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Parenting With A Purpose



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Parenting With A Purpose

Every Christian parent's heart echoes 3 *John 4* where it says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." As parents, we are given many principles so that we might "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The "Parenting with a Purpose" material brings together biblical principles on parenting in an effort to help provide structure and guidance to the journey of parenting. This material is not a formula that will lead to perfect children. Instead, this material is meant to help lay out basic biblical principles on parenting given in the Word of God. When Daniel "purposed in his heart," he was choosing to be directed by a commitment to God rather than the circumstance he was in. To parent with a purpose means to understand the importance and urgency of your interactions with your children. Knowing the impact your actions have can help you keep an eternal perspective based on biblical principles rather than parenting in a reactionary, situation-by-situation manner.

The "Parenting with a Purpose" material includes the Parenting Wheel and the six spokes that make up the Parenting Wheel. At the center of the Parenting Wheel you will find the topic of Relationships and around the outside of the Parenting Wheel you will find the "fruit" that you as a parent desire to see in your child's life. While each spoke helps make up the whole of "Parenting with a Purpose," each can be read as a stand-alone document. Therefore, if you have a particular interest in one of the spokes, feel free to jump right to that document. If you desire to go through all of the material, it is recommended that you study the Parenting Wheel and then read the documents in the order listed below.

1. Relationship Spoke
2. Season Spoke
3. Communication Spoke
4. Instruction Spoke
5. Discipleship Spoke
6. Challenge Spoke

It is our hope and prayer that this information can be used by our Great God to illuminate biblical principles that can encourage and strengthen parents as they carry out the instruction of *Ephesians 6:4*. "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Parenting With A Purpose



Parenting With A Purpose: Relationships

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Luke 1:16-17, “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

John 10: 1-5, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

- Parenting must be built on the foundation of relationship.
- Without a relationship built on biblical principles and motivated by biblical goals, parents will not be able to positively impact their children spiritually despite having good motives, intentions, and instructions.
- The relationship you have with your child will impact how he views all of his future relationships including his relationship with God and His creation.

Parenting With A Purpose: Relationships

APPLICATION –The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life” mode?

- **Building Trust:** Healthy relationships are built through experiences. Consider *John 10:3-4*, where the sheep follow the Shepherd because they know His voice. This would lead us to believe the sheep had heard the Shepherd’s voice before and had experiences that led them to trust that He had their best interests in mind. How parents interact with their children will affect the relationship with them and whether or not they believe the parents to be trustworthy. Knowing this, parents can use interactions, whether positive or negative, as opportunities to build their relationship with the children. While positive times together are certainly more pleasant, a parent who offers an apology and asks for forgiveness after negative interaction provides a powerful model of humility, repentance, and confession. This also demonstrates that parents are often learning just as much as their children through this process!
- **Knowing Your Child:** A core aspect of relationships is knowing and being known by someone. This takes time, effort, sacrifice, and shared experiences. Consider how this applies to the parent-child relationship. How well would your child say that you know what is truly going on in his life?
- **Showing Interest and Being Engaged:** *Luke 1:17* tells us that one of the roles of John the Baptist was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. In essence, it shows the Lord’s desire for parents to be concerned about and care for their children. By getting into their children’s world, parents will be better in tune with their children’s desires and needs. This requires listening and focused attention to things that parents may not find interesting.
- **Letting Your Purpose be Known:** Parents need to explicitly share and teach their children which goals, purposes and priorities guide the parents’ lives. For example, in *2 Corinthians 4:2* Paul expresses his purpose for writing to the Corinthians so there is no confusion as to his reason for the letter. Parents who are willing to be open and honest with their children will allow greater freedom for their children to be open and honest with them. Children need to see their parents’ hearts through both word and action, which ought to mirror that of Paul’s in *2 Corinthians 2*.
- **Acknowledging God as Creator:** Your child has been uniquely fashioned by God (*Psalms 139*). However, your child’s talents and gifts are also coupled with natural weaknesses. One of a parent’s most important parenting tasks is encouraging each child to draw on his strengths while identifying and working to either overcome or accept his weaknesses depending on what they are. By helping a child understand and accept both his God-given talents and his natural weaknesses, the child will be freer to develop a healthy sense of who God created him to be.
- **Being Created for Relationships:** Remember, child will have relationships with someone or something. Therefore, healthy relationships at home can have a profound effect on a child’s life. God designed parents to have a special role in shaping their child’s ability to relate to others.

Parenting With A Purpose: Relationships

- **Shaping Your Child's View of God:** The parent-child bond provides the foundation for a child's concept of God. This very humbling and weighty responsibility is also a wonderful privilege. Just think, parents get to help their child grow in understanding and relating to God! The primary goal in the parent-child relationship is to lead him to an "Abba Father" relationship with God as shown in *Galatians 4:6-7*, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." By building a healthy relationship with a child, parents begin to develop in him a healthy view of God and the world around him.
- **Recognizing that Growth Takes Time, Persistence, and Patience:** Maturing and growing takes time for all of us. Parents must understand that children do not mature overnight; many lessons will need to be taught repeatedly. It can be very frustrating for parents to have to deal with certain problems (e.g., sharing, minding, etc.) over and over. However, when considering that children learn through repetition, we find that this is one of the main functions of parenting. Having unrealistic expectations of a child's development will lead to a great deal of frustration that can negatively impact the parent-child relationship.
- **Building Connected Relationships:** Parents can begin building relationships by turning their heart first to the Lord, then to their spouse, and finally to their children. Relationships with children will be hindered if relationships with God and spouse aren't growing. To teach biblical principles to children but not follow them in the marital relationship is in effect the double-mindedness James warns against in *James 1:8*.
- **Establishing Marital Harmony as the Basis of Parenting:** God uses the marital relationship between a man and a woman as a picture of the church's relationship with Christ (*2 Corinthians 11:2*). Parents who live out scriptural principles in their marriage are helping their children develop a healthier understanding of their relationship with their Creator. Children thrive on safety and security. When there is strife in the marital relationship, safety and security are compromised. Parents need to make their marriage a priority. It is not an overstatement to say that one of the best things that parents can do for their children is to have a strong marriage.
- **Growing in Your Relationship with the Lord Affects Parenting:** A healthy relationship with the Lord is essential to a godly marriage and godly parenting. One of the many reasons this is true is the importance of agape love which comes from God. Agape love is a self-sacrificing love that does not depend on the worthiness of the one being loved. This type of love must come from God as He is the source of this type of love. God has agape love for us in that we are unable to merit or earn the love of God; He loves us because He chooses to love us. *Romans 5:8*, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ is committed to His people through good and bad times. Parents are called to the same commitment to their children as the Lord has towards parents. Showing children that love for them and commitment to them does not change based on what they do is a great way to model God's enduring love and commitment to His people. This does not mean that parents need to accept or embrace sin or poor behavior. However, it does mean that by God's grace, parents need to extend agape love to them.

Parenting With A Purpose: Relationships

Parenting Styles.

Research done by Diana Baumrind in the 1960's identified different parenting styles based on two factors:

- Parental demandingness: having clear expectations for behavior
- Parental responsiveness: how loving and warm the relationships are

These parenting styles can be looked at through the lens of God's grace and mercy (responsiveness) and His truth and holiness (demandingness). Neither grace nor truth can be compromised, and love must be the vehicle through which grace and truth flow. *John 1:14* tells us that Jesus came in grace and truth, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The diagram below shows four parenting styles and how each relates to a parent's demandingness and responsiveness. As you read on, consider which style you tend toward.

Parental Demandingness	"High"	Authoritarian Parenting Style	Authoritative Parenting Style
	"Low"	Uninvolved Parenting Style	Indulgent Parenting Style
		"Low"	"High"
		Parental Responsiveness	

Explanation of the Four Parenting Styles.^{1,2}

- Authoritarian Parenting Style (High Demandingness and Low Responsiveness): these parents have strict rules for their children and expect them to follow the rules without explaining the purpose or reason for the rules. There is little or no responsiveness (warmth) or reaction to the children, and punishment is often used when rules are broken. This type of parent might be compared to a drill sergeant. Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence, and self-esteem. They tend to be less emotionally connected to their parents.

