

HABIT NINE

Raise Confident Children

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Few things in life are as important, potentially rewarding, or heart breaking as raising children. This chapter provides tools for contributing significantly to your child’s confidence, courage, and self-acceptance. You can help your children gain the ability to relate favorably with others. The goal is to equip your children to influence their peers more than their peers influence them. If you do this, they will be more stable and steady. Regardless of the company they are in, they will be unshaken and unshakable. If you take these suggestions and testimonies seriously, you will worry less about your children getting into the wrong crowd — unless they are trying to reach out to them with the love of Jesus. However, there is a catch. This habit will take a lot of your time for the first 18 years of each child’s life.

For a number of years before Char and I were married, I prayed and searched for a wife and anticipated being married. Life with Char has been even better than I expected, though, as you

noticed in Chapter 8, we have had to be intentional. We deliberately decided we would remain friends after we were married — and then worked at it. One of the great surprises in life, however, has been the joy of parenting. We have thoroughly enjoyed each progressive stage with our children. We have experienced times of progress for both children *and* parents. Each phase — newborns, babes-in-arms, toddlers, primary students, junior high, senior high, college, and now adulthood — has produced a never-ending drama of personal growth and joy that has far surpassed anything I dreamed. Still, just as in marriage, successful parenting also must be intentional; you have to make a decision and then work at it. Because of the great importance of parenting responsibilities, Chapters 9 and 10 are devoted to this subject.

It Is Possible

We all want to raise confident and obedient children. Both qualities are possible, and we all have the power to do it right. I used to wonder if I would be a good parent. Char and I were blessed to have parents who demonstrated a good mixture of love and discipline. Char's wise and elderly grandmother came to Canada to help when our son, Dan, was born. She too had some excellent practical advice for us. Before we left Canada for Korea, we attended a very helpful Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar by Bill Gothard. In the early 1970s when Char taught Christian family studies in Korea, we absorbed other valuable materials like *Dare to Discipline* by Dr. James Dobson and *The Christian Family* by Larry Christianson. Those are great standard books on raising children, and most Christian bookstores have these or many other updated fine books available. Later, I listened to a taped series by Charlie Shedd. In what follows, you will find traces of what we learned from these sources. Distinct advantages belong to those of us whose own parents were good role models. Yet, even without the advantage of good parents, there are plenty of written materials and experienced successful parenting veterans available to serve as role models. This and the next chapter can help you get started.

Children become adults. That may seem like a blinding flash of the obvious, but much of our adult behavior reveals that we either do not know or believe this. When we disregard or disrespect our children, we seem to be saying that we do not feel they are significant. Children are people, and their development is important. Respecting, enjoying, loving, and spending time

with each child built a strong friendship between us that has flourished now that our children are adults. This strong friendship provided a good relationship with them for training them in the ways of the Lord that included both proper attitude and behavior. With careful thought based on recognizing the importance, value, and rewards of parenting, you too can do well. Don't be afraid; just take parenting very seriously.

Decisions and Priorities

A primary step toward raising confident children is to intentionally choose to do it. You must believe the value of raising confident and obedient children is greater than the cost. Otherwise, you may prefer not to have children. Recognize the time it takes to raise responsible citizens, and make a prayerful and united decision with your spouse. Child rearing has tremendous rewards, but it is not without costs. If we count the cost in advance, we will be ready to face the years of responsibility that follow the excitement of the stork's arrival. These costs, paradoxically, provide us another important arena for spiritual growth. In God's economy, when someone gives, everyone profits — including the giver.

The first step is to prepare for children. Readiness means different things to different people. Whether that readiness is psychological, spiritual, or financial, children should be welcome and anticipated. Psychological and spiritual preparation should precede other preparation. It is not a sin for married couples to choose to remain childless. Under some circumstances, such a practical decision could show maturity and great foresight. Under other circumstances, however, if children will not be warmly welcomed, it would be better not to have them than to raise problem children who become problem adults. It is sad to see children growing up in an unprepared, unwelcoming, and undisciplined atmosphere. No one wants problem children. Better not to be parents.

Parenting takes time and commitment. Adults sometimes lament that they did not spend more time with their children. No matter what we've done wrong in the past, we can correct our courses mid-stream so we have no regrets later. Along with hundreds of other parents, I chose to take time developing our sons, and I have never ever been sorry. An obedient and confident child brings great satisfaction and happiness to the parents while a disobedient child brings shame to them.

Numerous times during our 13 years as missionaries to Korea, time invested in our sons took some time from my work. Affirming my personal priorities, I often said to myself during those years, "I may fail as a missionary, but I will not fail as a father." I enjoyed my work as a missionary and felt it was some of the most important work anyone could do. Even so, it was less important to me than my role as a father. Fortunately, I was not a failure as a missionary and I received a great deal of satisfaction from my small part in the success of the church we worked with in Korea. Nonetheless, I derive even more satisfaction from having raised obedient, confident sons.

When we were preparing to leave Korea, many of our students who had become pastors visited us in our home. Koreans are wonderfully polite, and they came in large numbers to greet us during those final days. Several made statements that typically sounded like, "We learned from you in the classroom, but we learned more from you by visiting your home. The happiness the two of you enjoy together in your marriage and the pleasantness, obedience, and manners of your sons have taught us much about Christian family life." Money cannot buy the joy remarks like these produce deep in our spirits.

When parents attach more importance to parenting than to career responsibilities, they experience fewer crises in the parent-child relationship. Paradoxically, the career does all right, too. This policy led us to problem-free parenting. It eventually gave us more freedom to pursue careers than if we had originally given careers first priority. Illustrations of this irony abound.

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The Link between Confidence and Obedience

Confidence and obedience in our children are interrelated. To raise children who are secure and confident, most people realize that parents should learn how to affirm and encourage them. What some people do not realize is that there are deeper