

^{The} Good News

Article Reprint



Successful Parenting

Teach Your Children God's Ways • Parenting in the 2000s
If Children Could Choose Their Parents • Teen Sex: The Silent Epidemic



You may have noticed a subtitle on the cover of *The Good News* that we think captures the essence of what *The Good News* is all about: *A Magazine of Understanding*.

The goal of *The Good News* is to provide just that: understanding. Other magazines report the news, whether it's current events, social trends or lighter fare like sports or personality news and tidbits. They provide *information*, but not *answers*. They don't address the really big, really important questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose in life? Why, in spite of astounding technological progress, can we not solve many of our most basic, longstanding problems? Why must the world be plagued with war, crime, violence and misery? Why are so many families, marriages and relationships—and ultimately even whole societies—breaking down? Why can't the world's best and brightest find solutions?

What other magazines don't tell you is *why* these events and trends take place, nor *where they are leading us*. It's a paradox that in this information age, a time characterized by an unprecedented explosion of knowledge, communication and data, we are still so lacking in the understanding of *what it all means*. We ache for answers to questions we can't quite put into words.

All good writers and editors have their sources to help them report and explain the news. The same is true of those who bring you *The Good News*. We, too, have a primary source. Although our source is eminently credible, many people are suspicious of it or flatly reject it. Most writers, editors and publishers completely disregard this source of true, lasting knowledge. Although they can report what's happening—the who, what, when, where and how—they cannot explain *why*.

It's one thing to report the news. It's quite a different matter to dissect and explain world trends and events in light of the Bible. That's where *The Good News* comes in. We hope that this selection of past articles from *The Good News* on successful parenting will be of benefit.

Few of our writers are trained journalists. Their focus instead has been the world stage, the human condition and, most important, the Bible. That is our primary source, the only one that explains the *reason* for the events and trends we see around us.

Can you believe this source? Should you believe it? Those are the major questions we address.

If you want understanding, this source tells you where to begin: “. . . The LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

His words are preserved for us in the pages of the Bible, and the answers can come when you approach the questions from the right perspective and in the proper frame of mind. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,” He tells us (Proverbs 9:10).

Read this issue carefully. Seek out the source of knowledge that so many ignore. *The Good News* is “a magazine of understanding” only because our primary source is a *book* of understanding. Study its pages, and the pages of *The Good News*, to gain the insight so many lack.

We'd like your feedback on what you find in *The Good News*. We think you'll find this selection of past articles on successful parenting most helpful. The thoughts of our international family of readers quite interesting. We look forward to hearing from you.

—Scott Ashley

The Good News

Marriage and Family Article Reprint

This *Marriage and Family* reprint is from previous articles found in *The Good News* magazine published by the United Church of God, an *International Association*, 555 Technecenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2004 United Church of God, an *International Association*. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Publisher: United Church of God, an *International Association*
 Council of Elders: Aaron Dean, Robert Dick, Jim Franks, Doug Horchak, Clyde Kilough (chairman), Victor Kubik, Les McCullough, Joel Meeker, Mario Seiglie, Richard Thompson, Leon Walker, Anthony Wasilkoff
 Church president: Roy Holladay Media operation manager: Peter Eddington
 Managing editor: Scott Ashley Writer-researchers: Jerold Aust, Roger Foster, Melvin Rhodes, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder
 Art director: Shaun Venish Circulation manager: John LaBissoniere
 Editorial reviewers: John Bald, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemne Marshall, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson

To request a free subscription to *The Good News*, visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org or contact the office nearest you from the list below. *The Good News* is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an *International Association*, and others. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States and Canada. Those who choose to voluntarily support this worldwide work are welcomed as coworkers in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations. **Personal contact:** The United Church of God has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or access our Web site at www.ucg.org/churches.

NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795

Web site address: www.gnmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org

Canada: United Church of God—Canada
 Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
 Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 876-0569
 Web site address: www.ucg.ca

Caribbean: United Church of God, P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
 Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566

Martinique: Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida
 P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
 Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 01257-453978 Web site address: www.goodnews.org.uk

France: Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
 Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy
 Phone: (+39) 338-4097919 Fax: (+39) 035-452.16.26
 Web site address: www.labuonanotizia.org E-mail: redazione@labuonanotizia.org

Netherlands: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
Scandinavia: Guds Forenade Kyrka, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
 Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 Fax: +44 1257 453978

AFRICA

Ghana: P.O. Box 3805, Kumasi, Ghana
Mauritius: P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius
Nigeria: United Church of God—West Africa
 P.O. Box 1715, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria Phone: 234-1-791 8009 E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland:
 United Church of God, Southern Africa
 P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205, South Africa
 Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694 E-mail: rsa@ucg.org
Zambia and Malawi: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia E-mail: ucgzamal@ucg.org
Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
 Phone: 011716273 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia: United Church of God—Australia, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
 Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202 Fax: 07 55 202 122
 Web site address: www.ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

Fiji: United Church of God, P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva, Fiji
New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand
 Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines
 Phone and fax: +63 82 241-0150; Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444
 Web site address: www.ucg.org.ph

Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 127, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org
 Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to
The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

Table of Contents



Teach Your Children God's Ways 4

Cover Feature

Teach Your Children God's Ways

Jesus Christ recognized that children must be included in the spiritual life of His followers. Are we teaching them to love God's ways and especially His Sabbath? **4**



Teaching Youth Religious Values 10

Teaching Youth Religious Values

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." **10**

Parenting in the 2000s

The chances for successful parenting are aided by a deep commitment to the biblical principle that children are truly a blessing, well worth the time and energy that will be required. **13**

If Children Could Choose Their Parents

Being blessed with wise parents is a great advantage. However, children don't get to pick their parents. They are stuck with what they get. **15**

The Rewards of Reading Together

When family members read aloud together, lots of good things happen—including learning, laughter and love. **17**



The Rewards of Reading Together 17

Successful Parenting Begins With The Brain

What is the most important in a child's development? Is it his or her genetic makeup, or is it the life experiences in interacting with parents, siblings, teachers and surroundings? **21**



Teen Sex: The Silent Epidemic 24

Teen Sex: The Silent Epidemic That's Killing Our Kids

Sweeping the world, this silent epidemic is largely ignored by most Western governments—except for misguided programs that often make this devastating problem even worse. Most parents have little idea how bad this epidemic is, much less how to fight it—yet solid biblical solutions exist. **24**

Photos: © 2003 PhotoDisc, Inc., Corbis Digital Stock, Digital Stock. Cover: © 2002 PhotoDisc, Inc.

*Teach Your Children***God's Ways**

Jesus Christ recognized that children must be included in the spiritual life of His followers. Are we teaching them to love God's ways and especially His Sabbath?

by **Bill Jacobs**

If you are one of God's people, you are a vessel God is using to preserve truth. God preserves His truth and love for His ways in the hearts of people. He preserves His truth across time, from generation to generation.

This principle is so important that God commanded the nation of Israel: "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine . . . You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up . . . that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth" (Deuteronomy 11:18-21). He knew that, if the nation was to survive and thrive, His spiritual truths must be preserved and passed down from parents to children.

Jesus Christ perpetuated this principle, instructing His disciples not to ignore the children in their midst. "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me," He said (Mark 9:37). He, too, recognized that children must be included in the spiritual life of His followers.

The Sabbath command

Since God is vitally concerned about our children, we must be concerned for our children's spiritual welfare.

We must learn to pass God's truth on to them.

How do we do that? To illustrate how we can teach our children God's truth, let's look at one of God's Ten Commandments, the fourth. Specifically, let's see how we can teach our children to love and keep God's Sabbath as He intended.

Why single out the Sabbath as our example in this article? God commanded that we observe His Sabbaths—the weekly and annual Sabbaths—as a family. God commanded that all family members, as well as household servants and visitors, were to refrain from normal work on that day (Exodus 20:10).

The Sabbath is also a test commandment, demonstrating our level of commitment to obeying God regardless of any consequences.

The Sabbath also lays the groundwork for our relationship with God and the religion of the heart. It reminds us weekly that He is our Creator and that His Kingdom will come as promised. It is a day set aside to learn more about Him and His ways. It is time in which we cease from our work to allow Him to work in us, writing His laws and ways in our hearts.

But, before we can teach our children God's ways, we first build a right relationship with them, one in which God's truth will grow and flourish in the hearts of our children. Our teaching and example must demonstrate to them a way of life they will want to emulate,

The Sabbath also lays the groundwork for our relationship with God and the religion of the heart.



rather than a burden imposed on them.

Why differing views

How do our young people view the Sabbath? Some teenagers resent it, feeling that because of it they are missing out on something. "It's so boring," they may say. They'd rather be out with friends than with their families.

Not knowing how to handle this attitude, parents sometimes have two opposite, and equally wrong, reactions. Some think: Maybe if I'm more lenient, they won't dislike it so much. This approach causes children to devalue the Sabbath and disrespect their parents as they do whatever they please on that day.

Other parents think: Maybe if I make them do it, they'll learn to like it. This causes children to resent both the day and their parents. The tug of war continues, and everyone grows frustrated, discouraged and confused.

Do teens respect the Sabbath? Some don't, but a great many do. In my job as a national coordinator for programs for youth, teens often asked me questions about the Sabbath. During a visit I made to a church, a huge, strapping teenager, who looked like he was born to play football, approached me. "My name's John," he said, looking down at me. "Here's my question: Is it really wrong to play football on the Sabbath?"

I looked him in the eye and said, "Yes, John, it really is." He broke out in a big smile and

said, "Right! I was just testin' ya!"

And he was. He wanted affirmation that his sacrifice was worth it. It was a test for him, just as it sometimes is for the rest of us. He understood the Sabbath and followed it.

Why some are bored

Why are other kids simply bored with it? Let's consider another teenager and why her outlook is different. Tina is 16, an only child. She's bright, but unmotivated in school. She doesn't mix well with other students or with anyone else. She's not active at church, and she hates sports, dances and other social events. She's disrespectful to her mother. Tina would sum up her life—school, church, family, friends, activities—in one word: boring.

What's wrong with this picture? Tina was born when her parents were well into middle age. Her father was special to her, but he is now seriously ill, and she misses him. At 16, she needs him more than ever, but he isn't there.

Tina's mother spends a lot of time taking care of Tina's father and therefore can't provide much comfort for Tina.

Who is at fault here? No one. But there is a hole in Tina's life. She feels left out, abandoned, ignored. She feels like she's not a part of anything. To deal with her plight, Tina has chosen to distance herself from her feelings of abandonment

by being bored. She has closed her heart to her family, school, church and friends. When we

have no involvement in anything, we are bored.

Teens who feel bored with the Sabbath are teens who don't identify with their church, who don't feel a part of it, who feel the church doesn't offer what they need. They can't see that there is anything there for them. "This is boring," they say.

It's boring because they are not included and therefore not involved. They probably have the same vague uneasiness about their families because their parents are too busy to talk to them much. They feel excluded, disconnected from family decisions.

Underlying relationships

When parents who have not won the hearts of their children try to impose rules, they meet resistance. There is a simple equation for summarizing this phenomenon: Rules without relationship = rebellion. Rules without a relationship are boring because they are seen as meaningless.

