THE INFLUENCE PARENTS HAVE ON THEIR CHILDREN
by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

INTRODUCTION

This past year my mother passed away at the age of 98 and went home to be with the Lord. The last ten years of her life were spent in a care center, because my brothers and I could no longer meet her daily needs. Following my mother’s death I began to reflect upon the influence my parents had on my life, and why I ended up becoming the person that I did. My Dad was born in Sweden back in 1898, and immigrated to Canada in 1903 where his parents homesteaded a piece of land about fifteen miles east of Calgary in the province of Alberta… my Mom was raised about 150 miles east of where my Dad was raised (she was Norwegian) — they were both raised “old school” back in the “horse & buggy days;” which was simply a very disciplined, no nonsense, hard-working, authoritarian upbringing… that was the culture that impacted my parents and made them the people they had become. My father only had one year of formal education, yet he taught himself to read and write three different languages; obviously, life back then wasn’t at all like it is today. Since that’s the culture in which my parents were raised, that in large part was the culture that was passed on to me and my brothers — all of us are the product of our upbringing. This will make more sense to you after reading this study; you will not only understand me better, but you will understand yourself better. In putting this study together, I have combined the works of about a dozen different sources (both Christian and secular), all of which are pretty much agreement with each other. Let me begin this study by quoting the work of three prominent Christian scholars at Dallas Theological Seminary —

THE IMPACT PARENTS HAVE ON THEIR KIDS

Dr’s. Paul Meier, Frank Minirth, and Frank Wichern were all colleagues on the staff of Dallas Theological Seminary back in the 1980s — Meier & Minirth were adjunct teachers of pastoral ministries, and Wichern was the director of counseling. Both Minirth and Meier have M.D. degrees and are president & vice president, respectively, of the Minirth-Meier Psychiatric Clinic in Dallas. Among their publications are Minirth’s “Christian Psychiatry” and Meier’s “Christian Child-Rearing” and “Personality Development.” Wichern has a Ph.D. from Emory University. Recognizing the scarcity of textbooks on this subject, these three professors undertook to write the highly acclaimed textbook, “Introduction to Psychology & Counseling” (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1982). The material I have written in this section was taken from the following pages (pp.145-152; 373-384). With that in mind, carefully reflect upon what they had to say —
Most people have been told in various ways throughout their lives that they are inferior: the messages are both verbal & nonverbal, intentional & unintentional. Such messages threaten the development of a strong sense of self-worth among children, thus making life far more miserable for them than it ought to be. States Meier, “It is easy to impress on young children that they are inferior because they are much smaller physically than the adults around them, and more clumsy, ignorant, and naïve. Parents rule over them, and older siblings boss them around. When they go off to school, attention always seems to focus on what they have done wrong. No wonder we all have problems in developing a healthy self-concept,” but that is simply the residual effects of living in a fallen world.

A major factor in the development of self-worth is the influence parental values have on their children — no matter what parents may say, the things they really value in life will speak far more loudly to their children… be it materialism, athletics, sinless perfection, good looks, intelligence, or humanitarianism. If children detect their parents inner dissatisfaction and frustration about not having more money and material possessions, they will also feel worthless and inferior if they don’t have them — that is simply the way our human nature functions. By the way, it is sin to base self-worth on riches; our self-worth is to be based on our faith in God, wisdom, and godly character traits. Though some of God’s choicest servants in Scripture were wealthy (Abraham, Job, David), many were not (including the apostle Paul – cf. Phil 4:11).

Some parents place a lot of emphasis on things such as good grades and perfect marks on test papers; anything less than an “A” is a dishonor to the entire family (this is particularly common in Japan and a few other countries). Children whose parents have unrealistic expectations for them will feel like failures, no matter how successful they are in the world’s eyes. Obviously, it is possible to go to the other extreme, and care little about the accomplishments of one’s children. A school-child’s self-worth is influenced considerably by how they are regarded by their peers — being average or better than average in some athletic skill is one way children can gain the respect of others their age. Yet some parents and coaches push children way too far by continually correcting them and showing them how to do things — children who ultimately accept the sports philosophy of “win at any cost,” will end up applying it to other areas of life as well. In addition to the foregoing, millions of Americans experience inferiority feelings because they insist on comparing their real or imagined physical defects with the physical attributes of others. This fallen world in which we live has passed on its whimsical values regarding what true beauty really looks like. To counter the nonsensical thinking of our world, parents need to value and praise good character; in so doing they will help their children learn to behave properly and develop the feelings of self-worth that are vital to good mental health. Minirth, Meier and Wichern say the five chief characteristics found in mentally healthy families, that ultimately develop happy, mature, emotionally and spiritually whole adults, are these:
1. **Love** — In healthy families, parents express genuine love and affection for each other and their children (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7; Mt 22:36-40; Jn 13:34-35; Eph 5:25-30).

