BIBLICAL PARENTING

Discovering Your Child—and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

You are embarking on the most fascinating journey of life—the journey of discovering your child. Your child may be yours by birth, adoption, or marriage; he or she may be your grandchild or nephew or niece who lives with you. This amazing, one-of-a-kind boy or girl whom God has placed in your life to nurture and guide is *your* child.

Oh, the wonders of your child! Her heart is so tender and pure. His mind hums like a power plant with imagination and curiosity. Her personality sparkles with laughter and joy like a multifaceted diamond. Your task is to explore the hidden universe that lies within your child. Unlock the secrets. And then release your child to be the mature, confident adult that God intended him or her to be.

Along the way of discovering your child, a surprising second discovery will unfold. You'll discover yourself! Chuck Swindoll realized this parenting benefit, "It wasn't until we began to have children that I fully began to understand how I am put together." As you reveal to your child the wonders of who he or she is, God will do the same for you. As you parent, God will parent you, encouraging you to blossom right alongside your child. You can—and will, with God's help—grow with your child!

Are you ready to follow God's leading in the journey and joy of parenting? Let's dig into His Word to find the way.

DIGGING DEEPER

The word *way* is a key concept in Proverbs 22:6. In a few moments, we will ask the question, "What does *way* mean within the context of this verse?" Before we attempt to understand the meaning of the word (which is the task of *interpretation* in our Searching the Scripture method of Bible study), let's make some *observations* of the passage.

> Train up the child in the way he should go,
> Even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

Quotable

Wise is the parent who understands, "I need to spend time with my child. I need to observe. I need to dialogue so that my child grows up knowing his or her unique, God-given design."

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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By observing closely, you can identify five components of thought. In the chart below, fill in the words from the verse that fit the description.

Component	Words from the Verse
The command—the *what*	
The recipient of the action—the *who*	
The specifics of the action—the *how*	
The end of the action—the *when*	
The outcome of the action—the *then what*	

The *observation* phase of Bible study should spark some questions that you'd like to answer in the *interpretation* phase. Here are some questions to fuel your thinking:

- What is the nature of the training?
- What is the duration of the training?
- What is the implementation of the training?
- What are the results of the training?

Can you think of other questions you'd like to explore? Jot them down in the space below.

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Searching the Scriptures Tip

Asking a good question is like using a sharp knife when you're preparing food in the kitchen. Just as a paring knife in a skilled hand can slice away the peel to reveal the delicious fruit, so also a finely honed question can expose the core scriptural truth. As a parent, you need answers! What does training my child look like? How is training different from instructing or lecturing? For how many years should I train my child? These questions cut to the issue. Let's look closer to find God's answers.

Up Close

- "**Train up . . .**" The word in Hebrew is *hanakh*. To explore the meaning of the Hebrew word, Chuck used a Hebrew-English lexicon. The authors of the lexicon associate the word to an Arabic root, which, in one particular source, means to "rub [the] palate of a child with chewed dates." In another source, it refers to a midwife rubbing the "palate of a new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck."[1] Also, the Hebrew word *hanakh* is used three other times in the Old Testament, all with reference to dedicating a building (see Deuteronomy 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chronicles 7:5).[2]

A midwife stimulating a newborn's natural desire to suck by rubbing the palate with something sweet is a vivid image. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from this metaphor?

Training your child involves stimulating a latent talent or gift within your child. What may lie hidden within your child's God-given nature? Perhaps some interests or talents? Needs or longings? A thirst for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?

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- ". . . **A Child** . . ." The Hebrew term *na'ar* is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. Let's examine three of these uses. What stage of childhood is the "child" in Genesis 34:19; 37:2; and 1 Samuel 4:21?

What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child's life are you responsible to train your child?

- ". . . **The Way He Should Go** . . ." The Hebrew phrase can be translated literally, "upon the mouth of his way," which is an idiom meaning, "in accord with his way."

Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a prescribed and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her personality, abilities, or natural interests. So which interpretation is correct? Should we train a child in the way he or she *should* go? Or according to his or her way?

To help solve the puzzle, let's return to the question we posed earlier: What does *way* mean in the context of this verse? For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in The Amplified Bible:

> Train up a child in the way he should go [and *in keeping with his individual gift or bent*], and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)

In the italicized amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or "bent." Use the *Searching the Scriptures correlation* method to compare *way* in Proverbs 22:6 to the same word in

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Proverbs 30:18–19. In the space below, write down the verses, and substitute the word *characteristic* for *way* in order to highlight the metaphorical meaning.

The ways that eagles soar, snakes slither, ships sail, and even the way that a boy romances his sweetheart are all one-of-a-kind wonders. And so is your child!

God has shaded each child in your family according to his or her own color palette. No two are alike; even identical twins are unique. God definitely did not sketch homebody Jacob in the likeness of his twin, outdoorsman Esau. Your children's personalities, interests, relational styles, strengths, weaknesses are different (not better or worse, just different). Measuring one child against another would be like nitpicking a Da Vinci painting because it's not a Rembrandt. Both are masterpieces—and so are your children. So don't compare siblings.

Pause to put together the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6, as you have discovered it so far. Review the meaning of each part of the verse, and then write a sentence or two in the box below that summarizes God's plan for parenting.

"Train up (the *what*) . . . a child (the *who*) . . . in the way he should go (the *how*)"

Now let's look at the final section, "Even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6b). The root meaning of the Hebrew word for *old* is "hair on the chin," which suggests an age of maturity when children become young adults and are able to make it on their own.

The Hebrew word for *depart* means "to turn aside." When you help your children know their bents, they will follow their "way" and not turn aside from it. Why would they? They are living in harmony with how God made them.

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Bring It Home

How can you discover your child today? Start by tuning in to his or her deeds: "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself" (Proverbs 20:11). Children speak through the megaphone of their deeds. If you listen, you can hear them saying, "This is me. Please notice. I'm not him. I'm not her. Let me be me." Reflect on what you've heard in your child's deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. In what ways can you encourage your child's "bents"—his or her personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child's soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and you continue to shape and mold. Unite me with your creative work in my child's life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person you made me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

Endnotes

1. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), 335.
2. Chuck used another source to define the word *hanakh* as dedicate, inaugurate, initiate. See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 301.

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The Bents in Your Baby

Selected Scriptures

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Your child is like a beautiful tapestry knit together by God, the master weaver of the soul. David marveled at God's delicate handiwork:

> You formed my inward parts;
> You wove me in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13)

Your child's hair texture, eye color, voice timbre, and body shape; personality, interests, moods, and abilities—God entwines all these intricate threads in a unique pattern to create the masterpiece that is your child.

These characteristics, or *bents*, become more visible over time. Each stage of your child's lifespan—infancy, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood—reveals new and more features of God's design.

Your job as a parent, as we learned in the previous study of Proverbs 22:6, is to fit your training to your child so that it is in keeping with his or her individual gift or bent.

Seeing the bent accurately is the first parental task; responding appropriately is the second. In this study and the next, we'll take a closer look at the concept of bents, both toward good and evil. As you search Scripture for God's guidance in these important parental tasks of discovering and responding, pause to pray for insight from His Word.

DIGGING DEEPER

According to Psalm 139, God's creative work in our child's life began long before you saw your newborn's face. David composed this ancient hymn in four stanzas. Tune your ear to its message as you read, and summarize what you hear from the verses under each heading.

Quotable

Fit your training to your child so that it is in keeping with his or her individual gift or bent.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Verses 1–6—God Knows Me.

Verses 7–12—God Is with Me.

Verses 13–18—God Made Me.

Verses 19–24—God, Search Me.

Just as God was "intimately acquainted" with David's ways, so also is He with your child's ways (verse 3). The Hebrew word for *ways* is the same word used in Proverbs 22:6 and includes every aspect of your child's being. Your child's sitting and rising (behaviors), ups and downs (moods), comings and goings (pursuits), and even his or her thoughts that are so secret to you are pages of an open book to God. How can God read your child so well? Because He is the author. He wrote the manuscript!

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Notice God's hand in the composition of your child as you observe the repeated words and concepts.

> For You formed my inward parts;
> You wove me in my mother's womb.
> I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
> Wonderful are Your works,
> And my soul knows it very well.
> My frame was not hidden from You,
> When I was made in secret,
> And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. (Psalm 139:13–15)

Reread these verses, and this time highlight in yellow the actions associated with God. Then, highlight in green the actions associated with David.

How-To Tip

To highlight text in the pdf viewer, click the "select tool," and use the I-beam cursor to select the text. Right-click on the highlighted text, and click on properties to choose a different color.

Let's *correlate* the key actions to other biblical texts to enhance the meaning of some of the words that you highlighted. Look up the verses below in the version noted, and then write down the meaning in the space provided.

"You *formed* . . ." (Psalm 139:13, emphasis added). Compare with God's action in Melchizedek's blessing of Abram in Genesis 14:19 NLT.

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". . . *wove* me . . ." and ". . . skillfully *wrought* . . ." (139:13, 15). Compare with Job's clothing metaphor in Job 10:11 NIV and the making of the curtain in the tabernacle in Exodus 26:36 NIV.

". . . made in *secret* . . ." (139:16). Compare with the protective place of God in Psalm 32:7 NIV.

