

GOD'S WISDOM IN THE FAMILY DESIGN

2026 NEW ZEALAND WINTER BIBLE SCHOOL

The Wisdom of the Marriage Relationship

God's righteous ways are coming under severe pressure as the day of Christ's return approaches
We need to be clear in our mind how God defines marriage and the family unit; there is great wisdom to save all involved
The marriage relationship and the family unit have been designed by God to transform the character of each person
To the extent we understand God's wisdom behind each, we can cooperate with it and receive the intended blessings
The aim of a human marriage relationship is *happiness*; the aim of a godly marriage relationship is *salvation*!
A marriage relationship is built one piece at a time; if you stop building, it stops growing; it must be constantly renewed

Godly marriage is total commitment and devotion to God and to each other

Marriage is a refining process God uses for His purpose to mold and refine us for our benefit and for His glory.
From Creation God intended that marriage and family would be an essential part of developing His people, both in shaping their characters and in raising a Godly seed.

Marriages fail & homes are broken up because spouses do not have the power of God's Word dwelling in their hearts/minds, to keep them bound together in *love* and *respect* and *appreciation* for each other
A wise couple build their marriage on the solid rock of God's word, to withstand the trials of life; a foolish couple build their marriage on shifting sand - it fails when the storms of life assail it

Two things are essential for true marriage in the Lord - ***total devotion of both to God, and total devotion to each other.***

These two guarantee success; all else is tragic failure. If you want to be a good spouse, you must first be a good disciple.

All depends on the character of the couple

"If the fear of God and regard for duty and the hope of futurity in Christ prevail on both sides, there will be lasting sweetness, because neither leans too much on the other, yet both do their duty as partners in the pact. But if there is nothing but natural seeking for pleasure and ministration, there will come, with inevitable failings of nature, little breaks under stress - acts of inconsiderateness, expressions of haste that will act as escapes of steam, which scald and destroy. Scald wounds will heal with time, but not with repetitions going on; and this is the danger, that once this sort of thing sets in, it is liable to become chronic; and marriage degenerates to a mere lodging-house convenience, and sour at that, instead of being what it was designed to be; a partnership of sweet and helpful adjustment, a noble communion of life - a fountain of love and light that must prevail." [R Roberts]

The real enemy of a godly and happy marriage is our human nature

In God's wisdom, He takes two people, burdened with the flesh, & places them in a very close environment and relationship

- Their natural sinful tendencies don't disappear; they are rudely exposed and magnified for their spouse to witness, oftentimes directed against the very person closest and most dear to us

- This is the ideal place for our shortcomings/character flaws to be exposed, so they can be repudiated and changes made

- What better person to help hold ourselves accountable for needed changes than the one whom we love the most! A spiritual counselor who loves God, loves us, knows the failings of the flesh and has covenanted to be our lifelong partner

God dearly wants to save our families, and designed the family unit to accomplish this

He designed, created and implemented the family unit on day 6 - the husband devoted to his wife and she to her husband, with the two sharing a very special relationship and both devoted to creating a family environment to raise a Godly seed

All the commands in Scripture, and the counsel to parents, husbands and wives, are built around this divine model

The importance of the marriage relationship is no more evident than recognizing Adam and Eve were created within a marriage relationship. God wanted to save them both and recognized the best way to achieve this was as man and wife

"It is not good that man should dwell alone, I will make him an help meet (helper fit) for him" - Gen 2:18

This is God's thinking behind the creation of the woman, and identifies the critical role she plays in her husband's life

Left on his own, companion-wise, Adam would have been in a "not good" state, lonely and incomplete; he needed a

companion, a helper, a partner (fellow disciple) who would complement him and eliminate his deficient state

God tells Adam and all husbands: you need a companion; you'll be a better 'disciple' having Eve's companionship

- This is why a wife is intended to be a husband's best and most intimate friend, his closest companion

God didn't create husbands to be independent creatures

Man has a real need for woman, God created man with a 'female dependency'; husbands should therefore always treat their wife with the love, respect, devotion and care that such a God-given need warrants

Adam recognized his unity with Eve in his exclamation "*this is now bone of my bones...*", which isn't a biological explanation of her creation, but a description of Adam's joy and the *close affinity* he felt for her; she was part of him! They were one!

Husbands, we need to see our wives as God's spiritual gift to us; He knows our strengths and weaknesses, and He knows she will be uniquely helpful to us in light of those strengths and weaknesses

We don't ever want to squelch that divine aid/helper that's been specially selected and given to us

While God didn't create our wife from one of our ribs, He did bring her into our life as He brought Eve to Adam

There's a reason we're married to the wife we are - she is *exactly* who we need to assist our transformation

"What therefore God has joined together" (Matt 19:6) shows it was God who brought the two people together; how dare anyone, including either spouse, put asunder a relationship God joined for the purpose of saving both people

Our marriage together was not by chance; our children, who in reality are God's children (Ps 127), have been known by God from before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4); God's children don't happen by chance

Husbands must never forget that a prudent (Heb: to act wisely, being versed in the Word) wife is from the LORD (Prov 19:14); echoing the principle she is God's gift - not as a present, but a gift that we need to help save us

God uses the natural to teach the spiritual; as husbands readily acknowledge they need their wives physically, so too spiritually and emotionally; but the need must be recognized before it can be valued

God designed the marriage relationship to create a special affinity/intimacy between the couple – a Oneness

- 1) Eve was given to Adam by God to be his special friend, his spiritual, emotional and physical companion
 - 2) God intended that they see themselves as “one flesh”, not two; one in thought, action, purpose, planning and living
 - 3) Eve’s unique creation underscored the close affinity God sought to establish between them; she belonged to Adam and he had a responsibility to her; Adam recognized God’s intent, *“this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”*
 - 4) The husband’s focus, emotions and loyalties were to rest with his wife; he was to *leave* his parents and *cleave* to his wife
 - 5) God has them enter into a lifelong covenant – binding themselves to each other like no other relationship
 - 6) Eph 5 highlights the special relationship: God places the responsibility for the wife’s salvation upon her husband (v23); you cannot have a closer relationship than one in which one person has a unique responsibility to save the other; the wife is under command to submit to her husband in *everything* (Eph 5:24)
 - 7) God specially designed the pleasure resulting from their physical intimacy as the culmination of their unique relationship
 - 8) Through childbirth, they produce a new, unique and precious life together, for whom they are jointly responsible
 - 9) The raising of the child is intended to reinforce their special relationship, to create a home to teach the child about God
 - 10) God instructs their relationship is to be patterned after the very special relationship of Christ and his bride
- These 10 aspects underscore how God is impressing upon us just how important, unique and special He intends for this relationship to be between a husband and wife*

A couple should cherish their special relationship together above all other relationships, and be willing to nurture it, protect it, grow it, and be willing to make the personal contributions and sacrifices such a special relationship is worthy of – it is the foundation of the family unit

The very special marriage relationship is of such importance that God has the couple enter a lifelong covenant

The covenant is not punitive – it’s designed to save both people; it’s absolutely appropriate, because of the unique and special relationship they enjoy together, that the couple make a vow to remain united until either their death or Jesus returns. The marriage vow is a commitment of lifelong loyalty and devotion made before God (Mal 2:14); He hears/witnesses our vows. While God doesn’t sign our marriage certificate, *He takes responsibility for the marriage: “what God has joined together”*. The friendship of the couple didn’t blossom into courtship, then an engagement all by chance! Nor did they stand before God and exchange vows on their own; it was *God* who brought them together to be joined in this special relationship. Their covenant is also with God and ties their marriage back to the special relationship He implemented in the Garden. It is to be for life; there is no support in scripture for the couple to ever claim incompatibility as a valid reason to separate. They will have serious issues to work through and resolve, but incompatibility is outside the scope of God’s creation (Mt 19:4), expectation and teaching (v6). The ease with which marriage vows are broken in society (or never exchanged) reflects the last days, but must not be viewed as an option for saints. It’s similar to our covenant we make at baptism; God knows discipleship and marriage will be difficult and the flesh will, at times, want to give up. But a covenant compels us to continue despite the trials; both vows are exactly what we need, to prevent us from convincing ourselves we can abandon either commitment.

