

# CHAPTER TEN

## DRAWING NEAR TO YOUR CHILD THROUGH PLAY AND AFFECTION

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### *Scripture Memory Verse— Eccl 3:1,4-5, 8*

*“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--*

*...a time to laugh;*

*...a time to dance.*

*A time to embrace...*

*...A time to love,*

*...A time for peace.”*

## Chapter Ten

# Drawing Near To Your Child Through Play and Affection— Bible Study

*And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.*

Lk 15:20

## INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of this series is to help you fulfill the responsibilities as laid down in the Word of God concerning your child's training and discipline while at the same time developing a deep love relationship with your child that will weather the storms of life. The latter is by far the heavier emphasis in terms of time and attention required. Conflict and discipline should be but a blip on the screen of your overall relationship with your child. It is, however, discipline that makes this possible. The respect and order obtained through discipline and training makes play not only a possibility, but a probability since **it is as a result of discipline that play becomes equally enjoyable** for both the child and the parent. Family times become more common; children are drawn to their brothers and sisters; parents seek out opportunities to include their child in their life. How much better this is than the ill-mannered, sulky child prone to temper tantrums whose parents, though bursting with love for this child, only play with him in controlled situations knowing there will be at least one scene. For the well-behaved child, all life opens up for opportunities for play as the parent realizes that the child can be safely taken into many and varied social settings. Play becomes more fun not only for the child but for the parent as well.

What follows is:

1. a brief study in the Word of God to aid you in understanding the subject matter of this chapter.
2. a manuscript is provided for you and your spouse to read and discuss.
3. a set of practical projects for discussion and application, provided to aid you in implementing those areas of the seminar that meet your needs as a parent.

## Bible Study

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection: **verbal affection**, **physical affection**, and **parental involvement**. As you read the following verses, write out the phrase from the verse which best represents the subject.

#### 1. VERBAL AFFECTION

God the Father and verbal affection

Passage

Is 43:4

Phrases God uses to express His love

God the Son and verbal affection

Passage

Phrases God uses to express His love

God the Holy Spirit and verbal affection

Passage

Ps 107: 1, 8, 15, 21

Phrases God uses to express His love

#### 2. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

God the Father and physical affection

Passage

Is 40:11

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

God the Son and physical affection

Passage

Mk 9:36; 10:16

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

God the Holy Spirit and physical affection

Passage

Rom 5:5; Acts 9:31

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

### 3. PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

*God the father and personal involvement*

Passage  
*Dt 17:9*

Phrases God uses to express His personal involvement

*God the Son and personal involvement*

Passage  
*Rom 5:8*

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

*God the Holy Spirit and personal involvement*

Passage  
*1 Cor 3:16*

Phrases God uses to express His physical love

### GOD'S LOVE FOR US

***This is a very important conviction for us, that God loves us.***

**According to Jn 3:16, how did God express this love?**

**According to Heb 12:6, how does God express this love?**

**What do you experience more of in life, God's graces or His disciplines?**

**Grace is defined as "receiving that which is not deserved," and this is poured out upon us by God. As models of God to our children, how can we express Grace to them?**

**Does my child experience more grace or more discipline when it comes to our relationship? (Why)**

# Chapter Ten

## Reshuffling the Deck: Drawing Near To Your Child Through Play And Affection

*"...There is a time for every event under heaven...  
a time to laugh...  
a time to dance...  
a time to embrace...  
a time to love..."*

Ecc1 3:1,4,5 & 8

### I. PRINCIPLES AT WORK

The ultimate goal of this series is three-fold:

**First:** to aid you as the parent in fulfilling the Biblical responsibilities placed before you by God concerning your child's training and discipline.

**Second:** To equip your child with the spiritual skills that are necessary for him to be both fruitful and fulfilled in life.

**Third:** That your child will grow up and leave home.

In doing this, we always want to preserve a balance between discipline and fun, between project and relationship. Notice that I did not say between discipline and love. Discipline is one of the highest forms of love. Rather, I am emphasizing the difference between discipline and fun. Again, notice that I did not say between discipline and interactive projects. For some parents, fun is just another project. I emphasize therefore the difference between projects and fun relationships. They are not mutually exclusive, but must be kept in balance. Some projects may be within the set of fun relationship building. However, for the child, not all projects are fun. Similarly, some forms of fun, which the child will really enjoy and appreciate, require a degree of project-orientation. All relationship and no project usually results in a child who looks back on parents who had good intentions but never got anything done. All project and no relationship results in a child who looks back at parents who were action-oriented in their leisure time, but the child still does not feel that close tie that only play and affection can bring. In other words, it wasn't really fun.

We are striving for a close love relationship with our child that will weather the storms of life. Physical discipline should be nothing more than a blip on the screen of your relationship with your children. It is only one tiny slice of the relational pie. Its true benefit is that the respect and order obtained through love (expressed in discipline and training) makes drawing near to your child through play and affection not only a possibility, but a probability. Now it's fun for the parent as well as the child to spend time together. What is fun for the person in charge will get chosen more often than not. If play is something that gives Mom and Dad a headache because of a whining, ungrateful, unruly child, then play will occur less often. With disciplined, thankful, well-behaved children, family times become more common and children draw closer to their parents and to their brothers and sisters. It is the same with the child. A child who cannot control his emotions, who is selfish and unappreciative cannot really have interactive fun and play. This child cannot enjoy his

*"The key to drug free kids... teach them to play."*

— Dr. White, (Moody Graduate School; Wheaton Graduate School)

*Megan and Liz were happily jumping on the trampoline. They were laughing, talking, giggling and having a great time together. I came out in the back yard and they cried out, "Look, daddy, look at what we can do." Then they began jumping and improvising all sorts of routines, as they laughed and laughed 'til they finally collapsed, ending up just a ball of intertwined bouncing giggles.*

*"That's great kids," I cried out, "you seem to enjoy this so much, why don't I try to find you a gymnastic class for the summer." The giggling stopped and both girls looked up at me and stared goggled-eyed, mouths open, as if I had just suggested that rather than go to Church camp they sign up for math and spelling at summer school.*

*I beat a hasty retreat, "Bad idea, kids, show me some more." Life returned to the trampoline and they did their next routine.*

relationships with other children, his siblings or his parents. To the degree that he is disciplined and well behaved, he can enjoy fun and play with others.

