

children heavenward!

Really Build Your Child!

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..." Proverbs 23:7

The first ideas that our children get about *who* they are come from us! Is that as frightening to you as it is to me? They learn early in their lives whether we believe in them...care about their needs...want to know their deep thoughts...accept them as they are. Our words communicate all of that plus much, much more!

Isn't that frightening? When I think back to that passage in James 3, I realize how difficult it is to control my tongue (of course, I don't have to read that passage to realize how hard *my* tongue is to control!!). Then, realizing that words cut to the very depths of the heart. Then, going one-step forward, that our children *are* what they think in their heart. Then! Then, I am totally overwhelmed by the responsibility I have as a parent to guard my heart and my mouth with all diligence.

Proverbs 31: 26 tells us that the wise woman is careful with her words... *"She openeth her mouth with wisdom: and in her tongue is the law of kindness."* The wise woman remembers that her words are very, very important in building up her child. And yes, *"Every wise woman buildeth her house."* (Proverbs 14: 1)

Our words have much influence. Our words are one of the primary ways that we build our home, our child. Our words pour forth what is in our heart. This either builds up or tears down. So, how do we build our children?

Guard YOUR Heart...

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Proverbs 4: 23

First of all **guard your own heart!** Die to your expectations, ideas, plans, and preferences. Every day, these must be sacrificed as a living sacrifice. Every day you must go to God for His cleansing and His direction for each step. He will clarify what your child needs *and* how they are doing. Does this help in building up your child?? Of course, it guards your heart so what comes out of it is truth for your child.

If you are stuck on your expectations, they may not be met. Then, you will only com-

communicate disappointment and failure to your child. If you are stuck on your ideas, they may not work. Then, you will only communicate frustration and a lack of direction. Then, your child may "only hear" that they are problem and they are not going with the flow. If you are determined that your plan is *the* only plan, it may not (probably won't!) work. Instead of this showing that you needed to know God's plan all along, it will speak in little ways at odd times that you are not pleased with how your child is turning out. Oh, and if you are stuck on your preferences, more than likely you will never build a good relationship with your children because they are individuals too. As you die to this, which is inevitable at some time or another, you will communicate to your children that you are not satisfied with who they are...that their delights and their desires are somewhat inferior than those of yours.

None of this may be your heart, but Scripture tells us in Proverbs 4: 23 to, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*" If you want to build your child, the first place to begin is in your heart as you sacrifice all your desires to the Lord for His greater plan for your child!

Accept and Affirm WHO They ARE!

Next, **accept and affirm who they are!** The only way that this will be possible is if we make it our priority is to get to *know* our children. Each of our children is completely individual. I love how God created each and every one of us completely different! Each of us have different gifts... bents... likes... and dislikes. Not one of us has the same sensitivity of heart. Not one of us has an exact calling or preparation for our calling. This makes it paramount that we get to know our children so we can begin to build them up while they grow and mature in the Lord.

We are not just going to know how to encourage our children unless we have a glimpse into what God has planned for them. When we see this, we can encourage them each step of the way as we see them succeed. We can praise their character as they grow. We can praise their skills as they improve. We can praise their wise use of their gifts or talents. Then, we can experience the delight of watching them walk step-by-step into their calling! Priceless! All of this will just flow out as we get to know them heart to heart.

As we get to know our children, heart to heart, we can get close enough to their hearts that we can know when they hurt, struggle or succeed! We can be the one to walk with them through any pain that comes their way. We can be the one who they *know* will always really *care!* We can know when they are being led away by emotion. You already know what it feels like. How much greater to use your wisdom to walk alongside of them,

helping them to walk in the Spirit and seek God's will. We can know when they are a success so we can encourage and praise God with them! We can build strong ties that will not be broken by even the best or worst of circumstances.

Believe IN Them!

Finally, if you want to build your children, then **believe in them!** Ever noticed a child that may be in trouble (whether they did it or not)...they come to their parents...their parents instantly assume that if it is "Johnny" then he must be guilty! What a shame! Our children need for us to assume the best in them...to believe in them...to have confidence in them. It does not take a lot to convince a child that he "just can't win!"

Encourage Them All Along The Way...

Our words linger throughout their lives. They build those family ties or they break the cords that bind. Like us, our children struggle. Like us, our children want success. Like us, there is nothing in the lives of our children quite like the power of words to minister encouragement to the depths of their soul.

You have a precious soul before you. A soul made in the image of God. A soul whose very days were written before the foundation of the world. You have the power. Your words can praise and lift up...share God's vision...build up your little child from nothing...speak approval, love, acceptance, and blessings...inspire them toward greatness...or give instruction needed for life. Likewise your words can break your child's heart...wound the spirit of a child...tear a child to pieces...demolish a child!

Dear mother, you have great power! How will you use that power entrusted to you from our Heavenly Father? Life or death? Surely, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."*

Strong-Willed?? Strengthening the Will of Your Child



I remember one battle with my son as if it were just a moment ago. I was a young mother. He was around one-year-old. We were in town shopping. This was a rarity for me. Most days when Matthew was little were spent at the house just us working alongside one another and playing in those extra moments. The highlight of most days was taking Daddy to work...taking him a nice warm lunch...and picking him up at the end of the day. On this particular day, I decided to stay out and go shopping for some clothes for the new season that was so rapidly coming upon us.