Make the spirit of Ephesians 5 come alive in your marriage – Bro Harry Tennant, The Christadelphian (1986)

“Take for example, if you are a husband or a husband-to-be, the simple question: do you regard yourself *as the redeemer* in your relationship with your partner? Sister, if you are a wife, or a wife-to-be, do you see yourself in the marriage yoke *as the bride of Christ*? In other words, does each see the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as the very essence of a sound marriage? If the husband works always for his wife’s eternal salvation in the everyday things of marriage, and the wife fulfils her calling as part of the bride of Christ, then, together, they will truly be ‘joint-heirs of the grace of life’ (1 Pet. 3:7, R.V.). Words and deeds will be governed by the sole desire to work together for eternity, and to make the home a place where saving truth is the touchstone. In the context of Christlike life and marriage, Paul exhorts: ‘Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us’ (Eph. 5:1). *We begin by submitting one to another* (v. 21). *It is not simply that the wife submits to the husband; both submit to one another.* This is the spirit of service, the very core of how Christ has redeemed us. Marriage becomes infinitely sweeter when we learn this secret.”
Christ didn’t redeem us by dominating/controlling us but by serving/loving us; so too should husbands serve/love their wives
“Joint-heirs of the grace of life” means they don’t see themselves as two people just trying to get along, but as two saints, working together to help save each other, recognizing their relationship and inheritance is linked to God’s grace

The Role and Responsibilities of Husbands

A spiritually happy & profitable marriage starts with a husband’s love for his wife and concern for her well being

Eph 5:25—Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the ecclesia and gave himself for it **v28**—so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies [the natural love a man has for himself should become the spiritual love he has for his wife (v29), echoing the 2nd great commandment: love/do for others as you would want if you were in their situation (Lk 10:30-37); Paul is not teaching husbands need to love themselves before they can love their wife; such self-love is condemned in 2 Tim 3:2]

7 times Paul likens the marriage relationship to Christ and his bride, showing the (high) spiritual nature of a godly marriage. The husband has an incredible responsibility in fulfilling the role of Christ – to save his wife! This requires that he rise above his natural inclinations of looking out for himself and completely change his outlook to that of his wife’s spiritual well being. There are 3 components to the marriage relationship: the spiritual (v23-28); emotional (v29-30) and physical (v31).
The *spiritual*: the husband, his wife’s saviour, loving her with Christ’s sacrificial love; sanctifying her (keeping her holy, separate from the world’s evil); cleansing her with the Word to refine her character, to present her to Christ *ready for salvation* (v27).

The *emotional*: nourishing and cherishing her with tenderness and loving affection; being in tune with each other and connected; a unity of the highest possible level the relationship can achieve.

The *physical*: a culmination of the spiritual and emotional; a celebration of the complete relationship, including all 3 parts. For a marriage to be spiritually successful, both partners must submit to each other in the fear (reverence, high esteem) of God (v20); the same fear the Son had (Heb 5:7); a fear which draws a person closer to God in faithful obedience.

Being the spiritual head is not about authority/dominion, but responsibility to save his wife (v23-25) as Christ did his bride; headship means responsibility to save those over whom one is made the head (eg. judges, elders, kings, priests, Christ) A husband's love must also sanctify her (separate her from the world's uncleanness – Jn 17:19), cleanse her with the washing (renewal) of the Word; his lifelong aim is to *present her to Christ* holy and without blemish A husband should see God's wisdom behind the command to save his wife; God knows how He created her and His desire is for her to flourish spiritually – if we want to bring out the best spiritually in our wife, then we are to nourish and cherish her, treating her tenderly and lovingly, in an environment in which we are devoted to her salvation Christ's love doesn't come naturally – it must be learned; nor is it human love, the level of which varies by circumstance Courtship love is beautiful & romantic but must mature into self-sacrificing love, a love whose aim is salvation; romantic love isn't abandoned after marriage; it should blossom and have a deeper layer of love added – to become *a love that saves!* God brings husbands to the cross – see Christ's love & what he did for *his* bride? That love should be your love for *your* bride! In God's wisdom, He knows he cannot save a husband unless he learns to love as Christ loved; God teaches the husband to learn this love through his love for his wife, which transforms *his* character for salvation, while also saving her A spiritual wife will cherish and respond to a husband who devotes his life – out of love – to saving her's; this is true love

Col. 3:19—Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them

1 Pet 3:7—Husbands, dwell with them according to (God's) knowledge, giving honour to (*highly valuing*) the wife (*treat her as royalty, as a queen – cp 2:17*), the weaker vessel (*not weaker spiritually, but because she is vulnerable*), being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered. Peter echoes Paul: this is how husbands learn to overcome our natural selfishness and learn to love our bride as Christ loved his

Being sensitive to her needs is a God-given responsibility; her needs are different and must be recognized to be fulfilled Never show disrespect; never embarrass her in any way, ever! In private or public. Don't develop a habit of criticizing her at every opportunity—rarely, if ever, and then only with gentleness and forbearance

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband

Prov 18:22—He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord

“Scripture provides no support for a husband who thinks he is in any way superior, or that his sole role is to study the Word while his wife deals with the domestic chores. In his mind, his wife must be seen as a gift of God, a spiritual companion, a needed partner in the Truth.” [*Man & Woman, a Study of Biblical Roles, Michael Lewis, p14*]

The primary responsibility for a happy marriage rests with the husband

Man's authority is not one of sheer domination over his wife. There is nothing of harshness, oppression, self-centeredness or mastery. He is the lord of love in his home and he has cast his mantle around his beloved. He has made promise that he will care for her and create such circumstances as will allow her to respond with her love for him by building a home within the compass of his provision for her. He supplies strength and overall guidance in such a way as to fulfill the divine injunctions that husbands should 'love your wives as their own bodies'. Each husband should give himself for his wife as Christ did for the ecclesia and so nourish and cherish her that she may find ample room for the full expression of her tender love and unflinching care as though she were the bride of the Lord himself. [*H. Tennant, Christadelphian, 1978, p406*]

God's expectations of husbands: we will sacrifice our interests, serve her needs and satisfy her longing to be loved and adored Christ's love for his bride must be the standard by which we measure our love for our wife; we can't dismiss it as unattainable or unreasonable; it's how God transforms our character, by learning a love that has the power to save! In God's wisdom, He aligns my (husband's) salvation with my responsibility to save my wife; the only way to fulfill this is to learn to love as Christ loved, putting her needs before my own, dying to sin and becoming her servant (Mk 10:45); when we become good disciples, we become good husbands and vice versa

Christ, at the Judgment Seat, may ask husbands, “did you do all you could to save your wife?”

“Did you sanctify her and give your life for her? Did you wash her in the Word, to present her in splendour without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish? Did you nourish her, cherish her, separating yourself from all other relationships, giving her your full devotion, as I did for my bride?” – This is what the head does, all out of Godly love

Godly love is shown, not because a wife *deserves*, is *worthy* of, or has *earned* it, but because she needs it, and to save her! Human love is manipulative and transactional: “if you treat me nicely, I'll treat you nicely.” A marriage relationship built on human love won't weather the storms of marriage trials and the failings of the flesh; but a relationship built on Godly love can sustain the hardships and emerge stronger from them

If we treat our wife based on how she treats us, we're no different than all other men who do not have the Truth

We are to love her regardless of whether she is or isn't a 'model wife'; our love for her is to be unconditional

Bro Harry Tennant had one simple rule—seek your wife's salvation above all else

The trials of a marriage will always reveal the type of love upon which the marriage is built – either Godly or human love

Discipleship through marriage

But above all we know that our relationship in marriage speaks to us of the relationship of Christ and his ecclesia. It is in marriage that we learn to practice the things of Christ, to practice forgiveness and selflessness, to learn the true depths of love, to put someone else first, to subdue anger, to restrain a hasty word. If in our marriage we cannot learn these things then where else can we practice these qualities of discipleship? It is in the sharing of these things, which help each of us to be Christ-like in our lives, that we become truly one with our partner in our marriage. [*A. Walker, 1999 Christadelphian*]