Keep in mind here that for many evangelical parents, denial is not just a river in Egypt. It can also be a refusal to compare your actions with that of the Scripture. Even in play, children are still required to be obedient to their parents and under their control. I have seen many children go wild at play. The parents smile or nod condescendingly and say, “What a precocious child,” or “He is just so focused,” as if being intelligent or gifted is an excuse for disobedient or wild behavior. Parents simply end up cheating themselves and their children. They cheat themselves because either consciously or unconsciously, they spend less time playing with their children if they are wild. They cheat their children because a wild, unruly, sullen child does not have many friends in or out of the home.

### A. WHAT EXACTLY WE MEAN

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection: verbal affection, physical affection, and parental involvement.

We experience these in our relationship with God. Our children are prepared for this in their relationship with God, as we model God in our relationship with our children. The Word of God states in Ps 103:13, “*Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*” So our children will look back to the closeness we have with them, our affection, our love for them and relate that to their heavenly Father. Drawing near to your child through play and affection in these three areas— verbal affection, physical affection, and parental involvement— is a crucial element in helping your child to respond to God in these same three areas.

### **God Reveals His Love Through Verbal Affection**

**First, the Triune God is a loving, affectionate God in His verbal relationship with us.** This is seen in Jeremiah’s relationship with God the Father, where it states in Jeremiah 31:3 “*The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.’*” God the Father is not a distant, cold, closed, unexpressive God, but rather a close, self-revealing, verbally-affectionate God.

Similarly, concerning God the Son, Jesus Christ, we have ample evidence of His verbal affection. In John 11:3, Lazarus’s sisters sent for Jesus when he is sick, saying “*Lord,*

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*Jackie violently disagreed with me on this issue. “My child is simply a very, very focused child,” she protested. “He just gets so engrossed in his play that he is not conscious of what is going on around him. It is not that he is wild, he is just a very focused child. I understand this and it does not hinder our relationship at all.” I begged to disagree with Jackie on two points.*

*First on his being a “focused” child. By this, she means a highly-intelligent child who becomes mentally engrossed in his duties. Be it work or play, he loses track of what is going on around him. He may indeed be a “focused” child; this does not however give him the license to be a disobedient child. Nowhere in psychology or in the Bible is intelligence or concentration equated with disobedience. Instead, just the opposite is true. In fact, it is Jackie’s responsibility to discipline her son so that he experiences all that his intelligence has to offer him. What many parents try to sell “focused” as just a way of their denying that their children ignore them!*

*Secondly, I know Jackie and have seen the dynamics of her family and her child’s behavior does affect their relationship. True, Jackie is more conscientious than most in seeing that play takes place with the children, but two negative dynamics are at work. First, it is generally Jackie and her focused child. Her husband, Bill, wants little to do with the chaos that passes for play. Sure he can be coaxed in to it, but it is far less time than either of them are happy with. Secondly, what Jackie referred to as play time with her precocious, focused little darling was actually her standing back and watching while he did his thing with her periodically functioning as damage control officer. He played as she watched, and there was periodic conflict at first when she tried to keep his “focused” behavior in reasonable check and then as she tried to unfocus him or defocus him when it came time to leave.*

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*behold, he whom You love is sick.*" In seeing from the Gospels how freely Jesus used the word "love," we can understand how freely the sisters used it in their petition. Jesus referred to His love for the disciples in His exhortations for them to love others, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another," (Jn 13:34). He does this again in John 15:12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." He also spoke freely of His intense love for the disciples as in John 15:9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." He exhorted them to revel in the intense love He had for them. Jesus was not bashful concerning verbal affection.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, constantly reinforces His love for us: "and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Rom 5:5).

### **God Reveals His Love Through Physical Affection**

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In the parable of the prodigal son, God the Father has depicted Himself as a physically affectionate Father, "And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him." (Lk 15:20).

And again, we find Jesus Christ, God the Son, as a physically affectionate God, both with children, as in Mark 9:36, "And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them," and with the disciples, "There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." (Jn 13:25).

The Holy Spirit is also a loving God, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase," (Acts 9:31).

### **God Reveals His Love Through Personal Involvement**

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The Historical books are filled with God the Father becoming personally involved with men, beginning with Adam, "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man," (Gn 2:18, 22, 23).

He is also involved with Israel, "the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid," (Dt 11:2-). He is involved with the Church, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows," (Mt 10:29-31).

Similarly, Jesus Christ is personally involved in the lives of the disciples, as He is with us. "And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him," (Mk 3:14). The Holy Spirit is involved in our personal lives: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Cor. 3:16)

**Love expressed verbally, physically and through personal involvement is the normative, definitive love, as expressed in the scriptures.**

Paul was very expressive in *verbal love*, “Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!” (2 Cor 11:11), *physical love*, “But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, ‘Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.’ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,” (Acts 20:10, 37) and *personal involvement*, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” (1 Thes. 2:7)

We must then express these three areas in the lives of our children. They are modeled by the triune God towards us, and they are normative in relationships within the Church. How much more should they be modeled by us to our children, and normative in our relationships with our children! When the Bible speaks of God the Father’s verbal affection, His physical affection, His personal involvement, what picture will yours, the earthly father and model conjure up in your child’s life? When the Bible

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*“It is very hard for me to relate to the passages concerning God’s love for me and His desire for me to enjoy life. When I read the passages about God the Father, I think of my own father. He was a good provider, but was just not into expressing his love for us kids.”*

University student expressing to me her frustration at not being able to relate well to the passages in scripture referring to God the Father as a loving God.

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speaks of the Christian’s verbal affection, his physical affection, his personal involvement in the lives of others, what modeling, what preparation will your relationship with your child be in terms of his ability to obey God in this area? When God tells your child to “enjoy,” will your child be able to within the boundaries set by God? All this is gained by drawing near to your child by play and affection.

**B. WHY PARENTS FAIL:**

The first thing that comes to mind when I consider why parents fail in this area is just plain stinginess. Proverbs 18:6 teaches us that “A man’s gift makes room for him,” and this is true in our relationship with our children. I have seen spiritual stinginess take many forms.



### Selective Stewardship

In each case, the ministers with lay or full-time responsibilities practiced a highly selective form of stewardship. They were crippled in their ability to draw near to their children through play and affection by their own stinginess. You see they were loath to spend money on their family, but were more than willing for the ministry to bless them. This double standard, clear to their family, not only embittered their children toward them, but kept them from being able to take decisive action in this area on behalf of their relationship with their children.