Searching the Scriptures Tip

Digging into a biblical word can unearth rich nuggets of truth. When you discover a gem, polish it into a *principle*. A principle is a statement based on a truth that transcends time and culture; it applies to all people, from the rock-slinging shepherds of David's era to the selfie-clicking millennials of the postmodern age. Below are some truths from the text, followed by principles. We'll get you started with the first principle, then you can create your own.

TRUTH: God Himself, not some impersonal force of nature, forms each person at conception in the womb.
PRINCIPLE: We should value each person as a creation of God.
ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES:

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TRUTH: Because God made my child, He knows all aspects of my child.
PRINCIPLE: I can ask God for understanding and insight into my child.
ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES:

TRUTH: God made my child unique in body, mind, gifts, abilities, interests, and needs.
PRINCIPLE: I should accept my child and avoid favoritism.
ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES:

TRUTH: My child is fearfully and wonderfully made.
PRINCIPLE: I can take delight in my child as a wonderful treasure from God.
ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES:

Summing up, you can conclude the following: *God Himself knit together the fine details of my child. The workshop for His marvelous creation was the protected and secret place of the womb.*

The next verse describes the great care that God takes in watching over the creative process at my child's "unformed" embryonic stage when He is coding His instructions into the strands of my child's DNA.

> Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
> And in Your book were all written
> The days that were ordained for me,
> When as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:16)

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No wonder God knows the "days" of your child's life—He formed his or her "ways"! Your child is no mere product of biological chance, in the same way that a palace is no mere pile of randomly tossed bricks. A skilled architect supervised the building process from imagination to blueprints to construction. And so did God, the divine Architect, watch over the masterful design of your child.

Bring It Home

As a parent, you can **cooperate** with your child's good bents by watching over your child with the same diligence that God took in His design.

- Avoid re-bending God's bents. In other words, don't try to bend artists into athletes!
- Applaud your child's marvelous qualities when they emerge.
- Celebrate your child's unique bents, rather than compare or show favoritism.
- Nurture your child's self-image as you tell the story of his or her divine design.

And don't forget to tell the rest of the story, which includes not only their good bents but also their bents toward sin. In the next study, we'll take a closer look at David's admission, "In sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5) and Paul's teaching about how "sin entered into the world, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12). We'll learn about your child's inclinations to sin, how the "rod and reproof give wisdom" (Proverbs 29:15), and steps to **counteract** the sinful bents.

For now, what are some specific ways that you can cooperate with the good bents? Resist the temptation to force your child into your own mold, and don't be shy about verbalizing your praise and encouragement!

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me understand what it means to be a faithful, fair, consistent parent who rears Your children You give us in a way that pleases you and cooperates with Your plan. In Jesus' name, amen.

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Straightening Granddad's Bent

Exodus 20:4–6; 34:5–9

LET'S BEGIN HERE

So far in our study, we've learned that biblical parenting involves training our children *according to their bents*, not according to the way we've decided they should go (Proverbs 22:6). Your child was born with divinely stitched patterns already in place (Psalm 139:13–16). Your job is to discover the way your child is made, cooperate with the good bents, and counteract the evil bents.

What *beneficial* bents have you detected in your child? In the list below, use the select tool to highlight the characteristics that most describe your child.

Artistic	Sensitive	Athletic
Thoughtful	Verbal	Organized
Creative	Competitive	Carefree
Focused	Relational	Task-oriented
Boisterous	Reserved	Musical
Introverted	Extroverted	Industrious
Easygoing	Builder	Inquisitive

This list can go on and on. As the years go by and each stage passes, keep on developing and encouraging these treasures.

As you do, also watch for the *detrimental* bents. These are the streaks of clay in the marble, the presence of sin that you must counteract. What are these negative bents? Where do they originate? How can you help your child deal with them? Let's find out from God's Word.

Quotable

During their child's formative years, parents cooperate with the good bents and counteract the evil, for both are present in every child.

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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DIGGING DEEPER

Every child is born with a sin nature, which is a general bent toward wrongdoing. David lamented, "For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5 NLT). How can a child be born a sinner?

Imputed Sin

According to the apostle Paul, the bloodline of sin's curse can be traced to the first human: "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned" (Romans 5:12 NLT).

This cute and snuggly masterpiece of God's creation who is your child bears an imprint of sin that was transmitted from Adam—including sin's condition, *guilt*, and sin's consequence: *spiritual death*. Theologians call this "imputed sin."

Searching the Scriptures Tip

A handy guide to Christian theology is *Basic Theology* by Charles C. Ryrie. In this volume, you'll find concise explanations and biblical support for your understanding of who God is, the nature of sin, and Christ's provision for salvation.

No amount of personal merit can pardon guilt or give eternal life; only God can counteract your child's sin nature by giving your child a new nature in Christ. Read the following verses and insert your child's name in the blanks:

> "God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for _____ sin, so that _____ could be made right with God through Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT)
>
> "This means that _____ who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought _____ back to himself through Christ." (5:17–18)

This is the gospel in a nutshell. God sent His Son, Jesus, to bear your child's guilt on the cross. He offers your child His Son's righteous standing as a free gift for your child to receive by faith. Share this good news with your child at an early age!

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Your primary responsibility is to lead your child to saving faith.

Read Romans 3:23; 6:23; and 10:9–10, and write out the plan of salvation for you to share with your child. (If you need help formulating the words, we recommend the tracts for children published by EvanTell. Visit *www.evantell.org* for more information.)

Sinful Choices

You can see the bitter fruit of your child's sin nature in his or her defiance, disobedience, out-of-control temper, sneakiness, and just plain old mischievousness. Be alert, discerning, and determined to counteract these sinful bents. Nip sinful attitudes and actions in the bud by teaching your child to obey and respect authority.

Your second responsibility is to teach your child to submit to authority.

We will shovel deeper into the subject of discipline in study 5, "Shaping the Will with Wisdom." For now, determine to put a stop to your child's sinful choices the moment you see them sprout. Begin by making a list of bents that need attention. Write down how you plan to address them.

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Inherited Patterns

Another source of detrimental bents in your child are the patterns of sin that run like sap through your family tree from generation to generation. These inherited bents are implanted deep within your child's physical, emotional, and spiritual DNA.

Your third responsibility is to counteract sinful family patterns.

When a child acts just like his or her parent, grandparent, or even great grandparent, we sometimes say, "The acorn didn't fall far from the tree." Seeds of drug dependency, a hot temper, power and control, and other sin problems can sprout from the same family root.

God warned His people about generational sins. Read the following verses, and note the repeating phrases: Exodus 20:5–6; 34:6–7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:8–9.

The word *iniquity* in the phrase "visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren" (Exodus 35:7) is from a Hebrew word meaning "to bend, to twist, to distort, to pervert." Bents of this sort tend to run in families, even to the third and fourth generation. However, the lineage of God's lovingkindness stretches to thousands!

Look up these verses, and write down the ways that *iniquity* is connected to God's atoning mercy: Leviticus 16:22; Isaiah 53:6.

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Although children can catch their parents' disease, God has the cure in the atonement of His Son foreshadowed in the sacrificial system and prophesied by Isaiah. By God's grace and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, family patterns of inherited sin can stop with your child—but it takes insight, awareness, and diligence. Stand with God against these inherited sins for the sake of your child!

Bring It Home

In the next study, we'll examine a biblical case study of inherited sins being passed from generation to generation. In preparation, conclude this study by completing your own case study of the inherited physical, psychological, and spiritual bents in your family.

You will need separate pieces of paper. On the first page, list the physical bents of your child's great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents that may be passed down, such as inherited diseases like cancer, heart disease, or diabetes. On the second page, list the psychological/emotional bents, such as depression, anxiety issues, chemical dependencies, relationship problems. And on the third page, list the spiritual bents, such as immorality, abuse, rebellion against God, even satanic strongholds.

Share your findings with a trusted family member, and compare notes to discover more insights into the bents in your family tree. In the space below, write down the inherited patterns that you want to stop. Make an action plan regarding the resources you need and the steps you will take. With God's grace and help, the inherited sins in your family can stop with your generation, and His mercy will transform your family for generations to come!

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I need help. Family change is a complicated process, and I need discernment. I need courage to face the facts. I need understanding to be able to call inherited sin what it is rather than rationalize around it. Help me in this challenging task, and cover my children and their children with your healing mercy for many generations to come. In Jesus' name, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Unpacking Our "Ancestral Baggage"

Genesis 25:19–21, 24–28

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

In a typical airport, people by the hundreds crisscross wide corridors en route to far-off places. Almost all of them carry luggage—backpacks slung over shoulders, bags draped at one side, wheeled suitcases pulled behind. It's a luggage parade!

When these travelers arrive at their destinations, unpacking is the first order of business. Every item must find its place. Socks and shirts and coats and dresses are neatly tucked away in drawers and closets, and when the bag itself is empty it goes into the closet as well.

Imagine how strange it would be if no one unpacked their bags and everyone hauled their luggage with them wherever they went! Yet we do this all the time. All of us—even our children—carry baggage. Not literal suitcases, of course. We carry emotional and spiritual baggage, which consists of the negative traits that were passed down the family line from our parents to us and from us to our children.

In this study we'll examine how a bagful of sin tumbled down the generational conveyer belt in Abraham's family. And we'll be encouraged by the example of one progeny who determined not to fall in line with his forefathers. He unpacked his ancestral baggage and lived free of the family sin. Who is this courageous man, and how did he break the pattern? Let's find out!

