

## Chapter Ten

# ONE ON ONE: PARENTING



The significance of the marriage covenant and the permanency of the relationship between a husband and wife is emphasized so strongly in the Word because God has special plans and purposes that go beyond personal fulfillment between a man and a woman. Note marriage from God's perspective: "*She is **your partner**, the wife of your **marriage covenant**. Has not the Lord made them **one**? And why one? Because he was seeking **godly offspring**. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth*" (Malachi 2:14,15, emphasis added). The Lord Who opens the womb (see Genesis 29:31) has left instructions with the parents on how to produce "godly" offspring! His Word is full of practical application. His family of believers, *mishpachah*, has been designed as a body to minister counsel and wisdom to parents.

Whatever has not been implanted in the hearts of the parents, however, is not likely to be produced in their children (outside of direct revelation and intervention by God). Godliness encompasses a trusting faith and obedience to the *Lordship* of Christ, His privilege and position in our lives to expect obedience from us. Godliness also manifests a *righteousness* that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to reflect Christ's work by grace in us. God is not directing us to command our children to follow orders in the Bible and toe the line in respect to outward actions. He longs for our children's hearts to press in to their loving and holy Father. To help them recognize what pleases God, apply through His Spirit the wisdom of the Word. Allow the impassioned cry of God to sear your spirit as you dwell on this verse: "*Oh, that **their hearts** would be **inclined** to fear me and keep*

*all my commands always, so that it **might go well** with them and their children forever!”* (Deuteronomy 5:29, emphasis added).

How are we to teach our children the difference between acknowledgment that *God is* and wholehearted service from the heart? From a Hebraic sense, the heart represents the whole of one’s inner being that distinguishes him from the animal realm. With his heart man can choose to express love, to sacrifice his own well-being for that of his beloved, and to subdue his own personal inclinations. It is the part that God searches to know and to test (see Psalm 139:23) so that we might not try to fool ourselves or others by outward behavior that appears holy but masks sinful motivation.

It is the heart that responds when we are tried by fire. Are we willing to undergo our desert experiences as did the Israelites for forty years in order that He might *humble us* and *test our obedience* (see Deuteronomy 8:2)? For the children of Israel God brought about intense hunger that could only be filled by His mighty power as He provided them manna. We so desperately need spiritual manna: *“Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord”* (Deuteronomy 8:3). A heart that is truly seeking God and awaiting His purposes is the clay vessel, young or old, that God is looking to shape.

*“These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”* (Deuteronomy 6:1-7).

An examination of the first several verses of Deuteronomy 6 reveals the essence of childrearing ordinances that guided the Hebraic people before and after the incarnation of Christ. In Deuteronomy 5 God had delineated the Ten Commandments, initiating their deliverance with the words *“Hear, O Israel”* (v. 1), the same words that Moses repeated twice more in chapter 6 (vv. 3,4). This demand for attentiveness was worded in such a way as to command obedience; these were non-optional decrees. God’s commandments and statutes were designed to *teach* His people, not for mere knowledge sake but that they might *obey* them. In so doing, they would prolong their days. God intended that His people *fear* Him—have an overarching reverence and awe that recognized He was well able to reward or punish—yet at the same time wholeheartedly *love* Him.

The power of generational influence is seen as God directs His commands to *“you, your children and their children after them”* (v. 2) in order that the blessing would be upon them all. Sobering, isn’t it? How you train up your children will impact how they train up your grandchildren! No wonder God is so explicit in His directions for bringing up offspring! The *“careful obedience”* (v. 3) to which parents are exhorted has in the Hebrew a sense of guarding as a watchman; preserving; building a hedge around as with thorns. What a beautiful illustration of God’s commands from *His* point of view: Such a wondrous treasure for our

well-being demands that we carefully preserve that which pleases Him as a precious gem. We must post a watch around our lives that parallels a hedge of thorns against enemy incursion! Is this the panorama of loving obedience that you are sharing with your children? A devoted recognition that our heavenly Father knows what is best for us and desires intimate trust in His way for our lives?

In this decade of moral decadence, relativism, and economic anxiety, how good it is to cling to God's promise "*that it may go well with you*" (v. 3). Our wellness may take various forms, be they emotional, spiritual, or physical (God knows what forms each of us needs the most!). Trust-filled obedience that recognizes our need for His grace reinforces our relationship with the One in authority Who loves us. Our response to God's will mirrors to our children the reality of Him Who is not seen but Who is so very real.

