



## A Quick Reference and Lesson Guide

Dealing with Parenting

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# 1 Scenarios and Assessment

## Scenarios/Case Studies

### A. Scenario #1

1. Brad and Kerry, a faithful churchgoing family, have two boys and a girl: Jared (fifteen), Derrick (eleven), and Sarah (eight). Derrick is struggling academically and having difficulty focusing both at school and church. Brad and Kerry see similar behaviors at home, and despite their best efforts, they are struggling to know how to help Derrick overcome these challenges. In the midst of Derrick's increasingly difficult issues, Kerry has noticed that Sarah, a normally outgoing child, has become more withdrawn at home.

### B. Scenario #2

1. Mario and Jasmine are recently married and both have children from previous relationships. Mario's first wife left the marriage and has moved in with her new boyfriend. Mario's children are finding different expectations when they stay with mom. Mario's ex-wife no longer supports the godly values with which the children were raised. As Jasmine's children endeavor to accept Mario as their father, and Mario's children contend with conflicting expectations, tension is mounting for everyone.

### C. Scenario #3

1. Amanda is a hard-working single mother in her early thirties with a preteen son she has raised alone since his birth. Dillon has always lived on the edge, but recently his angry outbursts and aggression have become a cause for concern.

## Definitions and Key Thoughts

- A. 10.2% of children live with parents who experience high levels of stress from parenting (*They often feel angry with their child, often feel that their child is much harder to care for than most children, or often feel that their child does things that bother them a lot.*) (2007 National Survey of Children's Health).
- B. Children with special health care needs are less likely to have mothers and fathers who are in excellent or very good health (2007 National Survey of Children's Health).
- C. Each week, nearly one in 10 children (9.3%) age 6-11 years take care of themselves or spend time alone without an adult or teenager for supervision (2007 National Survey of Children's Health).
- D. High stress is reported more often by the parents of children living in single-mother households (2007 National Survey of Children's Health).

- E. *The Washington Times* analyzed the most recent census data, showing that the percentage of two-parent families has dropped significantly over the past decade in all 50 states. Even as the total number of American households with children increased by 160,000, the number of two-parent households decreased by 1.2 million.
- F. The number of children living in single-parent homes has nearly doubled since 1960, according to data from the 2010 Census.
- G. Approximately 82.2% of custodial parents are mothers, and 17.8% of custodial parents (approximately 1 in 6) are fathers.
- H. Black children (55 percent) and Hispanic children (31 percent) were more likely to live with one parent than non-Hispanic White children (21 percent) or Asian children (13 percent), according to data from the 2010 Census.
- I. Today one-third of American children—a total of 15 million—are being raised without a father. Nearly five million more children live without a mother.
- J. A 2011 University of Melbourne study found that absent fathers were linked with higher rates of juvenile delinquency, while a Canadian study showed that kids whose fathers were active parents in early and middle childhood had fewer behavior problems and higher intellectual abilities as they grew older, even among socio-economically at-risk families.

### **Assessment (Interview)**

- A. Questions to ask regarding general parenting issues:
  - 1. How long have these parenting challenges been present?
  - 2. In what environment are you seeing the most parenting challenges? Are there changes to your environment that need to be made to create less stress and anxiety for your children?
  - 3. Have there been any major changes recently that have created more difficulty in parenting?
  - 4. Are you as parents in agreement on how to discipline your children?
  - 5. Do your consequences match the misbehavior or are you over or under-correcting the behavior?
  - 6. Is there any overtly disrespectful behavior or is it just a matter of forgetfulness, immaturity, and/or irresponsibility?
  - 7. Are you working in conjunction with the school and doctor? Are you checking to see if there are underlying issues such as developmental problems, ADHD, or other treatable situations?
  - 8. Have you and your spouse been able to create healthy boundaries for your marriage and consistent attention to each of your children? What kind things do you do with each child to make him or her feel valuable?
  - 9. Is your child struggling in peer environments as well?
- B. Questions to ask regarding specific step-parenting issues:
  - 1. As step-dad and mom have you designed a disciplinary plan on which you can both agree?
  - 2. Mom, do you take the lead when it comes to directly confronting your biological children and Dad, do you do the same with your biological children?
  - 3. Do you back each other up if you have to discipline your spouse's biological child?