When we are interested in a subject, it is not boring. From a teen's standpoint, when our church and our parents are not interested in us, there is no connection, no personal involvement. When there is not enough personal involvement, there is no personal interest in the things that are important to the parent. The





In some families, the main Sabbath activity is sleeping. Children's motive in sleeping is to escape boredom.

Sabbath is boring to teens because they have no personal involvement; it belongs to other people, not to them.

If we want to pass on our values to our children, we must first open their hearts to receive them. There is also a simple equation that shows this principle: Rules with relationship = respect. Rules with a relationship are important because the child knows the parent cares, and the things that are important to the parent will be seen as important by the child.

Even though peer pressure and innumerable other distractions adversely affect children, their parents have a greater impact on their values than any other influence, and this is especially true when it comes to religious values. God, in spite of societal influences, has put parents in the most powerful position to influence their children's life-long beliefs. He places parents in this position so that they, unlike anyone else, can open the hearts of their children to receive their values.

If you want God to write the Sabbath on the hearts of your children, you must work on your relationship with your children and open their hearts.

Dealing with boredom

Is the Sabbath supposed to be boring?

In some families, the main Sabbath activity is sleeping. Children's motive in sleeping through the day is right: They want to keep the Sabbath. They sleep just to escape boredom.

But what does the Sabbath represent? It symbolizes the millennial rest, the Kingdom of God. Is that boring? Of course not.

The Sabbath is not supposed to be boring either. If we make it boring and tedious for our children, what message are we sending them?

The problem lies in misunderstandings about the Sabbath. We sometimes don't know how to keep it properly. To correctly and positively

picture the Kingdom of God, and eliminate Sabbath boredom, we must teach our children the real intent of the Sabbath. Everyone knows that God rested on the Sabbath, and so should we. But God also works on the Sabbath, and so should we.

But Sabbath work must be of a particular kind.

In John 5:2-17 we read the account of Jesus Christ's healing on the Sabbath of a man who had been crippled 38 years, an act that elicited criticism from the Jews.

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working'" (verse 17).

God rested from His creative work on the Sabbath, to show us that we should rest from our work as well. But God continues one kind of work seven days a week: Night and day, without ceasing, God is working to bring all of us into His

Kingdom. He works to help people grow spiritually on the Sabbath. He works constantly to build a close, personal relationship with His people.

Jesus healed more people on the Sabbath than on any other day. He traveled on the Sabbath; He taught and preached on the Sabbath.

Was Jesus sinning? No. These activities on the part of our Savior were part of God's work of helping people enter into the Kingdom of God and were perfectly acceptable to God.

Sowing seeds for the Kingdom

Whatever we do on the Sabbath should involve sowing seeds for the Kingdom. Consider the many people Jesus healed. As far as we know, most of the people He healed did not become converted. So why did He bother healing them? Did he just like to amaze people with His miracles?

TALK TO GOD AS A FAMILY

When our children were growing up, we had a family tradition of praying together every Friday night. We called it "talking to God."

To help everyone think of what to pray about, we had a formula we all used. Each of us would make his or her own prayer list using this formula before we would begin to pray. We would each:

- Express thanks for someone or something.
- Pray about something concerning God's work.
- Pray for someone else.
- Pray for something regarding ourselves.

Once everyone had his list complete, we would all kneel side by side in front of the sofa. As the mother, I would begin. Then each of the children would take a turn

(the order was determined before we began), and Dad would go last and close.

On occasion the girls might have guests over for the night. On those occasions, they were given the option to join us or not. Some did, some didn't.

We found this family tradition to be beneficial in several ways. Not only was it an opportunity to set the right example and teach our children how to pray, but it gave us insight into how they thought: what was important to them, what they were most concerned about.

If you're not used to praying together, it may seem awkward at first, but if you persist it will become a habit. We found that we were able to build an enjoyable family tradition of talking to God. *GN*

—Elaine Jacobs

Do you want your children to learn how to be kind and outgoing, to sow seeds for the Kingdom?

I don't think so. Jesus paid a lot of attention to beggars, the blind, crippled people, children: the people others ignored.

Why? He knew that someone unaccustomed to acts of kindness who is shown a little of it will remember it forever.

Is it not possible that Jesus was setting these people up for a future relationship with Him in the Kingdom? He can walk up to these people and say, "Remember Me?" and the rapport will be instantaneous. I think He was sowing seeds for the Kingdom.

Can we do the same thing? I asked a group of fifth-graders to tell me ways they could sow seeds for the Kingdom. Here are their responses:

- Be friends with the kids everybody else picks on at school.
- Study the Bible to learn the answers to hard questions.
- Visit friends and relatives when they get sick.
- Visit the elderly.

Do you want your children to learn how to be kind, to be outgoing, to project a giving, serving attitude? Do you want them to be considerate of those less fortunate, to take them out on the Sabbath and, as a family, sow some seeds for the Kingdom?

Of course you do. And, as you teach them, talk about why you are doing what you're doing. Involve your children in the thinking as well as the activity.

Why it's important

Why is it so important to set the proper example for our children?

Because God requires it of us, as described in Matthew 25:31-40: "When

the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.



"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer



Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the

King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Do you want your children to build a relationship with God? Do you want God to know your children?

Of course you do. Then teach them to do good for those less fortunate. Teach your children to be partners with God in sowing seeds for the Kingdom, on the Sabbath, as Christ did. Do it with them, and you'll strengthen your relationships with God and your children at the same time.

Get them involved

Get your children involved in helping in the Church of God. Teens and youngsters can do most things the older members can do. Of course they don't know how at first, but that's what the rest of us are there for: to show them how to do

it.

Paul discussed this principle in Titus 2:3, 4: Instruct "the older women likewise, that they be . . . teachers of good things: that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands . . ."

We must get young people involved and help them realize they have a part in the church too. Young girls should

We must get young people involved and help them realize they have a part in the church, too.



help out in the kitchen with snacks and refreshments. Boys can help with setup and cleanup. Put them to work and patiently teach them how to serve. That's how they become a part of God's Church. That's how they learn that they are loved, valuable and appreciated.

Will there be bugs in the system? You bet. But it's far more important that young people get involved than it is for everything to run smoothly and on time.

This inclusive involvement is the way every society passes on its ways and values to its next generation. It works, and it had better work, for the sake of our next generation.

Spiritual intent

Under the old covenant, God clearly spelled out rules for how the Sabbath was to be kept. When Christ came, He magnified the law (Isaiah 42:21). He showed us the spiritual intent: that hatred, for example, is like murder and lust is as bad as adultery.

Jesus also magnified the Sabbath. In Mark 2:23-28 the Pharisees criticized the disciples because they picked some grain as they walked through fields on the Sabbath. Jesus Christ pointed the Pharisees away from their rigid way of observing the Sabbath and pointed them to the original meaning of the day. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," He told them.

Jesus taught the Sabbath's intended purpose: that the day is a blessing God gave us to help us draw close to Him. Jesus emphasized what the day is for, rather than listing all the things

we can't do. This is how we must teach our children.

I received a letter from a teenage girl. "Please help me with my confusion about the Sabbath," she pleaded. "Is it okay to go out with my school friends on Friday night? Is it okay to play school sports on the Sabbath? Everyone I know says it's no big deal. My friends wonder what's wrong with me. I want to get along with my friends and have fun,



but I also want to please God and live like His Son. I don't know what to do."

I did not send her a long list of things she could and could not do. I quoted Isaiah 58:13, 14: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your

own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Let kids make decisions

If we take time out from the busyness of our lives, ceasing from our own works to let God work on us, we will draw close to God. That is what the

Sabbath is for, and we should teach our children how to use it properly. As they grow older, we can let them make decisions, just as God allows us to do. For instance, we can let them make the decision of what to do for several hours. Should they play video games, call a friend who is sick, do homework, help Mom get dinner ready—or just lie back and be bored?

Ask your kids which of these activities best fits the purpose of the Sabbath. In this process they learn to participate in Sabbath decision-making. When they make the right choices, they feel good, and the right decisions are reinforced. When they choose unwisely, they also learn.

Through this process, our children learn to become partners with God in Sabbath-keeping. They gradually learn the purpose and intent of the day, and the Sabbath becomes a part of them.

God's Fourth Commandment is being written in their hearts: not as a list of rules, but in its spiritual intent. As they grow older, the Sabbath will be a part of their lives. They will find themselves Sabbath-keepers.

When children are only a few years old, we need to tell them everything to do. But, if we continue that approach,

detailing every move and behavior for them well into their teenage years, the best we can hope for is little people who understand the Sabbath only as a list of rules and regulations. They will not understand the purpose of the day in their hearts.

But, if we build that relationship with them, opening our hearts to them, then their hearts will be open to us. Our desires and beliefs will hold great weight in their minds. They won't want to disappoint us, and they won't want to disappoint God.

Live our religion

We must live our religion at home. I once met a young man who told me about his mother. She had 18 children, and her husband did not like her religion. The family lived 150 miles from the nearest location for Sabbath services.

After the young man's mother attended church for several years, she contracted rheumatoid arthritis, which invaded most of her joints and spine, disfiguring her hands and feet. She was rendered bedfast, suffering excruciatingly.

However, every Sabbath at 4 in the morning her alarm clock would go off. She would rise slowly and, with great effort, ready herself and her children for Sabbath services.

She would ride with aching joints for three hours to services, sit on a metal chair for two hours, fellowship for an hour and ride three hours home. When she got home, she went to bed, where she stayed until 4 o'clock the morning of the next Sabbath.

After seven years of keeping the Sabbath in this manner, she died. Her son told me he found it almost unthinkable to miss services for any reason. He knew his mother's heart; she loved and honored God and wished more than anything else to obey Him.

If we want our children to love and respect God, the most important thing we can do is love and respect God. If we want our children to love and keep the Sabbath, then we must love and keep the Sabbath. We must live our religion at home, and we must remember that each of our children is a vessel dedicated to God for the preservation of His truth. **GN**

HELP YOUR CHILDREN PROVE IT

Most of us have experienced a time in our life when we have had to reexamine our spiritual foundations. During this soul-searching, the dilemma of a special group of people, our children, has given me pause.

My children are now grown, having been born and grown up in our church. Since my husband is a minister who prepares his sermons on Friday nights, most of the time it fell my responsibility on the Sabbath to read to our children and teach them God's way.

I took my responsibility seriously and was diligent, but a conversation I had with one of my daughters a few months ago started me thinking about how I could have done a better job. My daughter told me she didn't know if she believed what she believed because it was what she was taught or because she had proved it.

I imagine a lot of children who have grown up attending their parents' church have found themselves in this quandary. I started thinking about what could be done by parents of the next generation to ensure their children don't go through this.

It seems to me the thing to do is not only teach our children God's truth, but teach them how to prove it to themselves *and provide an opportunity for them to do so.*

For example, as the world's holidays approach, plan a day to take your children to the library to research the origin of the holidays. It seems to me encyclopedias would be a good place to begin the search. Help your children understand the meaning of the days and the various customs associated with them. Often, of course, you will discover the origins of such days lie in pagan

practices of the ancient world, and it is inappropriate for Christians to participate in those customs.