What is the preeminent truth that God emphasizes in this chapter of Scripture? That *He alone is God* (see v. 4). That He alone is worthy of all the worship, praise, and dependence that is due one's Lord. And how are we to respond to this Only God, and to train up our children in their relationship with Him? To "*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*" (v. 5). The love that is referred to here (Hebrew *ahab*) connotes a delight and desire in the one loved; a powerful emotional attachment that hungers to possess Him and to be in His presence.<sup>1</sup> Does that describe your "walk with God", the relationship that your children know *you* have with Him so that they can emulate that? Interestingly, this is the kind of love that God expresses toward His people in Deuteronomy 4:37 ("*Because he loved your forefathers*"); in Isaiah 43:4 ("*Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you*"); and in Malachi 1:2 ("*I have loved you, says the Lord*").

Such love finds its counterpart in the New Testament in the Greek word *agape*. This word encompasses the essential nature of God, His heart's concern for mankind, and the relationship that through His Holy Spirit characterizes the unity of believers.

This same love reflects the sacrificial devotion expected of parents: "*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love*" (Genesis 22:2); "*Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons*" (Genesis 37:3); "*I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free*" (Exodus 21:5). Curiously, the Bible directs no such love from children toward their parents. Children are instructed to honor their mothers and fathers, to revere and respect them, and to obey them. These are words that expect action as well as the emotion inherent in the relationship.

God commands our love not only from the heart but also from the soul. The Hebrew people considered the soul to be that vital part of the being that draws breath. From that perspective, even animals have a soul, in the sense that they breathe to live. The word contains no metaphysical essence of "spirit" as our culture might interpret it. Rather, it evinces a passionate zeal for life, a precious reflection of the inner person as he knows himself to be.<sup>2</sup>

To love God with *all your soul* and to pass that fervor on to your children requires great searching and appreciation for all that God has done to enhance your well-being: He has drawn you to Himself (see John 6:44) and given you new life, supplied you with His riches from glory according to your need (see Philippians 4:19), and created you in His image to enjoy true worship and fellowship with Him (see Genesis 1:26). What a priv-

illegible to search the Scriptures with your children to personally thank God for Who He is and for His manifestations of such great love!

You are also enjoined to love God with *all your strength*, with all the energy and boundless intensity that you can possibly establish! Do you get the sense that we are not talking here about an intellectual acknowledgment that God exists or a dry doctrinal stance of obedience that responds to the written word of the Bible? This is **your God** Who is so filled with consuming zeal for His people that He has called the Church His Bride! He has eagerly sought a love relationship that should constrain Christians to put aside all earthly pride and self-focus in order to cherish and adore Him. *This* is the purpose of your creation by Him, and His goal as you train up your children to do likewise. You can no more tell them to love God if *you* don't treasure Him than could a rabbi tell his students to live with integrity if he himself was a cheat.

These are no casual instructions to be voiced in passing. On the contrary, they are to be taught diligently, inculcated and exhorted, from the earliest part of the day before duties and responsibilities distract you until the last moments of waking so that you might dream of His goodness. Note the locations of this interaction with your children: *"At home and when you walk along the road"* (v. 7).

Consider carefully the hours, many or few, that you and your children are in proximity. How do you spend most of them? In front of the TV? Putting out sibling brush fires? Frustratedly responding to a jangling phone? How about when you are literally *"along the road"*? Do you take the time to stroll along the paths and sidewalks to capture their hearts with Him? Do you incorporate God's principles into your car trips together? Or are you so intent on meeting yet another obligation or activity to "benefit" your child or yourself that praising God doesn't even occur to you? Sports, piano lessons, and ballet may be good, but not if you are robbed of the parental interaction that God knows you and your child need.

***"Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.  
Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates"*** (Deuteronomy 6:8,9).

Have you ever wondered why Orthodox Jewish men wear little boxes on their arms and foreheads? The answer is found in the above verses. The boxes testify to a whole-hearted desire to obey God even while recognizing that we are frail human beings prone to distraction and sin. People are visual; that which we see with our own eyes makes a deep impression. Think of the awesome experience of the Israelites as they trembled at the foot of Mount Horeb in front of the fire that blazed out of the deep darkness: *"Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice"* (Deuteronomy 4:12). The voice of the Lord and the blaze of the fire totally absorbed their interest. This was God!

