

parenting
with hope

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PART 1

**The Basics:
Foundations
of a Christian
Home**

God's Word

Prayer

The Church



CHAPTER 1

An Instruction Manual for Life: God's Word

I'll never forget the first time I put my daughter Emma in her car seat. My husband and I were living in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Emma was born a week early. As we prepared to leave the hospital, we bundled her up and strapped her in the seat to the best of our abilities. She looked so incredibly tiny in her big baby carrier.

We then called for a taxi. Living overseas on a student budget meant that we didn't have a car, so I'd never had an opportunity to practice adjusting a car seat. As we carried all our things to the waiting driver, we did our best to safely secure her, feeling completely unprepared and unqualified for the task before us.

Buckling her in was just the beginning of my feelings of inadequacy. I didn't know how to bathe her, feed her, care for her, or parent her. I'd been handed this amazing gift and I found myself wondering, *Don't they come with instruction manuals or something?*

I'd read the books; I'd tried to prepare. But head knowledge can take you only so far. There are some parts of parenting that are learned only as you put theory into practice.

I felt inadequate on my first day of parenting. I continue to feel that way 23 years later. While I've now been a mother for many years, I'm still the first-time mother of an adult daughter. I'm still learning. I'm still growing. I'm still making mistakes. I'm still finding my way.

While I haven't found that longed-for parenting manual that gives me explicit instructions for each season of parenting, I can tell you, without a doubt, that I've found something even better. God's Word has been my firm anchor, my shining light, my faithful guide, my trusted resource, and my sure hope in every season of parenting.

It hasn't told me the particulars of how to get my child to sleep through the night or eat her vegetables. However, it has imbued me with patience and kindness while enduring another sleepless night or finding a veggie mysteriously hidden under a napkin (again). God's Word hasn't kept me (or my children) from the realities of suffering, but it has been a comfort while walking through painful losses and unmet expectations. God's Word doesn't promise me that my children will live long lives, get married, have grandchildren, or become Christians, but it does promise me that God will be with me always, never leaving nor forsaking me.



What we believe and how we live matters greatly for whether our children know, love, and obey God's Word.

As we enter the preteen and teenage years with our children, we know God's Word is important. We want them to read it. We encourage them to study it. We hope that they'll love it. And we pray with all sorts of fervor that they'll obey it.

But before we get to our children's relationship with God's Word, I

want us to think as parents about *our* relationship with God and his Word. What we believe and how we live matters greatly for whether our children know, love, and obey God’s Word. We can’t make our children believe in Jesus (see Ephesians 2:8-10), but we can put them in an environment that allows them to witness the fruit of God’s work in our lives. We can hope they hear God’s Word in our home and see its effects on our lives.

You may be tempted to skip over these first chapters, wanting to move on to the “important” stuff—like telling you whether or not it’s okay for your teens to watch certain YouTube videos or wear certain kinds of clothing.

There’s a reason we’re starting here. Parenting isn’t just about figuring out how to manage your teen. In every season of parenting, God is teaching us about himself. He’s parenting us as we parent our children. He’s teaching us as we teach them. He walks with us and wants us to rely on him for the wisdom we so desperately long for as parents.

I can’t promise you a ready resource guide to all of life’s answers for parenting teens. But I can lead you to the One who has the answers, the wisdom, and the guidance you need for your particular child. Thankfully, he promises to be with you and guide you. And, we find him in his Word.

Principles for Parents: Thinking Biblically

Moses, the servant of God, led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. While wandering in the wilderness, he taught the Israelites the importance of following God and teaching their children to do the same. He instructed them generationally:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life...

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You

shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:1-9).

This passage encourages us as parents to teach our children diligently—as we sit and rise and go along the way. However, it doesn't *start* with us teaching them.

It starts with us learning about God ourselves.

We are to love the Lord with all our might. We're to have his commands on our heart. We're to obey his Word and fear him. If we don't have this foundation, we'll never be able to teach our children.

All relationships take time to build. Friends plan times to get together and catch up. Spouses reconnect on date nights. Church members chat over potluck dinners. Building fellowship with others takes time. If we want to grow a friendship with God, we need time in his presence for that relationship to flourish. Reading the Bible on a daily basis allows us the opportunity to get to know God: What does he care about? How does he respond? Who does he love?

