

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 5 - LESSON 44

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:

- *Godly Parenting*

8. Develop Deference At Home
9. Guide Your Child's Ambition



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THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *Godly Parenting*

8. Develop Deference At Home

“Give everyone what you owe him... if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Romans 13:7).

During the half century since the end of World War II the Atomistic family has grown in the U.S. There are now two or three generations of Christian families who have lost the biblical understanding of both personal obedience to God and their spiritual responsibilities to their children.

Because of the individualistic, pleasure-bent pit of current retirement mentality, younger parents no longer benefit from the support of their own parents as they struggle to impart Christian character into the next generation.

We realize how much more pressure is put on parents today to raise a godly generation when they have so little

input from those who might have shared counsel and wisdom from their own experience of having raised children. If you've already read our Hebraic article, ***He Has Showed You***, then you're aware of how critical the Hebraic-style home fellowship is to come alongside parents and their children as *extended spiritual family*. We'll discuss this in our Lessons on home fellowships.

We realize your children may already be grown. However, timeless counsel based on God's Word can always be passed along if it comes from a loving, humble spirit! Discuss these truths with your adult children who are parents or with those in your extended spiritual family who would be blessed and stirred to action by them.

Paul's direction for followers of Jesus who were trying to raise their families in the pagan, debauched city of Ephesus apply well to us in our own hedonistic culture:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

The honor your child is directed to give you comes from a **heart of deference** that purposes to follow through in obedience to what you say. The apostle refers to this kind of obedience as *right*; this word actually connotes “just” and “expected by the person who has set the rules”—in this case, the parents.

The word Paul chose to describe the honor due parents carries a quality of esteem and high value for those being honored. It’s a heart reverence toward someone who is precious and beloved. That depth of relationship is *grown from within*, not slavishly adhered to out of servile duty.

A child learns deference to authority and the justice of this character quality as he internalizes the right motivations for his actions. Deferent obedience is definitely not a case of “sitting down on the outside but standing up defiantly on the inside!”

You’ll know that the character trait of deference is growing in your children when they:

- Avoid choices and decisions that would offend or disappoint you.
- Fulfill their responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.
- Humbly honor and esteem those who have a right to it.

Deference must be instilled through your instruction and correction. As deference grows in a child’s heart, the influence of their sin nature diminishes.

Part of parental responsibility is directed specifically to fathers: to chastise the child through disciplinary action if need be, and to be prepared to reprove or correct along with words of encouragement. Both are needed for the child to know he’s valued and loved by his parents!

The Bible does not call for you to have to *earn* deference from your children. Deference is due you because God gave you the authority you have, and you must have the courage to exercise it. In particular you must not hesitate:

- to **exclude** and **correct** those people or things that rob your home of peace and harmony.
- to **include** and **commend** those actions and attitudes that contribute to the peace and harmony of the home.

Paul also warns fathers to not exasperate their children so that they become enraged against you. That calls for you to exercise self-control, even if your child’s action or attitude seems utterly foolish or upsetting!

How *consistent* you are to apply “house rules” is a consideration too so that your children aren’t apprehensive over what you’ll confront one time and ignore the next. You’re also modeling a loving justice when you don’t show favoritism among your children.

A wise parent will point to the well-being of the entire household as a goal for each family member, and confront behavior which disrupts that harmony *each and every time*. The mantle of authority doesn’t depend on *how you feel* about it; rather, it’s a call from God for every father who desires to please God.

Do you yearn to raise your children with godly deference? Then you need clear understanding of the purpose for your marriage and how our Lord wants the authority He’s given you to be used in raising your children.

In order to parent the way He calls you to, you need to know the nature of your responsibilities. Discuss with your spouse your understanding of authority in terms of

how each of you “commends, corrects, includes and excludes”. Are you both on the “same page”? Yes or no? If no, what do each of you need to change?

Did you give deference to your parents when you were growing up? How did you respond to whatever forms of correction or discipline they administered to you? How has the manner in which you were commended or corrected by your parents affected your own childraising?

Deference isn’t confined to the heart of children toward their parents. While we were living in Israel we saw a wonderful enactment of the command to “**Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord**” (Leviticus 19:32). On crowded buses, the main means of transportation, younger people willingly and automatically got up to let the older folks sit down.

Passengers stepped off the bus to lift baby carriages onboard for mothers. People staggering on the rain-slippery floor immediately were met with a multitude of outstretched steadying hands.

In this youth-worshiping, age-denying culture, respect for the elderly has dropped to a record low. Intentional determination on your part to reinforce deference by your own actions and attitudes is needed if you want your children to value that as a Christ-like character trait.

You’ll find that deference is the first step for your children on the pathway in fulfilling God’s command, “**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ**” (Galatians 6:2).

How do you display deference toward others when your children are present? Do you rise when older people enter a room? Describe your interaction with the elderly.

Deference is learned as you **consistently** and **insistently** require your children to obey you. If they’re old enough to pass food at a table, do you insist they follow through so that they’ll learn to look beyond their own wants and needs? Do you insist they do their part in family chores commensurate with their age?

Consistently holding your kids responsible to “**carry each other’s burdens**” beginning in the home is a profound step to ingraining deference in them.