I have seen this many times. The difference between stewardship and blessing is the difference between what they like and what they don't. There is a shotgun for Dad, but no Christmas tree, or at best a third-rate one for the family. There is a bird dog run, training, and all for Dad, but shop at Wal-Mart for Mom and the kids. There is a bass boat, depth finder and troller for dad, but buy shoes at Payless for Mom and the kids. Dad has a deer lease, but no baseball camp for Junior and no women's retreat for Mom. Dad takes a mission trip to southern England, but no family vacation. Just take it at home again this year. Several new business suits needed for work and ministry, but buy the rest of the clothes at yard sales.

*David is a highly successful Christian businessman in my neighborhood. His success has given him the financial freedom to travel and minister as a layman in the denomination which he faithfully serves as an officer both on a national and international level. As such, he travels all over the world speaking for his denomination, doing great acts of charity. He is a blessing to his denomination, especially to its mission ventures.*

*When it comes to his own children, though, he is very tight-fisted. While he might stay in a four star hotel, his children must be content with a cheap artificial Christmas tree. While he might drop a couple of grand on an "evangelistic dove hunt," his kids must do without. He is very quick to preach his sermons on stewardship to his wife and children, and they do live very modestly and work hard.*

*David was constantly working while he was at home. I never saw him shooting basketball with his sons or engaging in play that they found exciting. It was always work and frugality at home. This would be a great testimony to his generosity to the work of God, except that on his mission trips and ministry activities, his generosity to others overflows lavishly on him, but not on his wife or children. David has often wondered why his children are not close to him and has spoken to me often of their worldliness and how he has tried to protect them from it. His children are all too aware that what is at stake is his stinginess towards them and not concern. David manifests a peculiar syndrome I see often in laymen and ministers alike; they have the ability to apply the Christian principles of liberality and forgiveness in lavish proportions outside the family but not within it.*

*Gary is a minister friend of mine. It would be poor stewardship to buy an expensive car, but when a congregant gave one to him, you could guarantee that it would be in his parking spot in the church while his wife and kids ended up in the clunker. Vacations were rare and bare-boned for the family, but you could guarantee that Gary was at every denominational function, staying in nice hotels in large cities. While Gary often met with businessmen in nice restaurants for lunch and never missed a denominational banquet, eating out was rare for the family. His home was frugal and thread bare, but you can bet his office was spacious, comfortable, and well-furnished. Gary practiced selective stewardship that included a form of spirituality that allowed him to present a picture to the world of sacrifice while, at the same time and at the expense of his family, he experienced all the world had to offer. It is no wonder his wife's countenance was fallen and his children were sullen and resentful.*

**It is not to say that buying clothes at yard sales, Wal-Mart or Payless is wrong.** That’s where the Mahon family shops. Nor is taking vacation time, but not actually going anywhere. Several times the Mahon Family has not had funds to take off for a week and has spent the vacation time on picnics, in parks and on a series of fun one-day outings. It is to say that in doing these things it has been a family financial situation. What’s good for Mom and the kids has also been good for Dad. The variable here has been that while Mom and the kids live at one level, “practicing good stewardship,” Dad, in business and the ministry lives at a completely different level. This is wrong.

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*Cliff was a missionary with a large family. They lived in a small house in a relatively poor neighborhood. In order to practice good stewardship they lived cramped, sacrificial lives. His wife looked years beyond her age and the kids looked like waifs. This was a sacrifice Cliff was willing to make, but only a few hours out of each day. You see Cliff’s office in the ministry was spacious and well furnished. He rubbed shoulders with educators and businessmen. He was often downtown eating out, ministering, and visiting. Often, he would be at home just a few hours before leaving again at night.*

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### **C. When parents are crippled by their own problems**

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*Connie's mother was an alcoholic, and her father worked away from the home as much as possible. He moved in his job until he could secure a position that enabled him to be out of the home much of the time. As a result, Connie never had a childhood. She grew up cooking meals, cleaning house, getting her younger brothers and sister off to school, forging notes and permission slips for them, making excuses for Mom and even doing the shopping. Her mother was always, “sick,” “too tired” from work or “suffered from migraines.” When Connie got married, she did not know how to play with either her husband or her children. She saw her relationships suffering from this and her children suffering as well. She simply did not know what to do about it.*

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*Tom grew up in a poor family and had worked all his life. He never had free time. His family lived on a farm and as long as he could remember life was either spent working on the farm or on jobs outside the farm if time permitted. He was the hardest worker I knew, but he did not know how to play. He could not get close to his kids, either. If it was not a project, if it could not be translated into a task, project or job, Tom did not know how to deal with it. His relationships all suffered, in the church, in his marriage, and with his children. Tom realized he did not have the relational standing with the kids to guide them through the difficult teen years. The one thing that would turn the corner, play and affection, he saw as weak and wasteful.*

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*Claire was the most dynamic woman in the church. She had strong values and was devoted to the family. She would never hold a job other than wife and homemaker. Yet, Claire could not play. She home-schooled, ran a music conservatory for her kids, and offered volunteer lessons for every needy situation you could imagine. She “mentored” young mothers. She volunteered in the church. She was, in fact, a compulsive worker and totally project-oriented. She was able to get away with this by spiritualizing it, but the effects were the same. Her highly-trained and talented children had a very mechanical and functional relationship with her. Claire was at a loss as to why her teenage daughters sought solace in the arms of young men rather than at home.*

In each case, parents crippled by their own emotional problems were unable to engage in play and affection with their children. As a result, both their marriage and children’s spiritual safety suffered.

### Poor Role Modeling by Parents

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This is true, though in many areas. Children tend to idolize their parents and to do to their children what was done to them, without really sitting down and thinking through as to whether or not they were raised with distinctly Christian values. To reject a value or method of your parents is not to be disloyal or dishonoring but to simply recognize that they were not perfect. Just because it was always done in a certain way does not mean you have to repeat it in your family life. Good secure cross-parent communication is essential here. As parents we must be secure enough to listen to our spouse who often sees the chink in the armor or the fallacy in the method or tradition.