2. **Discipline** — Scripture considers discipline as essential for a child’s good; it is to be fair, quick, and to the point (cf. Eph 6:4; Prv 13:24; 19:18; 22:6; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15; 29:17). Discipline takes many forms — at the top of the heap is communication (keep in mind communication is a two way street that requires both speaking and listening). Positive reinforcement for a job well done strengthens desirable behavior. Wrong is avoided because of undesirable consequences that may be imposed (reproof, spanking, and withdrawing of privileges). Discipline is a way of setting limits as a demonstration of love… even when children are being disciplined, parents can show that they accept and love them in spite of their undesirable behavior.

3. **Consistency** — Parents need to be united on all rules and consistently enforce them. To feel secure, children must know their limits — when limits are not known and consistently enforced, confusion, uncertainty and instability arises.

4. **Example** — Children learn much of their behavior from their parents; they end up doing what their parents do, rather than what their parents say they should do. So parents need to live up to the standards that they expect their children to observe (cf. Deut 5:29). If people live by God’s principles, later generations will follow their example.

5. **Authority** — Families are the healthiest when a father and mother cooperate in the task of parenting. Struggle for leadership between father and mother can produce neurotic children. God intended that there be harmony between a husband and a wife, not conflict. Though men and women are equal in importance in the eyes of God, their responsibilities differ somewhat (cf. Eph 5:22-33) — the wife is viewed as a “helper” in Scripture, not a slave (cf. Gen 2:18; 3:16; 1 Pet 3:7)… though the fall resulted in the wife being placed in subjection or submission to her husband, Scripture tells all Christians and family members in particular to “submit to one another in the fear of Christ” (cf. Eph 5:21). The concept of authority is best taught by having a father who assumes the leadership role, and a mother who shows respect for his authority. It is best that both parents who submit to the authority of Christ and to each other… respectfully sharing the leadership role, with the husband serving as a humble, loving leader and his wife co-leading in a submissive but assertive way.

**ONE’S PARENTING & SPOUSAL SKILLS**

Dr. Charles Stanley is the pastor of the 15,000 member First Baptist Church of Atlanta, and has twice been elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Through “In Touch” radio and television ministry, he is well known to millions of believers all over
the world. Charles Stanley is one of the great voices for Christ in our world. If you are interested in receiving his free monthly devotional, "In Touch," which I strongly recommend, you can get on their monthly mailing list simply by calling "In Touch Ministries" at 1-800-333-5849… in Canada they can be contacted at 1-800-323-3747. Few monthly devotionals possess the quality of this one. In his book “Handbook for Christian Living” (Thomas Nelson, 1996, pp. 365-366), Stanley tells us that one’s parenting skills and spousal skills were greatly influenced by what one saw when he or she was growing up; be it positive or negative. Whether or not we were aware of it, that is what occurred — day in and day out, year in and year out, our parent’s skills impacted our lives. These things are deeply ingrained into our personality — we are all the product of our upbringing. The various traditions that characterized your childhood home, were unconsciously passed down to you. The way your Dad talked to your Mom… the way your Mom looked at your Dad… the way they talked to you… all of these things made a significant impact upon the development of your personality. Everything that took place in your childhood years significantly effected who you are today — be it dining skills, meals, holidays, birthdays, Saturdays, Sundays, bedtime, sicknesses, shouting, whispering, slamming doors, retreating into silence, anger, drinking, pouting, expectations, family rules, television programs, respect, discipline, and inconsistencies — thousands of these things contributed to your development; your emotional computer processed every bit of it… and try as you might, hitting the delete button has not worked. Charles Stanley lists four things one must do to break the negative traditions that one doesn’t want to bring into his or her home —

1. **Identify the negative family traditions** — if we understand that our parents simply reacted the way they did because of what they learned from their parents, it is easier to understand where the negative traditions came from — if we don’t identify them in our parents, we’ll never see them in ourselves. Pray that God will help you scale these sacred walls and remember the negatives as well as the positives. It’s important to remember, if the past is unresolved in your mind, it becomes the present.

2. **Refocus and make a list of how you’d like your spouse & children to remember you.** What specific behaviors do you want to model? Being light-hearted, kind, generous, accepting, forgiving, hard-working, honest, loving, a man of God, highly supportive, a man of compassion, one who cares for and serves others? Pray through the list, and intentionally and diligently work at demonstrating these behaviors.

3. **Take responsibility for your choices without blaming others.** When you let others in your past dictate your choice, you are admitting they have great deal of control over you; as such, they are pretty much mastering your life. This is not the goal of a believer — we want one Lord and one Master whom we obey; we can’t serve two masters (cf. Mt 6:24) — either we are serving our parents, or Jesus Christ. No more excuses.