This day happened to be the day that Matthew decided that he would test me in *his* comfort zone—in front of nosy, interfering, disapproving (of me at least!) store clerks. I never allowed for him to directly disobey a command or to have an attitude. On this day, he decided to test the limits of my resolve. Our wills hit head-to-head!

I told him to not touch and to stand still...which I soon found was not *his* will. As I issued the warning that *should* have gotten his attention, I could see his purposed decision to be steadfast!

We want for our children to be steadfast. We want for them to purpose to stick by their beliefs. We want for them to be unmoved. **But!** We do not want for them to be steadfast in their will to do "wrong." We do not want for them to believe that it is ok to do wrong, purpose to stick to their error, and be unmoved in this resolve!

How does a mother or father strengthen the will of their child without breaking those tender little hearts? How do we instill a strength of will for the *good* things, the ways of our Lord, for Life?? Let's start at the beginning!

Just WHAT Is A Strong-Will???

Our culture has mistakingly called *willful* children "strong-willed." I never thought about that much until I heard a dear friend teach on the importance of strengthening the

will of our children. Donna-Jean said that actually the child who is "willful" is not strong in their will, but rather "weak-willed!"

They can be characterized in the verse that Paul wrote in Romans 7: 18-19; 21-25 ...

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing... When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in my members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Does this remind you of your little one?)

There is a war inside for good and evil...the flesh and spirit! The key to making it easier for our children to do those things that they *so* desire to do is in strengthening their will. Although strengthening their will is not easy, it is possible. The following are some tips that really do work (Remember that little boy I began sharing about at the beginning of this chapter?? His name is *Matthew!*) for strengthening the will of your child...

Build Good Discipline!

Research has shown that "set disciplines" build tracks in the brain. Just as you have probably seen ruts in mud made by constant use or from getting bogged down in dangerous places, so it has been found that our brain has physical "ruts" made by constant use. Good ruts help us to do things without even thinking about what we are doing...putting on our clothes, walking, talking, studying, cleaning up what is spilled, managing our temper, smiling, listening to others, on and on! Likewise, bad ruts can add a lot of frustration to every day. Want proof? Think about the rut of talking back...throwing temper tantrums...touching *everything*...sloppy work...self-pity...inattention...argumentative...whining...forgetfulness...disobedience...quarreling...making messes... whining...so on!

Good discipline is taught from conception. The wise parent will realize that much frustration and stress can be eased early in the life of the child by building good discipline. For those off to a bad start, there is comfort in knowing that it is never too late to change. It will take *more time* and *effort* to change the bad, but the fruit is well worth the sacrifices. Just choose one discipline at a time and spend concentrated effort in rebuilding. Use just

as much effort as you would spend if your child were ill and needing healing and restoration of their health! Actually their disciplines are even more detrimental than their physical health because they will affect their total well-being!

When you find your child succeeding encourage! Praise! Admire! Let them know that you are pleased. Let them know that you see their effort and improvement. When you see their struggle, let them know that they *can* do it! This will help them to *know* that you are on their side and that you see their potential. When times come that they cannot seem to get out of a bad rut that seems to be overwhelming, help make the decision easier. Walk them through their temptation step-by-step. Just as the Holy Spirit does not leave us alone in the midst of our temptations, walk your children through areas of temptation bit-by-bit. This will help to take much of the stress out of each and every day. This will help to strengthen their will to do right!

Help Them To Succeed!

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing...When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in my members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

When I read the passage above from Romans 7, I instantly think of toddlers! They want *so* bad to please...to do right...to do well. Yet, they find themselves constantly falling, spilling, tearing-up, getting frustrated! Toddlers are not the only ones in this predicament! Think of your beginning reader...your beginning writer...your early teen...*or* if you are like me, *yourself!*

One of the greatest things that we can do to strengthen the will of our children is to help them to succeed. Success is a perfect antidote for the weak-willed child. Little Johnny is going to become frustrated and angry...then, just quit unless he finds some success to help give him a reason to keep trying! Once in the grip of failure, it is really hard for a child to have enough will to continue anything. This is why we need to encourage, encourage, encourage, *encourage* our children!

More than anything in the world, they need the constant encouragement that their

Mom and Dad believe in them and trust them more than anyone in the world! They need to *know* that their parents believe that they can count on them! Take a look at your children. If you have an angry child, look into your heart...do you really believe in them? Can they do *anything* to please you? Do they believe from the bottom of their heart that *you* can depend on them? If not, they will never have a strong-will!

What if they are young *or* beginning to mature? Start very small. Let them experience little successes! *And notice* those successes! When they mess up, let your spirit be such that they feel as though you pick them up to try again! Be very specific. Until they get it all "down," see your role as their guide for each and every step of the way. Once they have got it, be sure to let them know that you appreciate their dependability. Don't take it for granted or assume that they *know* that you appreciate them. Your children will need to hear your praise!

Instruct Them!

"Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him."

Genesis 18: 18-19

Our days are full of so much to do. Yet, the most important thing to do is to command our children. In the passage above, we see that one of the things that God knew as He considered Abraham as a vessel to use for His plan was that Abraham would command his children and household after the Lord.

Children flourish under good clear instruction. Instruction gives security and boundaries. So often parents focus on outward behaviour to the detriment of the heart. If we want to train our children to have a strong will, then we must emphasize their heart and the matters of the heart rather than outward and external compliance. The goal in child training is not an outward show, but a sweet spirit of compliance and trust in the decisions of those in authority...a will to do as asked or required...a heart desire to please and bless. Training equips the child with the strength of will to follow through until completion!

