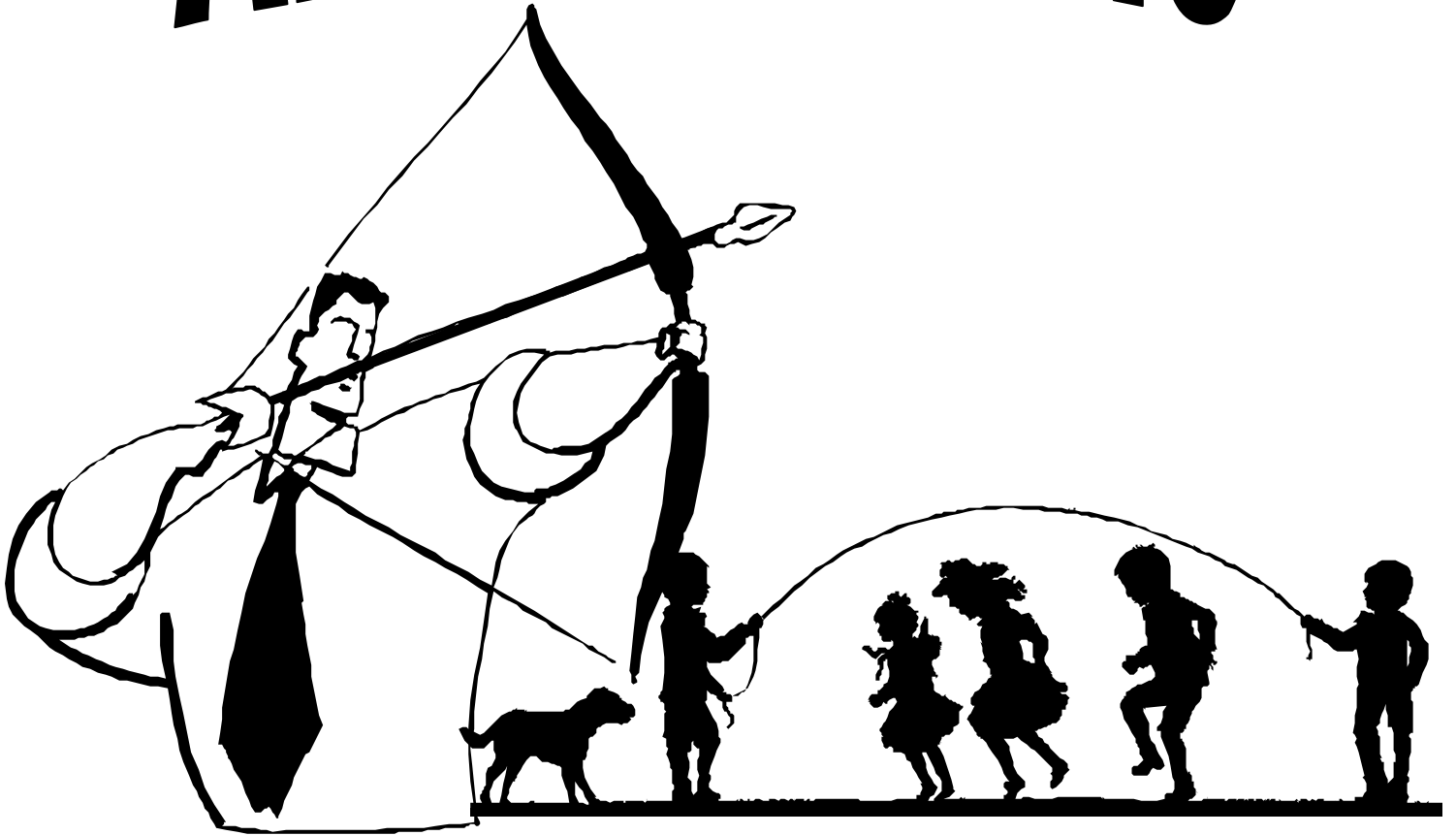


# Arrows in the



# Hand of the Warrior

**Ps 127: 4**

## **Amanda Buys' Spiritual Covering**

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# “Arrows in the Hand of a Warrior”

## Ps 127: 4

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A PARENT:

People did not invent parenting, God did. His is in a Parent-child role with us, His people, forever. He loves us and wants to nurture and develop us. He wants us to call Him by a parent name: “Father”.

Being a parent is one of the most important tasks God gives anyone. Children are a great blessing and a great heritage. Through parenting, humanity continues down through the centuries and the image of God is revealed in every new generation.

Parenting is a HUGE task. One of the elements of childhood is **dependency**. Dependency defines a child. Children look to and need parents for all those things they cannot provide for themselves.

#### Part I:

#### CONNECTEDNESS – THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE

Attachment is the capacity to relate to God and others, to connect to something outside of ourselves. When we make an attachment, good things are transferred between others, and us, e.g. empathy, comfort, truth, encouragement.

Attachment brings warmth, meaning and purpose to life. From the womb, your child is designed to connect. Leaving the womb, your child is in a state of isolation, terror and anger. He is utterly alone in his experience with no good things within or without him. Birth is a traumatic experience and the process of attachment (soothing and calming) helps the baby experience the good that exists in relationship.



We are by nature isolated, distrustful and afraid to reach out. Relationship brings us out of our natural tendency to be disconnected and self-sufficient. When a person is loved and treated well, he attaches to the person who loves him and treats him well. He learns to love and treat others well.

**Matt. 7: 12:** *“So then, whatever you desire that others would do to and for you, even so do also to and for them, for this is (sums up) the Law and the Prophets.”*

An attached person has the structures within himself to become a moral person. Attachment is not humanity's idea, but God's. Developing your child's ability to attach is of utmost importance. All of the tasks of life are based at some level, on how attached we are to God and others. Children who are emotionally connected in healthy ways are more secure. They delay gratification. They respond to discipline. They deal with failure. They make good moral decisions.

**The attached child is never left without a way to get the resources for life.** The connected child looks within himself for what he can provide, then goes to God and others for the rest. The detached child is left to fend for himself, and he does not have sufficient resources to conduct life on his own.

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF ATTACHMENT

Interactions between mother and child deeply affect an infant's developing neurological structures. The literal hardwiring of an infant's brain, including such basic functions as thinking, relating to the world, perceiving and judging, depends on the mother-child relationship.

Severe disruption of this attachment in the early months after birth can affect a child's entire life. An infant's very survival depends on relationship. God brings a child to trust in Him while at his mother's breast. (Ps 22: 9) The very act of learning to take in the goodness and nurture of the breast prepares your baby for taking in God's love and care. The child who is allowed to emotionally depend on a reliable, loving parent becomes secure with the assurance of mother's stability. As a child internalises his mother's love, he feels safe enough to explore the world confidently. **The first year of life is therefore critical to the development of attachment capabilities in a child.**



### LEARNING BASIC TRUST AND NEED

Your child needs to learn that being in relationship is the best way to live.

Basic trust is your child's ability to see the world of relationships as having enough goodness for him. The first few months of life, he is not very aware of mother as a separate person. He is well aware of warmth and goodness and begins to trust that this **warmth** and **goodness** will always be there when he needs it.

He learns that reaching out to connect is worth doing and that is reasonably safe enough to do. Children who have established basic trust tend to be **hopeful** people – good relationships will always sustain them.

### VALUE RELATIONSHIPS

Children need to see not only that connection is good, but also that having specified people in their lives is positive, too.

One aspect of maturity is our being able to value and appreciate other's love and sacrifice for us. This creates important traits like a **grateful heart** for others and the ability to seek out and connect to people who treat us right.

If a child is not taught to value people then they may use them only for their own comfort and then discard them. These people casually get out of relationships when they become inconvenient and cause great pain and hurt all around them.

They have learned that relationship only exists for them, that the other person has no feelings or rights. Or, when they grow up, they sometimes have problems picking safe people. Their lack of understanding may cause them to invest in people who are irresponsible, charming, deceptive, or controlling.

Help your child become a people-oriented person. **Talk** to him and **listen** to him. Assist him in talking about how you and him feel about each other. Show gratitude for the good things he does. Require gratitude from him. Let your child know how his reactions affect you.



If his attitude hurts your feelings or angers you, tell him. Let him know that you will not allow yourself to be treated in disrespectful or harmful ways.

### INTERNALISE LOVE

An important milestone for your child is to be able to soothe himself when you are not there. To achieve this independence, you need to shift from an external presence in his life to an internal one. Your child's many experiences of safety and consistency combine over time into a stable, internal, mental and emotional representation of you.



In times of aloneness, stress, loss, or conflict, your child can draw upon this picture and feel soothed, stable, loved, and structured. He can then use this picture to solve problems and make decisions.

The task of having an internal parent is completed ideally at about three years, but matures all through life. He does not experience this parent inside him, but as a part of his very self.

Not: "Mom loves me, so I'm okay."

But: "I'm a loved person, and I'm okay."

There is no substitute for the many, many loving experiences with you that your child needs to internalise. Provide many occasions when you are there for his needs. As he matures, gradually induce him to draw upon the internal love rather than you all the time. This helps him become more independent. Sleeping in his/her own bed, feeding himself, baby sitters, etc. are all part of this process.

### DEVELOP CAPACITY FOR LOSS

When we lose someone or something we love, we are faced with the reality of living in a fallen world, one that most of us are not really prepared for. Success in life involves learning to deal with loss.

Attached children learn to protest, mourn, and resolve their losses. Children need to attach to people and things so, when they lose something, they can bring their sad feelings to these people, who will help them let go of what they have lost. When children do not attach, several bad things can happen. They devalue what they have lost: "I didn't want that doll anyway."

They may protest: "But I want it!"

They may chronically mourn: "I will always miss the doll."



A capacity for loss helps children accept the world is as it is. It also helps them love and value people they miss. Crying and sadness are a part of this process and a mark of maturity. Sympathize with your child's loss. Help him value good things but also help him protest, let go, and resolve losses. The capacity to mourn a loss and to move on after mourning is a mark of maturity.