If your library skills are stale, as mine are, you might want to take a dry run: First go the library without your children and enlist the aid of the librarian to help you to negotiate, for example, the computerized card files.

When you do take the kids, remember you're on this outing to let them prove something for themselves. Offer to help them, but let them find the book, look up the topic and read the information.

Think of ways to make this a positive experience. Don't allow it to become hard work (by requiring a 10-page report on their findings, for instance).

Perhaps you could plan a picnic



or go for ice cream afterwards. Go to a private place where you can discuss what has been proved. You can stimulate conversation by asking questions and letting your children tell you what they learned.

Later, if you have other literature on the holiday in question, you could guide a study of the holiday, with the children taking turns reading and looking up Scriptures.

I believe an exercise like this done once a year or even semiannually will help write some of these truths on our children's hearts. Then, when they are older, they will know what they believe because they have proven it for themselves. **GN**

—Elaine Jacobs

Teaching Youth Religious Values

by David Treybig

The great experiment in value-neutral education is over. This movement, which advocated the idea that parents and educators should refrain from teaching young people moral values and allow them to determine their own values, has been a tragic failure. The results include an escalating rate of sexually transmitted diseases, higher rates of children born out of wedlock, and broken marriages.

Not teaching any values tells young people that nothing is wrong. Everything is okay! In such a vacuum, no wonder so many young people make poor choices that affect them for the rest of their lives.

Parents who have agonized over whether or not to teach their children religious values should notice what God says. In Ephesians 6:4 the apostle Paul said, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Paul did not advocate value-neutral education. He, by contrast, encouraged fathers to teach their children God’s values. This statement was simply a continuation of the same principle God gave the Israelite families in the Old Testament.

Command to instruct children

When God gave Israel His eternal laws, He told them, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

Here, God not only told parents to teach their children His ways, but He said to be diligent about it. He also said to do it throughout the day when they were sitting, walking, going to bed or getting up in the morning. This is all-inclusive; not much time is left.

The people of the Bible clearly understood God’s direction to teach children His ways. Abraham, called the friend of God in James 2:23, was given high praise by God for teaching his children and household God’s way.

Genesis 18:19 says, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” Abraham was conscientious in obeying God, and his descendants—Isaac, Jacob and Joseph—also diligently followed God’s ways.

King Solomon understood that when we reach maturity, we reflect the training we have received as children (Proverbs 22:6). This also includes religious training. History clearly shows that Israel did neglect teaching and obeying God’s laws as given in Deuteronomy 6, and they suffered the tragic results. The verses previously cited in Deuteronomy and Ephesians clearly show that God expects parents to teach their children His religious values.

Teaching is based on love

The biblical passages dealing with parenting express God’s will that our children be treated with love, dignity and respect. Love is the foundational principle for all Christian relationships (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34, 35).

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up”.

Jesus Christ said that obeying the Ten Commandments expresses love toward God and love toward our neighbor.

Just as God gives us laws because He loves us, we must give our children rules if we love them (Hebrews 12:7). Loving our children does include discipline. Child psychologist James Dobson has written a well-known book, *Dare to Discipline*, which advocates this biblical principle.

Establishing fair rules and punish-

3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

Ephesians 6:4 also tells parents not to use forms of authority that intimidate, bully or make children angry. Physical and emotional abuse of children is thus expressly forbidden by God. To those who foolishly reject God's direction on this issue, Proverbs 11:29 declares, "He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind."

Because physical and emotional



ments for breaking those rules has been described as setting up boundaries. The purpose of boundaries is for our children to learn appropriate behavior and to feel secure. Proverbs 29:17 (New International Version) says, "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul." A value-neutral or lack-of-rules approach is a mistake for children and parents. Proverbs 29:15 says that "a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

Authority not to be abused

Because humans have a tendency to abuse authority, some have mistakenly concluded that all authority is bad. This is not true. God intended that authority be used for good (Romans 13:1-4). Jesus commanded his disciples not to "lord it over" others in the Church (Matthew 20:25-28). In similar fashion, Colossians

abuse tends to continue through successive generations, some adults who were abused as children may find it difficult to break the cycle. With God's help and a strong desire, however, this scourge can be conquered.

Much has been written to help individuals who sincerely want to change, and the encouragement of older successful parents can go a long way toward helping adults adopt positive parenting roles. Titus 2:2-6 speaks of the older people teaching and modeling proper behavior for the younger.

Amazingly, this principle of modeling good behavior has even been found effective in teaching primates better parenting skills. (See "Primates Learn Better Parenting," this page.)

An inclusive, relational approach

Notice Jesus Christ's attitude toward children. Several passages in the New Testament record Jesus

PRIMATES LEARN BETTER PARENTING

Animal research does not always translate into simple solutions to human problems, but maybe zoo keepers and social workers ought to talk. In recent years, zoo keepers faced a problem of ape mothers mistreating their offspring.

Researchers found three effective ways of reducing the problem: 1. providing better living quarters, 2. placing new mothers with other female primates (the equivalent of grandmothers, aunts, and cousins) and 3. allowing the inexperienced mother to learn from other good mothers. This program reduced the rate of abuse from 75% in the 1970's to only about 2% now. Amazingly, researchers found that when abusive mothers were given examples of good mothering, they became better parents within only a few days.

Prior to the inception of this program for apes, the standard procedure had been to take infants away from their mothers and raise them in a nursery. Unfortunately, most of the apes raised in this manner almost always turned out worse than their parents. About three out of four of these apes would reject their own offspring, sometimes beating or even killing their infants. Needless to say, this practice was discontinued for apes.

A human program with interesting similarities was recently sponsored by the University of Rochester. New mothers were regularly visited in their homes by nurses who tried to cultivate warm relationships during a period of time prior to birth and for the next two years. The nurses taught the mothers how to play and talk to their children. Close friends and relatives were also encouraged to help. Finally, the mothers were helped to find jobs and obtain public assistance.

The result was that only 4% of the low-income teenage mothers abused or neglected their children as compared with 19% of those who were not visited by the nurses ("The biological roots of good mothering" by Art Levine, U.S. News & World Report, February 25, 1991. p. 61).

rebuking His disciples for trying to keep little children away from Him (Matthew 19:13, 14; Mark 10:13, 14; Luke 18:15, 16). He had a positive attitude toward children and showed them personal attention by picking them up in his arms, praying for them and using them as teaching examples for adults.

Christ was not too important or too busy to give them some of His time. We need to remember that God considers our children holy (1 Corinthians 7:14). We, too, must treat children with dignity.

In Deuteronomy 6:20-25, where God instructed the families of ancient Israel about the importance of obeying God's laws for their collective good, the frequent use of the pronouns *we*, *us*, and *our*, is significant. For instance, in verse 25: "Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us." God obviously intended for parents to include their children in matters of family obedience. God wants parents to expect their children to obey Him.

In one of the most passionate pleas

to influence behavior, God, as our Heavenly Father, straightforwardly instructed ancient Israel in His laws, and the consequences of obeying or disobeying them. God concludes His plea, recorded in Deuteronomy 28-30, with these words: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (30:19).

Did you notice? God did not attempt to be value neutral. He told Israel to "choose life" for their own good. We, too, must be passionate about our desire for our children to adopt God's standards as their own. We must work to help them do so and strive to influence them to make that free moral choice.

Personal example

Our own example is paramount in properly influencing our children. Children are quick to notice discrepancies between what we adults ask them not to do and what we do ourselves. In some cases those differences are logically defensible. For instance, children should not drive cars if they do not have the skills necessary for safely operating a vehicle. It is a different story, however, when children see

a double standard on moral issues.

Paul pointed out this principle to Jews who were trying to influence gentiles: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written" (Romans 2:21-24).

Parents cannot expect a "do as I say and not as I do" approach to bring success. Regardless of what parents say, most young people will adopt their parents' standards and lifestyles by the time they reach 25 to 35 years of age. In this case, actions do speak louder than words!

So when it comes to teaching values to our children, it is impossible to be neutral and God does not want us to be neutral. We adults have to concentrate first of all on being good examples ourselves. Then we can have greater expectations of successfully influencing our children to obey God for their own good. **GN**



Parenting in the 2000s

by David Treybig

Today there is great concern that the youth of Western society are caught in a relentless downward spiral—"going to hell in a handbasket" as some describe it.

In a world of drugs, crime and emotional upheaval, the schools are often blamed. Yet school administrators point out they are getting a different kind of student than was common in the 1950s. Back then, most youths grew up in families where both parents lived in the same house and Mother stayed home to rear the kids.

Obviously, in the 2000s circumstances have changed. What can today's parents do to help their children grow up to be solid, productive, emotionally stable adults?

King Solomon, who ruled Israel almost 3,000 years ago, said God was the foundation of successful families. In Psalm 127:1 he wrote: "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it . . ."

Adopting God's values for families and rearing children is the best starting point for a successful job of parenting in the 1990s and beyond. Let's explore some of the basic principles of parenting revealed in the Bible.

Children are a blessing

In verse three of Psalm 127, Solomon said, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Children are described as a heritage or inheritance from God, a reward or blessing.

Unfortunately, not everyone views children in such a positive light. A bumper sticker reads, "I'm suffering from a sexually transmitted disease—children." It's a quip that represents children as expensive, time-consuming inconveniences. The godly perspective is that children are wonderful blessings.

Because the family is the most basic building block of society, parenting children is one of the most important

things a couple can do. It should inspire both husband and wife to a greater level of personal maturity as they endeavor to make their part of the world a peaceful place for their progeny.

The chances for successful parenting are aided by a deep commitment to the biblical principle that children are truly



a blessing, well worth the time and energy that will be required. Most people on their death beds do not wish they had spent more time earning money. They most often regret not spending more time with their children and loved ones.

In a society of ever increasing single parents and economic pressures, many children are placed in day-care facilities so their parents can go to work. The proliferation of single parents and the lack of time spent with children are widely known to be detrimental to sound, stable families.

Sound marriages are important

Child psychologist and newspaper columnist John Rosemond often cites how important it is for children to see their biological fathers and mothers happily married. He said, "Parents must first center the family around themselves, paying more attention to their marriage than

The chances for successful parenting are aided by a deep commitment to the biblical principle that children are truly a blessing, well worth the time and energy that will be required.

to their children” (“Why Saying No to Your Children and Putting Them Second Can Be Best for Them,” *Urban Family*, Spring 1993).

This is a vital key to having well-adjusted children. A nationwide survey conducted in 1988 by the National Center for Health Statistics showed that young people who grow up in traditional families (both father and mother present in the home) are two to three times less likely to have behavioral or emotional problems than their peers reared by a single parent, or by a stepfamily.

Broken marriages are tragedies for adults and children alike. No wonder God says that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)! God wants what is best for all mankind, children included. His desire is for adults to produce godly offspring (Malachi 2:15).

It is also interesting to note that many marriages end in divorce shortly after the last child has matured and left the home. Families in which the father and mother successfully give their own relationship greater importance than their children, not only produce better children but also find their marriages unaffected by the departure of the last child.

Parental attention

The importance of parental attention during a child’s early years has been thoroughly documented. “Dr. Burton White of the Harvard University Preschool Project concluded that ‘what happens between 0-18 months of life does more to influence future intellectual competence than any other time.’ White’s data also concluded that the nuclear family is the most important educational system.