And, the more we know God, the more we will love God.

Have you ever had the experience of meeting someone, really enjoying them, but after a few weeks, the shine starts to wear off in the relationship? The deeper you get to know most people, the more you might be disinclined to like them. We've all got issues and problems and annoying habits. At times, this can make us fearful of letting anyone really know us or getting to know others.

However, it's the complete opposite with God. The more we know him—truly know him—the more wonderful he is. He's the creator of all

that's good. Everything that you think is wonderful, beautiful, magnificent, amazing...God is the author. All that is good in this world reflects his goodness.

Psalm 19:1-2 tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge." All of creation showcases his glory.

Yet, there's something even better than natural revelation to teach us about God—his Word. Psalm 19 continues, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).

Go back and read those verses again. What parent doesn't want revival and refreshment? Or wisdom? Or joy? Or enlightenment? What we most desperately want as parents isn't found in a spa vacation or the newest self-help book or even the bestselling Christian author's next amazing book. It's found in God's Word.



Our children cannot secure our contentment. Only Jesus can.

Here's the reality—if we're going to walk through the teenage years with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, it's found in only one place. We have to abide in Jesus. And have his words abide in us. There's no other way. Let me repeat that statement: *There's no other way to bear fruit except abiding in Jesus.* Even if your teen breezed through these years with straight A's, was captain of the football team, and voted prom king, you wouldn't have peace or joy without Jesus. Our children cannot secure our contentment. Only Jesus can.

I love to garden. I'm always amazed as I watch the tomatoes slowly grow on the vine. I spend the summer enjoying the produce. By the end of fall, the first freeze comes, and it's time to clear out the old vines.

It's easy work because once vines are dead, they lose all their strength and break apart with little effort. A detached vine crumbles to dust with the slightest touch. Perhaps that's why Jesus chose to use the image of a vine when he commanded us to abide in him, warning that apart from him, we can do nothing (John 15:1-6). Our best parenting efforts will crumble to dust without the soul-strengthening power of time spent abiding in the Word and prayer.

Parenting tweens and teens is difficult. They are dealing with changes to their bodies, swirling emotions, and fluctuating hormones. They can be awkward or angry; shy or stubborn; tearful or theatrical—and that's all in one day.

You'll be tempted to look for your joy in your children's happiness. To find your peace in their success. To be kind when they obey. To be gentle when they are loving. To love when they make you proud. To desperately just want for them to be okay. And, of course you want good things for your children and rightly rejoice in their happiness.

However, our children cannot be the source of our contentment. It's an unfair and impossible burden to place on them. Consider the pressure it puts on a child if they think they are responsible for your happiness. We're tempted to put the same pressure on our spouses. Asking anyone else to secure our happiness always leaves us unfulfilled and those we love overburdened.

Only the fruit of the Spirit at work in our heart can produce the fruit of true joy and peace and love. Yes, we can delight in our children and rejoice in good circumstances with them, but they need us to find our strength and security from a different source. We love our children freely when we're firmly rooted in Jesus.

Psalm 1 tells us that the person who delights in the law of the Lord is like a "a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,

and its leaf does not wither. *In all that he does, he prospers*” (verse 3, emphasis added).

Jeremiah uses this same imagery and declares, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, *for it does not cease to bear fruit*” (Jeremiah 17:7-8, emphasis added).

If we want to be parents who prosper in every season, we need to root ourselves in God’s Word—trusting in it, delighting in it, meditating upon it. Think of that tree planted by a stream. It’s independent of nature’s droughts and the sun’s heat. It bears fruit regardless of circumstances because it has an unending source from which to drink. We want to be like that tree.

Every parent has a unique set of circumstances as they parent. You may be concerned about the influences of culture on your child. Your child may be addicted to alcohol, drugs, video games, social media, or pornography. Your child might be battling anxiety or depression or suicidal thoughts. Your child might be engaged in sexual sin or lying or stealing or bullying. Your child might be making straight A’s and doing everything right, but pridefully independent of any need for God. Your child may not want to go to church or have spiritual conversations. Your child may be lonely or socially awkward, vulnerable to the harmful words of others. Your child may be starving herself in a quest to be beautiful (as the world defines it) and belong. Your child may be struggling in school or be cut from her favorite sports team.