How can we do this? The first thing is to **take the time that is necessary to look in their eyes while you explain exact expectations, exact penalties, and exact blessings!**

This may seem to take a lot of time, but this is essential if we want strong children who *will* to do right. I never thought about the importance of eye-to-eye contact for instructing, correcting, and blessing my children until a dear friend of mine shared with me some neat things that God had been teaching her from Scripture about how He uses His "eyes" as a form of training, discipline, and discipleship.

I was fascinated as she shared how differently one of her children was responding to her. She shared with me that since she had begun taking very seriously the importance of eye-to-eye contact with her children, she could see God using that focus to minister to the heart of one of her children. Through her experience she came to understand how God gets our attention...instructs...then holds us accountable! When she took the time to get eye-to-eye contact with her child in order to share what she expected, she found that her child was more able to choose the correct path in her decisions. She also noticed that there was a tremendous impact on her child as she used her "eye" as a means of discipline.

- Her child was much more attentive to discipline and approval just shown in her "eyes."

Take a look at how God models this before us...then try it out!

Instruction in the Word...

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3: 16-17...

- Another means for clearly instructing our children is through **direct, consistent reading of Scripture**. Of all of the many books that we have read to our children, *none* has had the impact that Scripture has had on their lives. We read aloud straight from Scripture every evening right before bedtime. The Word of God has never failed to meet us right where we are. We usually read aloud the next passage in our Bible. After we read from the Bible, we share what we find most interesting from the passage and how it ministers to us right where we are. It never fails that each of us find something to instruct us in the way we should go or to clarify the direction that God wants for us to go. This is one of my most special times of our day. I am constantly amazed at the way God teaches these precious children of mine.

- I do want to clarify that the easiest path to exasperating our children is to beat them up with the Bible. Not too long ago I was sharing my vision about this book with a friend. She poured out her heart about how her father, a pastor, never has been able to accept her as she is. He has always expected her to have his convictions and his understanding and interpretation of the Bible. Where they have differed in conviction, he has instantly

judged her as wrong, disobedient and rebellious. She is now grown, married, and in her forties. Yet, she, like so many others, still struggles with wanting the acceptance, approval, and blessing of her father. Instead of the respect that every child deserves as they listen to God and develop their own convictions, she is constantly struggling with her father's displeasure and painful words and comments such as, *"This one is my rebellious one!"*

Whether our convictions are right or wrong, we must remember that the Word of God is not for us to use in condemnation or judgment of others—*especially* our children. The bottom line is that our children need *love*. This is the bottom line with God. If we want for our children to become strong Christians seeking God's Will for their lives, then we must give them direct contact with God's Word. It is only through direct contact with the Word of God that they can develop their own convictions, standards, and commitment to the Lord.

Instruction Through OUR Life!

Finally, as much as we desire for our children to become godly, we have very little chance without first **instructing by our manner of life**. Although 1 Peter 3 pertains to marriage relationships, we can see the wisdom of living out our faith before our children as well. 1 Peter 3: 1 commands subjection of the Christian wife to her husband *even* if he is not godly. It continues with wisdom that could also win the heart of a child who does not know the Lord,

"if any obey not the Word, they also may be won without the Word by the conversation (manner of life) of the wives while they behold your chaste conversation (again, MANNER OF LIFE) coupled with fear."

1 Peter 3: 1-2

Our children will seldom develop godliness unless we are godly. Our children will not develop wisdom unless we are wise. Our children will not easily develop habits, which we ourselves do not live out. Our children will not develop character that we ourselves do not exemplify. Finally, our children will not have a strong will to live for God unless we live before them a life of complete surrender, surrendering *our* will day-by-day to the Lord. Instruct them that they may become strong!

Discipline

Isn't all of this just basic discipline and child-training? Yes! The whole process of strengthening the will of your child is a major element of discipleship—child-training! It

is through discipline that we will teach, train, and encourage our children toward godliness. For this reason, use godly discipline to strengthen the will of your children.

The will is where the child chooses or decides between the various courses of action. Often we are told several grievous errors in child-training. There is the one camp that teaches that we need to break the will of the child. This is where the child is caused under pressure to give way to the opposition with little or no regard for their heart. This crushes out and destroys the child's privilege to choose which way to go. Very simply, the fruit of this action is a child who can be influenced to change their will just through hardship. You can probably think through the apparent dangers of this means of discipline...lack of security, need for approval in all they do, need for ease in decisions, OR change or surrender of their will with the least bit of adversity or pressure (or even a lot of continued adversity and pressure!). This is the child who is trained to comply and please...never to stand firm and be courageous. Oh, and this is the child who goes on all of his or her life always feeling as though nothing they do can ever really please their parents!

The second camp is the camp that gives way to the child's will. This is where the child is the center of the family, dictates the direction of the family, and gets just what they want. The parents *never* make a decision without considering the child's wishes. Usually the parent of this child has had a parent from the first camp *or* they have been told, without questioning the validity, that they will in some way injure or harm their child (especially their self-esteem and confidence) if they impose upon their child restrictions, requirements, or teaching. The fruit of this method is a self-centered, insecure, spoiled child who has great difficulty in surrendering his or her will regardless of situations they are faced with. In very important situations, the willful child *knows* that all that is needed is to holdout until the parent gives in to their tears, cries, delays, or whining. The parent in this situation is constantly on the run "fixing" their child's errors...running after the child...explaining the "cause" of the child's actions (sleepy, tired, grumpy, hormonal, trying their wings, sowing their oats...) and comes to the end of the child-training years with an empty marriage, wild child, and confusion about where it all went wrong. Oh, and this is the child who goes on all of his or her life always feeling as though nothing they do can ever really please their parents!