## **DEVELOP GENDER ROLES**

As children grow into the preschool years, they begin learning how to attach to people of the same sex and of the opposite sex in distinctive ways. Little boys want both to be like and to compete with Dad; little girls do the same with Mom. Girls want to marry their dad, and boys their mom. Parents need to contain and structure these intense feelings for their children.

Mom needs to reassure her son of her love for him, and at the same time tell him: "I'm married to Dad, so I'm taken. But you will later be able to find someone special for yourself." And Dad needs to accept and deal with his son's competitive attitudes towards him.

## **RELATE TO THE WORLD**

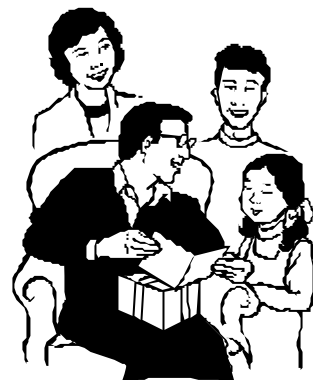
Children use relationships as a springboard of safety from which to explore the world of preschool, games, imagination, sports, and peers. Parents need to listen to and help make sense of the many interests the child has. Attachment helps children sort through what they like and don't like.

## **DEVELOP GIVE AND TAKE**

A relationship requires give and take. This ability develops during the early school years. The other person does not exist for the child and also has needs that have to be met in this relationship. **Relationships cost something.** If both parties do their responsibility for the relationship, things go well and both people grow. If the child sees the connection only in terms of his interests, he will have great conflict with people later in life. Reward your child for, and set limits on, his involvement in the day, welfare, and feelings of other family members as a basic attachment responsibility. "When you have told your story, ask the other person about their day." Do not reward bad and selfish attitudes. When he does not show interest in others, let him suffer consequences for that. Mutual love requires practice and experience.

## **TEACH SELFLESS GIVING**

The most mature attachment skill is selfless giving – giving out of concern for another without regard to oneself. It is the essence of God's love. Selfless giving has no other agenda, no other motive, except the welfare of the other. Growing up is a pretty self-centred endeavour. A childish person is often a self-orientated person. A child must learn with the comfort that they themselves have received.



**2 Cor. 1: 3,4:** *“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of sympathy (pity and mercy) and the God [Who is the Source] of every comfort (consolation and encouragement),  
4 Who comforts (consoles and encourages) us in every trouble (calamity and affliction), so that we may also be able to comfort (console and encourage) those who are in any kind of trouble or distress, with the comfort (consolation and encouragement) with which we ourselves are comforted (consoled and encouraged) by God.”*

Showing selfless love (not martyr love, but a love based on free and good-natured choice) to your child, you give him the fuel to give that back at some point. Reward him when he shows compassion for his friends. Let him see your selfless giving toward other people and encourage the same in him. You are building on his attachment capacities so that he can be a truly loving person, the highest goal.

### HOW ATTACHMENT HAPPENS

Specific **tasks** create the ability to connect. The child has his job and the mother (or primary caregiver) has hers. These two jobs interact to help the child become capable of making attachments to people.

The child must experience the reality that relationship is good and that it brings the necessary elements of life.

When your child learns this emotionally, he structures his existence to **seek** relationship to sustain him. He becomes relationally oriented rather than self-oriented.

The mother's task is to invite her child from isolation into relationship. This takes many experiences in order to bear fruit. The mother behaves and responds to the child in a fashion tailored to his particular situation and need. She pays close attention to her child's differing cries, so as to meet his appropriate need for comfort, warmth, changing or safety. He learns that reaching outside for help brings the things he needs.



All this is designed to help the child not only take in love, but also perceive love as a good thing – something to go after in life.

### THE CHILD'S TASKS

Needs drive us to risk attachment. From birth on, as a trigger for action, your child is designed to experience the discomfort of what is called “need states”. When he is lonely, afraid, anxious, hurt or hungry, he needs to respond in some way to this discomfort. He may cry, fuss or call out for help. The child takes the initiative by protesting, reaching out and getting the parent's attention. Do not underestimate the value of crying and fussing. These are the primary signals a child has to communicate his discomfort to the world.

Children grow in attachment by experiencing both relational needs and functional needs.



**Relational needs** are those that are met by connection itself (comfort, encouragement, love and affection). Relational need experiences are valuable in teaching connectedness to your child.

**Functional needs** may involve relationship but are primarily met through “**doing**”. Functional need experiences help the child learn that reaching out bring good.

**Relationship is always more important than function.**

The child’s task is to protest long enough for help to get to him.

A child has many empty places inside him. The younger he is, the emptier he is. One of his main jobs in the first year is to take in love through thousands of loving experiences. As his mother picks him up, cuddles him, holds him and feeds him, he literally internalises the love he needs to stay alive.

The older the child, the less he needs from Mom and Dad, as his earlier experiences become as internal source of comfort and nourishment.

A child does not receive the good passively. He goes out to find it and then actively responds to love. He experiences love, takes it in, feels more loved and safe, feels grateful for it, gives the gratitude back and uses the love to grow and do his tasks in life.

Nothing is more active and requires more initiative and activity than bonding. It is a lot of hard work.

## **THE PARENT’S TASK**

As caregivers and the source of meeting most of their child’s needs, parents must actively be there for attachment needs. Parents need to be attuned and aware of the child’s emotional need states. Especially in infancy, the child has no confidence that anyone will be there to help his distress. Discomfort and pain drives him to scream.



This calls the parent to action in connecting the child to life and showing him that there is someone outside of him who will comfort and sustain him.

Parents need to understand the basically empty, loveless and impotent situation of their child and devote enough time and energy to fill the child up with themselves. Mainly, a child’s mother meets these needs in the first year of life.

When mothers are cold and aloof, children often respond with coldness themselves. First, they protest. Then they go into what is called despair and then into detachment. Children then become quieter and less fussy. They are actually in trouble, as they have become cold to the love they need. They have disconnected from life itself. Responding to the children’s needs is a full-time job during the early stages. It is exhausting and taxing work as she gives all she has to someone who has nothing.

A mother needs to remember to stay connected to loving, warm, supportive adults during this time, as she can become drained and then be without emotional resources for herself and her baby.

Another aspect of responding to a child's need is **predictability**. Children are not stable inside. Their emotions are not regulated and they have no sense of security and safety. They are in a constant state of turmoil inside. The consistent "being there" of the parent provides a structure that begins to calm and soothe the child. He is able to take in this structure and rest in it, learning that attachment has an order to it.

Inconsistency here often results in anxious or ambivalent behaviour in the child. This child could often be clingy when mother is leaving the room, but then arch away when she returns. The child is stuck in the dilemma of needing someone who is unreliable; he does not trust that she won't go away when she finally does arrive to meet his need. Your child needs **connection** for his isolation, hurt, loneliness and so forth. He needs **answers**, suggestions, advice and problem solving for his functional needs. He does not have the ability to distinguish one from the other. Your task is to ensure that your child learns that relationship comes before anything. Help him connect by being understanding, being warm, listening well and being empathic.

**Empathy** is a critical ability for character development – feeling the pain or distress of another – an experience that drives one toward another to provide comfort. Empathy is more than an intellectual validation of someone's problem; it originates deep within our soul. Empathy says to the child, "You are not alone; you are loved and understood".

Simply connecting can solve what sometimes appears to be a functional problem, e.g. the child whines to play outside during homework time. Comfort him with understanding and empathy; he will settle down and finish his homework. Be aware also, of the tendency to solve **relational** problems **functionally**, e.g. ① an exhausted mom sticks a bottle in the needy infant's mouth; ② Dad gives a lonely child a toy with which to amuse himself; ③ you want to be understood but instead you get a lecture.

## **CONNECT WITHOUT INTRUDING**

Make attachment inviting by giving your child a certain amount of freedom and emotional space. Children's bonding needs are not constant. Most needs occur in cycles. When you have met the need for comfort and connection, the intense closeness is satisfied and the child will try and wriggle away. The child uses the fuel of love to begin safely exploring his world. If the parent is non-intrusive, the child feels free to move back toward relationship again, without fear of being smothered. **Children with intrusive parents experience relationship as controlling or enmeshing.** They will then assign bad things to closeness – this destroys freedom. They will sometimes react by shutting down emotionally and withdrawing inside to get away from the relationship. Or they will angrily distance in rebellion to a parent holding on too tightly.

Intrusive parents cause children to struggle greatly with intimacy as adults. They experience closeness as something that will destroy, violate or imprison them and they are not able to accept the attachment offered them. Love is not self-seeking (1 Cor. 13:5). Love desires the freedom of the other. It does not seek to comfort itself, but the other. **A good parent invites but does not demand connection the child does not need.**

A parent who has deficits in attachment himself may be trying to get his dependency needs met through his child. If you demand closeness to meet your own needs, it inhibits freedom and robs the child of experience – love can then become something your child dreads instead of seeks. Help to build a connected foundation inside him that will sustain him for life.

## Part II

THREE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS NECESSARY TO BUILD GODLY CHARACTER IN OUR CHILDREN: **GRACE, TRUTH AND TIME**

### GROWING A GODLY CHARACTER

Growing your child's character always involves two elements:

1. **Development:** Training through experience and practice.
2. **Internalising:** Taking those experiences inside to become a part of his personality.

**Teaching** transfers information from one to another. But teaching alone does not make the child "own", or take responsibility for, the information.

There are two types of "knowing" in the Bible:

1. "We are to 'know' (or understand) the truth to be free" (John 8:32).
2. Adam "knew" (or experienced in an intimate and personal way) Eve (Gen 4:1).

Your child needs not only to understand relationship, responsibility and goal setting, but also to **experience** these realities in an intimate, personal way.

The operative word for this part of character development is **experience**.

**We grow from what we engage in**, e.g. you cannot learn to ride a bicycle from just reading a book; you have to get onto the bike. So, too, character parenting provides a wealth of experiences that help the child learn about realities such as relationship, responsibility and forgiveness. Your child needs to be actively engaged in maturing at all stages of life. As a beginner in character, he starts out as a mistrustful, irresponsible, self-centred being. As he gains experiences of character training over time, his abilities to connect, take responsibility and give to others gradually increase and expand.