As the generation that observed this encounter passed, the awe of God and His power diminished, as God had warned the Israelites through Moses that it would. They failed to trust the Lord Who manifested Himself daily in His loving provision and turned instead to idols of wood and stone. The Israelites neglected the injunction to impress the commands of God onto their children. Today's Orthodox men box God's commands on their forehead

as a reminder that all that is seen with the eyes and thought in the mind should be filtered through a relationship with God. The commands are bound on the left arm near the heart to convey loving determination to follow God. These are visual reminders that the Lord is indeed very near, as Paul reiterates in Philippians 4:5. They are a *sign*, a symbol of God's covenant relationship with His beloved.

A sign is used to convey an idea, a desire, or a command. It points the way to a goal or destination. While Christians do not bind God's commands physically to their bodies, we do use visual cues to remind us of His proximity. Do you usually keep your favorite Bible in the same place for devotions and reference? Do you thank the Lord whether alone or with others whenever a meal is put in front of you? Do you take note of spiritual bumper stickers, coffee mug verses, breathtaking sunsets—and immediately think of Jesus? There are countless reminders of ways that God touches our hearts during the day to prompt us to communicate with Him. Sharing with our children these reminders of God's presence as they happen or around the dinner table reinforces a continual awareness of our Father. This helps to make His lovingkindness more understandable to their hearts.

Such reinforcement ties in with Paul's admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "*Pray continually.*" A constant attitudinal awareness of God in our spirit enables us to turn to Him regularly and naturally. This is the lesson we need to pass on to our young and to new believers. Our relationship with God is not bound to a place (a church building), a ritual (prayer meeting or Bible Study), or even to other believers. The more we can saturate our hearts with a God-awareness moment-by-moment, the more that our children and others with whom we interact closely will see Him manifested as the Living God Who changes us from within!

While we were in Israel we frequently saw the special little boxes, *mezuzot*, nailed to the entry way of each Jewish home. Inside those little boxes are the commands of Deuteronomy 6 that we have been discussing. These focus on obedience to God's commands and our relationship with Him. Every time a family member enters the home and sees the *mezuzah*, he or she is reminded that behavior is to be holy within that house. Likewise when they leave, they are reminded that their behavior is to reflect God wherever they go.

To a follower of Christ, this symbolic gesture should have rich meaning. Anyone who passes through your doorway should recognize that this is a home where its occupants love God. Your walk with God as a believer should reflect a loving obedience to His Word as He motivates you from within by His Spirit. Therefore, your home should reflect holiness, a *set apartness* available for His purposes and glory.

When you pass through your "gate" to the outside world, are you diligent "*as aliens and strangers in the world*" (see 1 Peter 2:11) to bypass evil and to choose righteousness? Would your children or friends refer to you as a person of integrity and conviction *on the job*? Are you willing to make the hard choices that might cost you in prestige or finances in order to uphold God's Word in and through you? Your answers to these questions can make the difference in your child's mind between religion as a ritual and faith as a lifestyle.

Have you fallen into the trap of letting the "professionals" (the pastoral staff, youth workers, Christian School teachers) replace you as the primary source of spiritual truth

for your children? How tragic to see this disregard for God's admonition in Deuteronomy for *parents* to impress these things on their own children. The Israelites had witnessed the awesome display of God's might "so that [they] might know that the Lord is God" (4:35). Surely such work of God in your own life and in those you love is worthy of retelling and praise!

It has often been said that the Old Testament presents physical truths that are to be enacted spiritually by New Testament believers. With this in mind, consider the force behind this verse: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9).

How necessary it is for followers of Jesus, whether parents or not, to "watch ourselves closely." The enemy of our souls came to "steal and kill and destroy" (see John 10:10). His targets encompass those who seek wholehearted devotion to God, and the children who could be powerful arrows in a righteous quiver.

***"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"*** (Romans 15:13).

What is "peace"? The biblical concept of *shalom*, peace, encompasses completeness, wholeness, soundness.<sup>3</sup> This is more than the absence of war or conflict. It is a positive term that speaks of contentment, health, calmness of heart, unity, restoration. What richness of blessing you are offered by God when you pray for the peace that comes *as you trust in Him*. When you view your life as a pilgrimage, a process, a path along which you are journeying, you can more clearly see the ongoing nature of this relationship with God. Daily testimonies of God's interventions in your life enables your children to be on the alert for His hand working around them too.