DIGGING DEEPER

For this study, the best tool from the *Searching the Scriptures* toolbox is the contrast-and-comparison method. We'll read six passages, taking note of the characters, situation, sin, and consequences in each passage. Then, we'll review our observations, noting similarities and differences. Finally, we will draw conclusions and craft principles for application. Golden nuggets of truth for your family await to be discovered!

Quotable

God, the ultimate Artist, builds into each child an original pattern. The parents' task is to make a serious study of how this child is put together and cultivate the good things.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Abraham

Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, was also a father of lies. His habit of lying is not the legacy we would expect from the great patriarch; however, it's recorded in Scripture, and it certainly triggered terrible troubles for his offspring. Read the passages below, and write down what you observe in the text under each heading.

- Abraham plants the seed of generational sin. Read Genesis 12:10–20.

List the characters. Describe the situation, Abraham's sin, and the consequences.

- Abraham cultivates the generational sin by repeating it. Read Genesis 20.

List the characters. Describe the situation, Abraham's sin, and the consequences.

In this story, take special note of the way that Abraham rationalized his lie (20:11–12) and manipulated his wife (20:13). What did he say and do?

Compare and contrast the two accounts. What is similar? What is different?

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Abraham's fear conjured a half-truth; a half-truth created a misunderstanding; a misunderstanding led to a serious problem, which prompted embarrassment, injury . . . and near disaster. If God hadn't intervened, the covenant that depended on Sarah having Abraham's baby would have crumbled. God's redemptive plan nearly ended before it began—all because of little white lies!

And it got worse. Instead of confessing when he got caught, Abraham gave excuses, minimized his sin, and manipulated his own wife. Unless pulled out by the roots, sin generates sin and always hurts the ones we love—in this case, Abraham's wife and his future son and grandson.

Isaac and Jacob

Read the passages below, and write down what you observe under each heading.

- Isaac replays his father's deception. Read Genesis 26:1, 7–11.

List the characters. Describe the situation, Isaac's sin, and the consequences.

- Jacob deceives his father, Isaac, with Rebekah's help. Read Genesis 27:1–29.

List the characters. Describe the situation, Jacob's sin, and the consequences.

Compare and contrast the two accounts. What is similar? What is different?

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Abraham's lies produced a crop of flaws in his family. In a performance eerily similar to his father's lie, Isaac lied to Abimelech, who was most likely a descendent of the king whom Abraham had deceived years before. Years later, Rebekah borrowed lines from the family script to deceive her own husband for the sake of her favorite son, Jacob.

With each new branch of Abraham's spreading family tree, the sinful bents of deception grow more twisted and gnarled. The stories read like a Shakespearian tragedy: wife plots against husband, son dupes dying father, brother double-crosses brother. What was Sir Walter Scott's famous line? "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"

Abraham's habit of lying spun through the family in tangles of cunning, guile, treachery, jealousy . . . and near bloodshed.

Jacob's Sons and Joseph

Read the passages below, and write down what you observe under each heading.

- Jacob's sons plot against their brother Joseph and deceive their father. Read Genesis 37:3–35.

List the characters. Describe the situation, the sin of Jacob's sons, and the consequences.

- Joseph breaks the family pattern by revealing his true identity to his brothers. Read Genesis 45:1–15.

List the characters. Describe the situation, Joseph's *right* response, and the consequences.

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Compare and contrast the accounts from Genesis 37 and 45. What is similar? What is different?

Instead of perpetuating the ancestral pattern and returning lie for lie, treachery for treachery, evil for evil, Joseph linked arms with God's grace and reversed the cycle of sin with honesty and forgiveness. Joseph's response to his backstabbing brothers shone a ray of hope for a new day for this dysfunctional family.

Principles and Application

How about your family? In the last study, you reflected on possible generational traits that have troubled your family. What can you learn from Abraham and his family that will help you deal with your ancestral baggage? We'll give you a few prompts to get you thinking.

Unpack the baggage of half-truths, deception, and secrets. Sample principle: "I want to be an example to my children of telling the truth."

Unpack the baggage of rationalization, minimizing, and manipulation. Sample principle: "I want to help my children admit sin and encourage an environment of forgiveness."

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Unpack the baggage of favoritism, jealousy, and sibling rivalry. Sample principle: "I want to resist at all costs the tendency to compare my children with each other."

Bring It Home

Think how much heartache could have been spared Abraham's family if someone in his life had confronted his lying. The family baggage might have been unpacked early on and replaced with a new legacy of honesty, confession, and forgiveness.

Don't be like some members of your family who shrug off the issues, saying, "Well, you know our family—we always keep secrets from each other." Or "Well, you know dad—anger is just his way." Or "Well, you know mom—she has to be in control." Instead, be an agent of change like Joseph!

Perhaps no one trained you to behave any different than your parents, but now you can train in your children a new way to behave. What new ways can you teach your children in order to counteract the negative bents in your family tree?

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me in this delicate issue related to child rearing. Open my eyes to the baggage in our family. Point it out. Make it clear. And help me to stay faithful to the hard work of parenting, as I unpack the ancestral baggage and change the course of my family history. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Now we come to a core teaching of biblical parenting: the role of loving discipline. "Those who love their children care enough to discipline them" (Proverbs 13:24 NLT).

Discipline and love must go hand in hand. To neglect discipline is to withhold love, and disciplining a child without love can do more harm than good. What exactly is loving discipline? To clarify this crucial parental role, we need to make some distinctions.

The Distinction between Discipline and Abuse
Abuse is unfair and shocking, degrading and demoralizing, extreme and even brutal. It erupts like a volcano spewing red-hot anger, and its aim is to punish. Abuse can be physical, such as slapping, pushing, shaking, and jerking, or emotional, such as shaming with sarcasm, withholding affection, name-calling, and yelling. Abuse creates terror in a child's heart and leaves deep scars on the soul.

The aim of discipline is correction. Discipline is fair and expected, upholds the child's dignity and value, and is restrained and controlled. It is motivated by a desire to correct wrongdoing for the good of the child and to enhance self-control and a sense of security.

The Distinction between Crushing and Shaping
You can see this distinction in your child's face in the moment of confrontation. Read Proverbs 15:13 and 17:22. How do these verses describe the self-doubting sadness of a child who is crushed versus the self-confident joy of a child who is shaped?

Quotable

Emphasize love and encouragement, not just rules and consequences. Uphold the dignity of your child. Do so in public and in private. Show the world you delight in your children.

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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The Distinction between Childishness and Defiance

Childishness comes in a variety of coloring-box hues: unrestrained energy, fidgety curiosity, clumsy spilling, distracted forgetfulness, failure-prone fumbling, roller-coaster mood swings, and mud-pie messiness.

Defiance, on the other hand, paints in darker shades: deliberate and stubborn resistance, hateful and selfish bullying, repeated disobedience, sassing, sneakiness, temper tantrums, and a belligerent and demanding attitude.

Loving discipline deals with defiance head on. It changes your child's course from a destructive path of defiant rebellion against all authority, including God, to a path of love for self and others and respect for authority.

Describing loving discipline is simple; doing it is not so easy! Shaping a child's will without being too permissive or too harsh requires the wisdom of Solomon. Thankfully, in Proverbs we *have* the wisdom of Solomon! Let's open its pages to find helpful guidance.

DIGGING DEEPER

The following verses in Proverbs cast light on four principles to lead you safely across the tightrope without tipping to one extreme or the other.

Start early. The first principle is in Proverbs 13:24 NASB.

> He who withholds his rod hates his son,
> But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

What are the two styles of parenting contrasted in this verse? And why do you think a child might perceive one style as lacking love and the other as expressing love?

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Notice the word *diligently*. Chuck Swindoll says that the noun form of the Hebrew word means "dawn," and the verbal form means "seek early." Tucked into this word is our first principle, namely, to start disciplining your child in the early years when the sun is dawning on his or her life journey. As the years pass, the window of hope for good outcomes closes. Read Proverbs 19:18, and note the somber consequences of not starting early.

Stay balanced. The second principle emerges from Proverbs 29:15 NASB.

> The rod and reproof give wisdom,
> But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.

Reproof refers to verbal instruction and warning. *Rod* refers to consequences. To reprove is to speak plainly about rules or boundaries. The rod is the corrective response when rules are broken or boundaries are crossed. A reproof uses words; the rod, action. Keeping these two elements of discipline *in balance* is essential. There is a time to stop talking and act; other times, it's wise to explain further before jumping to a quick consequence.

Look closely at other proverbs that describe reproof-and-rod discipline: Proverbs 3:12; 15:5; 22:15; 23:13–14. Write down what these verses teach.

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Searching the Scriptures Tip

A crucial step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method is application, which involves taking God's Word personally. Application invites God's truth to grip us in areas that need attention and call us to action.

Take a moment right now to apply the reproof-and-rod principle. In the space below, write out three rules or boundaries that you need to explain to your children (or grandchildren if you are assisting in their rearing)—the *reproof*. Then list the consequences of disobedience—the *rod*. Here's an example for a young child, "Put away your toys when Mommy tells you. If you disobey, you will lose the toys you didn't put away until you obey next time. Okay?" Remember, no discipline should take children by surprise. Clear instructions set the table for effective corrections.

Be consistent. Take a moment to read Hebrews 12:5–10. Write down the similarities between our heavenly Father's discipline and discipline from an earthly father.