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*Darlene's father was a successful physician with a lucrative practice in a large metropolitan city. She had a checkbook all through college that she never balanced. She had credit cards that never seemed to reach their limit. Most important of all, Daddy, in an effort to make up for his absence, spared her no luxury.*

*Darlene went to nursing school and married a doctor who was just beginning his residency. Although he would one day make a comfortable living, he did not specialize beyond Family Practice. He was content to return to a small rural community, similar to the one in which he had grown up. By the time he had begun his practice, Darlene had the family so deep in debt they might never dig themselves out.*

*Darlene never stopped to question whether she could live with her new husband at the lowest point of his earning power as she had with her father at the highest, or if the financial freedom given to her by her father was even right. She just pushed on. The friction caused by her free-spending ways and lifestyle resulted in a debt that greatly hindered their ability to draw near as a family through play and affection.*

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*Terrie had grown up in a family proud of its ethnic heritage. In her grandparents' culture, the boys ran wild, but the girls were disciplined and prepared for a life of service. It never occurred to Terrie to do it any other way until it was almost too late. Her daughter was a model of decorum and decency, but her four boys were such hellions that nothing was possible in the home while they were on the scene. Family outings were atrocious, church was a chore, dinner times were a disaster. As Terrie began to think back on her brothers lives, her own high school experience, and the boys she dated, she realized that the good girl/bad boy stereotype was not scriptural. She had almost sacrificed her relationship with her boys by blindly following it. Needless to say, her boys in this shape were not close to her.*

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*Carl grew up in a competitive home with a very competitive family. He raised his kids the same way. Whether it was play wrestling, basketball or catch, it always ended up in a competition to see who was best. What Carl did not realize was that his children were not drawing near to him through play, and competition is certainly not affectionate. His four boys took one of two routes, they lived for the day when they could cram it down Dad's throat, like they had grown up with him doing to them, or they just opted out of the relationship. I can remember being at Carl's home now that his boys were in their late teens and early college years. One son stood on the sidelines refusing to play at all, while the other three ran Carl into the ground playing driveway basketball. Just as soon as they had thoroughly put it to him and he had limped away, only then did the fourth boy join in and the four boys together engage in actual play.*

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It is important for us to ask ourselves two questions. First, are the methods our parents used in this crucial area of our relationship with our children really Biblical in nature?

And second, did they really bring us close to them, allowing them to have greater influence over our success in life— both personal and spiritual?

### **Selfish ambitions**

What we have fought, we have embraced. The desire for things has caused those in the modern evangelical family culture to accept and practice family methods our recent forefathers never thought possible, *“and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”* (Mk 4:19)

The restless desire for acquisitions is a powerful force within our culture. As a result, there are three modern philosophies that most evangelical couples accept without consideration as if they were Bible memory verses learned at early childhood, recited over the years and accepted without question. They are: the two-child family; the children cared for in day care and early education centers; and the mother returning to work while the children are still at home.

In my estimation, nothing has impacted the Christian family more in terms of its ability to draw close through play and affection than the blind following of young evangelical couples to quickly have two children and then stop. This is followed rapidly by the mother pursuing a career in order for the young couple to acquire more and more material things, and go deeper and deeper into consumer debt. The willingness to allow strangers to care for their children in exchange for material acquisition is something unimaginable to Christian couples even a generation ago.

### **A Lifestyle of Emotional Distance**

Lastly, parents fail to draw near to their children through play and affection for the same reasons they fail in their relationship with one another and with others in their sphere of influence.

It is always amazing to me that men, with few or no close friends, who are not on intimate terms with their wife, not close to their brothers or sisters, and have no intimate confidential friends in their church are amazed that there has been a communication breakdown with their children. Men who give themselves to their work, have no hobbies, have no outside pursuits, and have no deep relationships outside of their career-be it Christian or secular—are surprised that they do not have a close bond with their children.

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*It is a clear early childhood memory. It was 1959, the height of the Cold War and my fellow second-grade students and I were sitting attentively in class as we watched a movie. It was a Cold War propaganda film and the cornerstone of the message, the one thing that we all talked about afterwards, both in class and on the playground, were the stark pictures of Russian children, our age and even toddlers, being cared for and raised by institutional workers while their moms went off to work. The message was clear, only godless commies let strangers raise their children. We couldn't believe it. No mom at home. No mom to put on the Band-Aid. No mom to send us off to school with a kiss and a lunch. No mom to read us stories, put us down for a nap and be there for us when we got home. No mom to be homeroom mother, to work the holiday parties at school, to volunteer in the library and in the classroom. No mom to come and get us when we skinned our knees, fell in the mud, spilled our milk or came down with the flu. Yes, we all agreed, communism was indeed an evil, evil thing. We did not understand politics, but we did understand no mom.*

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*“Well, I lost that one for sure.” Mary was sharing with me her conviction that she had just lost one of her charges. Mary took in one or two children each year to help make ends meet. She had four of her own, but took in one or two each year. She enjoyed this more and more as her own children began to be in school all day.*

*The problem? The child in question had begun to refer to her as “Mommy” while at home. And why not? Mary related to the child as “Mommy” while the mother related to the child as a day care worker. Mary was with the child all day, five days a week, while the “mother” was with her evenings and weekends. That evening, the mother had come to pick her up and she had cried for “mommy” when she had to leave.*

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Women who live for career and service organizations, who are too tired to relate to their husband when they get home, much less their children, who get a groggy child up, feed him “breakfast” in the car on the way to work, drop him off at dawn and pick him up at dinner time, are surprised that their children are not intimate with them. Women who view themselves as workers, even in the home, while others play, they cook, clean, host, anything but play, are surprised that others are closer to their children than they are.

Look at your life, it may very well be that the distance you feel from your children is just a slice of the distance you feel in all relationships. Begin at home, but don’t stop there. As you grow in all areas of relationships you will grow in your ability to draw near to your child through play and affection.

### C. WHY PARENTS MUST NOT FAIL.

In our relationship with our heavenly Father, we are constantly reminded of His deep and sacrificial commitment

to our well being, of His constant reinforcement, through His Word, of His love for us and the joy He takes in the relationship. It is a blessing, yes, it is fun to be a Christian, a child of God. Jesus Christ said it aptly enough, in John10:10 “... *I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.*” Without this aspect of His involvement in our lives, this deep abiding love, the relationship would never survive the deep trials of discipline which invariably come our way. Of course, we should believe it simply because God says it, but in reality, we believe it because of the relationship, “*whom the Lord loves He disciplines.*” Because of the closeness of our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we believe that His discipline is an act of love.

*“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,  
and He scourges every son whom He receives.”*  
Heb 12:6

This is equally true with the relationship of earthly fathers to their children. We must have a deep, close love relationship with our children to weather the storms of discipline produced by their inevitable disobedience and rebellion. The discipline then becomes a blip on the screen of the relationship, consumed by a sea of intimacy that is based on our personal involvement in their lives, a crucial aspect of which is drawing near to our children through play and affection.

This will also serve as their model for the spiritual discipline they will receive from God., “*Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*” (Ps 103:13) When God disciplines them, they will remember the deep relationship they had with their father and how he disciplined them out of love not in anger, not out of vindictiveness, not in jealousy, not out of hatred, but because of a deep and abiding love. It would be inconceivable that a father who drew so close to his children through play and affection could have these emotions, so it must be love. Nothing else is possible, and in the same way they will think of their heavenly Father.

