obeying everything I say, then I will quit acting this way.

Sinful behavior can never be justified. We cannot rightfully say to any other person, “You made me sin.” Why do you think God gives such a complete definition in His Word of what love is and is not? When parents hear how this love applies to raising children, they often begin weeping over their sin. When they look honestly at themselves, they often see the unloving acts committed

against their spouse and children every day. Do you know the opposite of love? It is hate, which God calls sin. You cannot practice sin by ignoring God's instruction and still reap His blessings (Galatians 5:7-15). God is pure and cannot condone or reward sin.

Waiting and Hoping

As we look again, we see how the prodigal's father responded to his return.

When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and he is found." And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:20-24)

Father was not sitting in the house thinking, My jerk son is ruining my name out there and making me look like a dirt bag. He's taking my gifts and throwing them away and wasting them. You know what, I hope he never comes back! He was not complaining, whining, and fretting over the foolishness of his son. Instead, the father was waiting for his prodigal son to come home to him. This is a picture of your heavenly Father. He is waiting and hoping that you will come to Him every day to receive wisdom and grace to take care of the spouse and children He has given to you. He knows your mistakes. And He knows you better than you know yourself. He chose you and gave you these gifts.

God is not going to come to you and take them back. We can abuse them so much that we lose them and, yes, He allows us the freedom to choose. But your God is waiting for you to come to Him so He can wrap His arms around you and kiss you and bless you. He never intended us to do anything by relying on our own wisdom and strength. He is waiting and hoping that you will come to Him. He is not waiting for you to quit being angry. He knows you cannot change on your own. He wants you to come to Him and receive all the blessings and all the power that He so lovingly desires to give.

God knows our sins and weaknesses better than we do—and that we have been trying to do things our own way. He knows we have turned to worldly, sinful things to help us deal with the pain of not looking to Him. But His love is amazing. His grace and mercy are wonderful gifts. When you come, God will meet you right where you are now and begin to fill you with the wisdom, strength, and power needed to do His will. He can and will enable you to treat your gifts the way He desires.

I hope that when you have completed these workbooks, you will see your children through God's eyes, as His gifts to you. And that you will be better prepared to love and care for them as He desires. I pray that you will cast aside all your traditional views about parenting and learn through God's Word, by the Holy Spirit, what He would have you do with His gifts.

By fulfilling His promises in my family, God has shown me that no matter what is in the past, or how you have previously treated your gifts, He is eagerly waiting for you to embrace Him and His

ways. God's desire is to see you victorious, to see you as the parent He calls you to be. His Word reveals that these are His children He has given to you, and His Word is the instruction manual.

Follow Him and He will bless you.

Craig Caster

Are you really ready to follow Him now? Jesus encourages us, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30 NASB).

Father, thank You for Your grace and mercy to me. Thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your patience, and that You wait for me, with arms stretched out, to come to You every day. I believe You want to bless me. I believe You want to give me wisdom. I believe You want to empower me, Lord, with the grace I need to love and train my children. Thank You that I can come into Your presence anytime and anyplace. Please help me to hear Your voice, to know Your will in caring for the children You have given me. Help me, Lord, to be willing to invest time in learning what Your Word has to say. And I pray that Your Holy Spirit will guide me and give me understanding. Lord, I repent of my ways, and I am willing to denounce all worldly wisdom. I ask Your forgiveness for turning to these things in the past. I pray that You would be glorified by my life. I ask these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

Lesson 1

Parenting God's Way

Parenting is a little like learning to use a revolutionary new technology called the computer—in 1992. Except it's harder, because the confusion is greater, the frustration stronger, and the learning curve a lot longer. When we bring home our first bundle of computer technology, it is accompanied by instructions and a phone number for tech support, because we know sooner or later we will need help. We must learn how to navigate through a screen filled with pictures and information to our desired destination. And we also soon learn that typing without periodically hitting the *Save* feature can result in the frustrating disappearance of our hard work. But in spite of it all, we persist, because we will not be beaten, and eventually using the computer becomes a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

Learning to parent is similar. Take note of the word *learning*, because successful parenting requires instruction and application. Within hours of bringing that precious infant home from the hospital, the mystery begins to unfold. Why the crying? What is the need? And so it goes as the child grows, and so does the anxiety, until we realize that there is more to this than love. The only constant is that what works today won't work tomorrow, and so on. This continues from infancy to adolescence. And if you raise more than one child, you discover that God really has a sense of humor. Being unique really means the techniques that work with one child will have a completely different result with another. Every child needs training and guidance, and finding that routines and plans are not enough, we reach for wisdom.

Where Do We Turn?

Good news! Wisdom is available, and despite the challenges parenting can be incredibly rewarding. Whether you have one child or several, you already realize that parenting is an enormous responsibility, fraught with potential difficulties, but also filled with much joy and delight. Watching your children grow, seeing the dynamics as they interact, and noticing the change in their personalities are so interesting. And the best news of all: effective parenting is not a mystery. We can parent with confidence when we draw from the wisdom of biblical concepts and an understanding of God's will. When we do it God's way, our efforts will not be lost. God wants us to understand our role and purpose as parents and successfully escort our children to that desirable destination of godly maturity.

As you begin this study on parenting, God wants you to be fully assured that He can provide whatever you need. Notice what He promises:

As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

God gives us “all things that pertain to life,” which includes biblical parenting. Our instructions are in God’s Word, and it is by His divine power that we can do it.

Knowledge of Christ powerfully affects the believer and comes only through salvation and abiding in His Word. To *abide* means “to dwell in” and indicates more than just head knowledge. It means receiving the Word as truth and then being obedient.

FACT FILE

Power—Dunamis (Greek). Translates as dynamic strength or ability to do what only God can do.

Knowledge—Epignosis (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge.

As we abide in Christ, we gain knowledge that changes us, and we qualify for “great and precious promises” from a God who is 100 percent faithful. And as “partakers of the divine nature,” we have access to supernatural wisdom and strength for parenting according to His principles.

DIG DEEPER

List what God promises in these Scriptures.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
The Lord will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Self-Examination

How have these truths affected your attitude as a parent?

What are the main principles that are promised to you?

Past Experience Is Not Enough

Looking back at life with your parents, do you believe they really knew what they were doing?
___ Yes ___ No ___ Hit and Miss

Most of us are suspicious that our parents used a “hit-and-miss” philosophy for child rearing and were probably not confident about their effectiveness.

In view of your current parenting methods, how do you know what you are doing is right? Typically people copy the good things their parents did, throw out the bad, and make up the rest. And most of this is based on their own personality and past experiences. Since it is rare that both husband and wife had exactly the same type of upbringing, each brings a past into the present, and then both must cooperate to work out a mutually acceptable approach to parenting. But this method can be confusing as parents soon learn that children are uniquely different from them and that their best techniques are not bringing the desired outcome.

Understanding all this, we are ready for the first key to effective parenting: it is essential to depend on God’s Word. Such logic is not uncommon: “I thought if I was doing the job better than my parents, my kids would turn out at least as good as me.” Or “At least I’m not screaming and beating them. I had it much worse than they do.” Yet it is not a foundation for success. The foundation on which parents must build—the *only* guide—is the Bible. God wants parents to succeed, and He has provided all the necessary information.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God says about following your own wisdom.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

In Colossians, Paul said to *walk*.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6-7)

How are we supposed to walk? And if you walked that way, how would it affect your parenting?

Paul made an important comparison in verse 8. He said *beware*, which translated literally means “be aware and continue to be aware.”

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

What is the danger? What is the source of this danger? What do we need to beware of?

Where should we be getting our information and instruction?

These verses are filled with examples of possible consequences. List both the good and the bad.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:6)

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness." (1 Corinthians 3:18-19)

ACTION PLAN

We have learned in this lesson that apart from God's Word, power, and wisdom we are unable to be the parents God desires us to be. If you have any reservation about being a child of God, turn to *Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ* and follow the instructions from God's Word.

Lesson 2

The Original Blueprint

In order to follow God's plan for parenting, we must first look to the original blueprint. It was God, not man, who created the institution of family. And it was the first, therefore a foundationally important institution.

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him. . . ." And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18, 21-22, 24)

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

Legal marriage in the United States, for the most part, consists of one husband and one wife. This is due to the Christian perspective of those who founded this country, although currently that definition of marriage is under attack. In some other areas of the world, man's wisdom has prevailed resulting in polygamy. Women are considered possessions to be dominated, abused, and even killed, and some have few rights as wives and even as mothers of their own children. The true God is the creator of marriage and has much to say about proper behavior as husbands and wives—and about the training of children.

In Genesis 1:28, God said, "A husband and wife will come together and have children" (my paraphrase). This is God's design for the family, but just a starting point. The majority of couples soon discover that "togetherness" of heart and mind is difficult. And as children are added, frustrations and unfulfilled expectations can multiply. We put demands on each other and on our children, and when these needs are not met, the result is anger and other sins of the flesh such as resentment, bitterness, betrayal, and so on.

It would be a dirty trick for God to leave us with such challenging responsibilities as marriage and parenting and not provide clear guidelines for success. And God, of course, does not play dirty tricks. Scripture tells us, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works" (Psalm 145:17). A sad reality today is most Christian parents don't look to or believe the Bible has any relevant information about parenting. In truth, children are a gift from God, and He has greater love for them than we do. Therefore He provides in His Word all we need to know about parenting and godly living. He wants our actions to glorify Him and bless the children He has put into our care. Again, it is imperative we understand that God's Word contains what we need for success and that God's desires for the family are not hidden from us.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

FACT FILE

Thoroughly equipped for every good work—God’s intention is for us to both understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience.

Self-Examination 1

How does this verse apply to learning how to be a parent?

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Examine your attitude toward the Word of God. Do you believe it is the truth and that following God’s Word will lead to success?

DIG DEEPER

According to James, there are right and wrong ways to receive the Word of God. Identify the two different approaches and the characteristics of each.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22–25)

What should be our attitude be toward the Word of God?