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- Authoritative Parenting Style (High Demandingness and High Responsiveness): these parents establish rules and expectations for children but enforce and establish rules more collaboratively. Discipline is consistently applied, but is more restorative than punitive. Authoritative parents tend to be more nurturing and forgiving when children break the rules. Authoritative parenting styles tend to result in children who are happy, capable, responsible, and successful.
- Uninvolved Parenting Style (Low Demandingness and Low Responsiveness): these parents have very few, if any, expectations of their children nor do they respond to emotional needs of their children. They may provide for the children's basic needs but are largely detached from them. These children tend to lack self-control, have low self-esteem, and are less competent than their peers.
- Indulgent Parenting Style (Low Demandingness and High Responsiveness): these parents do not put many demands on their children and often do not have high expectations for their children in areas of self-control and self-regulation. These parents may be seen more as a friend of their children rather than a parent. Indulgent parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more likely to experience problems with authority and tend to perform poorly in school.

How does this concept benefit children?

Relationships Have a Lasting Impact: Relationships are interconnected; they do not exist in a vacuum. Who parents are and how they interact with their child will shape who he becomes. If a child feels safe and secure in his relationship with his parents, he will recognize and understand what a healthy relationship looks like. Understand that God is at work in both parents' and your child's lives. Trials, including trials in relationships, will expose sin, brokenness, and the need for forgiveness. God uses parenting to help mold and shape children. Likewise, God uses children to mold and shape parents. Through the challenges of the parent-child relationship, God can expose the need for what only He can do in their lives. The wise parent understands the dependence and reliance we have on Him.

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

1. How is your relationship with Christ? Are you growing your attachment with Him?
2. How is your relationship with your spouse? Is it modeling the type of relationship that reflects God's design?
3. Which parenting style do you identify with most and what are the strengths and weaknesses of your parenting style?
4. How is your relationship with your children? Would they say with confidence that they feel your love? Do they know you have clear expectations and standards for their behavior?
5. Identify at least two action items as to how you could build a healthier relationship with your child.
6. Where could you show agape love to your child?

Parenting With A Purpose: Relationships

References

1. E. E. Maccoby, "The Role of Parents in the Socialization of Children: An Historical Overview," *Developmental Psychology* 28 (1992): 1006-1017.
2. D. Baumrind, (1967). "Child-Care Practices Anteceding Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior," *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75 (1967): 43-88.

Parenting With A Purpose: Seasons Of Parenting

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Ecclesiastes 3:1, “To every thing there is a season, a time and every purpose under the heaven.”

Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

1 John 2:12-14, “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked on, I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

Proverbs 29:21, “He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.”

Definitions:

- **Season:**

1. A time characterized by a particular circumstance or feature.
2. A suitable or natural time or occasion.

- **Parenting Seasons:¹**

1. Season of Being a Servant – Provide love and nurture building to the Season of Authority.
2. Season of Authority – Increase in structure, consistency, and expectations which builds to the Season of Mentoring.
3. Season of Mentoring – Increase in instruction, guidance, and support which builds to the Season of Friendship.
4. Season of Friendship – Decrease in authority and responsibility for meeting child’s needs while increase in friendship and mutual respect which leads to healthy family units that can serve in the church family and bring glory to God.

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

The Journey of Parenting: The concept of parenting seasons brings milestones to the journey of parenting. It brings awareness to where you are as a parent based on the ages of your children and where you would like to go as they mature. It also brings awareness to your children’s needs at different seasons of life and the parent’s role in meeting those needs.

Parenting With A Purpose: Seasons Of Parenting

APPLICATION –The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life” mode?

Discerning Your Parental Role: In “real life,” parenting does not move smoothly from one season to another, nor do parents stay exclusively in one season. Instead, look at the seasons of parenting as a general guide to what your child will need from you at different stages of their development. Parents need to ask God for wisdom and discernment so they are able to move from one parental season to another based on the specific needs of a situation. Clearly, a child over the age of two will still need his parents to move into the Servant Season from time to time. Likewise, a five year old child will need his parents to occasionally move into the Mentoring Season and not stay solely in the Authority Season. Parents who are aware of their role and their child’s needs will have greater clarity of where to focus their energy in what is often the very draining and confusing journey of bring up a child. Of course, this becomes more challenging when parenting multiple children who will need you to be in different seasons. For example, parents may have a newborn child who needs a Servant while their young child needs a parent in the Authority Season. Being able to navigate these very different seasons is challenging but necessary.

Description of the Seasons of Parenting:

- **Servant Season (Ages 0-2):** In the servant season, a parent’s role is to serve the child by providing for his basic needs. A child will not survive infancy without consistent, direct intervention from parents. It is important that mothers and fathers know their role and fulfill it. This season can be extremely demanding on mothers and fathers alike. It is wise for parents to make an effort to exercise the love detailed in 1 Corinthians 13 through the blessings and challenges of caring for an infant. During this season, parents work to establish bonds, build connections, trust, language, and security. This is done through activities such as changing diapers, feeding, clothing, talking, playing, and singing.
- **Authority Season (Ages 3-12):** This season is the parent’s prime time to establish the foundation of obedience through intentional and purposeful training and instruction (Deuteronomy 6). In today’s society it can be difficult for parents to shift from the Season of Servant to the Authority Season. One reason this shift is difficult for some is because they have bought into the belief that a “good parent” is someone who helps their child avoid all disappointment and hurt. When this is the primary goal of parents, they are not able to adequately step into the Authority Season. Shifting into the Authority Season will only take place if the parents make a shift themselves and begin to give age-appropriate responsibilities to the child. This transition takes work and intentional action. In this season, parents are building a framework of right and wrong for the child. Many directives and explanations will be given with the hope of developing principles and the joy of Biblical obedience, not just a list of rules.

The following are some examples.

- o Please get your shoes.
- o Please write Grandma a thank you.
- o Please tell me the truth about the scratch on the car.
- o Please do your chores before riding your bike.

Parenting With A Purpose : Seasons Of Parenting

- **Mentoring Season (Ages 13-18):** During the Mentoring Season, the parent's role falls heavily into leading and instructing the child towards managing the future expectations of adulthood. It is a unique time of stretching the need to grow in responsibilities while maintaining an anchor of willingness to still receive counsel and advice. It is important for the parent to have a clear understanding of the differences between *preferences* and *moral absolutes* so they can lead and instruct in the way of truth. Preferences are personal choices that everyone has the right to make. Examples include a favorite color, food, or way to relax. It cannot be said that someone's preference is wrong. People may disagree, but neither is wrong. However, moral absolutes are defined in Scripture and are true for all people, at all times, and at all places. For example, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is an absolute. Parents need to guide their children by helping them learn and discern the difference between absolutes and preferences. In modern society many people believe that there are no moral absolutes and that personal preferences rule. This belief clearly does not square with Scripture. Parents need to discern when an adolescent's behavior represents a difference in a preference from the parents' preferences and when the issues are about biblical absolutes. One battle is worth fighting for; the other will just lead to strife.

In this season, parents are assisting their children in building their own framework for making good decisions and choices in their lives. Early on, they may make a lot of poor choices and parents may want to revert back to telling them what they should be doing rather than discussing and allowing them to experience the rewards/consequences of their choices. However, it is essential that they are allowed to learn from the "law of reaping and sowing" in this stage of their lives. *Galatians 6:7-8* says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

In this stage it is important for discussion to take place that exposes the heart of the child. The scripture is clear that our words and behaviors flow from the heart, as shown in *Matthew 15:18* "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man," and *Luke 6:45* "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." Therefore, changing a child's words and actions can only come from winning the battle for the child's heart. Consider how Christ interacted with those who opposed him. Christ typically would ask questions getting to the heart of the issue instead of engaging in a debate. This approach made those Christ interacted with consider their own heart and motives.

The following are examples of questions that could help address a child's heart.

