

# Godly Parenting

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**By Duncan and Vasanti Watkinson**

This booklet has been written to help fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. We believe that you will benefit from studying this book by yourself, but that you will be blessed even more if you work through it with your spouse or along with another couple.

In the process of writing this book, we have drawn from a wide cross section of God's church. We are extremely grateful for the many insights we have received from different sources.

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? Making Disciples	?	Walking in the Light

Duncan has also written a full-length book on Spiritual parenthood entitled 'Where are the Fathers?'

Details on this and the other study booklets can be obtained by visiting the website [www.irnet.org](http://www.irnet.org) or contacting any of the addresses shown on the back cover of this booklet.

# 1. God's passion for children

*"Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him."*

**(Psalm 127:3)**

God is a Father and delights in all his children, regardless of their age. His Father heart of love reaches out to all people - young and old, rich and poor, male and female. Out of this love, he enjoys blessing a husband and wife with offspring so that, as parents, they can have the privilege of demonstrating his Father heart to their children.

If a husband and wife want to reflect God's heart, both need to personally know the Father heart of God and to experience his love day by day. This will only happen when we believe in Jesus Christ because only through him is it possible to know God as their Father. (See **John 14:6**).

This is the foundation of 'godly parenting'. In addition to knowing God as our Father, we also need to learn how to "father" in the broad sense of the word. This requires a radical change of heart for most people, and it is something which only God can do. Both **Malachi 4:6** and **Luke 1:17** promise that God will *turn* the hearts of fathers towards their children. The biggest obstacle to well brought up children is parents whose hearts have not been "turned" by God.

## **A. God's heart for children**

The Lord gives children far greater significance than most of his disciples do. Different verses in **Matthew 18** and **19** show his heart for children and how he wants us to treat them:

- 18:4** We must recognise that children start off in a better place spiritually than adults. Children already have certain Kingdom qualities like humility, simplicity and ability to forgive quickly.
- 18:5** Children should be welcomed. Don't regard them as a nuisance or intrusion. Jesus makes them equal with himself.
- 18:6** Children are easily stumbled and our words or actions can cause a child to sin. The adult's punishment is more severe so parents must be careful that they do not model or teach sinful ways.
- 18:10** Children are fully human and we should value them and treat them with respect. Explain things intelligently. Remember their angels are telling God how you're doing.
- 18:14** Share the Lord with them in a natural, relational way. God does not want any of them to be lost. Pray much for them.

**19:14** Give time to children - don't be too busy for them

These verses are a challenge to all adults - especially parents. God's plan is that godly marriages will produce well godly children. **Malachi 2:15** says: *Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and in spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.*

**B. The importance of parenting**

If they think of parenting at all, most parents are concerned about its short term consequences and whether their children are a nuisance to them or make them look bad in front of others. This was the attitude of King Hezekiah (See **2 Kings 20:12-19**) who was only looking *for peace and security in (his) lifetime.*

Perhaps the best gift parents can give their children is a secure and loving marriage. Statistics from around the world show that children brought up in a stable, two-parent home are far more likely to become mature, responsible adults.

The effect of godly parenting is felt through the generations as this example shows:

**a) Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards**

This table compares the family trees of two men who lived at the same time (18th century) in the same part of America:

<i>Name:</i>	Max Jukes	Jonathan Edwards
<i>Belief:</i>	Irreligious	Christian (preacher)
<i>Married to:</i>	An ungodly girl	A godly girl
<i>Descendants analysed:</i>	1200	1400
<i>Descendants:</i>	310 died as paupers	13 college presidents
	130 criminals	100 college professors
	7 murderers	3 US senators & 1 Vice-President
	50 openly immoral women	30 judges & 100 lawyers; 60 doctors
		75 army & navy officers
		100 preachers & missionaries
		60 authors & editors
		80 public officials
<i>Cost to state:</i>	\$ 1.25 million	Nil

**Exodus 20:5** warns us that God will punish *the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation*. The effect of sin being passed down through a family is seen clearly in Max Jukes' descendants. Thankfully the opposite is also true as the next example shows:

***b) George McCluskey***

You've probably never heard of George McCluskey. To my knowledge, no biographies have been written about his life. McCluskey was a man who wanted to make a shrewd investment. As he married and started a family, he decided to invest one hour in prayer. He was concerned that his kids might follow Christ and establish their own homes where Christ was honoured. After a time, he decided to expand his prayers to include not only his children, but their children and the children after them. Every day between 1 am and noon, he would pray for the next three generations.