“Children who receive inadequate nurture in their early years become nonattached. According to Selma Fraiberg of the University of Michigan, nonattachment, at its worst, can ‘create bondless people who . . . contribute far beyond their number to social disease and disorder. They are handicapped in work relationships, friendships, marriage, and child rear-

ing’” (*Current Thoughts & Trends*, August 1994, p. 13).

Of late, much emphasis has been placed on spending quality time with children. Exactly what constitutes “quality time” is hard to discern. Originally, it likely meant giving children undivided attention or interacting with them. These are important principles. The reality, however, is that all time spent with children is important



to them. The cost of an activity or the distance traveled is not a factor in determining the value of time spent. Children value all time with their parents.

Two of the greatest advantages for children are biological parents who live together in a loving relationship, and parents who spend time with them. Children from these backgrounds are most likely to succeed and be well adjusted. Children, as they grow up, see how families should work and are statistically predisposed toward living out the same scenario when they become adults.

If you are happily married and meet these principles for successful parenting, you and your children have a greater likelihood of success. Count your blessings! Not everyone, however, is in this situation. Fifty percent of

all marriages in the United States end in divorce and many single parents find themselves in economic circumstances that require they work outside the home. Are these people doomed to parenting failure? Absolutely not.

The good news is that in spite of the statistics, many single, working parents have made a commitment to rear their children by God’s standards and are producing stable, well-adjusted children.

If you have made mistakes or been the victim of a failed marriage, you can bring your circumstances to God and commit yourself to God’s values. Then your children can start to reflect the blessings that come from His timeless parenting values.

Mothers who must work outside the home, but wish they didn’t have to, can take some encouragement from research done by Roger Webb of the University of Arkansas. Webb found that “while the best adjusted kids have mothers who choose to stay home and raise them, the second best adjusted children come from homes where the mothers work outside the home but don’t want to. These children seem to sense that their mothers would rather be with them if circumstances allowed” (*Current Thoughts & Trends*).

Make a commitment

Making a commitment to your mate, and to spending time with your children, are important foundational steps to successful parenting. These are not the only things important in parenting, but they are a good start. THE GOOD NEWS will continue to publish articles about family matters and how you can apply God’s principles in your life.

Earlier in this article I mentioned a bumper sticker. It seems only appropriate to close with another which embodies the basic principle of loving one’s children. This favorite bumper sticker of mine says, “Have You Hugged Your Kids Today?” Why not do it? And while you are at it, hug your mate. It will do you and your children a lot of good. **GN**



If Children Could Choose Their Parents

If your children had a choice, would they pick you for a parent?

by David Treybig

Being blessed with wise parents is a great advantage. However, children don't get to pick their parents. They are stuck with what they get.

"Pick your parents wisely." This saying is offered as sage, although tongue-in-cheek, advice for children. Since parents more than anyone else have the greatest opportunity to influence their children, being blessed with wise parents is a great advantage.

However, children don't get to pick their parents. They are stuck with what they get, and all too often a child is deprived of one parent by divorce—an event over which children have no control.

Sometimes it is helpful to look at situations from different perspectives to gain a deeper understanding. Some refer to this as thinking outside the box. How about joining me for a few minutes in contemplating issues that would matter to children if they could select their parents?

Perhaps you wonder why I'm focusing on a



Children want both of their parents, Mom and Dad, living with them under the same roof.

child's perspective. The answer is simple. It is because God's Word teaches us we should be concerned for other people (1 Corinthians 10:24; 12:25), and other people include children.

Jesus Christ loved children (Matthew 19:14).

Parents should follow the biblical injunctions to love their children and teach them God's ways (Titus 2:4; Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Since children have needs and God expects us to properly teach our kids and treat them with respect and love, let's consider the traits children might wish for in their parents.

They want, and need, both parents

First, children want both of their parents, Mom and Dad, living with them under the same roof. Since God says He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), God obviously agrees with kids on this point. He intends that children live with both of their parents in the same household. Regrettably, "nearly 40 percent of American children currently do not live with their biological fathers" ("The Lost Art of Fatherhood," Dan Fost, *American Demographics*, March 1996, pp. 15-17).

Researchers continue to find that two-parent households are best for youths. According to one source, children from single-parent homes are 20 to 40 percent more likely to suffer health problems than those living with both parents ("Physician and Pastor: Co-laborers," Hilton Terrell, *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine*, spring 1993, pp. 31-42).

Children in fatherless homes are more likely to drop out of school, abuse alcohol and drugs and break the law ("Father's Greatest Gift," Ken Canfield, *New Man*, July-August 1994, pp. 54-60).

As teens in the United States grow older, studies predict they will be "less likely to engage in [sexual] intercourse if they live with their natural fathers than if they do not" ("Father's Restraints," *Family in America*, March 1993, pp. 2NR-3NR).

Divorce so devastates children that the popular notion that children are better off when their parents end a bad marriage is shown, in many cases, to be wishful thinking.

Closely related to both parents living in the same



Another item on a child's wish list for parents would probably be an encouraging environment.

home is parents not sending their children off to day care. Wise children would select parents who would care for them as infants in their own homes and not place them in outside facilities. Too often debates rage over whether a woman's place is in the home or in the workplace, all the while neglecting the children's perspective. When we consider which place is best for the *children*, the issue takes on much greater clarity.

"Daycare workers are among the lowest-paid and poorest qualified in any industry in America, yet they are being entrusted with the nurturing of our most precious resource—our children. The younger the child when placed in a nine-to-five routine of day care, the less likely he is to become a well-adjusted adult" (*Current Thoughts and Trends* review of *Children of the Universe*, Amitai Etzioni, *Utne Reader*, May-June 1993, pp. 52-61). Child-care facilities with large numbers of children are simply unable to provide the sustained, personal, one-on-one attention so necessary for the healthy development of children.

Economic needs are commonly cited as the reason for placing children in day-care facilities. The reality, however, is that many times most of the money the second parent earns ends up spent on day care itself and

restaurants or fast food because no one stays home to prepare a meal.

Although two-income households can achieve financial gains, a commendable number of parents are giving their children's needs the highest priority and are choosing a lower standard of living so they can maintain higher family standards. When they do this they find they achieve a much more rewarding home life. Although some mothers remain at home with their children to accomplish this, others are finding part-time work when their husbands stay at home with the children or take on jobs that can be done from home.

Wise children would no doubt select parents who would place their welfare ahead of financial gain.

The value of quality time

The next item on a child's shopping list for good parents would likely be finding a mother and father who would spend time with them. The popular notion that spending "quality time" with children makes up for lack of attention at other times gets failing grades from their point of view. To them the quantity of time is more important than its supposed quality.

Sociologist Mark Warr of the University of Texas confirmed that recent studies "raise serious questions about the emphasis on quality time so prevalent today. Although quality time is surely desirable, the quantity of time spent with the family is not irrelevant. Contemporary arguments notwithstanding, small amounts of quality time may not be sufficient to offset the criminogenic aspects of peer culture to which adolescents are commonly exposed" (*Family in America*, February 1994).

In other words, children need regular and frequent time with their parents to help offset the growing exposure to negative influences outside (and many times inside, via television and music) the home.

Ideally, children should spend enough time with their parents to see them working about the house as well as enjoying the "quality time" of special occasions. By being with their parents, youths learn how to work. By doing a good deed for someone with their parents, youths learn how to give.

When kids see Dad give Mom an affectionate kiss and observe them treating each other with respect, they learn how a happy marriage works. Although some adults may not rate these sorts of things as quality time,

they are essential for the healthy development of socially mature children.

The power of encouragement

Another item on a child's wish list for parents would probably be an encouraging environment. Children would like to have parents who take a strong personal interest in helping them develop their skills and find their way in life.

Since children tend to live up to their parents' expectations, they are best served by a mom and dad who assure them they can succeed. Sadly, most homes are filled with negativism. "Psychologist Larry Kubiak says that the average amount of time parents spend communicating with their teenage children is only 14 minutes per day. Of that time, 12 minutes is negative, one minute is neutral, and one minute is positive" (*Youthworker Update*, November 1993).

Being good parents means putting our children's needs ahead of our desires. If you



The next item on a child's shopping list for good parents would likely be finding a mother and father who would spend time with them.

have children, give them what they need as well as what they want: a positive, encouraging home with both parents living together in peace. Their future, and that of our communities and ultimately our nations, depends on it. **GN**



The Rewards of Reading Together

When family members read aloud together, lots of good things happen—including learning, laughter and love.

by Don Hooser

Family members reading together is an ancient tradition that is being rediscovered with delight in many countries. Many families vouch for the importance and pleasure of reading aloud. It is a family activity par excellence.

At the same time, many people lack the ability or desire to read. Thus they read little. The situation can lead to a vicious circle. Lack of skill leads to lack of interest and enjoyment, and lack of enjoyment leads to lack of motivation to improve one's skill.

Most children learn to read well enough to get through school, but many of them stop reading any more than is necessary. Schools have produced school-time readers, but not lifetime readers. While teaching students how to read, they have failed to teach them to want to read.

Missing motivation

Why don't more people relish reading? The search for the answers to that question began in earnest with the 1955 publication of the book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Since then much research has confirmed a major conclusion: Reluctant readers were not read to as children.

Since reading is the single most important skill in education, the National Commission of Reading formed in 1983 to study what works and what doesn't work in teaching reading. After two years of intensive research, in 1985 the commission's members published their report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Note their conclusion: "The single most important activity . . . for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children." If parents want their children to be readers, they need

to read aloud to and with them.

Why is this so? First, success in many endeavors depends most of all on attitude. More than any other single activity, in or out of school, reading aloud has the greatest impact on building positive attitudes about books and reading.

A secondary reason is that regular reading aloud strengthens children's language skills—in reading, writing and speaking. Why is that so? Because it improves children's listening comprehension. Listening comprehension must come before reading comprehension.

In the United States Jim Trelease is the best-known advocate of reading aloud to children. Those who read his book *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* will likely be sold on the value of reading aloud with family members. The book answers the common questions on the subject and teaches parents how to be more effective when reading aloud.

Overcoming obstacles

Why aren't parents, grandparents, older siblings and teachers reading aloud to children like they used to? It's largely because television, overly busy schedules and modern education that places too much stress on assignments that can be measured and tested. But parents shouldn't rely only on schools to teach their children to read, and we can turn off the TV and give children the full attention they long for and need.

You say you just don't have the time? A mere 15 minutes a day is often sufficient, unless you and your child choose to read longer than that. We all have the same 24 hours in a day. We spend our time doing the things we think are most important. Each of

us must decide: How high on my priority list is the academic, mental, emotional and spiritual development of my child? How important is spending time with him?

Youngsters need to be introduced at a young age to the pleasure, joy and adventure of reading. Parents who tell stories and read to their children and have their children read to them mold them into devoted readers. They instill in them a lasting love of literature, a deep appreciation for the printed word and a fondness for lifelong learning. Adults can ignite the spark of desire in their toddlers and fan its flames throughout their youth.

Later benefits from reading

Some parents stop reading with their children as soon as the children can read for themselves. This is a mistake. When a child becomes a reader, he can take his turn at reading aloud, and reading with his parents and siblings continues to provide the same benefits and pleasures. We never get too old for a good story.