- o Is what you are doing obeying or disobeying one of God's commandments?
- o Is what you are doing honoring to God?
- o Where does that choice lead you?
- o What can be learned from that experience?
- o What is an appropriate time for us to agree on you coming home?
- o What has led you to make that decision?
- o What were you hoping to accomplish?

Parenting With A Purpose : Seasons Of Parenting

- **Friendship Season (Ages 18+):** Finally, the Friendship Season is where the parent-child relationship looks more like that of fellow peers. Here parents are enjoying and building a lifelong friendship of transferring wisdom and counsel to the next generation. Parents' relationships with children at this stage likely consist of asking questions, challenging, encouraging, listening, offering counsel, and so on. The difference is in the authority parents have in those interactions. The Bible is clear about children obeying and honoring (*Ephesians 6:1-2*) their parents. The Bible is also clear that as children grow into adults they are responsible and accountable for their actions (*Ezekiel 18:20*). These verses point to the concept of growth in children's lives from obeying and being under the authority of parents to becoming accountable for their own actions.

The previous parenting seasons (Servant, Authority, and Mentor) point to and prepare children for adulthood when they become more independent from their parents. In the majority of cases, children will grow into adults that live separate, but connected, lives from their parents. This is what the friendship season encompasses. While some may choose a different word than friendship to describe this season, it is a good goal to have in mind as the children move toward becoming adults. In this season, parents ask questions more as peers rather than authority figures, although parents are still authority figures in their lives. Bringing them up to walk in God's ways will make them wise and bring blessings to the relationship.

Proverbs 15:20, "A wise son maketh a glad father: ..."

Proverbs 23:24-25, "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice."

Proverbs 27:11, "My son, be wise, and make me heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me."

How does this concept benefit children?

- **From Child to Adult:** Parenting through the four seasons encourages growth for the child and leads him toward becoming a healthy, functioning, independent adult. This is a process that goes through numerous transitions. Unless parents make a shift in their own behavior and parenting, a child can become stuck and not effectively move through the stages of growth.
- **Right Training at the Right Time:** *Proverbs 22:6* encourages parents to "Train up a child in the way he should go . . ." It is important for parents to have the wisdom to know what this training looks like. Recognizing a child's personality and developmental stage will help parents train their child in the most appropriate way for that time in the child's life.
- **Accepting Who God Created Them to Be:** Parents can provoke a child to anger if they have hopes/expectations that are not appropriate for who God has created their child to be. Awareness of parental seasons and moving through them effectively can help prevent this from occurring. By not stepping into (or out of) the role your child needs, you will frustrate him. Knowing what your child is capable of at his age is important to appropriately "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Parents are doing their child a huge disfavor when they do not recognize and appreciate who their child is. Parents often have hopes, dreams, and expectations for their child that are not in line with who God has created that child to be. This might come out in a parent's career wishes, academic expectations, interests, etc. for their child. God has created each child with unique gifts, talents, abilities, temperament, and interests. Parents who do their best to facilitate a child's growth in line with who the child is will bless the child and enjoy watching him thrive.

Parenting With A Purpose: Seasons Of Parenting

Recap of Parental Role and Desired Product of Parental Seasons:

1. **Servant** – Provide love and nurture building to the Season of Authority.
2. **Authority** – Increase in structure, consistency, and expectations which builds to the Season of Mentoring.
3. **Mentoring** – Increase in instruction, guidance, and support which builds to the Season of Friendship.
4. **Friendship** – Decrease in authority and responsibility for meeting child's needs while increase in friendship and mutual respect which lead to healthy family units that can serve in the church family and bring glory to God.

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

1. Make a list of the names and ages of each of your children. Identify what season of parenting you are in with each of your children. Then write what you enjoy and what you find challenging about each of those parental seasons.
 2. Depending on each parent's personality and background, transitions between some seasons may be more difficult than others. Look at the seasons and consider which will likely be most challenging for you and why. Here are some things to consider if you are not sure which seasons may be more challenging than others.
 - Which of the seasons sounds most and least appealing to you: servant, authority, mentor, friend?
 - Which season best describes your mother: servant, authority, mentor, friend?
 - Which season best describes your father: servant, authority, mentor, friend?
 3. Are you stuck in a season of parenting that requires a parenting shift into a different season?
 4. How will you prepare for or begin transitioning to the next season, as appropriate?
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References

1. J. Rosemond, *Parenting By the Book: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child* (New York: Howard Books, 2007).

Parenting With A Purpose: Communication

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Proverbs 25:11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

Proverbs 18:13, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”

Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

- Effective communication is essential for a healthy relationship. Effective communication leads to enriched relationships as it allows parents to obtain information that will aid in their ability to lead their children.

Parenting With A Purpose: Communication

APPLICATION –The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life” mode?

- **Communication takes a Speaker and a Listener:** Good communication requires a Speaker and a Listener. The Speaker’s goal is to share information, while the Listener’s goal is to understand the information being sent by the Speaker. While this may seem self-apparent, unfortunately many conversations take place with two Speakers and no Listeners! Parents must be willing to be both a Listener and a Speaker, not just one or the other. People who have a tendency to be one or the other should try to gain more balance.
- **Watch out for Filters:** Anything that comes between the Speaker and the Listener that interrupts or alters the message is a filter (or barrier) to good communication. Filters can be either environmental or internal.
 - o *Environmental filters* can be things like being in different rooms, noise, or someone listening to an iPod while others are trying to talk with them.
 - o *Internal filters* have to do with an individual’s emotional and physical state. For example, being angry, frustrated, tired, or having a headache can all impact how a person speaks and listens.
- **You Communicate Constantly:** Communication takes place regardless of the presence or absence of words. This communication can either build or destroy relationships. Healthy communication facilitates growth, safety, clarity, and understanding.
- **Communication and your Emotional State:** A calm emotional state, plenty of rest, proper nourishment, and minimal filters between parents and children will make a big difference in communication. Remember, communication takes place whether the conditions are ideal or not. Parents must work to communicate appropriately even when they are tired, frustrated, angry, and the circumstances do not lend themselves to healthy communication. It is easy for parents to have their own “temper tantrums” during these times. Recognize when these challenges are present and look to the Lord for strength. Pray first, listen second, react last.
- **Watch your Tongue:** Scripture is very clear about the power of the tongue and the need for it to be controlled. Read *James 3:2-8* below and think about how it applies to parenting.

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

Parenting With A Purpose: Communication

We can see from this passage that we do not have the ability in and of ourselves to control the tongue. We need God's help! The good news is that He is willing and able to help us. *Colossians 4:6* provides good counsel, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." To do this, we must submit ourselves to God, be prayerful, and grow in grace.

- **Nonverbal Communication is Powerful:** Be aware that nonverbal messages are constantly being sent. Facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, etc., all speak volumes. Also, remember that parents are modeling interpersonal skills to their children. If parents don't use good eye contact with children when they are talking to them, how will the children learn to use good eye contact when other people are talking to them?
- **Work to keep Communication Open:** Some of the most common reasons children do not verbally communicate with parents are:
 1. They believe they will not be heard.
 2. They believe it will do no good to do so.
 3. They are trying to make a point or be controlling.
 4. They don't understand their feelings well enough to communicate them.

Parents can reinforce positive or negative beliefs about communicating through the verbal or nonverbal messages they send. Remember that it is the parent's job to go the extra mile to understand how to communicate best with their children. This will not be easy! However, remember the wisdom of *Proverbs 20:5*, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out."

Seeking to understand your child's perspective by being a good listener is one of the most helpful things you can do to help overcome the top two barriers to communication listed above. Taking the time to help your child feel heard will then allow you to speak wisdom into their lives. It is very difficult for the heart to be open to counsel when we don't believe we have been heard.

- **Make Sure your "Walk" Matches your "Talk":** *Matthew 5:37* teaches us the "yea, yea; nay, nay" principle. That is, we should say what we mean and mean what we say. When words and actions do not match, the Biblical instruction of meaning what is said is not being followed. Obviously this is a high calling, yet we are to take this standard seriously and desire to move toward it. When a parent's walk and talk don't match, they have the opportunity to take the lead in modeling how to acknowledge sin, repent, confess, and move forward.
- **Knowing how to Communicate with your Child is Important:** Learn which type(s) of questions each child will respond to best: open ended vs. closed, or general vs. specific. Also know what type of tone is needed with each child. It is very likely that every child will respond differently from the others. Being aware of these differences and responding to them appropriately will help parents communicate more effectively with their children.

