



Leading the Way in Marriage & Family 1 Timothy 3 & Titus 2

1 Timothy 3:2

²Now the overseer must be above reproach, *the husband of but one wife*, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

1 Timothy 3:4 & 5

⁴***He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*** ⁵*(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*

Titus 1:6

⁶An elder must be blameless, *the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.*

By examining the phrases Paul uses to describe the bishop's marriage and family, we can easily see that God places a high premium on a solid home life, as requisite for pastoral ministry.

Husband of but one wife, 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6

Literally, "a one woman man". It means one who is totally committed to one wife. Because these qualifications are clearly focusing on character issues, we can dismiss the idea that Paul is requiring an elder to be married, or that if his wife has died he can't remarry. He has in mind the issue of solid dedication to his marriage, if he is married. His marriage is to evidence the commitment and love he expresses towards his wife.

Children in order, 1 Tim. 3:4,5; Titus 1:6

A minister's children are a clear indicator of the quality of his own leadership. There is no reason a local church should have confidence in a leader if his children are disorderly and out of control. Because Paul makes no age differentiation, it is evident he did not desire to qualify his statements. Thus, no matter what the age of a minister's children, his ministry will be called into question if his children walk in a disorderly manner.

These verses have been the cause of much debate and pain, since they are so telling to the validity of a minister's leadership and provide external evidence of the reality of his ability to love and lead.

Principles for a Powerful Marriage

I've done a lot of marriage counseling over the years, and what I want to share is partially born out of those experiences and partially out of my own personal marriage experience.

In each of the following categories, I'd like to share on, there are virtually endless principles that could apply. What I have given reflects what has been especially helpful in building our marriage of 28 years.

I'd like to begin by encouraging you to believe the following statement: "Your greatest chance for happiness (not just marriage happiness, but happiness in general) in this life lies in being the kind of mate you want your mate to be to you."

1. Affectionate Words & Actions.

Be kind tenderhearted . . .

Speaking the truth in love . . .

Speech seasoned with grace . . .

- a. Loving, supportive, and tender tone of voice - always
- b. Frequent statements of endearment
- c. Purposeful statements of appreciation
Great meal, thanks for doing my laundry, thanks for doing the dishes, thanks, thanks, thanks. . . .
- d. Non sexual touches to just say "I love you", not just to say "I'm turned on and want you"
- e. Prolonged hugs
- f. Statements of admiration & affirmation

Great cook, super lover, wise counsel, you do your ministry so well, handsome, beautiful
- g. Focused listening
- h. Read & pray together frequently
- i. Make each other coffee in bed

2. Respecting Personhood:

Submit to one another - Eph. 5:21

- a. Not telling them what to do, but requesting
- b. Giving permission to disagree with you
- c. Waiting for agreement before taking action
- d. Asking for permission to spend money over \$25
- e. Being sensitive to her time of the month, rather than reacting to it.

3. Valuing Companionship:

1 Cor 7:27 Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.²⁹ What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none;³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord.³³ But ***a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife--***³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But ***a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world--how she can please her husband.***³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Marriage is best experienced when both sides of the marriage equation think much more about pleasing than being pleased. In fact I have never had even one marriage counseling case where both members of the relationship were living this one out and still the relationship was a major problem.

Here's another verse that has been a real instructor to me: Rom. 12:10 "In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; *in honor preferring one another*
This verse means: Try to out do or exceed others in showing honor

What are the Pragmatics of this?:

- a. Focus is off self and on your partner.
- b.. Think creatively.
- c.. Find your happiness, not in being served, but in seeing the delight it brings to your mate to be served.

- d.. This doesn't mean you never do anything for yourself, but the tenor of your relationship should be communicating to your mate that their desires often take precedence over your own. This doesn't mean always, just very often.
- e. It takes faith to believe that if you give up pursuing your own happiness that it will come to you of it's own, but it will.
- f. If this doesn't work, and your mate continues to use you, but doesn't reciprocate with appreciation or equal service, at least you can comfort yourself with the knowledge that you have acted like Christ towards them. Not a bad consolation prize. You will at least end up with a bunch of rewards in heaven.
- g. Have very few hobbies (one writer says *none*) that don't involve your mate
- h. Focused recreation with your spouse
- i. Reading together
- j. Praying together
- k. Discussing difficult issues
- l. Spending money on shared interests

4. Building a great sex life:

What would a marriage message be without at least some discussion of this controversial subject?

Proverbs 5:18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. 20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? 21 For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. 22 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. 23 He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

- a. In a day where so much pornography is so available through the Internet, let me encourage you to find an accountability partner if you are struggling with this area.