### THE INGREDIENTS OF GRACE AND TRUTH

Grace means "favour". Grace-filled people are kind towards others; they are "for" a person and not against him.

True grace is not earned; it is given freely out of love.

The many forms and qualities of grace include:

- Kindness.
- Empathy.
- Forgiveness.
- Compassion.
- Understanding.
- Provision.
- Love.
- Help.

**Truth** is the state of being reliable and trustworthy. It is ultimately **reality**. If we live in truth, we do what is right. The many forms of truth include:

- Morality.
- Standards.
- Expectations.
- Evaluations.
- Judgment.
- Confrontation.
- Discipline.
- Limits.
- Honesty.
- Integrity.

When a parent only gives **grace**, the child will probably lean toward letting himself slide when requirements are upon him. Inside he would have internalised a loving voice saying, "That's okay. Everything is still okay, even if you did not do what you were supposed to." This ignored reality.

When a parent only gives **truth** the child could be under the demands of a critical **conscience**, never able to do enough and always threatening himself with guilt, fear and maybe even anger at his imperfections. If he were aggressive, he might rebel against his parents' harshness.

## **INTEGRATION**

One goal of parenting is to **integrate grace and truth**. From the beginning, parents must at the same time love their child and provide **limits** and **structure**. They must be loving and firm. They must be kind, but require the child to do his part. They must be compassionate and forgiving, but require the child to change and be responsible. Soft on the person, but hard on the issue.

Grace establishes and maintains the quality of the relationship and truth adds direction for the growth and structure of a child's behaviour and performance. Grace lets a child know he/she is loved. Truth guides him/her on what to do and what to become.

## **WHERE DID THESE TWO ORIGINATE?**

In the beginning God created humankind after His image or likeness.

Again and again the Bible describes God as a Being of **grace** and **truth, mercy** and **righteousness**. As God lives out these qualities and passes them on to us as His creation, we are to live them out as well. We need to have the love that sustains our relationships in life and the truth that guides us to safety and good performance.

We are not born with these qualities fully developed. We are only born with the potential for these qualities. For the potential to become reality, the qualities of **grace** and **truth** must be developed and internalised within us. To develop means, "to cause to grow or expand". Parents must help children to grow and expand their **capacities for grace and truth**.

As you love and discipline your children, set requirements and provide consequences, nurture and teach, and help them get through failure and turn it into learning, your children will grow through experience.

Children need more than experience and practice. They need to **internalise grace and truth**. As parents model grace and truth, children take these qualities into themselves as part of their personalities; grace and truth are forever etched into the hard wiring of their brains to guide them through life. Grace and truth become the “voices” inside that encourage them through the day, help them feel a sense of hope, love and forgiveness and correct them when they do wrong and no one is looking over their shoulders. These qualities cause them to feel appropriate anxiety about the need to get jobs done, or the need not to violate conscience and standards, and they become the fuel to move them along that path.

**What once was outside becomes inside.** If a child hears soothing, forgiving, encouraging voices, and if he experiences these in his relationships, he will have these qualities as part of his makeup, and they will guide him through life. If he receives correction, discipline, instruction, truthful confrontation and consequences, he will have the truth and reality will guide him to perform along those lines. But, he will not be able to put them together if he has not experienced them together. Do not give them grace without truth or vice versa. Let them discover that reality, the truth, is actually **for** them and not **against** them. Grace shows them favour and truth shows them that reality is real and how to live it.

## THE TIME FACTOR

### QUANTITY TIME



Children are living organisms, like plants. They are growing all the time in a continuous process. So, if children are growing, someone had better be sure that this growth is happening in the right direction. Example: When planting a vine, the direction it takes as well as the health of the vine is entirely up to you. If you ignore it, growth still happens and can cause damage to neighbours' property!

Children will grow, but without you they will go their own way. Your children could end up being trespassers, going into places where they should not be and doing damage. Some choke and stifle themselves in their own growth.

As an unpruned vine can get entwined in its own branches, so can children get so wrapped up in themselves that they are unable to handle it. They get **depressed, withdraw**, are **fearful** or suffer from **lack of confidence**. They may turn to substance abuse or some other way of retreating from life. Therefore, **the first reason** that quantity of time is important is that growth is happening continuously and you must be there throughout the process. This takes a lot of time and you cannot “skip” time.

**The second reason** for quantity time being important is that since children internalise things from the outside world as they grow, you have to be ever-present, monitoring the things they internalise.

The quantity of love and discipline you give must be metabolised over time with the child. It must be taken in, understood, turned into neurological structures in the brain, practiced in the body with experience, corrected by that experience, re-internalised in a different fashion and given more fuel to consolidate it. This process takes large quantities of time from the parent. You cannot give it all in a “quality” moment, because then the child cannot use it over the process.

**The third reason** for quantity time being important is that children need to grow in relationship with another person in order to develop character. Your child needs to experience all of the aspects of himself with you relationally:

- Needs.
- Weaknesses.
- Vulnerability.
- Hurt.
- Sadness.
- Anger.
- Strength.
- Failure.
- Talents.
- Opinions.
- Assertiveness.
- Honesty.
- Sexuality.

Internalising a **new skill, habit or moral teaching** is a process – one that involves **ignorance, failure and disobedience** on the part of the child, and **discipline, encouragement and teaching** on the part of the parent.

## THE PROCESS

1. Introduce children to the **reality**. They must be taught or shown a concept, rule or behaviour before they understand it. **Children who are taught through anger develop anxiety, fear and uncertainty.**
2. Allow children to hit the **reality limit** of their **ability**. Children will fail when they try something new. They will not get it right the first time; they may not obey the first time. Failure is part of the process.
3. **Transform the failure**. When a child fails or is disciplined there is usually an emotional component to that event. Some failure and discipline hurt. The child may be **sad** or **angry**. In such cases the parent must empathize with and contain the child's feelings. **Empathizing** and **containing** are crucial to the process because they re-establish the parent's emotional connection with the child and win him over eventually to the side of reality and truth. Empathy helps the child to identify with the limit or the reality of his performance. In contrast, anger, guilt and shame distance him from the reality he needs to internalise.
4. Help the child to **identify with the reality**. If the child feels understood and loved while he sees the reality of his actions – he is ready to identify with reality. He will take in the reality of the rule, the concept or the needed growth step for the skill and move forward. It becomes a part of him: “Oh, I see.”

5. **Encourage** your child to **try again**. Learning takes more than one day. They have to assimilate the knowledge that they learned in the failure and make adjustments inside of them. Then they try again. The process of correction, metabolising and internalising is repeated.

These learning steps are a specific sequence of events in time. That is why parenting takes time and cannot be done from a distance.

Parents also need to understand how a child uses time to become a mature person. You cannot accomplish something “before its time”, e.g. you cannot teach an infant to read; reading belongs to school-aged years. You also cannot teach preschoolers about dating; that belongs to the teenage years.

Do not think you are going to have better children if you push them to learn things early. Parents who push their children are more concerned about themselves and their feelings of pride and accomplishment than what is good for the child.

Children may not be ready for what you expect of them; you may harm them if you require them to do things for which they are not ready.

## GROWING UP:

Generally, children develop along a predictable path:

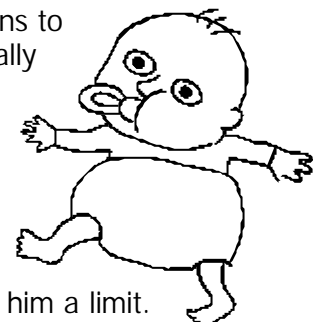
### THE FIRST YEAR



A child creates a **bond** with his parents and learns to **trust**. He must establish a healthy dependency and learn that being part of a relationship is a good thing. As the infant learns how to attach securely, he develops physically and cognitively. He spends most of the first year having his needs met and finding out that he is wanted. You cannot spoil an infant by loving him too much! Hold him often and comfort his distress. Meet his needs as he is totally dependent and helpless.

### THE SECOND YEAR

**Discipline** and **language** enter the scene. The child now learns to be a **separate person** and begins to get more mobile, eventually walking. He finds out what limit is. He adds “no” to his vocabulary and your task is to learn how to respond to it. You need to be present for your child while he learns independence, and he needs to be able to run back to you for refuelling his need for security. Be available to your child and give him time to test his budding autonomy. When he goes too far, or does something you have taught him not to do, give him a limit. But remember, he is just learning, so give him enough experience to know what he is doing wrong before you discipline him.



Soon thereafter, a child **finds** out that you are not going to do everything for him, and he has to cope with a few more rules and a few more structures. He begins to learn about **morals** as well as the difference between him and his siblings. **Play** becomes paramount – it is his way of “going to the office”.



In childhood years, a **group** is important. A child needs to learn how to operate in a group. In the school age years, a child rapidly learns skill development and social behaviour. Somewhere else besides home, he learns appropriate behaviour and many new skills and activities.

**Adolescents** almost begin life anew. Independence is at a whole new level. Sexuality is budding. Dating and opposite sex relationships enter the scene. The child questions his/her morals, values and ethics. The peer group becomes a powerful influence and you need not only to provide guidelines, but also to start letting go.

One reason why parents should not expect too much too young is that there are critical **windows of time** for certain developmental tasks. The general thinking is that children need to go through these stages at the appropriate time because windows open up at a certain time in a child's development. Example: Certain areas of the brain develop at certain ages and a child needs to have age-appropriate experiences to match those changes in the brain. If holding and bonding are missing or rushed, it is more difficult for a child to "make it up later". Or, if discipline comes too late, then powerful **rage** develops out of control and becomes an enduring personality trait.

Let your child be who he needs to be at that time, not forcing him to be older than he is. Let your children have the full timeline God designed for them. If we are impatient, we try to harvest "maturity" before our child is ripe. Do not rush your child; enjoy the process of growing up and maturing. Enjoy them because before you know it, they will be grown up – it goes so fast!