The development of deference in your children can’t be haphazard. It must be modeled by you toward others. As a couple, you need to determine the particular responsibilities you’ll delegate to each child to help them grow in obedience. Again, you’re training them to overcome the selfish desires of their sin nature and increasingly display Christ’s likeness.

We shared in Lesson 38 the way in which deference is connected to your trust in God. Jesus commended the Centurion who had such deep understanding of both authority and deference: “*I have not found anyone in Israel with such great trust*” (Matthew 8:10). May that praise be showered on both you and your children for the same trust-based obedience that proves itself through godly deference.

How *insistent* and *consistent* are you in seeing that your children obey? Do you and your spouse have seams in this area so that your children play you off against each other?

THE HOME
The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *Godly Parenting*

4. Guiding Your Child’s Ambition

“Train a child in the way he should go [the way his personality and ambitions are bent], and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Are you ambitious? Isn’t that one of the many ways we define each other—whether we’re *ambitious* or not?

Ambition is an earnest desire for some type of achievement *plus* the willingness to work to attain it.

A vast gulf separates wishful thinking from ambition. Anyone can dream (and should!). But ambition requires you to earnestly “*put your shoulder*” into trying to reach your goal.

Very often Christian parents look to Proverbs 22:6 as a guarantee that if they’re diligent to bring their children up with values that honor God, their kids will walk with Jesus when they’re adults. How dismayed many have been, as well as grief-stricken, when those very children have turned their back on righteousness to pursue the depths of their sin nature instead!

The Book of Proverbs was understood by our Hebraic forefathers to be a collection of applied, practical wisdom. These sayings offered direction in which God’s good commands could be fleshed out in day to day living. However, each individual must choose to either give way to his sin nature or to groan under the burden of guilt that that nature produces so that he’ll repent before our holy Lord.

Certainly as parents, if you role model a loving, obedient trust in Jesus and walk in His ways as you raise your children, they’re far more likely to respond to the Spirit’s wooing and yearn to align their ambitions with His will.

But YOU are not God! Each child must still own his *own* depravity, even if it’s just attitudinal rather than behavioral! Both are sin in His sight, and you can’t become weighted down with guilt that your own prodigal has strayed because you were somehow at fault.

Let’s revisit the Proverb we cited earlier. Each child has been “bent” as a tender twig in a very particular way by the One Who formed him in the womb. That’s why families with multiple children are often amazed that one child is

laid-back and compliant while his sibling is willful and hard-charging!

Both “twigs” have wonderful potential for the purposes for which our Lord has created them. Prayerfully determining just what life vocation for each child is best suited for the way He’s been made is a parent’s vital responsibility!

With this goal in mind, our Hebraic forefathers recognized this proverb called for them to know each of their children *thoroughly*. Then they could *effectively guide* him or her to fulfill godly ambitions according to the way God designed that child.

Deeply understanding your child’s bent doesn’t happen from occasional “quality time” intervals (to use today’s euphemism for priorities that sap meaningful parent/child time together). You are called to train up each child according to the way HE or SHE should be molded and equipped. That effective insight comes only as you devote significant ongoing time with each child so you can appreciate their individual personalities and motivations.

Think of a gardener who gently ties a sapling to a sturdy rod so that it will grow straight and strong rather than be bent by constant wind. As you come alongside each child armed with an awareness of both his strengths and weaknesses, you can both imbue into him the character and behaviors that please God and prepare him for the vocation that best fits those parameters.

If you provide no sturdy stake of guidance according to the way that child should be prepared for his life’s work, then he’ll fill that void with his own response to the world’s enticement. That which appeals to his sin nature or to the values of his peers will lead him toward

ambitions that have painful consequences.

We shared earlier that the Hebrew word for **work** and **worship** is the same: *avodah* [ah-voe-DAH]. A person who finds satisfaction in his or her work is much more likely to be grateful to God than one who grumbles in dissatisfaction. Our forefathers understood clearly that satisfaction is a *decision*, as is gratefulness to God:

Satisfaction and gratitude go hand-in-hand. A worshipful heart is a grateful heart.

Not only do suitable ambitions need to be guided and encouraged; the skills to achieve those ambitions must be taught as well.

As a child grows, his skill development intertwines with his ambition. Sometimes a new skill leads to a new ambition. At other times the ambition motivates him to develop the skills he needs to accomplish that new goal. As he matures, many of his ambitions will change over the course of time, and skills that once were important will be set aside as new ones take precedence.

Let’s use a simple example of how skill and ambition work together: brushing teeth. Every parent knows that this is a necessary skill for a child to acquire. Yet brushing teeth is not necessarily part of a child’s ambition! Through proper guidance and motivation (remember *consistent* and *insistent* from Lesson 43?!), proper toothbrushing can *become* an ambition and develop into an effective skill.

When you praise your child for brushing his teeth well, his ambition for

brushing may initially be to receive your praise. In time, however, if or when a cavity or two has been filled, he learns the connection between careless brushing and misery in the dentist's chair. Now his ambition to brush thoroughly becomes avoidance of consequences! Then, as he matures, the joy of a bright, healthy smile replaces the previous negative motivation.

This is a simplified analogy, but again it reflects the interplay between ambition and the skill needed to achieve that ambition. Your child may desire to be a great basketball player, a pilot, an artist or a policeman. In order for these ambitions to become reality, the appropriate skills have to be learned. Again, both skills and ambitions can be changed throughout a person's life with the right inducement and/or course correction.