As you become an available vessel prepared for His use, God can then fill you with *all joy and peace*, so that your hope can overflow onto those you encounter. Is your family being showered with this hope? Is your home a refuge where this can occur? Does your heart trust in full reliance on God? At least twice Jesus connects faith and peace: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50), and, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34). Your relationship with God will determine the measure of peace that you can offer to your home.

Harmony in the home, *shalom bayit*, is a critical goal toward which to work. The home is the crucible in which your sin nature is confronted and the fruit of the Spirit has opportunity to come forth. Harmony does not come naturally. It must be nurtured, modeled, and reinforced daily: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification" (Romans 14:19). You cannot pass on to your children what you don't practice first in your own life. How important is personal peace to you? Are you willing to sacrifice activities and even certain relationships in order to be a vessel of peace? Weigh this verse carefully: "For whoever would love life and see good days...must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:10,11).

Now obviously peace is not an entity at which you can grasp. Rather, your peace comes from a wholehearted search for intimacy with God, to seek His face: "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:14). Your heart will find rest

in your faith only as you earnestly hunger for His presence with a sincere, pure heart (see Psalm 24:3 and a host of other psalms). This dichotomy, that you *make every effort to find peace*, reflects Hebraic block logic: How can you find peace if you have to work so hard at it? It is also a lifelong process to identify what is hindering the sense of His peace and to return to the trusting relationship of loving obedience. Constant awareness of His glorious grace will restore your peace.

So important is the concept of peace that it is used as a name of God: *Yahweh Shalom* (see Judges 6:24) and the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). Since the names of God reflect some part of His character, your peace will be developed by God as you choose to trust Him. He is the God of peace, even in trial and conflict: *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”* (Romans 16:20). This is a wonderful visual image for children: the God of *peace crushes Satan* under our *feet*, the very body parts that are fitted with the readiness that comes from the *gospel of peace* (see Ephesians 6:15)!

When Jesus sent the seventy-two ahead of Him to every town that He was about to visit, He instructed them, *“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you”* (Luke 10:5,6). In order for visitors to enter your home and take note that this is a place of peace, you must first check your own heart. Are you walking in righteousness even when you are alone, away from curious eyes? True integrity embraces reverence and awe toward God, permeation of truth that makes no room for “little white lies”. Uprightness is empowered by grace and a humble willingness to serve.

Are you plagued by anxiety and fears when you are surrounded by the four walls of your home? Young eyes observe and absorb the actions and attitudes of those who are most important to them, their parents. Any discrepancy between your words and your behavior will only cause doubts in your children about the credibility of God to keep you in perfect peace. Be open to confess your sins and shortcomings in front of your children so that they can also see the forgiveness and cleansing of God at work (see 1 John 1:9). Ask for their forgiveness when you have sinned against them, and make restitution when the situation calls for it.

The Holy Spirit lives within the “four walls” of your heart to remind you of the precious promises of God: *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:26,27). Make sure that you sacrifice some other activity, even sleep, so that you can pray and feed on His Word to be reminded of the things the Spirit wants you to know.

Differentiate between the peace that the world gives (fickle, fleeting, dependent on circumstances and people) and the peace offered by Jesus (holy, without ulterior motive, independent of circumstances, relational to Him). Ask your children to come up with examples that show that they know the difference. The peace of Christ is designed to be fruit bearing and self-sacrificial so that others might be blessed and give praise to God! Believers are admonished to not let their *hearts* be troubled. Think of how “catchy” worry, insecurity, and hopelessness are to others who love you. Most will want to quickly solve your problem for you; a few may even suffer with you. Ask God to reveal if some sin may be separating you from intimacy with Him or if some spiritual stronghold may be blinding

you to His sovereignty and love. Approach your situation first from a spiritual level and then consider other factors afterward.

Jesus also admonishes, *“And do not be afraid.”* This parallels Peter’s words, *“You are [Sarah’s] daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to **fear**”* (1 Peter 3:6, emphasis added). Do you have any reason to fear? Jesus said, *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword”* (Luke 10:34). Satan has declared war on believers: *“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus”* (Revelation 12:17). Those in the world system who hate your Master will certainly respond to you with persecution: *“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man”* (Luke 6:22). Are you able to accept such insult and exclusion as a *blessing*? Will you teach your children to have the kind of relationship with Jesus that will result in the same “blessing”?