Just a comment about pornography - even though it is a very stimulating thing, it is one of the biggest killers of sexuality in marriage, because it encourages selfishness not selflessness. Nobody can measure up to pornography's glamor - certainly not those who pose for it. It encourages objectification not adoration. (Use you vs. adore you)

- b. Being thankful for your partners sexuality, not coercive of it.
- c. No negative comments. Negativity kills sexual desire.

- d. Many positive comments. Positivity grows desire.

You're beautiful/handsome. Work at communicating your acceptance of God's standard of beauty - i.e. the soul. At first your spouse won't believe you, be persistent.

- e. The Bible doesn't define what is sexually permitted or prohibited for the couple behind closed doors - don't let someone outside your marriage bed define this for you. Not pornography and not someone who is negative about sex. You decide and then enjoy.
- f. Honor each other's conscience. If they don't like something that's it, case closed.
- g. Be a great sexual lover. Determine to understand what great means to your spouse and attempt to meet what is reasonable.

5. Financial partnership.

Heirs together in the grace of life . . .

- a. Teamwork, not Lone Rangering
- b. No big deal who pays the bills. Big deal that each has decided what will be bills.
- c. Accountability
- d. Desire to bless, not demand to be blessed

Principles for a Strong Family

A Consideration of Proverbs 22:6

1. Word Meanings:

Train a child: In Israel, if a new mother was having difficulty in getting her child to begin nursing she would place crushed dates mixed with honey on her index finger and touch it to the palate of her baby's mouth to begin the sucking reflex.

The word train comes to mean *dedicate*. As a baby becomes dedicated to the mother's milk for nourishment, so wisdom skillfully applied will dedicate a child to the right ways of God.

Implication: Take the right ways of God and make them palatable and desirable to your children.

In the way he should go: According to the unique personality and temperament of each child.

Implication: Parenting requires more than a cookie cutter approach to children. We must spend enough personal time with our kids to discover which forms of teaching, disciplining and loving have the greatest positive impact on their lives.

And when he is old he will not turn from it: A personal desire for what is right will have been birthed in your child.

Implication: Good parenting has fairly predictable outcomes.

2. Interpretive Conclusions:

- a. This verse does not guarantee a parent that all children will walk with God, just because they were properly parented. This would fail to acknowledge the failure of Adam & Eve in a perfect paradise environment, with a perfect Father God. This would miss the point of the prodigal son and the perfect Father God. This would fail to recognize Mary & Jesus' failure to convert their biological family prior to His crucifixion.
- b. This verse can't be made to imply that good teaching will never be rejected.
- c. What parent knows all of the right ways to train? What if a parent knew 99% of the "right ways"? Isn't it possible that the missing 1% could have a profoundly negative impact?
- d. What about influence of an ungodly nature, outside of the family? We would have to say that there may be influences beyond the control of good parenting that might have a significantly negative impact on your child.
- e. The existence of a child's own personal sin in their flesh must also be taken into account. A child isn't born a blank slate. Each child is born with an inborn leaning towards sin, that the devil just might successfully lean his direction, even in the presence of excellent parenting.
- f. Whatever this verse ultimately means, we would be unwise in concluding that a parent could, in all cases, with right training, in a fallen world, with a real devil, with sin in the flesh, always capture the will of all children and submit that will in a settled way to the will of God.
- g. It is always right to train up a child in God's ways.
- h. Right training is better than wrong training and as such will generally have predictably

positive results.

- i. While it is generally predictable that good parenting will produce godly children, children do have their own wills, and in some cases good parenting won't always see the fruit they desired in their children, at least not immediately.
- j. In many cases where generally good parenting took place, but children chose sin for a season, the good seed sown in good earth will finally bear good fruit one day. Therefore, don't turn your rebellious children over to the devil, or give up on them. Spiritual warfare may be necessary to water the good seed you planted and eventually see them return.
- k. Careless and even well intentioned but faulty parenting can have devastating results, and it therefore behooves every parent to purify their hearts, watch their lives and teaching carefully, and open their hearts to learn God's keys for godly parenting.

3. Principal's to avoid the Pitfalls of Parenting.

We are going to look at some of the emotional and spiritual issues that surround parenting. The reason we are going to approach this topic this way is because it is my conviction that good parenting has a lot more to do with who we *are* as parents, than just what we *do*. People who hurt will parent in hurtful ways unless they learn to manage their pain, and do so in wisdom and in connection with God.

Prepare to have some of your most cherished concepts shaken. When we get close to God's thoughts, as I hope we will, they will disturb us to the depths of our personhood, where we tenaciously cling to self protective systems, that ultimately are protecting us from God and His answers to our life dilemmas.

I am inviting you to a place of transparency as persons and parents, to a place of admitting we don't have all of the answers and that this deeply troubles us, to a place of getting in touch with how much it scares us to be responsible for molding the lives of the children God has put in our homes, recognizing that in some measure our children will reflect the job we did as parents.