As a child ages, reading with their siblings and parents is important in a different way. It helps to keep the lines of communication open. Children may open up more about a relationship problem after reading about a similar problem. As children face moral temptations and dilemmas, the situation in a story and the relaxed togetherness with parents may lead to a helpful discussion.

Family members reading together helps bind families together. Reading, unlike TV viewing, is a social experience. Members of the family can stop anytime to talk about the story and laugh or cry together. Reading funny, sad and inspiring stories builds emo-

tional bridges as members share matters of the mind and heart. Reading together is an ideal activity to draw and keep us together, to snuggle and benefit from the healthful tonic of touch. The whole experience is the making of pleasant memories and warm love.

The benefits of reading are illustrated by a poem by Strickland Gillilan, “The Reading Mother”:

*You may have tangible wealth untold:
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be—
I had a Mother who read to me.*

Fathers, too, need to get involved. When mothers do all the reading, boys get the idea that reading is not masculine and

children’s mental and emotional development. Children’s TV-viewing time needs parental regulation and rationing.

If mishandled, reading aloud can be monotonous and boring. Here are a few suggestions to keep it interesting:

- Make sensible choices of reading materials—not too difficult and not too easy.
- Read together regularly with your children.
- Choose reading together for short sessions more often than reading together for a few long sessions.
- Don’t let a session go longer than a child’s attention span.

Be enthusiastic and use expressive tones of voice. Modulate your voice to fit the dialogue. If a story contains words or sections that are boring or too difficult for the child to understand, skip over them or change them. In other words, talk the story. Vary the pace. Don’t read too fast. Slow down during a suspenseful part. Take time to discuss what you just read.

Suggestions for reading

What should you read? A vast variety of valuable literature is readily available: wonderful books, stories, poems and articles. In general, pick subjects that you know will be interesting as well as wholesome and profitable to your children.

Choose literature that clearly communicates

right vs. wrong, that glorifies virtue and condemns vice. We can learn so much about how to live and how not to live by the heroes and villains of fiction and non-fiction. If your child’s school is neglecting important subjects such as history and the great leaders of the past, include those subjects at home.

The New Read-Aloud Handbook gives many suggestions for good read-aloud books (not all good books are good for reading aloud). The author, Jim Trelease, also edited the book *Read All About It!*

Its subtitle is *Great Read-Aloud Stories, Poems, and Newspaper Pieces for Preteens and Teens*. Both books are published by Penguin Books.

The book no one should be without

The volume we most highly recommend is the Bible, a perennial best-seller around the world and the foundation of all proper knowledge. Even when the Bible is judged only as literature, the scholars of the world consistently rank it among the world’s greatest works of literature. Actually, it is a collection of a wonderful variety of types of literature.

Many great men and women of history have appreciated the Bible. Notice what some American presidents have said:

- George Washington: “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.”
- Abraham Lincoln: “This book . . . is the best gift God has given to man . . . But for it we could not know right from wrong.”
- Theodore Roosevelt: “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.”
- Franklin D. Roosevelt: “I feel that a comprehensive study of the Bible is a liberal education for anyone. Nearly all of the great men of our country have been well versed in the teachings of the Bible.”

To underscore the unique importance of the Bible, including its divine origin and purpose, *The Good News* has produced several accompanying articles about this Book of all books in this issue. Be sure to read them because they explain how the absolute truths of the Bible are relevant and applicable to our everyday lives.

Family Bible reading

Everything said so far in this article is applicable to reading the Bible aloud. When family members read the Bible together, they draw closer to each other as well as to their Creator, who inspired the Bible.

Everyone love stories, and the Bible is largely a collection of stories. Even most of the instructive parts are presented within a story flow. The Bible has an abundance of action and adventure, heroes and villains, tragedies and triumphs, drama and emotion.

Some parents feel inadequate or even hypocritical in taking the lead in Bible reading. But God doesn’t want parents to wait until they overcome their flaws before they



then lose interest. This is a reason most of the children in remedial-reading classes are boys. Fathers need to support and participate in reading aloud.

What about the competition of TV? Spending significant time watching television has many negative effects. Even when a family avoids TV’s moral trash, TV viewing can detract from time that could be spent in more-beneficial activities including reading, thinking and communicating. Unlike reading, passive TV viewing stifles imagination and creativity. Intellectual junk food smothers

teach the Bible to their children. Ask for God's help and He will answer. Reading the Bible gives parents increasing strength to overcome their own faults.

Some have made brief attempts at reading the Bible and concluded it is hard to understand and boring. When reading to children, remember the suggestions above for making it interesting. One can skip sections that seem uninteresting, hard to understand or relatively unimportant without distorting the overall message. One can paraphrase and summarize sections in one's own words.

Children understand much better when a parent chooses a modern version of the Bible rather than the King James Version with its often-outdated language. Though some versions of the Bible are more accurate than others and should be relied on for serious study, almost any version of the Bible conveys the lessons fairly accurately. The Bible quotations in *The Good News* are mostly from the New King James Version, which is similar in wording and accuracy to the King James Version but uses modern English. Or a parent may choose to use the King James Version and substitute a modern synonym each time he encounters an archaic word.

What does the Bible say about itself? The apostle Paul reminded Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Today's English Version). Paul knew that reading the Scriptures was and would always be the most profitable reading possible.

Paul told Timothy: "... From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation..." Timothy was greatly blessed to have been grounded in the Scriptures during his early years. His grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, had taught him God's Word and had served as his role models in the faith (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

The importance of teaching children

In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus revealed that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our fellowman. The

Bible can be summed up as the Instruction Book that teaches us how to love God and how to love our neighbor.

In stating the first great commandment, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Notice what follows: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (verses 6-7).

Words are "in your heart" after you repeatedly hear them, think about them, believe them and apply them. To "teach them diligently" is accomplished partly by parents reading the Bible to their children and explaining its passages. To "talk of them" shows the importance of encouraging interactive responses, comments and discussion during Bible-reading time. It also indicates parents should daily point out biblical principles and their applications.

Of the New Covenant God said, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10). Parents can greatly aid the process through family Bible reading.

Another help to absorb God's Word is memorizing key scriptures. Encourage children to learn important verses while they have strong memories.

Why is family Bible reading so important? First, God's Word is the most important subject by far for our children to learn! Second, childhood is the best time to start learning God's Word. Children are naturally more teachable and pliable than adults. As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.

The Bible verifies that information and lessons taught during childhood can have a lifetime effect. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, New American Standard Bible). To put it another way, the knowledge he learns as a child won't depart from him.

Provide spiritual nourishment

Most parents want to be good providers, as we are told to be in 1 Timothy 5:8. But God wants parents to provide not just the physical necessities, but spiritual nourishment. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by

Who's Behind The Good News?



Who's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **To proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all mankind's problems. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets (also free) we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



For additional information, visit our Web site

www.ucg.org

bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

For very young children, select parts of the Bible they can easily understand. Often what works best is for the parent to learn a Bible story well and then tell it in his own words. One can use children’s Bible-story books, but be aware that they vary considerably in quality and biblical accuracy.

Some of the most beneficial parts for young children are stories from throughout the Bible (with their lessons) and clear Christian-living teachings. The book of Proverbs is directed especially to children and offers practical advice on all aspects of life.

Family Bible study can include information and material that is related to the Bible as well as the Bible itself. Some books about the Bible are quite accurate and interesting. Nonbiblical stories and articles that teach good lessons and values can be worthy supplements to Bible reading. *The Good News* publishes many booklets and the *Bible Study Course* that can help in understanding the Bible, Christian living and God’s purpose for mankind.

Children generally learn more when teaching is interactive. Encourage them to ask questions and make other comments. Bible games can make learning fun, and some games don’t require buying anything. Quizzing each other about the Bible can be fun while it reinforces young memories. For those with computers, many Bible-related software packages, including games, are available.

Many Bible stories and other worthwhile stories have been recorded on videotape and audiotape. Listening to recordings with family members can supplement other teaching methods.

Parental responsibility to teach

Regrettably, a strong anti-Bible bias exists in today’s educational system. Parents need to support their children by teaching them the basic truths and moral values God’s Word offers.

Now a word to fathers in particular: We earlier emphasized the value of fathers reading to their children. Notice that the Bible, too, emphasizes the need for fathers to be fully involved in the spiritual education of their children: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of

the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, Revised Standard Version).

Family Bible reading and family prayer are two ways to fulfill this admonition. Fathers reading with and talking with their children help “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

According to Scripture, teaching children is a top-priority parental responsibility. It is a priceless accomplishment when you teach your children the lifetime habit of reading and studying the Bible. It’s even more wonderful if this gratifying family tradition carries on from generation to generation.

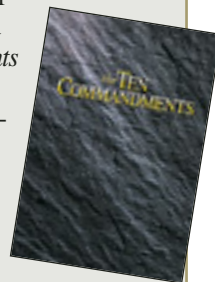
The apostle Paul wrote of the need for people to have “the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Parents can help cultivate in their children a love for the truth of God’s Word that, in turn, will lead to wisdom, faith, character and eternal life.

When members of a family read aloud together, and especially when they include reading the Bible, they truly are doing something worthwhile that will last. Their minds are enriched and expanded as they explore great literature. Their personalities and character are molded both by the wonderful words and the way the words are spoken and shared.

The children will likely become better readers, they will enjoy reading more, and they will become lifetime readers. Someday, when those children have children of their own, they will read to their children. **GN**

Recommended Reading

As a foundation for beginning regular Bible reading with your family, we recommend *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. These free booklets discuss many vital principles that guide human behavior. With this understanding, you’ll be much better equipped to understand and explain the many lessons recorded for us in the Bible. Request your free copies of these booklets from any of our offices listed on page 2 or access them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Want to Learn More?

If you like reading our youth articles in *The Good News*, take a look at our new magazine, *Vertical Thought*, at www.verticalthought.org.

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful insight and eye-opening articles to help today’s young adults get the most out of life—both now and in the future.



You’ll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what’s really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

Visit www.verticalthought.org today!



www.VerticalThought.org

Successful Parenting Begins With **The Brain**

by Howard Davis

I knew something was wrong when my wife called my Seattle office the afternoon of Jan. 19, 1987. Rushing out of a computer-system demonstration for a client, I raced home to find her collapsed on the floor.

Our son wasn't due to be born for nine weeks. But, a few hours later, Benjamin was taken by cesarean section. Monitors detected he had been dying in the midst of a disintegrating placenta. Patti had lost so much blood that her life was in danger as well.

Although more than 14 years have passed, some memories remain vivid. I often reflect on the powerful impact my decisions, emotions, actions and inaction have on our children's lives.

When Benjamin was lying in an incubator for seven weeks to gain weight—he weighed as little as two pounds—I remember Patti driving to the Tacoma General intensive care unit every day to talk with—and touch—our tiny son.

I was busy with business at the time and thought it wasn't important for me to see Benjamin that often. I didn't need to reach through the openings in the incubator's side and feel his small stick-sized limbs as Patti felt compelled to do. After all, he seemed so peaceful resting there by himself, amazing me with his calm maturity for a person so tiny. He didn't really need me, I thought.