At the same time, parents need to earnestly pray for God's will for their children to be revealed step by step. The parent first and foremost should be the witness who confirms our Lord's plan for the occupation and vocation of each of their children.

Many parents miss this all-important responsibility and are clueless about the connection of their child's work as an expression of his worship and gratitude to God.

It's all too easy for Christian parents to get caught up in the world's values and "horizontal" motivations because they sound so *rational*: "If my child goes to college he'll make more money." "I want my child to have an easier life than mine has been." "I have to make sure she has all these extra classes and activities so she can keep up with her friends." "If he goes to a *Christian* college I won't have to worry about him."

We fell into the trap of "horizontal" considerations with our own son. His bent toward kindness and mercy had been evident for years at the retreat center as he was the first to come alongside the handicapped or underdog to assist or help feel at ease. Yet we felt that our home-schooling had to rigorously prepare him for college "in case that was God's plan."

O we of little trust! Ignoring his spiritual gifting, we made sure he took part in sports (for which he was unsuited) and spent months preparing him for standardized tests and SATs. Between academics and farm chores, he had little time to relax. In retrospect, had we been listening to the Spirit, we would have discerned the nudge for him to volunteer at a nursing home or with disabled children so that his bent would find support and strength. Then the vocation for which He'd been created would have been evident to us all!

Godly parents have a period during which they can earnestly seek God's will for each of their children long before decision time comes. These are years of praying, guiding the child's ambition according to his particular bent, and developing the necessary skills for what will become his occupation or vocation.

Even preparing your sons or daughters for their future marriage partner should be part of training up each child according to the way each should go!

If you have children at home, describe the personality and bent of each. Have you any inclination or guidance from God as to what future occupation/vocation would give each the most fulfillment and bring glory to God?

For each of your children write down six characteristics that they should look for in a spouse that would complement their own personality and ambitions. Then discuss your insights with each child. [Take your time. You'd be surprised how often this exercise has helped offspring recognize their intended!]

Guiding Ambition— *Helping Your Child Make Right Choices*

Each generation passes along to the next its values. Unlike the cold facts of knowledge, values carry an **emotional attachment**—an important facet to keep in mind as you train your child.

The emotional intensity with which you hold a value determines whether you will truly own that value intrinsically or verbally agree because it's expected of you.

As Christians we desire our children to adhere to a biblical lifestyle. In 1993 a major Christian family-oriented ministry conducted a survey. To their dismay, they discovered how few children of Christian parents were embracing the faith with which they'd been brought up.

The study revealed that many parents had emphasized certain **behaviors** they defined as "Christian". When their chil-

dren followed these behaviors, the parents were satisfied that they'd trained them to be "Christian."

The problem the study uncovered was that a child may enact a certain behavior for a time without adopting the *value* behind the behavior. Your child may not cheat at school because you've repeated so often the consequences of such actions. But when confronted in college with the harsh reality of poor personal time organization and overdue deadlines, he or she may rationalize that cheating outweighs honesty under certain circumstances.

True learning in which your child takes ownership of a certain value requires *discussion* and *guided trial and error*.

In earlier lessons we've discussed how important discussion is. Far more of what is discussed is retained than that which is merely read or heard. Discussion among followers of Jesus who are seeking His perspective is especially important because He promises to be in their midst as they talk it over (Matthew 18:20).

Because of the influence of Hellenism on Christendom over the centuries, teaching often comprises *speaking at* rather than *talking with*. *Speaking at* is the method of choice in many families as well as throughout the religious system.

Parents as well as clergy **talk at** their "audience", expecting that because the words have been spoken they'll be internalized and applied.

However, **talking with**, that is, discussion, is the biblical method of exchanging insights and passing on wisdom. As the Word so often emphasizes, wisdom is found *in discussion* with the wise. (See Proverbs 11:14; 13:20; 15:22; 24:6.)

People who are accustomed to being *talked at* perceive any correction as *rejection*. When confronted by someone who is trying to help them change their course, those who are unfamiliar with discussion often feel their personal rights are being infringed upon.

They resist any input, and immediately offer argument or rebuttal for why they should stay as they are in a certain position or action. They may even spiritualize the issue with a misuse of Romans 8:28, “*All things work together for good*”, leaving out the part about loving God and walking according to His purposes!

Yet our Lord often uses the wise to return the willful ones back to His path if they’re willing to turn from darkness and heed righteous counsel:

Repent when I reprove—I will pour out My Spirit to you, I will make My words known to you (Proverbs 1:23).

Those who resist godly insight and discussion lack ambition toward their relationship with God. An emphasis on “Christian behavior” produces shallow biblical values, and a lack of communal responsibility for others in their extended spiritual family.

How do you change from being a parent who ***speaks at*** to one who ***talks with***? First, you ask pertinent questions of your children so you’re aware of what’s going on in their heart and mind. You draw out their motivation for their actions and attitudes, and help them to be aligned with God’s Word.

You openly disclose the mistakes you made and the lessons you learned from situations similar to what your child is going through. Rather than lecturing about what they should do, you discov-

er with them through God’s Word and prayer what HE has to say about the matter.