I know wonderful Christian parents who have dealt with every one of these situations. We don’t get to control the hardships our children suffer. We don’t get to choose the mistakes they make. We don’t get to pick the battles they will fight.

However, we can choose to be parents who find our strength in the Lord, not our children’s successes or well-being. This is a gift to our teens

and releases them of a huge burden. We can seek God for wisdom when we have no idea what to do in the circumstances we are given rather than attempting to control circumstances ourselves. We can ask him for strength when we face the unthinkable or endure the unimaginable. In the midst of suffering, we can look to his Word for joy and comfort and peace. Our parenting prospers not because of our perfection (or our children's), but because of God's power. It's his grace and nothing else.

Purposeful Parenting: Engaging Gracefully

We begin building our homes on God's Word by abiding in it ourselves on a daily basis. Then we're ready to teach it to our children, engaging them with the truths we are learning for ourselves. We can do this through our example, our habits, and our daily conversations.

Our Example

Here's the good news/bad news as we share our faith with our children. According to a national sociological study of American religious parents (not just Christian parents):

Parental consistency in word and deed, rules, and meaningful intentions affects the success of religious transmission to children. Perception of hypocrisy when parents do not act in congruence with their religious teachings, or when parents follow the letter but not the meaning of the law...reduce children's interests in carrying forward the religious faith and practices of their parents.¹

How we live affects what our children believe about God. Take a moment to pause and consider the weightiness of that truth (yes, it's somewhat overwhelming to consider).

At the same time, let me clarify: *Your actions are unable to save your child.* Salvation is a free gift of God's grace, not the result of parental perfection. However, God uses providential means to save people. It is a

blessing for children to grow up in a home where the fruit of faith is readily apparent. Religious training through families is often the agent of grace by which our children come to faith. God is the one saving, but our homes are opportunities to create a healthy environment for spiritual truths to flourish.

Our homes can also create a negative environment. If our actions don't match our words, our hypocrisy will adversely affect our children. Teens can spot a fake. If we claim to love God but are filled with anger, discontentment, lying, and impatience, our children will notice. If we bow down to the idols of money, success, power, approval, comfort, or control, our children will observe the truth of what we love. And, most likely they will love and serve the same idols we do.

Let me also clarify: This doesn't mean that prodigal children are the result of a lack of parental integrity. I know many wonderful Christ-honoring parents whose children are not walking with the Lord. We have to hold the uncomfortable tension of two parallel truths: Our personal integrity as we walk with Jesus matters for our children, but is unable to save them. Our hypocrisy and idolatry will have a negative impact on our children, but ultimately, a lack of parental integrity is not the cause of prodigal children.

Where does this leave us? The first thing that comes to my mind is the old hymn "Trust and Obey." We entrust our children to the Lord for salvation and we obey the Lord, hoping that our faithful example will leave an indelible impact on our children. We also do everything we can to creatively engage our children with God's Word, because it has the power to do what we cannot: transform our children's minds and make them wise for salvation (Romans 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:15).

Our Habits

Every home has daily habits. You've formed them, and you probably don't even think about them very much at this point. Hopefully by the teenage years (with the exception of children with special needs), your children brush their teeth twice a day, dress themselves, comb their hair, and

take showers on a regular basis (although some teenage boys might struggle with these last two). Your home has given them daily rhythms.

One of the habits that we tried to instill early in our home was daily Bible reading. When our children were young, we read a Bible story with them every night before bedtime. Once they entered the elementary years, we began having a devotional time every morning before they went to school. This habit has continued into the teen years. Surprisingly, my kids have never complained about this time together as a family, which has taught me a lot. Here are some of the lessons I've learned.

Begin Early

The earlier you begin habits, the better for your children. Just think how problematic it would be if you forgot to teach your children to brush their teeth until they were age five. They'd probably already have a few cavities, and they wouldn't have this habit fixed in their daily routine. (And, just as a side note, I did forget to teach my youngest daughter to brush her teeth in the morning. She came home from school one day and said, "Mom, I didn't know people brushed their teeth in the morning too!" This is what can happen to the last child.)