4. **Seek out a positive role model; i.e.,** find a person who exemplifies what a healthy, Christian family looks like — find a believer who honors his or her spouse and
children... spend lots of time with that person that you might be remodeled. Your original modeling took years, and your remodeling won’t happen overnight... but God by His grace can reverse the negatives in your life, and help transform your behaviors — “with God, all things are possible” (cf. Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17, 27; Mt 9:23; 19:26). The God who adopted you into His eternal heavenly family knows how to make earthly families work.

**CHARLES STANLEY ON PARENTING**

As the psalmist Solomon said, “Children are a gift of the Lord... a reward” (cf. Ps 127:3). this was particularly true in ancient times in an agricultural economy, since extra hands of children increased the productivity of the farmer — a full quiver was a mark of God’s blessing (cf. Ps 127:5)... it was also a measure of pride in the community. Hannah saw her little boy (Samuel) as a gift... and understood her long-awaited son was both a gift and a stewardship (cf. 1 Sam 1:1-20). In the same way, we need to see ourselves as stewards of God’s children — they are gifts on loan to us for just a few years... they were in God’s mind in eternity past (cf. Ps 139:13-16). No child is a mistake or a surprise to God... every child is a totally unique creation of God, and as their parents, “we are to train them in the way they should go” (cf. Prv 22:6); i.e., we are to train them as they are bent (that’s the Hebrew term; every child possesses a unique bent/personality; we are not all the same). As parents, we need to be mindful of the unique differences in our children, and train them accordingly. Charles Stanley in his textbook, “Handbook for Christian Living,” lists six important habits every parent should develop and incorporate into their parenting skills (Thomas Nelson, 1996, pp. 386-398) —

1. **Communicate and demonstrate a genuine interest in what goes on in the lives of your children**... don’t be too busy with other things and neglect the involvement that is necessary to properly train your children. If God, your spouse, and your children are not the most important things in your life (by far!), your values are essentially self-centered and completely unacceptable to God... even if you are a pastor, your ministry cannot be subordinate to your congregation; these three persons must be at the top of your list, or you are abrogating the responsibility God has given to you. Keep in mind, a large part of expressing interest in your children’s lives is listening and being attentive to what they have to say... when you truly hear what your children are saying, you will have a very positive impact upon them by speaking appropriate words (communication) to them.

2. **Love and accept your children unconditionally**. Unconditional love is not a feeling, it is something you choose to do with their highest interests in mind. Loving and accepting your children unconditionally are not options for parents. All of us as God’s children are loved unconditionally by God, in spite of the fact that we are disabled and seriously lacking in numerous ways.
3. **Set limitations and boundaries for your children.** Ultimately, our job as parents is to produce responsible adults who are able to function independently of parental authority, yet wholly submitted to God. **Discipline** prepares your children to live outside your home. Along with limitations comes **consequences** when they are not followed — so be clear in your **instructions**, and consistent in your **discipline**. Obviously, parents need to reward good behavior.

4. **Meet the material needs of your children** (cf. 1 Tim 5:8). Though needs and wants may differ, be careful to understand what your children need, and not disavow its importance in their mind — remember, **their culture** will differ somewhat from yours, so be sensitive to their cultural needs as well. Pray for direction and guidance in financial matters.

5. **Pass along your faith to your children.** Your primary responsibility as a parent is to pass along your faith (your beliefs about God and His will for your life) and corresponding values to your children (everything already mentioned is a part of that). To lead children toward owning our faith as theirs, we must become leaders worth following. Loving them, accepting them, providing for them, and setting limitations on them are all part of establishing ourselves as respectable leaders. We must **live out our values** if we are going to positively impact our children spiritually... and an important part of that is teaching divine truth to your children (Deut 6:7); in so doing, you will shape your children’s worldview. By the way, **Don’t preach!** Gently share, and boldly live it.

6. **Teach your children to be wise.** Soon your children will leave the comfort and security of your home; they’ll be on their own, making their own decisions. They’ll take into their own world everything you taught them. Learning to live wisely is extremely important in child rearing, because many of the issues facing our children are not clearly addressed in Scripture — dating, dancing, smoking, alcohol, music, societal values, financial issues, cleanliness, household chores, goal-setting, driving, eating right, health issues, physical exercise, etc.

**Significant Quotes Pro-offered by Stanley**

- **In order to be a good listener, it is also important that we not ridicule what our children say. We may not understand what they are saying, but being critical or ridiculing a child lowers his sense of worth and can cut off meaningful communication.** — Gary Smalley

- **Your boy wants to know that he is worthy, that he is acceptable, that he measures up in your eyes, and that he means something special to you. It takes so little to confirm him. Tell him that he is the greatest, and back it up with your actions.** — William Beausay II
• Spare the rod and spoil the child — that is true (Proverbs 13:24).

But beside the rod, keep an apple to give him when he has done well.
— Martin Luther

A PARENT’S INFLUENCE

Research tells us that parents have far more influence on their children than they realize. Not only are children listening to their parents, but more importantly, they are watching them closely and modeling their lives after them — without question, parents are the biggest influence in their children’s lives (even into their teenage years). Following are a few ways in which parents strongly impact their children’s lives — this material was written by “The Christian Broadcasting Network” (www.cbn.com/family/parenting).