By the way, this would be a good time to grab a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. Look for entries such as *parenting* and *children*. Read over the material that describes how children and parents related in biblical times, especially in the Old Testament, since that's the period in which Proverbs was composed. Make some notes about things that struck you as significant to your interpretation of these principles.

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God's love and reproofs flow together in a steady stream. What is true today is true tomorrow; what was wrong before is wrong now, whether done in public or private. The entire stream flows within the secure banks of a consistent, loving relationship.

Say words of support as consistently as words of correction. Emphasize love and encouragement, not just rules and consequences. Assure your child how much you delight in him or her.

Further principles that emerge from our study are these: *explain rules beforehand; discipline with dignity (privately); administer consequences firmly; assure tenderly.* Now it's your turn to write any other principles you've discovered and how you plan to put loving discipline into practice.

Be reasonable. A final principle flows from the compassion of Christ. When you see childish behavior, give correction from a soft heart. Remember your own childhood, and apply the oil of good humor and understanding. Being stern and unreasonable is like dumping grit in the gears, but reasonableness helps a relationship run smoothly.

Bring It Home

If you're a grandparent, your role is to undergird and support your adult children who are the parents. Affirm them, and let them know what a good job they are doing. Talk about issues and ask for clarification, but don't take over their job. How wrong it is for a grandparent to undermine the authority of parents by giving the child anything he or she wants despite the parents' values . . . or by usurping the parenting role and disciplining the child as if you were the parent.

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Clarifying the roles between parents and grandparents requires open discussion. As we close this study, write down a plan for the adults in your family to talk about discipline issues. What topics would you like to discuss? What principles are important to emphasize? Is spanking an appropriate correction for defiance? When and how should it be done? What clarifications can you make to the roles of parents and grandparents in rearing children? Setting the course for discipline as a family will make your children even more secure.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help us in the journey of parenting to grow under Your loving hand of discipline in our lives. Help us to model a submissive spirit to Your authority. Shape our will. Mold our thinking. Create in our homes a secure place where our children can become mature individuals who love You with their whole hearts. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Delighting in Your Children

1 Thessalonians 2:5–12

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

When you pray, how do you address the Lord? When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He didn't use impersonal, clinical, or stuffy terminology to talk to God. Instead, Jesus simply said, "Our *Father*" (Matthew 6:9, emphasis added).

We've been adopted into God's family and can call Him "Daddy" (Romans 8:15)—how extraordinary! And God delights in us because we are His children. Psalm 37:23 says,

> The LORD directs the steps of the godly.
> He delights in every detail of their lives.

One of the most profound ways parents can teach their children a sound theology of God is to *enjoy* their children. This doesn't mean unbridled and undisciplined indulgence, but it doesn't mean intractable and inflexible discipline either.

What does it mean to delight in one's children as a reflection of God's delight? Let's take a look.

DIGGING DEEPER

This study is all about taking the lesson of delighting in our children out of the realm of abstract concept and into vivid reality with tangible action steps.

Chuck highlights several key ways to express delight in the children in our lives.

What Does the Bible Say About It? Let's Correlate

In this exercise, find one or two Scriptures that support the following attributes of delight that Chuck adapts from 1 Thessalonians 2:7 and 2:12. (An example is provided for each attribute.)

Quotable

May we become reacquainted with what it means to delight in our children, to find pleasure in them, and them in us.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Know your child's world. Tenderly meet his or her needs.
(Matthew 19:13)

Care enough to warn him or her of life's pitfalls.
(Proverbs 6:20)

Exhort (Chuck notes that this word is taken from a term that means "to treat someone in a congenial manner/to invite/to speak in a friendly manner") your child.
(Colossians 3:21)

Encourage your child.
(Deuteronomy 11:18–21)

Implore (from the term that means "to affirm in a supportive manner/speak well of") your child.
(Luke 11:11–13)

Straight from the Scriptures: What Delighting in Your Children Is . . . and Is *Not*

The Bible provides us with concrete wisdom passages—such as Proverbs 22:6—that teach readers how to parent well. In addition to the wisdom texts, God also provides stories in His Word that vividly serve as warnings to those who may be tempted to parent passively.

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One example of biblical narrative that reinforces the need for vigilant parenting is found in 1 Samuel, with a dad named Eli and a mom named Hannah.

Eli was not a foreigner but a citizen of the nation of Israel. He wasn't just an Israelite; he was a Levite priest—born to serve the Lord. In an era of biblical history when the chosen people relied on the priesthood for access to and acceptance from God, Eli wasn't a sparkling example of one who discerned God's will or voice.

For example, Eli thought Hannah was drunk when she was praying fervently that God would bless her with a child (1 Samuel 1:12–16).

Note how Eli responded in 1:12–14. What are some of the verbs used to describe his actions?

He watched Hannah. He presumed. Then he rebuked her. He acted at once to correct what he observed as wicked behavior. These are good responses in general, but in Eli's case the responses were grounded in a fundamental disconnection from godly discernment. Why? Eli relied too much on his eyes without investigating Hannah's circumstances or allowing room for God's prompting.

Let's rewind to Hannah. We're given the context of her tearful prayers: she was also an Israelite from Ephraim and one of Elkanah's *two* wives. She was barren (1:1–2). This complicated family would trek yearly to the tabernacle to make sacrifices. Every year, Peninnah (Elkanah's other wife) would taunt Hannah because of her barrenness. Hannah's barrenness had another implication in her ancient Near Eastern context: every year she grew older without a child meant increased chances of her becoming a widow with no one to provide for her. In light of this, every year, instead of worshiping, she wept. Instead of eating, she fasted.

One day, she thought she would cry somewhere else, to Someone besides "better-than-having-ten-sons" Elkanah (1:8). This choice changed her life and the history of Israel:

> Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut." (1:9–11)

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What does this prayer say about Hannah's faith and character?

I will give him back to you. What phenomenal faith! Hannah promised God a sacrificial gratitude and wagered her own inheritance on His goodness.

God responded to Hannah's faith, and she gave birth to Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19–20). Hannah lovingly, tenderly cared for and nourished her little one (1:22–23), no doubt delighting in him. Then, she kept her promise and dedicated Samuel to the Lord right after he was weaned, and they worshiped the Lord there (1:27–28).

Now, let's contrast Hannah's faith and God's response with Eli's behavior toward his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and God's response.

Read 1 Samuel 2:12–3:1 and answer the following questions:

In what ways did Hophni and Phinehas treat the Lord with contempt?

Did Hannah forget Samuel? How did she continue to be present in his life? How did the Lord respond?

Did Eli know what his sons were up to? How did he find out (2:24)?

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How did Eli hear the word of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:27–36; 3:11–14)? Considering this, what is the symbolism of Eli's blindness (3:2)?

Why wasn't God satisfied with Eli's rebuke of his sons? Why wasn't that attempt good enough?

As Samuel grew in stature and discernment, Eli declined. His passive parenting had resulted in the serial degradation of the sacrifices of the people of Israel. What an affront to a holy God! Eli failed to follow up with action his rebukes to Hophni and Phinehas. He was so unaware of the day-to-day of his children's spiritual and vocational lives that he had to be informed by other people in the community. His passivity preceded his stunted legacy and the deaths of his sons.

In contrast, Hannah delighted in Samuel. She prayed over his future before she knew him—that he would be a Nazirite, voluntarily devoted to God all his life, and that he would serve the Lord in His tabernacle. She nourished him. From her song of praise in 1 Samuel 2, it's clear that she knew God's Word and probably sang theology over her nursing child, planting seeds of godliness within him. The little ephods she sewed him were tangible gifts of encouragement and warm reminders of her love. Hannah helped prepare Samuel to be the man God created him to be—a man who would hear God's voice.

Up Close

We all have children in our lives whom we have the privilege and unique opportunity to love with delight. We don't have to wait to apply this lesson to our lives—we can begin today! Here are some practical suggestions on how to delight in your children (please note: the possibilities are endless!):

- Send care packages to your college-aged child (even if he or she lives at home!).
- Make a surprise visit to your elementary-school-aged child at school.
- Ask your adult child how you can pray for him or her each week for a month.

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- Write and frame a prayer for your child, praising God for him or her, and naming unique things that you love about him or her.
- Write words of encouragement in dry-erase marker on your bathroom mirror for each child.
- Take your children out for interview dates: take lots of selfies, eat yummy food, and ask them interview questions.
- Make a list of all the gifts you see in each child. Pray through them, dedicating each gift to God.
- Make sure that when you connect with your children (no matter their age), you look directly at *them*. Put ALL your devices away and communicate nonverbally that you are listening.

Picture one of the children in your life. (He or she can be an adult son or daughter too!) Jot down some ways that you intend to delight in him or her this week.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a joy it is to call you Father. Please help me to reflect Your delight and love for Your children in how I delight and love mine. Thank you for the blessing of these children. Help me to dedicate them to You and guide them in the paths that You have laid for them. Amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Delightful Memories Your Children Won't Forget

Psalm 127:3–128:6

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Take a stroll through your family's museum of memories. What treasures do you see on exhibit? A flowing wedding gown hangs elegantly in a glass case. On a pedestal rests the keys to the old family car—it was a used clunker, but it was big enough to fit three kids, the dog, and enough camping equipment for a week at Yosemite! To the right is the birthday memories section, and the school memories wing is around the corner. It's all here in your family museum.