I am sure that there are many other options for child-discipline, but let's look at the biblical model. There is *such* a difference! If you want a really good book on this model, there is *none* to compare to the Bible! Do a word study on words such as instruct, train, discipline, teach. You will come away with ideas that will work while ministering to the heart of your child!

Some Quick Keys for Strengthening the Will of Your Child Through Discipline

Understand Discipline!

Very few people understand *why* or *how* to discipline. There is a battle in our society over this one aspect of child training. I believe the battle is on because of how *close* the model of discipline between parent and child resembles redemption. We have an enemy who does not want for this to be a clear picture because he wants redemption (and child discipline) to seem formidable, complicated, and inaccessible. .

Biblical discipline is this simple...children have a heavy conscience when they are not righteous--good. They need *a way* to "pay the penalty" for that sin and *a means* for bringing them back into restoration—a way to make things right and good again so their conscience is clean and peaceful. This is the same with redemption. We all, *no exceptions* have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Our consciences burn in heaviness as we commit the simplest sin. It is healing to confess that sin...turn away from that sin...and walk in newness and life!

The only problem is that we have no way to pay for the sin and clear our conscience because we are all sinful and unworthy to pay that penalty. It is not as simple as our children being spanked for wrong behaviour. The penalty for that sin was death, impossible for a sinner to pay because a sinner is not worthy to be a sacrifice for sin. The only perfect man, born of God and man, was Jesus. Once and for all, He took the sins of each and every one of us...*all* of them! Yes, He, our Pure Lamb of Sacrifice, took our sins upon Himself and *choose* to pay the penalty for our sin. Accepting Christ's payment for our sin completely clears the record and our conscience as well! This is simple redemption.

Redemption is the picture of what our discipline is *supposed* to do in the life of our children. They cannot bear the pain of a wounded, heavy conscience. The rod of reproof is the only means for a child to get rid of the heaviness and pay the penalty for what they do wrong. This natural law cannot be violated by a parent who chooses to go against what God instructs. It is the child who will pay the penalty of this sin until they finally find the peace through salvation. You may have seen the result of this in our society. Children are *wide* open. They cannot concentrate because they need peace. They cannot relate with others because they are in a muddle and downward spiral. They cannot have life because they are walking in death and destruction.

Our role as parents is to help them in the early years to live in obedience. We are the

ones who hold them accountable. We are the ones who require confession of their sins (not denial or excuses or blame or hard-heartedness). We are the ones who relieve the burden by letting them pay the penalty for their sin...in other words--spanking, apology, restoration, restitution through work, so on. As the years go by, we will lesson our role bit-by-bit until the child is dealing directly with his Heavenly Father and walking in the Holy Spirit.

This year we went through a transformation in our discipline of our children. My son is now a pre-teen (only a few more weeks until he will be a full-fledged teenager, he would want for you to know!!) *NOW, he is almost 19—how fun to read this now!*. There was a situation that came up that the Lord showed me the transition from childhood discipline into discipline of our older children. Matthew came to me in deep remorse about a situation. He shared with me that he had already confessed and repented of the sin before God. He wanted to let me know because he knew that it was breaking a rule that we had set for our children. I was in awe of his maturity and responsibility for his error. I shared with him that I felt that he had done all that was needed in that situation to make things right. I shared that in that situation, I felt that God wanted for me to extend grace to him *just* like God would. *Now...*before you think that this situation would be the breeding ground for *more* sin, I also shared that this was my greatest concern—that he would get the idea that all that was needed was coming and giving me this scenario and that he would get off without much of a penalty *then* get into the depths of sin—does this sound like a mom thinking of *all* that could happen?!

I did explain to him the objective for discipline. I wanted for him to have a picture of God's grace and God's judgment. I wanted for him to understand the seriousness of his sin and the deep love that Jesus had in paying his sin penalty. I also wanted for him to have a strong will. This is where we are going with our children. A child, who does not understand the penalty for their sin, will not have the strength to choose right because they will be zapped by their heavy conscience. However, a child who has experienced the fullness of restoration time and time again will understand that *nothing* is too big for God to forgive and there are *never* too many mistakes for God to cover with His grace!

We want for our children to one day become strong enough in their will that they will choose Christ when they are given the temptations of the world. This begins with those little moments of teaching them His will in the little things and helping them to make good choices all along the way.

Guard Their Will To Choose!

In all things that they do, present to them that they *do* have choice. They can choose good or evil. *"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil."* (Deuteronomy 30: 15) *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve..."* (Joshua 24: 15)

God created man and woman with a will to choose. This makes it biblical to teach your children from an early age that they, too, have the will to choose which way they will go. Guard this at all times!