Parenting With A Purpose: Communication

How does this concept benefit children?

- **Intentional Communication Brings Clarity:** When parents are intentional about what they communicate, it reduces the probability of a child misinterpreting what was meant by what was said. We all put meaning to information. Parents who are willing to help place correct meaning to what is being said will help reduce conflict and frustration for both the child and the parents.
- **What you Communicate is what you Teach:** Communication in the home will shape how a child communicates with parents and others in his life. Displaying and teaching healthy communication skills at home is one way parents can model the Fruit of the Spirit to their child. The Fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22*) will then manifest themselves through healthy social skills such as being courteous and polite.
- **He First Loved Us:** It is the parent's responsibility to teach and model healthy communication. This can be done through first communicating love, affection, and blessing before expecting it in return. Christ did the same for us! (*1 John 4:19*, "We love him, because he first loved us.")

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

1. What are your strengths when it comes to communication? What are your spouse's strengths when it comes to communication? Your child's?
2. In what ways could your communication improve? What changes could you make that would help you communicate better with others?
3. Rate yourself on the following items from 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.
 - a. Communication.
 - i. How well do you communicate your thoughts and feelings verbally? ____
 - ii. How well do your verbal and nonverbal messages match? ____
 - iii. How well do you avoid being negative or critical in your communication? ____
 - iv. How well are you communicating in a way that encourages and edifies? ____
 - b. Listening.
 - i. How well do you listen? ____
 - ii. Ask your spouse how good of a listener he/she feels you are. ____
 - iii. Ask your child how good of a listener he/she feels you are. ____
4. What are three to five concepts you want to clearly and consistently communicate to your children (i.e. "God loves you." "God is good." "I love you.")?

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Proverbs 23:12, “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.”

Psalms 43:11, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

- **Biblical Discipline is Motivated by Love:** The Bible is clear that (a) discipline must be motivated by love and (b) the lack of parental discipline is an indicator of an absence of love. Read *Hebrews 12:6-11* below and think of its application to parenting.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

Hebrews 12:6-11, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth [correction; discipline], and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

These verses help us understand biblical love and biblical correction and how they are to be applied. It is clearly stated that God corrects us because He loves us. His love motivates Him to correct us so we can be partakers of His holiness and that it might bring about righteousness. Biblical correction starts with love. Parental instruction needs to be motivated by the same principles we find in *Hebrews 12:6-11*.

- **Having a Biblical Vision for Parenting:** Parents must have a biblically-based vision for their child so they know what they want to teach through parenting. *Proverbs 29:18* tells us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Having a clear vision of where they want to lead their child helps parents know what to instruct and how to instruct them. As *Proverbs 1:7-8* says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:" It is a blessing for all when parents have a clear vision of what they want instilled in their child's heart. Having a clear vision in parenting means taking biblical teachings and principles and applying them to specific life issues that arise. Biblical teachings and principles provide the foundation for a day-to-day parenting plan. When parents encounter a season of struggle or challenge with their child, having a clear vision to help navigate the journey is a great source of comfort and guidance.
- **Biblical Principles Must be Taught Intentionally:** For children to know and desire the will of Christ for their lives, they need to be trained and taught in accordance with His word. *Deuteronomy 6:6-7* says, "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." If left to themselves, children, like adults, will pursue the flesh rather than godliness. *Proverbs 29:15* is a sober reminder of this when it says that a child left to himself will bring shame to his mother. The Christ-centered honor and respect between parents and children talked about in *Ephesians 6:1-4* will not just happen; rather, it is the product of purposeful instruction. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."
- **Recognize that the Bible Provides More Parenting Principles than Specific "How-To's":** The Bible's parenting plan does not prescribe specific parenting action for specific child misbehavior. It does not stipulate specific "how-to's" in dealing with sibling rivalry or correcting a misbehaving child in a store. Rather, it describes the proper point of view that parents should acquire and to which they should adhere.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

- **Sowing Good Seeds Into the Lives of Children:** Our children have much to gain by how they handle their own actions and emotions, how they relate to others, and how they go about making wise decisions. There is joy in the lives of parents when they can observe their children reflecting wisdom (*Proverbs 23:24*). Godly wisdom can produce a harvest of the fruit of the Spirit, blessings of the beatitudes, and honor and respect for the 10 Commandments and other biblical precepts.

APPLICATION – The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life?”

Establishing the Fundamentals: As Daniel purposed in his heart to follow God (Daniel 1:8), so ought parents to purpose in their hearts to instruct their children in the truth of God’s Word. *John 17:17* says, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The “how” of instructing children in the truth of God’s word will vary from parent to parent and family to family. While the Word has graciously allowed for flexibility in the “how-to’s” of discipline methods, there are some fundamental elements that need to be in place with whatever discipline method parents choose to use. Examples include training our children (*Proverbs 22:6*), teaching them diligently (*Deuteronomy 6:7*), not avoiding correction (*Proverbs 23:13*), and not provoking them to anger (*Colossians 3:21*).

Building Blocks: Listed below is one way to consider the building blocks of parenting.¹ This model includes three core building blocks along with three modifiers. The modifiers tell us the spirit in which the building block needs to be applied. The building blocks are what we DO and the modifier describes HOW it is done.

<u>Building Block</u>	<u>Modifier</u>
a. Communication	MUST Command
b. Consequences	MUST Compel
c. Consistency	MUST Confirm

If we think about constructing a wall out of blocks, we can more easily see the need for modifiers. A wall constructed of blocks stacked together without mortar might have the appearance of being strong; it might even hurt to run into it. However, the block wall could probably be pushed over or even dismantled one by one. The modifier (i.e., how it is done) is like the cement that holds the blocks (i.e., what we do) together. The mortar between the blocks is what unifies the strength of all the blocks and can create a structure that will provide strength and security when the storms of parenting come.

Building Block 1: COMMUNICATION with modifier of COMMAND

Description of Building Block 1: This building block and modifier help answer the question, “How do we communicate instructions, limits, and expectations with our children?” The building block, Communication, forms the basis of all relationships. The modifier, Command, refers to the ability to speak or direct with specific authority. As parents, this means striving toward being seen as a trusted leader. If parents are not viewed as an authority figure in the home, it will be difficult (if not impossible) for them to be commanding in communication.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say: Are children able to rely upon the word of their parents? The “yea, yea; nay, nay” principle of *Matthew 5:37* teaches us that we have the responsibility to be clear in our communication. Do children know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that when we say ‘yes’ we mean nothing short of ‘yes?’ Or that when we say ‘no’ we mean ‘no?’ Below are four aspects of communication. Is our communication:

- Clear – direct, unambiguous, plain, free of abstraction?
- Concise – specific and intentional vs. loud and long?
- Commanding – presented with authority and assertive when it needs to be?
- Controlled – reflects gentleness, kindness, and respect?

Parental Leadership: As parents, we can and should use discipline and instruction to point a willful child toward becoming a willing disciple. However, this is accomplished not by manipulation or overly harsh consequences, but by providing the child with effective leadership. Parental leadership provides clear guidance that includes planned and purposeful discipline that is communicated effectively. Leadership is an attitude and mindset as well as a set of behaviors. When it is rooted in biblical wisdom, it can produce the desired fruit of discernment and obedience in our children (*Proverbs 1*).

Your Words Matter: Words can do great things in leading children, especially when information is communicated in a purposeful way that is built upon biblical principles. Joshua certainly displayed that type of leadership when it was time to trust and go forward into the Promised Land (*Joshua 1:1-9*).

Building Block 2: CONSEQUENCES with modifier of COMPEL

Description of Building Block 2: This building block and modifier helps answer the question, “How do we implement consequences, and how do we know which one to use?” The building block, Consequences, teaches about the effects and outcomes of one’s behavior, whether positive or negative. The modifier, Compel, refers to the ability to convince others of the need for change.