Drawing near to your child through play and affection will serve then as an anchor to help the relationship weather the storms of life. It will cover a multitude of sins including the mistakes we will invariably make, and it will serve as a stabilizing force, the rudder of a sailing ship, the beacon light for the safe haven during the turbulent teen years.

## II. Stages—Conception through Infancy:

“The first three years are just maintenance.” It was a cute cliché used by Stew to explain his indifference to his small children, his saddling of his wife with virtually all the responsibilities for the newborn and his preoccupation with the ministry. This utilitarian attitude revealed itself in one way or another throughout his relationship with his children.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The earliest years are an important time of bonding and relationship- building. Both parents should view their new child as a gift from God, and should enjoy this gift to the fullest.

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*Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.*

Ps 127:3-4

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### A. VERBAL AFFECTION

This begins, believe it or not, at conception. Begin to talk of the baby as a baby. Express love and thankfulness to one another and to the child. I really encourage you to avoid terms like “it” or “thing.” Pray for your new baby. Praise God for your new baby. Encourage the other children to say “night-night” to the new baby while the baby is in the womb and to give the baby night-night kisses and hugs. Lay your hands on the mother's womb and pray for the child. Rejoice verbally to the child, to the Lord, and to one another for this great gift.

Once the child is born, make sure there is lots of holding and cuddling. No thought of discipline should be given for the first six to nine months. This is a time of love, affection, and bonding. Laugh, coo, express your love and affection to the child. The child's brain is a giant sponge. Fill it with words and expressions of love. Sing to the child. Pray for the child. Worship God for the child and express, express, express your deep love for the child.

### B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

This also begins at conception. Learn to stroke and kiss the child in the womb. Encourage the other children to feel the child's movement, to hug and kiss the child. Once the child is born, hold, kiss, and caress the child. When your children read I Thessalonians 2:7, “*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children,*” they should be reminded of your behavior around their newborn brothers and sisters.

### C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

This begins at conception and is done through the mother. At this point, serving the mother is serving the child. By taking an active role in prenatal care and the birthing process, the young father prepares himself for the entrance of the child into his life. Be willing to take one of the excellent birthing classes. Take an active role in the preparation of the baby's living area.

Once the child is born, activities associated with play are many for the young father. Rock the baby to sleep, and hold the child while sleeping. Sing and laugh as you change the diapers and bathe the child. If Mom cannot nurse for some reason, then dad can take

an active part in feeding the child. Play little games with the child's limbs, cuddle games, tickle games, kissing games, hugging games, singing games, talking games, play, bond, play, love, play, kiss, play, pray, play, play, play. At every opportunity the young father should pick up the newborn and draw near to him through play and affection.

When young fathers are at home, they should ask themselves, "Why aren't I holding the baby?" and if they cannot come up with a good answer, they should go pick up their baby.

### III. Stages— Toddler through Preschool:

At this stage, for the child, the definition of fun in life is quite simple, "Fun is having Mom or Dad do something with them." This, however, presupposes the training and discipline to make this possible. Of course, a foolish, scornful child will not hold to this definition of fun, nor will he be able to fully appreciate these relational activities. This child is foolish; he will want to be in charge. He will spoil his own activities. He will spoil his fun times with whimpering, whining, selfishness, and unmanageable behavior. A parent who loves his child will discipline and train the child in such a way that fun is possible, that play with the parents is true interactive play which bonds and draws them closer to one another and prepares the child for success outside the home.

#### A. VERBAL AFFECTION

This is essential for the young father. The cold, unexpressive father is no more acceptable here than in the marriage relationship. Just as in marriage, to fulfill the scriptural mandate, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,*" (Ephesians 5:25), the husband must be communicative, both in expressing himself and in listening. In this way, his relationship with his children will be an example of the heavenly Father's willingness to always be there, expressing love, affection and affirmation. The earthly father must be this example for his children.

The advertising media spends millions of dollars each week to convince your children that they are unattractive, unpopular, disappointing, and unintelligent. If your children will just spend lots and lots of money, the products advertised will fix their problems. The creation of a poor self-image in your children is the supreme goal of a multibillion-dollar world-wide industry, and it is our jobs as fathers to fight against this process. As a result, there are four phrases which I try to say daily to my children...

- "I love you."
- "You're pretty/handsome."
- "I am proud of you."
- "You're smart."

The constant reinforcement of these phrases cannot be over emphasized. They must hear it over and over again. In addition, spontaneous phrases of praise must be given...

- “You're special.”
- “I am so glad God gave you to us.”
- “I wouldn't change anything about you.”
- “You make me the happiest daddy in the world.”
- “You're the greatest child in the world.”
- “You're the most wonderful child a father could ask for.”

Nick names and terms of affection such as, “sweet heart,” “little darlings,” “honey,” for the girls, and “best buds,” “buddy,” “tough guy,” “super pal,” for the boys are also important.

In the same way I shudder as I hear fathers berate and put down their children to lift their own egos. Nick names such as “monkey face,” “pinhead,” “goof ball,” “squirt,” “half pint,” “pumpkin,” “tubs,” “toady,” and the like are destructive and egotistical and should be repented of by the foolish and self-centered father. These not only create vulnerability and low self-image in the child, but often they create friction between husband and wife, between parent and other adult relatives, and between parent and child.

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*I have always had affectionate names for my children. Becca was “Becky Boo.” “Sweetheart” was common. The two youngest girls have always been “the lil’ darlin’s.” Sam has been “tough guy” and we were always “best buds” and “friends to the end.” Sam, even though now in his early twenties, will come up to me and put his arm around my shoulder and say, “friends to the end” or “best buds, right Dad?” Becca, even in college, would refer to me as “Daddy” as would all the girls. “Oh Daddy!” is a common exclamation from the girls. One of the reasons I believe that we are all so close to each other is that El and I have always used affectionate terms with each other and with the children, and had a no-tolerance policy of the children being unkind in words to each other.*

*I always shudder when I hear children call each other names without being spanked. How foolish of them! Their parents will die. Their friends will all get married and move away. Pastors and teachers will move to new ministries. Many will find that their spouse has predeceased them. Their truly life-long friends, the ones who will always be by their sides, are their brothers and sisters. How foolish to call an ally such as this a name, and how tragic for a parent to allow it to happen.*

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*“Hey, dork, tell Brother John your name.”*

*“Wart Hog” beamed the toddler, and then his father laughed and laughed and laughed.*

*Embarrassed, I did not know what to do. This father, in his effort to play with his children, did not seem to know how to play, kid and show affection without the inclusion of some insult. Is it any wonder that they grew up estranged from their father? By the way, his wife never forgave him, even to this day, though the kids are all married and gone. She still has not forgiven her husband for teaching her little hero to respond to the name “Wart Hog.”*

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## B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION

This is equally important in terms of the young father's relationship with his children. Here, I recommend lots and lots of lap time. After dinner, in the car, in the home, in church, during leisure times, there should be lots of lap time. Of course, this presupposes “obey” and “no.” A child who cannot obey, who cannot respond to the command “no,” is being robbed by negligent parents of the opportunity to bond and be affectionate with his parents.