Want to know how this will look? Back to our situation with Matthew as a toddler...he had a choice to make. He could choose to be pleasant and have a fun time shopping OR he could choose to be disobedient and have Mommy spank him for his disobedience (this was the explained penalty for willfulness, especially in public). This did not set our wills at odds. Instead, it gave him a choice of good or evil...blessings or penalties. *"Please close the door to help Mommy OR Mommy will have to spank you for disobedience."* Give them choices. This is a perfect picture of how God relates with us as His children. God has rewards for obedience and penalties for disobedience. Guard that right to choose and hold them accountable!

Train Them In "Right-Doing" From Their Infancy!

One of our primary duties is to guide our children toward "right-doing" and continue to train them in the lifestyle of "right-doing." Want to know what "right-doing" entails?? Search the Scripture for what God calls "righteousness." As our children are guided toward righteousness and trained in righteousness, they will begin to make noble, wise choices!

Beware Of Exasperating Your Children!

Yes, this is one of the greatest considerations that we have as we train up our children. In Ephesians 6, we see that children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord...to honor their father and mother, yet with these commands comes a great responsibility to the parents, *"And ye, fathers (and mothers), provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up on the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* I don't know about you, but this is a day-by-day dying to self and a day-by-day commitment to ministering to the heart of my children. It is so easy to exasperate our children with unclear expectations, preachiness, threats, lack of unity with parents, excessive discipline, or even disciplining one child for the errors of another child.

One quick note here...*EACH* child is accountable unto God for its sin. This needs to be modeled in the home relationships between siblings. Far too many parents exasperate their children by holding, say, the oldest or more mature siblings responsible for the actions of the younger. This is the number one cause of poor family-sibling relationships exasperation, and regrets...sooooo beware!

If you want a child with a strong-will, beware of exasperating them!

Require Submission Of Their Will To You!

This is a key to real joy for the child. From an early age, your children need to be taught over and over that their relationship with you is a picture of their relationship later with God. *Not* that they are to worship you—there would be a great fall in that perspective since all parents are still flesh and blood! What I mean is that your relationship is a visual picture of the relationship that we have with our Heavenly Father. They may not understand it now as children. But as they mature, they will begin to understand submission and obedience and discipline in its fullness.

Submission to you is a picture of submission to the Lord. As they learn how to submit their will to your will, it will be easier for them to submit their will to God's will. Their obedience to you is a picture of their obedience to God as well. The Bible teaches us in 1 Timothy 1: 5, "*The GOAL of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" The purpose for instruction *and* spanking or punishing our children is so that our children can have a pure heart with pure motives and intentions...a good, clear, clean conscience (which is only clean if we help them to cleanse their conscience the way that God instructs for us to help them—through the rod and reproof)...and a sincere faith (which is passed on from your heart to theirs!).

Instruct your children to obey quickly and cheerfully. In our home, delayed obedience is considered disobedience. Also, expect your children to obey without being watched. This will teach them self-control that will last for all of their life. Allow absolutely *NO* murmuring or poor attitudes. These are symptoms of inward defiance and willfulness...the complete opposite of submission to our will! Finally, require obedience without any explanations. This is how God requires for us to walk with Him! We must follow where He leads, without explanations of His reasons or constant questions of His choices along the way. While you may want to explain to your children the purpose for some of the things that you do, do not make this a requirement for all of the things that you require of them to do. Expect for them to obey without any excuse and without any hesitation. If you want to prepare your children for a walk with God, then strengthen the will of your

child by teaching them submission from an early age!

Give Your Children REAL Security!

Want a child with a strong will?? Give them *real* security! Children need security. They do not get this through a bounty of words...all of the things that they ask for...a large inheritance...or all of the counseling in the world. Children do not get real security *even* from homeschooling! True security is established through the discipline of a loving home! Money just cannot buy the comfort of firm boundaries where a child *knows* what is allowed and how they are protected under the umbrella of their parents' protective authority. Nothing can teach a child respect for leaders and authority like the discipline of a godly home. The child may have beauty all around them, but without duty and specific guidelines and requirements, a child misses the depths of commitment and beauty of duty. Finally, children are almost a nervous wreck without the rest and peace that comes with firm boundaries and specifically clarified expectations. Want real security, thus a sweet disposition in your children? Strengthen their will by giving them real security that is *only found* in clear, absolute boundaries based upon God's absolute, unchanging Word!

Capture Your Teen's Heart!

By Cindy (and her teens!)



*This chapter has been added to the book after the new revision...
Hope you enjoy!*

Well, he graduated! For real! After 13 years of homeschooling, my BABY graduated! Just ONE MONTH ago today! Talk about a mushy, mushy month!

The last month has been simply my most favorite ever. We have had some of the most incredible discussions...more late night talks than ever...and more laughs and tears (mushy ones!) than I could ever have imagined!

I have gotten quite a bit of email and letters lately asking HOW we got here. This meaning, how do you capture your teens heart so that you have THIS type of relationship with an 18-year-old son???? A 15-year-old daughter???? How do ya get there? Well, after much prayer and many long, long discussions, here are a few things that I think make the difference!

Ready?

Let's dig in...

- **Be (and STAY!) Connected!** Teens NEED connection. They literally seek after connection. Want their heart? Make sure that their number one connection is at home! How? Listen! Listen--AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH COMPLETELY SHUT!!!! Talk. Really talk with them. NOT AT THEM! As long as they are talking to you, there is an open door that satan cannot close. During these years, make it your number one goal to keep strong lines of communication with your teen. Yes, you will be instructing, guiding, counseling...but, remember your own teen years when you do. How did people "get in" to you? Yep. Respecting you as a person, respecting your opinions, valuing your insights, and caring more about YOU than their own preferences. Your teen is a WHOLE person. They

need for you to respect, value, and treasure them...and everything about them. If you want to capture their heart, the best way to do so is to stay in the position that keeps them talking and listening to you. Don't let ANYTHING isolate either of you! Be connected. Stay connected!