Discipline Must Be Purposeful: *Hebrews 12:11* states, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” This verse affirms that consequences are to have impact. To apply such consequences, parents need determination, discernment, and the right attitude. The consequences we give our children should be powerful enough to compel them to reestablish self-control in a present situation and then, ideally, to act correctly in similar future situations. Such consequences need to be purposefully unpleasant enough so that the child can recall from memory what happened the last time he disobeyed.

Avoid Extremes Regarding Spanking: Spanking is a specific discipline method often considered when discussing the rod of correction mentioned in the Bible (*Proverbs 22:15*). This is a matter of which there are many opinions today and in which people tend to go to extremes. At one extreme, some parents fear that spanking their child will cause him to solve problems by hitting, teach him to become violent, or that he will learn to fear his parents. Consequently, these parents will avoid using spanking at all. The other extreme includes those who believe physical force and fear is the only way to manage a child’s behavior. Neither extreme is biblical in application or in producing the fruit of honor and obedience. Rather, age appropriate and under-control spanking that is administered by a loving parent will avoid the pitfalls of both extremes.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

It is wise to consider that this method is most effective for younger aged children (2-7) when used for limited and specific misbehaviors. The term “the rod” has a deeper meaning than just using a specific stick or hand to administer a physical consequence. It also points parents to the importance of knowing why correction (in whatever form) is important and needed for children. Without correction, children will not learn valuable lessons about obedience, sacrifice, and love. The deeper meaning of the rod is about building character and restoring relationships. When these principles are lost, then correction becomes powerless, regardless of the method.

Discipline Must Keep the Child’s Best Interests in Mind: The power of the modifier “compelling” for this building block lies in how it brings purpose to consequences. It can also provide assurance to the child that his parents have his best interests in mind even when they are implementing consequences. A child will often rebel against consequences, but there is a part of his heart that will find comfort in knowing he doesn’t have to lead the home or be in charge.

Building Block 3: CONSISTENCY with a modifier of CONFIRMING

Description of Building Block 3: This building block and modifier help answer the question, “How do we maintain consistency with how we are parenting?” The building block, Consistency, allows parents to provide children with a predictable set of guidelines for living. The modifier, Confirming, refers to the ability to instruct with assurance and truth.

Steadfast Parenting: A simple definition for consistency might be to do the same thing over and over. So, one could imply that good discipline requires a parent to do the same thing over and over. However, consistency is deeper than just “doing the same thing over and over.” It is a steadfast adherence to the same principles or course of action in an intentional parenting plan.

Another definition of consistency means that there is agreement and harmony among the parts of a complex thing. For example, a husband and wife raising children of different ages can be a complex arrangement. However, there is blessing when agreement and harmony guide the parents in applying instruction, communication, and consequences.

Parental Modeling of Christ-likeness: Paul stated in *1 Corinthians 11:1*, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*” In essence, he was telling them, “Follow me as I am following Christ.” This same principle applies to parenting. Parents must follow hard after God so that their children have a good model to follow. In so doing, children who become disciples (students/learners/followers) of their parents will ultimately be directed toward Jesus Christ. Excessive inconsistency prevents discipleship. Instead of causing children to want to listen, inconsistency (in practice or principle) causes confusion. Inconsistency breeds exasperation in children and gives them reason to look at the parents in a dishonoring way (*Ephesians 6:4*).²

Consistency in Principles, Flexibility in Application: As parents, our response to our children’s issues needs to be consistent from day to day; however, our actual disciplinary tactics will vary based on the needs of the situation. To be consistent in approach, we are to pursue consistency in our attitude (i.e., the way we think and believe) and our composure (i.e., how we behave). We develop this consistency by being firmly grounded upon biblical principles. This allows parents to vary disciplinary tactics while remaining consistent in what they are teaching their children.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

The Parent's Attitude Speaks Loudly: The power of the modifier “confirming” also plays an important role in this building block. We are confirming when we reflect a definite assurance that our composure and attitudes are establishing a measure of order and truth. Consistency in these areas confirms parents’ values, vision, and determination to stay the course for their child’s benefit. This is not to say that parents have perfect composure, always know how to handle situations with their child, or never lose their cool. However, *Deuteronomy 6:6* reminds parents of the significance of having these biblical words and precepts in their hearts throughout daily life in order to more effectively impress them upon their child.

Consequences such as time out, appropriately-applied spanking, and rewards/punishments are all “How-To” aspects of Instruction. Remember that consequences, however, are just 1/3 of the Instruction recipe. The effectiveness of Instruction is largely based on the strength of each ingredient in the recipe. Consequences must compel, be communicated clearly and effectively, and be used consistently.

How does this concept benefit children?

- **The Security of Knowing:** Children want and need instruction and discipline in a way that the consequences and expectations are clearly communicated and consistently applied. To say that children want instruction or discipline is not to say that they will enjoy it or appreciate it. Rather, children thrive when they know where the “ground floor” is and have a healthy measure of predictability in their lives. Children flourish with proper instruction and discipline.
- **Parents Aren't Perfect:** Parents who are in the process of instructing their child will need to continually evaluate their approach to ensure that it is motivated by biblical principles. By modeling a willingness to admit mistakes and take a different approach, parents will help their child accept and heed instruction. The wisdom of knowing that it is ok to say we are sorry and ask forgiveness for parenting mistakes models an important biblical truth taught in the following scriptures.

Mark 11:25, “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Colossians 3:13, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also [do] ye.”

1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

- **Actions and Words Must Match:** Parents who model Christ’s expectations in their home and whose “walk matches their talk” will have a significant advantage in their instructional efforts. Examples:
 - o What parents say about loving others will not be nearly as impactful as how they treat others.
 - o Telling children to take responsibility for their actions will not be nearly as powerful as modeling it by acknowledging faults and saying, “I’m sorry.”
 - o Consider what a child is learning if they are told to forgive others when parents are not willing to forgive another person who has hurt them.

Parenting With A Purpose: Instruction

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

1. In thinking of the Instruction spoke (with training and discipline elements), how has your understanding or application of that word changed from this study? If it is the same, what point(s) from this study connected with what you already knew?
2. What expectations do you have about your role and your spouse's role in instructing your children? Consider your strengths and weaknesses and how you can help each other.
 - a. Self:
 - b. Spouse:
3. What is a family strength in the area of:
 - a. Communication that commands?
 - b. Consequences that compels?
 - c. Consistency that confirms?
4. Where does the family need to improve in:
 - a. Communication that commands?
 - b. Consequences that compels?
 - c. Consistency that confirms?
5. What will be your first priority or area to address?
6. Do you need any additional information or support to help that make happen? If so, what would that be?

References

1. John Rosemond, *Parenting by the Book: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child* (New York: Howard Books, 2007).
2. Ibid.

Parenting With A Purpose: Discipleship

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “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.”

John 15:8, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

Definitions

- **Disciple** – a pupil or student who not only accepts the views of the teacher (listens), but adheres to the practice and purpose of the teacher (obeys).
- **Discipleship** – a process through which a follower (or disciple) is taught in doctrine and precepts for the purpose of helping the person grow.

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

- As parents, an important part of our calling and responsibility is to purposefully point our children towards Christ. To model for them what it means and looks like to be a disciple of Christ.
- To be grafted into the vine of Christ and to bear the fruit of the Spirit, our children need to know:
 1. Who Christ is and their need for salvation through Him. *John 14:6* says, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”
 2. The way of salvation, as stated in *Mark 1:15*, “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Also *Romans 5:1*, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”
 3. What living a sanctified Christian life looks like. *Galatians 5:22-23* says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”
- Children must be taught that there are two forces at work in this world: God’s plan for love and salvation (*John 3:16*) and Satan’s desire for evil and death (*1 Peter 5:8*). Parents must teach and train their children to understand carnal/fleshly living prevents discipleship while growing and living in the Spirit mandates it. *Galatians 6:8* states, “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Parenting With A Purpose: Discipleship

APPLICATION –The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life?”