What are the positive consequences when we obey and do the Word of God?

Describe what is said about the Word of God and you.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:2-3)

God said to Abraham:

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him. (Genesis 18:19)

Just as Abraham was told to command his children, we also must teach our children with intention—being intentional about our ways and about following God’s Word. Once we understand that, as parents, we are truly ministers to our children and our relationship to Christ is the source of needed wisdom and strength, we can begin to walk the path of successful parenting.

Also notice that God says He has “known” Abraham personally, “in order that he may command his children and his household.” This implies that God knows Abraham’s strengths and weaknesses but promises to teach and strengthen him for the responsibility of training his children.

Self-Examination 2

Are you confident at this point in your parenting journey that you know how to command your children according to God’s Word? __ Yes __ No

How comforting is it to know that God knows your strengths and weaknesses and promises to give you the wisdom and strength to do His will as a parent? Write a few thoughts telling God how grateful you are for His help.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Paul made it his aim to be well pleasing to God. He was very intentional about it. Write a prayer below telling God that your aim is to please Him by completing this workbook.

Lesson 3

The Ministry of Parenting

When we hear the word *minister*, we commonly think of a pastor or person who works for a church. But the word includes more than those descriptions. So how does this apply to us as Christian parents? It means we are under the care and authority of Jesus Christ, who is one with God the Father, and that we receive our instructions from Him. God has given us our children, and He desires for us to execute His purposes as we raise them. You and I are ministers over our children, under God. This mindset should completely change our disposition and approach to parenting.

Have you seen your role in the home as that of a minister?
 Yes No

FACT FILE

Minister (noun)—*Diakonos* (Greek).
 A servant. A servant or waiter, one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

Minister (verb)—To adjust, regulate and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

As parents, depending totally on the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. We are not to promote our own will and wishes, but we are responsible to follow the Lord's will and desire in raising our children. Matthew 20:28 (KJV) says, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The same verse in the New King James Version reads, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." Clearly, ministering and serving are the same, and Jesus is our example. Do not mistake "serving" as the worldly view of indulging children, but serve by raising them according to God's instructions. In serving, we also are not to be harsh with our children but model the lovingkindness of the Lord. When we begin to see parenting as serving God and ministering to our children for His purposes, we are headed in the right direction.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how Paul and his companions ministered to people. What attitudes did they display?

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

The Right Blueprint

As ministers of God we must know His purposes, what He wants us to accomplish, and how we are to proceed. Understanding His purposes helps us recognize our daily need for God's wisdom and strength.

If a hundred parents are asked what they believe God’s purpose is for them as ministers and parents, it would likely produce many different answers. This indicates the lack of unity between husbands and wives in this area. To a certain extent, this is the problem: when two people with the same task are going in different directions, confusion results. And the Bible shows us that this is not God’s plan.

FACT FILE

Purpose—An intended, or desired, result or goal.

For God is not the author of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Regrettably, the body of Christ has not given preference to training or discipling people in parenting. Many churches have never conducted a parenting class. During our teen years we undergo fifty hours or more of training to get a driver’s license, yet how many hours of training are required for parenting children? *None*. Which is more important, driving a car or raising children? The answer is obvious. And due to that lack of training, many parents, even Christian parents, can be a negative influence on their children, more even than that of the world.

Counseling Christian families in distress has revealed that, in most cases, it is not music, drugs, or influences at school that most affect children—it is what occurs within the four walls of the home. These couples did not marry and decide together that they want to mess up their kids. It simply results when two people are doing things their own way, with no firm foundation to build on and no common wisdom to guide them. What happens when a husband and wife disagree and are not clear in their God-given purposes? Problems arise followed by tension, strife, and division. This puts a strain on marriage and family, which is a devastating problem today in the body of Christ.

Jesus revealed a self-evident truth:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. (Matthew 12:25)

Self-Examination

Write a prayer to ask God, as husband and wife, to give you the grace to begin again with your parenting. Ask Him for the mercy to forgive each other for past mistakes, for not working in harmony while parenting your children, and to open your hearts to receive His instruction and work together as a team.

Meditating on the attitudes God desires for us:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:12-16)

The foundation for all we do must be an understanding of the purposes and plans God has for us. This will be the topic of the following section. Once we embrace God's authority, it is essential to follow through in practical ways. God is the architect, but it is our job to build the house according to His blueprint. When we understand what God is trying to do through us and within us, and when we follow His design, we then understand why it is so vital that we have a right relationship with Christ.

DIG DEEPER

How does this verse relate to you as a parent-minister?

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Lesson 4

God's Purpose for Parents

God's purpose for us as parent-ministers can be broken down into four areas.

First Purpose: God's Glorification

Our primary purposes as believers is to glorify God. First Corinthians 6:20 says, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." The word *glorify* translates "to reflect." As believers and ministers of God to our children, we are to act as His reflection to them.

FACT FILE

Glorify—To reflect, to honor, praise, to give esteem or honor by putting Him into an honorable position.¹

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

God is changing us from the inside, which is evident by our attitudes and behavior. Our transformation becomes real as we exhibit the very nature of Christ to those around us.

Self-Examination 1

Consider the attitudes you are demonstrating to your children. Write what words and behaviors do not reflect God.

The story of Moses in Numbers 20:8-13 provides an example of a person challenged under the pressure of responsibility. Moses wandered through the desert with two to three million people for forty years. The people were rebellious whiners, despite the fact that they had the evidence of God right in front of them. He was as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and He provided food and water. When Moses left them and went to meet with almighty God on the mountain, they created and worshiped an idol.

Although God allowed consequences to occur and administered discipline, He patiently endured and led these stiff-necked children. When the Israelites complained to Moses about needing water, he turned to God again for help. God told Moses to "speak to the rock." But Moses became so frustrated with the people and their constant complaining that he did not say, "Water, come forth!" as God has instructed him. Instead he grabbed his rod and struck the rock in anger.

The Lord was not pleased with Moses because he disobeyed and misrepresented God's nature and attitude to the people. Moses failed because he exhibited his angry nature rather than God's mercy when he struck the rock. God does not condone our sin, but He does promise to supply our needs, and the people needed water for themselves and their animals. God is perfectly just and will guide his servants into the proper response for every situation. We need to be cautious not to put the heavy burdens of our selfish expectations and frustrations on the children trusted to our care. But as we grow closer to God, understanding how He transforms us, then we can better represent Him to our children.

Self-Examination 2

Identify incidents in the last week when you misrepresented God, and ask for His forgiveness.

God has given principles in His Word that, if followed, are linked to a promise.

The righteous man walks in his integrity;
His children are blessed after him. (Proverbs 20:7)

How does this apply to parenting? How can this bless your children both now and in the future?

FACT FILE

Integrity—Indicates singleness of heart, not double-minded. One who walks according to His will and exemplifying God's righteousness.

DIG DEEPER

Timothy was pastor of the church at Ephesus when Paul wrote to him:

When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. (2 Timothy 1:5)

According to this verse, who influenced Timothy in righteousness? What was the outcome?

Lesson 5

Parenting Purposes

Let's examine God's three additional purposes for parenting.

Second Purpose: Our Transformation

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (1 John 2:5)

Being transformed into Christ's image is God's plan and purpose for every believer. The word *perfected* translates "to make complete," which indicates that something is in process. This process involves our responses to everyday experiences and situations, including the challenges of home life where we interact with spouses and children. We like to tell ourselves when we are angry, "Another made me act this way." But we cannot find that in God's Word. God says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). That ungodliness is inside you, and God is using a child to bring it out, yet you imply your innocence by not taking responsibility. We must understand as ministers that God is using the dynamics of our families to purge us and transform us into the likeness of Christ.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Transformed here represents the thorough change as a Christian gradually transforms into the likeness of Christ and comes to desire God's will in all things.

FACT FILE
<i>Transformed—Metamorphoó</i> (Greek). From which we derive our English word <i>metamorphosis</i> . To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

This verse gives assurance that God is at work in you, changing you. Can you thank Him for the work already done and ask Him to reveal areas where you still need improvement? __ Yes __ No

Write a commitment to accept His perfect way in revealing the lack of Christlikeness in you.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God promises to do in you.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

This good work is the process of becoming like Christ. Do you still have room to grow in this area?
__ Yes __ No

In my own life God particularly used my oldest son, Nicholas. In the beginning, because of my ignorance to God's ways, I was so disturbed by Nick's misbehavior that I took everything he did the wrong way—and very personal. God often used him to reveal anger and impatience within me.

When Nicholas was five years old, God finally got my attention. He said, "Craig, that's Me. That's not Nick. I'm just using him to bring about this transformation in you." I have discovered over the years that God has used my son Nicholas as one of the most powerful tools to reveal those areas that needed to be transformed. In the same way God is using the strong-willed child He has blessed you with.

How foolish can you be?
He is the Potter, and He is certainly greater than you, the clay!
Should the created thing say of the one who made it,
"He didn't make me"?
Does a jar ever say,
"The potter who made me is stupid"? (Isaiah 29:16 NLT)

Ouch. So many times in a heated moment, when God is trying to bring about transformation, we tell Him through our actions, "Take Your hand off me, Lord! I don't want to be shaped. I don't want to be transformed. I'm not going to look at this child right now, whose head I want to take off, and believe that is You!" We must remember, however, that it is God who brings about or permits these circumstances and that He uses them to reveal things in us that are ungodly and do not glorify Him.

God is not allowing these circumstances so He can find out what is within us; He already knows and sees all, and He still loves us. Praise Him! He is doing it so we will see ourselves and seek His help for change.

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests the hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)

Self-Examination 1

As God is testing your heart, what are some of the ungodly attitudes and actions being revealed to you through your child or children?