If you are willing to have the motives of your heart exposed and see troubling things in your life then I believe you will experience growth and the development of parenting skills that will change both your lives and the lives of those you parent.

The following concepts are, in measure, taken from a book entitled "False Intimacy", by Dr. Harry Schaumburg.

1. Recognize that there are no absolute guarantees.

We do our best to manage the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they attend, the friends they choose, the quality of parenting they experience, but in the end parenting

involves more than controlling a child's environment.

Nothing will guarantee that our children will turn out the way we hope. We can't protect them from all the serious problems in this sinful world.

2. Our first goal is to encourage relationship with God.

Our first goal should never be to be good parents, or do all of the right things in parenting. Any attempt to prevent serious problems in our children's lives that isn't founded on our relationship with God is pretentious. Without this focus, our attempts to deal with the complexities of child development are as futile as applying tiny bandages to seriously wounded patients. Only God can succeed at this job.

3. Not just bland relationship with God, but a vibrant one.

We can reduce the possibility of serious problems by developing a vibrant relationship with the Lord that positively impacts not only our relationship with our children but their own relationship with God. (I'm not simply referring to more church involvement, attending more Bible Studies, and implementing family devotions, as good as those are. I'm talking about developing a personal relationship with God that goes far deeper than activities.)

Each of us must pursue godliness with everything we have.

4. Vibrant relationship with God is best cultured in a vibrant relationship between the parent and the child.

The likelihood that a child will develop a strong relationship with God, when their relationship with their own parents is weak, is not too great. Parents must accept the challenge to bond with their kids if they hope for their kids to bond with God.

5. Humility about our own sinful hearts will go a long way towards encouraging our children's intimacy with us and God.

“Developing better relationships with our children is reasonable goal, for improved relationships are the fruits of godly living cultivated as we uncover the filthiness of our hearts and turn to God in humble surrender. Such exposure and forgiveness of sin ripens the blameless character that produces love. The path toward Christlikeness is through a deepening realization that our hearts are wicked and will try to lead us away from trusting the Lord completely. Concentrating on the reality of sin rather than on the external qualities of family life is the most effective parenting tool in preventing major problems in our children.”

6. Let our children see that we too wrestle with the reality of sin in our own lives.

We must avoid the common pitfall of focusing on our children's problems while we ignore our own. Serious and courageous self-examination of the intent of our own hearts and the goals of our relationships with our children is one of the most difficult tasks any parent can perform.

Proverbs 21:29 says: "A wicked man puts up a bold front, but an upright man gives thought to his ways."

I am not suggesting you share with them about the secret sins of your life, that might be too much for them to handle. I'm suggesting you discuss openly the ones you know they see in your life.

7. How we handle our disappointments with our children and other relationships will send a huge message to them.

Disappointments in life are inevitable, but do I model for my children a godly way of handling those disappointments, or do I pretend that my disappointments don't really exist so I won't have to work through them, in front of them?

I must be careful I don't create an illusion that life is much easier than it really is, rather than helping them understand and face relational pain. By trying to spare them (and myself) inevitable disappointment, I can be a block in their pursuit of God as the only source of real meaning."

How willing am I to examine the ways I move toward my children as a result of my own self-centeredness and self protection? Do I attempt to manipulate my children's behaviors in ways I would never attempt to do with adults, primarily so as to avoid disappointments with myself in terms of the way they behave, or reflect upon me when they are outside of my home? If I do this it will be apparent to both God and my children that I am relying far more on my own ability to control potential painful life experiences than I am in trusting God.

8. Here are some important questions to ask ourselves:

- 1) Is my **primary** goal with my children to do everything I can to help them avoid failure and achieve success as they grow through adolescence and into adulthood?

If so I am deceiving them into believing that in a fallen world everything can go well. It won't and it is my job as a parent to help them to accept this and allow life's disappointments to lead us to God.

- 2) How emotionally detached from my children am I? Am I focusing too much on external issues?

As parents we all wrestle, to some degree, with issues of rejection, and negative self image. We must work through these in the presence of our children, otherwise our

relationship with them will simply be an example of our commitment to self serving self centeredness. We run a great risk of emotional enmeshment, i.e. demanding they meet our emotional needs.

- 3) Am I able to move toward my children's pain as they grapple with getting good grades in school, finding acceptance from friends, or trying to make the team?

Or am I afraid that doing so will make me aware of my own fears and failures as a parent?

- 4) Do I deal with the pain I feel as I sense the pain my children sometimes feel, or do I back away from my children's pain because I can't face the pain within myself?

Our personal relationship with God will be excruciatingly exposed as we walk with our kids. If we don't do pain, we shouldn't expect that they will either. If our pain leads us primarily to anger rather than to a disappointment which leads us to God, then we shouldn't be surprised if they grow up angry, relationally unhealthy, and determined to push every boundary we set up for them. If the only thing they learn about pain is to reject it and try to force life to feel good then we can expect them to do drugs, sex, violence, crime, etc..