Just as our Lord faithfully makes known both the blessings and the consequences of our choices, you make known the parameters of righteousness and let your child know the boundaries and consequences of the choices and decisions he makes. Then follow through according to his response.

Do you *speak with* your children or *talk at* them? How do they respond to your approach?

Ask your family for their feedback.

As you look back, have you emphasized “Christian behaviors” rather than ownership of Christian values? Explain your response.

Ask your family for their feedback.

As a parent it takes trust and courage to let your child make appropriate, non-catastrophic mistakes. The study we cited above indicates that many Christian parents are fearful to let their children learn through trial and error. They expect their child to get it right the first time, as though missteps by their children will reflect on their poor parenting.

However, *you* would never have responded to our Lord’s gracious invitation to repent and receive forgiveness if

you hadn't any awareness of your own propensity to do evil. Painful consequences *are* a deterrent so that the benefits of obedience can be owned and valued.

You must allow your children to make mistakes—to err within limits—so that they may discover and take ownership of their own values.

The results of not allowing your child to make mistakes—of expecting him to get it right the first time—are obvious. When he or she leaves home and is confronted by the values of the world, earlier behaviors may be discarded for alluring worldly practices. Why is this? Because your now young-adult child may not consider that he's giving up anything he himself values.

This is an important consideration for home-schooling parents and for those whose children are in Christian school. *Right behavior* can be so policed that the child's conscience fails to develop any receptivity to the Holy Spirit's conviction. They are so use to being externally corrected they never internalize the biblical values of their faith.

Through discussion and trial and error you permit them to position an emotional attachment to the biblical values they're learning. That which a person cherishes he won't forsake.

Have you been seduced into the **behavior modification** programs some family ministries offer? Focusing on the *actions* of the child throughout his development can make parents or Christian school teachers feel good about themselves.

But **heart modification** is our Lord's way of instilling devotion to Him and His Word. As we've shared before, when

the motive of the heart is upright, the behaviors will follow. And we serve a God who probes our heart:

Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23).

Make it a life priority to focus on the *character development* of your child. Rather than emphasizing academic achievement, praise those qualities which reflect Jesus at work in your child's heart. His ever-transforming *character* will serve him as a lifelong witness of the reality of Jesus as his Lord.

[Mike]: While we were at the retreat center, students from a nearby Christian school came for a three-day retreat. Our son, Mike, had attended the school for three years before we home-schooled him, and I had been president of the Parent-Teacher Association.

As the kids unpacked and got settled in their dorms, the eighth-grade teacher, who had been a foreign missionary for many years, shared with me her sorrow: "As much as I've tried, I don't seem to be able to instill the kind of motives these kids need to serve the Lord Jesus. They have a pecking order among themselves based solely on their grades." Having previously observed this woman's deep devotion to Jesus, her sense of failure touched me deeply.

"Would you mind if I helped? These kids need to be broken down and rebuilt if they're ever going to have the attitude that serves the interests of Jesus. Let me coordinate their activities for the next 3 days." With her permission I devised a plan.

First, I had the girls challenge the boys to a race. While they shoveled the chicken coop, the boys cleaned out the sheep pen. What began with some grumbling started to

bring them together as both groups were called to serve. Then the assignments got progressively tougher.

I watched for the *helpful kids*—the ones who were aware of others’ needs and served them. When everyone else was tired, they were the ones who were pouring cups of water or rubbing sore backs. As I spotted kids with these qualities, I commended them and encouraged the rest to take notice of those who *served others*.

[During many youth retreats I’d survey a group at the end of their stay about who they admired the most during the retreat. It was ALWAYS *the young person who served others without concern for him/herself*.

Interestingly, while the kids with servant hearts were recognized and appreciated on retreats, back on their own turf these qualities weren’t generally highly regarded. Achievement and good looks were the criteria back home, and many youth directors fell right into affirming worldly qualities. Popularity and the desire for recognition are seductive...]

On the afternoon of the third day we had a picnic and swam in the river that flowed below the retreat center. The lodge was a long uphill walk from the river. I mean LONG—and STEEP! But as we were getting ready to make the trek back, the willing helpfulness of *everyone* was overwhelming!

As we stopped halfway back for a breather, the teacher sat down and cried for joy. In between tears and laughter she told her students how pleased she was with the caring nature each of them had begun to develop.

And *they* knew they were changed! That special time fabricked them together. That teacher died of cancer a few years later, and I can picture the “Well done, good and faithful servant!” she heard as her name was proclaimed to all the hosts of heaven.

Again, do you judge your children’s spiritual development by *correct behavior* or by the motivation of *their heart*? Are the key values your children display in their behavior *theirs* or *yours*?

In Israel, when a boy makes his *Bar Mitzvah* he becomes a “son of the commandments.” He’s now personally responsible to God for his own obedience. At what age and in what ways are you preparing your child(ren) to be personally responsible to the Holy Spirit?

Rather than looking for “correct behavior”, the biblical manner of teaching is to help your child make *right choices*. It may or may not be self-evident to you that pursuing a particular ambition is a matter of *choices*.

Helping your children to understand the *biblical basis* for the choices *you’ve* made makes it that much easier for *them* to seek the scriptural basis for their own decisions.