It is in the presence of such “fearsome” attacks that followers of Christ are admonished, as were the disciples, to fear God alone: *“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him”* (Luke 12:5). In the midst of the fearful crises you may face, you must immediately turn your complete focus, your thoughts, your decisions of will, your emotions, onto God, the only Source of peace. Having told His disciples to fear God, Jesus then tells them, *“Don’t be afraid”* (Luke 12:7).

This is not double-speak. They, and you, are commanded to have awesome regard for the power and might of God. But as His precious child, you are of great value to Him. Loving submission to this awesome Lord is meant to *draw you closer* to Him, not to drive you away cringing. It is through your own attitudes and actions toward God that your children, or anyone whom you are discipling, will see the balance between fearing God and loving Him as *Abba*, Papa Father. Think of the comfort God intends for you as you read Philippians 4:5-7: *“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

***“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever”*** (Isaiah 32:17).

Twentieth century rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance.”<sup>4</sup> The priorities with which you live determine how you spend your daily twenty-four hours and with whom. It doesn’t take long for children to recognize when your words don’t match your actions. We once challenged a friend who was a believer experiencing marital difficulties to ask his twelve-year-old daughter what she thought were the three things that were most important to him. She came up with four: “Golf, God, Mommy, and me.” Try this with your own spouse and children; if you are single, ask your closest friends for an evaluation.

This is a serious assignment, for God has purposes for each of His children. If you are not making yourself available to Him to become prepared and strengthened through



personal prayer, worship, and Bible meditation, then you are hindering His development of your righteousness. That extra hour before the day begins or after quiet has settled at night may be the opportunity for God to fill your “clay vessel” with what is needed for the coming hours. Is the benediction from the writer of Hebrews an incentive to closet with God? *“May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever”* (Hebrews 13:20,21).

There are many wonderful books available on activities that can draw families closer to each other and help you to train your children in godly living. We are including some “helpful hints” that might whet your appetite or at least give you some ideas to build upon if you recognize the need for your home to be a sanctuary. Note that actions alone will not build character in either yourself or your children. True reformation begins with your heart, where your character is formed.

Determine with your spouse (or with an accountability partner if you are single or a single parent) how you might specifically carry out the following commands of God. They may appear idealistic, if not impossible, but God has empowered His children through His Spirit to follow His orders! *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy [set apart for His purpose but not yet perfect] and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves** with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **Bear with** each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive** [Paul repeats this—it must be important!] *as the Lord forgave you* [whether the one being forgiven deserves it or not; not holding a record of it for later recall]. *And over all these virtues **put on love*** [obedience to an action as well as expression of emotion], *which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the **peace of Christ rule** in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And **be thankful**”* (Colossians 3:12-15, emphasis added).*

Have each family member write or draw a picture of examples of each virtue, *i.e.*, humility, forgiveness, thankfulness, presented in these verses. Pray about specific opportunities to exercise virtues during the day’s activities. Encourage each family member who has chosen to appropriate one of these qualities of righteousness rather than a fleshly response during a stressful circumstance. Exhort those who have violated one of these commands and allow opportunity for confession before God and a chance for restitution. So often people tend to excuse sinful choices (“Oh, she’s too little to understand”, or, “He deserved it!”) rather than to recognize that the One Who was truly violated was God. Learn to thank God for the grace He shows you as you repent, confess, and receive forgiveness and cleansing (see Hebrews 10:22).

Maintain a prayer journal for the whole family, complete with dates and who was prompted to bring up that prayer topic, and update it regularly. Set aside time to orally review the journal as a family and to express gratitude to God for His faithfulness. Remember, Daniel had to wait twenty-one days before his prayer was answered, yet God heard his prayer on the first day. Persevering in prayer is an important lesson, as God’s timing is always perfect, and there are spiritual forces in the heavenlies who oppose the saints as they pray. To share *“the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done”* (see Psalm 78:4) is scriptural. The people of Israel were encouraged to teach such things to their children *“so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.*

***Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds  
but would keep his commands” (Psalm 78:6,7).***

The level of respect, or lack thereof, that children have for their parents reflects the degree of authority that they recognize in God. If your children do not respond to the authority of those who rightfully exercise it, such as parents, teachers, police, and other civic representatives, then they will certainly not defer to God, Whom they cannot see. The writer of Proverbs 6:20 repeats a theme found throughout all of Proverbs: *“My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”* Such injunctions are countercultural to the 90’s “rights” atmosphere. The Word, however, is timeless and unbounded by cultural constraint. The heart attitude for parental guidance commanded in Ephesians 4:2 forbids harshness or domination: *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* “Every effort” indicates a lot of work, consistency, and energy motivated by love of God and for one another.