- 5) Do I back away from tough issues? Am I content simply to be a "good parent" and meet my children's material needs?

If I model this, then in likelihood they will learn this from me.

- 6) Have I experienced such pain and disappointment in my own relationships that I make my children feel that they desperately need me and that I'm essential to their achievement?

As hard as it may feel to really need the encouragement of our children, either by their doing well in life which encourages us, or encouraging us in the difficult times in our lives, it is emotionally far too difficult for them to feel they must carry us. Because I'm afraid of pain and disappointment, am I somehow putting a sense of obligation on my children, in which they feel that the only way they can be acceptable to me is to succumb to the pressure to succeed and make me feel good?

It is so important for us as parents to wrestle with this one. How often are the rules we put on our kids, the expectations we have of them, the exhortations we give them about life, simply reflecting our fear that they may do something that will make us feel bad about ourselves and our parenting skills? In these times we simply must model for them our dependence upon God.

- 7) Do I find myself giving so much to my job or ministry that I have little or nothing emotionally to give to my children and wife? Am I avoiding intimacy?

I'm not sure how to encourage you in this area, except to say that if I had it all to do over again I assure you I would prioritize this one much more highly.

- 8) Can my children feel free to really reveal to me what they are thinking and doing, without fear of rejection?

It is here that we must model grace. As parents we often feel we must hold up some unreasonable expectation of their personal righteousness, as though it were somehow possible for them to live perfect lives, while at the same time almost ignoring the fact that we miserably fail God at times ourselves. We must not be afraid of admitting that we blow it too, and that this is part of life. God has no expectations of flawless behavior. He watches us sin all of the time and still hangs in there with us. We need to teach our kids that they can talk to us about every sinful desire they have.

9. Am I willing to trust God with my pain and disappointment, to allow Him to be the source of ultimate fulfillment in my life? Will I submit to Him all my desires and my needs for relationship?

Or, do I have to nurture some unreasonable expectation that I, or He, or someone else should make everything in life work out well, and if it doesn't all I can do is be angry or demanding of conformation to my desires.

We must deal with our own unfulfilled desires before we can be of great spiritual help to our children.

Each of us must ask ourselves penetrating questions that can reveal unhealthy ways we respond to other people:

- 1) How do I deal with the desire to be loved?
- 2) How do I relate to others when I feel alone?
- 3) Do I gain love and acceptance by always being helpful and kind?

Shades of codependency? Or can I be honest enough to say that I hurt, or I'm too tired to help, or I really feel I need to do something else than help you right now? Certainly there is a balance here, but our kids need to see we know how to set healthy helping boundaries, so they don't grow to believe their value is primarily based upon their performance and other's appreciation of them, or that they can successfully manipulate others to gain the attention they feel they need to feel valued.

- 4) Do I avoid conflict in order to be liked or to remain in control?
- 5) Am I afraid to contemplate my own hurt?

- 6) Do I feel lonely? If so, how do I deal with my loneliness?
- 7) Do I get angry? If so, when? If not, why not?

Is my anger primarily based on things not going the way I want them to, or am I angry over truly wrong things that have been done? Do I let my anger lead me to pain and my pain lead me to God, or do I independently determine that someone or something must pay for my pain?

- 8) Do I often take charge, wanting to lead, even though inside I'd rather not?

Why can't we simply admit to our weakness and allow someone else to be strong sometimes? So often men wrestle with this one. We tend to believe that we must problem solve everything and come up with a resolution to everyone's pain. It's simply not true. We're not responsible for everyone being happy, or making decisions that will guarantee their happiness. We aren't God, and we need to let ourselves off of the hook from acting like we are. If we do we may find that our relaxed attitude will encourage everyone else in our homes to take responsibility for their own actions and emotions a bit more.

- 9) Do I trust someone enough to let him or her know my deepest feelings?
- 10) How often do I share my true thoughts and feelings with others?
- 11) Do I intimidate others to gain control?

We need to face it, all too often we use emotionally manipulative means to gain control because we tell ourselves that if things don't go the way we want them to we won't be able to live with the pain of their negative choices and the outcomes of those negative choices. Yes we can! In fact, I guarantee you you are going to have to live with their negative choices no matter how hard you try to control them. And in all likelihood, the more you over control, the more likely you will have to live with a whole lot more pain than if you had trusted God more and controlled less.

- 12) Do I find it difficult to make decisions?

Often we are afraid to make decisions, because we fear if they are wrong decisions we will be blamed for the outcomes and our self image will be threatened.

- 13) Am I suspicious of people's motives?