It is foolish for a child not to want to be held and loved by a father. This foolishness is driven out by the rod. How sad that Jeff allowed this foolishness to remain and cheated his child out of the bond that comes from close, affectionate contact with the father. Unfortunately, to Jeff's as well as to many parents shame and dismay, children do not grow out of bad behavior, they grow into it. It is discipline that saves them, not time. Jeff's teens were no more able to draw close to him than were his toddlers.

*Jeff strongly differed with me in this area. He did not discipline his children, and he was affectionate with them. But I differed with Jeff. His children could not be held at the dinner table during the after dinner conversation. For one, they would not stand for it. They would wiggle and make a nuisance of themselves 'til Jeff was glad to see them depart. Another problem was that if they were in his lap, they would be pulling the silverware, coffee, place mats and what-have-you onto the floor, or Jeff's lap. Elsewhere, if they were tired and of the right disposition, they would be held, otherwise they foolishly denied themselves of Jeff's affection and attention by wiggling and squirming and crawling all over Jeff, pulling his glasses off, taking his pens out, yanking at his hair and mouth until he finally let them go.*

Having taught our children, “no,” “obey,” and “hush” by the time they were 12 months old, it was always a pleasure to have them with us at the dinner table. After dinner I would hold the small child in my lap as the family talked. I read the devotional or the older kids worked on their Scripture memory verses. The child quietly amused himself with my buttons, or a spoon, or the hair on my arms. If things got a little out of hand, a gentle “no” or “obey” or “hush” would restore order. If not, a spanking, that might last a few minutes, insured hours of intimacy. This early discipline in behavior, self-control and social etiquette served them well. As they matured, they were able to gain access to many of Eleanor's and my conversations that ill-mannered children are denied. They loved to sit and listen to us talk and were able, when we had visiting missionaries and dignitaries, to be privy to the inside “scoop,” in terms of the mysterious working of adults. All simply because they had learned as a lifestyle, not to be rude.

**Lots and lots of lap time is the name of the game.** After dinner, have the child sit in your lap with you as you enjoy after dinner conversation and a leisurely cup of coffee. If your child is too unruly for this, your application is to deny yourself and your child this fun time together, or discipline your child so that his foolish behavior neither cheats you nor him out of this special time together. Duhh! I always enjoyed having the children in my lap in the car. Letting them play with the steering wheel, talk in an animated way, it was great fun. At home, my lap was always open territory for the children. I loved to have them sit in my lap as I read to them, told them stories, let them play with toys in my lap, etc. At church, I loved to have the children near me, falling peacefully to sleep in my arms or lap during the sermon. These are fun bonding times for the children, make lap time a habit.

I want to say here a word about toddlers and preschoolers in the car. With the advent of the understanding of driver safety and sophisticated car seats, many parents have taken to driving with the kids in the back seat. This I can understand, if the parent is convinced of its necessity for the safety of the child. What should not be necessary is for the mother to be relegated to second-class status by having to sit back there with the child. A child can ride in the car without screaming, crying, and always throwing his toys down on the floorboard.

I cringe when I see men driving confidently around town while their haggard wives are crunched in the back seat, playing nanny to some little brat who will not let his mom have her seat of honor in the front. Even worse is the father and a child in front, while the mother is in back, by herself or with another child. Who do these kids think they are,

displacing Mom from the front seat by their rude and unmannerly behavior? And what kind of brains was this young father born with to allow this to happen? Of course, some fathers will reply that this is not an ego thing or a pecking order thing. They will insist that it is for safety, and that Mom likes being back there. It is good for her relationship with the child. Great! I have no problem with this. I presume then, that you, Dad, spend an equal amount of time in the back seat because it is such a neat bonding experience. No? Then I don't buy it.

On trips, I enjoyed riding with El in front, holding hands, talking and being together, away from the phone and pressures of ministries. I certainly wasn't going to let the kids rob me of her or of those special times. We had the wooden spoons in the glove compartment. I would stop anywhere, no matter the weather, no matter the traffic, no

matter the part of town we were in, no matter where we were going or how late we might be. I would take that spoon out of the glove compartment, have those children lie over the back seat with their hands on their cheeks, and drive that foolishness right out of them. Because this was done first and thoroughly, at an early age, Eleanor was never forced to surrender her place of honor in the front of the car, nor was I, and we have wonderful memories of road trips as a family.

Along with lots of lap time, are lots of hugs and kisses. We never allowed our children to draw away and refuse a hug or a kiss from Mom or Dad, or one of their brothers or sisters. How foolish of a child not to rejoice and respond to the love of his family! One of the most foolish life skills parents allow their children to develop is that of using the deprivation of affection to manipulate or punish family members. We never, never allowed this. The shortest route to the wooden spoon was to deny Mommy, Daddy, Brother or Sister a kiss, a hug or affection.

The first thing the kids get in the morning is a hug and a kiss. At mealtime, for the kids to leave the table they had to pay the "Daddy tax". That meant, to come by my chair and give me a hug and a kiss. As I arrived home from school, Eleanor would have the kids waiting for me. "Daddy's home!" they would yell and then hugs and kisses all around. At bedtime, I would hold them in my arms as I read the "night-night story," then wrap my arms around them and pray with them. I would give them a good-night kiss and then linger just a moment, with a hug. During this time, they would often share something very close to their heart.