4. Are you developing a relationship with your stepchildren outside of just discipline?
  5. Are you allowing the assimilation process to be gradual and natural? Are you allowing the children to develop their own terms of endearment for their step-parent?
  6. Do you have consistent routines for your children when they are in your home?
  7. Have you sat down with your children and had a conversation of how they can successfully navigate the different expectations between their two homes?
- C. Questions to ask regarding specific single-parenting issues:
1. Do you have an adequate support network to help you?
  2. Single mothers with sons, have you been able to have a conversation with your son regarding puberty? Likewise, single fathers with daughters, have you done the same?
  3. Does your child have a godly, healthy role model in his life that meets the void (lack of father or mother figure)?
  4. Single mothers with sons, are you putting unfair pressure on your son to be the “man of the house?”
- D. Red flags to know when to refer for professional help:
1. *Each pastor should be aware of local state law regarding mandated reporting issues. If there is any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or reasonable suspicion that a child is harming himself or herself, appropriate action should be taken.*
  2. *In very extreme scenarios, if a child is dangerous to himself or to other family members, she may need to be removed from the home to receive necessary help.*

## 2

## Critique and Counsel

### **Biblical Insight**

- A. Parents are expected to be the primary source of imparting biblically sound principles to their children. Far too often, parents are forsaking this biblical mandate and expecting teaching to come only from children’s ministry leaders, youth leaders, and the pulpit.
1. **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** *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.*
  2. **Proverbs 1:8-9** *Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.*
  3. **Proverbs 22:6** *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*
- B. Parents are commanded to discipline or chastise children. In this act of discipline, parents are

to mirror the motives of our heavenly Father, which is to bring the fruit of righteousness.

1. **Proverbs 19:18** *Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.*
  2. **Proverbs 29:17** *Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.*
  3. **Hebrews 12:7-11 (ESV)** “... but he [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
- C. Four verses of Scripture admonish parents to use “the rod.” These verses are often cited to advocate corporal punishment. The word *rod* is “shebet” in Hebrew. This word is defined in Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon #7626 as: rod, staff, branch, offshoot, club, scepter, tribe a. rod, staff b. shaft (of spear, dart) c. club (of shepherd’s implement) d. truncheon, scepter (mark of authority) e. clan, tribe. It is used thirty-one other times throughout the Bible, and each of these times except for two the rod is a figurative rod, not a literal rod.
- D. It is worth consideration that these passages are actually encouraging parents to extend their “rod” over their children by demonstrating God’s shepherding nature and teaching their young about godly authority. While corporal punishment is a personal decision that should be carefully weighed by each family, these verses are not necessarily speaking exclusively of corporal punishment.
1. **Proverbs 13:24** *Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*
  2. **Proverbs 22:15** *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.*
  3. **Proverbs 23:13-14** *Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*
  4. **Proverbs 29:15** *The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*
- E. Parents, and specifically fathers, are also commanded to treat children with love, even in times of correction. Avoiding anger is actually a mark of holiness for a man (**I Timothy 2:8**). This principle is likewise applied to parenting.
1. **Ephesians 6:4** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
  2. **Colossians 3:21** *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*
  3. **I Peter 5:3** *Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*
  4. **Proverbs 16:23** *A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.*
  5. **Proverbs 16:21** *Pleasant words promote instruction.*
  6. **Matthew 18:5, 6** *And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. 6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who trusts in me to lose*

*faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck.*

7. **Titus 2:7, 8 (ESV)** *Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned...*