Too often triangulation gets going in our homes, where we become overly suspicious of our mates behavior when it appears they are acting in contradiction to our preferences for our children. Triangulation means that our children learn to manipulate one parent to the frustration of the other, and then create tension between everyone over it.

If we can learn to accept that our mate doesn't have to obey our every desire for family dynamics, then when they choose to act independently of our wishes and things go wrong, we will be there to help pick up the pieces and move forward again. One of the best ways to avoid this triangulation is for the husband and wife to retreat to a private location, temporarily suspending final judgment on a matter, while they take time out to come to agreement about a contentious issue.

All too often husbands believe their masculinity and self worth is on the line with regard to the family's success. This is wrong. We don't have to demand that everyone do it our way. We aren't ultimately responsible for every wrong decision of the home. If we have become relationally involved, given our non threatening input, and it is rejected, we have done our jobs. We are then free to help pick up the pieces, without feeling we have failed and need to be angry about it.

14) Do I cause conflict to avoid continuing relationships?

In other words, am I actually sabotaging my relationship with my children, because I can't manage my own fear of their rejection? Beware of your own personal rejection syndrome! Let God process your pain if you have come from a background that has communicated negative self worth and rejection. It is a family killer, almost more dangerous than any other.

15) Am I often easily hurt?

9. Acknowledge that true fulfillment comes only from God, not your children, and not how much your spouse respects your parenting perspectives.

10. You aren't responsible to make life work for everyone.

In his book *Parenting Adolescents*, Kevin Huggins stated, "The inevitable result of personal reflection in light of the Scriptures is an erosion of the parent's confidence in his own ability to make life work for himself and his children."

11. Become a student of your personal relational skills.

"We can't effectively parent (or do anything to prevent serious problems in our children) unless we are willing to develop a deep understanding of the nature of our own relationships and how they impact our children. Our recognition of that fact can motivate us to depend more on our heavenly Father and the Body of Christ for encouragement and support in our weaknesses. Or it can drive us on a godless quest for self-fulfillment that can keep us from developing genuine intimacy with our children and thereby fail to model what it means to know God. Ultimately, we need to understand our tendency to adamantly refuse to become more dependant upon God. We can't parent well unless we passionately understand that He is the source of true fulfillment."

12. Model godly pain handling and your children will reflect it in their lives.

” How we handle our relational pain is always being watched by our kids. If we avoid relationships, withdraw, pout, get angry, show kindness, or do special favors in order to obtain what we want, our children may learn to do that, too. Likewise, if we express our desires through direct, sincere requests and are willing to face relational pain and rejection, our children may be more willing to enter the relational uncertainty in which real intimacy can develop.”

13. More probing questions:

- 1) Are we willing to acknowledge the complexity of life and relationships, feel the inevitable confusion, and know that we are helpless to control what’s really happening to our children internally?
- 2) Will we acknowledge the tenacity with which we move sinfully in our own directions and then seek fulfillment in God?

How often do we put God’s name on our own ideas, and then shove them down our family’s throats?

- 3) Will we allow God’s power to course through us so we can be free to love others without ever requiring that they love us in return?

Because children are immature, they will often reject us. How we handle their rejection will tell them whether we truly love them or not. Our anger often lets them know we love ourselves far more than we love them, and they slowly begin to shut us out of their lives. We shouldn’t be surprised if one day they make decisions that they know will hurt us, but can’t find it within themselves to care.

If we can learn to love selflessly there is great hope that our parenting efforts will succeed.

14. Draw your child’s desires to the surface, rather than just rebuke them for them.

“Part of our job as parents is to help our children recognize their internal desires and then guide them toward a fulfilling relationship with God. Otherwise their deep desires, combined with their natural inclination to pursue self-gratification and avoid pain, will inevitably lead our children toward evil.”

15. Knowing God intimately results only when we acknowledge that we can’t make everything turn out all right on our own. But this humility goes against our nature and is therefore hard to accept.

16. Life is often not within our control.

Listen to an especially insightful comment he makes, “During a workshop in Dallas

several years ago, I pointed out that life is often not within our control and that accepting that fact scares us. A lady interrupted me to say, “You mean, if I live as God desires, serving Him and living a Christian life, what matters most to me may not work out as I want?” “Yes,” I answered. “That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Her surprisingly candid response was, “Well, that stinks!”.

But, it is extremely important for the welfare of our families that we accept this. To live with any other view is to attempt to bring reality to a fantasy, and thus miss the true means for helping our families. If we recognize that pain is inevitable then our children will be less likely to develop some sort of magical thinking that tells them if they just work all of the principles correctly they will be able to live essentially trouble free lives. Reality therapy is much wiser, because it causes us to think of God as the one we draw close to because He is God, and not just because we think of Him as one who will solve all of our problems. God is wonderful all by Himself, even if He doesn’t make everything in life work out well.