- **Discipleship as Christ Modeled:** Effective discipleship of our children requires that we follow the Word and provide them with Holy Spirit-inspired leadership. As parents mature spiritually and grow together in unity, their leadership in the home will grow. Disciple-making does not come easy and often requires repetition. Christ's interactions with His disciples show the need of repetition. Jesus frequently taught and showed His disciples how to love one another, how to help the hungry and hurting, and how to ask questions to discern and seek the truth. He often pulled them aside and taught them with parables to guide, grow, and gauge their understanding and spiritual growth. The depth of His love was shown to them in His ability to administer grace and truth through times where He chastised and rebuked them. He showed compassion and mercy to them in spite of their sin and lack of understanding. Christ's interaction with His disciples is a perfect example of what discipleship looks like as parents interact with and lead their children.
- **Parents must be Intentional about Discipleship:** Dads and moms need to be intentional in working together in preparing a child's heart for the seed of the Word of salvation and sanctification through Christ. The “garden” of a child's heart (*Luke 8:5-15*) requires both the strength of a tiller and rock remover and the gentleness and patience of someone separating the roots of a sinful weed from the tender new plant. The desired fruit of effective discipleship is expressed in *3 John 4* when the author said, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*” The blessedness of that joy should instill a sense of purpose and urgency for parents to want to teach and model the joys of living as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **The Importance of Parents Following Christ:** It is vital that parents model Christ-like behaviors to their children. Like Paul in *Philippians 3:17*, parents need to be able to say to their children, “*...be followers together of me...*” as we seek to follow Christ. Even at a young age, children are quite adept at noticing whether a parent's words match their actions. Since most children tend to be visual learners during their formative years, they will often believe what they see over what they hear. Therefore, it is important to be a disciple of Christ and become more conformed to His image every day (*2 Peter 3:18*). In doing so, our actions will be consistent with our words as we are preparing our children's hearts for the Word of God and for becoming a disciple of Christ.
- **Discipleship is a Developmental Process Over Time:** We are to diligently teach God's commands to our children. How we teach those truths to our children is part of the discipleship process. How parents carry out this process will vary, depending on the ages of the children. By using *Deuteronomy 6:6-7* as a model, we can glean some specific discipleship opportunities: “*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.*” These verses teach us that discipleship opportunities are around us virtually all of the time. This also means that the parenting tasks that seem mundane or insignificant can actually be the springboards to teach our children valuable lessons. What we are doing (or not doing) as parents matters and directs our children. Below are ideas about how discipleship might look with children of different ages.

Parenting With A Purpose: Discipleship

- o Ages 0-2: Starting at a tender age, the opportunity to model the love of Christ begins with the love that flows in a Christian home. When our children are in the early stages of life (ages 0-3), they love to be held and taught through our physical and emotional closeness with them. A secure and healthy attachment between parents and children helps to set the stage for developing a personal relationship with God. Eventually, children in this stage will begin to repeat modeled behaviors such as folding hands and bowing heads during prayers.
- o Ages 3-7: Allow children to learn through discovery and using Bible story books, pictures, and hands-on opportunities (coloring, etc.). Hearing the engaging stories of characters from the Bible ignites their curiosity and wonder. As children grow older, they spend increasing amounts of time with peers and less time with parents. This should motivate parents to take advantage of the unique opportunities and time they have with their children while they are young.
- o Ages 8-12: In the pre-teen years, children learn the most through the application of thoughts and ideas. In other words, “How does this work?” Therefore, focusing family devotion time on what a specific Bible story teaches us about life is helpful. Concrete examples and object lessons help anchor Biblical teachings and principles in their minds. For example, when reading the story of David and Goliath, go outside and measure against a tree how tall Goliath would have been. For the brave parent, try putting a sling together and let them learn how hard it is to throw a stone accurately.
- o Ages 13-18: Our older children are pondering the future and can benefit from teachings that show the relevance of Scripture to life today. Remember, children are moving toward independence and forming belief systems of their own during this time. When children are young, their parents’ beliefs largely govern their lives. However, as children grow into teens, the beliefs and values that govern their lives will shift from their parents’ beliefs to their own set of beliefs.

Most teachers like to test their students to see how they are doing. Allowing older children to occasionally lead a family devotion (this can be as simple as reading a short passage or story and asking a few questions) helps the parents see progress and development. Allowing them to do some leading and teaching will help them formulate their belief systems in an environment where the parents are still present and able to provide feedback and guidance. Just as Christ was preparing His disciples for the time when He would no longer be physically walking with them on this earth, parents’ roles with their teenage children is the same. Specifically, parents are training children for the times when they will not be present, such as when they talk with peers, drive from one place to another, or find themselves alone in a challenging situation. Children’s personal beliefs, not their parent’s beliefs, will determine how they respond to these situations.

- **Discipleship in Everyday Life:** Along with taking into account the age and maturity of each child, discipleship is a lifestyle that permeates all avenues of life. Below are some ideas about discipleship in day-to-day interactions.
 - o Prayer: Parents who express and demonstrate their belief in the power of prayer through the ups and downs of life are teaching their children valuable lessons. Children are taught that God is always a prayer away and that they can go to Him in times of difficulty or in times of thanksgiving (*Philippians 4:6*). Parents are also teaching their children to seek help from the ultimate Source of power and authority. Through this, children can learn to share their burdens, and they can talk to their parents when they need advice or are in a tough situation. It is a wonderful blessing for children to hear their parents praying specifically for them.

Parenting With A Purpose: Discipleship

- o Scripture Memory: Promoting and facilitating scripture memory for children to hide the Word in their heart (*Psalms 119:11*) is another powerful opportunity for children to grow as disciples. Parents should learn the verse right along with the children. Don't give in to the misbelief that some people can't memorize!
- o Reading the Bible: Remember that one of the goals of making a disciple is connecting the truths in Biblical stories to the relevance and application in everyday life (*2 Timothy 3:16*). Not only should children be taught to believe that the stories in the Bible are true, they should also be taught to develop the faith and trust that the same God who helped Noah is the same one who helps them. Having specific lessons or conversations with children about the characters of the Bible is a great way to teach about His ability and power.
- o Personal Testimonies: Parents have great opportunities to teach their children by taking the time to have conversations with them about how God has worked in the parents' lives. Parents also get to help guide children's eyes to see how God has helped or provided for the family. If parents are not purposely seeking these opportunities, they can quickly become overtaken by the cares of this life (*Mark 4:19*) and will sadly miss these teaching times.
- o Focused Attention: Making time to play with and listen to each child strengthens his ability to trust in the parent's teaching. One-on-one time with a parent is very special to children. Being engaged with children and their lives gives a parent the credibility to speak truth into their lives.
- o Family Time: Group settings can be a great way for children to learn to love God and to do His will. By learning to grow and enjoy the rewards of family fellowship, they are much better prepared for the joy of worship in a church fellowship. While God has ordained and designed the family unit for good, it is the parent's responsibility to build and nurture the family unit to experience God's blessing. Start small and early! Build on the families' experiences to establish a stable foundation of family discipleship. The supper table is one of the most powerful tools in this setting. Family vacations (short or long) are another valuable opportunity to build family time.
- o Adjust Your Expectations for Young Children: With very young children, a formal devotional time can often be hectic or chaotic. However, even a short Bible story and singing some Sunday School songs will help set important precedents in the home and teach the child about family values.
- o Show Interest in Each Other's Lives: As the children get older, the supper table should be a place to "download the day" and share about the good, bad, funny, etc. in the day. Make sure everyone gets a chance to share.
- o Have Fun Together: Laughter can be a lubricant that keeps family members looking forward to time together.
- o Family Devotions: Having a regular time of family devotions is a powerful blessing to a family. Of course, the format for this will greatly depend on the needs, ages, and schedules of the family. That said, taking time to read, discern, pray, and reason together regarding the Word will do wonders for family relationships. For example, integrating wisdom from the Proverbs and other applications from the Word are good opportunities to strengthen and sharpen disciples through family devotions. Using characters from Bible stories, doing word studies, and identifying how current events may fit with prophecy are all devotion opportunities. Allowing children some input into what is talked about and who gets to help with the lesson can also build participation and maintain interest.