### **Wise Counsel**

#### A. Regarding raising children with special needs:

1. Sometimes there are organic issues that can cause healthy people to become unhealthy. Some children may be unable to focus on schoolwork and parental commands due to physical or emotional obstacles. It is important to not crush his or her spirit by ridiculing or demeaning him or her when disciplining. Discipline must be strategic and done in a loving way.
2. Learning more about what a child is actually dealing with will help to guide parents, teachers, and even church youth leaders. Often parents and pastors can be afraid of labels like ADHD, developmental delay, or learning disability. However, when a child receives the appropriate diagnosis, everyone can be proactive and give the proper care. When a child does not receive the proper help, he or she instead receives negative labels, such as dumb, lazy, rebellious, or slow.
3. Parents need to give directions in a way the child understands them. He or she may need visual directions to go along with verbal commands and may only be able to receive one or two directions at the same time.
4. Both parents must agree upon discipline and it must be consistent. This does not mean it should be identical for all children, just consistent. Routines are crucial to any and all families, especially those with younger children. However, teenagers tend to be much more settled also if their lives are governed by routine. Sleep is a key component for helping children to respond well to directions. According to the National Sleep Foundation, school-age children need ten to eleven hours of sleep a night. Due to the busyness of life, many families have difficulty applying these helpful principles.
5. It is very difficult for parents of a child with special needs to balance their energies with their other children. Knowing your children's love languages will help you to direct your energies in a way they will best receive.

#### B. Regarding parenting within step-families:

1. Marriages forming step-families are facing the challenge of bringing together two different family systems. This can be a gradual and delicate process. The non-biological parent must take the time to create a healthy relationship with the stepchildren. If a step-father begins making demands of his wife's teenage daughter that are different than what she is used to, there is likely going to be a long and painful battle. This daughter needs to know the step-father has her best interest at heart. Mom may have chosen a new husband, but her daughter needs time to mirror this choice. When parents are thinking of remarriage, they should carefully consider the feelings of their children and provide necessary adjustment time.

2. Ron Deal, in his book *The Smart Step-Family*, discusses the best way to cook a stepfamily. He does not encourage use of the term “blended” because a blender brings everything together but at the loss of one’s identity. A chopped salad is not the way to go because you lose pieces of yourself and there really is not a sense of cohesiveness. Many families would like a microwave family: Nuke the family and instantly create loving relationships between all members. However, he concludes the best way is a casserole. A casserole is cooked a long time over low heat and when it is finished each member has remained its individual identity. Every member of the family can feel a sense of individuality and yet discover a sense of belonging to the new family structure.
  3. Because the children live in two homes, communication between ex-spouses is vital. There is the responsibility to make transfers happen as smoothly as possible and be conscientious to follow the guidelines as given by the courts, if a court is involved. Step-parents will need to be clear as to what their expectations are for their home regarding media, clothing, language, and so on. At the same time, they must also accept the differences their children experience in the other parent’s home. Step-parents must realize that, outside of abuse or gross negligence, they cannot change what happens in the other home. Instead, great parents find “teachable” moments to instill godly truth. If a child shares information about a questionable movie she watched, a parent could ask the child how she felt while watching that movie. A follow-up question could be: “Is this a movie that a Christian should watch?” However, the parent should not discipline his child for something that happened in the other home. This could cause the child to become bitter and withdrawn.
- C. Regarding parenting in single-parent families:
1. Single moms and dads must work very hard to care for themselves and serve as the sole parent to their children. The balancing act is how to work enough to make ends meet but then have time and energy leftover to infuse children with life principles. As one parent, he or she must prepare food, help with homework, and do all! Single parents often feel a great amount of guilt over their divided time and can be easily overwhelmed by their weekly challenges. Their anxiety over their own circumstances can easily spill over and be mirrored in their children’s behaviors. Strategies for managing time or finances and tips on dealing with anxiety are all valuable to a single parent.
  2. Many single parents are looking for a new spouse, thinking that this is the solution! However, single parents should be careful not to choose a new spouse just to bring a father or mother figure into their child’s life. In fact, the hunt for a new spouse can often become a highly emotional roller coaster for a child, as they see “nice” people come in and then quickly move out of their lives. Instead of finding a “father” or “mother” figure that is a dating candidate, the single parent should more wisely bring their child into contact with healthy spiritual role models that are already married or not dating candidates. This wisdom can save the children of single parents from great heartbreak and, ultimately, anger.