“Of all the relationships in which we’re involved, the parent/child relationship is the one in which we must be most willing to endure pain and disappointment. Only through our willingness to love vulnerably, which stems from our faith in God, do we grow in character and provide the greatest possible spiritual benefits to our children.”

17. Helping our children to know God, and feel loved and accepted is more important than demanding they do everything right.

“A child who knows God and feels loved and accepted is more likely to take a risky step toward developing an intimate relationship than one who has learned the hard way that intimacy leads to pain. The more committed to self-protection a child is, the more likely it is that he or she will hold back in relationships for fear of being hurt, thereby creating more internal pain. Failure in relationships reinforces the seeming advantages of painless fantasy, such fantasy can prepare our children for all sorts of addictions (pornography, licentious sexual relationships, food addictions, addictions to alcohol, drug abuse, work addictions, buying addictions, etc.). These are self-created illusions of being accepted.

18. Practical ways to build intimate relationships with our children.

- 1) Create an environment where your children can share desires safely.

This is especially true in those times when they are experiencing relational challenges at school and with friends. Never pretend the painful reality doesn’t exist. Help them face their pain, not deny it.

Don’t be quick to problem solve it. Often what is far more needed is comfort and support. Help them to identify and understand where their pain comes from, and then help them bring that pain to the only One who can ultimately do anything substantive about it - God.

- 2) Use appropriate physical touch.

This encouragement is to the fathers as well as mothers. Jesus modeled touching in His ministry. If your children experience appropriate touch they will be far more open to God's touching their lives.

3) Model Positive Intimate Relationships.

Men typically back away from tough emotional issues in relationships and are fearful or reluctant to pursue intimacy. Women, on the other hand, seem to push for discussion and resolution of intimacy-related issues. It would do us men well to value this in our mates, and to accept that this is a dimension of our humanity that God has given to our wives to help us draw nearer to God.

In every relationship there will be points of tension, and intimacy will be challenged there. To the degree that we model proper resolution and working through our pain, our children will learn from these experiences and become more likely to follow our example.

4) Model Masculinity and Femininity.

It is his privilege and responsibility to model emotional support and encouragement, how to show respect to her, and how a man can and should be able to share emotions and intimate feelings.

Every father is a model who helps his daughter learn about what her future husband may be like. Unfortunately, the main lessons some daughters learn is that some men are hurtful, insensitive, and abusive. They learn what to avoid in men rather than what to seek. Worse yet, daughters may learn that intolerable male behavior is the norm and subconsciously choose husbands who are also poor role models of what males are, thus continuing the cycle.

The son will learn much from his mother, in seeing a woman who is responsive, open, caring, and supportive to him as a son and a male, not one who is negative toward men and puts them down. She can also teach him how to express emotions. Modeling emotional expression doesn't begin and end with the mother alone, boys learn much about this from their fathers.

5) Set Appropriate Intimacy Boundaries.

Children should never be exposed to the sexual relationship between their parents. Sexual conversation should be discreet and very limited.

Marriage issues, relating to parenting:

1. What do you do when you can't seem to agree on parenting perspectives?

How do parents handle differences in parenting perspectives.

- a. Pay more attention to understanding than to being understood, to listening rather than speaking. Be interested in the other's point of view.

All too often a misunderstanding of the woman's role in submissiveness becomes the platform for the husband's demanding his right to parent the children the way he wants to, without any interference from his wife.

Both parents need to focus more attention on their responsibilities than on their rights.

- b. Learn to recognize why you are feeling upset.
- c. Learn to express your feelings clearly, simply and without accusations or ultimatums.

I.e. Do pain instead of anger.

- d. Talk out your differences and come to agreements outside of the hearing of the children.

"Seeking harmony between mates should have priority over most other goals for promoting familial harmony. The children need it as much as the marriage." John White, in "Parents in Pain", pg.111

In the long run peaceful harmony between mom & dad is more important than absolute correctness of parent to child policies. This isn't to encourage emotional detachment or disdain, nor is it to back out of the challenge of developing a parent to child policy that reflects biblical standards, but it recognizes that we each bring differences of perspectives of what God would want done with our children and both perspectives must be respected and carefully considered.

2. What do we do if our spouse is hurting our child?

How can I help them to see it?

How can one spouse help the other spouse come to terms with how hurtful their parenting really is?

What does one spouse do when he or she knows that the negative habits of their spouse is adversely affecting their children. (too much TV, bad TV, drinking, swearing, displays of anger, laziness, drivenness, passivity when leadership is needed, criticalness, impatience, neglect, etc.)