The Role and Responsibilities of Wives

The role & responsibilities God assigns to the wife, based on Eve's creation, are distinctly different than the husband's

Eph 5:22-23,34—Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the ecclesia: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the ecclesia is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing...the wife, see that she reverence/respect her husband

Col 3:18 – Wives be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord

1 Pet 3:1,5 – Wives are to be in subjection to their own husbands, regardless of the husband's standing with God (v1), so the principle is not waived if her husband is not in the Truth or not diligent in his service to God

1 Tim 2:12 – A wife should not usurp the authority of her husband

Titus 2:5 – Wives are to obey their husbands; her focus is to be on her home: her husband and her family

1 Cor 11:8-9 – *"the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man."* The flesh thinks: possession and dominance; instead, think: *special care* and *responsibility to save*

Paul states the subjection principle in Eph 5:22 - a wife is to submit to her husband; v24 - she is to be in subjection to him, in everything. Which means the subjection is not only when he makes good decisions, but also when he makes poor ones

Subjection does not mean a wife is to be extinguished in the relationship; she still plays a valuable role as the "helper"

A wife's subjection is done by faith – "as unto the Lord" Eph 5:22; "the holy women...who trusted in God" (1 Pet 3:5)

1 Tim 2:11 – God did not create woman to fill a leadership role or to have authority in the marriage relationship

God doesn't ask a wife to put her faith in her husband; she is to submit to him, but her faith remains in God

Husbands are placed by God in the role of Christ in the marriage relationship – a daunting responsibility

This role is not one that husbands would naturally aspire to, knowing their weaknesses and numerous failings

Husbands are not asked to be a *type* of Christ, but to be Christ as a *reality*; nor are they asked to be the head, to lay down their life, to sanctify, cleanse, wash and save their wife in type, but as the reality

What should the wife do in support of her husband's mammoth responsibility? Be his "helper" (her God-assigned role – Gen 2:18), his companion and encourager, help him to be the best Christ he can be, especially when he feels overwhelmed or fails in his duties as the head

God's wisdom is evident: when a husband embraces his role as the saviour, it will transform him and save both people

A wife is to excel, not in her leadership of the marriage, but in setting the right example with a quiet spirit – 1 Pet 3:1-5

Subjection doesn't preclude her godly conversation/conduct (vv1-2) & her meek and quiet spirit, which God highly values (v4)

The holy women of old were subject to their husbands, but their faith was in God and their character reflected His ways (v5)

A wife shouldn't view the command to submit to and respect her husband as a thing imposed, but should submit by love

A husband needs his wife's respect, especially when he's made a bad decision; the respect is needed, not because he is

qualified, but because he is so unqualified; it enables him to keep going in fulfilling his responsibility as the head

Though he placed her in dangerous situations, Sarah remained subject to and retained her respect for Abraham ("lord" v6)

Respect starts in the heart and is a state of mind; Sarah carried her respect in her heart; her actions reflected her heart

Respect and submission to a husband are not things he earns or deserves; it's unconditional and it's something he needs

Sarah's example shows the wisdom of respect and its value to the head who is trying to lead, but who has many failings

The command to submit isn't designed to feed a husband's ego, but to encourage him to fulfill his responsibility as the head
It's what he needs, not because he is qualified but because he is so unqualified; his wife's continued respect helps prevent him from abandoning his daunting responsibility to fulfill the role of Christ in the relationship

Submission and respect is what the head needs to be the spiritual leader; leaders can't lead if followers won't follow; a

general cannot go into battle if there are no soldiers behind him; nor a conductor lead an uncooperative orchestra

We must see the dual divine commands: placing responsibility upon the husband to lead/save his wife and the wife to submit

God wants the wife to *willingly* submit to and respect her husband out of love, not because she has been forced to

The only way her husband can be the head in their relationship is if she willingly accepts his role along with her submission

In God's wisdom both the husband and wife must work together if the husband is to fulfill his responsibility as the head

She's asked to submit to the very person who carries the responsibility to save her – it's a wonderfully wise arrangement

While society sees submission as archaic, the divine model provides a perfect arrangement for the wife's salvation

The only way a wife can fulfill her responsibility to submit to her husband is by Godly love, based on faith

By placing her faith in God, not her husband, she trusts God will bless her and will not put her in a situation beyond what she can bear; that all will work out for her eternal well-being. God asks wives to submit to their husbands out of love for Him, not because the husband deserves it, or is worthy of it. But there's a tendency to put a human condition on this divine principle – when my husband is a good man and treats me right, then I'll submit to him; if he doesn't, why should I submit to him? That's human reasoning – you improve your treatment of me, I'll improve my treatment of you. A spiritual wife finds motivation and power to obey her husband because of her faith in & love for God. [*physical or emotional abuse requires outside intervention*]

"No husband is perfect, far from it, and it is tempting to find fault and justify one's own position. Dwell on his particular strengths instead and encourage him in these. The exercise of self-control and patience, refusing to explode at him over life's small hiccups, oft times make the difference between the successful and the ordinary marriage. If you can turn adverse events into opportunities for endearment and support you will sustain a closer and more enduring unity. Problems can become the building blocks that marriage cements itself on; they can present opportunities to share love rather than harbour resentment." [*Be Ye Doers of the Word, A Practical Guide for Godly Living, South Australia*]

Forgiveness needs to be immediate and continual – we must never tire of forgiving our spouse

Christ immediately forgave any and all personal offenses against him without waiting for an apology

From the cross, his first recorded words were a plea for those who put him to death to be forgiven ("Father, forgive them")

Stephen (Acts 7:60), Paul (Acts 21, 2 Tim 4:16), Joseph (Gen 50:20), David (to Saul) all forgave, absent apologies

It is not a sin to forgive a person who has not repented, but it is a sin to fail to forgive (Matt 6:11-12)

Immediate forgiveness doesn't mean we condone the sin; if it is serious enough the ecclesia must become involved, but any

disciplinary action is left for them to decide; our first response is to forgive; it should be the first thing we do, not the last

Apologies are very helpful and appropriate, but are not a prerequisite to forgiveness

The alternative is to keep score of who owes us an apology; but love doesn't keep score (1 Cor 13:5 – "thinketh no evil")

A marriage based upon immediate forgiveness will be altogether different from one that is not

The Wisdom of the Family Unit

The family unit is built upon the marriage relationship and reflects God's supreme wisdom

God designed the family with a mum & dad who: ① love God & ② each other and ③ are committed to each other's salvation. Into that home and relationship, a highly favourable spiritual place for a child to be raised, God places His children; an ideal environment for children to grow up learning about Him, His future, how they can be part of it and make Him *their* Father. A baby begins life with a sin prone nature and 2 parents devoted to teaching him how to overcome it – exactly what he needs. In God's wisdom, it isn't just the children who benefit spiritually in a family unit; the parents, by devoting themselves to their children's salvation, are saved in the process, because of the spiritual example they are compelled to constantly set. Everyone involved is encouraged unto righteousness and encouraged to encourage each other unto righteousness. God aligns our love for Him, the Kingdom, our spouse and our children, so that all the pieces pull in the same direction. It's all specifically and purposely designed to save everyone in the home, who are ALL God's children. We need to understand the wisdom behind the family unit so that we can fulfill our responsibilities and cooperate with it.

Its wisdom is further seen in that when people *deviate* from the divine model, they make it difficult for God to save them. There is no substitute for the family unit designed by God; any other model will *spiritually fail* the parents and the children. As with the marriage relationship, the family unit is the ideal place for the character flaws of our children to be exposed – in an environment of two loving parents, familiar with the failings of the flesh, and devoted to the children's salvation. Expect issues to arise on family outings – treat them as wonderful teaching moments; deal with them properly, out of love and not anger; then everyone can move forward; don't expect to have perfect kids – *they don't have perfect parents*. As parents, we are going to make a lot of mistakes, but God doesn't need *perfect* parents to raise His children; He only needs *devoted* parents who are committed to raising His children according to His ways. If God needed perfect parents, He would have arranged for His children to be born in the Kingdom, to immortal parents. The divine wisdom of the family unit is further evident from its continued use in the Kingdom (families of Zech 14:17).