The earlier you can begin a daily habit of reading the Bible with your children, the better. Here's the secret I tell myself on a regular basis: *Kids only know the family life you make normal for them.* Most likely, my kids have never really wondered if other families spend five to ten minutes each morning for a devotional. They may be surprised at how few of their friends read the Bible regularly with their parents. That's okay. You get to create the habits in your home.

If you feel like you've waited too long and now your children are too old to begin, I encourage you to start with a conversation. I've found that if you begin from a place of invitation rather than compulsion, the conversation usually goes better. Something like: "I want to ask you all to try something with me for a few weeks. Could we commit together as a family to be at the breakfast table ten minutes before you leave for school so that we can

read the Bible and pray for one another? I know you may not want to do this, or it may feel strange as we begin, but I believe it would be a blessing for our family to have this time together. I love you all, and I've been learning how important God's Word is, and I want us to learn from it together. If mornings are too difficult, can you help me to think of a good time that we could do this as a family?"

As your children become teens, it's helpful to allow them to become stakeholders in the family habits. Invite them into the discussion. Ask for their input. Engage them graciously. During these years, it's vital to involve them and listen to their perspective.



Kids only know the family life you make normal for them.

Also, prepare for the discussion to go differently than you may want it to. Recently, I asked my teens if we could do a family Bible study together once a week. They looked at me with eyebrows raised and asked, "Why would we do that?" I told them some of my reasons, and they responded, "We don't want to do that; we already know how to study the Bible." After some further back-and-forth discussions, I jokingly called them all pagans for not wanting to study with me, and we left it at that. Bible reading is serious business, but you don't have to take yourself too seriously. If at first you don't succeed, keep trying with new ideas. Pray for wisdom and insight as you continually invite your children to the goodness of God's Word.

Engage Warmly

Centuries ago, Puritan pastor John James encouraged, "Let your warmest affection, your greatest cheerfulness, your most engaging smiles, be put

on when you teach Scriptural truths to your children.”² He understood that *how* we teach our children matters in their receptivity toward *what* we are teaching them. Modern research agrees. According to a recent study, parents with warm and nurturing relationships were more likely to pass on their faith and religious practices to their children.³

Basically, don't make reading the Bible a miserable experience for your kids. It just doesn't go well if you're frustrated and yelling at everyone to "COME AND READ THE BIBLE!" Create healthy patterns, but don't get stuck on some sort of idyllic image of perfection. Every family is different. You may decide to read the Bible together once a week on Sundays. That's great. It's better to create a warm and inviting environment of engagement once a week than to have everyone sitting at the table every morning learning nothing because they all feel scolded and miserable. The goal is to create habits that allow your kids to learn God's Word. Focus on what works well for your family and how they learn best, not the particular method or timing if they're reluctant. Be creative for your family (you don't have to do what other people are doing) and ask God for wisdom.



**God's Word is a life book
more than a rule book.**

While there will always be a recalcitrant teenager who doesn't want to talk about spiritual matters, during my years of teaching I found that most teenagers are longing for adult attention and conversation. They may act like they don't want it, but I've found our availability as adults deeply matters to teens. Ask questions more than you supply easy answers. Be interested in their thoughts and show respect for their ideas. These kinds of

regular interactions open the door for further conversations at other times of the day. You may be surprised to find that your teens enjoy these times together, however reluctant they may be in the beginning.

I've also found that how we think about the Bible affects how we communicate it to our children. Some people think of the Bible simply as a rule book—a burden that shows them all the ways they've failed. However, God's Word is a life book more than a rule book. It's a grace to us, a demonstration of God's kindness and pursuit of his people. Scripture is a tutor, showing us our inability to fulfill the law perfectly as a means of leading us to Christ. Yes, the Bible teaches us what not to do. But more importantly, it teaches us what *to do* in order to have abundant life.

If you share God's Word more often with your children in corrective ways ("Don't do this!") than in comforting ways ("God is your refuge and help!"), they may be less inclined to want to read it. Allow your teaching of God's Word to be full of the good news: "Yes, you need a Savior. Let me tell you about how amazing Jesus is and how much he loves you."