- **Choose Your Battles.** Yep! Heard this one? Tuning me out? Well, if so, you are PROBABLY tuning out your teen as well! (Sorry! Truth hurts!) If you have heard this one, there is probably a very good reason. There is MUCH wisdom in this one statement. You cannot enter the teen years battling with your teen. If there is a battle with them on every front, there is a very serious problem. Solving this problem begins with US as parents. Just as in a marriage or in real combat, during the teen years you cannot win the real battle when fighting in the foxhole with your fellow soldier. You will have different ways to battle. They are entering into their own adulthood. They will do things much, much different than we do things. And...for much of it, it is MUCH, MUCH better than we could ever imagine. Our teens do not see things the same way that we do. Quite frankly, I am ever learning and ever growing from my teens' perspectives and beliefs. They constantly challenge me to step up higher and higher. And...this is what I have trained them up for! What about your teens? Have you stopped lately to just see things through their eyes? Have you listened to their heartbeat? If we want to capture their heart, we MUST know their heart. We must choose an intimate relationship over our preferences (honestly, some of our preferences are really weird. beloved friends!!!). We must choose their hearts over our quirks! Who knows, we JUST MIGHT BE WRONG!!! Let me give an example! A while back we were shopping in town. My daughter wanted a pair of shoes. Now, they were the ugliest pair of shoes I had seen in a while. I instantly told her no--no thoughts, except that they were ugly and I did not want her to wear clothes because "everyone else did." She had a look on her face that communicated that she was stunned at my decision. She asked one more time--ugh, that IS against the rules that we have had THROUGH THE YEARS! Something hit me. I decided I would make MY POINT by asking her a question (never knowing that God would teach ME a point! Ugh...why is it ALWAYS ME learning??). My question was very simple, "WHY do you want those shoes so badly?" Want to know her answer? She said, "They make me taller!" Yep! It cracked me up. Yep! I bought them! OH! If it was NOT peer-pressure or fashion or pleasing others...I was OK. Just wanted to be taller!????????! That was the moment that I figured out that I might just be wrong at times! I might just miss it! I might just need to choose my battles with a bit more "intel." I might be making a mountain out of NOTHING...not even a molehill! Their hearts are sooo much more important than our JUNK! Our relationship is much, much more im-

portant than my silly quirks and assumptions. Maybe there IS NOTHING behind the shoes...the ugly bracelets (Elisabeth told me just Saturday about a boy that is visiting our church who had heard that she was a REAL Christian--he heard because someone remembered seeing her (UGLY) bracelet and they talked about HER being the REAL THING!!! HELLO!). Maybe it is time to get beyond my own understanding and get God's! In the meantime, that just might capture the heart of the teens we love so much!

- **Get rid of pre-conceived stuff!** Yep...kinda the same thing as the last point...but we need to really say it, "Get rid of the pre-conceived ideas." Those quirky ideas! Maybe it is music. Maybe it is clothes. While we have very high standards in our home, my teens respect and embrace those standards because they know that they can present an idea to us and we will talk it out and pray it out to see if OUR perspective is valid or if we do not need to compromise. This is a very fine line. Yet, our children respect if we are uncomfortable with anything. They honor our convictions. They bring things to us that most parents have NO idea that their homeschooled teens are dealing with. They know that they can trust us to give a very serious thought to the things that they bring us. BUT, we had to let go of a lot of JUNK that we had made a big deal of when they were just babies (ugh...maybe we were REALLY more rebellious than they would ever be????). We had to let go of the STUFF in favor of a real relationship with them. We have committed to seek for their heart above all else. And...in turn they have embraced those things that we are REALLY committed to--beginning with our Lord! Capture their hearts. Get rid of the stuff that would chase them away!
- **Split the differences!** Balance guidance with friendship! Respect them. They are young adults. If they are not where you want for them to be in maturity or godliness, why not back-off a bit? Respect them. Venture to get to know their hearts and minds. There is probably MUCH, MUCH more in there than you imagine. Yet, if we do not respect them, we will not get to know that side of them. In fact, if we do not respect them, we may be the very one to weaken them instead of strengthening them. Respect them. They will want to hear and do what we recommend. But, only with balance!
- **Really support them!** Support them as they go through the TEEN STUFF--rejection, fears, battles with purity, seeking God's plan, need for purpose and direction, preparation for their own home and family... They do not need for us to train them to run away from the teen stuff. Rather, they need to know how to handle those tough things the very best way. As parents of teens, this is one of the

best opportunities to see what our children are really "made of" right before our eyes. They don't need for us to "handle" the situation for them. Rather, they need for us to be there as a support for them as they walk through the tough times. They need for us to slow down to really KNOW what they are going through. Understand it. Support them! Just give this a try and you will capture their heart!