Three years later Benjamin was diagnosed with autism.

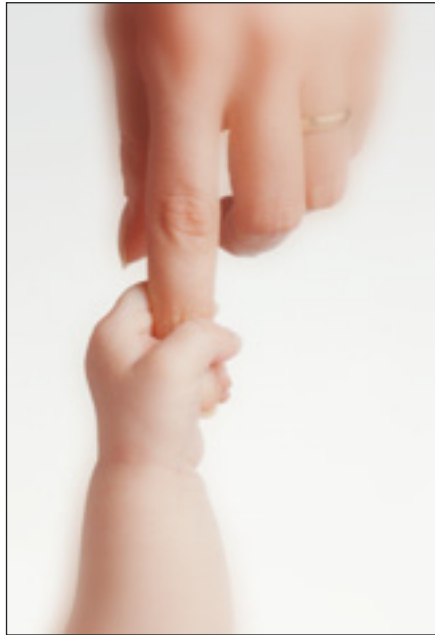
I was wrong. Benjamin had needed me more than I could have imagined.

Most fathers—at least sometimes and often out of ignorance—neglect to take the opportunity to help, stimulate growth and nurture their children.

Benjamin's autism was a neurological disorder caused by a damaged brain that leaves a child unable to process information normally. I would learn that much of his recovery depended on me.

Early stimulation is critical

Our tiny son had gone from hypoactivity (being underactive) for the first 12 months to



hyperactivity and explosiveness for the next two years. We spent our days and nights listening to this screaming, ever-moving child, a Jekyll and Hyde for whom we finally had a label for a condition we didn't understand.

Science in the last decade has discovered that touch can be crucial to young children with autism. Parental attention in the forms of talking, smiling, singing, feeding and touching makes a significant difference to brain-damaged children.

We now know that these parental activities are vitally important for all young children. If we don't touch our infants in the manifold ways parents should relate to them—through their bodies, eyes, ears, emotions and intellects—children are profoundly affected in ways that mark them for the rest of their lives.

Why is this so?

It is because this kind of interaction of parents with children *builds* the brain structures necessary for their further development. Brain research reveals the physical processes of constructing a personality through development of the child's central nervous system.

Mechanically, children are virtual learning machines. They are constantly learning beings made in the image of their

parents. But, to thrive as well as survive, children need constant stimulus led by competent parents.

The learning brain

What is most important in a child's development? Is it his genetic makeup, or is it his life experiences in interacting with parents, siblings, teachers and surroundings?

This question summarizes the nature-vs.-nurture debate. People have argued it for 2,000 years, but research proves that the either-or approach is fruitless. Nature and

Parental attention in the forms of talking, smiling, singing, feeding and touching makes a significant difference to brain-damaged children.

nurturing are *both* important.

Until the last generation, scientists thought the brain was hardwired, with all its circuits intact in early childhood, with little change possible during the remainder of a person's life.

Each child is born with 100 billion neurons (nerve cells) in the brain, the total number of which does not grow significantly for the rest of our lives.

For years researchers thought basic brain development stopped after early childhood. Now we know that the brain's wiring only *begins* at birth. Most of the adult's conscious functions of logical thinking, goal-setting, writing, planning and communicating are the result of neuron connections—called *synapses*—which develop throughout childhood. It is these connections that are created by learning and responsible for additional learning.

In a real sense, properly rearing children is the process of nurturing young brains to maturity, of correctly wiring the neural circuitry that will determine the child's personality for the rest of his life. The actions and attitudes of parents exert a powerful force on the brain development of their chil-

dren throughout childhood, regardless of their genetic makeup.

The incredible learning machine

At birth what appears to be a long and slow process of learning begins, but every day brings the brain a spectacular array of experiences to interpret, record and respond to. Billions of bits of information must be processed and stored every hour of every day of young lives.

Brain development occurs throughout life, but the rate in childhood is much faster than it will be later. Young brains are more flexible because most of their connections are new.

Consider how marvelous are the unfathomable basic structures of the human brain.

It takes a committed, mature adult to know how to shape the child's will to be positive rather than negative, to be obedient and cooperative instead of defiant and disobedient.

The human brain is unbelievably complex. In addition to the 100 billion neurons, the brain contains one trillion other cells that play roles other than computing messages.

Neurons hold the keys of communication and learning. Each has a long extension, somewhat like a tree trunk, called an axon. The axon transmits basic messages to other neurons. From infancy to adulthood, each neuron grows elaborate tangles of side branches called dendrites. Each neuron develops up to 100,000 dendrites. Dendrites receive information from other neurons. Through sending and receiving messages, neurons both teach and learn from other neurons.

Fifty-three specialized chemicals, called neurotransmitters, transmit electrical messages across the synapses. Each synapse has at least 10 strengths. The number of configurations, arrangements and patterns of the neurons, dendrites and synapses in one brain is at least 10 to the trillionth power—a number greater than all the atoms in the universe!

Learning is the process of the creation, growth, strengthening and weakening of these connections. Every experience either builds or weakens dendrites and connections in one or more parts of the brain.

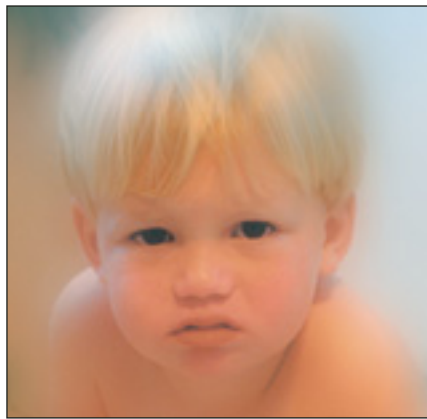
God designed and made these connections available to us so we can learn, wonder, ponder, understand and plan. You are using millions of them as you read this article.

In *A User's Guide to the Brain*, Harvard Medical School's professor of psychiatry John Ratey writes that, "happily, this

dynamic complexity is actually the solution to many people's fears that our nature is genetically 'hard-wired.'

"The brain is so complex, and so plastic, that it is virtually impossible, except in the broadest fashion, to predict how a given factor will influence its state. Genes do contain direction for much of the brain's initial development, yet they have no absolute power to determine how the brain will respond" (2001, p. 11).

What does all this mean? To put it simply, a child's brain is an inner universe with the potential to learn, be taught and change throughout life. Childhood is a critically important time when the connections in the child's brain are being established and



strengthened for the first time.

An independent person in the making

One more factor influences how the young brain will become wired. The brain is the seat, the home, of the whole little human being who is more than just the sum of neurochemicals firing across cells in some mechanical way.

Each child has an independent will. He is a bundle of wants, needs and desires to grow, experience and know. Basic tendencies are preprogrammed genetically. But the kinds of choices a child makes are shaped by an interaction of the child's will and the environment, especially the environment shaped by parents. Parental style and choices become critical issues in creating a child who is generally cooperative and pleasant or one who is predominantly aggressive and mean.

Parents can achieve their best outcome in rearing their children when they understand

that their child has a continuous need for care, love and respect as a small person with an independent will—just like his father and mother.

The environment is not the only factor besides genes at work in brain development. The independent will of the child—based on the genetic heritage from his parents and other ancestors—also drives the brain's development. A child will develop best when parents guide him to be self-motivated and to desire to experience constructive behavior, attitudes and thoughts. A parent also must provide guidance, direction and protection from harmful influences.

Positive parents

With each smile from his mother and father, every redirection when he gets in a fight with siblings, and each time a parent allows or doesn't allow him to be exposed to sexually offensive or violent television, a child's brain modifies some of its tangle of 100 trillion constantly changing connections. Through this process a child learns the choices he can make in reacting to these challenges the next time they arise.

But it takes a committed, mature adult to know how to shape the child's will to be positive rather than negative, to be obedient and cooperative instead of defiant and disobedient, to be outgoing toward others and not self-obsessed and self-absorbed. The tantrum-throwing terror in the supermarket is often the result of parents who don't know how to help their children be better behaved and not the manifestation of the supposedly inherently evil nature of a child.

Harvard's Ratey says that "everything we do affects everything that follows . . . Genetics are important, but not determinative, and the kinds of exercise, sleep, diet, friends, and activities we choose, as well as the goals we set for ourselves, have perhaps equal power to change our lives" (p. 12).

Brain research shows that each child's brain is shaped—or "parented," you might say—by its interaction with its environment. Such interaction is largely controlled by the quality and quantity of parental interaction. There is nothing static about it; the process continues throughout a human being's life.

In the 21st century some of the ancient wisdom regarding the basics of rearing children has come full circle and is being recognized as the best our modern age can offer.

The foundation that reveals how parents should rear and nurture their children is found in the Bible. God designed children to

succeed under the guidance of competent parents. The guiding principle is expressed simply yet powerfully in Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Training of the caliber expressed in Scripture comes from one huge but simple requirement for successful parents: leadership throughout the child’s youth, from infancy to adulthood.

Continuously involved leadership

Research shows that, from the first hours after birth, infants’ eyes follow the shapes of the mother and father, associating them with their voices, warmth, care and nourishment. As soon as a child’s eyes can focus well enough to perceive the smile of his mother, he begins to imitate and mirror the movements of her facial muscles, lips and laugh lines.

The mother or father orchestrates a great symphony of connections, feelings, inferences and meanings that builds a new person who is, to a remarkable degree, in the parent’s own image. At birth the parent leads the external stimulation of the brain, a process responsible for 80 percent of the developing personality through the formation of trillions of synaptic connections. Each of these sensations builds the superstructure of circuitry for the subsequent development of the child’s brain.

The parent is a leader who shapes the development of his child. Children are natural followers, built to imitate their parents. Without the appropriate leadership from parents, children do not develop socially and often are too aggressive and lack self-control.

In April, news sources reported the largest study ever in the United States on the behavior of young children in day-care facilities compared with the conduct of children who stayed at home with their mothers. In the study more than 1,100 children in 10 cities were rated by parents, day-care providers and others. The results are startling.

Children in day care, researchers found, are three times more likely to experience behavioral problems than those who stay at home with Mom. Young children in day care also were reported to be unhappier.

“As time [the duration of daily day care] goes up, so do behavior problems,” said Jay Belsky, an investigator conducting the study. Dr. Belsky noted that, if children spend more than 30 hours a week in child care, they generally are “more demanding, more noncompliant, and they are more aggressive.” He

added: “They scored higher on things like [getting] in lots of fights, cruelty, bullying, meanness, as well as talking too much [and] demand[ing that his needs] must be met immediately.”

We shouldn’t be surprised.

Mothers know best

Natural mothers dedicated to staying at home to offer optimal nurturing for their children provide more continuous emotional warmth and support for their young children than do day-care providers with no familial attachment to children who come and go under their care.

A mother’s warmth and support are registered in the neural connections in a child’s brain. So is a child’s less-optimal day-care experience. An at-home parent provides more continuous focused involvement throughout the day than can a day-care provider, who typically provides for many more children, all of whom are strangers to the child.

As every mother knows who has had to get a young child out of bed early, the child can be emotionally traumatized when dropped off in day care as the parent goes off to work. Even the mother is often sad at having to endure a struggle with the unhappy child who doesn’t want to be separated from his mother. A sad child plus a sad mother, repeated well over a thousand times in early childhood, is hardly the best formula for proper brain development.