"I cannot exaggerate the importance of parental harmony. Children need it and need it more than ever when they go wrong. Their well-being depends on it. The welfare of children rests more on parental unity than on any child-rearing expertise the parents may have. Parents can get away with many mistakes if their children see them as a solid, loving alliance." John White, in "Parents in Pain", pg.106

Two kinds of parenting styles are particularly hurtful:

- a. The passive husband / frustrated wife.

The husband vacillates between noninvolvement where his leadership is really needed, and then stepping in when it's too late and doing so with rage or anger.

This pushes the wife towards over controlling and being perceived as the nagging mother, and ultimately causes deep marital divisions.

- b. The overly harsh and restrictive husband / overly merciful and permissive wife.

If the father sets up unrealistic expectations for his children, administers them harshly, and fails to truly listen to the hearts of his kids, then his standards will create alienation from Him and God, especially if the mother modifies, nullifies, or identifies with her children's struggles.

And if his standards are not unrealistic, but his wife perceives them to be, or he doesn't truly listen to the struggles his children have with his standards, then his failure to come to a place of harmony with his wife will ultimately lead to a polarity between he and his wife, and the children frustrated in between. Psychologists call this *Triangulation*.

3. How do we determine when change really *must* happen.

When does one parent say "enough is enough, I won't let you negatively parent like this anymore"?

This is so difficult, because to force change when it is more our emotional need than a true need, is very dangerous to a relationship.

However, there do come times when we can see that the way our spouse is parenting is truly dangerous to our children, and we must step in and demand they/we get outside help for their/our problem.

In the long run it is merciful to the resistive spouse to force them to get help. To have to live with the consequences of bad parenting will likely be more painful than the tension that arises due to forcing our spouse to get the help they need when they don't think they need it.

Foundational issues in parenting:

1. When do we discipline and when do we verbally challenge and when do we say nothing and let them learn from their own mistakes?

Discuss the pamphlet "*Under Loving Command*". I have some real difficulties with this

approach, but no matter what way you do it it will not be easy.

There are other means to correct negative behavior than just spanking:

- a. Divert their attention from the wrong thing they are doing, to something constructive.
- b. Time outs.
- c. Spend focused time with your child, they may just be trying to tell you they need you.
- d. Be creative in your approach to changing their behavior. Spankings often represent a lazy mind that fails to accept the responsibility to creatively mold the attitudes and behavior of a developing child.
- e. When they get a little older, then sit down and listen to their struggles with your commands. Be open to modification where it doesn't compromise the eternal commands of God.
- f. Recognize that your ideas of what they should do may be wrong.
- g. Beware of black and white thinking, especially with older children.

If I had it all to do over again I would reserve corporal discipline primarily for young children, ages 2-9, for issues that represent:

- a. Genuine danger to my child due to direct disobedience.
- b. Genuine disrespect for my person and authority.
- c. Direct harm to something else or someone else, or themselves.

And, I wouldn't use corporal discipline for every infraction of these kinds. Remember, sometimes they are issues of their emotional needs that you are overlooking that are fueling negative behavior.

2. Rejection vs. Acceptance.

Active rejection:

- a. Reject = "to cast off", "to spew out" or "to refuse to accept or consider".

Passive rejection:

- a. Rejection can occur when a parent withdraws from or withholds something from his or her relationship with a child. Often a withholding of communication.
- b. It also occurs when a parent withholds affirmation or encouragement from a child.
- c. Another form is withholding of emotional support, involvement and interest in a child's life.

Rejection often has more to do with retaliation for hurt or humiliation caused by the child.

The threat of rejection is often a desperate attempt at control. “As long as you live under my roof, you’ll live by my rules,” is a common ultimatum.

Margie Lewis, in her book “Hurting Parents”, has the following comment to make, “There may be some examples of parental rejection shaking up and turning around a son or daughter, but I haven’t heard any. The testimonies of the people I have talked to in researching this book have convinced me rejection is a dangerous strategy - of either control or punishment. Even unthinking, passive forms of rejection can open deep painful wounds that can result only in bitterness, hatred and regrets.” p.51

3. Acceptance.

Human beings have an unquenchable desire for acceptance. From infancy, children crave assurance of their worth. As much as they need love, they need to feel worthy of love; it is crucial to their self-development and their psychological survival. This basic human need for acceptance is never outgrown.” Lewis, p.p. 58,59

The primary difficulty in expressing difficulty is working through the difference between acceptance and approval. True acceptance does not require a surrender of principle, a resigned defeat. It distinguishes between a son or daughter who *has* a problem and a son or daughter who *is* a problem. Acceptance embraces the person without condoning action or behavior.