If your children see that your life flows out of the great value and ambition you place in your relationship with God and your desire to obey His will and purpose, they’ll more readily adopt that same value and ambition. This is where role-modeling obedient trust in Jesus

and encouraging your kids to seek **rhema** and establish **halakhahs** will be foundation stones for assuming responsibility for their own pilgrimage with our Lord.

Because people are creatures of habit, it takes *awareness* to recognize the many other choices they could select than those to which they're accustomed. In the "Great Commission," Jesus tells His followers to "*teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" In essence, discipling calls you to teach them *alternative choices to the world's way.*

Establishing **halakhahs** is God's way of establishing biblical principles to guide your life. A **halakhah** is a biblically-based choice of applying God's way to a given situation. For example, a family **halakhah** to refrain from watching violent or immoral programs on TV might be established by applying the verse that says to put no wicked thing before their eyes (Psalm 101:3).

- Take the time to explain to your children the **halakhahs** you have for your family.
- Keep a family journal of **halakhahs** to fortify your home as a sanctuary where He is always welcome, and yourselves as temples in which you're constantly aware of His holy, sustaining presence.

As they grow older, guide your children to establish **halakhahs** for themselves. In this manner you're reinforcing the Bible in what it does so well—***it exposes the motives of their heart.*** Prayerfully discerning through the Spirit and God's Word how to live in love-grounded obedient trust evidences His ongoing work of transforming your heart.

For the word of God is living and active

and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Perhaps your children are grown and have messed up their lives through divorce or seizing the world's values. You can still help them, but not through the world's ways.

- Begin by discovering where *you* erred in your own ambitions and values.
- Confess to our Lord your sin of ignorance and/or rebellion because *you* need the grace of His forgiveness in order to be available to serve your children.
- Next, pray and search the Scriptures for God's way to put into practice what you should have done years ago when you sinned.
- Develop a **halakhah** for yourself in that area.
- Go to your child(ren) and ask forgiveness. Then show them what you wish you had taught them earlier. Now the ball is in their hand...

An Important Suggestion:

If you keep your **halakhahs** in a written format, as your children leave home you can give each a copy as a spiritual inheritance.

- Before your child marries, discuss your family **halakhahs** with their betrothed.
- Before their wedding day, help the couple work through their own **halakhahs** that will affect their marriage relationship.

How are you doing in the whole realm of helping your children apply the Bible to their lives? If you haven't been responsible or diligent in this, what do you need to do differently? Ask your family for input.

One of the best ways to learn where *halakhahs* need to be established in your family is to ask them about the things that are bothering them or are producing apprehension.

**Guiding Ambition—
Respecting Gender Differences**

Gender differences will affect certain aspects of how you train your children. Males and females differ in the methods that are most effective for preparing them to follow worthwhile ambitions and to succeed in their pursuit. As we’ve noted several times in past Lessons, males are *changed by* (in order of importance):

1. **Role-modeling**: the choices made by the people they esteem.
2. **Confrontation**: corrective intervention that helps them make a better choice.

A boy is *not* changed by education. Information transmission only adds to his knowledge. But *discussion* of what he’s taught in conjunction with role-modeling and confrontation can *become* life changing.

Females, on the other hand, most effectively respond to:

1. **Role-modeling**: the choices made by the people they esteem.
2. **Education**: transmission of information which they can then apply.
3. (To a lesser extent) **Confrontation**: corrective intervention that helps them make a better choice.

Note that the most effective training method (and often the most underestimated) is **role modeling**. Children of both genders are strongly influenced by what they observe being put into practice. In Lesson 8 we wrote:

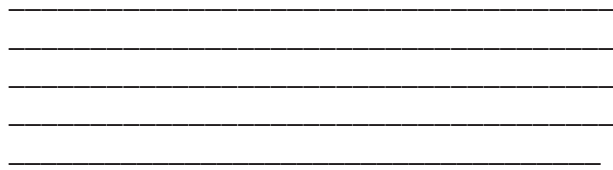
“The disciples of that rabbi were absolutely devoted to him, inhaling not only his every word, but the *manner* in which he taught. Every act of that rabbi became a role model trait that was emulated by his students. If a rabbi performed acts of mercy, his disciples then followed his example, *learning by doing*.”

Your children are your disciples. They will learn more from what you *do* than from what you say. Keep that in mind! In particular, the obedient trust in which you walk before your children will most effectively convey to them the reality of our Lord’s priority to you.

The peace that your trust produces will evidence the connection between what you *say* and how you *live*. And, that’s the best preparation you can give them.

If you have both sons and daughters, do you train them differently? Yes or no? Describe what works and what doesn’t with each.

Ask your family how they see Jesus in what you role model. Ask them if you’re more prone to transmit facts than to put biblical truths into action.



**Guiding Ambition—
Protecting From Worldly Values**

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong”
(1 Corinthians 16:13).

The ambitions of the world flow into and out of every person’s sin-indulgent heart. When these ambitions get passed along without biblical scrutiny, the next generation undergoes the same painful consequence as their predecessors: They don’t experience the love of God.

Be sure of this: Your children’s hearts *will* be filled, one way or another. The ambitions of the world get passed along to children because parents:

1. Fail to know and to love God.
2. Fail to grasp what He wants for them.
3. Fail to share their relationship with Him with others.
4. Fail to spur others on to encounter Him.