1. Being present in a child’s life — It is important that parents make every effort to be present at critical milestones in their children’s lives; things like birthdays, graduation ceremonies, getting their driver’s license, going on their first date. These moments of affirmation by their parents strongly influence a child’s life; one study revealed that the inactivity of parents during these milestones in a child’s life made them far more likely to create their own moments by participating in risky behaviors such as drinking, drug use, early sexual activity, and dangerous driving. To the extent that you value your kids, to that extent you will impact their inner core… parents who are actively involved during these key moments, not only made their teenage children less likely to participate in those kinds of behaviors, but they were far happier teens as well. If you are too busy to be an integral part of their lives at the most important junctures of life, you are “too busy!”

2. Significance of fathers attending church — Swiss researchers discovered that if a child’s father faithfully attends church, even though mother does not, kids are still 44 percent more likely to keep going to church as adults. On the other hand, if Mom regularly goes to church and Dad never shows up, only 2 percent of the kids continue to attend. That’s a monumental gap, and a very telling sign of why the father’s influence is so significant.

3. Importance of parents spiritually on a child’s life — Meeting children’s spiritual needs goes far beyond attending church and must be a priority for every parent. Dr. Janice Crouse of the Beverly LaHaye Institute explains: “The relationship that parents establish with their children determines to a very large extent ‘their outcomes.’ If we as parents don’t feed their souls, they are far more likely to fill that emptiness with drugs, alcohol, or sex — or they will turn to the dozens of other ways teens mess up their lives by seeking a parental and faith substitute.” Crouse is right. According to a report from Child Trends and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, parents with strong religious beliefs who communicate
and explain them to their kids play a big part in preventing early sexual behavior. The research also showed that going to church as a family, being part of a church denomination, and having friends with the same beliefs who attend the same church help to keep teens from being sexually active. One of the premiere teachings of the Law was that “parents diligently teach the significance of God’s Law to their children at every moment of life; be it when they are sitting down or up and walking” (cf. Deut 6:7). God’s revelation should be so central to a godly family that they should naturally talk about Him at every juncture throughout the course of a day. This particular principle was one of the most important aspects of the Law, and demonstrates just how significant a parent’s teaching is to his or her children (cf. Deut 4:9-10; 6:20-25; 11:18-19; 32:46). The message is this — our diabolical world is constantly teaching our children its ways; if the premiere authority in their lives does not teach them the ways of God, they will embrace the secular teaching of our world. Just as adults need to learn to fear the Lord and love and serve Him, so children need to learn what it means to fear and love — this is the responsibility God gives to parents with regard to their children; they are to be the premiere instructors of their children. The Israelites were enjoined to instruct their children from infancy, by speaking on every suitable occasion (cf. Deut 11:18-20; Ps 34:11; Is 28:9; Jer 31:34). Keep in mind, children are gifts that God has entrusted to parents, and they are to faithfully care for them… how they rear their kids will deeply impact their lives. Here are three steps a parent can take to be an effective example to his or her children:

• **Walk the walk, don’t just talk the talk** — Ever since they are little, kids watch their parents like a hawk; they know when you are telling them to “Do as I say, not as I do,” and they don’t like it. Do not set a double standard for your children; live by the same rules you expect them to live by. When parents live godly lives, their children will be far more likely to follow God because they will follow their parent’s example.

• **Listen to your teen** — This involves paying close attention and genuinely caring about what they have to say. If teens do not come to their parents for advice or support when they face difficult situations in life, there is usually a reason. Most likely, it is because the parent is not a good listener (cf. Jam 1:19). Young people often simply need to talk and express their frustrations, questions, or concerns. Solving their problems or jumping on their faults and mistakes simply adds more stress to the situation. When your teens are ready for advice, they will ask for it; until then, show them that you care for them by listening.

• **Realize that you impact a lot of teens beyond your own** — In a society where half of the marriages end in divorce, countless teens lack the godly parent or role model that they need. God’s heart break for these young people. Psalms 68:4-6 says, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His
Holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families…” As parents, you have an incredible opportunity to fulfill that role in the lives of your teen’s friends. By simply welcoming them into your home, giving them some food, and listening to what they are going through, you may change the life of someone who has never experienced the unconditional love of a parent.