- **Find what gets them talking--and LISTEN!** For my daughter, she loves "GIRL-TIME" with me. Lunches at a nice, quiet, private restaurant just seem to compel her to really talk to me. I love those moments! She does too! Those will forever seal our relationship. They speak more than a million words could ever speak to her. They communicate that I really care. She knows more than almost anyone that I do not have TIME...but, that I will take it for HER to know her and her heart! My son just pours out like crazy when we drive somewhere...or right before bed. Those are the moments that are my greatest treasure in life. I treasure that they trust me with their hearts and minds. I cannot overstate that this is one of the most vital ways to capture their hearts!!! Keep communication open. Then, they will willingly give you their hearts!
- **Be real!** Let them really know YOU! Ugh...they already do! The down-side. They know your crud! Sooo, why not take more time to let them know your heart! Let them know your dreams. Let them know your desires. Let them know your heart struggles. Let them know how much you really desire to be more than you are. Let them know how you battle with the same things that they may not like about you! And...the same things that they battle with. Do you know what that ALONE will do to capture your child's heart??? Let them IN! Let them see "your side" of things. Let them see that you battle each day just like they do. Let them see your dreams. Let them see your desires. Let them see what you love. Let them watch you grow through mistakes. Let them see you seek after God! Be real and you will capture their hearts when others turn away their teens.

Oh, beloved, this is one of the most important things I could write today. I challenge you to really consider how YOU can capture your child's heart.

I have a few friends who are my most favorite homeschool pals. They were the "perfect" homeschool moms. Yet, one day everything that they thought mattered had to go. One friend called me one day to let me know that she needed my prayers desperately, her daughter had run away from home. All the sudden nothing else mattered but getting her back! All of the sudden nothing else mattered but capturing her heart!

Wondering what happened? Well, great news! Her daughter came back home. They worked on their relationship as never before. They let go of the things that were insignificant compared to the riches of a real relationship. Now, they have one of the most incredible relationships that I have ever seen! God has restored their relationship beyond where it ever could have been. It is what He desires for our relationships with our children to become.

So, where are you today?

Have you captured your teens heart? Keep on beloved! God has so many riches in store for you. The relationship you build today will be one of your greatest treasures tomorrow.

Are you needing to undo some damage? Are you growing further and further away? Do you have no idea where to begin? Why not go back over these points and see if there is something that is just pulling at your heart? Why not let some of the STUFF go? Why not purpose to build a strong relationship with your teen? Why not repent openly before them? This could be the moment that changes the course of your relationship with your child forever! God IS a restorer of broken relationships. He wants to restore this relationship for you too! Surrender to His sweet, sweet call right now.

Can you just see the vision before us? What do you want for a relationship tomorrow? Capture the heart of your teen today!

What About Teens...Must They Rebel OR Can We Continue Heart-to-Heart???



"Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed: and His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? and they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Luke 2: 41-52...

Teens...does the word bring dread? Fear? Feel your teeth clenching tight?

Relax! The teen years *can* be a delight for parent and child. We can continue heart-to-heart! In just a few short days, my Matthew will be turning 13-years-old (*we are now getting ready for his 19th birthday!*)! A new chapter in his life will open. My heart is full as we prepare for this new chapter of his life.

We have a mother-son date planned. I will be presenting him with a ring, his "promise ring" to me, promising his heart until he gives his heart to his wife. I already feel the pangs in my heart. He has grown so fast, matured so quickly. I get a little too sentimental as I think of how fast the next few years are going to pass as he continues on toward his call. It

is sometimes simply overwhelming as I realize that there is so much to teach and so much to learn together before he steps into the next chapter of his life.

I have loved every minute with this little boy. He has brought delight to my heart since the moment I found that I was with child. The thought of parenting becoming a struggle at this age still sends chills to my heart.

Actually, we had a scare last year. We organized a retreat for homeschool mothers. I was busy with ministering and coordinating all of the workshops, meals, and tiny details. My children were busy helping so I did not mind when Matthew wanted to take some breaks to fellowship with the other children.

As another speaker was giving her main address for the evening to the ladies and her husband was sharing with the men, I heard a *loud* disturbance. You have got it—the boys! I was *so* upset. The dads needed this encouragement. Plus, these boys were all old enough to know how to behave, *especially* to never run around a church!

I caught up with them, no small feat! As I asked them to be mindful of the workshops going on, *in* church, and why it was important for them to help us by behaving...I got the look! No! It was not from Matthew. It was from his little friend. His good, *Christian* friend from a good, Christian family. A child who is a complete delight to *his* parents, but does not like for another adult to impose authority of any kind upon him.

Only one weekend. Only one friend. That is all it took for Matthew to pick up this same resistance toward authority! Now, we are talking about *my* child!

The next few days were rather rocky. There were some pretty nasty looks. There was a hardness of heart. There was an instant resistance toward me. All of the sudden, it appeared that teenage rebellion was ushered in over-night! I immediately went to my knees. Yet, each moment was getting more and more serious. I needed help and help quick!

It all came to a climax a few nights later. I don't remember what it was about...all I remember was that "look" and the way he turned away from me. I had tolerated enough! I told him to turn back to me and look me straight in the eyes. I told him that I felt that these bad habits had to be pruned...that I would not be "buddy-mom"...that every offense would be nipped immediately until this was discontinued...and that I was extremely disappointed because I never thought we would come to this! Upset, yes! I sure was! Then, he did it again...he turned with that snarling look. I turned as tears began to flood. I was going to have to leave the room to go pour out my grief to God. Harold was

stunned at what was going on—he had seen it with his eyes too!