## **INTEGRATION**

Integrate time with grace and truth: GRACE + TRUTH over time = GROWTH.

Giving grace and truth for a weekend or once a month will not work. Giving only truth over time will also fail. That is a prison. Giving only grace over time is disastrous.

A child needs to know you are on his side = GRACE.

He needs to know you will give him reality = TRUTH.

He needs it every day, from birth to his late teens – have a good TIME!

# DEVELOPING CHARACTER TRAITS

## 1. DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY

### Responsibility puts love into action

Every caring parent wants his/her child to do well in life – having a good job, financially successful, honest, hard working, etc.

The **key** to all these qualities is **responsibility**. The child who learns that responsibility is his **friend** is one who has a head start in life.

Responsibility defined: The capacity to own one's life as one's problem. Responsible people are much more apt to be successful in their relationships, work and mission in life. They are not waiting for someone else to make them successful. They take action and find solutions to their own problems.

Children are always “working” at something. It is the parent's job to help structure their time and energy into activities that develop responsibility.

Children who have internalised a sense of responsibility are also free to make good moral decisions. Responsibility leads to freedom – to behave according to their values instead of reacting to their whims and immaturity.

Being responsible makes life run better. Irresponsibility brings bad results.

When they face temptation to have sex outside of marriage, smoke dope, etc. they have been making free choices in other areas for some time already. They are not imprisoned by their impulses or resentment of authority. Because they have earned freedom, they are free to say “no” to bad things.

Choices and information are indeed important, but a child needs to practice self-control, delay of gratification and setting and receiving limits before he can choose the good and refuse the bad.

The primary function of responsibility is to **put love into action**. We are here to bring the love God offers to the world – we protect, share and grow this love by responsibility. We are to develop it by performing good works.

Relationship is the reason for existence. Responsibility is the means to bring it about and protect relationship.

**Responsibility keeps love alive!** Mutual trust, respect, honour and integrity keep love nourished.

From the beginning, life included **love** and **work**. **Gen 1:28:** “*Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over...*” They were responsible for certain tasks.

Responsible people have developed many abilities:

- Making decisions.
- Solving problems.

- Being truthful even when it hurts.
- Structuring love.
- Taking initiative.
- Having self-control.
- Resisting evil.
- Being free to choose.
- Owning one's mistakes and learning from them.
- Performing good deeds.
- Being actively involved.
- Persevering.
- Living according to one's values.
- Entering into conflict for justice and righteousness.
- Having integrity and virtues.
- Protecting the weak and oppressed.

Bonding/attachment and responsibility must grow together the same way that love and truth are to be integrated. Example: Many very attached children are irresponsible, unreliable and totally out of control at worst. They constantly interrupt the conversation of adults by their own demands.

**Big problem!** From the beginning the child has no interest whatsoever in becoming responsible. Children cannot see value in taking responsibility for a problem. They are without self-control. They are into controlling others and manipulating their parents into taking care of things for them.

## THE ROLE OF BOUNDARIES

Setting boundaries is a central part of developing responsible character in your child. Boundary experiences enlarge the child's ability to be an honest, responsible person. **Your boundaries become the structure that the child must internalise and make his own.**

Teaching responsibility to your children has **four qualities** in view: **Love, truth, freedom and reality.**

### 1. Love

Children learn responsibility only from a loved state. You must forge an emotional alliance with your child before he will develop any sense of responsibility. The child must know that even when you and he disagree, you are "for" him – his welfare, safety, best interests and growth. There are **two** reasons for this:

- 1.1 **Responsibility is intricately connected to truth.** Truth is what exists that is **factual**. Responsibility is our **attitude** toward what exists. When we understand truth, then we are responsible to attend to that truth. Telling a child to do something he does not want to do clarifies the reality that you and your child are two different people, with different agendas and desires in life. Without the bridge of love and attachment between you, your child could feel alienated and isolated from you. There would be no warmth to help him tolerate the differences. Your child needs to know that, though you and he are separate, you are united in safe love.

- 1.2 **Responsibility and consequences make your child aware of law and punishment.** By nature humans are “anti-law”. We do not want to be exposed to rules and consequences. We always protest this reality at first. The demands of the law make a person angry. Children have tantrums, whine, defy authority or say: “It is not fair!” Or they become guilty inside and angrily condemn themselves. For you, the experience is discipline, which teaches. For the child, it is punishment, which judges. Love is the only way your child can tolerate law in your relationship. Love makes it okay to protest the law but still learn to abide by the rules. Love also frees the child from self-judgment when he fails. **Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.**

Empathize with and have compassion for your child’s struggle to develop responsible character. His rage, defiance or whining – may be hard on you, but your child is in lots of pain himself – that is why he is protesting. Begin to integrate grace and truth into your own character as you start helping him take responsibility.

Your child may reject you as well as your love when you begin working on responsibility. Children tend to shoot the messenger of the responsibility lesson. It hurts for a child to hate you, but this is all part of the burden of being a parent. Stay connected and keep holding the line with your child.

## 2. Truth

Love is necessary but it is an insufficient quality to develop character. It is not enough to make the child feel safe and attached. He also needs to know the truths of his responsibility and duties in life in order to learn, execute and internalize them.

Truth becomes the structure for him to follow as he learns the rules of life, e.g. give your child some choices (age-appropriate of course!). Children of 2 to 4 years old can help sort laundry. A high school student should be able to cook dinner once a week, while a second grader can learn how to wash dishes.

If you under-require your child will be an under-performer and immature. If you over-require your child will be exasperated or discouraged.

Ways to convey the rules of life effectively:

- Base rules and expectations on your **values**.
- Be deliberate, not reactive. Do not set guidelines when you are angry.
- Type up the rules and post them on notice boards, etc. to be clearly seen.
- Call family meetings to let everyone know the rules.
- Distinguish between universal and specific rules: Universal rules apply to all, e.g. treat everyone with respect; specific rules are unique to an individual.

## 3. Freedom

Love and truth alone do not teach responsibility. Freedom is at the heart of learning responsibility. Freedom allows your children to experience their choices for themselves. It is not enough to know the rules; your children must also be free to transgress the rules.

## Freedom is needed for the following reasons:

- 3.1 **Responsibility** is impossible without freedom. Your child needs to be free to say no to obeying you. If your child **must** obey, his character is not growing. Freedom involves the whole person. We are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. This unreserved giving over of ourselves to God comes only from a free choice in which we understand the costs and benefits. When your child says yes to you, it is with his whole person. Freedom is at the heart of your relationship with God. We are free to submit to or reject Him. Freedom is the price tag of love.
- 3.2 **Love and safety** are destroyed without freedom. A child who is not free to reject your rules is living in **fear**. If you can **force** your child to submit to you, it is probably because he is afraid of loss of love, abandonment, attack and condemnation. This fear cannot co-exist with love and loving choices ("perfect love drives out fear" – 1 John 4:18).
- 3.3 **A child needs freedom** so that if he chooses wrongly and suffers consequence, he will look at himself, not you, as the problem. When an outside force controls us, we can externalise blame and responsibility. The child needs to look at himself as the originator of his choices. Example: A three year old won't eat her beans until she has reason to. The art of parenting is giving her the right reason. "You can't make me." Agree with her completely: "You're right, I certainly can't. But I can hold back your dessert until you freely choose to eat your beans."
- 3.4 **Reality/structuring consequences**. To develop responsibility, **consequences** need to be structured for the child. The parents must mirror the real world as much as possible to help the child internalise the way things work out there. Example: When he is selfish or hurtful and reality is working right, he loses friends and other good things. Reality, as God has designed it, is your child's friend. Reality assumes your child will disobey. Testing limits is how a child learns to grow up and take responsibility. **Testing the limits – crossing boundaries – is your child's job!** The parent's job is to be on the other side of the crossing and to make things unpleasant for him when he does. When a child experiences a limit, a loss or appropriate pain, he begins to internalise the truth that being irresponsible hurts and that being responsible brings good things. Bringing reality to bear through consequences helps him to take ownership of himself and establish self-control. Consequences are not simply to be stated as a threat. Do not set up consequences you are not willing and able to carry out, otherwise your child internalises the reality, "If I can't get past the threats I can still put off seeing my life as my problem". **Following through is everything**. Count the cost and be prepared for much testing of the limits.

### Effective consequences are:

- As close to natural consequences as possible.
- Appropriate to the child's developmental maturity level, e.g. a driver's license at 18 – he has to **prove** he is mature enough and should not just get it because he is of age.
- Appropriately severe. Let the punishment fit the crime.
- Administered ASAP. It immediately allows the child to relate his choice to the consequence with less interference from intervening events over time.
- Loving. **Loss of love is not the consequence**. The attachment must stay in place (even if the child withdraws attachment from you).

- As specific as possible. What, when, for how long? “You’ll be sorry” is a vague threat.
- Flexible. Change boundaries and consequences as the child takes responsibility and matures. As the child has internalised the boundaries and consequences, you can relax them and move on.

**The four responsibility builders, love, truth, freedom and reality, all work together to create learning and internalising environment for your child.**

## THE FRUITS OF RESPONSIBILITY

### 1. Ownership

Your child’s orientation toward life begins to change. To take care of his problems, he looks less to you and more to himself. He still needs lots of love and connection, but he begins to take **stewardship** of his behaviour, attitudes and emotions.

### 2. Self-control

Ownership leads to self-control. As your child experiences consistent, appropriate consequences, he takes in the structure. This structure helps him work through impulse problems, procrastination, lack of concentration, temper tantrums and much more. He becomes more confident and less dependent on you.

### 3. Freedom

As your child develops self-control, he creates the space in his head to think maturely about his choices. Self-control helps him take stock of what he should and shouldn’t do. This is a different freedom than you give the child in establishing consequences. That freedom is a gift from you to help the child learn. This freedom, however, does not come from the parent. It is the ability, which the child earns and develops over time, to make good, value-based decisions.