# 3 Application and Prayer

## Application

### A. Ways that parents can improve their parenting skills:

1. Attend a parenting workshop.
2. Address inappropriate communication styles or negative behaviors such as angry outbursts, silent treatments, or blame.
3. Learn your child's love language and think of creative ways to show your love in ways he or she will understand.
4. Read books on parenting. If you are a two-parent household, take time to talk about what you have read and how you can apply it.
5. Work out a discipline plan that you can consistently implement.
6. Manage children's and teenagers' media time.
7. Monitor teenagers' media usage (cell phone, ipad, computer, xbox with internet access, and internet). You may choose to use filters, but you should definitely have some type of tracking device that sends a report to you listing all visited sites with a rating of those sites. There are several inexpensive options available.
8. Catch your children "doing good." When you notice your child's good behavior, reward them by giving a rock or token that they can cash in for a prize after receiving six or seven tokens. Have a prize bin that may include age-appropriate items such as toys, books, or written rewards like "*Stay up thirty extra minutes past bedtime on a weekend*" or "*Go out for ice cream with a parent!*"

### B. Strategies for building healthy child-parent relationships:

1. Parents should model the ability to say, "I'm sorry" when appropriate.
2. Have regular family meetings where each family member can express himself or herself freely and without fear.
3. Discuss the discipline plan as a family and, if necessary, make adjustments or ask the children to "sign off" on the plan.
4. Make sure that prayer, family devotions, or times for spiritual conversations are a regular part of the family routine.

### C. How to take action for severely dysfunctional family systems:

1. Engage the help of necessary professionals such as school counselors, medical practitioners, or a family therapist. Some parenting issues will require a team to provide long-term care and support.
2. If a child is a danger to himself or others in the family unit, immediate action must be taken.

## Prayer

### A. Focused prayer for the pastor:

1. Pray for God to give him or her a love for children and a compassion for the unique challenges of parenting.
2. Pray for healthy communication within the family units in the congregation.
3. Pray for positive spiritual influences over the families in your congregation and pray against negative spiritual influences.
4. Pray for discernment to know if an emotional, spiritual, or physical issue is causing the undesired behavior.
5. Pray that the hearts of fathers would be turned toward their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.
6. Pray a prayer of blessing over church families.

### B. Focused prayer for the parents:

1. Pray for ways to infuse godly principles into their children.
2. Pray to not become weary in well-doing and remain consistent in their care and discipline.
3. Pray for the emotional, spiritual, social, and physical well-being of their children.
4. Pray for their children to have a love for the truth.
5. Pray for their children to positively navigate peer relationships.
6. Pray a prayer of protection for your children as they navigate an often-godless society.
7. Pray a prayer of blessing over their family.

## 4 Recommended Resources

### A. Parenting Books

- a. Arterburn, Stephen and Fred Stoeker. *Preparing Your Son for Every Man's Battle*. Waterbrook Press, 2003, 2010.
- b. Barna, George. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. Regal, 2003.
- c. Chapman, Gary, and Ross Campbell. *The Five Love Languages of Children*. Northfield Publishing, 1997.
- d. Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers*. Northfield Publishing, 2000.