As the years went by, his two daughters committed their lives to Christ and married men who went into full time ministry. The two couples produced four girls and one boy. Each of the girls married a minister and the boy became a pastor. The first two children born to this generation were both boys. Upon graduation from high school, the two cousins chose the same college and became roommates. During their sophomore year, one of the boys decided to go into ministry as well. The other one didn't. He knew the family history and undoubtedly felt some pressure to continue the family legacy by going onto the ministry himself, but he chose not to. In a manner of speaking, this young man became the black sheep of the family. He was the first one in four generations not to go into full time Christian ministry.

He decided to pursue his interest in psychology and over the years met with success. After earning his doctorate, he wrote a book that became a best seller. He then wrote another and another, all best sellers. Eventually he started a radio program that is now heard on more than a 1000 stations each day. The black sheep's name? James Dobson - without a doubt the most influential and significant leader of the pro-family movement in America. His ministry is the direct result of the prayers of a man who lived four generations ago.

### ***C. The competition for our children***

Our children do not grow up in a neutral environment. The world is competing for their souls and we need to be alert to how much they are influenced by TV, friends, books, relatives. The world's (ungodly) values include:

- ? win at all costs
- ? if it feels right, it must be right - no absolute moral values.
- ? personal convenience (selfishness) is the only real basis for decisions. This leads to easy acceptance of abortion, divorce, etc
- ? sexual immorality is acceptable and desirable
- ? happiness and approval are found in material things
- ? violence and revenge are acceptable
- ? there's an exciting escape in cigarettes, drink, drugs
- ? do your own thing - authority stops you being fulfilled, so ignore it or mock it

### ***D. Loving children***

Parents are God's way of bringing children into this world and of raising children who will become his instruments as they live on this earth. The parents' most powerful tool for influencing their children is love. It is God's unconditional love for us that impacts and changes our lives. It is parents' unconditional love for their children which will have most effect on them. Some of the ways we can show love:

- ? Spend time with them. Be available to play, talk and laugh. If necessary, schedule the time so that it actually happens.
- ? Be available to them when they ask for you. Be quick to respond to their calls.
- ? Fulfill your promises to them. If you have said you will do something with them, do not put it off because you do not feel like it. If you promise a gift, make sure you give it. Plan surprises for them. Arrange special parties, outings, fun things to do together.
- ? Treat them as very special gifts from God. Remember that your children are really God's and that you have a responsibility from him to care for them in the best possible way so that they become all that he has planned.

The following song warns parents of the dangers of not giving time to our children.  
Decide to demonstrate your love to them now!

### ***E. Cat's in the Cradle***

My child arrived just the other day.  
He came to the world in the usual way.  
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay.  
He learned to walk while I was away.  
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it and as he grew he'd say,  
"I'm gonna be like you, Dad, You know I'm gonna be like you."  
*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.  
Little boy blue and the man on the moon.  
"When you comin' home, Dad?"  
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then.  
You know we'll have a good time then. "*

My son turned ten just the other day.  
He said "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on, lets play,  
Can you teach me to throw?" I said "not today  
I got a lot to do." He said, "That's O.K."  
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed. And said,  
"I'm gonna be like him, yeah, You know I'm gonna be like him  
*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.  
Little boy blue and the man on the moon.  
"When you comin' home, Dad?"  
"I don't know when, but we 'll get together then  
You know we 'll have a good time then. "*