Parents are not effective leaders unless they are grounded in strong principles that make them proper role models. The process of successfully rearing children requires many skills, many of which they need before bearing children but are not acquired until one becomes a parent.

One might become an Olympic athlete, climb Mount Everest or think he has the greatest job in the world, but proper parenting requires as much or more leadership as these activities. Bringing up children can be as just as rewarding and thrilling an experience.

But, like these heroic and athletic endeavors, being a parent involves enduring some tough times. Leaders must make course corrections and never give up. Successful parents constantly develop their skills to rise to the next level. They are committed and involved.

The same principles that lead to success in life apply to successful parenting.

Parents always have an impact. Even though parents may not realize it, children are

always learning by the action, attention, respect—or disrespect, inaction and inattention—of their parents.

As much as we would like to mystify children’s behavior, the quality of parents and their child-rearing efforts are largely responsible for the nature of every child. Much of the negative behavior of youths is the result of parents who do not control negative influences, do not know how to simultaneously love, nurture and discipline and do not understand the spiritual needs of children.

We need to remember that every brain has a parent. If not the natural parent, some other influence will dramatically affect every child’s brain and character.

Help from heaven

After Patti and I discovered our son Benjamin was autistic, we struggled to reverse the damage he had suffered before birth. Taking cues from health-care professionals, I became Benjamin’s speech therapist and helper—tickling, wrestling and holding him and taking him to Little League baseball games and on camping trips and mountain climbs. Patti did the same. Benjamin received sensory and motor therapy, school intervention and care and love from many.

But Benjamin’s neural wiring problems exposed mine. I had to admit I wasn’t wired as the ideal parent from birth. I often hit the wall of frustration. I was not prepared to handle the intensity of working with an autistic child. But, once you are a parent, there is no turning back.

I realized then, as I still realize, that I couldn’t do it alone. I was often forced to go to God on my knees to ask for help from the heavenly throne of grace. After all, God is the greatest parent, the ultimate authority, the one who wrote the book. The Bible is *the* book about parenting. God, who is infinitely good, has given parents priceless guidance and instruction.

Benjamin is 14. After his rocky start, he has a good brain. He is doing well in middle school, has many friends, talks about things like any other 14-year-old, swims all over the state as part of the school-district swim team, is studying second-year Spanish and has forgiven me for the times I didn’t know what I was doing.

His wiring will be fine in the end.

But I have learned an important lesson. Like every parent’s, my wiring is still under construction. **GN**

Teen Sex: The Silent Epidemic That's Killing Our Kids

Sweeping the world, this silent epidemic is largely ignored by most Western governments—except for misguided programs that often make this devastating problem even worse. Most parents have little idea how bad this epidemic is, much less how to fight it—yet solid biblical solutions exist.

by John Miller

The SARS outbreak made daily headlines not too long ago. Governments and the international medical community have mobilized to keep this disease from further spreading around the globe and causing an even greater epidemic.

But a silent epidemic more lethal and widespread is lurking closer to home—at your very doorstep. This epidemic spreads to another 8,000 American teenagers, and thousands more around the world, *every day*.

To put it in perspective, this epidemic infects as many American teens *daily* as the total number of recognized SARS cases reported in the first four months since that disease was first recognized in February of this year.

You would think that a problem of this magnitude would shout from the headlines each day, mobilizing the medical community and U.S. government to declare war on it. But no. Most of the population remains unaware of its magnitude, the victims maintain their silence, and government agencies and institutions dealing with the problem keep barking up the wrong tree. Sadly, those who are most likely to experience the ravages of this epidemic are among those most ignorant of its growing threat.

Sexual freedom's terrible cost

The truth of the matter is damning: The Western world, and the United States in particular, has flaunted its so-called “sexual freedom” for decades. The results are disastrous, but as a nation we have not yet found the courage to admit just how wrong we were.

If you think your kids are not at risk, think again. A recent book by Meg Meeker, M.D., doctor of adolescent medicine, makes a compelling case based on solid medical research and firsthand clinical experience. Our teens are at risk, she says, and without substantive action casualties will continue to mount. Consider these facts from her 2002 book *Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*:

- Nearly one in four sexually active teens has



We thought we could have sexual promiscuity without the undesirable results. What we discovered was promiscuity produced far more than unwanted pregnancies.

at least one sexually transmitted disease (p. 13).

- One in 5 children over 12 tests positive for herpes type 2 (p. 13).

- A British study found that nearly half of girls become infected with a sexually transmitted disease during their first sexual experience (p. 12).

- Herpes has skyrocketed 500 percent in the past 20 years among white American teenagers (p. 13).

- For most sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), especially viruses spread from skin-to-skin contact, condoms offer little or no protection (pp. 104-105).

- One in five teens believe oral sex is “safe sex” (p. 144).

- In June 2002 a 13-year-old sixth-grade girl who made good grades and led the cheerleading squad was strangled to death by a married man—one of many sexual partners

she had met on the Internet (p. 163).

Dr. Meeker illustrates the magnitude of the problem this way: “Picture a football stadium filled with teenagers. Start counting. One out of five of those cheering kids has herpes (at least, that we know of). Every third girl in the stands has HPV [human papilloma virus, which can cause cancer], and one out of ten has chlamydia. If we pulled all the healthy kids out of there, leaving just those teens infected with an STD, the stadium would still be nearly full” (pp. 13-14).

Shocking? Perhaps, but backed by solid medical research—research that is not based on high-risk, inner-city kids. We are talking about the kid next door, the captain of the basketball team and perhaps your very own children whom you love and cherish. Bad things happen to “good” kids when they engage in irresponsible sexual behavior.

Dr. Meeker attributes this epidemic of sexually transmissible diseases to four things: birth control pills, condoms, popular media and high-risk sex. This is certainly not a politically correct position for a physician—or anyone—to take, but the facts speak for themselves.

Easy birth control changes everything

Dr. Meeker—herself the mother of four, including two teens—has not always taken this stand. Early in her career she was a proponent of birth control and held feminist ideals. She wanted girls to like being women and to make their own sexual decisions—to have control of their bodies. She prescribed oral contraceptives to “wage war” on unwanted pregnancies. But after years of experience she has concluded that this is not the right approach. *Birth control does not equate to disease control.*

“Twenty years ago, I wouldn’t have hesitated to prescribe oral contraceptives to teenage girls . . . As a young doctor swept away by the message of ‘safe’ sex, I didn’t know any better” (p. 98). But today, she thinks long and hard about prescribing birth control pills—for while they protect against unwanted pregnancy, they inadvertently *encourage* increased sexual activity and the danger of picking up a sexually transmitted disease.

The advent of oral contraceptives brought new choices and so-called freedoms—the freedom to choose to engage in sexual activity without the unwanted responsibility of children. This freedom, as we all know, sparked a social revolution that reshaped popular notions about sexuality and family.

“When birth control pills arrived in the 1960s, our generation felt we had just what we needed to take ultimate charge of our sexual lives and our decisions about reproduction,” Dr. Meeker writes. “But what we failed to see was the curse that accompanied it . . . Only now are we coming to realize that

safe sex isn’t safe. In fact, it can be deadly” (pp. 89-90).

Stated another way, we thought we could have sexual promiscuity without the undesirable results. What we discovered was promiscuity produced far more than unwanted pregnancies—sexually transmitted diseases exploded. What was needed now was protection from the other consequences of sexual freedom, some of them quite deadly.

The not-so-magic solution

Enter the condom. The latex condom became the darling of the healthcare community and the proponents of safe sex. Millions of condoms are distributed to teens in schools each year. Sex education classes teach our teens how to use them to have sex safely. The message that is sent either overtly or implicitly is that sex is safe as long as you wear a condom. The problem? *Neither the condom nor sex education works as advertised.*

Consider these findings: “Less than half of adolescent boys (45%) say they use condoms for every act of intercourse, and older teens (age 18 and 19) actually use condoms *less* than younger teens (age 15 to 17). Remember, these are the same kids who forget to do their homework, brush their teeth, or take the dog out. Can we really expect them to use condoms each and every time they have sex?” (p. 116).

This illustrates an important point: Just because someone is educated does not mean that the knowledge will be applied—especially in something as impulsive and emotionally charged as sex. Isn’t the idea that sex education will result in teens following through and actually using protection dangerously naive?

Furthermore, as sex education fails to deliver the advertised results, so does the condom. Condoms do not always protect. They leak or break at least two percent of the time

and do not offer adequate protection against many sexually transmitted diseases.

Human papilloma virus (HPV), for example, is spreading like wildfire and is a leading cause of cervical cancer in young women. Yet the latest studies conclude that “condoms have *no impact* on the risk of sexual transmission of human papilloma virus in women” (p. 108). Another study published in 2001 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that when a man’s sexual partner has herpes, “using condoms didn’t help the men reduce their risk of getting the disease at all” (p. 109).

Teaching teens to use condoms and making them readily available gives teens a false sense of security that inadvertently exposes them to greater risk. They are receiving a fallacious message that sex is safe when, in fact, solid medical research shows it isn’t.

This incongruity points to a bigger problem: “As long as the idea of sexual freedom remains the driving force behind national sex education, the STD epidemic will continue . . . The only way to stop it is to curb the conspiracy of those who urge total sexual freedom and argue that it has no costs and causes no harm” (p. 28).

High-risk sex

Dr. Meeker also attributes the epidemic level of STDs among teens to their involvement in high-risk sex. They tend to act on the messages they receive from school and the media to engage in sexual activity that most teens several decades ago knew nothing about.

These high-risk activities include the increased popularity of oral sex. Teens feel a false sense of security because oral sex cannot cause pregnancy and they believe it to be safe. While oral sex does not result in pregnancy, the idea that it is safe is not true.

Says Dr. Meeker: “You can mince words all you like, but while oral sex may leave you a

How Mass Media Sells Sex

The idea of sexual freedom is kept alive and well by what Dr. Meg Meeker considers a major cause of the current epidemic of teen sex—mass media and the sexually charged world our kids see: “The American Psychological Association estimates that teenagers are exposed to 14,000 sexual references and innuendoes a year on television alone—all subtly (or not so subtly) influencing my patients into having sex, an act that can physically and mentally harm, if not kill them” (*Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*, 2002, p. 120).

What messages are they sent through movies and television? “Consider the impressions they’re likely to take away from a film such as *Titanic*,” writes Dr. Meeker. “Do kids even remember the movie is based on a true historical event? Do they remember the old couple who held each other as the ship sank so they could die in each other’s arms? The captain who shut himself in his cabin to go down with his ship? Of course not. Kids remember the steamy windows of the car parked below-deck



in which Jack and Rose made passionate love. Did she get pregnant? Herpes? Chlamydia? No. She got the ‘strength’ from this three-day tryst to ‘go on’” (p. 124).

Television and movies are only part of what our kids see and are exposed to. Increasingly, fashion designers and mass merchandisers are using sex to sell to our kids.