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10)

I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:10)

When we believe God is in control, it helps us stop and think, *Wait a minute, how is God using this trial for me?* I don't want to tell God to get His hands off me. Parenting can be difficult because of the overwhelming feeling that we give, give, give and get very little appreciation in return. It feels like children take, take, take and we are often the enemy when giving them our best. But look at Jesus. People rarely walked up to Him and said, "Thanks, Jesus! I'm so glad You're here." Consider the trials of Moses. No matter how God provided for the Israelites, they complained to Moses and rebelled. Ministry is often a selfless task with delayed or little thanks.

God has a purpose in the trials He brings through our children. It will be impossible to embrace these trials as lessons, and transformation will not occur, if our eyes are not fixed on the goal of becoming more like Christ. When our hope is not in Christ and these circumstances come about, we react from our flesh and exhibit such sins as anger, pride, self-pity, and more. People tend to interpret their sinful attitudes and responses in relation to external causes, such as a difficult child. But listen for the voice from God, saying, "No, that's your sin. Own it!"

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Self-Examination 2

Hebrews says Jesus endured the pain of the cross because of the joyous result, the salvation of our souls. What joy do you see that makes the pain of transformation worthwhile? Name at least two areas God is revealing within you that He wants to change such as anger or impatience.

The verse also says to look to Jesus. Write a prayer of commitment to look to Him when a challenging parenting issue comes up in your home.

Third Purpose: To Love Them

Certainly, a primary purpose of parents is to love our children. Remember that we are being transformed into the image of Christ and that the Bible tells us, “God is love.” Our attitudes should be guided by the example of Jesus, who acted with love and forgiveness. Even as adults we are considered by God to be His children. How do we want to be treated by God?

As parents we must view our children through God’s Word first, not according to their personalities, stages of life, or failures. God has determined the value of our children, and He dictates how we must treat them.

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
(Psalm 127:3 NASB)

FACT FILE

Reward—A great precious value.

Self-Examination 3

Do your children feel that you consider them a gift from God by the way you treat them?

Yes No Sometimes

How should we treat a valuable gift from God?

We will study this topic more in volume 2.

Fourth Purpose: To Train Them

Finally, our fourth and most obvious purpose is to train our children.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

To *bring them up* is to raise our children to maturity, to educate them. Sometimes during this process, parents are more concerned about the opinions of strangers than they are about the impression they make within the walls of the home. This type of pride comes off as hypocrisy and can be the cause of your children becoming rebellious and walking away from the Lord, especially during the teen years. When they see us at home doing things that are contrary to what we teach or expect of them, they become confused and disillusioned. We must be concerned with glorifying God at all times, especially to those *within* our home. Even those who are serving in ministry as a career must remember that their first ministry is family.

We will study this topic more in volumes 3 and 4.

No Exceptions

The principles and promises covered in this material apply to every parenting situation: single parent, blended family, grandparents, and whoever is in charge. God's Word applies equally to all. And He understands that raising children, especially for those who are single, is one of the most difficult challenges in this world.

Divorce has devastated many families, causing children to be hurt and confused, which complicates an already daunting responsibility. But God promises, "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5). The Bible refers to the fatherless forty-one times and mentions the widow seventy-four times. This shows us that God's heart is upon the single-parent family.

We tend to think the word *widow* means a wife who has lost her husband by death, but in Christ's day it meant much more than that. The Greek word *chera*, translated "widow," is derived from the word *casma*, meaning the deficiency or vacancy of somebody. A widow was a woman who was simply minus a husband.

We also tend to think of single parenting as a rather recent problem. This is not true. In Christ's day, all it took to put away a wife was a certificate bearing the signature of a priest. It was a big problem then, as it is now, and God knows and cares.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
(James 1:27)

If you are a single parent or in a blended family, all the instructions and principles contained in this book apply to you. Thankfully, God's Word promises that He will help you apply each of these principles to your unique situation.

Self-Examination 4

If you are a single parent, meditate on these passages. Find God's promises, copy and post them in a place you see often, and then prayerfully thank Him for what He has done and will continue to do for you.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)

The helpless commits himself to You;
You are the helper of the fatherless. (Psalm 10:14)

Lesson 6

A Strong Foundation

God wants His instructions to be clear, so Scripture often includes examples and comparisons people can easily understand. In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus told the parable of the two builders: one man who built his house upon rock and another who built on sand. Eventually “the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house” and, as expected, the house on rock remained while the house on sand fell. Jesus had been teaching many things to His followers over time, and Matthew 7:24 reveals His point: “Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

The Architect

We always have a choice to follow the path of wisdom or the path of folly. There is no third alternative. One path leads to success, the other to failure. For example, many years ago I was a land developer who built industrial parks, shopping centers, and storage facilities. A piece of property was purchased for the construction of an office building based on a cost analysis that looked profitable. But when the architect finished the plans, the foundation was much larger than expected, adding additional expenses. The foundation footings required were seven feet in diameter and used four times the usual amount of steel.

When questioned, the architect explained that about thirty feet under the crust of this land was a fault line resulting in a level of mud. In his expert opinion, the only way to build safely required a massive foundation to support the building. By this time in my career, I had completed various projects representing more than three million square feet of construction, and I could have chosen to follow my own experience rather than the architect’s advice. Imagine what would have happened, however, if I had taken those plans and decided to build according to my past experience.

If I chose to shrink the foundation to what I thought would be adequate, the problems would have been devastating. As storms and earthquakes hit, the foundation would have cracked. The deterioration would go like this: the slab would eventually break, cracks would appear in the windows, door jambs would get to the point where the doors could not close, the staircase would crack, and the elevator shaft would not line up. Eventually, the building would be condemned as unsafe because of the inadequate foundation and resulting damage.

Obviously, I would have been foolish to ignore the architect for any reason, be it greed, pride, or even putting faith in my past experience. To follow anything but the architect’s plan for a strong foundation would have resulted in disaster and greater loss. And so it is for us as believers when we are ignorant of or ignore the instruction of God. It is not enough for us to be “hearers,” but we must be “doers” if we are to build a strong foundation for our lives (James 1:22). It is always foolish for us to question or ignore the architect of our faith, Jesus Christ.

Scripture reveals information on God’s design for a strong foundation that we need to study and follow, because a building is only as good as the foundation it stands on. Your life can look good

for a while, but how strong are you really? The storms of trouble will eventually reveal the true nature of your foundation.

Priorities in Place

Jesus told us, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Seeking God and His kingdom must be our priority as believers, and as such it is the foundation for life. The promise is that if we do, “all these things shall be added to you.” When interpreting “all these things,” we must note that this sermon starts at Matthew 5:1, known as the Sermon on the Mount. The immediate context in Matthew 6:31 speaks of food, drink, and clothing. If Christ will take care of those needs when we seek Him first, how much more will He give us all things to parent His children?

FACT FILE

Seek first—A command to do and never stop.

As parents we also are ministers of God to our children and face the added challenge of fulfilling His will in all things pertaining to family. We accomplish this by putting the issues of life in perspective and by prioritizing our choices according to what God says is important. To truly fulfill God’s purposes in and through us, we must look to Him daily for strength to accomplish this task.

Most would agree that it is important for a pastor to have a strong, intimate relationship with the Lord. We would expect him to get up every day and spend time studying and praying, seeking wisdom and guidance from God to lead his congregation and family. If he did not, we would question his dedication since we recognize the need for God’s empowerment and direction in order to fulfill his responsibilities.

You can easily put those expectations on your pastor, but now consider yourself. If God looks at ministering to your children with the same importance He places on a pastor’s relationship to his congregation, is it not just as urgent for you to seek God’s face every day? Is it not necessary for you to build that strong foundation, that relationship with Christ where you get the strength and wisdom needed to lead a family? Experience and Scripture tell us that if we do not read the Word and pray daily, the old sin nature begins to show up, bringing chaos and destruction into our lives.

When we look at families throughout the world, we can see that they are in trouble. Our kids are killing one another, abusing drugs, experimenting with sex, and walking away from the faith. “Somewhere between eighty and ninety percent of kids in America are abandoning their parents’ faith once they reach adulthood. At that tragic rate, the fifty million children who are growing up in church today would die out to fewer than seven thousand in only ten generations time. That’s sadly where current Christian families in America are headed without a radical change.”²

Christian counselors who see families experiencing major trials often find that the foundations for strong and enduring faith have been neglected. In many cases this is due to ignorance, parents acting from experience and worldly advice rather than biblical truth. Because the parents have not been taught how to build this strong foundation in their own lives, the influence they should

have on their children for good is weak at best, and at times it's actually turning their children away from God.

Intimacy with God

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses fulfilled God's will by teaching the Israelites what was expected of them when they entered the promised land. Within these instructions, God revealed His heart regarding the close relationship He wants to have with us. This intimate relationship with God is the foundation, the strength of our faith, upon which we build.

Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—"a land flowing with milk and honey."

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:1-6)

Verses 3 and 4 begin with "Hear, O Israel" to emphasize the importance of listening to God's voice. Whenever that phrase appears, the message is "Listen up!" God is really on our side; He wants us to succeed. In these verses, the information was actually essential for Israel to survive as a nation. And what God said in Deuteronomy 6 is relevant to us today. These verses reveal truths that also are fundamental to our success as believers and ministers to our children.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." This means you show your love for Him by choosing to have an intimate relationship with Him. Spending time with Christ is a daily choice. Being closely acquainted, familiar and personal, and abiding in Him with all your heart, soul, and strength means the involvement of your total being—body, soul, and spirit. We recognize that our spouse and children need love from us, and we have some idea of how to do that. God asks for individual attention, time, as you build a loving relationship with Him. He promises that if you put Him first, other relationships will also improve.

Verse 6 tells us God's words must be first in our hearts. This means not only reading it regularly, but also obeying. To exemplify Christ and teach others, you must have intimate knowledge of God's will. That, combined with dependence upon Christ's wisdom and strength, is the foundation needed to fulfill the difficult responsibilities of guiding your children to godly maturity. And your daily practice of devotion and communication with God is directly related to success.