A Kingdom heading family!

This can be an overarching theme for your children: they can understand it, relate to it and learn to embrace it – a goal for all. Paint an age appropriate picture of the Kingdom for your children so they will see that it is a better life to live for. The children will learn the Kingdom is the central focus of your family; especially important living in an ungodly world. It helps explain the WHY behind the family do's and don'ts, where you go, what you talk about, how decisions are made. It also helps explain why your family is different than other (non-Kingdom heading) families. Make it age appropriate; kids will grow to see family standards (and discipline) are done with the aim to save everyone. Put up a picture of the Kingdom in your home as a vivid reminder of its importance and what the family is living for. *A Kingdom heading family creates a family environment that encourages all to help save each other and not to live for self.*

The direction God is heading should be the direction our family is heading to be part of that future

As parents, this should be our primary objective for our children: to teach and encourage them to want to reflect God's character, to learn to live like Christ – to think, speak, love, preach, forgive and treat others as he did. God typically gives us about 18 years to teach and prepare our children for Him to then become their Father. The family unit is designed consistent with God's plan to fill the earth with people who reflect His glory; marriage is intended to provide a family environment to educate and prepare God's children for that specific future. *Everything else (material goods, career achievements, recognition) is of secondary importance to saving the family.*

Parenting's overriding divine principle: "If I want to raise a godly seed, I must be living a godly life"

Being a good parent starts with being a good disciple who genuinely loves God and puts the Kingdom first in his/her life. The best thing we can do for our children is to live the Truth ourselves! Showing them God's ways are the right way to live. There is no substitute for this critical responsibility of parents; if it's missing, it will leave our children hopelessly confused. Our children must see: ① we reverence God in how we live; ② the Kingdom is the most important thing in our life; ③ the Bible is special; ④ Christ is special; ⑤ the ecclesia is special; ⑥ prayer is special; ⑦ we love by putting others' needs first; ⑧ sharing the Truth with others is our responsibility, because as God is saving us, we should help save others. When our children see us living the Truth, the Truth becomes alive for them; it gives meaning to the principles we stress. In God's wisdom, children become a motivator for parents' right conduct and restrain parents from wrong conduct! Who is saving whom? Is it the parents saving the children or the children saving the parents? Both help save each other! The flip side is a sober warning: if our children see we're not living the Truth, we severely damage them spiritually!

In this age of confusion, our children need to clearly see 2 things: 1) what God's Truth is & 2) that Mum & Dad are living it!

"Parents in the Truth have only one life: the spiritual, which enters and shapens every aspect of daily living. This kind of living has a tremendous influence on growing children: to them deeds are far more powerful than words. Children who grow up in a family where attendance at ecclesial meetings is as habitual as the daily meals become accustomed to loyalty to the ecclesia as a way of life. If, as soon as they are able to read, they take part in the daily readings, they are absorbing a habit which will not be easily broken. If they see parents showing unswerving affection and devotion to ecclesial members, especially the lonely and the aged, they are likely to carry into their lives that care and affection for others long after they themselves have left the family circle. These things are not "preached" to the children: they are lived out in the lives of the parents. Children need not to be told that they must go to a meeting. It is unthinkable that a family should act other than as a family in all these things...Deeds rather than words, and example rather than exhortation are good rules for spiritual living, and children readily absorb them." [John Marshall, *The Christadelphian*, 1965, pg 199]

Mum & Dad must be united & consistent in their parenting and interactions with the children & their enthusiasm for the Truth. A united basis of discipline & counsel must be maintained or it leaves the children confused & promotes parental favouritism. If only one parent stresses the need for Bible education, meal and night time prayers, ecclesial attendance and how we are a Kingdom heading family, the children's ability to fully embrace the Truth themselves is severely impeded.

Our family is God's family and our children are His children; we raise our children to be God's children, not our own— Ps 127

The house (v1) God is building is not a physical structure, it's the family unit (the people), which is why v1 describes how God keeps the *people* (not the walls) in a city safe, and v3 speaks of *children*; God is building families!

V1 paraphrased: "Except the LORD build *the family*, they labour in vain that build it;" unless God is at the centre of the family, unless His principles are the foundation upon which it is built, all parental efforts, strenuous though they be, are fruitless. Children are a heritage (a thing of great value, passed on to us); they don't originate with us but with God and belong to Him. They are also called a "reward" (v3) God gives us; not a thing earned, but a thing given (by grace) independent of our deeds. Parents' response to the 'reward', given as a gift but belonging to God, should be to raise the child in a Godly home.

Ps 127 identifies our main objective as parents with the children God gives us: to raise them to understand and embrace His ways, so when they are older, they will embrace Him as their Father – the very reason He brought them into the world. Children are also likened to "arrows" (v4) and meant to be aimed! A mighty man (a marksman) would find his target and aim his arrow with *great precision*! We are to aim God's children in the right direction; they can't aim themselves. *If we fail to aim them, we can't expect them to go in a godly direction*

Ezek 16:20-21 – thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters whom thou hast *born unto me*...thou hast slain *my children*

Prov 22:6 – Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it

Isa 49:2 – Christ was an arrow (a polished shaft), hid in God's quiver as a youth

Conception is under God's control and guidance and results from God giving life to His children

He has known His children by name from before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4)

As with other aspects of life, there is time and chance for those outside the household of faith, but not for God's children. He has foreknown them, predestinated them to be like Christ, called them, justified them and will glorify them – Rom 8:29-30. Jacob, Leah and Rachel all recognized their children were from God (Gen 30:2, 17, 22-24); as did Boaz/Ruth (4:13).

(Additional references: Eve: Gen 4:1,25; Sarah: Gen 16:1-2; Isaac: Gen 25:21; Hannah: 1 Sam 2:21; Jeremiah: Jer 1:5)

The danger of disconnecting our children from God at conception is we end up thinking all occurred by our strength and timing

A Mother's Unique Role and Responsibilities

Mothers play a special role in raising children

"It is impossible to overestimate the importance (of the mother's influence on her children)...the ability to instruct through the everyday pattern of daily life is a mother's highest quality...From the mother's example, good or evil, children learn the rudiments of life. The mother who redeems the time, sees in all parts of her activities the need to honour the name of God, has the happy disposition of one who leaves the affairs of an unknown future in the hands of her God and concentrates instead on today and how she can please Him, will communicate this devotion to her children." *Swanwick Family Gathering 1986*

God created women with unique qualities; when it came time to ascribe who would have the greatest influence over children in their formative years, God sent the father into the field & instructed the mother to stay home & care for His children.

The mother creates a Godly home environment whereby children see there is a genuine devotion to the things of God

Dt 6:6-9 ("teach them diligently when you walk, talk, sit, rise") describes the need to put God's principles before the children's minds at every opportunity; they need to see God's principles being *lived* – mums have ample opportunity for this. She must be sound spiritually to establish a God-centered home and to fulfill Ps 127 (build the family on God's principles). Mothers were created with a special sensitivity to discern what is spiritually helpful (and destructive) for her children; she needs to share this with her husband, who, in turn, needs to be receptive to her unique insights, remembering her special creation/abilities.

The single most important aspect for a mother *is to be faithful herself* – her godly influence is *spiritual gold* for her children. Her kids observe: does she fret or speak of faith? Gossip or remain discreet? Complain for more or give thanks for what she has? Talk of the ecclesia in a negative or positive way? Love only those who love her, or love all? Hold grudges or forgive? At the earliest of ages, mothers represent the Bible to their children; they are Christ's commandments put into practice.