Personal Habits

We all want opportunities to talk with our teens about the Bible. However, we also want them to be reading it for themselves. One of the best ways to normalize daily Bible reading for our children is for them to see us reading our Bibles regularly. Our personal habits leave such a deep impression on them.

I've never told my children explicitly, "You need to read your Bible on your own every day." But I've watched as they've slowly implemented these habits into their lives. In the teen years, it's important that your kids start developing their own time in the Bible at their own pace. We want them to develop a relationship with God, not guilt them or nag them into reading their Bibles. I encourage you to give each of your tweens or teens their own Bible, provide helpful Bible study resources and devotionals, and then pray that your children will open their Bibles and start reading on their own.

Our Conversations

Moses instructed the Israelites, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:7). When we read God’s Word regularly, it naturally overflows into our conversations with our children. Let me encourage you: Look for opportunities to talk about God as you go throughout your day with your children. Learning about God isn’t something that happens only during family devotions or private Bible reading. Learning about God is done in community, as we are living our lives.

Listen to your teens as they discuss the circumstances of their day. Avoid jumping in and offering quick solutions or simplistic answers. Don’t minimize what might be a discouraging or difficult situation for them. Ask good questions, engage them in conversation, and help them learn how to process their circumstances through a biblical lens. You want to help them develop discernment for themselves, not just thoughtlessly follow rules. In the teen years, it’s important (and sometimes difficult!) for parents to be quick to listen, slow to speak (James 1:19).

The survey findings from *Handing Down the Faith* explain:

The most effective parent conversations about religion with children are children-centered rather than parent-centered. In them, children ask questions and talk more while parents mostly listen; the questions about religion are clearly related to the children’s lives; parents try to help children understand their religious faith and practices; the conversations are open, not rigid or highly controlled; and the larger relationship between parents and children is thereby nurtured. When parents, by contrast, talk too much, make demands without explanations, force unwanted conversations, and restrict discussions to topics that they control, faith transmission to children is likely to be ineffective or counterproductive.⁴

The tween and teen years are a wonderful opportunity to understand the spiritual development of our children. While you may think that these are the last few years of opportunity for you to teach them all your hard-earned wisdom, they actually learn better as they talk *with* you rather than hear lectures from you. Diligence in our conversations with them doesn't mean we are the ones doing all the talking. It means that we are always thinking about ways to allow the Word to saturate our conversations and the advice we offer.

When my children were young, there were multiple cookbooks that taught various ways to sneak extra vegetables into foods like lasagnas, soups, and brownies without children knowing. The concept was to smuggle healthy foods into the foods the kids already loved so that they would get the veggies they needed.

This is a helpful way to think about working God's Word into our daily conversations with our children. You may not always be able to quote the exact verse, but as you have God's Word hidden in your own heart, you'll be able to offer his wisdom in the midst of driving your teen to soccer practice, waiting in the doctor's office, or having a late-night conversation.

Practical Advice: Living Wisely

My college education courses introduced me to the concept of different parenting styles (which were applicable to teaching styles as well), and we'll continue to refer to these throughout the book. While modern psychology is limited in its ability to give us ultimate wisdom, we can glean common-grace insights from its research. Understanding these different parenting styles has been helpful to me as I've sought to teach my children to love and obey God's Word.

Essentially, there are four different types of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved/negligent.⁵ Here's a helpful way to categorize these styles:

Authoritarian parents tend to have high expectations and

demands, with low levels of warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance. They could also be called *domineering parents*, who lead by intimidation and fear.

Authoritative parents tend to have high expectations and demands, with high levels of warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance. They could also be called *shepherding parents*, who lead wisely with patience and gentleness.

Permissive parents tend to have low expectations and demands, with high levels of warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance. They could also be called *indulgent parents*, who follow their children's lead and desires.

Uninvolved or negligent parents tend to have low expectations and demands, with low levels of warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance. They could also be called *absentee parents*, whose impact is felt by their absence more than their presence.

When it comes to understanding the distinctions between these different parenting styles, I find it helpful to imagine a backyard play area.