FACT FILE

Heart—Lebab (Hebrew). Heart, mind, inner person. The primary usage of this word describes the entire disposition of the inner person.³

Heart—Kardia (Greek). The seat of the desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses, i.e., the heart or mind.⁴

DIG DEEPER

What does the psalmist say about God’s Word and what we are to do with it?

With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:10–11)

List the main principles below. How would each apply to your parenting?

And he said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 32:46)

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 11:18–19)

But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. (Deuteronomy 30:14)

The law of his God is in his heart;
None of his steps shall slide. (Psalm 37:31)

I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

Sadly, many people in the body of Christ have never been disciplined in the truth that intimacy with God (the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) is proportionate to the amount of effort put into seeking Him. That requires time in His Word, praying, and fellowshiping with other believers. The word *disciplined* indicates that one Christian (or several), perhaps more mature in the faith, has come alongside to help another develop intimacy with the Lord. Without a guide, the pathway can be difficult to follow. We may think, *How is it possible to develop a relationship with an invisible God?*

And many may also think, *I go to church on Sunday. I'm a Christian because I prayed the prayer of salvation. I remember the emotion of that decision. Haven't I quit smoking and drinking and changed some of my bad habits? Is there something more? Yes, there is.*

Self-Examination

How have you been maintaining a daily relationship with God, in prayer and reading His Word?

ACTION PLAN

After learning these principles, are confession and asking forgiveness needed? If so, use the space below to write your prayer and commitment to start each day with Him.

Lesson 7

Three Essential Ingredients

In Luke, we see the importance Jesus put on having a strong foundation. He broke it down into three essential ingredients.

But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:46–49)

First Ingredient: Receiving Jesus Christ

The Bible is clear that Jesus is our foundation. In Luke 6 above, He said, “whoever comes to Me,” which indicates where we are to build.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

There must be a time in life when you sought forgiveness for your sins and asked Jesus Christ to come into your life as Lord and Savior. Merely being born in America or attending a church does not make you a Christian. Salvation requires a decision to repent from sin and turn the control of your life over to God, through Jesus Christ.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Have you agreed with God that you are a sinner, received Christ’s death on the cross as payment for those sins, and asked Jesus into your heart as Lord and Savior? The first ingredient is either yes or no. This is the first essential step for building a strong foundation. You cannot skip this one because Christ is the foundation for our faith. If this is still confusing, go to *Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ*.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9–10)

You also can pray this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. Thank You for dying on the cross for me and paying the price for my sin. Please come into my heart. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be Your disciple. Thank You for forgiving me and coming into my life. Thank You that I am now a child of God and that I am going to heaven. In Your name I pray. Amen.

After choosing to build your life on faith in Jesus Christ, the next two ingredients refer to “following” Christ by establishing priorities.

Second Ingredient: Daily Relationship with Christ

You must decide to regularly spend time reading and meditating on God’s Word, really listening to what God is saying. In Luke 6, Jesus also said, “whoever . . . hears My sayings,” which refers to the tools we use for building that relationship: God’s Word and prayer. Through these, we get to know Him, understand His love, and learn how to live correctly.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Third Ingredient: Living It Out

Building a strong foundation also involves follow-through. In Luke 6, Jesus added, “whoever . . . hears My sayings and does them,” which describes the person who is doing God’s will. This process of hearing and doing means to obey or apply His Word to life.

You have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . . through the Word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:22–23)

Scripture tells us it is important to continually examine our intentions and actions.

Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)

Self-Examination

How would you describe the quality of your spiritual foundation?

The Practice of Prayer

Prayer is often considered an attempt to enlist God’s power to alter circumstances, but God is more interested in having constant mental communion with us. Prayer is a function of thought, but more than that, it is an open channel of communication with God that involves both speaking and listening. God wants you to know He is available for all things at all times.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

God desires constant awareness of His presence and continuous communication. He also wants you to spend some quiet, private time with Him each day. In Psalm 5:3, David said, “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.”

Prayer and study of the Bible are essential elements for growth in the Christian life. This time of study and communication is often referred to as a devotional time. To become truly engaged beyond the written word requires an aspect of imagination called faith, to believe though we cannot see. Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). In Matthew 6:9–13, often called the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus Himself gave us an example of how He prayed and some basic aspects to be considered in prayer.

The following prayer is an example of simple, heartfelt communication inspired by elements of the Lord’s Prayer to be said prior to beginning your devotional time:

Lord Jesus, I praise You for desiring to be close to me, for wanting to spend time with me. I praise You for Your love and faithfulness and praise You, for You are God, the creator and sustainer of all things. I am asking for the grace to walk in obedience today, to love my spouse and children, and to tend to them according to Your Word. Help me to forgive anyone who hurts me today, and give me the grace to ask for forgiveness when I fail to represent You, Jesus. And Jesus, please open my heart to receive Your Word this morning. I’m asking for understanding to know You more and for Your grace to obey. Amen.

Begin your devotional time with prayer, perhaps one similar to this. You may be tempted to use prepared prayers, but God’s greatest desire is to just talk with you. After all, He already knows what is in your heart and loves you in spite of what you have done. Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” As you spend time each day with God, you will begin to feel comfortable in His love, and praying will become “talking to God” about everything.

Only by faith in Christ are we are given access to the Father.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

ACTION PLAN

Write a prayer asking God for help to develop an intimate, open prayer life with Him.

Pray through this prayer that Paul offered for the Ephesians, and make it personal by putting your name in each blank space.

For this reason I [_____] bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you [_____] according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your [_____] hearts through faith; that you [_____] being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you [_____] may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we [_____] ask or think, according to the power that works in us [_____] to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:14–21)

Make a list of specific requests or praises Paul included in his prayer.

Along with personalizing this prayer, you can also use it regularly to pray these things into the lives of your spouse and children and other loved ones. Just put their names in there instead.

Abiding in Christ

You have learned that God desires relationship, which requires that you first receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then choose to set aside time for prayer and Bible study. Living the Christian life, sometimes referred to as “abiding in Christ,” involves listening to God through reading and meditating on His Word. Jesus said, “Man shall not live bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Your pastor may be an extraordinary teacher, but living for a week on a Sunday morning message alone will lead to being spiritually feeble.

Many Christians put daily devotional booklets, such as *Our Daily Bread*, in the bathroom or beside the bed to grab a quick dose of spiritual energy. They pull it out, read a little, and think, *Okay, I did my thing. I got into the Word today; praise the Lord.* But a quick meal like this wears off, as does the memory of what we read. In our culture we have so many gadgets to help us multitask. These cell phones, radios, TVs, Kindles, and more often make our time with God just part of the daily mix. If

we do not actively pursue daily time alone with God, including focused study, meditation, and prayer, then we may fall into the “grab a quick bite” category, which surely will lead to poor spiritual health.

DIG DEEPER

What do the following verses say about the attitude we should have when reading the Word and seeking wisdom from God?

The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (Proverbs 18:15)

Buy the truth, and do not sell it,
Also wisdom and instruction and understanding. (Proverbs 23:23)

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every
good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10)

To avoid the quick study, cultivate the habit of meditating on the Word of God. When people hear the word *meditation*, many think of Hindu prayers, but meditation is a term used in the Word of God. We are to meditate upon the things we read, which indicates that we are listening responsively in thought to what God is saying.

I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways. (Psalm 119:15)

FACT FILE

Meditate—To moan, utter, or growl.

In the biblical world meditation was not a silent practice. It had the idea of muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, so you would interact with the text and it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds.

DIG DEEPER

What did God tell Joshua to do in this verse, and why was this so important to God and to Joshua’s success?

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

Do you want to have good success? __ Yes __ No

Describe the meaning of these verses and how they would affect your parenting if you did as they say.

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:1-3)

Lesson 8

True Priorities

When children are young, their dependence on Mom and Dad can make them uncomfortable or fearful when left in another's care, and when Mom or Dad returns, there is great affection and rejoicing. As they mature, the excitement cools and parents may be given a greeting like, "Hi, Mom," "Hey, Dad," or maybe not much at all. By this time, the presence of parents is somewhat taken for granted or is not acknowledged at all.

Beware, because we can do the same thing to the Lord. When we first come to Christ, we cannot wait to pray and get into the Word. When we read it, we feel God speaking right to our hearts. Oftentimes we experience wonderful emotions and even share our good news with friends and loved ones.

Over time, if we are not watchful, our attitude can become, "Yeah, studying Matthew again. Been there, done that." Sadly we lose the attitude of "Daddy's here!" We cannot stay in this state of mind. Just think: you have the blessed privilege of going into the holy of holies, with a God who wants you to call Him "Daddy" (Romans 8:15 says, "Abba, Father"), to hear Him whisper awesome truths and tell you how wonderful and important you are to Him.

Self-Examination 1

When was the last time you sat quietly with the living God, excited for Him to speak to you?

The first event recorded in the Bible after Jesus Christ gave up His spirit on the cross was the ripping of the veil from top to bottom, which covered the entrance to a temple chamber called the holy of holies (Matthew 27:51). It meant Christ's death on the cross had ended our separation from God. Before that, only the high priest could enter once a year bearing sacrificial animal blood.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.
(Hebrews 10:19)

A great price was paid when Christ offered His own blood for our deliverance. Jesus's death was not only to defeat the power of sin, but to buy a way for the Father to have intimate fellowship with us. We must not "neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3).

For those who have grown children, how blessed are we when they want to spend time with us? Do you think God is any different? He loves it when you and I call "time-out" and say, "Daddy, this is Your time, mine and Yours, right now, and I'm not going to let anything get in the way. I'm going to protect this, God."

And it is interesting, *and revealing*, that when we make this commitment to set time aside for God, that distractions seem to come out of the woodwork. If not interruptions from family and phones, then your mind floods with thoughts: a problem at work, the bills, your spouse, your kids, and so on. Many times Satan sends those distractions because he knows that our firm foundation, the strength of our faith, does not come from good works, or just desiring to be the best dad, mom, or spouse, but from our relationship with Christ. Everything good grows out of this relationship.