In God's wisdom, into the life of a (typically) young woman, herself a daughter of God, comes a tiny little bundle of joy that begins to grow up and observe and ask questions and make judgments on just how committed mom is to God's ways. The child becomes a daily reminder to mom of just how critical it is for her to remain faithful! Who is saving whom? "A mother's ability to create a home is priceless. No other person within the family has the privilege of spending so much time in building the very framework in which all other members live together. We live in an age when home-building has been replaced for many women by self-fulfillment in careers and other activities away from home. There are profound dangers here for all of the family. It may be that economic factors or illness of one's partner make this necessary. It can be that we choose this other way of life for other reasons. We read that "even Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). All of us assume responsibilities when we marry: the husband to provide and the wife to "do him good and not evil all the days of her life" and to look well "to the ways of her household" (Prov. 31:12, 27). These are our prime activities." *Swanwick 1986*

A wife must balance her responsibilities to God and family

"The Bible provides no support for a wife who would seek to evade her spiritual responsibilities and opt for a purely domestic role. As far as she is able, she must acquaint herself with the principles of divine truth revealed in the Word and be prepared to contribute to the Lord's work in the way He has prescribed." [*Man & Woman, a Study of Biblical Roles*, M. Lewis, p14]

Mothers have a primary responsibility to nurture children

We must not let the world undermine for our young mothers the valuable role they play in raising their children

Titus 2:4 – That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands

1 Tim 5:14 – I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

1 Tim 2:15 – Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing (*rearing and nurturing children of faith*), if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (modesty).

Prov 31:27 – She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her

- Note: In Prov 31:1-9, Lemuel recounts how his mother had educated him in divine principles, he learned as a teen and later recalled as an adult; in a precautionary and proactive manner she had warned him of loose women and strong drink

Why God hates sins of immorality: fornication, adultery and homosexuality and divorce

God hates and specifically condemns sexual immorality of any kind because these sins undermine the wisdom and destroy the eternal purpose of the marriage relationship and family unit, which are specifically designed to save His family

Adultery or women having children without fathers poses a spiritual catastrophe for the children

Homosexuality renders it impossible to establish a marriage relationship leading to a spiritual family environment, in which the children are raised to fear and obey God

Divorce is included among sins that destroy marriages and families, which is why God hates divorce (Mal 2:16); there is an enormous spiritual cost that is paid, not just by the husband and wife, but by the children, who typically suffer the worst “Man’s greatest weakness in this respect is his utter vulnerability to women. Therefore, every man should look inwards to his own marriage, create every circumstance to foster its well-being and avoid every place, person or condition which presents a temptation.” [*Husband and Wife in the Lord, H. Tennant, The Christadelphian, 1978*]

Teaching our kids about God’s supremacy – He makes the ‘rules’ in our house (not us) and we all live by them

The family takes its direction from God and the Bible, which defines right and wrong for the family in all matters

The rules don’t change based upon the whim of Mom/Dad because God’s principles don’t change; this aids on several levels:

- 1) It elevates the Bible in our children’s mind as the highest form of authority – they learn to value and respect it
- 2) The children see Mom and Dad don’t try to portray themselves as supreme; God is supreme; they too live by what He says
- 3) Mom and Dad don’t make up rules, especially those that are restrictive; all rules tie back to God’s Word & His principles
- 4) The children (especially teens) will come to see parental rules are linked to the Kingdom; the need for obedience is not just about pleasing Mom and Dad, it’s about pleasing God who is the originator of the principles behind the rules
- 5) They will learn to link the Bible to their actions (spiritual maturing); “*what does the Bible say is the right thing to do?*”
- 6) In the (oft times) difficult teen years, when they challenge the rules (we all did), they’ll see they’re not just challenging Mom and Dad, but challenging God! Making their challenge more serious and potentially jeopardizing their salvation
- If we, as parents, set up rules and restrictions that don’t tie to God’s Word, but reflect personal preferences, then when these rules are challenged, God is not in the conversation!
- 7) Tying family rules to the Bible helps later in life when the children transition to God as their Father and *set their own rules*

Children need rules, clearly defined boundaries of right/wrong; partly so they return to the right side when they are wrong

God’s wisdom in establishing the family unit – see the big picture

God gives us the command that we learn to live like Him

He then gives us children, as parents, with the command that we teach them to learn to live like Him, like His character

- as children, the foremost example they will follow is us – their parents; not what we *say*, but what we *do*

For us to be able to teach our children to live like God’s character, we must be living it ourselves

Our children, given to us by God, become added motivation for us to live like Him – who is saving whom?

The need to honour father & mother is a fundamental requirement for the wisdom of the family unit to be realized

The command is echoed many times: Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Prov 1:8; Mk 10:7; Col 3:20; Eph 6:1; 1 Tim 5:4; being reiterated in the NT shows it is not unique to the Law of Moses; its roots go back to Creation and the family unit God established

Within the family unit – designed to save everyone – each member must fulfill their role & responsibilities for all to be saved

Parents carry a massive responsibility as God’s representatives to their children – God’s ambassadors, teachers, witnesses;

it’s as if they wear a badge: “*we are God’s messengers to you*” and they never take the badge off

God places them in the highest position of responsibility within the family, then instructs children to honour and obey them

God isn’t showing favouritism and indiscriminately elevating them; parents bear God’s teachings and model His character

Children need to learn to honour & respect, not just their parents, but God’s teachings & character, whom parents represent

If the children learn to honour their parents when they are young, this will help them honour God when they grow up

If the children are permitted to disrespect or disregard their parents, it destroys the family unit and its purpose to save them

The parents have the primary responsibility to ensure their children learn to honour their father and mother

They cannot abuse the position of authority in which God has placed them, nor can the honouring be forced

It would violate God’s character, the very character parents are to model for their children, to force our children to obey

and/or honour us as parents; God never forces obedience, neither does He force anyone to honour Him

It’s possible when children are young to use excessive punishment to force compliance with the command to honour them

- Such children don’t learn to honour their parents, they live in (human, not godly) fear of them; when the children become teens, the fear becomes resentment and ultimately rebellion

How parents go about teaching the divine principle of the need to honour them is as critical as the principle itself

The parents must act in a way in which the children *choose* to honour & respect them, which reveals further divine wisdom

The commandment cuts both ways: the children must honour their parents, but the parents must also live in a way that is

consistent with and encourages such honouring; the commandment is directed *as much to the parents* as to the children!

Who is saving whom? In God’s wisdom, if both parents and children will embrace the commandment, it will save them all!

The importance of this “honouring parents” principle is a qualification for brethren to serve as elders (1 Tim 3:4)

A brother must first demonstrate sound shepherding skills within his family to be eligible to become an ecclesial shepherd. He must “*rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (reverence/respect). For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the ecclesia of God?*” So too the deacons (v12)

Reverence can't be forced upon children; it only results when they see their father loves them, treats them fairly, wants only what's best for them and administers discipline equitably and lovingly, because his aim is to save them, not be their master. 2 Tim 3:1-2 warns that in the last days, in which we seek to raise a Godly seed, children will learn to be disobedient to their parents as society seeks to break down and destroy the very family unit God designed to save His children.

“It (4th) is a commandment founded deeply on the reason of things...When the child comes into the world, its mind is a blank in all directions. Everything depends upon exercise as to how development will take place. If the child hears nothing but laughter and scorn and profanity, its higher capacities never will open: it will assimilate to surroundings, and grow up an insipid buffoon. But let it be taught that reverence and obedience to father and mother are duties which must be enforced, it will grow up in that deferential mood and attitude which will readily be transferred to God, when enlightenment opens the understanding in that high direction. *The fear of parents is the best education in the fear of God.* The commandment concerns the highest well-being of the child.” [Bro Roberts, *Law of Moses*, pg5]

As with all other aspects of our discipleship, raising children is to be done by faith

No part of our discipleship excludes faith; our obedience/love, in whatever form it takes, must spring from faith (Gal 5:6). When our actions arise from faith, we glorify God because it's His principles that we put into practice, not our own.