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*Gus was obviously depressed. "Boy, do I hate Christmas" he confided. I could not believe my ears. Gus certainly never struck me as a Scrooge. He was one of the most pleasant ministers I had ever met.*

*He went on to explain. "Christmas means a two day car trip to my in-laws and after two days in our car with my kids. I can preach on Hell for a month." I felt for Gus. He did not believe in spanking and his kids knew it. They would misbehave. He would threaten. They would misbehave. He would deny them (and by default he and his wife) fun. The children were selfish and unruly. If not hell, at least he could preach on depravity.*

*When I told him how our family looked forward every year to the two-day car trip to see my sister in Colorado, he simply did not believe it. I painted a picture of us playing games, singing songs, the children playing quietly in the backseat by themselves or with each other. I spoke of Eleanor driving and me taking a nap in the back seat while our toddler quietly played with toys on my back. I shared how everybody talked about the coming trip for weeks before we left.*

*He quite simply did not believe it. It was so far from the reality of his life, that he just would not believe. Sad for him, but true, happy for me, for it was indeed true. What about you?*

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*As I prayed with Sam, I could see by his face that something was bothering him. As usual, we were hugging as we prayed, and I had to lean over him in bed to do this. "Sam, is everything alright?" He shook his head, no. "Are you sad?" Yes, he shook his head. "You can tell Daddy, tell Daddy what is wrong." I coaxed him. As I waited for him to share some deep secret or fear, he quietly replied. "You're leaning on me with your elbow in my stomach."*

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From the early toddler stage, I have walked and held hands with the kids. For our children it was not a form of discipline, but of love. How sad for the family that must hang on to a child for the sake of discipline rather than love, with a child who is squirming, pulling, yanking, and complaining. A disciplined and obedient child is a joy to go for walks with, to go shopping with or to be with, as they quietly and affectionately hold your hand.

A preschool child, if your hands are full, can be told to reach up and put their hand in your pocket or gently hold the edge of your hem and walk along by you. They can be asked to place one hand on the basket or cart, and walk quietly with you as you shop. More importantly, they can gently and lovingly, give and receive affection as you walk hand in hand, without yanking, without whining and without running you ragged.

Isn't *this* how you imagined it? Shopping with your little darling and sharing special affectionate times together, walking hand in hand. Then, when she tired out you would take her in your arms. Taking little walks together, little strolls, sharing affection in this special way is something which only a parent and child can do. *Isn't this how you imagined it?* Well, don't let a foolish child or a screwed-up world cheat you out of this special time. It is what we had, and you can have it, too, if you will take the time to discipline and train your children so that they can experience the love and affection you have for them.

Another thing I always let my children do was "mess with me." My kids loved to comb my hair. They would make it stand up straight or change the part or make it as wild as possible. They loved to play with my hands, my veins, the skin on my hands which was not nearly as elastic as theirs, the hairs on my hands and my face. If I was napping on the couch, they loved to come and sit on me and play quietly on my back. All this is possible with a gentle, respectful child, who wants to do these things out of love, and to be near and familiar with their parents. This is unlike an impish child, who wants to see what they can get away with. They try to pinch, get something, bother or make fun of Mom or Dad. What a joy pleasant children are. How much easier it is to draw near to a child through play and affection when that child respects his parents and accepts boundaries of behavior.

*I could not believe my eyes, but there it was. A mother and father with their child, their only child was on a leash! I saw this first in the airport. Then it began to appear in grocery stores. Now it is everywhere. I can think of no greater shame, of no greater admittance of failure, of no greater conformity to the fallen world's view of a child as an animal, than to be reduced as parents to putting a child on a leash. I put my dog, Sugar, on a leash when we go for a walk. We pass others with their dogs on leashes. We even pass some whose dogs are so well-trained that they obediently walk beside them without the leash. These poor parents have decided that their children are on the same socialization scale as their dog, yet less able to be trained than dogs.*

*I have seen it many, many times. It is depicted on greeting cards. It is on posters. It is in the morning comics. And, it is live in the grocery stores, supermarkets, and malls of America. A poor frazzled mom, lines of wear under her eyes, hair disheveled and cloths unkempt, screaming baby in her arms, a toddler pulling one way and a preschooler the other, hangs on for dear life trying by physical force to control their movements.*

### C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

Someday your child will read in the Bible of the deep personal involvement that God the Father has and takes in his life. He will read of God's view of him as His son, of the Church as His Bride, and of all Christians as His children... children of God. He will read of God's deep personal involvement in, and commitment to, this family of God. It is at that point that he will begin to struggle for a frame of reference, for a context in which to

understand and picture these great truths. He will turn to the only reality he has experienced: that of his own father, his own parents, and his own family. Our objective is that when this happens, a light will blink on in his soul and he will say, “Ohhh, so that’s what it means, just like Mom and Dad’s love for me and deep involvement in my life. They were always there for me. Just like Dad and Mom, God will always be there for me. Just like my own brother and sister, so kind, so supportive, always there for me, that is what brothers and sisters in Christ are to be. Just like our family: close, stable, and warm... that’s the family of God. So that’s what it means.”

### **Reading:**

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Reading to and with your child is one of the greatest ways to draw near to your child through play and affection. Christian tapes are good and fine. There are many good Christian children’s books that come with an audio cassette tape. There is a little chime that rings when it is time to turn the page and children love to look at the picture and turn the pages. This is great entertainment for a child, but *you* do not draw near to your child, as your child sits by the tape player, headphones on his head, isolated from the world, listening to a tape. It is good, and it is edifying. We loved them. Many good lessons and biblical truths are learned, **but it is not drawing near to your child**. There is virtually no personal involvement. It always amazes me to hear my Christian friends decrying the TV, talking about how it breaks up the family. Some don’t even have their TV hooked up to receive signals. But their kids sit there listening to the book tape, or watching the video. These become mechanical babysitters so Mom and Dad can get on with their lives. These systems are great ways to entertain the children and to create an atmosphere conducive to learning truth. They are no substitute for the close love and affection expressed by the child sitting in your lap or arms as you read to them. You interact, ask questions, play little games and express your love. Your child equates the most fun in their lives being that special time you spend together.

### **Bedtime:**

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Bedtime is a great time to read, as is right before dinner. While Mom puts the finishing touches on things, Dad can read with the kids. Then, it is the bedtime routine. Children will be highly motivated to get their jammies on, get their clothes in the dirty clothes hamper, get their teeth brushed, get their clothes out for the next day, and get their lunch made for school, (*Oh, you do all these things for your child? You must be very tired*). When it is all done, Dad comes up to pray and read with them. These were special times in our family, and I did not allow for interruptions. I have had more than one supervisor or ministry leader upset with me when Eleanor told them, “Sorry, he can’t come to the phone, he’s reading to the kids.” But that’s the way it is. If I am reading to the kids, I only interrupt it for an emergency.