Your children have their own mental collection of artifacts. Their images can't be stored on a smartphone's memory chip, but they are just as vivid and even more permanent. They will last a lifetime.

Among their memories are your attitudes and actions that they observe during their years in your home. What would you wish for them to remember long into adulthood? Psalms 127 and 128 offer an inventory list we can study together.

DIGGING DEEPER

In Psalms 127 and 128, we can identify *three attitudes and actions* that build memories, and each of them say to your children, "You are important!" In addition, the psalmist teaches parents *four investments* they can make to their children's memory bank.

We'll look at these principles and applications in a moment. First, though, let's take a step back and use our *Searching the Scriptures* process to lay some groundwork.

Genre and Background

A good study Bible can help you understand the genre (type of literature) and background of the text. Examples of excellent study Bibles are the *NLT Study Bible*, which is based on the New Living Translation, and the *NIV Study Bible*, which is based on the New International Version. Take a moment to review the introductory article on the book of Psalms that appears before Psalm 1.

Quotable

Think of yourself as a curator for your family's museum of memories. You're the one who watches over the treasures, who realizes their value and passes them on to the next generation.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Delightful Memories Your Children Won't Forget

Psalm 127:3–128:6

While reading, look for information that pertains to Psalms 127 and 128, and jot down a few facts about these psalms that you discover. What type of psalms are these? In which collection do these psalms appear?

Pilgrims traveling in family groups walked to Jerusalem for annual festivals. As they ascended the dusty hillsides, they sang their beliefs in songs known as Songs of Ascent. Psalms 127 and 128 are two songs dedicated to family values.

Overview and Observations

Overview Psalms 127 and 128 by reading them straight through and making observations of each section as listed below. What was the psalmist teaching Israel's families about God and family life?

The Foundation of the Home (Psalm 127:1–2)

The Expansion of the Home (127:3–5)

The Child-Rearing Years (128:1–3)

The Later Years (128:4–6)

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Delightful Memories Your Children Won't Forget

Psalm 127:3–128:6

If the Lord isn't building the values on which your home life is founded, all the time and money that you spend on constructing your house is in vain. What good are energy-efficient windows and a watertight roof when greed, envy, immorality, shame, and criticism are seeping into the hearts of the people living inside the house?

A Closer Look

As Architect and Master Builder, the Lord builds what's most important into your home. What is at the top of his materials list for your home life? *Communicating to your children with your attitudes and actions that they are important.* Using the select tool, highlight the words in Psalm 127:3–128:2 that describe a positive perspective of children.

> Children are a gift from the LORD;
> they are a reward from him.
> Children born to a young man
> are like arrows in a warrior's hands.
> How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!
> He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.
> How joyful are those who fear the LORD—
> all who follow his ways!
> You will enjoy the fruit of your labor.
> How joyful and prosperous you will be! (NLT)

Without realizing, we may be tossing our children or grandchildren a look or a tone that says, "You're a hassle. You're in the way. Don't bother me." These barbed messages cut deep. Instead, determine to give your children encouraging messages to snuggle—such as the following three that emerge from the words you highlighted above.

You are a gift and reward. Brainstorm some words and ways that you can communicate that your child or grandchild is a gift and reward. For example, one word to use is *treasure*, and a way to communicate that is to treasure the time you have with him or her.

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You have potential. The archer and arrow image portrays the idea of guidance. Like an archer aims and shoots an arrow toward a target, parents take the time to guide their child toward a good goal. It takes patience and practice to help a child build the habits necessary to reach his or her potential. Use the space below to think of your child's potential goals and how you can guide him or her toward those targets.

You bring joy. The NLT translation captures the meaning of the Hebrew word that is translated "blessing" in the NIV and NASB. It means "happy" or "joyful." Children learn the powerful role of happiness and joy when they grow up in an atmosphere of happiness and joy.

Children thrive on fun! Fun communicates that you're glad to be with them, that joy accompanies their presence. Oh, the blessings of laughter and play! Just think of all the benefits: encouragement, praise, security, approval, acceptance, friendship, belonging, love. Years from now, when your child strolls through his or her museum of memories, the evenings spent having fun with mom and dad will be their most prized treasures.

The Master Builder can help you to create a positive, fun-filled atmosphere, and it begins with your own heart. Adults whose museums are full of painful memories sometimes drag those old hurts home with them. If you're having trouble filling your home with laughter, ask the Lord to search your heart. What is He revealing about your joy or lack of joy that needs addressing? How can you restore your joy—and then, how can you lighten the atmosphere in your home?

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Bring It Home

The final section, Psalm 128:3–6, paints a portrait of family life that we'd love to hang in our hall of memories:

> Your wife will bear children as a vine bears grapes,
> your household lush as a vineyard,
> The children around your table
> as fresh and promising as young olive shoots.
> Stand in awe of God's Yes.
> Oh, how he blesses the one who fears God!
> Enjoy the good life in Jerusalem
> every day of your life.
> And enjoy your grandchildren.
> Peace to Israel! (MSG)

Take some time to imagine what it would be like to walk through your own vineyard or olive tree grove—a vast field of row after row of grapevines or olive trees, hanging low with deep-colored fruit. What images come to your mind? What might you experience? What would you smell? How would you feel amid a rich, full crop of grape-filled vines or olive trees with branches brought low by ripe olives? Write down some of your responses.

How do the images of a lush vineyard or rich olive grove strengthen the psalmist's message about the value of children in your home?

Reflecting on the lush images in this portrait, as well as the principles we highlighted above, let's wrap up our study with some final applications. Here are four ways you can invest in your children's museum of memories.

- Make time for your child or grandchild.
- Value your child or grandchild.

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- Mom and dad, love one another.
- Live a life of faithful cultivation of faith in your home

Now it's time to usher these applications through the door and into your home life. Write down four ways you plan to put these principles into action this week. It may be as simple as bending down to your child's eye level and saying, "I love you," followed by a big hug.

1.

2.

3.

4.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the Master Builder of my heart and my home life. You are a safe place to whom I can bring my admissions of failure. By Your grace, the sun will rise tomorrow on a new day to hold a loved one's hand, to choose joy instead of gloom, to encourage, praise, and celebrate the treasures in my home. Help me, Lord, to love from Your heart . . . and laugh! In the name of Jesus, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

When the Fun Stops for Parents

1 Samuel 15:22–23; Luke 15:11–24

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

We learned in the last study how parents are to guide their children like archers aim an arrow. Archers aim their arrows at the center of the target; parents aim their children at the center of God's design for them.

Just as an archer releases an arrow, so also parents must let their children go as they become more capable and responsible. Independence is a healthy process. The first steps of the toddler lead to the first driving lesson of the teenager and, eventually, to the first apartment of the young adult. Celebrate your child's growing self-sufficiency and independence!

But what if the arrow veers off God's good course? What if the child's natural urge toward independence becomes a fist-clenched demand for control and godless freedom? How should parents respond when the sounds of laughter in the home fade into the sobs of having a wayward child?

DIGGING DEEPER

In this study, we'll examine God's response to rebels as a model for parents. No one else has more experience in parenting rebellious children than God. His list of rebels stretches as long as history's timeline, all the way back to Adam and Eve.

A Study of Rebellion

One prominent name on God's list is Saul. Read the story of his disobedience in 1 Samuel 15:1–21. In the space below, write down what God clearly told him to do (1 Samuel 15:1–3). Then summarize what Saul did (15:7–9), along with God's and Samuel's responses (15:10–11) and Saul's rationalization when Samuel confronted him (15:12–21).

Quotable

The rebel curls his lip toward his parents and says, "I'm going my own way!" You can't reason with him or counsel him; you've got to cut him loose. God will be faithful.

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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Samuel's next words penetrate Saul's excuses like darts aimed directly at Saul's rebellious spirit.

> "What is more pleasing to the LORD:
> your burnt offerings and sacrifices
> or your obedience to his voice?
> Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice,
> and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.
> Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft,
> and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.
> So because you have rejected the command of the LORD,
> he has rejected you as king." (1 Samuel 15:22–23 NLT)

Linger over these verses for a few moments, and use the fivefold observation plan in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Look for words that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, and unalike.

Which words are *emphasized*? Saul has been so dull of hearing that God must shout in his ear, "Listen!" What follows this attention-getter is likely the central point of the passage. What point is God driving home?

Which words are *repeated*?

Which words are *related*? Some words form a connection to each other. Look, for example, at the question, "What is more pleasing to the LORD?" The question is related to its answer, which is what?

Which words are *alike* and *unalike*? Comparisons and contrasts clarify meaning. Note the synonyms in the passage, as well as the words that are opposite. What do these synonyms and antonyms tell you about the meaning of these words?

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Dig deep enough into the craggy soil of disobedience, witchcraft, and idolatry, and your excavation will reveal the common source of all rebellion: *opposition to God's authority.* And why do rebels oppose God? The answer is as old as the first rebellious act: to make self the final authority and to worship self as god (Genesis 3:1–6).

A Story of Rebellion and Repentance

Is there hope for the rebel? Yes! And also, healing for the rebel's family. Jesus tells the story of a family wounded by a son's rebellion and restored by a father's love. Let's read Jesus' story, The Prodigal Son, with an eye toward finding help for families with wayward children.

