

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CHILDREN A PRIORITY

With all the good and necessary tasks and opportunities that demand our attention each day, we need to prayerfully consider what God wants us to do with our time. When we struggle with the constant act of balancing other responsibilities with the clear responsibility to nurture relationships within the family, it is good to remember what God has to say about our priorities.

We must remember that we are responsible to build relationships. God has commanded us to disciple our children. To do this, we must have strong, healthy relationships with them.

“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

We must believe God when He says that our relationship with Him is demonstrated through our relationship with people. We express our love for God by how we love those made in His image.

“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” (1 John 4:21)

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

We must treasure the opportunity and privilege that God has given us to display His love as we lay down our lives for our children, spending time with them, discipling them, loving them, and teaching them God’s Word.

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:16-17)

We must remember that love is demonstrated through actions! We must invest time and energy building a foundation of love and trust that leads our children to welcome and value our instruction.

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

We must remember that the season of childrearing is short! Use it well!

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

“As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.” (Psalm 103:15)

A FEW SIMPLE WAYS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Take someone with you any time you go somewhere in the car!

This gives you time to talk together. Your children will learn from you while you shop, while you minister, while you drive, and they will learn to serve alongside you.

Work together!

Work in the garden, the kitchen, the house together. Not only will this give you more time to talk and train your children in the tasks you perform, but it will also save you time, leaving you more time to spend with them in other ways.

Schedule times to spend with individual children.

Pray together! Work together on areas of temptation and sin, communicate that you are on their side, pray for each other.

Study the Bible together. Teach your children how to study the Bible as you study pertinent topics together

Read and discuss books together. (*Girl Talk, God at Work, Future Men, Tearing Down Strongholds, Thoughts for Young Men* are a few examples of the books we've read. We also read just-for-fun books together.)

Go for walks together. (We have found this to be especially good with our boys! They talk a lot more on a walk than they do while we're sitting together on the sofa.)

Go out to eat together. This doesn't have to be fancy – McDonalds or an ice cream cone can give you just as much time together as a big, expensive meal.

Have a campout! When everyone was little we all "camped out" together in the living room every Friday night! I still have campout nights on the floor with individual girls and impromptu summer campouts on the deck. Sometimes I sleep in the girls' room with them. It's amazing how much more the kids talk when we're laying there in the dark!

Have a monthly "Girls' Afternoon Out" or a "Boys' Afternoon Out." This is an idea that I was inspired to implement after reading Carolyn Mahaney's fine book, **Girl Talk**. Once a month the girls and I just go out for the afternoon (or sometimes the whole day) and have fun together! We've gone to tulip and iris farms, rose gardens, tea rooms, bookstores, parks, and more, and we always have a great time!

Share a regular time to discuss and set goals. We try to do this at least once a year. It has proven to be a very helpful tradition, and we're always encouraged when we look back and see how many goals have been reached over the course of the previous year.

Extend hospitality and socialize together as a family.

Minimize the time your children spend with just children their own age, and spend more time together as a family, in activities together, hosting other families in your home, and welcoming your children's friends into your home.

Design projects to share as a family.

Sharing common goals while you work and serve together will draw your family together. Find a way to serve together through your church, minister to shut-ins or retirement home residents together, start a small business together, host events for other families, help grandparents, raise animals, play music together!

Show an interest in your children's interests!

My father was a master at this! My security in his love and the direction of my life have both been profoundly affected by this great gift that only my daddy could give me! Sit down and listen to your daughter practice the piano, go to the softball game, build a model with your son, draw a picture together, admire the Lego constructions, give them your full attention!

Show physical affection to your children.

Hold their hands, hug them, say "I love you," and hug them some more!

Discipline your children.

One of the best ways to communicate love to our children is to firmly, lovingly, and consistently discipline them. Proverbs 13:24 says that *"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently."*

A child who gets his own way is not a child that will feel secure in the love of his parents. Left to himself, he will also become a child that is more difficult to love.

Welcome discipline situations as opportunities to grow closer to your children. Humbly facing our sinful hearts, rejoicing in God's grace and the gospel that covers our sin, asking and granting forgiveness – all these actions draw children and parents together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Welcome discipline situations as teaching opportunities. We have much to teach our children in the few years we have them in our homes. Every misbehavior, every sin, is an opportunity to further teach them from God's Word!

Don't step back too much when your children graduate or reach the age of 18.

It's possible to pull back too much just when children are reaching an age when many life-altering decisions (vocation, spouse, etc.) are being made. Stay connected with your young adult children! Be aware of their friendships. Encourage them to live at home until God leads them into marriage. Continue to guide and offer counsel, recognizing that the relationship is changing as your children reach adulthood.

Thank God for your children and pray for them daily!