THE INFLUENCE OF A HOME LIFE

The deepest imprints of human faults are probably made by parents upon their children. Moses told the Israelites that in some cases “God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and fourth generations” (cf. Ex 20:5). When our sins and failures run their normal course, they harm future generations… our hang-ups are passed on to our children, who in turn pass them on to their children. The New Testament says that parents sins may cause specific problems like anger, resentful behavior and depression (cf. Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). A comparison of the offspring of two marriages clearly illustrates this: Over four-hundred descendants of Jonathan Edwards, America’s first great theologian, have been traced. Similarly, over twelve hundred offspring of a criminal named Max Jukes have been studied as well. Of the descendants of Jonathan Edwards — historians believe about one hundred became ministers, missionaries, or theology teachers; one hundred became professors; over one hundred were lawyers and judges; sixty became doctors; and fourteen were college presidents. Among the descendants of Max Jukes — it is believed one hundred and thirty were convicted criminals; three hundred and ten were professional paupers; four hundred were seriously injured or physically degenerated due to their lifestyles; sixty were habitual thieves and pickpockets; seventeen were murderers; only twenty ever learned a trade, and half of these learned their trades in jail. With the foregoing in mind, can we say that most of us reflect our parents (i.e., our upbringing) in pretty significant ways? The message is this: we need to put forth great effort in persuading, influencing, affecting, and swaying our children for Christ — the aforementioned story about Max Jukes has been debated and can be found on the following websites – (www.faithkannapolis.com/the-influence-of-a-life and www.rfrick.info/jukes.htm). Exactly how accurate the statistics pertaining to Max Jukes are is difficult to know — the Jukes family was first studied by Richard Dugdale and reported in a book published in 1877, and later expanded upon by a man named Estabrook. Regardless of the accuracy of the various numbers, the off-spring of Jukes were anything but wonderful, glorious people.

Wayne Jackson, in an article he wrote for the Christian Courier titled, “The Influence of Home Life” (www.christiancourier.com/articles/981), asked this question — “To what extent does the influence of the home affect the religious convictions and practices a child develops as he or she grows into maturity?” The British author Canon Henry Lewis, who was the Rural Dean of the Anglican Church in Bermondsey, London… attempted to illustrate the following in a book he published in 1913 titled, “Modern Rationalism as Seen at Work in its Biographies” — he attempted to illustrate the causes behind the development of some
of the most prominent *infidels* of history. A fascinating sketch of Lewis’ famous work is found in Wilbur Smith’s enchanting little volume, *Chats From a Minister’s Library* (Boston; W. A. Wilde Co., 1951) — note some of the examples:

- **Voltaire** (1604-1778) was a French deist who vigorously opposed Christianity. Lewis noted that when Voltaire was but three years old, his tutor taught him a poem by Rousseau, in which Moses was ridiculed as an imposter. It was downhill from there.

- **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873) was a British philosopher who did much to prepare the way for the modern ideology that no restriction should be placed on “freedom of speech.” According to Lewis, he was brought up “without any religious belief.” In a letter to Carlyle in 1833, when Mill was twenty-seven years of age, the skeptic wrote: “I have been reading the New Testament. I can never be said to have read it before.”

- **Lucile Dudevant** (1804-1876) was a sensual novelist who wrote under the penname “George Sand,” and whose immoral life was legendary (Chopin was one of her “lovers”), was virtually weaned on the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose famous work *Emile* espoused this philosophy: “I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do; what I feel to be right is right; what I feel to be wrong is wrong” (London; J. M. Dent & Sons; 1943, p. 249) — that essentially is what postmodernism teaches in our world today (pure, secular, humanistic thought).

- **Thomas Pain** (1739-1809), whose mother was a Quaker, yet was described by Paine as a woman of “sour temper” and “eccentric character,” wrote his infamous *Age of Reason* as an attack upon the Bible (though he admitted therein that he did not even own a copy of the Scriptures). At the age of eight, Paine says he was revolted at the idea that God sent His Son to be murdered. He suggested that one who did such a thing was worthy to be “hanged.” In his writings Paine had not a solitary good word to say regarding his mother. Is it not highly probable that there was a cause-and-effect relationship there? As the twig is bent, usually so grows the tree. Incidentally, Paine’s professional life was punctuated with corruption and scandal. He was dismissed from various offices on several occasions for unethical conduct.

These examples, and many others, support the biblical position that a child who is loved with the highest level of devotion is a child that will be nurtured in the instruction of divine things as taught in Scripture (cf. Deut 6:4-9). A youngster neglected in such matters, or given only a superficial exposure to such (e.g., Bible school and occasional church services) is likely destined, one fears, for an unpleasant eternity. Parents, think about it.
The Influence of a Heavenly Life

The world of science tells us that the atmosphere round about us is fourteen pounds to the square inch, yet none of us feel this pressure because it is pressing equally in all directions. Precisely so, says Charles E. Orr: “Our lives are creating an atmosphere which is pressing with weight and influencing those who come in contact with us” (www.library.timelesstruths.org/texts/heavenly_life). We are here in life only for a short time, but our influence lives as long as time lasts. The story is told of a young man who had become a born-again believer, but soon after was involved in an accident that proved to be fatal in a few days. As he was dying he said, “I am going to be with Jesus; I have made my escape from eternal death; will you please bury the influence of my life of sin with me?” That they could not do. “Abel being dead yet speaketh” (cf. Gen 4:10; Heb 12:24).