Searching the Scriptures Tip

As with all His stories, Jesus mounts this gem of a story in a cultural setting to enhance its meaning. A helpful resource to gain insight into the customs of Jesus' day is *Insight's Handbook of New Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book.* Click this link for more information and to purchase your copy.

The Ethnic and Domestic Scene

Read Luke 15:11–12. The younger son brazenly demands from his father, "I want my share of your estate now *before you die*" (Luke 15:12 NLT, emphasis added). Can you feel the jab to the father's gut? This same boy who once sat on his father's knee and so lovingly hugged his father's neck now is a wild stallion chomping at the bit and bucking off his relationship. He says in so many words, "I wish you were dead so I can have my inheritance."

Put yourself in the father's shoes, and describe his heartache as well as the cultural stigma he must endure because of his son's disrespect.

Notice how the father's love absorbs the son's hurtful words. He doesn't lash back, cling, or lecture; instead, he calmly gives the boy what he asks for and lets him go. What do you learn from the father's example when relating with your wayward child?

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The Lifestyle and Consequences

Read Luke 15:13–16. By bolting to Gentile country, this Jewish boy shows contempt toward his father, family, and his own heritage. When his money runs out and famine strips the countryside as bare as his bank account, the once unbridled youth enslaves himself to a Gentile farmer and takes company with pigs to survive. He is alone and ashamed, rejected and unclean by Jewish standards, and starving.

Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' listeners, and describe how they might have responded to this part of the story. Would they have felt compassion toward the young man? Or judged him? Perhaps Proverbs 13:15, 18 would have come to mind—and rightly so. Read and reflect.

The Realization and Decision

Read Luke 15:17–19. The opening line in verse 17 is the turning point of the story, "But when he came to his senses." Like a thick wall, a stubborn will does not crumble easily. For the son, it took an onslaught of hardship to break through his defenses before he finally surrendered his pride. If you have a wayward child, what might it take to get through to him or her, and how can you sustain yourself as you wait for the turning point?

The Return and Restoration

Read Luke 15:20–24. Jesus puts the Father's loving heart on full display—which is the point of His story and the purpose of His mission. Jesus came to display *His* Father's love—a love that disregards its own dignity to run and embrace us, lost sinners still in the filth and stench of our condition. God's love is equally as shocking in its extravagance as the love of the prodigal's father. Just as the father covers his son's shame with a robe of honor and restores his identity with the family signet ring, so also does our Father cover and restore us. In this moment of grace, prodigals drink their fill of true love and, once satisfied, never wander again. Oh, for this to be true of our wayward one!

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As you read the following verses, write down how the Father loves you through Christ and restores you as His own. Matthew 9:35–36 (the same Greek word for *compassion* in Luke 15:20 is used here to describe Jesus); Galatians 3:26–27; 4:3–7; Colossians 1:21–22.

Bring It Home

To wrap up the study, here are Chuck Swindoll's four principles for parents, based on the father's response to his wayward son's rebellion. Reflect on the principles, and then use the provided space to write down your plan for dealing with the rebel under your roof.

- *No rebel can be allowed to ruin a home.* How is the stress from the rebel's presence in the home robbing peace and harming other family members?
- *If the rebellion necessitates a separation, go there.* Draw a line, and stick to it. Follow through. Don't support a foolish child's folly.
- *Let go!* Resist the urge to rescue.
- *When true repentance occurs, let grace abound.* Forgive without reservation or hesitation!

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, bring hope to every broken heart in homes fractured by rebellion. Give peace to replace anxiety, patience to support weakness, and love to cover shame. Help us wait. And please, Lord, by Your grace and mercy, bring the wayward one home. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Resolving Those Parent-Child Conflicts

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

About conflict, Chuck says, "it is doubtful that one person listening to me right now has spent these years on earth without hurting someone else or being hurt by someone else. It's part of life." Nowhere is this potential for hurt and conflict more true than in the context of family. When those conflicts flare up, they have the potential to create a toxic foothold for resentment, vengeance, and emotional cold wars. When tensions are not addressed, the entire family is tortured by the malice.

Whether you have been wronged and just can't let it go or you have hurt another family member but don't know how to make a move toward reconciliation, the book of Matthew has the answer for your conflict. It boils down to three simple words: *It's your move.*

DIGGING DEEPER

Matthew 18:35 is a shrill alarm ringing in the hearts of those who read its words:

> "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

What is "that"? Look at the preceding verse: "Then the angry king **sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt**" (18:34, emphasis added). Jesus, who voluntarily sacrificed His life to offer a sin-stained world the ultimate forgiveness, gave this warning: The Father doesn't mess around when it comes to those who enjoy the freedom of His forgiveness and yet refuse to extend forgiveness to others. When we don't forgive, we are left tortured by our thirst for payback.

How do we even begin to unpack this hard truth for ourselves and for others?

On our knees.

We must ask the Lord to examine our hearts before we go any further into study. We must allow the Lord to illuminate the dark places where harbored resentment, lust for revenge, and grudges can thrive.

Quotable

Forgiveness *is one of the key words in the life of a family living in harmony with one another.*

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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Prayer

Take a few moments to pray. Ask the Father to show you areas of unforgiveness staining your heart. Write down your prayer here.

Teaching the Tough Stuff

Matthew 18:21–35 is God's truth. As Christians, we must live it. As a part of the body, we must model and teach it. Where to begin?

Here are some thought-points on how to teach with humility, compassion, and accuracy.

You Are the First Audience

You are the first person impacted and changed by what you teach—at least, you ought to be. Set the same—or higher—expectations for yourself that you will for your audience. Wrestle with the text; seek God through prayer; and do what the Word says: forgive. It probably won't be long before you have an opportunity to practice what you teach.

Be Gentle

If this lesson on forgiveness were meant to be wielded as a weapon, Jesus would have led with the fiery wrath of the Father. Instead, He led with forgiveness and compassion—*this* is the heart of the King. We ought to do the same.

Have you ever been told a difficult truth with gentleness? What made the experience impactful?

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Check Your Theology

Be careful about contorting a parable to fit a purpose apart from what the original speaker intended. For example, it's possible to teach Matthew 18:35 in a way that implies that believers can lose their salvation because they don't forgive. This is why correlation is such an important step in studying a passage—comparing Scripture with Scripture helps us to accurately interpret what we read. Because salvation is based on grace through faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8–9), it's not something that can be earned—or lost—by our effort.

How do you check your theology?

- *Correlation.* You can use technology or a concordance to investigate what the Bible says about a specific topic.

- *Commentary.* Scholars have written volumes on the book of Matthew. (Sometimes, even *they* aren't settled on how to interpret a passage!) Good commentaries will reverence the inerrancy of the Bible, draw on scholarship from the church fathers to present day, engage in word studies, and give a range of scholarly theories when they examine difficult passages.

- *Context.* The context of the parable, narrative, or epistle is the foil for the story. In Matthew 18, Jesus illustrated the traits of a humble disciple—one with childlike faith and dependence; who intensely values his brothers and sisters in Christ; and who seeks resolution and doles out forgiveness, rather than rage and revenge.

- *Conversation.* We weren't meant to learn the Bible in an individualistic vacuum. Talk about the Bible with other Christians who are walking with the Lord, in environments where you are *not* the teacher.

Glean the Principle

What is the universal (true for all time) principle of the passage—the kernel of truth that must be shared? One universal principle is this: be guided by Christlike compassion. Christlike compassion reconciles and forgives.

Take a moment to think of some additional principles that would help you compassionately and accurately teach the principle of forgiveness, based on Matthew 18:21–35. Write them down here:

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Know Your Audience

Whether you are teaching a classroom of 8th graders, a small group of inmates, a women's retreat, or giving a Sunday-morning sermon, know to whom you are speaking. Different audiences may face age or gender-specific challenges and may be in varied stages of spiritual maturity. Ideally, you want to tailor your teaching to that audience in such a way that they have tangible takeaways to go and *live* what they have learned.

Who is a potential audience for you to teach? (This includes your children, relatives, coworkers, as well as more traditional ministry contexts.) How would you tailor your teaching to reach your chosen audience?

Where You Fit in the Story: It's *Always* Your Move

Voracious reading, endless research, and prayerful study are *meaningless* if your life isn't changed by what you learn. Practicing forgiveness and reconciliation from your heart are two of the most valuable life practices you can do to reflect the compassion of God in palpable ways to the people in your life. Whether you have done wrong or been wronged, it's always your move. Will you move toward forgiveness and reconciliation or fall backward into the torture of bitterness and revenge? The choice is yours.

Can you think of a person you need to reconcile with? Create an action plan to reconcile. Write it down below.

Can you think of a person you need to forgive? Write a prayer below to express to God your desire to let go.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Let's pray from the words of Francis of Assisi:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred,
Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
As to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.[1]

Endnotes
1. St. Francis of Assisi, "The Peace Prayer," The Franciscan Archive, https://franciscan-archive.org/patriarcha/peace.html, accessed Mar. 10, 2017.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Accepting Reproof from Those Who Love Us

Selected Proverbs and Ephesians 6:1–4

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Biblical parenting is training children in godliness in a way that is tailor-made for your child. Children won't grow well in a one-size-fits-all style of parenting. They'll bust out the seams if we try to force fit them. They yearn to be known intimately and personally, which requires that we care enough to spend time with our children; care enough to listen to their thoughts and share their feelings; and, when needed, care enough to confront.

