

and emulating the way God works with us. Do *we*, when praying, *ever* ask God for wants? Or do we *always* confine our requests to absolute necessities? Whether we show generosity and kindness or stinginess and cruel treatment with no compassion toward our children, an example *is* presented to them. Sometimes good, other times bad. But we *are* continually examples. Children learn about God through the example of parents. An important tool in teaching children responsibility of *any* kind is our actions. God gave *us* an example of generosity and kindness and children should see God's influence in our interaction with them. Can we convince our children that their *Heavenly* Father "...*is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that (they) ask or think...*" (Ephesians 3:20 KJV) if they've *never* seen a similar example from their earthly father or parents? We look to God for our very existence. Children do the same with parents. We are charged to provide shelter, food, clothing, security, assurance, guidance and all other needs as God in his goodness does for us.

Teaching our children to respect us as parents, as well as teaching them to respect others is most easily accomplished by *our* demonstrating respect for them — respect for their uniqueness, abilities, ambitions, friends, likes and dislikes. Respecting them as a part of daily life, allows them to learn respect not as a topic, but as a way of life. Respecting a child because s/he is a gift from God is much different than respecting him or her because of what s/he *does*.

What about discipline? What punishment is appropriate? What is too much or too little? The courage and energy that it takes to discipline and tell a child "no" in the face of certain resistance is immense. But the opportunity that these times provide a parent can be some of the greatest learning experiences that a child will ever have. A parent must however, see it as such and not allow him/herself to be controlled by the emotions of the moment. The purpose of saying "no" is not to prove anything except to give appropriate guidance in light of the situation at hand. To say "no" for the purpose of proving to a child that a parent is the boss is counterproductive. A delicate balance exists between guiding and controlling. *When guidance isn't accepted control must be taken.* Children who must always have their way can grow up to be selfish adults who must endure harsh relationships to learn a lesson that could have been taught while in the house of their parents. Few spouses like having to raise a child when they thought they married an adult. We know that God tells us he disciplines those whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6).

Again let there be no mistake, there is no earthly institution that has more impact on the world than the family and the parents who raise the children therein. Let us not grow weary in doing good both outside our homes and within.

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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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A Parents Power

There is much said about the role of parents in today's society. Probably no single institution in the world has more impact on mankind than does the family and its primary guiding forces — parents.

To be more specific, no role we assume in this world has more lasting effects than does the role of parenting. Regardless of whether we find ourselves raising children alone or with the joint effort of a spouse, there is no greater opportunity to impact *future* generations than being a parent. Parents not only impact the lives of today's generation but also the lives of many generations to come. This is a joyful yet sometimes daunting responsibility.

Each day, as we attempt to meet the challenges of raising children, it is difficult to see into the distance and visualize a great grand child that will come into the world and feel the impact of *our* parenting many years prior to his or her birth. Yet sometimes it is that very view that can help us to deal with the current challenges that the world brings to our door as parents.

Regardless of how we may choose to explain or interpret the verse, Scriptures such as "...*women will be saved through childbearing...*" (I Timothy 2:15 NIV) give us a sense of the importance that God places on this critical role.

So what is there to be said that has not already been said and what advise is available that we have not already heard? Perhaps not too much. But in the spirit of encouraging "...*one another on toward love and good deeds...*" (Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV), we are taking this opportunity to encourage parents, soon to be parents, hopeful to be parents, grand parents and perhaps even great grand parents in this great endeavor.

As we consider God as our *Heavenly* Father, the very concept of a father at all is a challenge to many children today. It is a brutal reality that many children are raised without fathers in their homes. This does not remove the need to provide the *influence* that a father should provide, but rather makes it all the *more* important to teach the goodness and character of God the *Heavenly* Father.

Regardless of the makeup of the family — two parents or a single parent, the role of parenting plays a vital role in children growing to mature as followers of Christ. There are numerous references made in the Scriptures concerning *our*

relationship to God that can best be understood when we understand the role parents are to fulfill.