- e. Clinton, Tim, and Gary Sibcy. *Loving Your Child Too Much: How to Keep a Close Relationship with Your Child without Overindulging, Overprotecting, or Overcontrolling*. Integrity Publishers, 2006.
  - f. Deal, Ron L. *The Smart Stepfamily*. Bethany House, 2002.
  - g. Dinkmeyer Sr., Don, Gary D. McKay, Don Dinkmeyer, *The Parent's Handbook*. AGS, 1997.
  - h. Dobson, James. *Bringing Up Boys*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2004.
  - i. Dobson, James. *Bringing Up Girls*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012.
  - j. Dobson, James. *Parenting Isn't for Cowards*. Word Publishing, 1987.
  - k. Ethridge, Shannon. *Preparing Your Son for Every Woman's Battle*. Random House, Inc., 2010.
  - l. Faber Adele, and Elaine Mazlish. *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* Avon Books, 1980.
  - m. Leman, Kevin. *How to Have a New Kid by Friday*. Revell, 2008.
  - n. loveandlogic.com *A website on verbal discipline techniques. Discusses matching consequences with behavior. Lots of free downloadable articles and handouts.*
  - o. Nelson, Jane. *Positive Time-Out*. Prima Publishing, 1999.
  - p. Parrott III, Les. *Helping Your Struggling Teenager*. Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, 2000.
  - q. Stoop, David, and Jan Stoop, eds. *The Complete Parenting Book: Practical Help from Leading Experts*. Revell, 2004.
  - r. Tobias, Cynthia Tobias. *The Way They Learn*. Tyndale House Publishing, 1998.
- B. ADHD
- a. Amen, Daniel G. *Healing ADD: The Breakthrough Program That Allows You to See and Heal the 6 Types of ADD*. Berkley Books, 2001.
- C. Adoption
- a. Purvis, Karyn B., and David R. Cross, Wendy Lyons Sunshine. *The Connected Child*. McGraw-Hill, 2007.
  - b. Trip, Tedd. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. Shepherd Press, 1995.
  - c. Verrier, Nancy Newton. *The Primal Wound, Understanding the Adopted Child*. Gateway Press, 1993.



### Nurturing Spiritual Sensitivity in Children

By Laura Payne

**Focus Thought:**

Of all the things a godly parent does for their children, there is nothing more important than nurturing spiritual values. Raising up children who are spiritually sensitive to the presence of God and who see their world through God's eyes is not an easy task. Likewise, the local church must stand alongside parents and be committed to raising the value of spiritual things in the eyes of its young. This lesson is not only for parents; it speaks a vital principle to the entire congregation.

**Focus Verses:**

“One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him. Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children’ (Luke 18:15-16, NLT). (See also the same account in Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16.)

“Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation” (Joel 1:3).

“Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power” (Psalms 145:4).

“Then Elkanah and Hannah returned home to Ramah without Samuel. And the boy became the LORD's helper, for he assisted Eli the priest... Now Samuel, though only a boy, was the LORD's helper” (I Samuel 2:11,18, NLT).

**Are Children Really a Blank Canvas?**

It is easy for us to fall into the belief that every human born is a blank canvas and that human nature will automatically lead our young towards loving, godly, wise behaviors, unless something “bad” happens to them. While this perspective would be nice to believe, the Word of God speaks otherwise. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, a root of sin was planted into the heart of us all. In Psalm 58:3 David reminds us, “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.” In his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp (1995) says this, “The Heart is Not Neutral. Since there is no such thing as a place of childhood neutrality, your children either worship God or idols.... As your children interact with their childhood experience, they interact based on their Godward orientation. Either they respond to life as children of faith... or they respond as children of foolishness... The point is this: They do respond. They are not neutral.”

The weight of this reality should motivate us to do far more than just make our children “happy” or “safe.” We should give great consideration as the people of God to the spiritual orientation we are encouraging in our young. Are we raising up a next generation that truly worships God? This is about so much more than measuring outward worship behaviors such as clapping or raising the hands. The church must know, without a doubt, that our next generation has a heart that is positioned towards the kingdom of God.

**Children and Their Formative Years:**

Child psychologists in the past century have agreed that the formative years of a child are vital in shaping personality, values, and thinking. Many would say that the entire personality of a child is fully developed by age five.

In a paper entitled “Research Shows that Spiritual Maturity Process Should Start at a Young Age,” George Barna analyzes his own research and comments, “In essence, the research noted what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing” (2003).

This research clearly echoes the words of Joel 1:3, “Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation” and Psalm 145:4, “Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power.” The Word of God revealed, long before psychologists confirmed, that the formative years are the critical time for one generation to pass on a spiritual legacy to the next.