What is the atmosphere of your home? You can influence the environment toward harmony by the choice of music there. Words that honor God, melody that sings in your heart, and rhythm that soothes rather than agitates can be a vehicle of joy for the whole family. Take seriously the psalmist’s decision before God: *“I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing”* (Psalm 102:2,3).

Consider if any “vile thing” is being set before the eyes of anyone in your home. How carefully do you weigh what *you* watch on television as well as what your children are allowed to view? How comfortable would you feel if Jesus were sitting there with you (as He really is, through His Spirit in you!)? Besides desensitizing your children to evil and increasing their exposure to the world value system perpetuated through commercials, television viewing devours time, stifles creativity, and lowers attention levels toward anything that isn’t constantly changing images. Set up an experiment in your own home of alternative family activities: visiting the library and sharing worthwhile reading material aloud, making your own board games (such as a “concentration” type game, picture dominoes for little ones, bingo), or gardening as a means of stewardship (sewing seeds, nurturing and cultivating the seedlings, reaping the fruit and sharing it with the needy).

Some family hobbies could even be preparation for future home business endeavors. What crafts are you often receiving compliments for? Teach them to your children. How about carpentry or car repair, during which you talk with your children even as they assist or do the repairs with you? Sewing? Baking? Accounting? The things that you may prefer to do alone because it’s quicker are actually opportunities in the training-up process to produce responsibility, perseverance, and diligence in parents as well as in their children!

A number of creative families have established a bartering network to earn points for necessities. They are able to offer services to one another ranging from technical to unskilled. For instance, one father operates a carpet cleaning business. He is able to clean the carpets at another member’s restaurant and accumulate points for the job done. He can choose to “spend” them there or “buy” the services of another member. You and your children have a goldmine of skills and talents to offer to other individuals in which services rather than money can be exchanged!

Older children can also use the time not spent in front of the TV to gain practical skills in budgeting money earned from part-time jobs. One young friend had often come home from school listless and bored, complaining of nothing to do. A neighbor expressed a need for an after-school baby-sitter several days a week and the young lady somewhat reluctantly agreed. Within two weeks her mother remarked excitedly how responsible her daughter was becoming as she allotted time for homework, entertained the children, and made decisions regarding her earnings! Her grades soared, as did her savings. She had purpose to her afternoons and goals to achieve.

As the center for spiritual training for your family, the home is the obvious arena for living out biblical truths and developing Godly character. Rather than criticizing certain family members for their messiness, sit down as a family and establish a goal (organization, neatness, orderliness) and discuss how each person can contribute to that goal. As a parent, examine yourself first. Do you rise early enough in the morning so that rush and hustle can be avoided in your own life? Are there things that can be prepared the night before (clothes set out, books organized, keys and purse always in the same place)? Is your home filled with time-consuming items that require extra maintenance: silver, brass, cluttery knickknacks, fussy yards? These rob time from your family, so weigh the personal importance of these time-eaters against their upkeep effort. Simple surroundings really do add to harmony and peace, especially when everybody knows where everything is!

Very few Christians have work schedules that cannot accommodate family devotional time. One family rises at 5:30 each morning to spend time sharing God's Word and praying. The very youngest in the family can draw pictures to illustrate what is read aloud as older ones take turns reading and sharing insights. We found that handwork, be it embroidery or interlocking blocks, keeps hands out of mischief even while ears are intent. This will take effort and consistency until it becomes a pattern of your lives, so don't be discouraged if your children are fidgety at first. Especially pay attention to the needs of each family member and the application of God's Word, the *rhema*, to those concerns. Children so need to understand the vitality of God and His active presence in their lives.

How wonderful that God created people to require food! The opportunities involved in food preparation, thanksgiving, sharing, and clean-up are daily occasions to evaluate the level of cooperation and consideration being developed. When these are lacking, they should be immediately addressed out of concern for what is going on inside the individuals who are troubled. Are there situations they are experiencing that need counsel or wisdom or intervention? So vital are mealtimes together that any activity that interferes should be seriously reconsidered, be it athletic practice, music lessons, or telephone calls. So often the Bible records Jesus imparting important lessons as people were sharing meals and relaxing. Should we ignore so significant an example?