The story is told of a little girl who stood one summer afternoon looking intently and thoughtfully at the great bank of clouds piled like a mountain of glory by the setting sun. Seeing the beauty of it, she said to her mother, “I wish I could be painter,” to which her mother replied, “Why?” The little girl said, “Then I could help God paint the clouds and the sunsets.” It was a beautiful aspiration, yet we can do something far nobler than that. Our common work of everyday life can be done in such a heavenly way so as to touch the lives of others with divine loveliness... the life filled with the love of Christ will minister to the heart and souls of others. The message is this: if you want your life to tell for Jesus, you must allow Him to dwell in you, controlling your will and all the powers of your life. When Christ is the controlling influence of your life, then your life will speak for Him in the most impactful way. If you want to influence the world for Christ, your life must be influenced by Christ... if you want to move the world toward heaven, you must live heavenly... if you want to bring thoughts of God to others, you must live in the thought of God... if you would feed others on the living bread, you must feed on that bread... if you would comfort others with the comfort of God, you must be comforted by God... if you would lift men to a higher life, you must live the higher life. You cannot move the world if your feet are planted in the world... plant them in heaven, and then the world can be moved by you... if you would leave the impress of heaven on the lives of others, your life must bear the impress of heaven.

Every day we are scattering seeds of some sort, and these are falling into the lives of others. You may scatter seeds of truth into others lives and have heavenly flowers from above grow where otherwise there would be but bleakness and bareness. Though you may never be able to preach the gospel with the tongue of an angel, you can translate the bible into holiness of life that others may read it (cf. 2 Cor 3:3; Prv 3:3; Jer 17:1; 31:33; Ezek 36:26-27). There lives an old man today who tells the story of young stranger who roomed with him in a hotel room some sixty years ago... before retiring, this young man knelt down and silently prayed — “though his prayer was in silence, it spoke loud to my soul,” said the old man. “Half a century has rolled by, but that silent prayer still wields an influence in my life.” A life made lovely by prayer and contemplation of God will reflect
the loveliness of God and impact those around us. We are told that we should be an example of believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in love. The more heavenly is our walk through life, the greater will be our influence for good… the more perfectly we imitate the life of Jesus in our life the more we will be a blessing to the world (cf. Mt 5:16; Jam 3:13; 1 Pet 3:1,15-16). The question is this: Are we leaving God-honoring footprints on the sand of time so that others might read them in the years to come?

Pastor and author Kevin Thompson tells parents that no matter what mistakes they may make as parents, they need to seek to utilize their influence for the well-being of their children, by righting the wrong… if they do not, they will forfeit the opportunity to influence them properly, either by failing to realize what they have done or by exerting power in wrongs ways (www.kevinathomopson.com/parents-influence-children). The most overlooked area of influence we have with anyone, including our children, is the example we set. No matter what mistakes we may have made in the past, if we will acknowledge them, seek forgiveness, and make amends, we can right a wrong and make it a tremendous example for others, including our children. The guilt of a mistake can be removed by confessing the wrong to the offended person and engaging in restitution; the integrity of our parenting involves honesty and openness and confession when needed. Remember, we are the premiere role models for our children. By owning up to a wrong, a parent will be acknowledging that Christ is the one who is the authority in their lives, and that it is His authority to which we must submit. Thompson addresses still yet another important issue for parents, and that is telling parents that children never grow weary of hearing the following words from their parents: “I love you; You are capable; You can do this; I believe in you; I’m here for you.” One of the main problems that parents have is that they are far too concerned with communicating their opinion with their children, and not nearly concerned enough with communicating their love and encouragement to their children.

**THE IMPACT OF A PARENT’S ATTITUDES & BELIEFS**

Dr. Joanna E. Grusec, of the University of Toronto in Canada, has written an article titled, “Parents’ Attitudes and Beliefs;” in it she asks the question, “Why do parents behave the way they do when raising children?” One answer, she says, is that they are modeling the behavior of their own parents… another is, they are behaving in accord with information about parenting that they have acquired through books and other information sources. Yet another major determinant of their behavior lies in their general attitudes as well as specific beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. Researchers interested in children’s development have explored parenting attitudes, cognitions, and the resulting emotions (such as anger or happiness), because of their influence on parenting behavior and on the subsequent impact of that parenting behavior on children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. The child-rearing attitudes of parents are cognitions (i.e.,
psychological reasoning) that causes an individual to act either positively or negatively toward a child — a parent’s behavior toward his or her child is not without reasoning. The *attitudes* most frequently considered involve the degree of *warmth and acceptance* or *coldness and rejection* that exists in the parent-child relationship, as well as the extent to which parents are *permissive or restrictive* in the limits they impose on their offspring. A large body of research on attitudes indicates that *parental warmth* together with *reasonable levels of control* combine to produce positive child outcomes. In accord with the realization that children’s behavior affects that of their parents... so also, parental attitudes affect child behavior — the reality is, the older children get, the more their adolescent behavior impacts a parent’s style and attitudes. When a parent’s thinking results in feelings of *anger or depression*, these feelings distract parents from the task of parenting, and make it more difficult for them to react appropriately and effectively. An important aspect of parental thinking is the ability to *take the perspective of the child* — parents who recognize what is distressing for their children have children who are better able to cope with their own distress, and parents who accurately identify their children’s thoughts and feelings during conflicts are better able to achieve satisfactory outcomes for those conflicts. The ability of parents to think of their children as being rational in their thinking as well as being accurate in their assessment of these mental states, has been linked to a child’s secure attachment to his or her parents; in particular, the mother.