Listen to Lewis again, “A strong sense of disappointment is one of the most common hindrances to acceptance. As parents we usually have high expectations and dreams for our children. As we rear them and watch them grow, we can’t help dreaming of the mark they will someday make for God and maybe even for us and our families. We want them to utilize every ounce of their potential. When they fail to attain our dreams or they choose some other dream of their own, we have to struggle with our feelings.” p. 60

Acceptance can’t be simply resigned tolerance, or a passive acceptance. It must be active and encouraging. It must be expressed in such clear words and acted out in such open-armed fashion that it can’t possibly be misunderstood. It must be so obvious, so overwhelming that it sets our children at ease by overcoming the dis-ease which exists because of our differences and because of such feelings as guilt and regret.

4. Issues of control.

What is appropriate vs. inappropriate control in the parenting process? How does this change over time?

“We live in a moral universe, a universe made by a righteous God and inhabited by creatures who have often failed to respond to the way he has “handled them,” who have instead chosen the opposite of what he wished. This God calls us to be to our children what he is to us. Therefore we are not to base our relationship with them on any supposed results of the relationship but on what is right. It follows that if God’s greatest desires for our children may not always be fulfilled, our desires for our children may not always be fulfilled either. It

is better that we aim at being godly parents even though we may fail to produce perfect children, than that we aim at being social scientists employing techniques which, were they successful, would change the parent/child relationship to a technician/object relationship. We are called to move beyond pragmatism to a walk before God. We are to choose what is right without demanding that the right shall always gratify our vanity, satisfy our carnal longings or even the yearnings of our least selfish loves. If God has wept over a rebellious humanity, then we at times may have to grieve over rebellious children.” White, pgs.163-164.

Perhaps one of the greatest issues we face, in regards to control, is that often the reason why we control so tenaciously is because we are most committed to ourselves not being inconvenienced by their bad behavior than we are truly concerned about their well being.

Another serious issue of control has to do with our personal sense of security, and whether we can handle their rejection of **our** beliefs, opinions, desires, or commands. When our commands are mixed with our insecurity then control issues are most paramount. We will not raise perfect kids, but if we **need** to have perfect kids we are indeed in trouble.

This means that to whatever degree we struggle with our own personhood issues, to that degree we will tend to fall prey to this mixture and have kids whose hew and cry of being *over controlled* is likely to be at least somewhat valid.

God refuses to force our obedience. Can we say we the same towards our adolescent children? We will not relinquish the authority we need to fulfill our parental responsibilities but we release controls that arise from excessive fear and selfish ambitions. While sin has fearful consequences, we must be careful we don't use excessive fear to manipulate or coerce our children in to fulfilling our own selfish desires for them.

Settling control issues requires we:

- a. Forsake the *right* to be proud of our kids.

Let your boast be in God's goodness to them and to you, in all he has taught you through them and in the privilege he gave you of watching over them.

Their life performance may break your heart, but it doesn't have to fill you with shame, even if you made mistakes. In the end, if you let God mold you by their failures and your pain over it, you will grow in ways you would never otherwise have grown.

- b. Give up the right to uninterrupted enjoyment of your children.

To teach what is right is one thing. To insist that I get my parental "rights" is quite another. We will be miserable if we demand of our children that they be our source of happiness.

These apply to parents with small children as well as those who are older. If I have a

possessive mindset, the mindset that regards my children as my pets, then I am in trouble. Is my first concern really with their moral development or is it with my own needs?

I may have to live with sorrows from my children's poor choices, but my sorrow doesn't have to be tainted by bitterness.

- c. Give up the right to possess my children.

They aren't really *yours*, they were only loaned to you for your training. Therefore, when or if they go wrong, then it ultimately becomes more God's problem, than yours to attempt further controls so as to fix them, once they are young adults.

- d. Give up the right to have them repay you for all you have done for them.

This is so hard, but it must happen.

- e. Give up the right to uninterrupted tranquility.

If your peace depends on so controlling events that nothing gets out of hand but that everything remains in its place, then either you or your children are going to be in trouble.

This doesn't mean you give up normal requirements that would normally create an acceptable environment, but unexpected things will come along, and you will just have to flow with it.

- f. Give up your right to respectability.

If gossip arises over the events of your family, you can live through it.

“How can you hold up your head when your daughter's pregnancy becomes obvious? Who knows? What will they think? If you ask such questions, your perspective has become distorted and your relationship with your daughter will be affected. What is gossip? What is reputation? How much do they really matter? they will not matter a scrap on Judgment Day.” White, pg.173

- g. Allow your children to face pain.

They must learn the consequences of their actions, and if they don't learn from your gentle teaching and encouragement, then allow them to learn from their poor choices, and then be there to strengthen them when they are hurting, but don't bail them out of their consequences or pay their debts. Just be there to share their pain with them.

“Relinquishment consists of a freeing from a whole series of rights and delusions which are not truly rights at all but costly territorial claims ministering to my discontent and

delusions of power over a vehicle driven by another.” White, pg.176

It’s more than just a *giving up*, it is a *giving it up to God*.