Mealtimes are an opportunity for intimate communication and emotional expression. A *Readers Digest* poll revealed that strong supportive families were also a critical factor in giving children an edge in school. "The family is society's main way of transmitting to the next generation the values and behavior that lead to success in school and in the world. Much of what kids know, they don't learn in school, they learn from their moms and dads...*Eating together* seemed to make a bigger difference in our poll than living with two [parents] together. This means that the family is not just there, but is doing its job"(emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

Can you recall the last time you had guests into your home to share hospitality? Paul exhorts believers to *“practice hospitality”* (see Romans 12:13). In other words, your heart should be ready without notice to receive with sincere love any in the household of faith who have need. They, too, are part of your *mishpachah*, your family. What is the general atmosphere before guests arrive and while they are in your home? Do they sense the peace of God in your welcome, that their presence is truly a pleasure rather than an obligation? Make it a point to involve your children in the preparations, serving, and sharing of meals with guests. You are training them to interact on a personal level with those outside the family confines.

Part of Peter’s admonition to *“love each other deeply”* (see 1 Peter 4:8) involves offering hospitality *without grumbling*. The choicest food and most lavish settings cannot compensate for a hassled, frazzled host who is more concerned about the dinner than about the guests! Let your children see that entertainment and considerate conversation with others is an opportunity to show appreciation for those who care enough about you to share your hearth.

***“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands”*** (Isaiah 55:12).

When you have the peace of God in your heart to nourish those in your home, you are then equipped to *“go out in joy”*. The calmness of spirit that the Holy Spirit bears as fruit in you gives you the freedom to wonder as a child, to appreciate the infinite creativity of God in the work of His hands and to thank Him for it. The vitality of Jesus that energizes believers is often portrayed as *“living water”* (see John 4:10, 7:38, Revelation 7:17). Life-sustaining water flows from its entry point to its outlet, ever-changing with refreshment and cleansing for you as your life circumstances change.

Think of the impact your life and the lives of your children can have on the ones outside your gates as you see your own self as Jerusalem, the City of Peace: *“I will extend peace to her [Jerusalem] like a river [the extent of God’s peace toward us is limitless], and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream [our wealth is a godly heritage, a Spirit-filled life overflowing like a flood to bless others]; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees [in our peaceful homes we are fed, our relationships prosper, and we find joy and relaxation]. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 66:12,13). *Shalom bayit* enables lovers of God to reach out beyond their family to comfort others and exercise compassion and empathy.

The peace that the Holy Spirit works through you in your home acts like wholesome leaven to extend its influence into the wider arena of your neighborhood, workplace, and society. Be alert for opportunities to model and verbalize to your children what obedience to Zechariah 7:9,10 means on a daily basis: *“Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless [today’s single mom, and kids with absentee dads], the alien or the poor [perhaps international students or refugees]. In your hearts do not think evil of each other [make sure your outside actions match your inside thoughts!].”* And be faithful to pray earnestly *“for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

*This is good, and pleases God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:2,3).*

A practical means of outreach is through correspondence, not only to teach your children to express gratefulness for blessings shared but also to train them by example to be vessels of life and encouragement to those they don't see regularly. The letters of Paul and Peter begin with variations of **“Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father.”** The epistles are filled with examples of how God has demonstrated these virtues in their own lives and in the lives of others. Your correspondence should contain aspects of these elements too.

*“To show mercy”* can be manifested in very practical ways. One mother wanted to train her children to help those who couldn't repay. Through a local congregation she located a contact person who was helping to resettle Bosnian refugee families in their area. This family scoured friends, neighbors, and fellow worshipers for blankets, coats, and household goods to bring to a few needy families. Through an interpreter they were able to share compassionately from the heart, as years earlier, they too, had been “aliens in a strange land” as missionaries overseas. A bond of friendship was woven that has continued to this day. They were not just doing a good deed of meeting material needs. This family was being the hands and feet of Jesus carrying His love to those who had suffered much. Opportunities such as this one abound. You have only to pray and be alert to the answers God supplies as you live out your trust in a way that your children can see is “for real”.

Parenting involves so much more than following guidelines of behavior and hoping that the professionals in your child's life will compensate for your shortcomings. Your children are on loan to you from God so that you might rely on His grace, power, and love to train them to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Such a responsibility could seem overwhelming, but as you will see in the next two chapters, God has redeemed you into a body of load-bearers so that together you might trust Him.