Well he came home from college just the other day  
So much like a man I just had to say  
"Son, I'm proud of you; can't you sit for a while?"  
He shook his head and said with a smile  
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys.  
See you later. Can I have them please?"  
*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.  
Little boy blue and the man on the moon.  
"When you comin' home, Dad? "  
"I don't know when, but we 'll get together then.  
You know we 'll have a good time then. "*

*I've long since retired. My son's moved away.  
I called him up just the other day.  
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."  
He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time.  
You see my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu.  
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad. It's been sure nice talking to you."*  
*And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me-  
He'd grown up just like me. **My boy was just like me.**  
And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.  
Little boy blue and the man on the moon.  
"When you comin' home. Dad? "  
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then. You know we'll  
have a good time then. "*

From the song *Cat's in the Cradle* by Sandy and Harry Chapin, copyright 1974 Story Songs Ltd (ASCAP), quoted by Gordon Macdonald, *The Effective Father* pp 134-5 (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, USA)

### 3. God's method for parents

Being a godly parent is difficult and challenging. But it is possible to raise children who will bring glory to God if we ask the Lord to help us. As we have seen in **Malachi 4:6** and **Luke 1:17**, the hearts of fathers have to be turned, but the good news is that God is willing to turn them if we are willing to let him.

#### A. *God's problem with parents (especially fathers)*

The two key areas where parents' hearts have to be turned are:

##### 1. Love

Each parent needs to love the child in a committed, unpossessive, unselfish way. Godly parents should be learning how to express love, affection and security to their children:

- ? through their lifestyle
- ? with appropriate words
- ? demonstrably with repeated hugs, kisses, comforting, lying together on bed etc

The parent's heart of love will show the child that he or she is valued and accepted just as he/she is.

##### 2. Authority

Each parent must stand in the authority God has given and not use other means such as persuasion, cajoling, threatening, bribing, tantrums etc, to get the child to obey.

Authority is derived from submission, and so the parent must firstly be submitted to God, and then to the authorities appointed by him - with Government authorities, at work and in the church.

Each New Testament instruction for children to obey is followed by a warning to fathers:

**Ephesians 6:4** - *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

**Colossians 3:21** - *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

Parents exasperate or embitter their children by:

- ? not being available
- ? setting a bad example - teasing, pinching, bribing, gossip, dishonesty, hypocrisy, unforgiveness, selfishness
- ? being inconsistent, showing favouritism, making comparisons
- ? refusing to acknowledge their own sins and not seeking forgiveness for them from their children when appropriate
- ? disunity between parents
- ? imbalance between love and discipline
- ? not allowing their children to grow up. God's goal is godly offspring who make their own godly decisions. Parents should encourage their children to:
  - take responsibility
  - strive for excellence
  - embark on tasks which will stretch them
  - grow in confidence through the parent's positive encouragement
  - make their own decisions
- ? forcing children to grow up too quickly by giving them responsibilities way beyond their years.

Remember it is God who has promised to turn our hearts - so ask him to do it, and then co-operate with him.

### ***B. A picture of family life***

**Hebrews 12:5-11** shows how God treats his sons and gives us a model to follow. Note that:

- ? love and discipline go together (v 6)
- ? discipline is assumed on earth ( vv 7,9,10)
- ? disciplined children respect their fathers (v 9) and enjoy peace and righteousness in the future (v 11)
- ? discipline is painful (v 11) - to both father and son
- ? father has the primary role (v 7). He sets the standard and ultimate authority and responsibility. Mother, though, will most of the day-to-day work.
- ? discipline is essential for a true son (v 8). Proverbs 22:15

Discipline is that which makes us do the right thing - preferably at the right time and in the right way. Discipline is learned through fear of punishment and hope of reward and should be aiming to help the child develop internal discipline. It is almost impossible to discipline others without first learning to discipline oneself..

Before looking at disciplining children, you might like to think about how disciplined you are in the following areas:

Paying debts	Writing letters
Praying	Returning borrowed items
Being punctual	Keeping your word
Obeying the law	Reading the bible
Passing on messages	Handling your emotions

### 1. God's tool for discipline

God says that children should be disciplined using a rod.