The parent provides the first freedom – to fail and learn. The child then **develops** the second freedom – the ability to say no to himself based on your love, freedom and consequences. It is your child’s freedom from bondage to childlike things such as his impulses, intense emotions, peer pressure and pleasure-based thinking. This earned freedom gives your child a foundation from which to make moral, relational and spiritual decisions. He is truly able to make his own choices. A free child has learned the blessings of owning and choosing well.

## THE MOTIVE ISSUE

Parents fear that a child who is only afraid of consequences will grow up to be an adult whose only reason for obeying laws and staying true in marriage is a **fear of getting caught**. This is not a mature person, nor one whose motives are ruled by love, which is the highest motive. We want our children to grow up to be responsible and faithful because he **cares** and **wants** to do the right thing.

## PRINCIPLES OVER MOTIVES

1. **Motives are developmental.** Children learn obedience at different levels of complexity. They start life off as lawless and self-centered individuals. They have little ability to empathize with their mother's exhaustion and discomfort as she takes care of them. Gradually, they experience rules and prohibitions as well as the pain associated with doing the wrong things. Bad things happen when rules are broken and vice versa. Then come more advanced reasons to behave righteously, such as morality, learning universal codes of conduct and ethics, and empathy for others.
2. None of us are mature enough to only be driven by love for others and love for God. We need **to continuously do a spiritual check-and-balance** to see if we are driven by love or by self. This protects us against our fallenness, immaturity and lapses into selfishness.

## SECOND CHARACTER TRAIT:

### 2. TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO LIVE IN THE REAL WORLD

Teach your child how to lose because he will lose and he'd better know how. We do not like to lose, but in reality, we all do. Losing well, with the ability to continue is one of the most important character traits you can develop in your child.

Reality is a place where things do not always go as we would like. When we fail, or when circumstances or relationships do not turn out as we had hoped, we have to keep going and try to make the best of a bad situation. Your child's ability to do this will determine how well his life goes. In the real world where we all have to live we experience **conflict** between **how things should be and how they really are**. In the Garden of Eden life was as it should be. After the fall, man was locked out of the Garden and encountered a world of sin and loss. "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:33).

Almost everyday, in some form or another, your children will find this to be true. Because your children were created for Eden, not a fallen world, they still wish for things to be **perfect** and **ideal**. **Learning to accept both the good and the bad** enables children to have a firm grounding in reality and to create a life that will help them pursue what's left of Eden without giving up along the way.

#### THE THREE REALITIES

Your children will have to learn from the beginning of their life to overcome imperfection in three spheres.

##### 1. Self

They are not ideal or perfect. They are flawed, imperfect people who will fail, lose and make mistakes.

##### 2. Other people

Other people are also not perfect. Your children want others to gratify them, to never make mistakes and certainly to never hurt them. You will have to prepare your children to deal with these questions: Will they be able to spot the good ones and avoid the destructive ones? Will the good ones be good enough for them when they are less than perfect? The risks are two-fold: Raising a "brat" on one end of the spectrum who demands that everyone be just what he/she wants them to be, and, on the other hand, a "co-dependent" who tolerates destructive behaviour from everyone.

##### 3. The world

Birthday parties will get rained out. Pets will die. Toys will break and bicycles will get stolen. In short, they will experience – in a thousand ways – the lost ideal of not living in Eden. They will have many days in which very frustrating things will happen. Your job is to help your children develop the character that will enable them to be happy in a world that daily gives them opportunity to be miserable.





## THE PROBLEM DEFINED

God created your children to live in a perfect world, with perfect others and to be perfect themselves. But now, in a fallen world, they have to live with both the **ideals** and the **imperfections**. Your task is to teach them to hold onto and pursue their ideals while accepting, forgiving and redeeming the imperfection they encounter in themselves, others and the world around them.

They will need the character to face reality, to handle it with **grace** and to overcome it. Your children will bring into the world the tendency to split their experience into "all good" or "all bad" **feelings** and **judgments**. They will naturally, like all of us, see themselves and others as "good" when things go well, or as "bad" when things go bad.

In their **toddler years** children experience you as the "all-bad" parent who sets limits on them and frustrates their wish to be in control. In **early childhood** they judge themselves harshly when they are not able to perform, as they would like. Only the internalised character of grace and truth can help children negotiate life's ups and downs successfully. That character can only come from many experiences with a loving but truthful parent who forces them to deal with reality, accept themselves and others and continue on to pursue their ideals.

When something goes wrong in life, whether inside or outside of us, a predictable natural strategy is set into motion. This strategy is to make sure that neither we nor anyone else knows the truth. We call these strategies by many names: **Denial, defence mechanisms, lying, covering up**, etc. The purpose is to keep the pain or badness out of our own or someone else's awareness. Just like Adam, we are afraid to be naked and exposed in the reality of who we are with our pain, failure, sin or brokenness. So we have ways of hiding from this reality.

## FOUR BARRIERS IN DEALING WITH REALITY

### 1. Denial of the bad

Parents tend to deny that their child is the problem and they shift the problem to some outside party. Children readily deny their own sin and problems as well. Help them to face their mistakes so that they will learn.

### 2. Denial of the ideals

Some parents label their children as "bad" when they do not live up to their expectations ("black sheep of the family"). These parents have assigned him the role of the "bad one". The child perceives himself as a loser or an "all-bad" person. This affects his self-concept in such a way that he sees himself as "bad" when he fails, instead of seeing his behaviour as a problem to be dealt with.

A child who is not forced to face his imperfections never resolves the "good me, bad me" split inside. Since the split is only resolved through failure, the child who is not **disciplined, corrected** and **forgiven**, never learns to push towards the ideal and handle failure.

Children who “have it easy” are left with an unintegrated self-concept; they never find out that they are not as good as they think they are. Maintain high ideals of character for your children and require them to attain them. In the process of **failure** and **correction** they become whole.

The same is true for **performance expectations**. Parents fear they will damage the child’s self-concept. **Expectations shape and form character**. Dealing with our failure to meet expectations is part of the process that integrates us. Problems come when you do not expect and then correct for failure, when your expectations are **unrealistic** or when you do not correct with grace and forgiveness. Children need to perform to standards of goodness or excellence. They will have them for the rest of their lives. Do not deny the good, either in the child or in the standard itself.

### 3. Judgment of the bad

Judgment is the condemning emotional tone with which imperfection is met. Judgment is reflected in such things as **wrath, guilt, loss of love** and **condemnation**. In parenting we usually see judgment as **anger** and **crippling guilt messages** toward failure.

To the extent that children are afraid that their imperfections will cost them love or will incur anger or crippling guilt, they will be afraid to be forthcoming with their failures. They will hide the bad to keep from being found out. No one wants to show his failure if he thinks that someone will no longer love him or will condemn him. Judgment or wrathful **shame** and **condemnation** is one of the key barriers to children being able to integrate their “bad parts”.

### 4. Lack of experience

When parents do not give their children the opportunity to fail – they are so **overprotective** – they don’t have the opportunity to find out that they can’t do everything they thought they could.

Appropriate risk taking and freedom to attempt new skills give children the chance to find out that they do not know everything, nor do they know how to do everything. New experiences humble us.

## POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

People are trying to cure the child from the feeling of “bad self”. Or they are trying to prevent the child from developing a “bad self” in the first place by having the child see himself solely in a positive light. This is **confusing** because:

1. It places the **security** of the child at risk by basing it on his **positive performance**. What happens when his performance is not positive? What happens when he fails? What will we do with failure? Hide it? Explain it away? Rationalize it? Deny it? How can we maintain this “positive view” in the light of sin, badness and failure?



A better way than seeing ourselves as **good** is seeing ourselves as **loved**. A child who is loved as himself, both good and bad, does not need to see himself as positive or negative.

He sees himself as **loved** and the whole issue goes away. **A loved self is stronger than a positive self** – the child does not need to worry about losing his “good self”. He does not need to **hide** or **deny** what he does. No matter how he performs, he will be loved.

2. The focus is on maintaining a **good view of ourselves** as opposed to maintaining relationship. Loved people do not get all caught up in themselves. They do not worry all the time about being “good enough”. They focus more on tasks and loving others. When they fail, they try to solve the problem. The self-esteem problem is a false solution to a wrong focus.
3. The “good self” is a **proud self**. A proud self does not develop the kind of humility before God and others that results in gratitude. We are grateful because we find love and success beyond what we deserve. It is all grace.

**The parental stamp of approval helps the child internalise this feeling of competency.** Children were created with a need for parental approval, so praise them for a job well done. This does not create pride. **Praise is a good thing.** **Validate** your children’s talents and abilities. Fill up their tummies with good feelings about themselves. It is important for children to feel good and secure about their talents, work and abilities. Children need, most of all, to feel loved as they are, and then to be encouraged to learn how to do things well from a loved position. The issue of “am I good enough” will become a non-issue.

### **SAFE ENOUGH TO BE REAL**

Making children feel bad does not motivate them to do better. The answer to the self-esteem problem is this: Give them a combination of grace and truth and they will feel safe enough to be real. **The cure to the problem of self-image, self-concept and self-esteem is to have enough grace to be who one really is.**

Your children need, above all, to develop a “real” self. They need enough grace to face and bring into relationship who they really are at any given moment. **They need to know that it is okay to fail, to hurt or to be less than perfect. They need to feel secure in bringing their bad parts to relationship.**

If children do not feel that they can be who they really are, then their problems never get solved. They just get hidden away to grow into bigger cancers.

### **THE PROCESS OF EMBRACING REALITY**

#### **1. Protest**

When reality hits us, we all respond predictably: We hate it! The first thing we do is protest. We say, “No! It can’t be.” The first thing a child will do is protest the painful reality, e.g. the pain of separation – he screams for his parents; the pain of discipline – he will protest the limit; pain of failure – he will protest, “I should have done better”. Anything but acceptance is the first response.

## 2. Reality remains

If his protest does not change something, the child must finally deal with the reality as being real. It is at this point that much discipline falters. For a limit to be accepted and dealt with, it must remain.