Parents who neither love God nor know Him intimately as He desires can’t discern the adulterous ambitions of the world. Don’t be surprised by the word “adulterous”; it means sharing the devotion that belongs solely to our Lord with any other heart yearning.

Adulterous lifestyles among the churchd resemble the world’s with some Christian behaviors attached. But what does our Lord think about such divided loyalties?

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

This is a serious warning! How awful to consider yourself a “Christian” but in fact be “*an enemy of God.*”

Your influence on your children’s goals and values can’t be overstated. Remember, *you* are their prime role model. They are paying far more attention to ***what you do*** than to *what you say*. Make sure these line up in your own life!

Your children can see through your many “Christian” activities straight to your *heart motives*. And, *why* you do what you do is what they’ll either respond to or react against. Weigh deeply the message you’re handing to them. Then ask yourself: Is my own faith walk pure? Or, is it an alloy of worldly values sheathed with a veneer of spirituality?

[Parents], do not love the world or anything in the world. [Do not teach the ambitions of the world to your children.] If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him [and will not be experienced by them]. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:15,16).

In ancient times as now, a battle raged within the soul between material worldly success and spiritual righteous victory. Young people two thousand years ago were just as tempted to pursue worldly pleasures as are today’s youth (remember the Prodigal Son?).

Yet the more a child was exposed to the **role model of godly, virtuous parents** who were willing to forsake material gain to prize that which pleased God, the likelier he was to cling to those values when he matured.

What proceeds from your conversations (even the ones you think are private)? Does your family hear *worldly cravings* in your words? Does that which you *lust after* ring loudly in your words and actions? Does your mouth *boast about* your achievement or possessions?

Ask your family for feedback.

Guiding Ambition— Correct Selfish Ambition

“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice”

(James 3:14-16).

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves”

(Philippians 2:3).

The Bible warns about motivations that serve only your own interests. We earlier defined *ambition* as an earnest desire for some type of achievement that’s accompanied by the willingness to strive to attain it.

Ambition in itself is not wrong, but the *focus* of your ambition may be. Selfish

ambition cares only about yourself and your own interests. You’re blinded to the concerns or needs of others. You’re convinced that your particular future goal will be worth whatever else you have to set aside in the present to reach it.

This type of selfish ambition is particularly true of fathers who are in the “Warrior” stage of life. They rationalize their family’s sorrow over their overwork or absence. Some overcompensate with material gifts, then feel angry when they sense the “stuff” isn’t appreciated. Others gratify themselves at the expense of their family because they feel they deserve *something* for their hard work.

Don’t be surprised if that which you tolerate in your own life is *excused in excess* by your kids as they build on your fleshly foundation. A person who is consumed with selfish ambition is called a “**hardened** or **mocking fool**” in the Bible. And, as the Book of Proverbs frequently notes, self-seeking, ambitious children bring only sadness to their parents.

But listen! God’s Word offers wonderful insights to guide your children’s ambition and prevent them from falling into a life pattern of self-focus. The “Golden Rule” so powerfully proclaimed by our Lord holds the key to the righteous guidance you need to parent:

So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

Let’s first look at the “Law and the Prophets” aspect. The *motive* for your response to “do to others” is a heart issue: to *love God* with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and to *love your neighbor* as yourself. (See Matthew 22:36-40.) On these two commands *depend* all

the Law and the Prophets. Without love, you're going through motions that might make you feel good about yourself in a self-righteous way but have no worth in our Lord's sight (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The summation of the intent of "*the Law and the Prophets*" is to extend to others the same dignity of worth as you have in God's sight. How you choose to interact with every other person our Lord has put on Earth reflects whether you're seeing them from His perspective as in His image, or from your own narrow self-focus of how they might benefit you.

Learning to value another's worth starts early! Simple things like teaching your children to pass food at the table as soon as they are able helps them develop the *other-awareness* the Bible requires. Encouraging your children to help you shovel your elderly neighbor's sidewalk trains them to see their life and ambitions in terms of blessing others.

Again, you are guiding each child's ambitions toward a *life that pleases God*. How will that be fleshed out as your children mature into adulthood? They will "*in humility consider others better than [them]selves*" (Philippians 2:3).

Developing a life pattern of humility will help keep them from thinking of themselves "*more highly than they ought*." Paul's command for sober self-evaluation "*in accordance with the measure of faith God has given them*" (Romans 12:3) is an ongoing process that needs to begin in childhood. Humility doesn't come naturally to any of us!

As you're *consistent* and *insistent* in maintaining the dignity of each family member, your children will grow in their own ability to take responsibility for their treatment of others. Confronting

selfish ambition as it erupts is a safeguard to preserve the harmony of your home as a refuge. Then your children can learn day by day the *interrelational connectedness* that begins with family and extends outward to others.

Your Speech Reveals Your Ambitions

"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

The focus of your conversation will generally reflect your ambitions or where your ambitions have led you over the years. Those ambitions have been driven by the *motives of your heart*.

You can learn a lot about people by:

- What conversation topic they bring up first;
- Which topics they linger on the longest;
- Which topic they return to most frequently.