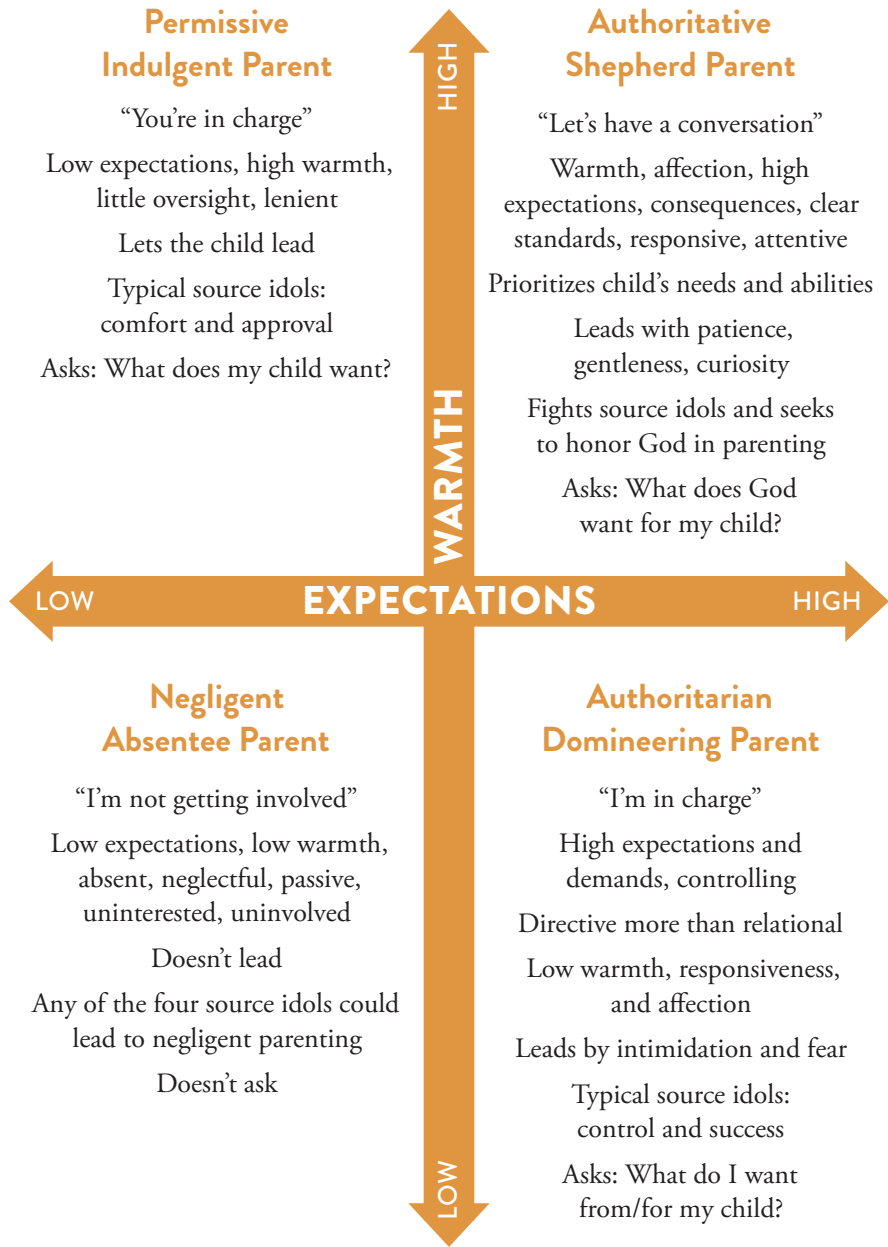
An authoritarian/domineering parent sets up a pack 'n play in the midst of a big yard and restricts the child to playing in that small and confined area. That setup may work when the child is young, but eventually the child will outgrow the pack 'n play and become increasingly frustrated by its constraints and limitations.

The authoritative/shepherd parent builds a fence that encloses the yard and allows the child a wide area to play and run that is age appropriate.

The permissive/indulgent parent opens the door to the unfenced backyard and says, "Have fun playing outside!"

The uninvolved/absentee parent has no idea what the child is doing or where the child is.