Good parents, the kind who help their children live in reality and grow, let the reality remain so that their children can learn to deal with it. Parents who rush in to change painful realities for their children aren't doing them any favours. They teach their children that pain is not really a part of life and that someone will always fix it for them. When Mom or Dad is not around, such a child may turn to drugs to do away with the pain instead of dealing with it. Let failure, discipline or loss be what it is. Let reality remain when it is truly reality.

Now the child must face the reality, learn from it and move on. He must take the good from the experience and let go of the bad. **The only way children can accept painful reality is through love.** They need enough love to let it go. They experience this love through empathy – the soothing words of a mother or father make children feel safe enough to accept the difficult reality of whatever they may have lost.

**Empathy is grace communicated.** It validates the pain of the child and makes a bridge back to love. It takes the sting out of what they have lost.

## 3. Grief

If you empathize with your children's loss, hurt or failure, they can face the reality of the loss and then grieve and let go of whatever was valued and is gone. Example:

- Let go of the wish to have won.
- Let go of a lost love.
- Humbly realize they do not have a talent that they wish they had.

### **Matt 5:4**

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted"* (... and then they are able to move on).



#### 4. Problem Solving and Resolution

We need to now learn why we failed and we need to try again. Resolution involves finding out what we did wrong, fixing it to the extent possible and in any case, moving on. Resolution builds perseverance and achieves goals.

In relationships, problem solving means forgiving and reconciling, i.e. **confront**, **repent**, **forgive** and **reconcile**. In the area of performance it is “get back on the horse and try again”.

### VARIOUS STAGES OF CHILDHOOD

#### 1. INFANCY



Loss is not something infants have to learn – they are born into it. They are born separated from love and truth; they have no love and security inside them. Reality is there from day one. Separation is a reality because they have not internalised love. The hunger and need states of infants are so overwhelming they must be transformed by comfort and love. You must satisfy and comfort their needs first. Infants are born cut off from love and unable to take responsibility. Give comfort to your infant so that he can learn to internalise the care and empathy that will help him to accept reality later. The constant cycle from pain to comfort lays the foundation for a child to learn to put good and bad experiences together. It actually builds brain structures that will enable infants to soothe themselves later. These stages are the foundation of their learning that grace can overcome painful reality. Love them out of their distress.

#### 2. TODDLER YEARS

Toddlers go through the process as you give them limits and they encounter the limits of their own abilities. Give them empathy while you hold the limit – they need to learn that they are not in control of the universe. It is a difficult loss to go through.



#### 3. EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL AGE



Skills, morals and relationships become very important. In the area of relationships teach your child to apologize, ask forgiveness, make amends, face the person, etc. **One of the best things a child can learn is that working out conflict is a good thing.**

In the area of tasks and skills, give your child opportunities to fail. Correct them, but limit the balance and protest. Do not allow quitting unless there is a good reason. Require your children to complete the projects they have begun.

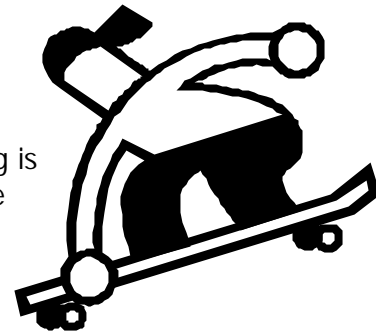
In terms of **moral issues**, give your children the standards and also the safety to talk about the parts of themselves that are not up to the standard. Give them the safety to talk about their hatred, anger and selfishness. Teach them what to do with those feelings.

If children feel safe to talk about feelings that they know are not good, they do not fear them and they learn to deal with destructive feelings in a positive way. That way they do not develop the “good-bad splits” which is being nice on the outside and full of hatred on the inside.

A problem in many Christian homes is that children are not free to bring the “less than perfect” part of themselves into the light. They feel as though they have to always be “good” and that their bad parts have no place. So, the good-bad split develops with the good on the outside and the bad on the inside in the darkness of their souls.

#### 4. ADOLESCENCE

Now again the good-bad split gets re-awakened. Dating is a whole new world: “Am I good enough?” Make it safe for them to talk to you.



#### BEING HATED

One of the most important qualities for a parent to possess to integrate their children is the ability to be hated. Your child will never integrate their good and bad feelings if you are uncomfortable with their anger towards you. Their protest is absolutely essential for the process, if you get scared of their anger and remove the limit, integration cannot take place. Co-dependent parents create co-dependent children. You must allow them to get angry and frustrated with you. But, if you get angry in return, it keeps the split going as well. The answer is to remain firm with the limit and empathize: “I know you hate me. I know you hate that you cannot go. But that is how it is. I’m sorry it’s so upsetting to you.” This kind of non-reactive but firm response will keep the child from getting you into a power struggle. Protest → Grief → Acceptance. **Only if you are firm!**

#### 5. THE RESULT

All these steps will now build into your children’s character the ability to:

- Be real and honest about who they are.
- Let go of failures and losses.
- Forgive and be forgiven.
- Reconcile with others.
- Face failures and learn from them.
- Solve problems and persevere.
- Enjoy life and the process without the pressure to be “perfect”.
- Love people who are real and imperfect themselves.

Hold onto and pursue ideals for your children even when they have not reached them or have failed in them.

These character traits will enable your child to live a good life – not perfect, but good and satisfying.

## THIRD CHARACTER TRAIT

### 3. DEVELOPING GIFTS AND TALENTS

#### A. WORK

Even when he is young, your child has to work. Work is a central aspect of our existence. Much of the time and energy invested in living involves some work, e.g.:

- Career
- Life skills (hygiene, clothing, finances, time management, home maintenance)
- School
- Sports
- Hobbies
- Training



God designed us not only to be in relationship and to connect, but to be productive in the world, to contribute meaningfully to others in a significant way. (Subdue and rule: *Gen 1: 28*)

Children who grow up competent in something are better able to function in the adult world, where expertise is a larger part of life. They will have more to offer, and they will gain more satisfaction from executing their craft well.

- **Competence: Entrance into the Adult World**

Teaching your children competence helps them move toward adulthood.

1. First requirement is to be **competent** in some area – have a **function** or **service** to offer.

**Proverbs 22:29** *“Do you see a man diligent and skillful in his business? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.”*

2. **Second requirement** is to become **equal** and **mutual** with adults. Competent people show themselves to be brothers and sisters to other adults, with God as their parent. A child’s need for a parent shifts from his human parents to God Himself, who wants to be his only Parent.
3. The **third requirement** is **relational**. Adults connect on both a **bonding level** and a **task level**. Your child can relate in both ways to other adults by developing some skill or expertise – they share the mutual task of work. Your child’s ability to master some gift or talent is also an important source of a realistic **self-image** and **confidence**.

- **Love and Approval**

Work and mastery are related to **success, achievement** and **performance**. **Your child should not have his love needs tied to his performance**. He should be secure in his relationship to you with no strings attached. This is the essence of **grace** – love that one does not deserve.

You are “for” your child, no matter how good/ bad/ hard working/lazy he/she is. Love and approval are two different things. You need to help your child gain an **approval** that is tied to **performance**. By his competence and skill, he is qualifying to enter the adult world. He earns respect, equality, opportunities, chances that others don't get, a good position and pay check, etc.

**Remember:** Keep love and approval separate. “However, I do not approve of how you are doing your job.”

## **WORK IS GOOD, IMPORTANT AND EXPECTED**

Developing your child's competency **first** involves helping him create a “pro-work” attitude. He must internalise the reality that **work is good, important and expected**. He needs to make friends with work early in life and understand that it is just as much a part of life as attachment, friends and fun.

- **Internalise Work**

Your child needs to see you involved in your work and bringing the interesting part of it to the family conversation. Your child tends to see work as something that takes you away from him, and that is a bad thing. Let him see you love him, but you have a work life too. Take him to your job site. He needs to internalise an emotional picture of someone who is mastering some niche in life.

- **Values**

Your work is, at some level, tied into your values. You have chosen a certain path and speciality because of what you believe is important in life. Talk to your child about why you think it is important. He needs to see how work is part of the big picture of life.

- **Habits**

Modelling also involves not only involvement in work, but also your work ethics and habits, e.g. being on time, finish tasks, follow instructions, etc. Walk your talk.

Expect the same from your child. Set consequences for work not completed without supervision, and praise staying on task.

- **Attitudes**

Your child's attitude needs to involve appreciating the value of what he is doing. Your own work-attitudes, praise for his work, and valuing what he does for the family will help him develop this. Internalisation helps this move from being dependent on your praise to an inner sense of satisfaction in a job well done.

## **Work is an integral part of life – it is normal!**

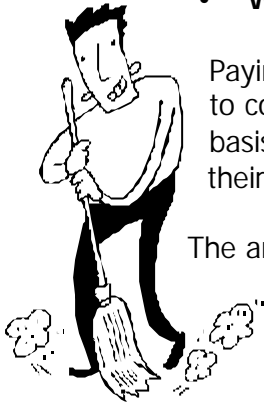
Do not only live for weekends and holidays!



- **Delegation**

Children should be helping with age-appropriate tasks. Let them know that a family is a team, and the team works together. Provide consequences when one member does not pull his weight.

- **Work and Money**

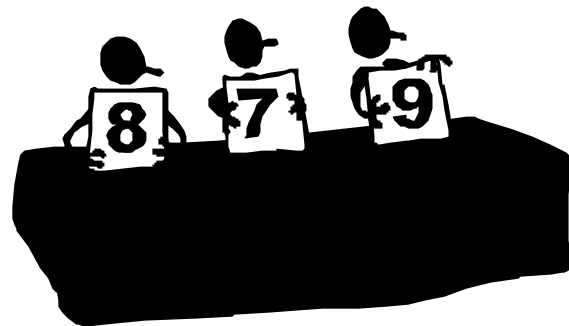


Paying a child for chores is not right. Family members should be expected to contribute to a smooth-running family home. Instead, on a regular basis, give your children some money not tied to chores. This money is theirs for certain expenditures (age related of course!).