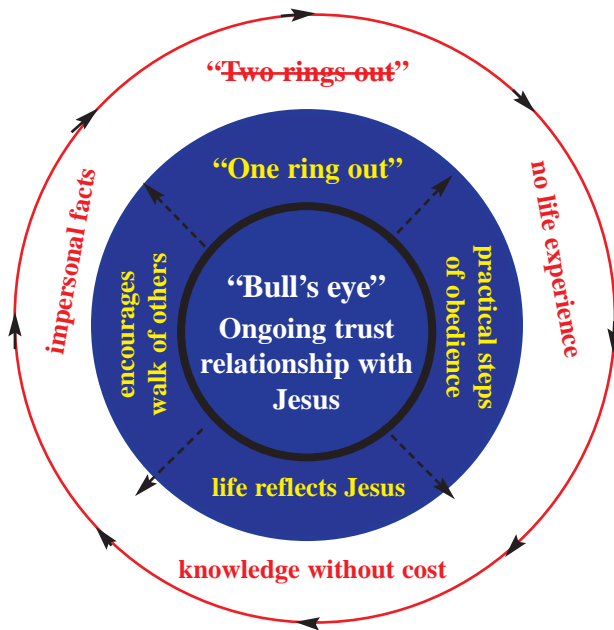
You can also recognize a self-focused heart when they fail to interact with a conversation topic that's initiated by someone else.

The Dart Board

Over the years we've tried to create visual images for people to understand from what part of their lives their topics of conversation emanate. Picture a dart board such as the one on the next page. The "bull's eye" represents biblical ambitions that glorify God and extend His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

"One ring out" are types of conversations that emerge from a life whose ambitions are for God.

"Two rings out" conversations, however, are filled with impersonal facts anyone could read or hear on TV for



himself. No real life experience resulting from ambitions for God comes forth in these discourses. Whatever “spiritual knowledge” this person has accumulated has cost him nothing.

People who speak from “two rings out” may disseminate a lot of “Christian information”, but neither their motive nor their experience reflects personal conviction or the cost of obedience. Sadly, those who talk a lot *about* Christianity often discourage the testimony of others who are attempting to be true to God through obedient trust.

The “bull’s eye” and “first ring out” represent the Hebraic side of our *Hebraic/Greek Influence* chart in Lesson 2.

“Two rings out” represents the conversations of those who consistently find themselves on the Greek side of the chart. These people are focused on whatever they think will *gratify themselves* in the spiritual dimension of their lives. This is the motive for their ambitions—one which they often try to disguise through conversations about Christian issues that have no real impact on their personal life.

We all at different times have conversations that are factual, relating things we’ve read or heard. Yet, for those whose ambitions are for our Lord, the *bull’s eye* and *first ring out* produce the conversations and dialogues we most relish. Trust-filled followers of Jesus are spurred on not only by their love relationship with their Lord but also by the real-life testimonies of others who love Him.

For example, those whose ambitions are toward God will see their workplace, neighborhood or school as a place to represent Christ to the people they encounter. As a result, their conversations will reflect this focus, and their prayer requests will reflect a desire for life-giving opportunities with specific individuals with whom they interact.

Those whose conversations primarily emanate from “two rings out” concentrate on subjects that mask their shallow or non-existent relationship with God. These secondary conversations may also divert attention away from family problems they don’t want to face.

An unwillingness to confront that which hinders intimacy with our Lord evidences little desire for availability to serve His purposes. A heart held captive by self-serving motives has no power to extend itself through word or through deed to reach others with the glory of a relationship in Jesus.

Use the dart board as a reference point to evaluate the focus of conversations in your own home. Involve your family in discussion about this. Write down what your priorities are.

Then ask your children to list what they believe you value the most. After they've given you their input, ask them what you do to reflect that these values are important to you.

Guiding Ambition— Guarding Your Family From The Lawlessness of Today

“Your words are a doorway that lets in light, giving understanding to the thoughtless. My mouth is wide open as I pant with longing for Your commands... Guide my footsteps by Your word; don't let any kind of sin rule me” (Psalm 119:130,131,133).

You need to use the times when your family is together as the primary means for passing along a trust-based biblical lifestyle that will matter at the Judgment Throne (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It begins with *you* getting to know the God of the Bible yourself.

The importance of a trust-based obedient lifestyle manifests itself by *you* teaching your children from the Bible to apply and live by His commands. It grows through *you* living out biblical character qualities that honor God, and purposefully and prayerfully instilling these in your children. Your home is where it **all** happens!

Do *you* pant with longing for insight from His commands and deepening appreciation for Who He is? Remember, to let the light in, you have to open the door of His Word! Exploring *both* testaments of God's Word brings light and

guidance and understanding of what pleases Him, and strengthens your reflection of Him to your children as well as to others.

Is your sloth to meditate on *and apply* God's Word resulting in spiritual starvation for your children or grandchildren? Or, are you greeting each morning with eager prayer and satisfied soul because you've dug into His Word and strained out morsels that will prepare your family for the day ahead?

As a child, when I [Mike] woke up early some mornings, I'd find my father on his knees praying by the dining room table. Sometimes I'd catch him at night kneeling beside his bed talking with God. Today I do the same... Sometimes your influence is greatest when you're observed unaware.

If this hasn't been your regular practice, start to put into humble practice that which God commands will ultimately occur when Jesus comes: Get on your knees!

At the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10,11, apperceived from Isaiah 45:23).