Little has been done to see how fathers’ cognitions and attitudes affect child development. There have been some studies done on how mothers and fathers differ in their parental cognitions and parenting style — *Mothers* report higher endorsement of progressive parenting attitudes, encouraging their children to think and verbalize their own ideas and opinions... whereas *Fathers* endorse a more authoritarian approach. Since mothers generally spend more time with their children than fathers (because they are out working), mothers generally spend more time conversing with their children. What is unknown is the extent to which these differences in attitudes affect child outcomes. Another area that has not been fully investigated is how children affect their parents’ cognitions and attitudes. The long and short of it is, *child-rearing cognitions* influence parents to act either positively or negatively towards their children. The reality is this — *parents observe their children through a filter of conscious and unconscious thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, and these filters direct the way they perceive their children’s actions*. When the thoughts are accurate they will usually lead to positive actions; when they are distorted and distressing, however, they distract parents from the task at hand as well as leading to negative emotions and attributions that ultimately impair effective parenting. When Mothers and Fathers improve their parenting cognitions, and reduce their levels of harsh parenting, their children will display lower levels of aggressive behavior as well as better cognitive skills. These findings clearly underline the important role played by *parental beliefs* in the child-rearing process.
A Child's Social & Emotional Development

A parent’s day to day behavior significantly shapes the way their children will act the rest of their life, so states Lucy Martin and Virginia Hite at Vanderbilt University (https://my.vanderbilt.edu/developmentalpsychologicalblog). Just as all of us are the product of our mother & father’s parenting… so our children will be the product of our parenting. Psychologists refer to this as the influence of parent socialization — the reality is, parents influence the way children learn the behaviors and skills necessary to interact in their everyday lives; they influence their children’s social skills directly, indirectly and through management of their children’s activities. They also influence them unintentionally through their own daily actions, such as conversing with other adults while their children are present — a parent’s actions will highly influence a child’s life; parents are the premiere teachers of their children’s lives. Ultimately the most important thing parents can do is behave in a way that they want their children to emulate, and that involves respecting their children and listening to what they think, and adjusting one’s expectations accordingly, and setting clear boundaries that are appropriate and helpful to them.

Essentially, there are two excessive ways in which parents manage the lives of their children — there are those who are too authoritarian, and those who are too permissive; the truth is, there needs to be a “balance” between these two life-management styles, because one can be overly authoritarian and overly permissive. When a parent is too authoritarian and too demanding and too restrictive, their children are not only likely to be unhappy, but have low self-esteem, and be overly quiet and keep to themselves in life. Conversely, when a parent is too permissive and unrestrictive, their children will tend to be impulsive and perform poorly in school, and have a difficult time forming peer relationships, and be far more likely to experience depression, engage in risky sexual behavior, and misuse drugs and alcohol. Without boundaries, children will wander all over the landscape in life. The reality is this: both of these parenting styles have very negative impacts on their children — the old saying, “garbage in, garbage out” applies here; one cannot expect one’s children to reflect a lifestyle they did not experience growing up.

According to Bethel Moges and Kristi Weber (also at Vanderbilt University — https://my.vanderbilt.edu/developmentalpsychologicalblog) parents play a significant role in influencing how their children turn out — influencing their personality, emotional development, and behavioral habits, as well as a host of other factors. Parents must not only be physically present in their children's lives, but emotionally invested and responsive to them — without this closeness and warmth, one's children will struggle with learning how to regulate their emotions and properly interact with others. So parents must treat their children in ways that foster secure attachment in order for them to grow into emotionally stable adolescents and adults. Children observe how their parents display emotions and interact with other people, and they imitate what they see their parents do to regulate emotions. Furthermore, how parents address the emotions of their children and respond to them also
has a strong influence on how expressive children feel they can be; reacting with criticism or anger can cause children to be even more prone to negative emotions and less able to cope with stress. Instead, guiding children’s emotions and helping them find ways to express themselves in a healthy manner helps them continue regulating their responses to challenges and even aids their academic and social competence. This sort of emotion coaching greatly helps in reducing future problem behavior in children. Though there is not necessarily a perfect formula for parents to model behavior, parents can help their children develop into emotionally stable people by giving them a supportive environment, positive feedback, being a role model of healthy behavior and interactions, and being someone their children can talk to about their emotional reactions to their experiences. If a child senses that their parents are uncaring and unloving, they will look elsewhere to find the kind of emotional attachment that they need in life.