DIG DEEPER

Write what this Scripture says about the battle we are in and what we are supposed to do.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

When Jesus explained the parable of the sower to His disciples (Mark 4:13-20), He wanted them to know what Satan and his demons are up to. How would this Scripture relate to your time in the Word? What is the battle?

And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. (Mark 4:15)

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 11:3 (below), he was referring to Genesis 3:1-7, which describes how sin entered the world when Eve listened to Satan's lies. Paul's fear was that Satan, in the same way, would corrupt (spoil, subvert, destroy) the new believers' minds from the simplicity (purity, sincerity, "singleness of heart"),⁵ that they had in their relationship with Christ.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Eve was deceived (led into error) by Satan's craftiness (cunning shrewdness) so she believed a lie to be the truth. Satan's plan is always the same.

Self-Examination 2

Are there any lies you have believed regarding God's desire to be in a close relationship with you?

List some common thoughts that come when starting or doing your devotions.

But Satan cannot be blamed for everything. Sometimes we are at fault ourselves. When Jesus prayed in the garden as He faced going to the cross, His disciples slept when they should have been praying also. Jesus warned them about the weakness of the flesh:

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

Jesus's command is to "watch and pray," and the result is for our good—that we are not overwhelmed by temptation and our laziness. Praying is an essential discipline, so we must fight the battle against such thoughts as *I just don't feel like it, I'm tired, I just don't care, or I don't have time*. Complacency must be replaced by nonnegotiable priorities of seeking the Lord.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses are instructing you to do.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Put on the *whole armor* of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11, emphasis mine)

All your success, including the power to minister as a parent, comes from a continuous relationship with Christ. Mark 4:34 says, “And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” As long as we are spending time with Jesus in daily devotions and Bible study, we will receive great insights and understanding from Scripture as well as the power and wisdom we need as a parent. God loves each of us the same, and He longs to commune with us. There is no parenting book written that will cover every situation you face. That is why God wants you to depend on Him each day, looking to His Word for understanding and guidance.

DIG DEEPER

Notice the disciples’ attitude in this verse when they did not understand Jesus’s teaching. What did they do?

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”
(Matthew 13.36)

God is always waiting for us to come to Him, wanting us to seek the wisdom we need to deal with life. Knowing this, how can we be too busy to spend time with the living God? We need to keep this continuously in mind, guarding against our tendencies to become independent or take God’s goodness to us for granted.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV)

What grade would you give yourself in your Bible study?

What do you think God means by the word *ashamed*?

FACT FILE

Study—A zealous persistence in accomplishing a goal. This imperative verb is a command to do and to continue to do.

Rightly dividing—Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

ACTION PLAN 1

Write a prayer asking the Lord for specific help in following His instructions.

What is the exhortation in this verse?

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. (2 Peter 1:10)

Obedience Is Action

The third ingredient of building a strong foundation (from lesson 7) is the decision to act upon what we hear or learn from God.

Whoever . . . hears My sayings and does them . . . is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. (Luke 6:47-48)

We need to treat the Bible, the Word of God, as the *words of God*. In the Old Testament, the Jews considered the very name of God so sacred that they dared not to speak it. It is by God's grace alone in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that you are considered righteous and given the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as a teacher and guide. Your part is to desire to do His will and respond in thankfulness and obedience. If you treat the Word of God as suggestions, then you may find yourself picking and choosing what best suits your will. This is not wise and will not result in the success that comes from building on a strong foundation.

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake [deny] all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33)

This verse tells us to daily align our priorities with God's Word, which places His will over ours. Many considered Jesus's teaching too difficult to follow, so they walked away from God.

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:66-67)

Similarly, some instructions in these lessons may be different from the way you do things currently. Some may even seem hard. But by God's grace you can do His will, not by your own strength.

ACTION PLAN 2

Write your commitment to God to depend on Him for the grace and power to both desire and follow His instructions on parenting.

Consider your priorities with God, your spouse, your children, work, church, leisure time, and fellowship. Do you believe they are in proper order? If not, write a commitment to change.

God shares His heart regarding our priorities:

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

This passage in 1 Timothy makes it clear that your home must be your first priority in order for you to be a good minister. Many homes are out of order, with people more concerned about leisure, work, or even service in the church.

One author says concerning this passage:

Paul indicated that the experience the leader gained in the home would develop sensitive compassion (“take care of”) for his role in the church. The verb *manage* appeared in verse 4. The development of proper leadership skills in the home was a prerequisite for using them in the church.⁶

Self-Examination 3

A pastor must have his family in order before qualifying in God’s eyes so he can set an example for the congregation. If you were in a church and saw that the pastor had many problems with his family or did not tend to his family correctly, would you respect him and his leadership? Why or why not?

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.
(Genesis 18:19)

We mentioned this Scripture earlier, but it is excellent example of God’s attitude on parenting. God is telling Abraham, the father, that He has known him for a purpose, to instruct his family in the ways of the Lord. These are his priorities. Notice that God does not say, “You need to work all the time to bring in the cash” (although we know if we do not provide for our family we have denied the faith, based on 1 Timothy 5:8), nor does He say, “Do more ministry” or “Mount that camel and head on down to Egypt to relax and take it easy.” Even though work, ministry, and leisure time are important—and even biblical—none are first priority. A balance must be reached, but your priority relationship is with God first and family next.

Self-Examination 4

Describe what the priorities in your life have been. Has God been first, then family, then work? If you are married, ask your spouse if they agree with your assessment. If you have kids, you can ask them too. They will usually give you a straight answer if you ask in a gentle way.

DIG DEEPER

What do these verses say about the biblical concepts of choosing, serving, and the family?

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

Finally, are you practicing godly principles in your home?

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23 NASB)

Are these the qualities your children see growing in you and increasing in your home? How would you evaluate yourself? Doing Great? ___ Sometimes ___ Lots of room to grow

What is most important to you, other than your relationship with Christ? If anything else becomes more important, you will suffer, and so will your family. God blesses obedience. Disobedience puts us outside God's provisional grace that we need day by day and causes us to begin to operate in our flesh.

Do you see any room for improvement? These are not trick questions. God gives us these instructions, and He makes them clear enough to understand. He also says we are to encourage one another continuously. We all need God's power and grace every single day. But we must never forget that God will not do by miracle what He has called us to do by obedience.

What are the three ingredients for a strong foundation (from lesson 7)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Lesson 9

The Chief Cornerstone

The most significant aspect of building on a strong foundation is selecting the proper chief cornerstone. Let's look at what Scripture says in relation to Christ and our relationship to Him:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

“The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone,”

and

“A stone of stumbling

And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. (1 Peter 2:6-8)

Notice the order of spiritual progress presented in these verses:

1. accept Jesus Christ,
2. abide in Him, and
3. obey.

Most Christians become preoccupied with the third step. Perhaps you have found your thoughts dwelling on, *I've got to quit doing this* or *I have to do something better* or *Why can't I stop doing these wrong things?* Fortunately, accomplishing the first two steps brings success for the third. We find ourselves with the power, grace, and desire to be obedient believers.

When people come in for counseling, struggling with sinful behaviors or even addictions, the first question should be, “How's your abiding relationship with Christ?” The most common response often is, “What does that mean?” The answer is that our relationship with Christ is the connection that gives us the power to obey. Our intimacy with God is what gives us the power, the grace for that day, to have victory over sin. And He only gives us grace for the day. He does not give us grace for a week. We need to see this connection and understand this spiritual principle.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

FACT FILE

Abide—To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.

Jesus was concentrating on the idea of abiding. He used the word *four times*. When He gave this instruction to His disciples, it was only a short time before He would go to the cross and then on to be with the Father in heaven. He wanted to make sure His disciples knew that their relationship with Him would continue, even after He was not physically there.

DIG DEEPER

According to these verses, where are we to abide? What is the result?

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)

Notice how these Scriptures relate to us abiding in Christ, our dependence upon Him, and the outcome.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God. (2 Corinthians 3:5)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Our devotional life is so like the foundation under a house. You cannot see it, but the strength of it will be revealed as natural disasters occur. We may spend most of our time and money making the house look good, but a weak foundation can quickly bring all that time and money to nothing. If we spend our time on the mere image of success instead of growing in righteousness, our home will be built on “sand” and will “fall” just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 7. It is the foundation that holds up the house, not the frills and attractive paint job.

In the following workbooks you will find biblical tools for raising children. However, if you skip this spiritual principle, ignoring your foundation, you will go right back to your old habits. The strength of your relationship to God, in Christ, is the only foundation on which you will build successfully.

Rebellion and Choices

When you hear the word *rebellion*, what comes to mind? Teenagers? The word *rebellion* often is associated with adolescents, however rebellion means any resistance to authority.⁷ When you choose to do things your own way, including setting priorities according to your desires instead of God's instruction, that is rebellion. So choosing to not set aside time for an intimate relationship with the Lord is rebellion.

Developing intimacy and abiding in Christ are choices, and God clearly tells us in Scripture, "Do it." He said it to the Israelites before they went into the promised land: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). We spend time with the people we love, and we must choose every day to love God by spending time to know Him better by searching the Bible for spiritual truth, then work it into our lives through prayer and obedience.

The erosion of our spiritual foundation, our connection to God, begins with neglecting our devotional life and usually leads to the following:

1. We stop giving of ourselves and start asking, "What about me, my feelings, and my needs?"
2. We begin to wallow in selfishness and exhibit conditional, rather than unconditional, love.
3. We stop hungering (seeking) for holiness.
4. We begin to justify our sinful attitudes, behavior, and selfishness toward others and our children.
5. We start blaming others for our misery, sinful attitudes, and behaviors.

Self-Examination

Are you exhibiting any of these types of thoughts or behaviors? If so, list them. Then confess them to the Lord and ask His forgiveness. Remember 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How can we combat our natural tendency toward neglect, which leads to apathy and sin? The answer is that we must train ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the apostle Paul wrote, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection.” He understood that he needed to work, that he needed to train his own body to make it do what it normally did not want to do.