Parenting With A Purpose: Discipleship

- o Family Prayer Time: Share together about needs for prayer and then take the time to pray together as a family for those specific needs. Writing prayer requests and praises down in a notebook can help the family see how God has answered prayers over time. Praying together creates trust and unity.
- o Serving Together: Serving together as a family is another great opportunity for disciple building. These could be projects in the church, neighborhood, World Relief, etc. Serving together models the teaching of being a “doer of the Word” (*James 1:22*) and focusing on the needs of others (*Matthew 25:40*).

How does this concept benefit children?

- Discipleship helps fulfill the Great Commission to raise up disciples (*Matthew 28:19*).
- Grace and peace will be multiplied to those in Christ Jesus (*2 Peter 1:2*).
- A child growing up in a home where parents are modeling Christ’s example of grace and truth experience the blessings of security and stability.
- They can have the joy and peace of salvation in Christ as they learn to place their trust in Him.
- It promotes future stability for families, church, and society.

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

1. To whom are you a disciple? Are your priorities consistent with the priorities of your Teacher?
2. The answers you gave to question #1 show where you are leading your children. Are you leading them where you want them to go? How does your current leadership style reflect biblical or secular values? Do your actions show the fruit of what your words say are your priorities?
3. What is one thing you can do to more effectively lead your children toward Christ?
4. As *Deuteronomy 6:5-7* instructs us to teach the way of the Word to our children, what are some ways that your family can accomplish that?
 - a. Individually with each child:
 - b. As a family unit:
5. What are some road blocks or barriers to fostering this “disciple-building” time with your children/family?

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

BIBLICAL BASIS – What does God say about this topic?

Proverbs 16:20, “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: . . .”

Romans 15:1, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

Psalms 22:24, “For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.”

What purpose does this concept have in the parenting wheel?

- Challenges have occurred in families from the beginning. A by-product of living in a fallen world is that there are times when our children and families struggle with issues that aren't resolved through the normal channels of proper communication, discipleship, and instruction alone. These factors are important, but sometimes not sufficient to overcome all the challenges we endure over the course of our life. Families should not feel alone in these challenges. The Bible contains a number of stories about families who struggled in both the Old Testament (e.g., rivalry between Jacob and Esau) and the New Testament (e.g., parable of the prodigal son in *Luke 15*).
- Challenges are often draining. Unfortunately, dealing with challenges without a plan can stress the fabric of marriage and family harmony. Therefore, having a solid understanding of how to approach challenges is important. Nehemiah was presented with the challenge of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (*Nehemiah: 1-6*). He faced lack of resources, resistance to change, and limited help. He didn't just blindly run into the city with some tools. Rather, he sought the Lord and then planned ahead by receiving support, materials, and insight on those who could help.
- Remember to go to the Power Source. We must rely on the working of the Holy Spirit and His power to resolve challenges. Without tapping into the power that we have as followers of Jesus Christ, all attempts to overcome will ultimately fall short.
- Avoiding extremes is essential. Parents first need to be aware that their child is struggling. Neither denial nor panic is helpful when addressing challenges.

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

- Early intervention is best. Most problems are more difficult to resolve if they have had time to become entrenched. Addressing challenges quickly and appropriately will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.
- Keeping a proper perspective when addressing challenges is one of the keys to victory. Consider Paul's perspective in *2 Corinthians 4:16-18*, "*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" God wants to draw us nearer to Him and to glorify His name through challenges, while Satan desires for them to cripple and destroy us. Consider the two passages below and how they relate to trials and God's desired outcome of these challenges compared to Satan's desired outcome for them.

The battle between God and Satan during times of trial.

1 Peter 5:6-11, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

God's grace is present and sufficient during challenging times.

2 Corinthians 12:6-10, "For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

These passages of scripture clearly show that God is not absent through trial. Unfortunately, our adversary, Satan, is not absent through our trials either. Emotionally, we may feel alone, isolated, and even abandoned at times. However, the truth of the Word tells us that God is present, aware, working, and giving us grace to overcome. Remember God's promise found in *Hebrews 13:5*, "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

APPLICATION –The act of putting something to a special use or purpose.

What does this concept look like in “real life?”

- **Challenges Come in Many Shapes and Sizes:** Challenges can be connected to biological, social, spiritual, and/or emotional issues. These four areas of human functioning are closely connected and often influence each other. Something that falls into the physical, emotional, or relational category may be the result of a spiritual issue, but this is not necessarily the case. Most often, multiple areas are involved at the same time. However, looking closely at each area can help us develop a more specific plan to best approach each challenge. Below are examples that could fall into each area:
 - o Physical: pain, lack of sleep, hunger, chemical imbalance
 - o Emotional: depression, anxiety, fear, perfectionism, low self-worth
 - o Relational: broken relationships, abusive relationships, loneliness, poor social skills
 - o Spiritual: sin, distorted view of God, lack of knowledge or misunderstandings about God
- **Christian Homes Aren’t Exempt:** Even the most loving Christian homes can (and do) experience the fallout from issues such as chronic health struggles, physical challenges, anxiety, learning difficulties, sexual acting out, sexual abuse, socially-inappropriate interactions, unresolved grief (e.g., from loss of a loved one, family tragedy, or family relocation), eating or body image issues, drug and alcohol abuse, homosexuality, rebellion and anger, distorted self-image, depression, etc. Satan often tries to use shame, confusion, and fear to isolate and keep families that are experiencing these challenges from seeking and/or receiving help from others.
- **Seek Counsel:** Seeking wisdom and guidance from the Lord through fervent prayer and study of the Word is always an essential part of our lives. In addition to seeking God’s counsel, the Bible speaks clearly about the wisdom of seeking counsel from others. *Proverbs 19:20* says, “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.” Also, *Proverbs 11:14* states, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” The type and intensity of the challenge and the resources available will determine whom should be sought out for counsel. Below is a suggested hierarchal list of those who could be consulted. Seven levels have been identified and each level builds on the previous level. Moving from one level to another does not mean that previous counsel should be disregarded. Instead, we should be adding another group of “helpers” to seek increasing levels of counsel. For example, parents should be collaborating at each level and not just at Level 1, and meeting with mentors/friends should continue even if they have moved to Level 7.

Level 1: Parents Collaborate and seek the Lord’s Direction

Level 2: Parents Meeting with Child

Level 3: Family Meeting

Level 4: Mentor/Friend

Level 5: Counsel with Elder/Minister

Level 6: Professional Helper who works with Identified Challenge

Level 7: Residential In-patient Treatment Facility

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

- **Problem-Solving Approach:** There are many ways to solve problems that our children may encounter. As parents, we want to seek wisdom to do the best we can for our children in times of need. The following are some helpful steps to apply during a problem-solving intervention.
1. **Seeking God Together.** When facing challenges, parents have the opportunity to model seeking God's guidance through prayer and reading the Word. Depending on the issue, parents may want to make the issues a matter of specific prayer time in the family. Seeking the Lord does not ensure that the conflict will go away, but it does ensure that we will be given the power and grace to overcome regardless of the outcome.
 2. **Being aware.** We need to be aware of what is going on within ourselves and the environment around us. We also need to be aware of what is going on within our children's world. Look and listen to their actions, thoughts, eating/sleeping, socializing, hygiene, learning, Internet use, etc. Sometimes getting feedback on the situation from a close friend can help us do a "reality check" to see if our perceptions are accurate.
 3. **Defining the problem.** Define the problem concretely enough that it could be understood by an outside observer. It may be helpful to think about how the identified problem may be rooted in each of the following areas: Spiritual, Physical, Relational, and Emotional. If the problem cannot be defined or is confusing as to what the contributing factors are, it is often a signal that it would be good to seek counsel from someone outside of the situation to help clarify the situation.
 4. **Identifying roles.** We engage in various roles throughout the week (work, family, church, etc). Once a challenge in the family has been defined, we can work to identify the individuals who will be involved in the problem-solving process and what each of their roles will be. Define what part of the problem and solution belongs to each parent, the child, possibly siblings, other helpers (counselor, mentor, teacher, etc.), and what each person is responsible for doing about it.
 5. **Looking at alternatives.** Begin to identify ways to address the problem. These usually aren't broad and general concepts, but more specific actions to try. For example:
 - o I will call _____.
 - o I will sit down with my spouse and develop a list of family rules and consequences when those rules are broken.
 - o I will take 20 minutes every day to do something I enjoy so I will be better prepared and more relaxed to cope with the challenges that arise.
 - o I will faithfully bring my burden to the Lord in prayer with the desire to accept the Lord's will and solicit His help and guidance.
 6. **Giving up on the "silver bullet."** When problems occur in our lives, we usually want quick solutions. Indeed, when the problems are simple, then the solutions are often simple too. However, it can be tempting to try to find simplistic solutions to complex problems. When they are frustrated, overwhelmed parents sometimes have the tendency to jump from solution to solution, chasing from one supposed "cure" to the next. However, in the middle of a stressful situation, we should do our best to avoid giving up too quickly on the plan of action, avoid fad cures, and realize that the solution to the situation is not going to work exactly like someone else's solution.