**GOD’S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS**

The authors of the popular book, “The Handbook of Bible Application,” define five things that God expects of parents (Tyndale House, 1992, pp. 456-457) —

1. *Parents are to be good role models for their children* (cf. Prv 1:1-9). Our actions speak louder than our words — this is especially true in the home. Children learn values, morals, and priorities by observing how their parents act and react every day. If parents exhibit a deep reverence for and dependence on God, the children will catch these attitudes; so let them see your reverence for God — teach your kids right living by making worship an important place in your family life and by reading the Bible together.

2. *Parents are to train their children in the art of decision-making* (cf. Num 30:1-2). From this Law comes an important principle for both parents and children — young people still living at home should seek their parents’ help when they make significant decisions. A parent’s experience and wisdom could save a young person from a serious mistake. Though parents should let their children learn from their mistakes, they should protect them from disaster.

3. *Parents are to teach their children the Scriptures* (cf. Deut 6:6-7). This passage sets a pattern that helps us relate the Word of God to our daily life. We are to love God, think constantly about His commandments, teach His commandments to our children, and live each day by the guidelines in His Word. God emphasizes the importance of parents teaching the Bible to their children. The Church and Christian Schools can’t be used as an escape from this responsibility. Eternal truths are most effectively learned in the loving environment of a God-fearing home.

4. *Parents are to train their children in applying the Scriptures*. The Hebrew people were extremely successful at making religion (*i.e.*, a God-orientation of life) an
integral part of their lives. The reason for their success was that religious education was *life-oriented*, not *information-oriented*. They used the context of daily life to teach about God. The key to teaching your children to love God (*i.e.*, put Him first) is stated simply and clearly in the Law (cf. Deut 6:6-7). If you want your children to follow God, you must make God a part of your everyday experiences. You must diligently teach your children to see God in all aspects of life, not just those that are church related.

5. *Parents are to seek God’s will for their children* (cf. Mt 20:20-28). The mother of James and John asked Jesus to give her sons special positions in His kingdom. Parents naturally want to see their children promoted and honored, but it must be sought in accord with the specific will of God for their lives — the reality is, God may have a different work in mind, not as glamorous, but just as important. Thus parents must pray for God’s will to be done in their children’s lives.

**IN CLOSING...**

Obviously, parents influence their children in numerous ways — first of all, God creates them by mixing the *genes* of their parents; so children do *inherit* some traits from their parents. Then the parents create the *environment* in which the child is raised... in so doing, parents heavily influence a child’s intelligence and personality by the ways they *interact* with them. Children are like *sponges*... as such, parents greatly affect a child’s behavior; children *model* everything a parent does and incorporates what they see into their own lives. So it is very important that parents *set right examples* for their children, because negative examples can be detrimental to a child’s development. Since parents are *role models* for their children, it is from them that children adopt certain values and life skills. Children also learn how to express emotions and deal with the problems of life from their parents; a lack of parental involvement and being a poor role model can have a very damaging impact upon one’s children. Remember, children are not only *listening* to what their parents have to say, more importantly, they are *watching* them closely and modeling their lives after them. Obviously, the majority of children are raised by two parents, and it is their “*combined input*” that influences and effectuates the personality of a child — because each child is wired differently, some children will likely reflect the input of one parent more than the input the other parent... in spite of that fact, both parents will significantly influence the personality of a child. Aside from *loving their child* and *modeling a godly life*, the most important thing a parent can do is *be a prominent presence* in their children’s lives, and *continually share divine truth* with them — the sober reality is this: *your children’s eternal destiny will largely be impacted by you as a parent*.

P.S. Since this subject first requires that the individual *understand himself*, and why he is the way he is, or why she is the way she is, it is important that you first see the positive
and negative impact your parents had on you as a child — remember, we are all the product of our upbringing... and just as you are the product of your parents, your parents are the product of their parents... likewise, your children are the product of your parenting — so you are the premiere influence of your children’s lives, just as your parents were the premiere influence of your life. With that in mind, don't judge your parents too harshly; remember, we are all fallen creatures — none of us were raised in paradise by glorious angels; as such, we were not only positively influenced, but negatively influenced as well, and none of us fully understand the “negative effects” that our grandparents had on our parents. So ultimately the personality your children develop will be a reflection of the parenting skills that you learned in your upbringing; though none of us are perfect role models, we can all work at being better role models... especially when we make Christ the cornerstone of our life. Though life is not easy for any of us, it is far more fruitful when Christ is on the throne.