The pressure is intense at a time when our kids are vulnerable. According to *The Harvard Guide to Modern Psychiatry*: “Sexual impulses, intensified during puberty, remain intense during this phase of adolescence. Permissiveness, the lack of moral guidelines, the sexually stimulating aspects of mass media, and other dimensions of today’s society make control of these impulses particularly difficult for the modern adolescent” (Armand Nicholi, Ed., 1999, p. 617).

Sadly, what the media portrays as fun or fashionable—to sell merchandise—often induces behavior that leads to debilitating diseases, even death.

technical virgin, it won't leave you disease-free . . . The sad truth is that HIV *is* spread through oral sex, as are herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea, HPV, chancroid, intestinal parasites, and hepatitis A" (p. 147).

Particularly troubling is this observation based on many interviews with teachers and high school counselors: "Group sex is most popular with younger teens (particularly at the eighth-grade level)" (p. 156). How utterly society has failed when such activity is popular among those so young! Making matters even worse is the level of exposure to disease. Research shows that the earlier teens engage in sexual activity, the more partners they are likely to have—and hence the greater likelihood of contracting one or more diseases.

Most teens are blissfully unaware of the danger. If they think of risk at all, they believe their exposure is limited to their direct partners. *But that is not true.* In reality *they have been exposed to everyone who ever had sexual contact with their promiscuous partners.*

Let's say that a teen has sexual contact with seven partners, which is a number not unusual for teens engaged in such activities. This means that he or she has statistically been exposed to 127 other teens—not just the seven *immediate* partners, but also all of *their* partners, plus *their* partners, ad nauseum—a frightening proposition. Promiscuity is not fun and games—it's highly risky and potentially deadly.

Must-read books for parents

Dr. Meeker's well-researched book *Epidemic* is a must-read for all concerned parents, but so is another best seller that reaches similar conclusions—the Holy Bible. Millennia ago one of its writers—famous for his wisdom and observations of human behavior—wrote words that echo Dr. Meeker's sentiments.

"For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, and saw among the simple . . . a young man devoid of understanding." The writer describes how the young man meets a young woman and the predictable action and reaction follows. ". . . She caught him and kissed him . . . 'Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love.' . . . Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter . . . As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would take his life" (Proverbs 7:6-23).

The Bible denounces sexual promiscuity and warns of the terrible consequences of the kinds described by Dr. Meeker. But it also offers a great deal of hope and encouragement to parents committed to follow its instructions.

The incessant bombardment of popular media notwithstanding, research consistently

confirms that parents—even poor ones—still are the *primary* influence in their children's lives. Concerned parents should draw encouragement from these findings, because they show that we are not powerless against the negative pressures our children face.

So what are parents to do?

We must take positive action and stand as advocates for our children. This task is not as daunting as it may seem, because we can avail ourselves of the power and principles of the God of the universe—the Author and Creator

the fact that it won't happen *universally* should not discourage us from administering those laws *individually*.

The great principles of the Bible are most effective when administered from one heart to another in the context of our family relationships. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 speaks to this concept: ". . . These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."



"Touch lets teenagers know that someone likes them. So when a parent—still the most important person in a teen's life—touches them, it affects them deeply."

of all things, including family and children. Children are a gift from God, the Bible tells us (Psalm 127:3-5)—and as such we can be sure that we have His attentive interest.

The first commandment that God gave man was "be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth"—defining sex as a good thing, integral to accomplishing His divine plan (Genesis 1:28). Family and children have been central to God's purpose from the very beginning. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that the forces of evil consistently wage war against this time-honored institution.

When God codified His moral principles into what is known as the Ten Commandments, He included powerful antidotes for the current epidemic. Consider the impact should a full dose of "Thou shalt not commit adultery" be injected into every man, woman and teen in our societies. The application of just this one of God's moral principles would bring the epidemic to a screeching halt! And although that will never happen in our world,

The content of this passage demonstrates the depths of wisdom in the Holy Scriptures. Articulated in just this one passage is a set of tools that equip committed parents to build a strong defense against the negative culture of our dying world. Ironically, but not surprisingly, these tools are consistent with modern research in family and sexual dynamics.

Commitment from the heart

God's "words," this passage tells us, must be in our "heart"—not a set of rules for teens taped to the refrigerator door. There is no room for hypocrisy, double standards or knee-jerk actions. Parents who are committed to consistent principles that they believe in their heart of hearts usually will foster respect, not contention, from their teens.

Commitment to the principles found in this passage provides a solid basis for positive action, because they produce conviction that taps the power of the Almighty God. There is no need to be timid. You can move forward

with confidence, knowing that you are on solid ground. Nowhere can your dedication to the consistent moral principle of these “words” have greater influence than in your children’s attitude about sex. As Dr. Meeker puts it, “What’s really important *isn’t what you say, but what you believe*” (p. 215).

What you believe in your heart of hearts is what you will ultimately transfer to your kids—good, bad or indifferent. A good friend of mine, old enough to be my grandfather, once told me: “Don’t wonder how your children will turn out. They will become as you are”—a sobering, but constructive, admonition from the voice of experience.

Instruction must start with yourself

Notice that this transfer of values is to take place “when you sit in your house.” It is something that is “talked” about in this setting. Does this describe the typical scenario in a 21st-century household? Hardly. Dad and Mom are often away at work most of the time or otherwise uninvolved with their children. The kids are glued to a television or computer screen in their own rooms, or listening to music with their headsets on. No wonder the mass media has such a powerful influence.

Many believe there is simply no time for family in our hectic world. This is just not true. Simply reducing the amount of television or movie time by half would *quadruple* the amount of time for family in most cases.

How is this done? The sense of this passage is that it occurs in a natural and practical way. And remember the teaching must come *from the heart*, which means parental behavior and habits must change first, not the other way around.

Reducing your teen’s television or other media time without first going on a media diet yourself will not bring results. Says Dr. Meeker: “Parents who warn their children that teen sex isn’t good but spend a lot of time watching highly sexualized television or movies are muddying the waters . . . If a kid sees his parent ‘approving’ of sex between young sophisticated singles on television, why shouldn’t he be one of those young sophisticated singles?” (p. 220).

Changing *your* media diet first makes a powerful statement. It will create a natural environment where you can talk about these things in a family setting.

How? Teens are naturally curious. And when they see you change, they will often ask—giving you the opportunity to talk. Tell them *why* you have changed. Silence, especially on moral issues such as sexual activity, creates a vacuum that will be filled with undesirable behavior. Once your behavior is consistent with the moral principles of the Bible,

then you have an obligation to set guidelines on the type of media that is allowed “when you sit in your house.”

This consistency is important, notes Dr. Meeker: “. . . Don’t, as an alternative, offer to sit and watch restricted movies with your child. Regardless of what is said afterward, the simple act of watching it will sanction the movie and its content in your teen’s mind” (p. 141).

Applying God’s instruction practically

According to this passage in Deuteronomy 6, another practical time for teaching is “when you walk by the way.” This has particular potential in our modern world where we seem to be running to and fro most of the time—especially when we have teens.

There are the trips to ball games, the dance studio, the piano lessons and the list goes on. Use these opportunities to talk about what is in your heart. Of course, talking about what is in our heart is what usually happens anyway—the problem sometimes is that either there is nothing in our heart or it is filled with negative things.

The inside of a car can be a tremendous classroom. Turn down or turn off the radio sometimes and let the heart speak. “If teenagers think you like them, they will communicate with you. If they think you dislike them, they will shut you out” (p. 197). This time is familial, practical and you may have just found hours each week that you did not know you had.

The beauty about God’s instruction in Deuteronomy to teach our children is that it occurs at natural intersections where our busy lives cross. Instead of worrying about creating “quality time” to do family things, which often ends up either not happening anyway or feeling unnatural, choose to stop and greet each other at these intersections when your busy lives cross paths—when you sit in your house, when you travel and when you lie down.

Bedtime is another opportunity. Spend time. Pray together and give them a goodnight hug. Dr. Meeker notes that “touch lets teenagers know that someone sees them, someone likes them. So when a parent—still the most important person in a teen’s life—touches them, it affects them deeply” (p. 202).

If this has not been your practice or tradition, it may seem awkward at first. But be consistent, patient and natural. You are filling a great need; your teen will respond in time if your actions are heartfelt.

The morning, “when you rise up,” is no less important. A heartfelt “Good morning!” with praise and affection goes a long way. “It’s really not so hard for parents to communicate

self-respect to teens,” writes Dr. Meeker. “They want positive messages—about themselves, about life, and about sex.” Teens, especially girls, “want someone to tell them that their bodies are beautiful, so beautiful in fact that they should keep them protected and covered” (p. 214).

This is a need parents should take pains to fill—because if you do not, someone else will. The comment “Good morning, beautiful” is not trite when well-placed and heartfelt.

Admittedly, mornings can be challenging, but the intersection is there. Look for opportunities. I know some parents who drop their teens at school in the morning expressly to create another opportunity to “walk by the way.” Few young teens will pass up the opportunity to avoid the dreaded bus ride—and just consider the change of influence.

If schedules simply do not coincide, leave a note with a snack and juice to let them know you care. Teens in particular have an uncanny ability to know whether you really don’t have time, or if you just don’t want to make time. The former is acceptable; the latter is not.

Why not make a start today?

The challenges for families with teens are great. The risks of the epidemic described in Dr. Meeker’s book are real and the medical challenges are complex, but we are not powerless in facing them. There is much that you can accomplish if you determine to take such positive steps.

Simply applying these principles with consistency and patience will go a long way in containing the current crisis for your children, but there is a lot more. The Bible—the consistent international best-seller—is a source we should regularly read and cherish for its many timeless principles designed to help us enjoy happy, healthy and productive lives and pass on the same to our children. **GN**

Recommended Reading

The publishers of *The Good News* offer many resources for helping parents understand and apply biblical principles. When it comes to applying God’s commandments and teaching their value to our children, we strongly recommend our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. For an overview of the Bible’s fundamental teachings, we recommend our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, also free. And be sure to read the article “Virginity: Is It Worth It?,” beginning on page 30. As this article reports, there is encouraging news that more teens are saying *no* to premarital sex.



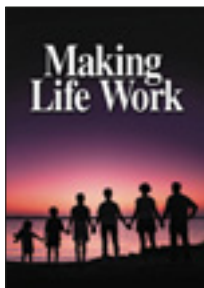
Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at

www.gnmagazine.org

Life Works Much Better With the Right Instruction Manual.



Life simply isn't working for many people. They need help with the many problems, challenges and stresses of everyday life, but aren't sure where to turn.



You may not realize that most families already own the best self-help book ever published. Millions of copies have been published. Its words have been around for thousands of years. This book is *your Bible*.

Although it's a perpetual best-seller, few people take the time to read and study it. But those who do take the time find that it's a *timeless* book, filled with practical, down-to-earth advice from our Creator. It records

vital and profound lessons from real people. It can help us see and avoid the pitfalls that come with doing things our way.

It's filled with sound counsel on how to have happy families, marriages and friendships, how to properly rear children, how to manage family finances and succeed on the job, how to maintain your health, and so much more. In short, it tells us how to *make life work*.

In this booklet we've gathered and summarized some of the Bible's best advice on these topics. Be sure to request your free copy of *Making Life Work* today!



United Church of God
an International Association

Visit us on the Web: www.gnmagazine.org