FACT FILE

Discipline—Hupopiazō (Greek). Used to describe boxers giving knock out blows (punches to the part of the face right under the eyes) until they were black and blue. (See 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 2 Peter 1:5-6.)

What are your first thoughts in the morning? When you are lying in bed, when you become conscious, what is your first thought? Train yourself this way: first thing in the morning, focus your mind on Christ and remember or acknowledge to yourself and God how much you need His strength to battle your natural sinful desires. The great thing is that God already knows your struggles. And remember, when you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. Now, in Christ, God can get through to you: “Here I am. I want to bless you. I love you.”

DIG DEEPER

What do these verses say about the psalmist’s thoughts in the morning? What was he doing? How can you remind yourself to think of God first thing, before you get out of bed?

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord;
In the morning I will direct it to You,
And I will look up. (Psalm 5:3)

I rise before the dawning of the morning,
And cry for help;
I hope in Your word. (Psalm 119:147)

God knows everything. He knows how weak and foolish we can be and already knew all the “junk” we had inside when He adopted us as His children. He knew—and chose us anyway! He is not here to condemn us, but He desires to bless us. We must train our minds. When you wake up, let your first thoughts be, *God here I am. Thank You that I am one of Yours! I know there are so many areas in my life that need improvement. God, I need Your strength.* The Lord is longing to hear you say that every day.

Train yourself to put your mind on Jesus in the first moments of the morning; not on your bills, your spouse, your kids, or your job, no matter how pressing those things may seem. Pray and ask

Him for His grace to love your family and to walk in His will today. And this is before you begin or do your personal devotional time with Him. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). If we put God first, before all things, we will reap all the promises waiting for us in Him.

Set your mind on God first and have your devotional time, but you must also return to Him in thought during the day. God is the One we depend on and obey when we face difficulties, including problems with our children.

Notice how God encourages us to think in the follow verse:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)

Seek and *set your mind* are imperative verbs, indicating the action is a continual process. What are you to set your mind on?

FACT FILE

Seek—To look for and strive to find.

Set your mind—Refers to the will, affections, and conscience.

ACTION PLAN

Write a prayer asking God to quicken your mind to think upon Him.

Our Sovereign God

As God’s children and His ministers, we must always remember that God is in control and that He has a purpose in the trials we face. Psalm 139:1- 18 tells us our days are predestined, every one of them. They were written in His book before time was created, before the earth even existed.

The Bible says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). We can take comfort in the knowledge that in every situation, God has already been there. He knows all things. He is never surprised. So when you get up Saturday morning to find your three-year-old has spilled orange

juice and cereal all over the floor and is making a little goulash, you can walk in and calmly think, *Okay, God, You were already here. What is this about?* And on Friday night when your teenager comes home later than allowed, you can remind yourself, *Okay, God, You have been here already. You knew this was going to happen to me. You said in all situations You have prepared me for good works. We can learn to glorify Christ in all our circumstances.*

Use this catchy motto as a guide to develop a good attitude:

If I put my eyes on others, I get stressed.
If I put my eyes on myself, I get depressed.
If I put my eyes on Jesus, I get blessed.

Post it on your refrigerator or on your mirror so you see it each morning to remind you to do your devotion. Or better yet, memorize it.

DIG DEEPER

According to this verse, what is God doing behind the scenes? Who do we have to trust?

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.
(Ephesians 1:11)

Describe what the following verses reveal about God's nature.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying,
"Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass,
And as I have purposed, so it shall stand." (Isaiah 14:24)

O Lord, You are my God.
I will exalt You,
I will praise Your name,
For You have done wonderful things;
Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. (Isaiah 25:1)

There are many plans in a man's heart,
Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand. (Proverbs 19:21)

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but
according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus
before time began. (2 Timothy 1:9)

Lesson 10

Your Amazing Transformation

Our primary goal as believers, and as parents, is to be transformed into the image of Christ and do His will. Simply put, we are to become more and more like Him in thought and action. God has a plan and purpose in the trials you face. As God works, He will use these challenges to reveal the areas that need to be transformed.

DIG DEEPER

List the positive consequences in these verses.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (1 John 2:5)

An illustration of this transforming process can be found in Matthew 14. Jesus had been ministering to people. He fed thousands, healed and preached, and at the end of the day, He was exhausted. He walked down to the Sea of Galilee and told the apostles, "Get in the boat and go to the other side; I'll meet you over there." So the apostles jumped in the boat and began to sail across, while Jesus remained behind to pray.

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water

to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:22-31)

When they were halfway across the sea, a storm came up. But Jesus had sent His disciples out into that storm, knowing full well it was coming. He purposefully put them out there, just like He often does to us. Seeing Jesus walking on water, Peter cried heroically, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." At Jesus invitation to "come," Peter began to walk on the water! But when took his eyes off Jesus and put them on the storm, he began to sink. When Peter cried, "Lord, save me," the Word says Jesus "immediately" extended His hand and caught him.

When Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat, He was testing Peter's faith. Was Peter going to keep his eyes on Christ and have faith that He had it all under control, giving him the ability to do something he could not do on his own? Peter had the faith to begin, but then he wavered in fear and began to sink. Peter learned the importance of keeping his eyes on the Lord. Some thirty years later, when Peter wrote the following words, you can see the transformation in his perspective.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
(1 Peter 1:6-7)

FACT FILE

Genuineness—Dokimion (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. It was used of metals that had been through a purifying process to remove all impurities.

Peter was encouraging the church, assuring them that trials are necessary to develop sincere, pure faith. If you see trials this way and cooperate with God, you can rejoice.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about trials, testing, and how God works through them.

You have tested my heart;
You have visited me in the night;
You have tried me and have found nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. (Psalm 17:3)

For You, O God, have tested us;
You have refined us as silver is refined. (Psalm 66:10)

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests the hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)

Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its
perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
(James 1:3-4)

As parents in crisis, we often take our eyes off Christ and His promises, put them on our
circumstances, and become overwhelmed. So often turning to Jesus is our last move. But God is
waiting to prove Himself faithful and more powerful than our circumstances. We must keep our
hope fixed on Him (Hebrews 12:2) and remember that He sends us into storms because He has a
plan (Ephesians 1:11).

Just as Christ showed power over nature when He walked on water and power over death on the
third day, so God wants to perform miracles for us as we raise our children. We need to live each
day seeking to please God alone, keeping our eyes on Him, not on the storms and difficulties.
Sadly, because we do not develop intimacy with Christ, peace disappears. We become agitated,
angered, and lose our joy and strength when the going gets tough. Peter wrote, "Yet if anyone
suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter
4:16). No one enjoys suffering, but for parents it is part of the job. Rather than *God, why is this
happening to me?* turn your thoughts to *God, what are You revealing in me through this circumstance?*

Self-Examination

Many parenting and marriage problems stem from not viewing trials God's way. Over the next
seven days, list as many things as you can that qualify as your trials. Then include what was
revealed to be in you (anger, impatience, etc.), attitudes you believe fall short of God's nature.
This will become a beginning list of areas that God can transform in you. Then start taking
responsibility for those failures by asking for forgiveness from God, your spouse, and your kids.

Suffering is part of God’s plan and can lead to inner transformation and His glorification. Our struggles come from three sources: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Yes, even Satan has the freedom to trouble us, as He did with Job (chapters 1-2). If you are not totally dependent upon God’s daily strength (Psalm 88:9) and His wisdom in every situation (James 1:5), the temptation is to trust in yourself. Moving away from God gives strength to our sin nature (Galatians 5:16). Fleshly reactions and attitudes are not a reflection of God’s nature (Galatians 5:19-26), and these most often trouble us when we are out of fellowship (Hebrews 10:24-25) or when we reject the fact that God uses our children to transform us spiritually.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this verse changes your attitude toward non-glorifying or sinful behavior.

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently. (1 Corinthians 10:13 AMPC)

It is true that, in Christ, no trial is beyond our ability to be victorious. But God is not saying you and I must be perfect. All of us will fail at times. But you must accept responsibility for your actions and ask God for help. In this way you cooperate with God to change, grow, and mature in Christ. The moment you and I accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the journey of transformation begins.

We will travel this road until we die. There will never be time when we can think, *Okay, I'm done* until we are with Him in heaven (Romans 8:22–23; 1 John 3:2–3).

Read this as a prayer, from you to God, asking Him to do this work in you:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Hebrews 13:20–21)

After meditating on these Scriptures and praying, what principles do you see that relate to your transformation? How can these also relate to your parenting?

Laborers Together

In the first verse of Psalm 127, the author wrote, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” God so wants to protect our families. Can you see from this passage that you and God are to be working together—with Him in the lead position? He wants to intercede in your child’s life, showing Himself both faithful and powerful, but you must first allow Him to be the Lord over your family.

God’s Word tells us He blesses obedience (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 18:20–21). When we are disobedient in the areas of intimacy and relationship with Christ, will God be able to intercede on our behalf (John 9:31; Hebrews 11:6)? He is faithful, but we need to do our part (Philippians 2:12–13). In order to glorify God, you must stay connected to Him each day. Then you will experience transformation and stand on a solid foundation. Remember, God will not do by miracle what He has called you to do by obedience.

As a parent and minister of Christ, the mainspring for service is not love for your children, but love for Jesus Christ. If you are devoted to the cause and or outcome of raising children, you will become discouraged and brokenhearted, looking to them for your reward. Parents often receive less gratitude from their children than they do from the family house pet. But if love and service toward God is your motive, no ingratitude or outcome will hinder you from serving your children and fulfilling His will and wishes. Christ Himself came to earth with one desire: to serve and please His Father in heaven.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

Clever methods are not the key to accomplishing God’s purposes; the key is your relationship with Him. God will foil the best of man’s plans if He is left out of them. The tools we will cover in the remainder of this series will be extremely useful in helping you raise your kids. Tools are the means, but the *meaning* comes from commitment to God and fulfilling His will and plan. God has a plan for each child, and we are to study, pray, train, discipline, and enjoy them. But the day will come when they also will be fully accountable to God for themselves.