- We don't invent our own principles for love, forgiveness, preaching, caring for widows/poor; nor should we for parenting. Parenting must also spring from faith; we first identify the Biblical principles regarding parenting, then follow them by faith. We trust that if we obey God's principles (not invent our own way of parenting) God will bless our efforts; so if God says:

① we are to implement *a mammoth educational program* so our children learn His ways, we don't leave this to SS or CYC

② we are to teach our children to pray, then this isn't an option, it's our responsibility

③ we are to teach our children to honour their parents, we don't dismiss this as being too difficult in a godless world

④ we are not to provoke our children to wrath, we ignore this warning to our own peril and to our children's destruction

Parenting is not done by the strength of our own cunning ability, *nor necessarily as we were raised*, but by God's ways.

When it is done by faith, our prayers are not just to help us be good parents, but to help us rightly use God's principles and counsel in raising His children so that He can bless our efforts and be glorified (just like all other aspects of our discipleship). Parenting, especially when the children are little, is hard work; it is exhausting and relentless and *will exhaust us* when done properly, just like any other aspect of discipleship, if done with all our heart, soul, strength and might.

It's an enormous responsibility to take an infant and prepare him/her over 18 years to grow up to embrace God/the Kingdom. The enormity of the task isn't intended to discourage parents, rather to help us get our priorities right: *to save our children*.

Love and Discipline – our children need to know we love them, especially when we discipline them

Children need to be disciplined in the manner God chastens us – in a spirit of love, to correct and to save.

Discipline done apart from love is not discipline – it's punishment.

We shouldn't assume our kids know we love them; we need to tell them often – with words, hugs, treats and surprises!

Dads especially, just as we can't tell our wives too often that we love them, our children must be certain of our love for them; they don't know the depth of our love nor can they typically discern the subtle ways love is expressed by actions.

When children know they are loved, it strengthens the security they need to find within the family.

No one questions the love our Father has for us; we should follow His example in conveying this same assurance to our children. There must be a foundation of love that exists in our relationship with our children before we embark upon discipline; if a child

does not feel a parent genuinely loves them, the discipline will add confusion, not clarity, to forsake wrong behaviour.

A child can be 'successfully' disciplined (it is received, not resented) to the extent they know they are loved.

Discipline should never be administered out of anger, frustration or because we are tired or are having a 'bad day'.

Even when a child has done a very bad thing and severe discipline is needed, it must still be done out of love, to save.

If a wayward child knows the disciplining parent's love is genuine, the pain won't be felt in the child's heart, just his bottom.

Don't let public embarrassment, arising from your child's wrong conduct, cause you to intensify or amplify the discipline.

Discipline is vital, but must be done according to God's counsel and model

Proverbs stresses the need to discipline children, including the rod of correction (13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17).

The rod isn't intended to be a tool for *punishment*, but for *salvation*; nor should it teach children to resent divine principles. God knows the flesh cannot be transformed, even at an early age, without the use of discipline.

The world seeks to outlaw/eliminate the rod and God's command because they have no desire to see flesh transformed.

Scripture also warns parents (especially fathers) of a danger in discipline: it can drive our children to anger and leave them with a broken spirit, the *very opposite* of what God intends for parental discipline to accomplish (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21).

Eph 6:4 *provoke*: to enrage; *nurture*: to educate, may involve disciplinary correction (Strg); in Heb 12:5,7,8,11, showing that discipline must encourage the one being disciplined unto righteousness; *Godly discipline leads to righteousness*.

- *admonition*: a mild rebuke or warning, an exhortation (Thayers); when disciplining a child, think exhortation, not violence.

- When disciplining a child, if we overreact, our wrong response to their mistake can become greater than their mistake and leave them confused, given to wrath and driven *deeper* into sin instead of helping the child *recover* from their sin.

- Paul places responsibility for the child's response to the discipline squarely on the shoulders of *the father*, not the child!

Col 3:21 *provoke*: (different Greek word than Eph 6:4, but same meaning) to stir up to anger; *discouraged*: to be spiritless, disheartened; Thayers: a broken spirit; excessive discipline can drive our children to anger or leave them with a broken spirit. We need to know our children: what might be appropriate discipline for one child may not be for another.

Our discipline (& parenting) must be “of the Lord” (Eph 6:4); all is done under the umbrella of and consistent with God’s ways
- Our children may not always like the restrictions and discipline we administer, but they will know it is all of God
Parents (especially fathers) must never grow weary in disciplining our children, even for repeated mistakes
- If we lash out at or belittle them, how will they learn? We sin repeatedly, yet God never lashes out at us
God needs us to get our discipline right; done prayerfully and never from anger. If you’re angry, take time to cool off and give your child a chance to tell you what happened. Listen to them and then discipline to fit the mistake. It’s among the most difficult things parents have to do for their kids. It takes prayer and thinking through the issues and must be done well. The angels don’t overlook anything in our lives; they deal with all of it – not to destroy us, but to perfect us.

Our responsibility to teach our children – each family must have a massive education program about God’s ways

Consistent with the aim of the family unit, God stresses the need for parents to teach His/their children; it’s His expectation!

Deut 4:9 – but teach them (God’s statutes and judgments) thy sons and thy sons’ sons

Deut 6:6-7 – these words shall be in thine heart and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children

Deut 11:18-19 – lay up these words in your heart...and ye shall teach them your children

Deut 31:12-13 – Gather the people together, men and women and children...that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: 13 *And that their children*, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God

Deut 31:19 – God told Moses to have Israel teach their children the song God gave him, as a witness for God against the future disobedience God knew was coming after they entered the land

Deut 32:46 – set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you...which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law

Ps 34:11 – come ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD

Ps 78:5-7 – For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: 6 that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: 7 That they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments

Prov 1:8 – my son, hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother

Prov 4:1 – hear ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding (3 generations noted here)

Prov 6:20 – my son, keep thy father’s commandments and forsake not the law of thy mother

Prov 22:6 – train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it

Isa 38:19 – the father to the children shall make known thy truth

Isa 54:13 – and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD

There are multiple examples of faithful parents who taught their family to embrace God’s ways

Gen 18:19 – for I know him (Abraham) that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment

Josh 8:35 – the children were present when Joshua read the Law to the people

Josh 24:15 – as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD

Ezra 10:1 – children were present when the nation gathered to confess their sin of marrying unbelievers; it was fitting for the youth to be present to learn firsthand not to marry gentiles; it was a life and death lesson taught that day

Neh 12:43 – children were present on the day the nation assembled to celebrate the completion of the wall; 12 years later the children suffered spiritually (13:24) when their parents (present as children in Ez 10:1) sanctioned marriage with unbelievers
- The children in such marriages (to an unbeliever) inevitably suffer because the family unit, designed to save, is abandoned

Est 4 – Mordecai had taught Esther to evaluate life situations using a spiritual (God’s) perspective in order to make right decisions, even when it meant placing her own life at great risk

Jer 35:6-14 – Jonadab (2 Kg 10:23) recognized imminent apostasy and gave commandment to his family to live apart from it and to teach subsequent generations of the family to do the same – they did, for 240 years, and were blessed by God (v19)

Acts 10:1-2 – Cornelius...a devout man that feared God with all his house

Acts 16:15 – Lydia; when she was baptized and her household

Acts 18:8 – Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household

Acts 21:5 – children were present in NT worship and significant ecclesial events; ecclesia gathered to send Paul off

2 Tim 1:5 – the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice...how from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures (3:15)

God purposely designed rituals or established a symbol of remembrance at key events so children would make inquiry

(“what does this mean?”) and parents would be compelled to teach them the lessons God wanted the children to learn

- Ex 12:26-27 – when your children shall say unto you, what mean ye by this service...ye shall say, it is the LORD’s Passover

- Ex 13:8-9 – thou shalt shew thy son...saying, this is done because of that the LORD did...when I came out of Egypt

- v14 – when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, by strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage

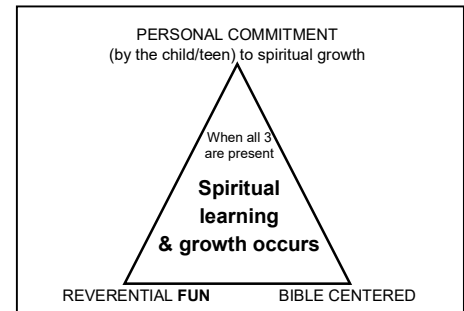
- Josh 4:6,21 – God told Joshua to set up stones, taken from the Jordan, to memorialize the nation’s crossing, “that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?