**Proverbs 22:15** it drives away folly

**Proverbs 23:13-14** it brings salvation

**Proverbs 29:15** it imparts wisdom

**Proverbs 29:17** it causes the child to bring peace and delight to the parents

It has the following benefits:

- ? it gives time for parents to consider, control their anger, and explain coolly and clearly
- ? it leaves the hands for showing love-especially straight after punishment
- ? it acts as a deterrent without even being used
- ? it injures no organs when applied to the bottom
- ? it leaves no visible marks, which is important for the child's self-respect
- ? it can be delegated

We do not punish immaturity, foolishness, or genuine misunderstanding -nor do we punish in anger, embarrassment or frustration. Our motive is love. The rod is used on a child who disobeys an instruction which is:

- ? clear - spoken with the right tone to the child
- ? understood - you've made sure he knew what you meant
- ? reasonable - it's within his ability

Proverbs 13:24 shows what God thinks of parents who are unwilling to use the rod in an appropriate way.

### 2. The application

**Proverbs 22:6** *Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

**a) It is training**

Training is an active process. It is hard work. Some of its elements are:

- ? **Talking** - see **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**. Talk about God's ways, until they are impressed on the children's hearts. Eli didn't communicate and his sons suffered for this - see **1 Samuel 2:25**
- ? **Setting a godly example**. Eli didn't - see **1 Samuel 2:29**. We should demonstrate in our lives both our love for the Lord and our fear of God. See **Psalm 112:1-2**. More is caught than taught!
- ? **Restraining** - see **1 Samuel 3:13**. The long term tragedy of Eli's poor parenting is shown in **1 Samuel 8:1-3**.

**b) There is "a way" a child should go**

The way is obviously Jesus so we train our children in God's ways, based on a living relationship with him. All children are born with a sinful nature and must make their own decision to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

**c) It is a faith process - "when he is old"**

We do not immediately see all the benefits of training our children well. It is a faith process with consequences which will only be obvious in 15-20 years time. God assures us in **Proverbs 29:17** that it's worth all the effort: *Discipline your son, and he will give you peace: he will bring delight to your soul.*

There is no greater joy than to see your children grow into mature men and women of God and embarking on their own exploits for the Lord. Truly it will bring delight to your soul. This is what the apostle John felt according to **3 John 4**: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

**d) It needs God's enabling**

Being a godly parent is not easy for anybody. We are aiming to raise children who will bring glory to God throughout their lives. We do not know exactly what to do, but we have a Heavenly Father who is willing to guide us at all times. As we keep asking him for grace and wisdom, he will show us what we should do and point out when we are missing the mark. He will provide his power to help us in our weakness.

## 4. Praying for children .

Pray diligently for every aspect of your child's life - present and future, including specific character issues and spiritual needs. Paul's prayers provide a great start for interceding for our children. Insert the name of your child (ren) where the blanks are - and start praying!

### *a) Ephesians 1:17-19*

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give ..... the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that he/she may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of ..... 's heart may be enlightened in order that ..... may know the hope to which He has called him/her, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.

### *b) Ephesians 3:16-19.*

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen ..... with power through His Spirit in his/her inner being, so that Christ may dwell in ..... 's heart through faith. And I pray that ..... being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that..... may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

### *c) Philippians 1:9-11*

And this is my prayer: that..... 's love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that he/she may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God.

*d) Colossians 1:9-12*

For this reason, since the day we heard about..... we have not stopped praying for him/her and asking God to fill him/her with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that..... may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that he/she may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified ..... to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

*e) 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*

With this in mind, we constantly pray for ..... that our God may count him/her worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of.....'s and every act prompted by .....'s faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in ..... and ..... in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*f) Philemon 1:4-7*

I always thank my God as I remember ..... in my prayers, because I hear about his/her faith in the Lord Jesus and his/her love for all the saints. I pray that..... may be active in sharing his/her faith, so that he/she will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ....'s love has given me great joy and encouragement, because he/she has refreshed the hearts of the saints.