The integrity of the foundation on which we build our homes and raise our children is directly related to the strength of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through daily prayer, Bible study, and a desire to obey, we are working with God as He purifies and changes us, enabling us to become godly parents to our children. We must be disciplined and devoted, and God has a glorious promise waiting for us.

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:1-4)

If you could get up every morning and take a pill for peace, knowledge, divine power, and wisdom for every situation of the day, would you do it? Clearly that is what God promises to us if we will simply seek Him first.

DIG DEEPER

List the promises in the following verses.

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:9-13)

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made a deposit of grace, power, knowledge, and wisdom in each one of our names (2 Peter 1:1–4). But you can only make a withdrawal from your account if you use His name, and He only gives His name to those who receive and trust Him. How often have you gone to the bank lately? Have your efforts to have a devotional life, to be alone with the Lord for even a few minutes, ended in distraction? Never let failure turn you away from your Lord. Ask for His help and keep at it. Don't be robbed by discouragement or let your account go dormant due to lack of use.

Keep Building

If God reveals that your relationship with Him has become weak or stale, the first thing to do is ask forgiveness (1 John 1:9), saying, "I'm sorry. I forgot. I've lost my first love. I've allowed life's duties, desires, and troubles to turn me from the very reason I exist—to have fellowship with You."

Then commit to begin anew. Start with fifteen minutes; tell yourself you are going to read one chapter, or read until He speaks to you. Start first with prayer, putting yourself in His presence, praising Him, with the expectation that God is going to reveal Himself to you. When you are finished, meditate on what you have read.

Finally, get a journal. Keeping a record of your devotional time is telling yourself and the Lord, *I'm expecting You to say something to me today*. This is very important. Wait upon the Lord, and whatever He gives you, write it down and date it. He may give you some direction or a prayer, or simply remind you of His promises.

Keeping a journal enables us to go back and see what God has already done, what He has shown us, and maybe renew our strength for a present trial. Sometimes I go back and read through my journal, and usually, by the third or fourth page, I am brought to tears because of the things written there that God spoke to me about my life, my kids, my wife, and for the ministry.

Intimacy is a process. Begin with fifteen minutes daily, and it will grow. You will learn how to abide in Christ, pray without ceasing, and be in fellowship with Him throughout the day. On this strong foundation you can build a solid family.

See *Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God* and *Appendix D: Recommended Books*.

Appendix Resources

These appendices are included as additional resources. They are found throughout all four volumes, but not all appendices are included in each volume. If you wish to review a specific appendix, find where it is located in the list below.

Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter	Volume 1
Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ	Volume 1
Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God	Volume 1
Appendix D: Recommended Books	Volumes 1 & 3
Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness	Volume 2
Appendix F: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix G: Improving Your Loving Communication	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix H: Showing Love to Your Child	Volume 2
Appendix I: Essentials for Single Parents	Volume 3
Appendix J: Parenting the Blended Family	Volume 3
Appendix K: Leading a Child to Christ	Volume 3
Appendix L: Inappropriate Entertainment	Volume 3
Appendix M: Disciplining Behavior	Volume 4
Appendix N: Rules and Consequences	Volume 4
Appendix O: Positive Reinforcement	Volume 4
Appendix P: Chore List	Volume 4
Appendix Q: Questionnaire for Teenagers	Volume 4
Appendix R: Questionnaire for New Adults	Volume 4
Appendix S: Parent Self-Evaluation	Volume 4
Appendix T: Glossary	Volumes 1-4

Appendix A

Parent Commitment Letter

Dear Parent,

As you begin these lessons, I want to encourage you that God will bless you as you seek His guidance and wisdom for your family.

He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

I also want to challenge you to make a serious commitment to finish the workbooks. If God has led you to begin, know that He desires you to finish. After reading the following commitment, please sign and date below.

It is my prayer that you trust the Lord to reveal His truths and give you the grace “power” to work out His will.

Blessings throughout the journey,

Pastor Craig Caster

Parent’s Commitment to Finish

I commit to seek the Lord’s will and guidance for my family, to attend each class (if enrolled), to finish each volume, to complete my assigned homework, and to pray for the other parents in the class.

Parent’s Signature

Date

Each parent should sign their own workbook. If you have one workbook as a couple, please order another workbook or download the full series (for free) at FDM.world. Each parent will need their own workbook to complete the series.

Appendix B

Committing Your Life to Christ

Perhaps you have struggled in some areas of parenting and have come to realize that your struggles are a result of a weak or inconsistent spiritual life. God promises to bless, encourage, and strengthen us as we submit to His lordship.

The Lord will give strength to His people;
The Lord will bless His people with peace. (Psalm 29:11)

Write a prayer to the Lord. Commit to putting Him first in your life, and ask Him to help you parent the gifts (children) He has given to you.

Perhaps you have never surrendered your life to Christ. Know God loves you and has provided the way for you to have a relationship with Him. You must simply do a few things to surrender.

1. **Recognize** and admit you are a sinner.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

2. **Believe** Jesus died on the cross for your sins and He is the only way for sinners to be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

3. **Confess** your sins to Jesus and repent (be sorry), asking Him to forgive you.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19)

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

4. **Ask** Jesus to come into your heart and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Repeat the following prayer to begin your new relationship with Christ.

Lord Jesus, I admit I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. Thank You for dying on the cross for me and paying the price for my sin. Please come into my heart. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be Your disciple. Thank You for forgiving me and coming into my life. Thank You that I am now a child of God and will one day follow You to heaven. Amen.

Appendix C

Developing Daily Intimacy with God

The greatest gift received through salvation is the ability to have a close, dependent relationship with God. There is nothing He desires more from you.

Set aside time.

Choose the best time of day (morning or evening) and commit to a daily devotion with God. Don't set yourself up for discouragement with a goal you will not be able to keep. Start small, and then add time as you grow. Begin with fifteen minutes each day.

Choose a book of the Bible.

Read one chapter (or less if it is a long chapter) or a few verses, and meditate on it. In addition, you may also want to read from a daily devotional book. See *Appendix D: Recommended Books* for suggested reading.

Pray.

Pray specifically over the truths you have just read. Ask God to reveal how they apply to your life. Pray for the humility to submit yourself to His authority and to respond in obedience.

Listen to Him.

Spend a few minutes in silence, just listening. This may be uncomfortable at first. We live in a time of constant distractions and are not accustomed to sitting quietly. Persevere and God will be faithful to speak to you. Remember that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you and can minister to you in your thoughts.

Keep a journal.

Record your prayers, experiences, ideas, or reflections to keep for private use. Write what verses mean to you and anything the Lord speaks to your heart.

Pray again.

Be intentional about your prayers. Use the ACTS method to guide you:

- *A—Adoration*—Worship and praise God.
- *C—Confession*—Confess and repent of any known sins.
- *T—Thanksgiving*—Express gratitude for God's blessings in your life.
- *S—Supplication*—Humbly make requests for your needs and the needs of others.

Close by asking God to help you to know and acknowledge His presence throughout your day.

Appendix D

Recommended Books

While there are many excellent books to deepen your relationship with God, we recommend the following to guide, teach, and challenge you.

Discipleship Books

Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Man to Man by Charles R. Swindoll
 Marriage Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster
Men of Courage: God's Call to Move Beyond the Silence of Adam by Dr. Larry Crabb

Devotional Books

Daily Experience with God by Andrew Murray
Drawing Near: Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith by John F. MacArthur
Every Day with Jesus: First Steps with New Believers by Greg Laurie
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Meet the Bible: A Panorama of God's Word in 366 Daily Readings and Reflections by Brenda Quinn and Philip Yancey
Moments Together for Couples by Dennis and Barbara Rainey
My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers
On the Other Side of the Garden: Biblical Womanhood by Virginia Ruth Fugate
Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman
The Love Dare Day by Day: A Year of Devotions for Couples by Stephen and Alex Kendrick
The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omartian
The One Year Book of Psalms by William J. Peterson and Randy Petersen
Understanding Teens by Craig Caster

Devotional and Discipleship Books for Children and Adolescents

Bad to the Bone: Fifteen Young Bible Heroes Who Lived Radical Lives for God by Miles McPherson
Favorite Bible Stories by Carolyn Passig Jensen (various ages)
God and Me! Devotions for Girls by multiple authors, including Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer, Diane Cory, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Gotta Have God: Fun Devotions for Boys, Ages 2-5 by Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer
Gotta Have God: Cool Devotions for Guys by multiple authors including Legacy Press, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Growing Little Women: Capturing Teachable Moments with Your Daughter by Donna J. Miller, with Linda Holland
Talksheets by David Lynn (various books for junior high and high school)
Youth Devotions by Josh McDowell

Appendix T

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.

accountability: Subject to giving an account, answerable, a statement explaining one's conduct.

admonition: *Nouthesia* (Greek). Warning, exhortation, any word of encouragement or reproof, which leads to correct behavior (Ephesians 6:4). It is the idea of having a corrective influence on someone by imparting understanding.

affectionately longing or fond affection: *Homeiromai* (Greek). To long for someone passionately and earnestly, and, being linked to a mother's love, is intended here to express an affection so deep and compelling as to be unsurpassed (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Ancient inscriptions on the tombs of dead babies sometimes contained this term when parents wanted to describe their sad longing for a too-soon-departed child.

approve: To continually put to the test, examine prior to the approval of your action.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, or an undue degree of significance.

attitude: A posture or position; a feeling, opinion or mood.

bears all things: *Bears, stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others, covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

behavior: The act or manner of behaving.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in, or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

blamelessly: Faultless, able to stand a critics' scrutiny. As you move along in obedience to God's will, you are transformed into the image of Christ, and your godly behavior becomes evident to others.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

bring them up: *Ektrepho* (Greek). To nourish, rear, feed (Ephesians 6:4). To nurture, rear, to bring up to maturity such as children, in the sense of to train or educate.