First let's note that children are a gift of God. *He* knows our child before we ever become acquainted with the new creature He sends to us.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." (Jeremiah 1:5 NIV)

"This is what the Lord says, He who made you, who formed you in the womb..." (Isaiah 44:2 NIV)

"Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name..." (Isaiah 49:1 NIV)

We must therefore show appreciation for the Giver of Life and respect for the gift. Thanking God for a child and accepting him or her into our home as a valued gift from God provides a positive growth environment. Once we have the new child, the responsibility is immediate and if it is the first child it can be overwhelming. The total dependence of a newborn is demanding. This new little person will advance at amazing speed toward gaining adult independence. The time we as parents, are given to shape and mold him or her into a God serving individual is brief at best.

Throughout the Scriptures we find numerous Bible stories that involve children. Some are examples of good parenting while others are examples of poor parenting. All of those stories however, regardless of the success or failure of the parenting in those stories, are great teachers for *us*. The fact remains that whether it was a Bible family thousands of years ago or is *our* family this very day, in all cases, there has been the introduction of a new human being into an existing family. And that new being is introduced into that family with a soul that has the *opportunity* for a home in Heaven for all of eternity. As Christian parents it is always our goal to train that child in such a way that he or she *will* eventually receive that eternal heavenly home with God. Unfortunately however, the opposite possibility also exists. The Scriptures are clear that there is also the opportunity for that soul to eventually refuse God's eternal blessings and enter into eternity as a soul forever lost. While the *goal* is crystal clear, the "how to accomplish it" is sometimes fuzzy.

Let's consider some basic teachings that we find in Scripture. It's clear that we should *"train up a child..."* with the expectation that, *"...when he is old, he will not depart from (the training)"* (Proverbs 22:6 KJV). But is this an absolute fact? Is it possible that a parent may train a child in the truth of Scripture and the child still goes a different way and never returns? This is a question reserved for God. The guiding thought however is for parents to *accept the responsibility* of raising the child to know God and His teachings. This is certainly a wise saying and has great merit, but does it *unconditionally promise* an absolutely predictable outcome in *every* situation? Again, that question is not for mankind to be able to

answer. We can pray, we can hope, we can believe. But most of all, we can take with all seriousness the admonition to *"train up (the) child in the way he should go..."* Ultimately however, it is up to God *and the free will* of that individual whom we have trained to the *best* of our ability as parents.

Additionally, fathers are admonished to *"...provoke not (their) children to wrath"* (Ephesians 6:4 KJV). What are some ways in which this might happen? *As* fathers and parents, we are to emulate God — our Father. As a child needs and asks for guidance and/or assistance, parents should be there for the child — thereby instructing by *example* that God will *also* always be there for him or her, even as an adult. We should not try the patience of our children by teasing them or requiring them to *prematurely* take on responsibilities that they will assume for a *lifetime* once they are adults. During the teenage years (in anticipation of the youngster quickly approaching adulthood) it is sometimes *very* tempting for parents to *recklessly* increase a teen's responsibilities. A parent who *fails to thoughtfully consider* exactly *which* responsibilities should be transferred from the parent *to* the teen may send the message to the teenager that a parent will only "be there" for so long before the teen will be expected to assume *all* of the responsibilities — perhaps even before s/he is mature enough to do so. A parent *must* remember that a teen *is not yet* an adult. Doing a chore *together* — even with an older teen, may serve to build the relationship. Often times, assigning tasks to be the *total* responsibility of a youngster not yet ready to accept them, may serve to build resentment in him or her if done excessively. Too much responsibility, too quickly and too soon may subtly teach the teenager that he or she is in fact, the *only* one who can be counted on over the long haul. So when parents transfer too much of *their* responsibility to the teen *before* s/he actually reaches adulthood, how can they expect that child to learn that s/he can *always* depend on God — a *heavenly* Father? Parents must diligently guard against *excessively* transferring responsibilities to the child — especially in the teen years — as nothing more than a way of reducing their *own* responsibilities. Children learn a great deal about God by watching their earthly parents. Youngsters who see by example that parents are willing to make personal sacrifices in order to help *them*, subtly learn that they can also depend on God as they mature. Remember that God, our Father, *did sacrifice* His Son for us, His children.

In Matthew 7:7-12 we find Jesus' instructions concerning the degree to which we can count on God and also be accountable to our own children. The statement, *"would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread? Or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish?"* has very serious implications. Providing for the *needs* of children is *expected*. Providing for the *wants* of children is optional and wise parents can sometimes use wants to encourage a positive direction for their child. When we raise a child, in the manner that God would have us to do, we are directly following the teaching of Jesus