Confrontation done well isn't condemnation, criticism, or humiliation. It doesn't erupt in angry outbursts or leak out as sarcastic fault-finding. It is speaking truth in love, which is perhaps the highest expression of care (Ephesians 4:15).

In this study, we'll take a biblical tour of God's thoughts on caring confrontation, and our first stop is the hall of wisdom: Proverbs.

DIGGING DEEPER

In the *Searching the Scriptures* process a helpful exercise is determining what type of book you're studying. The Bible is comprised of all manner of literature including several books of poetry. The Old Testament book of Proverbs falls into the category of *books of poetry*. This collection of books is also sometimes referred to as *wisdom* literature. Take some time to read through the introductory material in your study Bible at the beginning of the book of Proverbs. Or read that same section in a commentary to help orient you to the unique nature of this magnificent collection of poetical expression.

In Proverbs, we learn *wisdom's perspective on reproof*. When God confronts, wise people see beyond the sting of reproof to God's benevolent hand. They understand God's motive is to protect them by correcting behavior that will lead to greater pain. Consequently, they don't resist His reproofs but welcome them.

Quotable

Confrontation comes after thought and prayer and at just the right time. Speak the truth in love so that your child can grow.

— *Charles R. Swindoll*

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> My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord
> Or loathe His reproof,
> For whom the Lord loves He reproves,
> Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (Proverbs 3:11–12 NASB)

Delight is in the heart of a loving father who firmly pulls back his child from stepping in front of a speeding car. He cherishes his child as he saves her from disaster with a corrective hand. Children, however, feel only the yank. They don't see the danger they narrowly avoided, and they may lash out in anger, "You're mean, Daddy!" Words such as "This is for your good" don't diffuse their resistance.

However, what warnings do Proverbs 15:5, 10, and 32 issue to those who resist correction?

Children must learn by experience that, "If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself" (15:32 NLT). In addition, parents who *neglect to discipline* will harm their children—as well as the unfortunate people in their children's unruly path. Avoid confrontation, adopt a peace-at-any-price approach, and you'll pay a steeper price in the end.

Proverbs also teaches us *wisdom's guidelines for reproof.* After reading the following verses, answer the questions below.

> Like apples of gold in settings of silver
> Is a word spoken in right circumstances. (25:11 NASB)
>
> Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
> But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy. (27:6 NASB)
>
> In the end, people appreciate honest criticism
> far more than flattery. (28:23 NLT)

Who has the right to reprove?

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What is the lasting value of the wound?

Friendship includes the freedom to do what?

What harm could listening to flattery cause?

How should criticism be done?

At what time should reproof come?

Reproof done *in private* with words that *build up*, not condemn, and are given *at the right time* will give life to your children. If they accept them, they will dwell among the wise (healthy peers) and will acquire understanding (of how life works). Parents couldn't wish for more!

A Closer Look

The next stop in our biblical tour takes us to the correspondence room where we find Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Here he gives counsel to children and their parents.

Counsel to Children
What are the two commands for children in the following verse?

> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1–3 NIV)

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Obedience is action; it involves a child's behavior. Honor, which conveys the ideas of respect and devotion, is attitude; it involves a child's thoughts and emotions. Both right action and right attitude are essential. To obey without respect is defiant compliance; to respect without obedience is empty lip-service.

What is missing in these scenarios of compliance and lip-service? *A trusting relationship.* At the heart of children's obedience is a trusting relationship in which they are secure in their parents' love. They know that their parents truly desire what's best for them, so they are willing to accept reproof and submit their will to their parents' will. Submission is the theme of this entire section in Ephesians which addresses husbands, wives, children, parents, workers, and bosses: "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21 NIV).

Why does God instruct children to obey and respect their parents? Can you spot the two reasons in the verses above?

On the flipside, how might things *not* go well for disobedient and disrespectful children when they grow up and get married, try to hold a job, and live as citizens in a community?

Counsel to Parents

How can parents help their children avoid the inevitable life storms that defiance and disrespect stir up? The apostle Paul advises fathers to take a balanced approach; mothers can learn from his instructions as well.

Read Ephesians 6:4. What does Paul warn against? What does he command?

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Two Greek words in this verse are worth excavating. First, *parorgizete* means "provoke to anger." Compare its usage in a parallel passage, Colossians 3:21. How might a father provoke his children to anger or, as the word appears in other translations, "aggravate" or "exasperate" them? According to Colossians 3:21, what happens to the child as a result?

The second Greek word is *ektrephete*, which means "nourish." Compare its usage in Ephesians 5:29. In this verse, Paul challenges men to nourish their wife just as they nourish themselves—and to view Christ's love for the church as a model. As a father, a man must also create a nourishing environment for his children by providing for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Compare the two words in the following chart. We'll list a few descriptors, and you can fill in some of your own.

PARORGIZETE	*EKTREPHETE*
Exasperate	Nourish
Provoke	Encourage
Aggravate	Praise
Nag	Affirm
Lecture	Support
Harass	Clear Boundaries
Ridicule	Patient Instruction

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Bring It Home

Confrontation is a dance between two partners who must learn to step in sync with one another. The confronter moves first with a gentle hand on his partner's back and an assertive step forward. The partner responds, trusting the gesture and submitting in turn. Back and forth the partners move, giving and taking, saying what's needed, and responding with respect—all in time to the music of love.

Here are a few guidelines for the dance.

- *Think and pray before you say anything.* If you react rashly and rush your reproof, you'll surely step on someone's toes. It will be difficult for others to trust your next move.
- *Don't share the reproof with anyone else.* The dance is for two people. Be wary of talking about your child to all your friends—and never when your child is in earshot.
- *As the change occurs, affirm!* Notice the subtle movements of your partner's response, and celebrate his or her success!

Do you need to confront one of your children? Take time now to pray and use the space below to write down the words you need to say. You'll know that you've done well when your child realizes how much you care, respects you for talking straight, and experiences the benefits of listening, learning, and changing.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your reproofs which come at just the right time, always for the right reason, and in ways that we never forget. Give me Your words, timing, and lasting results as I reprove those I love for the sake of peace and harmony in my home. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

Suggestions for Parenting Grown-Up Kids

Ephesians 4:25–32

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Great anticipation and excitement mark the beginning of marriage. Then challenges arrive with the birth of children, which require the couple to learn parenting skills without a handbook. With each stage of their child's growth—from preschool through elementary school, middle school, and high school—parents must fine-tune their skills if they hope to sustain harmony in the home.

Then, after all that adapting, a new set of challenges arises when the children reach adulthood. Can there still be mutual respect and meaningful relationships in the family? Can harmony continue between parents and their grown-up kids? Absolutely! Let's look to Ephesians 4 for God's direction.

DIGGING DEEPER

The theme of harmony winds through Ephesians 4 and flows into six practical principles about relationships in the church that we can apply to families with adult children.

In the third verse, we discover the sparkling source of family harmony:

> Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit,
> binding yourselves together with peace. (Ephesians 4:3 NLT)

"Keep yourselves *united in the Spirit*," Paul urges church members—and this command is particularly fitting for family members. The Spirit joins us to our adult children with a power that is stronger than any family tie. No rift is too cavernous to cross; no issue is impossible for God through His Spirit to solve (Luke 1:37).

Quotable

Your grown-up sons or daughters deserve to hear the truth from you. Not necessarily what they may want to hear, but at the right time what they need to hear.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Not only is the Spirit with us, He equips us. According to Ephesians 4:7, the Spirit "has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ" (NLT). What is the purpose and result of using these gifts? Read verses 12–13 to find the answer.

There's our word again, *unity*. We achieve more and more unity as we *build up* one another, *grow up* in Christ, and *measure up* to His standard.

Finally, we experience the benefits of unity. List these benefits as you find them in 4:16.

Now that's harmony at its best! As each family member matures into who God made him or her to be and contributes his or her unique gift, the whole family becomes "healthy and growing and full of love" (4:16 NLT).

That's the hope, anyway. An ear at the door of your family home may overhear less than harmonious sounds. Paul's melody of unity within church and family is possible with God's help, but it takes practice on our part—specifically, by putting into practice the following six principles.

Speak Truth

Think of the "neighbor" in the following verse as your adult child.

> Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25 NASB)

Searching the Scriptures Tip

Versions of the Bible follow different formatting rules to indicate special cases in translation. For example, the NASB version uses small caps to indicate that a New Testament author quoted from the Old Testament and italics to show which words don't appear in the original text but have been added to clarify the ancient

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syntax for modern-day readers. In this verse, you can see the added words in italics, as well as the phrases that the translators believe Paul borrowed from Zechariah 8:16.

Your grown-up son or daughter needs to hear the truth from you. Talk straight. Don't fudge the truth by saying something is okay when it isn't; by holding back your honest feelings (about the person he or she is dating, for example); by shading your better judgment when asked for advice on a moral dilemma.

Have you been sidestepping an issue with your adult child? If so, raise your right hand, and swear to tell the whole truth from now on! Here's some space to write down what you may need to say.

Get Passionate

The next verse may surprise you with Paul's opener: "Be angry . . ." (Ephesians 4:26 NASB)! The form of anger Paul describes here isn't an out-of-control temper caused when a person doesn't get his or her way. Instead, Paul's saying, "Get passionate!" Get fired up about an injustice or wrongdoing.

Let your adult children see your tears over evil and the resolve in your heart for what's right and good. Find a cause that lights your fire. If you can't find one, borrow a spark from your adult child's enthusiasm and join his or her cause!