While these images present a somewhat simplistic understanding of these parenting styles, they provide insight into our homes. It's helpful to consider the type of home you grew up in, as well as your tendencies as a



Permissive Indulgent Parent

“You’re in charge”

Low expectations, high warmth, little oversight, lenient

Lets the child lead

Typical source idols: comfort and approval

Asks: What does my child want?

Authoritative Shepherd Parent

“Let’s have a conversation”

Warmth, affection, high expectations, consequences, clear standards, responsive, attentive

Prioritizes child’s needs and abilities

Leads with patience, gentleness, curiosity

Fights source idols and seeks to honor God in parenting

Asks: What does God want for my child?

Negligent Absentee Parent

“I’m not getting involved”

Low expectations, low warmth, absent, neglectful, passive, uninterested, uninvolved

Doesn’t lead

Any of the four source idols could lead to negligent parenting

Doesn’t ask

Authoritarian Domineering Parent

“I’m in charge”

High expectations and demands, controlling

Directive more than relational

Low warmth, responsiveness, and affection

Leads by intimidation and fear

Typical source idols: control and success

Asks: What do I want from/for my child?

parent. When it comes to raising our children to love and obey God, we want to have rules and boundaries for them that reflect those found in God's Word (that's the fence we put up). It's loving and kind for us to give them wise boundaries.

However, we have to be careful that we don't keep our tweens and teens in boundaries that are too restrictive (like the pack 'n play) and are more about our fears rather than God's Word. We also have to guard against having no boundaries at all because we fear that may cause our children to not like us. And, as for the uninvolved/absentee category, I'm thinking that if you are reading this book, you probably aren't a negligent parent. So, for most of our discussions, I'll focus on the authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles.

Both authoritarian/domineering and permissive/indulgent parenting are associated with negative outcomes for children. Children from authoritarian homes have lower academic performance, poorer social skills, and higher rates of mental illness, drug abuse, and delinquency. Children from permissive homes have higher rates of impulsive and egocentric behavior, poorer social skills, and problematic relationships. In contrast, children from authoritative/shepherding homes have higher academic performance, better social skills, less mental illness, and lower rates of delinquency.⁶ In addition, children who grow up in an authoritative/shepherding environment are more likely to consider the faith of their parents an important part of their own life.⁷ While parenting styles are not ultimately determinative for outcomes, they are a helpful tool for evaluating best practices as parents.

We want to teach God's Word to our children as the absolute authority in their lives. It's the firm fence for which we can always plead with our children, "Stay in this boundary for your good!" However, every family will have additional rules within their home. It takes a combination of wisdom and prayer to know how to formulate our home rules, as well as enforce them. In our next chapter, which is about prayer, we'll discuss this concept more as we seek God's wisdom in the ways we discuss and determine helpful boundaries for our teens.

A Note of Gospel Hope

Sometimes, it's intimidating to teach God's Word to our teens. Perhaps you feel as though you don't know it very well. Maybe you feel guilty for the ways you didn't obey your parents or God as a teenager and you feel like you can't expect your children to do what you didn't do. Perhaps you fear that you'll talk about the Bible too much and they'll become disinterested. Or, maybe you have many doubts yourself and are concerned your teens will ask questions you can't answer.

Let me encourage you today—it's okay to have questions. It's okay to still be learning. It's okay to be unsure of yourself. None of us feels up to the task! Thankfully we're not alone. The Spirit guides us in all truth, and God brings other Christians into our lives who can offer additional wisdom and insight for our questions. Teach the biblical truth you know, read the Bible yourself, talk with your children about the questions you have, ask a pastor or teacher for help finding answers, entrust your fears to God, and teach your children that God's grace is big enough for all their failings (and yours too!). Small steps of faithfulness can lead to big changes in our homes. Keep depending on God's Word and his wisdom in your own life, and that will impact your children.

God loves you. He loves your teen. Today is a new opportunity to know Jesus better. May his grace guide you, protect you, and help you!

MK

Parenting Principles to Ponder

- Spending time in God's Word matters. It nourishes our souls as parents and prepares us to share with our teens.
- Teens learn about godly practices by our example and our conversations with them.
- Parents who provide authoritative/shepherding homes have high expectations, alongside high levels of warmth and responsiveness. These homes typically have the best outcomes for teens.