As I whimpered, *"Oh, Lord...NOT MY Matthew!"* I heard that soft voice I treasure so much! In great tears, he said words that brought instant healing, *"I am sorry...I can disappoint a lot of people in a lot of ways...but Mom, I can't disappoint you...please forgive me!"* We broke into a flood of tears and great big bear hugs! Harold was still stunned!)

There you have it! My experience with rebellion! Oh, Don't think that curse (*Didn't we already cover how words have power to bring life or death?!*), *"You are not done yet!"* Of all of the chapters in this book, you must know that this one was not planned by me on purpose. From the beginning to the end (the first one), I argued with God about the value of writing a chapter on the very things I am *seeking to do* in my life in the next few years. Actually, I refused to write it until my computer crashed and the floppy disc locked up with the original manuscript ready for print!

On my knees before God, He gently whispered, *"It will be MY words...do it again...this time with NO resistance!"* So, here I am--a fellow-pilgrim. Yet, there is true power for mothers wherever you are! Let me share some thoughts about walking through the teen "years" heart-to-heart with your teen...

Encourage Them To See Themselves Through God's Eyes!

I love this age! Actually, I have truly loved each and every age and stage of their lives. I am thankful that when they were little I had Godly counsel teaching me that *"Today is the day with my children...that there is no greater day than today...no greater stage than this one...and no greater blessings than today's!"* BUT, I must tell you that this is still my favorite age! (Until tomorrow!)

As I look at the story of Jesus as a pre-teen, it reminds me of Matthew. Like Mary, I have known since Matthew was little that God had His hand on Matthew's life. Just as this age of Jesus was especially noted in Scripture, I find that this age is very special in our lives. Now, we are able to see much, much more who Matthew is becoming. We are seeing great growth in *"wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man."* We are seeing God narrowing Matthew's life *daily* so Matthew can only go the way that is already planned for him.

The hardest thing about this age is that they really need to be encouraged more than ever. They struggle with confidence in *who they are*. They struggle with getting weary as they seek to be godly. They fluctuate back and forth with uncertainty about where they

will be going in just a few short years. What they really need is to be encouraged in who they are! They need for their successes to be pointed out. They need to constantly hear that God can *and* wants to use them! They need to hear that you see growth and maturity!

The only way that we can encourage our children from the depths of our heart (*And at this age they will know whether it is sincere or not!*), is if we are daily asking God for a sanctified view of our children...if we are daily sacrificing our preferences, our ways, and our ideas...and if we are willing to get out of the way so our children can develop intimacy with God. This is the only way that God can move our children from the temporal to eternal...from externals to godly character...from "being good" to true virtue!

Don't Cut The Cords...

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more." Isaiah 54:2-4

This passage is so rich, but I want to stress one little bit as we look at ministering to the heart of our teens. *"Lengthen thy cords..."* One of greatest tendencies at this age is to underestimate the great role we play in the life of our teens. They are so fiercely independent. They are finally able to take responsibility for all of the things we had to yell about for years. They finally "get" so many areas of study that have caused years of frustration, strife, and struggle. Our tendency is to turn them loose and let them go...to cut the cords (*I can CERTAINLY testify to this now that I am a mother of a 19-year-old and 15 year-old. I thank God that He moved on my heart when they were young to not quit mothering! These are precious, precious years! J!*)!

Isaiah 54 is powerful! It gives us a new view of motherhood. I shared earlier the inspiration that this verse gives me for centering all around my home and family. But, look at this passage in a different way. As I looked at the application in my home, I have found that as I give up my empty works, my fruit is greater in my home. As I focus on my home, the Lord keeps enlarging my tent. As He enlarges my tent, I am noticing a few things. First, there are more people taking a peek into our home. People need to "see" what a godly home is like...warts and all! They need to see what a home is like with God as the center!

Another thing that God is doing is lengthening the cords and strengthening the stakes. Our tendency, probably due to our culture, is to cut the cords with our little ones much too early. Actually in most homes cords are cut beginning at birth. Even the best homes will sever the cords around school age...or when the children go off to college. I believe that this forsakes God's best. God can do much with a child under the authority of his/her parents. Another danger is present. Pulling the cords in so tight that there is never any growth in the family. Holding the children in so tightly that the children are not able to minister at all. This also forsakes God's best.

As we let our children stretch forth into our culture, we will find that there are blessings that would be missed if we cut the cords that bring strength and growth to our tent or if we never stretched out our cords. Lengthen the cords. Minister together. Work together. "Lengthen" your teen out on apprenticeships. Help them start their own businesses. Prepare them for the day that you do "cut" the cords for them to begin their own families. Lengthen for now. Do not cut the cords!

Walk the Walk!

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Deuteronomy 6: 6-9

Do you mess up? Wondering what a question like that is doing in this chapter? Want me to answer first?? Yes! I sure do! I mess up probably more than all of you combined! The tough thing is that my children *see* all of those times that I bomb!

Shouldn't we seek to walk in Christ? Shouldn't it help that we are Christians? Yes. But truth is, we are flesh and blood. Being redeemed is not equivalent to being perfect. For this reason, I believe that in these years, as we parent our teens, we need an extra dose of mercy and humility. If we could only remember *our insufficiency* as we deal with our teens, we would be more understanding and extend more grace and mercy and unconditional love to our teens. Keeping in mind just *who* we are and *what* God has done for us should help us to see our teens through different eyes, prayerfully God's! This is true ministry to their souls!