charged, implore, urging: *Martyromenoi* (Greek). Implies the “delivery of truth” and was likely meant to convey the more directive functions of a father. A good father encourages and provides guidance, which the mother does also.

chastening or discipline: *Paideia* (Greek). Correction or training. There is a consequence for every offense; some type of training/correction will follow. Used in Ephesians 6:4.

cheat: To plunder or rob as when plunder is taken in war. Translated as “take you captive” in Colossian 2:8 NASB. In this case it is to rob believers of the complete riches they have in Christ as revealed in the Word, plus His power and intervention.

cherish: To give heed to, to pay attention to, to minister, to soften by heat, to keep warm as of birds covering their young with feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6), to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care. Translated as “tender care” in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 NASB.

communication: The act of communicating is the exchange of thought, message, or information.

confess: To agree with God that what you did ignorantly or deliberately was a sin.

consequences: That which follows from breaking a rule. When you have a rule, there must be a corrective consequence for breaking that rule.

controlling: To exercise power over, to dominate or rule, to restrain, a restraining force.

countenance: *Paniym* (Hebrew). Has the literal meaning of *face* (Genesis 43:31; 1 Kings 19:13) but also means the reflection of a person’s mood or attitude such as being defiant (Jeremiah 5:3), ruthless (Deuteronomy 28:50), joyful (Job 29:24), humiliated (2 Samuel 19:5), terrified (Isaiah 13:8). Scripture shows a bad countenance (Matthew 6:16) and a good one (Psalm 4:6).

defiance: When a child rebels against the authority and the discipline that follows their foolish act of immaturity.

defile: To pollute, render impure; or corrupt.

devoutly: Holy, pious, sacred, dedicated to God. This describes your abiding relationship with Christ. When you are devoted, or dedicated to God, that relationship is the source of a sacred life.

diligently: Perseveringly attentive; steady and earnest in application to a subject or pursuit; prosecuted with careful attention and effort; not careless or negligent.

disciple (verb): Instilling God’s Word into our children’s hearts through example and instruction, teaching them to pray and how to have a relationship with God (spiritual training of morals and values).

disciple (noun): *Mathetes* (Greek). A student, learner, or pupil. But it means much more in the New Testament. It is a follower who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of

conduct. In Classic Greek, “an apprentice,” one who not only learns facts from the teacher but other things such as attitudes and philosophies. The *mathetes* could be called a “student-companion,” one who doesn’t just sit in class listening to lectures but rather who follows the teacher to learn life as well as facts and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.

discipleship/discipling: An intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.

discipleship (direct): Instruction-discipleship is the time you set aside to have devotions (Bible study) with your children. It is a planned activity that involves the family.

discipleship (indirect): Instruction-discipleship occurs when God presents an opportunity for an informal or unplanned discussion of spiritual things. This means the parent is paying attention, seeing those opportunities.

discipline (of children): Instilling character traits of a mature adult (Ephesians 6:4), which are morals, values, personal responsibility, and self-control; training behavior.

discouraged: *Athumeo* (Greek). The root word is *thumos*, which means “violent motion or passion of mind, such as anger, wrath, or indignation.” Adding the *a* (alpha) before it makes it negative, meaning “without” passion; despondent, disturbed in mind, and indicates loss of courage (Colossians 3:21).

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else, used to indicate building up a house or structure.

encourage or comfort: To inspire, support; console in time of trouble or worry, soothing encouragement designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek), To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another’s excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

exhort: *Parakleo* (Greek). To call to one’s side, to aid; to encourage, admonish, or exhort someone to do something. We are to come alongside our children and help them grow in the things of the Lord.

faith: *Pisteuo* (Greek). To have faith in, trust; particularly to be firmly persuaded as to something. This is more than just giving a mental assent; it means to act on what is believed.

foolishness: Lack of character, deficient in understanding, unwise, brainless, irrational, ludicrous, a lack of judgment.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used of metals that had been through a purifying process to remove all impurities.

glorify: To reflect, to honor, praise; to give esteem or honor by putting him into an honorable position.

head: The chief or lead person to whom others are subordinate. Metaphorically of persons, e.g., the husband in relation to his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23) insofar as they are one body (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:8), and one body can have only one head to direct it; of Christ in relation to His Church, which is His body, and its members are His members (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19); of God in relation to Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). God the Father is designated as the head of Christ (Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:22).

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

hurts: Can cause a person to harbor bitterness toward others. Can also affect our relationship with God and His sanctification process in our lives. If we allow a hurt to turn into bitterness, this will affect the grace of God needed to walk and grow spiritually, and it can negatively affect those around us. Hebrews 12:15 says, "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

hypocrite: Someone who acts phony, or is a counterfeit; a man who assumes and speaks, or acts, under a pretend character.

impart: This verb has the idea of sharing something, which one already retains in part.

integrity: Indicates singleness of heart, not double-minded; one who walks according to God's will and exemplifies His righteousness.

justly: With integrity and honesty, just, uprightness of character and behavior, daily desiring to live life according to what pleases God. When you know the Word of God, you can judge what is right and wrong.

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. *Agape* is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from *agape* and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. *Phileo* is conditional love.

make disciples (verb): *Matheteuo* (Greek). To make a disciple (Matthew 28:19; Acts 14:21); to instruct (Matthew 13:52) with the purpose of making a disciple. It is not exactly the same as "make converts," though it is surely implied. The term *make disciples* places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God by instructing new believers on how to follow Jesus, to submit to Jesus's lordship, and to take up His mission of compassionate service. It also involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher and getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (Matthew 11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right.

manipulation: To control or play upon by artful, unfair, and insidious means, especially to one's own advantage.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter, one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

morals: Defined by what is right and wrong from God's perspective.

not rejoicing in iniquity: When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

nurse: The act of nursing, suckle, nourish, train; something that nourishes, to supply with nourishment; to educate or foster, to further the development of someone or something (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

perfect or mature: *Teleios* (Greek). Goal or purpose; finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing (Ephesians 4:13).

perfectly trained: *Katartizo* (Greek). To put a thing in its appropriate condition, to establish, equip so it is deficient in no part.

persecute: To pursue in a manner to injure, grieve, or afflict; to oppress; to set upon with cruelty; to cause to suffer.

personal responsibility: The ability to take care of oneself; to follow through on things you have committed to do, or the things required, without anyone else having to prompt you; taking ownership, being accountable and accepting responsibility for your actions.

power: *Dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength or ability to do what only God can do.

punishment: A measured amount of pain to motivate, or the infliction of a penalty. Punishment is part of the overall discipline plan, but it is different from a corrective consequence. Punishment motivates a child to yield to parental authority and accept the corrective consequence.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rebuke: To convict, to prove one in the wrong.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

revenge: To inflict injury in return for an insult.

reward: A great precious value.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

- rude:** Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.
- rule:** To rule, manage, lead, shepherd, and guide. By implication this means to take care of something, to be diligent, to practice.
- scourges:** Entails all suffering God ordains for His children, which is always designed for their good. It includes the entire range of trials and tribulations, which He providentially ordains and which work to mortify sin and nurture faith.
- seek and set your mind:** Imperative verbs, indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means “to look for and strive to find.” *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience (Colossians 3:1–2).
- seek first:** A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).
- seek your own way:** Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God’s perspective.
- self-control:** The ability to govern oneself emotionally, physically, and spiritually; the ability to not always yield to the path of least resistance.
- self-seeking:** Doing things in our own way, using ours or this world’s wisdom in making choices.
- shutdown:** Room restriction with no friends, phone, radio, computer, games, or iPods.
- sin of commission:** We sin acting out of our own authority. God says do not do that, and we do it anyway. For example, God says don’t steal (Ephesians 4:28), but we steal.
- sin of omission:** We sin by not doing what is right by God. He commands us to do something, and we decide not to do it or, out of ignorance, we treat our children according to what we feel is best, *not* doing God’s will. For example, God says to forgive, but we refuse to.
- steward:** Overseer; manager; one who acts as a custodian, administrator, or supervisor.
- study:** Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one’s best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.
- submissive:** *Hopotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.
- thinks no evil:** *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one’s mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.
- thoroughly equipped for every good work:** God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience.

train up: *Chanak* (Hebrew). To dedicate or set aside for divine service (Proverbs 22:6).

training: *Paideia* (Greek). Chastening, because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies discipline, correction, as the Lord approves (Ephesians 6:4). Discipline that regulates character. Also to cause to grow as desired; to make or become prepared or skilled.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

values: Principles or actions you live by. Your behavior shows what you value most.

voids: Something that has been left out. God has placed within us emotional needs that are as important as our physical ones. If we do not have air to breathe, water to drink, and food to nourish our bodies, we will eventually die. God has placed emotional development needs within every child. If not met, they can cause serious emotional and psychological problems as an adult.

For example, a child has certain developmental emotional needs that must be nurtured through loving authority, with consistent proper discipline. If these needs are compromised or not provided, a void is created within the child. This often occurs because parents do not understand their God-given responsibilities or the extent of their influence for good or bad. Most children cannot identify what is missing—what the void is—but they will instinctively try to fill it with something. A lack of real love and proper discipline can make a child vulnerable to addictions or emotional and psychological problems that lead to destructive behavior. When followed, biblical instruction can produce a healthy relationship with your child and an emotionally healthy person in your child.

wiles: *Methodia* (Greek). From which we derive the word *method*. Indicating craftiness, cunning, and deception. The term was often used of a wild animal that cunningly stalks and then unexpectedly pounces on its prey. Satan's evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.

Endnotes

1. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 481.
2. Stephen & Alex Kendrick with Randy Alcorn, *The Resolution for Men*, ed. by Lawrence Kimbrough (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 115.
3. Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 537.
4. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).
5. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, electronic ed.
6. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 112.
7. *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition Unabridged (Springfield, MA: G & C Merriam Company, Publishers, 1939).

About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.