The amount needs to include money for tithing and savings, with the remainder left for spending. Give them the gross amount, and then have them put the tithe and savings amount in a separate place. (After-tax paychecks – what you earn is not what you can spend!)

- **Evaluation**

It helps children to be graded on their performance. They need to experience success and failure. Being graded helps them to monitor their ways and make necessary corrections. It reinforces responsibility and punishes slothfulness.



**2 Corinthians 5:10** *"For we must all appear and be revealed as we are before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive [his pay] according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil [considering what his purpose and motive have been, and what he has achieved, been busy with, and given himself and his attention to accomplishing]."*

Teach your child to fail well and learn from the failure.

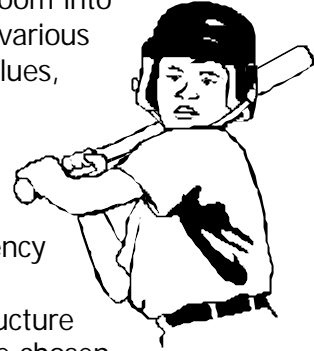
- **Competition**



Mastering tasks often involves some conflict with and comparison to other children. Competing is by nature a good thing, as it helps children adapt to realities such as team co-operation, others' competition, and goal motivations. Help your children know how to compete well. (It should not be a big deal in the early years.) Help them know how to accept loss. In addition help them to preserve their relationship with competitors. Value relationship above competition.

## B. DEVELOPING TALENTS AND GIFTS

Within your child's soul are certain aptitudes to emerge and bloom into talents and gifts. Your job is to invite your child to engage in various experiences so that you and he/she can figure out what he values, excels in, and loves doing.

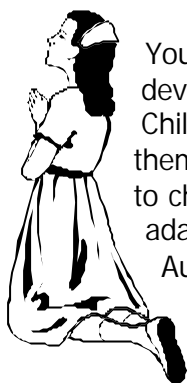


Invite your child to discover their interests. Invest time and energy in it and challenge them to develop their talent. Interest alone will not cause your children to develop competency in their chosen area. Most children don't have the internalised structure to work on a specific task. They need a parent's structure to help schedule, stick with, and improve in the area they have chosen, until structure has become a part of them. You will need to act as a coach. "I know it's hard to stick to things you've committed to, but you signed up for this sport and you need to finish it out for yourself and for the team."

Mastery of work is one of the most rewarding aspects of child rearing for the parent because it provides an opportunity to see measurable growth.

## FOURTH CHARACTER TRAIT

### CONNECTING TO GOD



Your child's spiritual life is a fundamental part of a total character development, not just the developing of moral and religious character. Children demand that life adapt to them, while mature adults adapt themselves to life. As we adapt to life as it really is and give up our attempts to change it, we grow up, and life works better for us. If being grown-up is adapting to reality, to grow up your child needs to order his life around the Author of reality.

**Acts 17:28** *"For in Him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your [own] poets have said, For we are also His offspring."*

God has designed your child – and reality – to operate in certain ways within certain parameters. Finding and responding to God's statutes and ways becomes the key to growing up. The spiritual dimension of life is therefore the most important character capacity of all. Your job as a parent is to help your child to see his life as oriented around **God's realities** and to live out those realities in daily existence.

You cannot separate your child's spiritual life from the rest of his life. It was meant to be integrated into all the aspects of his relationships and tasks. Spiritual character growth involves much more than religious training: it involves helping the child experience that the essence of existence is spiritual.

Life begins with a relationship, and spiritual life is no exception. The relationship is between your child and God. The development of this relationship is extremely important during the first few years of life. A relationship requires two willing parties. God invites but does not force Himself on you or your child. Ultimately, this choice is your child's. "God has no grandchildren" – no one is related to God by virtue of the faith of their parents. Your task is to do the background work for your child's encounter with God. Creating the structure for this kind of relationship is something you can do.

### PREPARING THE SOIL

Your child needs to approach life as if it were eternal; this is fundamental in the quest for God. Especially in the years between birth and puberty, they experience the world as a supernatural place – airplanes fly; microwaves create instant food, etc. (Money grows on trees!) The very dependency of children lends itself to their accepting a world beyond their understanding with rules they can't comprehend. Talk to your child about how God can help him.

Know the right thing to do when he is in a struggle, or how God has answered prayer, or how he can apply what he heard at church to what is happening at school.

On another level, help your child experience that the rules in both the seen and the unseen worlds are similar. Principles such as love, faithfulness, honesty, and ownership work in both worlds; they are how God governs reality – he aligns himself to approach God.

## GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD THINGS

In their dependant role, children work hard at needing and receiving. Children need to learn that asking brings us closer to God. Your child needs to understand that God first wants to give him the good things he needs, while He wants him to follow His ways. God is the source of **all** our needs for existence, emotionally and physically. Talk to your child about God's provision for love, protection, information, and hope in his life. Show him that being in relationship with God is the best way to get his needs met.

**Your child needs to see that you are a better parent to him by virtue of being connected to God.** As you go to the Source in prayer, worship and study, you receive what you need to love your child better. It is so sad to see how children hate church because they experience contradictory existences: Parents do the Christian routine on Sunday, but are selfish or out of control on Monday. **Children should learn that good things happen when people are around God.**

## GOD IS ALSO KING

God is not only the Source of all good things but He is also King. **Relationship always involves responsibility.** God provides your child with all the good things he needs to live, but in doing so, He also requires him/her to order his/her life around His ways. God has structured reality according to certain truths. Truth exists in God's commands, laws, and principles for conducting our lives. God does not give us laws because He is a control freak.



**Deut 6: 24:** *"the Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today."*

**Spiritual growth and development both prosper and preserve the life of your child.** Show your child that a life of obedience is a good thing. God's "house-rules" of love, fairness, faithfulness, and honesty make all of life work well.

## FROM IMMATURE TO MATURE DEPENDENCY

There is one major difference in your child's relationship with you and with God. Your role of parent is temporary; God's is not. You are working yourselves out of a job. Your child was designed to be God's child forever. While you are helping your child to need you less, you are helping him/her to need God more. He is internalising experiences with God that also create capacities to function well, but never apart from dependency on God.

Your Father in Heaven wants a relationship with your child. Ask God daily how you can help and when you need to get out of the way for this process to occur in His time. Be aware of your own emotional influence on your child, especially in the arena of his freedom to choose. Make sure the child knows his decision has nothing to do with your love and acceptance.

# PREPARING THEM FOR ADULTHOOD

## ADOLESCENCE / TEENAGERS

You need to stand back and understand first the big picture of how a child develops into an adult.

**Infancy** was a time of learning to trust and depend on others. It was a time to take in love and care, a time for your infant to find out that others can meet his needs and allow them to be met.

**First step** to independence – **the toddler** now wants to “be a person on my own”. The strong will emerges. It’s exhilarating as well as terrifying. Your limits remind him that he is not in control of everything, and slowly he learns to get in control of himself. Soon after, he learns right from wrong, and has to process his own failures and feelings of not being “good enough”. He also learns that you aren’t the perfect parent, and he learns to accept and work with someone who is also not “good enough”. **Forgiveness** becomes reality. Anger toward and love of the same person is a developmental milestone. He learns that there is not a “good mom” and a “bad mom”. Or a “good me” and a “bad me”. There is a “good and bad me” and a “good and bad you”. He is building frustration tolerance with himself and others. That gives him the ability to be imperfect and have good relationships with imperfect people – a skill that serves him for life.

**Starting School** – he now learns about being part of a social group. He learns the skills he needs to have friends and belong to a larger group called a community. This community requires him to perform certain tasks, play certain games, have certain skills. Then he puts all of this together into what is looking more and more like a complete person and less like a child.

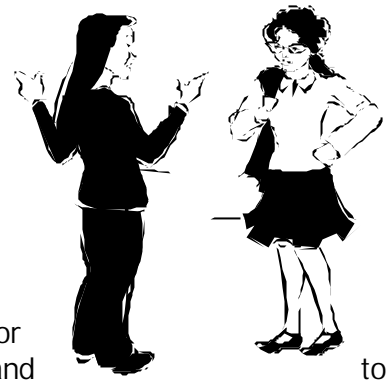
And then it happens... He hits thirteen and goes crazy! Or so it seems to you...

- “We have never fought like this before
- She used to be so friendly and now she’s so moody
- What happened to my nice kid?”

Adolescence is a time when all of the **past developmental issues are reworked** in a different context. Your teenager is working out those issues in the context of **independence** in preparation for adulthood. Therefore **two things** are happening:

1. He is going through issues in a different, more independent way.
2. The issues are open to reworking and repair if he missed them the first time round:
  - Trust and dependency
  - Independence and autonomy
  - Limits and authority
  - Living with and accepting imperfection in self and others
  - Frustration tolerance
  - Social group demands and interpersonal skills
  - Talents, activities and interests

The bad news is that you thought you were finished with these issues, but you aren’t. The good news is that you have a second chance to fix things that need fixing, and better than that, you have an adult emerging with whom you can experience a whole new relationship. Adolescence, for all of its parenting trials, can be a very rewarding time. If you know what to watch out for, it can be one of the best times you have ever had with your soon-to-be-adult child.



to

# DEVELOPMENTAL FUNCTIONS

## 1. Trust and Dependency

The first time around, your children learned trust and dependency out of desperate need. Infants are alone and demanding, and they know it. They want Mommy all the time. Responding to their dependency is pretty simple. In teenagers, it is more complicated. The trust and dependency of teenagers are now going through major changes. Teenagers have to learn to depend and trust all over again in some major ways.