In all 3 instances, God wasn’t looking for parents just to recount exciting stories but to teach their children about redemption (the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ) and about salvation (the things concerning the Kingdom of God)

God desires that our children ask about His ways; He wants parents to create a home environment that encourages questions

Suggestions and recommendations for teaching our children

1. Make learning about the Bible fun! Spiritual growth occurs when: ① the child is committed to it; ② it's Bible centered & ③ (reverentially) fun
 - Fun is not foolishness or irreverent or God-dishonouring; but learning takes places in an enjoyable environment
 - Manitoulin Kids' Camp follows this model: learning takes place in an environment that is fun and Biblically based; kids learn a lot, grow spiritually and look forward to the next year
 2. Make the dramatic stories of the Bible come alive; children need to see how faith was a moving force for good in the lives of the righteous (Samuel, Mordecai, Esther, Nehemiah, Paul, etc); *when the stories live, their principles have power!*
 - Teach the children how to use their imagination when reading the stories & to place themselves in the midst of the action; don't stray from the text, but the stories are written to excite our imagination
 - When young, they see thrilling power in the *stories*; as they mature (teens) they learn to see power in the *principles*
 3. Daily reading is a must! Whatever time is best, whether you read all 3 portions or concentrate on 1; our children must learn the daily habit of being instructed from God's Word; Mom and Dad must both be committed; Mom can champion this
 4. The education we provide our children should be age appropriate
 - From ages 1-5 we teach/reinforce: God exists and the importance of the Bible and God in our life & the coming Kingdom; the difference between right/wrong, the need to treat others nicely & how to pray, even if their full understanding is lacking
 - From ages 6-11 we teach them how to read and begin to understand the Bible, removing its mysteriousness by identifying for them specific teachings (life lessons) from stories about right/wrong that can be put into practice in their life
 - From ages 12-teen we teach them spiritual skills that enable them to evaluate situations from a spiritual perspective using God's teachings and then act consistent with those teachings; a suggested model to use for a teen:
 - Step 1: he reads and reflects upon a Bible passage, chapter or story, in order to [Step 2] identify the divine principle it teaches, so that [Step 3] he can identify how the principle applies in his life, in order to [Step 4] ask God to help him hold himself accountable to live by it, with the ultimate aim of [Step 5] glorifying God by living the divine principle
- The aim of a family's massive education program is not to create Bible scholars, but to fill the children's hearts/minds with God's ways, thus creating a godly conscience (one they were not born with) to guide them throughout their life
- Baptism is the answer of a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21); it's the parents' responsibility to help create such a conscience
- Prepare yourselves for the teen years; they are not dangerous, just more challenging for both the teens and the parents; develop a loving relationship in the earlier years so they will see you always had their long-term spiritual well-being at heart*



There are key divine principles we need to teach our children before they move out of our house

These principles, if not learned, can be a source of trouble and/or confusion for them later in life; older ecclesial members have lost their way spiritually due to such confusion; simplified versions can be taught to our children at young ages

- 1) Salvation is by grace, the cross & by faith, but obedience is also needed, which is why salvation is both a gift & a reward
- 2) God redeems us from evil, but He doesn't protect us or prevent us from suffering under the evil
- 3) God uses suffering/trials to increase our faith; He can't save us if He can't teach us to trust Him and He oftentimes does this by putting us in difficult circumstances that challenge our trust
- 4) Daily prayer and reading of the Word are critical to a disciple's spiritual growth and a transformed character
- 5) The flesh is our great enemy as it is God's great enemy; never trust it, never rely upon it, never depend upon it; never be comfortable listening to its logic or reasons; it will deceive us and in the end destroy us
- 6) Always retain a standard of holiness by which to measure our conduct; we won't always measure up, but if holiness remains our standard, when we fall short, we will recognize the need to repent and return to right conduct
- 7) Our sins will be numerous, we will let God down repeatedly, but Christ's sacrifice can cover all sin, provided we conform to God's requirements for forgiveness; a person must never conclude he's become so sinful he cannot be redeemed

Children and Prayer – We teach our children to join with us in reading God's Word at an early age, even before they can understand or pronounce all the words. We need also to teach them at an early age to join with us in singing hymns of praise to God in our communal worship, and to pray to Him for help and guidance as they grow up in His presence and learn to lead lives that are pleasing to Him. This should start as soon as they are old enough to have any understanding of His ways. Children are expected to know and observe the way of the Lord – yet they cannot do that in their own strength any more than we can. "I can of myself do nothing" is as true of them as it is of us. God must therefore hear and respond to their petitions for His help and guidance when they are old enough to realize their need and approach Him in prayer.

Enjoy your children!

Our children can and should be our best friends. The early years determine the quality of life-long relationships. Their coming into the Truth is His mercy, despite our failings. Like the angels with us, there is only so much we can do for them. They must make the free will choice to serve Him. Their entering into the Truth & into the Kingdom is what we seek and are striving for.

"Children are meant to bring added joy into marriage and with that joy there is added responsibility. Children are born into the home which we create before they arrive. Coupled with our longing for children should be a longing that they will be willing to follow Christ. To that end we must make Christ live in their presence through our own lives. Godliness, an open and well-loved Bible and constant association in joy with the ecclesia should provide a secure environment in which the plants of childhood can grow. The love and understanding of the parents one for the other and unfailing love for the child will produce a sympathy and a love in the family which will be stronger than anything which the world can show. Moreover, the practice of prayer and dependence upon God in a quiet, unobtrusive but positive way will lead the child to an understanding of the Fatherhood of the Almighty and to a trust in him and in his word in Christ. Family discipline leads to discipleship. A home without discipline is likely to lead to unhappiness & the loss of some or all of the children to the ways of the world."

[HTennant, *The Christadelphian*, 1978]

Ecclesial aunts and uncles can be very helpful to parents in the raising of children

Your life experiences provide additional insight and validation for how God works in the lives of His children
Be willing to share your significant and spiritual experiences, especially life lessons learned the 'hard way'
In our ecclesias we have Naomis, Ruths, Josephs, Judahs, Jacobs, Elijahs, Davids, Sampsons, Mordecais and Esthers
In every case the flesh was humbled and exposed for what it is, and God was glorified
Older sisters are to teach young wives/mums the Godly love they must learn to have for their husbands/children (Titus 2:3-5)
- It doesn't occur naturally; older sisters learned to love through their husband's flaws and to put God first in loving their kids
When life experiences are shared with teens, it brings God's principles to life & offers unique encouragement to persevere
Spend the time/resources needed to develop a meaningful relationship with a teen, so he/she welcomes your friendship
Share how you learned to overcome the world's temptations, including your mistakes, so hopefully they can avoid these
The humanism of the frog-like spirits (Rev 16) in these last days requires the ecclesia to play a greater role in helping teens
Learning to overcome the world is not an innate skill; it must be learned; ecclesial aunts/uncles make excellent teachers

Faithful parenting

Mordecai taught Esther to evaluate life situations using a spiritual/godly perspective to make right decisions

"Honour your parents" was a living principle in her life as was walking by faith: Mordecai had taught her to trust God, do the right thing and leave the situation for Him to bless as He saw fit
He had a loving relationship with her; she never doubted his love, even when instructed to lay down her life for her people
They were a Kingdom heading family – his counsel: "live for the future Kingdom, not for this present life"
He had taught her key life lessons: God redeems us from evil, He doesn't insulate us from it; He uses trials to grow our faith