This research and these passages of Scripture should motivate us all to become committed to the process of nurturing spiritual values in our young. George Barna says in his book *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, “The longer you wait to pursue influence, the more difficult it is to counteract the influence of other parties that have been imprinting their values upon children” (2003).

**What Does Jesus Model to Us about Children and the Kingdom of God?**

The story of Jesus blessing the children gives us great insight into God’s view towards children. First of all, the story is told three times! The accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke make it evident that this story was a significant moment in Jesus’ ministry. Likewise, the disciples were impacted by this moment because they took time to write about it! Notice that it was a group of parents who brought their children to Jesus. Many parents are genuinely interested in their children encountering God. But how does the church meet the needs of these parents? Do we make a safe place at the feet of Jesus for our children to gather and be blessed? Or do we exhibit the spirit of the disciples, who chastised parents for bothering the Master with their children?

**Do Godly Parents Automatically Raise Godly Kids?**

It is, sadly, possible for parents with the heart of God to somehow fail to pass on their godly spirit to their children. One of the most striking examples of this is found in the story of David and Absalom.

David was noted to be a “man after God’s own heart.” His integrity towards leadership was like none other. Despite Saul’s wickedness and evil intentions, David would not disrespect his leader and rebuked his own man, Abishai, who suggested that they kill Saul after slipping unseen into his camp (I Samuel 26:6-11). By contrast, Absalom revolted against his own father, David, and declared himself King (II Samuel, chapters 14-18). The story is one of heartbreak and grief. How is it that a father who was so committed to honoring his elders could miss passing that same godly virtue to his own offspring?

**Practical Applications for Today**

- Parents and church leaders should seek to monitor the attitude of the heart in children, not just legislating behaviors.
- We must make the Bible true and alive for our children.
  - We do this by making sure we teach the Bible in age-appropriate ways.
  - We do this by including children in Bible reading and Bible lessons.
  - We encourage children to read a translation they easily understand.
  - Those speaking in the church should consider passages that are particularly hard to understand in the KJV, and consider reading a second translation or explaining the King's English to be sure that young members of the congregation are engaging in the messages.
  - Adults in the church (parents or otherwise) should find ways to engage children in conversations about Bible topics or the sermons they have heard.
- We must model reverence for the House of God and the things of God.
  - Parents should speak positively and enthusiastically about the church and the family of God.
  - Likewise, when children come to the church, they should find an environment of reverence for the things of God and an environment where positive, healthy fellowship is felt and seen.
- Develop Spiritual Sensitivity in Young Children
  - Moms and Dads, pray with your infant or toddler in tow! Don't disengage from the altar experience just because you have a young one in hand.
  - The altar should always be a safe, inviting place for young children. Occasionally, offer special altar appeals just for children.
  - Moms and Dads, allow you children to hear you speak in tongues and see you worship freely.
  - Monitor closely your child's media usage at church. Hand-held games and smart phones can dull the spiritual sensitivity of your child.
  - Adults, freely share your spiritual journey with children around you. Live out the principles of Joel 1:3 by telling what God has done in your life!

**In Conclusion – Who Is the Lord's Helper?**

The story of Samuel and his mother, Hannah, is often told as a beautiful example of a mother who dedicated her son to God. But embedded in this passage is an often-overlooked description of young Samuel: "Then Elkanah and Hannah returned home to Ramah without Samuel. And the boy became the LORD's helper, for he assisted Eli the priest... Now Samuel, though only a boy, was the LORD's helper" (I Samuel 2:11, 18, NLT).

Bible scholars suggest that Samuel could have been just six years old or younger when his mother, Hannah dropped him off at the Temple. And yet the Word of God declares this young, formative lad to be "the LORD'S helper." How profound! Are we truly seeing the potential that

lies in the young ones around us? Are we focusing on the spilled milk, loud voices, and childish ways? Or do we see the potential God sees? Each one of us in the local congregation plays a vital role in nurturing the spiritual heart of our next generation.