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

7. **Planning.** Develop a plan of action. It can be helpful to write down the plan and date it.
 8. **Doing.** Carry out the decided action. Remember that most challenges didn't develop "overnight" so don't expect "overnight" success either. Parents need to help each other stick with the plan to maintain consistency.
 9. **Studying.** Look at the results of how the plan is going and determine if adjustments need to be made. It is helpful to keep a journal during this time and record successes, set-backs, "ah-ha" moments, drastic changes, or big swings in behavior, etc.
 10. **Taking Additional Action.** If what we are doing has not brought some relief to the situation or things have gotten worse, it is time to use what has been learned and begin a different intervention. Remember that some interventions require patience for the change to begin to take form (depending on the problem, sometimes weeks and months), while others need immediate attention and follow up (self-injurious behavior, etc.). If we feel confused and struggling with what to try next, it is often helpful to seek counsel at this time.
- **Some Challenges Persist Despite Taking Action:** Taking the right steps and following wise counsel does not guarantee that we will get the results we are hoping for. We live in a fallen world and some parents will have to grow towards worshipping and giving God glory in situations that cannot be fully understood or changed. In these situations, consider these principles from the Word:
 - o It is ok to hurt. *Matthew 26:37-39, John 11:35*
 - o Cry out to God. *Psalms 13, 1 Samuel 1:9-18*
 - o Acceptance. *Philippians 4:11, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9*
 - o Thankfulness. *Hebrews 13:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Ephesians 5:18-20*
 - o Encouraging others in similar circumstances. *2 Corinthians 1:3-4*
 - **Hindrances to Getting Help:** Parents sometimes resort to hiding, ignoring, or minimizing the challenges they face in their families. While these reactions are understandable, they are not helpful or biblical. Unfortunately, fear, pride, and embarrassment can keep parents from taking necessary action toward identifying and working through challenges. Take a moment to consider what keeps us as parents from seeking help for challenges we experience with our children. Ask God for the strength to move past fear by moving forward in faith.

How does this concept benefit children?

- **Teaching Them Problem Solving Skills:** Working through challenges in the family is a way that parents can (and should) teach children how to apply biblical principles in their everyday lives. Remember, most children lack the life experiences and sufficient brain development in the areas of logic, reasoning, and discernment to make all the right problem solving choices during childhood. Therefore, parents have a great opportunity to teach, model and mentor their children through challenging times in a manner that is appropriate for the children's developmental level.
- **Pointing Them to Christ Through Trials:** God provided a bridge for our sin (a challenge we couldn't overcome on our own) through Jesus Christ. It is imperative that parents model Christ-likeness and become a bridge for helping their children deal with their challenges.

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

- **Experiencing Parental Advocacy:** When going through trials and challenges, children need to know that their parents clearly love and desire the best for them. What a blessing it is for children to grow up knowing that their parents are supporting them no matter what. This doesn't mean that we will always be pleased with our children's behavior. In fact, many times during challenges children will not appreciate the parents' role and will even become angry and defiant against the parents for trying to help. In this way, parents model God's love for us in drawing us closer to Him, even when we sometimes resist. *1 Thessalonians 5:14* provides us with counsel about how to handle a wide assortment of problems, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."

PERSONAL REFLECTION – How am I doing in this area?

What is a challenge that I am currently experiencing? Begin to lay out a plan for walking through this challenge.

1. **Seeking God Together:** When facing challenges, parents have the opportunity to model seeking God's guidance through prayer and reading the Word.
2. **Being aware:** We need to be aware of what is going on within ourselves and the environment around us, including our children's world.
 - What emotions is my child experiencing (or seem to be displaying)?
 - What emotions am I experiencing?
 - At first glance, or on the surface, what do I see happening?
 - Are there patterns I can identify?
 - How are others being affected?
 - Is there someone I should talk to to help me get perspective?
 - What happened (family, community, church, etc.) before the challenge arose?
3. **Defining the problem:** Define what the problem is concretely enough that it could be understood by an outside observer.
 - What is happening that I believe needs to change?
 - When does the challenge occur?
 - How long has the challenge been present and how long does it last (if applicable)?
 - Are there times, events, situations, or people that seem to make the challenge greater or less?
 - What are the Spiritual Issues involved in the Challenge?
 - What are the Physical Issues involved in the Challenge?
 - What are the Relational Issues involved in the Challenge?
 - What are the Emotional Issues involved in the Challenge?
4. **Identifying roles:** Once a challenge in the family has been defined, we can work to identify the individuals who will be involved in the problem-solving process and what each of their roles will be.
 - What can I as a parent do about the identified challenge?
 - What can the child do about the identified challenge?
 - Do either of the parents need to increase or decrease their role in dealing with this issue?
 - Who are some possible support people that we can counsel with?
 - Is it time to add another perspective by counseling with an additional person(s)? If not yet, at what point should we add someone?

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

5. **Looking at alternatives:** Begin to identify ways to address the problem. These usually aren't broad and general concepts, but more specific actions to try.
 - Of the interventions that we have tried to use in overcoming this challenge, which ones have been helpful? Which ones have not helped?
 - Additional ideas on what else can be done:
 - Ideas from those we are/will counsel with:
 - What perspective does the Scripture give on the identified challenge?
6. **Giving up on the “silver bullet:”** It can be tempting to try to find simplistic solutions to complex problems.
7. **Planning:** Develop a plan of action. It can be helpful to write down the plan and date it. Identify your action steps in tackling this challenge:
 1. First I will...
 2. Then I will...
 3. Finally, I will...
 4. Extra steps include...
8. **Doing:** Carry out the decided action. Remember that most challenges didn't develop “overnight” so don't expect “overnight” success either. Parents need to help each other stick with the plan to maintain consistency.
9. **Studying:** Look at the results of how the plan is going and determine if adjustments need to be made. It is helpful to keep a journal during this time and record successes, set-backs, “ah-ha” moments, drastic changes, or big swings in behavior, etc.
 - Set a date for evaluating progress and the plan:
 - Are there any actions that we had difficulty doing or finding success with?
 - Are there any actions that the child had difficulty doing or finding success with?
 - Are there any actions we did well with or went better than expected?
 - Is this a challenge that can be fixed or one that must be managed/accepted?
 - What perspective does the Scripture give on the identified challenge?
 - Is it time to try something else?
10. **Taking Additional Action:** If what we are doing has not brought some relief to the situation or things have gotten worse, it is time to use what has been learned and begin a different intervention. Remember that some interventions require patience for the change to begin to take form (depending on the problem, sometimes weeks and months), while others need immediate attention and follow up (self-injurious behavior, etc.). If we feel confused and struggling with what to try next, it is often helpful to seek counsel at this time.
 - Go back through steps 1-2.
 - Consider moving to a different level on the list of helpers below.
 - Go back through steps 4-7.

Parenting With A Purpose: Problem Solving For Challenges

Seeking wisdom and guidance from the Lord through fervent prayer is essential at each of the following levels.

Level 1: Parents Collaborate and seek the Lord's Direction

Level 2: Parents meeting with Child

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