Stop Stealing

Paul adds, "He who steals must steal no longer" (Ephesians 4:28 NASB). Parents may not be pocketing their adult children's cash, but they can swipe other valuables. Their adult children's *freedom* is one example of a treasure parents sometimes steal:

- Freedom to make their own decisions
- Freedom to think independently
- Freedom to do for oneself

Some parents steal these freedoms by overcontrolling their adult children, not allowing different points of view, and taking care of them when they should be taking care of themselves. Stealing adulthood's freedom leads to a second theft: stealing *consequences*. When we rescue adult children to spare them the pain that naturally follows poor choices, we steal an opportunity for growth. In addition, we contribute to a mind-set of entitlement in which the adult child expects and then demands unearned privileges—which is a form of stealing!

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Pause here, and use the space below to reflect on the rest of verse 28: "use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need" (NLT). Adult children must learn hard work and generosity. Have you unintentionally discouraged hard work by doing too much for your adult child? If so, how can you restore what should belong to them by granting freedoms and allowing consequences?

Stop Yelling

Read verse 29. Unwholesome words can take many forms: cursing, threatening, sarcastic putdowns, caustic comments. Parents resort to outbursts when they feel disrespected, but a volcano reaction just enflames an adult child's rebellion and sparks even more disrespect.

Without resorting to angry words, what are better ways to work out your feelings when relating to your adult children? What does the latter part of verse 29 advise?

Give Grace

Can you sense the spirit of grace in verses 29 and 30? Parents steeped in grace hold their tongue when an adult child suffers for making a mistake. "I told you so" is not good or helpful. Just as God identifies us as His own and redeems us by His grace, so also we pour soothing oil on troubled waters for our adult children when we show grace to them.

What do words of grace that are good and helpful sound like in conversation with your adult child? List some redemptive, life-giving phrases in the space below.

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Be Kind

Read verses 31–32. With this list of imperatives, Paul wraps a reminder string around our finger with a summary statement: *be kind*. Simple as that! You can express kindness through a warm embrace, thoughtful listening, and asking for and offering forgiveness.

Make "be kind" a habit through daily practice. Is there an act of kindness you can show your adult child today?

Bring It Home

Memorize this list of practical principles: speak truth, get passionate, stop stealing, quit yelling, give grace, and be kind. Share the list with a friend, and ask for help in making these principles routine in your relationships with your adult children. Then enjoy the benefits of a harmonious family that is "healthy and growing and full of love" (Ephesians 4:16 NLT).

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in the fast-paced race of life, it is easy for us to run beyond the essentials. Truth, kindness, forgiveness, love. Remind us that we're a family. Fill our family with the unity that is possible only through Your Spirit that is our common bond. In Jesus' name, amen.

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BIBLICAL PARENTING

What to Do When You've Blown It

Isaiah 58:6–12; Joel 2:23–26

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all blown it as parents and grandparents—we've blown it as people! We've spoken harshly or rashly. We have falsely accused. We have said or done things that have eroded the confidence of those we care about. The space between our wrongs and our loved ones feels like an impassible chasm. Reconciliation seems impossible, perhaps because too much time has passed or because fear keeps us silent and paralyzed.

The same Spirit who resurrected Jesus from the dead lives in us. God can do the impossible. Not only is God able, but He is willing to restore the "years the locusts have eaten" (Joel 2:25 NIV).

Let's learn more about what to do when we've blown it.

DIGGING DEEPER

The focus of this *Searching the Scriptures* study is on application. Application is allowing the Bible's lessons to take a hold of our lives—causing us to examine ourselves and act on what we have learned. The lessons of humility and restoration are vital takeaways for reconciliation. Even if we don't have children, these lessons are applicable to relationships with our loved ones, classmates, and coworkers. At some point in our life, we will blow it. Application of Scripture informs how to respond after we blow it.

Chuck Swindoll calls this the painful reality of being human, and then he summarizes how those painful realities manifest themselves:

- First: We are all imperfect, including our children.
- Second: We cannot change the past. It is set in stone.
- Third: We are personally responsible for our own wrongs.

Quotable

The goodness of our God is greater than the badness of our failures. He will graciously give you a future and a hope, even with the children with whom you may still feel a sense of distance.

— Charles R. Swindoll

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Which one of these painful realities of being human most pricks your heart right now? Why?

Chuck's sermon outlines five steps to attempt reconciliation when we've blown it. Let's take each step in turn and apply each to our own situation—whether with children or our coworkers or peers.

Step 1: Humble Yourself

One poopy diaper change is all the proof we need that parenting isn't the role one would choose for the glory and constant affirmation. Good parenting takes steady, behind-the-scenes, sometimes undignified faithfulness. Still, we can allow pride to creep into our parenting in how we relate to our children. For example, we cannot be humble parents and yet never admit that we were wrong.

Read Chuck's words about common-sense parenting: "There's no magic in the Christian's home. There's no wand to wave over the situation. You as a parent have a job to do. It's thankless. It's sometimes unappreciated. . . . You have to do the strong talk. It takes reproof. It takes honest confrontation. It takes your standing your ground, setting boundaries, and not giving in, no matter how much the child may threaten, scream, or deny. The boundaries are set. And good common sense will lead you in how you carry that out."

Thankless and *unappreciated* are words unassociated with pride, but these words are also often closely related to service.

Read Matthew 11:29. How does Jesus describe Himself?

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Name someone whom you have observed to be humble. What characteristics convey his or her humility?

Read Matthew 18:3–5.

Who is the greatest in heaven?

How does a child display humility?

When we welcome children, who else is welcomed?

Step 2: Pray

When applying the Bible to our lives, it's important to *pray vulnerably*. Application isn't for perfect people; it's for people who are keenly aware that they need God's help. Vulnerable prayers happen when we open up our blind spots, shortcomings, fears, and impatience to the Spirit. God doesn't despise a humble, vulnerable heart—instead, He delights in exalting the humble.

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One of the best examples of vulnerable prayer can be found in the Psalms, where David writes:

> Search me, O God, and know my heart;
> test me and know my anxious thoughts.
> Point out anything in me that offends you,
> and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Here are some questions to help us zero in on vulnerable specifics (instead of the generic "Oh Lord, help me to do better!") when we've blown it:

- Is there someone I've hurt and haven't reconciled with?
- Is there a person I need to stop running from?
- Do I have bad habits to break?
- Do I need to shift gears or change direction?
- Is there someone I must forgive? Is there someone I must ask for forgiveness?

Write down one or two more examples of questions that will aid you in praying vulnerable, specific prayers.

Step 3: Stop Blaming Others

Another important step in applying God's Word to our lives is the step of confession. Forgiveness and cleansing are on the other side of confession (1 John 1:9). We cannot, however, receive the healing God desires for us if we continue to blame other people or circumstances for our own bad choices.

The first and most important confession we can ever make is a confession of faith. Bible studies and attempts to apply God's Word to our lives are fruitless efforts if we are not connected to the vine. Jesus is the vine; we cannot bear fruit without Him (John 15:5).

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Take this time to write down your commitment to Jesus. If you are not certain you have committed to Jesus, stop everything and read this link on How to Begin a Relationship with God.

Step 4: Make Yourself Available and Vulnerable

Have you ever found it easier to confess your failures to God than to another person? Part of the confidence we have in talking to God is healthy. He is our Father, and we should have an open and honest relationship with Him. That said, God always, always expects His children to be in peaceable relationship with Him *and* with other people. Sometimes we run to God yet avoid other people. It can be a daunting challenge to be vulnerable with the people closest to us! There's no guarantee that our kids will appreciate a broken spirit and a contrite heart . . . at least not at first.

Yet, it's a risk God encourages us to take. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23–24: "if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God."

Ask the Lord to help you remember any offenses that your children (or spouse, coworker, peer, etc.) have against you. Write them down.

Look at your calendar and make some deadlines to contact each person that the Spirit has brought to mind.

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Write down your prayer asking the Lord for help in having a soft, open heart in communicating with the people you've named.

In his message, Chuck shared his pithy advice for having frank and vulnerable conversations:

Number one: Don't hide anything.

Number two: Don't hurry the process. You don't need to get closure right then.

Number three: Don't hold onto anything in the past. Don't bring it up again.

Step 5: Trust God to Bring Healing and Change

The King James Version of Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Rest. Rest in the Lord. When we have honored God with our confession and our action, we then rely on Him to bring about change. We can be confident and grateful that even if the one with whom we attempted to reconcile never grants us forgiveness or reconciliation, we are loved and forgiven by God.

Read and meditate on Isaiah 58. Write down the promises and words of encouragement that you find.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Fanny J. Crosby's verses to the hymn "Let Me Cling to Thee" is our prayer:

Jesus, let me cling to thee,
Show thy mercy now to me;
I am lonely, weak, oppressed;
I am weary, give me rest.

Should I wander from thy side,
Thou, my ever faithful guide,
Wilt restore me to the right,
And in darkness grant me light.

Thou wilt hear my soul's complaint,
Thou wilt cheer me when I faint,
Thou hast suffered death for me,
Jesus, let me cling to thee.

Fold me in thy arms of love,
Give me comfort from above;
May thy Spirit's gentle power
Save and keep me hour by hour.[1]

Endnote
1. Fanny J. Crosby, "Let Me Cling to Thee," public domain.

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