As we've shared, your *home* is also where the biblical guidelines for manners, relationships, attitudes, behavior, work, and deference to authority are molded into your child. Don't try to outsource this responsibility to others. The sooner you fulfill from a heart's motive of love that which God commands, the more effectively your children will learn yieldness with a willing, teachable spirit.

Instead of more games or clothes for your family, invest in some quality materials that impart lessons in character. Two outstanding resources are *Character Sketches* by the Institute in Basic Life Principles (www.iblp.org/iblp/ or 1-800-398-1290), and *Building Christian Character* by Blair Adams (Truth Forum, 2433 N. 43rd St., Waco, TX 76710).

The crucial generational instruction God gave to Moses is repeated by Paul because it impacts your children's and grandchildren's opportunity to live in blessing and to focus on God's ambitions for their lives:

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you in the land which the LORD your God gives you (Deuteronomy 5:16; see also Ephesians 6:1-3).

Do your children understand what honor is? Have you taught them and modeled for them honor in your own life? Tragically, so many church-going kids bad-mouth their parents and teachers while the parents silently excuse it as "just a phase." Yet rebellion is sin, and sin bears painful consequences.

You're undoubtedly repelled by even the thought of incest with your children or murdering your neighbor. Why? How do you know these things are wrong? Because they're declared in the Bible as *repugnant to God*.

Lawlessness is bound up in the heart of the sin nature. Who will affirm that homosexuality and adultery and hatred are against God's ways if you don't teach your children from the pure truth of His Word?

It's as simple as getting into your Bible yourself in the morning, and then using an appropriate time that day to share with your family what God's Word says. For kids to hear truth from a parent or grandparent who lives His Word and shares testimonies about it has far more impact than whatever anyone else can impart.

The day will come when you and each of your children will stand before our Lord. Have you modeled for them the humble repentance and grateful honor that evidence a heart motive of the love produced by His Spirit's presence? Have you diligently prayed for the ears of their hearts to hear, and for their spirit to respond to His Spirit to walk in obedient trust?

What could be more important for eternity's sake than this privilege and responsibility?

On that Day, many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in Your name? Didn't we expel demons in Your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in Your name?' Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:22,23, apperceived from Psalm 6:8).

May this never be so for you and your children. If you are grieving because you know you've fallen far short in this responsibility, remember: Our Lord is a Redeemer. Pray diligently for His grace to lead them to repentance. He can redeem the time the locusts have eaten as your children have walked in disobedience, although the scars of their lawlessness will be evident.

We realize that most who are reading this weren't raised themselves with

righteous parents who role-modeled loving, obedient trust. But if the Holy Spirit is indeed dwelling in you, then you have the power to make a difference in your children's lives whether they're still under your roof or not.

Make the most of today's opportunity to walk uprightly yourself and to guide the steps of your children the same way.

Are you and your children eager to explore God's Word and to keep His commands for His Name's sake? Yes or no? If no, what is hindering each of you?

How would our Lord have you respond when you stumble in your responsibility to role-model obedient trust from a heart motive of love? How would He have your children respond when you stumble?

**Guiding Ambition—
Are You *LIVING* The Way of the Lord?**

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

- Are your children prepared to resist the deceptions of Satan in the world?
- Do they know how to inventory their life—their choices, their motivations, their goals, their actions—and discern

how these line up with the Word of God?

- Do they have the courage to look at the way they live and ask themselves, “What is the *biblical basis* for my activities, my priorities, my ambitions, and my attitudes?”

“All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart”
(Proverbs 21:2).

What is the true biblical pattern of *testing yourself*? First, you need to discern in **whom** or in **what** you trust. This is evidenced through the values you embrace. And these values are revealed through discussion and by the choices you make. Be sure you clarify these points in ways that are appropriate for the understanding of each of your children.

As we've been sharing, through discussion they need to understand **why** they think and act as they do. Each child has an ongoing need to scrutinize the *real focus* of the way they live their life. Are their values, priorities and choices the way of the Lord? Is their heart motive an obedient devotion, no matter what the cost, to the One Who has established a love relationship with them?

Before they leave your home, your children should be clear about the *root motivations* and *goals* for their actions. Perhaps each birthday you should review with them these questions: Have they become focused on personal fulfillment and recognition from others? Or, are they a servant of God to others so that He will be praised by the way they live?

Biblical trust is *not* a passive belief. It's a way of daily decision to walk in love-grounded obedient trust in God and His

Word. That's why Scripture can proclaim, "***Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right***" (Proverbs 20:11).

How your children live after they leave home speaks more loudly to others than what they say. Living the ***way of the Lord*** is *caught* from you, not taught.

Daily encourage your children to align their focus on our Lord, and through example show them how to intentionally pause in their activities long enough to scrutinize their lives. Two sayings deserve your consideration:

"A fool is the lumberjack who doesn't stop to sharpen his ax."

"Why struggle to put up a ladder alongside a house and climb to the top, only to realize you've put the ladder against the *wrong house*?"

Your home is the basic building block for spiritual development. Anchor this truth, and then follow through in the Spirit's power to train up children whose lives will press on for His purposes and glory.

Suggested Further Reading

July 2002 Newsletter: ***Raising Sheep for Heaven***

March & April 2000 Newsletters: ***Forgiving Others (Part 1 & 2)***