Jonadab and the faithful generations of Rechabites

He saw the apostasy of Jezebel (2 Kg 10) and made a vow of separation and dedication for himself and his family
He rightly concluded the family needed to make life changes to avoid being swallowed up by the evil of their day
He recognized the need to introduce new and more restrictive standards (than prior generations needed) to counteract and overcome the new and more evil enticements arising in his day
He introduced 7 standards (Jer 35:6-10) designed to preserve holiness and to protect the family from Jezebel's apostasy; these were to be taught to his family and all future family generations (v6: "nor your sons, forever")
He was a faithful father who took a stand for righteousness against the evil of his day, and 240 years later the family still honoured that stand and still stood against the evil
This is spiritual leadership – taking steps to save your family when you witness an explosion of evil in the world around you
It is possible to teach children God's ways, who grow up to teach their children, who then teach their children (Ps 78:6)
Jonadab's message to us: be willing and prepared to change the way we live because of the evil we now live in

In a remarkable statement, God declares Abraham a faithful father, the patriarch of a Kingdom heading family

"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Gen 18:19
God knew Abraham would command (Heb: charge/obey) his children and household to keep His ways – to live the Truth
Justice ('zadok': righteousness) & *judgment*: to live righteously yourself and encourage others to (Christ in Kingdom Jer 23:5)
V19 doesn't describe Abraham living the Truth, but *his children*; he taught it to them and they lived what they learned
"they shall keep the way of the LORD": he didn't teach his children to obey *himself*, but *God*; family 'rules' must link to God
His motivation to teach his children to live by God's ways, was *their* salvation; for them to be part of the promises
His was a Kingdom heading family! This is why there was a community of believers in the "east" in Job's day (Gen 25:1-5)
He raised his children "in the nurture & admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4) and taught them how to hold themselves accountable to right living
He fulfilled the command of Ps 78:5-7, to make known God's ways to his children so they would set their hope in Him
Abraham taught the principle of Gal 3:9 – it's "men of faith" (not the natural seed) who are blessed with him; a person must live by God's ways; he must "keep the way of the LORD to do justice and judgment" to be part of the promises
V19 is the simple, yet powerful parenting banner; it identifies what we should do as parents, how we do it and why we do it;
what: command our children to know and obey God; how: using an extensive educational process and by setting the right example in how we live; why: for the same reason Abraham did – so our children can be part of God's glorious future

Ch18 occurs *before* Isaac's birth and reveals Abraham's *commitment* as a father; ch22 shows the *results* of that fatherhood
22:7-8 is a gripping scene! What father cannot relate to Isaac expressing his plea/fear; Abraham encourages him unto faith
The evidence for Isaac being old enough to understand what was happening (late teens) and cooperating, is substantial:

- 1) He is old enough and strong enough to carry the wood for the sacrifice (v6)
- 2) He is old enough to know how to properly offer a sacrifice and that the required lamb is missing; if he is very young, it's a cute point of observation, but God doesn't deal in such, not in a situation of this seriousness; neither does God ask our children to put themselves in life threatening situations which cannot increase their faith, only their fear
- 3) He is old enough to understand and participate in God's worship as Abraham conveys to his servant (v5)
- 4) Abraham's response to Isaac's inquiry is to encourage Isaac to trust God; he is not hiding the situation from him
- 5) God doesn't cite Abraham's *paternal* love (for a young child) but his *spiritual* love, because of Isaac's spiritual character; "thine only son whom thou lovest" (v2) echoes God's love for His only Son, based upon his spiritual character (Jn 1:14)
- 6) God choreographed/recorded the events of ch22 to foreshadow the offering of His own son
 - take thine only son, whom thou lovest
 - offer him in sacrifice on an altar God provides
 - the two of them go off together
 - the beloved son will carry the wood
 - the son has great anxiety, the trial causes mental distress
 - Isaac will be offered and resurrected
 - it is God who provides the lamb both times
 - it is the father who offers the son, in both cases
 - the certainty of resurrection in both cases
 - both occur at the same place – Mt Moriah

These links, foreshadowing Christ's offering, are only meaningful if Isaac is a willing, cooperating, faithful lamb in Gen 22

- 7) “they went both of them together” (v6,8) shows they are together spiritually, as one, by faith – not their physical journey; the phrase has great meaning if Isaac understands the situation; it has NO meaning if he does not
- If Isaac is bound on the altar and is naïve, not cooperating by faith, he would be fearing for his life and likely screaming
 - When Abraham says, “God will provide a lamb,” he is not hiding the truth from Isaac; faithful fathers don’t hide God’s truth from their sons! Abraham was not lying to his son, nor was Isaac fooled or deceived into becoming the lamb of God; God did not require Abraham to lie to/deceive his son in the very event that pointed forward to the sacrifice that reflected the extreme love of the Father and the Son in overcoming Sin!

Abraham had previously taught Isaac what it means to trust God & live by faith! God deepens our faith through trial

- He taught Isaac to love God and remain obedient, even in the face of perplexing situations; the end will be your salvation

Just as importantly, Isaac had embraced these life-saving principles! While Scripture doesn’t record the teaching times

Abraham had with Isaac, it is evident Abraham utilized a massive educational program

Abraham had pointed and shot Isaac, as an arrow (Ps 127), in the direction of those things that are eternal

God declared (18:19) Abraham would teach his children to know and obey God; the events of ch22 validate he did!

The events of ch22 define what it means to teach our children about divine ways so they will embrace them and live them

Despite his many failings, Jacob provides helpful and positive lessons for parents

- 1) **Gen 48:15** – “*before whom my fathers Abraham & Isaac did walk*”; at this spiritually intimate setting, Jacob recounts to Joseph how God had fed, sustained & redeemed him from evil – as He had done for his great grandfather & grandfather
 - Jacob was impressing upon Joseph & his sons their spiritual inheritance going back 3 generations; a far greater inheritance than a physical one; fathers bear a responsibility to remain faithful to the end, as a witness to their children & gr/children
 - v21: a father’s final message: I’m going away, but trust God as I have; He will care for you & bring you to the promised land
- 2) **Gen 49** – Jacob recounts Joseph’s faithful response to his trials in Egypt following the hatred of his brothers (v23)
 - v24 is a declaration of Joseph’s faith in God during the treacherous years in Egypt; he abode in strength – strength in God
 - his words “*the mighty God of Jacob...even by the God of thy father*” show he found strength in the God of his father Jacob
 - Jacob had taught Joseph about putting his faith in God *before* Joseph had been unexpectedly whisked away into slavery
 - Jacob had prepared Joseph for his later-in-life trials, exactly what parents are supposed to do for their children; Joseph was placed in very difficult situations, but responded just as his father had taught him to! Trust God, He will sustain you
 - Herein lies the wisdom of teaching our children life-saving lessons *before* they leave our home; God’s command for parents to teach their children His ways is done for the children’s sake – to prepare them for their own probation
- 3) We must remain faithful to God for the sake of our children, even if they turn from the Truth or fail to accept it
 - It took a very long time for Jacob’s sons to eventually convert; they chose to reject the same Truth Joseph had embraced
 - Our children continue to watch & observe if our faith is genuine, even into their adulthood; if they see us forsake the Truth, we will be of no help to them; it’s because Jacob remained faithful to God that he could assist in their conversion
 - The brothers had retained their spiritual conscience for their mistreatment of Joseph (42:21), due, in part, to Jacob’s continued faithfulness; Judah cites Jacob’s faithfulness & past suffering as contributing to his own conversion (44:30-34)
 - Judah learned, from Jacob, the life-saving principle of laying down your life to save your brother (Joseph learned it too in 37:16); though Judah had not immediately embraced the lesson, the seeds planted eventually took root and bore fruit
- 4) **Gen 50:5** – Even after his death, Jacob is still teaching his children, because parents never cease teaching their children
 - Before Jacob had left Canaan, he prepared a grave for himself, knowing he would die in Egypt, to impress upon his family that Egypt should never be considered their permanent home
 - Just as the father taught the son, so Joseph, at his death, taught not only his sons, but the nation, the same life-saving principle, giving order that his bones should be carried back to Canaan when the nation left Egypt
 - Incidents such as these validate the divine wisdom behind the family unit; God knew that a special relationship would be created between parents and children and He looks to parents to *spiritually leverage* that relationship to impress upon their children the life-saving principles that lead to salvation

Bro Ken Styles