There is the issue of trusting you and your spouse. Infants look to you for connection and soothing, adolescence look to you for

**understanding. Teenagers feel connected**

**when they feel understood**, as opposed to feeling physically close. They feel connected

when you understand that they don't necessarily want to do things the same way you do, or that the trauma they are experiencing might seem small to the rest of the world but to them is everything. **To**

**teenagers, everything can feel extremely important and when a parent devalues their current crisis or feelings, trust is broken.**



**Validation of their experience** is very important, and such affirmation comes less from lectures than from **empathy**. Empathize with teenagers, and they are more likely to see their circumstances as trivial faster than if they have to fight to have their own feelings. Teenagers want to trust you, to be able to come to you, to look to you for guidance. But if they are not able to do that without being controlled, they will look for someone else to trust. Trust for teens is also built through a parents' genuineness – when you are not being real, being true, having integrity with your own agenda and feelings, or being honest, your teens will see it. And they will not trust you, especially in the spiritual area. Do not be dismayed at their emerging tendency to put more trust into others than you. This can also be a way of establishing independence. Teens are also learning to trust in the **romantic realm**. Make sure you have done some good teaching and have had some good discussions on boundaries in sex and dating. Help your teen **to examine his relationships** through questions. Ask about the new boy/girl he/she is hanging around with. What is it like to be around him/her? How does he/she make him/her feel? Does she miss sharing that part of herself with someone? Limits do have to be set, but more often, what is better is that our teen comes to his own conclusion that this person is not trustworthy. And someone can only do that if he **gets in touch with how the relationship really makes him/her feel**. If you just lecture him, he sees you as the problem and fails to see the problem in the relationship. The control issue gets in the way of him seeing the reality of the relationship and who he is trusting. We have all seen teens make horrible choices because they were so caught up in the control issue with a parent that they were unable to see what they were doing.

**Hebrews 5:14** *"But solid food is for full-grown men, for those whose senses and mental faculties are trained by practice to discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law."*

**Help your teens get in touch with their own senses.**

## **2. Independence and Autonomy**

(The "terrible twos" all over again, but this time in a bigger body!)

In the "twos", toddlers are moving away from the early dependency of infancy. In the teens, children are moving away from their lifelong dependency of leaning on parents for a lot of functioning.

They are looking to:

- Think for themselves and have their own opinions.
- Question, evaluate, and choose values.
- Follow their own desires and goals.
- Build skills and abilities.
- Look ahead.
- Develop their own spirituality.
- Find their own ways of making money.
- Have parents available to them while they are working all of this out.

Since you know that in these years teenagers are learning to "guard and manage" themselves, be proactive and develop a plan with them for giving them more autonomy.

### **Example:**

1. We want you to have the ability to connect to God and other people in a significant way. We want you to have close relationships with good people who love you and do not hurt you.
2. We want you to have a good sense of self-control and personal boundaries. We want you to be in control of yourself and not for others to be in control of you. We want you to be self-directed and able to say no to things in yourself and from others that are not good for you and that you do not want.
3. We want you to be able to be comfortable with who you are, both good and bad. We want you to own your good parts and work on your weak areas. We want you to understand the process of confession and forgiveness. We want you to be able to face problems and solve them, including your sin and failure.
4. We want you to have a good sense of your talents, abilities, opinions, desires, values and sexuality. We want you to think about these things and choose wisely. We want you to own them as yours.

Being a partner in your teenager's independence is a good way to look at this issue. If you become a partner, they will need you and look to you. If you become an adversary, you will lose them, and they will lose the ability to grow into independence in a way connected to love and authority.

Partnering in independence and autonomy means to think always about your children guarding and managing themselves at the appropriate level. Give them enough space to fail, and then manage the failure with nurture, empowerment, support, discipline, and correction. Or, when they succeed, give them more.

Show them that **responsible use of freedom leads to more freedom.**

Faithfulness in a little leads to receiving more. Give them freedom within limits and require them to use it responsibly.

- More freedom to go places and stay out later.
- More freedom to do what they please without you being there all the time.
- More freedom in choosing things they like instead of what you like.
- Freedom to question things you have taught them and make up their own minds.
- Freedom to pursue their own interests.
- Control over their likes and dislikes.
- More control over their spiritual life.

Do not see every drive to be independent as a testing of limits, although testing will come. Expect them to do some things that you don't like and that don't make sense, just to express their independence from you. Look for individual expression in music, clothes, hobbies, political views, overall appearance, and the like. If their choices do not get them into danger, let it go. If they go too far, they will run into trouble in their own social circles. If they begin to make unsafe choices that could lead to moral or physical danger, it's time for limits.

In the spiritual area, your children might try to show independence as well. Do not get into a power struggle over God. Teenagers may reject God just to show you that they still have freedom and choices. Show them God. Live out His life, His love, and His truth. Expose them to good activities and teaching. Get them involved in a good youth group with good youth leaders.

**Remember:** Teenagers have to make their own choices. Pray for your teen, show him/her how, but do not try to control him into faith.

## **LIMITS AND AUTHORITY**

You must be around your teenager to protect them and manage them until they are independent. They are not there yet! But the problem is that they think they are ready now! They are big and grown, with engines raring and ready to go. They know everything! They can handle it! "Stop treating me like a child!"

To some degree, they still are children until they reach adulthood. Your teenagers have all the equipment, but they are still under your management. You still have to give them limits and enforce the limits even as they want more and more freedom.



Your job is to give them boundaries that protect them in reality when they get past their own abilities to manage themselves faithfully in moral and interpersonal matters.

- 1) **Reality limits** – areas where there is real danger. Sex and drugs, gangs and drunk driving, dropping out of school, etc.
- 2) **Moral, spiritual and interpersonal limits** – These develop the character needed for success in life and relationships, e.g. lying, cheating, stealing, promiscuity, disregard for authority, etc. Submission to God and His Word. Disrespecting and being mean to others.

#### **SUMMARY :**

- 1) Some things are dangerous; stay away from them, or you will die.
- 2) Some things are not wise; do not do them, or you will lose.
- 3) Some things are not moral; avoid them, and you will win.
- 4) You are in charge of all the above until you prove that you cannot be, and then we or the law will intervene.

### **ACCEPTING INDEPENDENCY IN THEMSELVES AND OTHERS**

Teens have totally unrealistic standards of themselves and sometimes others. They go up and down with their own failures and successes, e.g. a pimple! A missed goal! Help them to accept themselves as they are with a goal of always getting better.

**The best defence against imperfection is love.** To the degree that your children feel loved, they will be able to accept their imperfections. Do not devalue their feelings, but empathize. Give them lots of positive feedback on their strengths and talents. It involves being open about negatives and failures and then facing them with grace and truth. As your teen tests the limits, fail, and sin, make sure that you face all of those issues with lots of grace. To the extent that you shame and condemn them, they may develop a good-bad split. They will begin to show the good child on the exterior and hide the bad stuff from you. Make it safe enough for them to bring it all to you and integrate. Especially important in this process is your acceptance of their **feelings**. They may go through extremes of rage and depression at times. Remember that **your job is to be big enough to not react to their reactions**. You don't have to become a teenager to deal with one! Stay calm and give them empathy and understanding, even when they are hating you. Don't allow attack, but accept their feelings. Then they will be able to integrate their emotional extremes. Empathize with their heartache and sadness, sexual frustrations, and "unholy" attitudes, and then contain and structure their anger. Forgiveness must always be available.

### **DELAY OF GRATIFICATION**

In the teen years, delay of gratification is an important quality. It comes from a parent having limits and the proper stance towards pleasure. Pleasure is good! Teach them that. But for pleasure that lasts, we have to work first. Teach your children to learn to wait, make sure you limit what is limitable, e.g. teach them to wait for a car until they earn part of it. The content is not important. They must learn to delay gratification until they do their part.

## THE RESULT, LOOKING BACK...

You taught your children that all the things you had been teaching them were one day for them to manage. You taught them that your job as guardian and manager was just temporary, and that what you were doing was just showing them how to do what they would have to do later: guard and manage themselves. You have given them what they need to go out into the world on their own: **CHARACTER.**

In the teen years you have given them the process of freedom, discipline, love, support and forgiveness that helped them to become their own people.  
**CONGRATULATIONS!!!**



## WRAPPING UP IN CONCLUSION

Raising great children is a goal that is both overwhelming and frightening for many parents. The responsibility of someone's life in your hands, knowing your own failings, can make anyone anxious and unsure. Remember that God chose you to be your child's parent. God chose you to be His "hands and feet" in dispensing His grace and truth to your child. You have been called with a holy calling. He is helping, guiding, and supporting you. He trusts you with what He has given you, and He has equipped you for the task.

### Normalize Failure

Every parent is a bit of a perfectionist. You want to parent the right way, and you don't want your failures to hurt your children. The sad reality is that you have failed in the past and that you will fail in the future. And your failures do affect your children. This is not meant to make you feel guilty. Admit your failures, ask for forgiveness, and change as you learn from your errors. Be a parent who is not afraid of failure, but sees it as a way to grow. Be less afraid of mistakes and more afraid of denying them.

### When in Doubt, Connect

Parenting is unpredictable because children are unpredictable. When you encounter these periods of uncertainty, when you don't have an answer, a game plan, or a solution, the best course of action is to get connected with your children. This is not always easy. Children can be frustrating, provocative and hurtful. Connection may not be the first thing you think of.

Relationship is the most important of all the character aspects of this teaching. It is the foundation on which you build. **Relationship is the very meaning of life** – it is the source and reason for existence. **In being bonded, we truly live.** Childhood is the time of developing the ability to stay connected. Sometimes your child will disengage, detach, or not be able to feel your care. Or you may be so angry and you withdraw your love, pull away and become cold. Either way, you should make the first move toward your child when relationship is broken. Connection always comes first. When you encounter an unsolvable problem, take steps to move toward your children in a way that they can experience that you are with and for them and that you want to understand their internal world. This is how God dealt with us – He reconciled to us first, knowing we didn't have it in us to change. Keep your love sustained and constant, rooting and grounding your child in an atmosphere of care. Through good times and bad, make attachment the norm of your child's existence.

May God bless you in your task, and may He complete it through you!

**Psalm 127:3-5:** *"3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.*

*4 As arrows are in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.*

*5 Happy, blessed, and fortunate is the man whose quiver is filled with them! They will not be put to shame when they speak with their adversaries [in gatherings] at the [city's] gate."*