### **Dates:**

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Another great expression of personal involvement is taking the child on special dates. These do not have to cost you a thing. My preschoolers loved to go for walks, go to the park, go to the airport, go to the lake, go to the fire station, anywhere where they could laugh, run and play with me. We called them “dates” and they felt so grown-up. They knew Saturday night was “date night” with Mom, and it made them feel so special and

grown up when I would have a date with them. Usually, we would top it off with a ice cream cone or a stop at the supermarket to ride the mechanical horse.

**Play:**

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Playing with the child is equally important. Each child has special activities, books, coloring games, board games, dolls, sports etc. that they particularly love. Play with the child down at his level, the way he wants to, with no rules and no competition, just fun.

Sure, competition is good. Sure, learning to lose is good. But, there are plenty of bumps and bruises out their for your children. For me, play is not a character-building project, but a way to draw near to my child by being personally involved in their play. My kids all grew up beating me at checkers, beating me at cards, beating me at play wrestling, beating me at tag, beating me at racing, beating me at thumb wrestling, beating me at Candy Land, Bingo, and beating me at Chutes and Ladders.

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*Liz loved to play cards with me. She was just barely old enough to hold them, she certainly did not know what the symbols meant or what they were. Each time we played, she got 8 cards and I got 6. We each laid down a card, the last one holding cards won. She always won! She loved spending time with Daddy.*

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**Fun:**

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Whether tickling is fun is not decided by the person who wants to tickle, but the person who will be tickled. How much is fun? How long is fun? And where? etc. This is true, especially in an area of what could be considered physical, or one-sided fun, such as tickling. In reality, it applies to all play. The person you are treating gets to decide what is fun for them.

Since it was mentioned as an example, here is good time to say a word about tickling. We have never been big ticklers. All the kids liked to be tickled and I would tickle them. One game we would play was called “Piano”. I would place them on my lap, lying down, and begin to play the piano dramatically like a concert pianist. Their squeals of delight would be the music. Another would be “The Magic Jell-O Trick.” I would say, “Want to see me turn someone into Jell-O?” They would all run and squeal, “No, no, not me, him, him.” The girls always banded together to offer up Sam as the sacrifice. Finally, when they saw that I would not do it if they said “no” even in jesting, one would say, “Do me! Do me!” At that time, I would place them sitting in my lap and say, “Abracadabra, turn into Jell-O” and as I tickled them they would squirm out of my lap like a loose bowl of Jell-O onto the floor.

The last game was the dreaded pit probe. The child would form my hand into a play gun, thumb up, forefinger out and others held to the palm. They would activate the probe by turning the thumb. I would make a humming noise, touch the fingers together and make a sparking sound. Then the special tickle pit probes would tickle them in their arm pits. The children would activate them and go running around the room squealing gleefully, “Pit Probe, Pit Probe!”

**Now the reason this was fun is that we had some rules.** First, no one is tickled who does not like to be tickled. Second, whenever anyone says stop, the tickling stops. Third, no one is embarrassed by the tickling. A basic rule of all fun and all relationships is this, the person receiving the stimulus gets to define the stimulus.

**Walks:**

Walks are a great treat for children. Just remember, the objective is to draw near to your child through personal involvement in a fun or play activity. This means, a walk where the child wants to go, at a pace the child enjoys, talking and visiting with the child. Stopping to investigate along the way. A fun walk with a child is entirely different animal than a fun walk for an adult. The objective is for the child to have fun and to draw near to you. Where you go, the pace, and the activities should be inconsequential to the parent. The child is everything.

I could fill this whole book up with stories of my walks with the children. They loved to go for walks. Even now, when my college-age kids come home and see me in my sweats, ready to go on my exercise walk, they will come along. I slip my verse pack quietly in my pocket and concentrate just on them. I can always do my verses another time. Walking is a great way to draw near to your children, children of all ages.

**Errands:**

Errands are another way to draw near to your child through personal involvement and play. Now I know that at the time, going on an errand with Dad was not my child's first choice. But now that they are grown, the repetition of this time has created a wealth of memories. Over a period of time, the child becomes convinced that Dad just likes me and likes to be with me.

**Chores:**

Believe it or not, for a preschooler, doing house chores with Dad is great fun. I always had a little plastic lawn set for the kids. I had a play hammer and tools as well. I would give them something to do as I worked around the

*Becca and I loved to take walks. We would talk, stop, and pick some "flowers" (usually flowering weeds) for Mommy. Sometimes we would look at the dogs or just watch the cars. Some days she would walk very quietly. Other days, she would chatter nonstop. On this day, she was very philosophical for a four-year-old.*

*"Daddy, did God make the ground?"*

*"Yes, dear"*

*"Daddy, did God make the trees?"*

*"Yes, dear"*

*"Daddy, did God make the flowers?"*

*"Yes, dear?"*

*I was wondering where this was all headed when suddenly, Becca stopped and pointed to an elderly lady all in white. She had long white hair, a white sun hat on her head, very white skin, and she was kneeling by a little bed of flowers around a freshly planted tree in her front yard, digging gently in the garden, with white gloves on. Becca whispered, "Daddy!!! Is that God!?"*

*Sam loved to go for walks with me. One of his favorite places for me to take him was the local Agricultural College to go walking among the pens, looking at pigs. On the way over one day, it began to rain. By the time we got there, it was coming down so hard we did a U-turn and headed home. Sam was happy to play an inside game instead, but was disappointed in missing his walk among the pigs. As we drove out of the parking area, he was able to get up on his knees in the front seat and just clear his eyes above the edge of the door to see adult and baby pigs out in the rain and the mud having a good time. Trying to be positive, he plopped back down on the seat and shared philosophically, "Well, dad, it's a good day for pigs."*

*As I walk through the house on the way to the car, I always check for the kids. If I ever see one idly watching TV or hanging around, or even reading or playing by themselves, I draft that child to go with me. I keep the radio off, so that we can talk. Many times, the child will not talk. It is not because they are mad, just that they will sit in the silence and safety of the car with Dad and simply think. Slowly, if you will keep that stupid radio off, they will begin to let these thoughts out, and you will have a great talk together. I always stopped for a little "treat" as part of the errand. It pays off to run an errand with Dad.*

house. Yes, it is a little messier and a little more trouble, but not too much if your children are obedient and respectful. Shaving? I always kept a play shaving kit for the kids to shave with me. Whatever you are doing, with a little creativity, your child can join in.

Now if your response is, “You don’t know my kid, I could never get anything done with him around.” My response is, “Yes, yes... I do know your child.” I have seen him in the supermarkets and malls of America. I have seen him at the preschool department at church and at parties in homes. Your spoiled, sullen, disrespectful child would make work impossible. Now, can you think of any better reason to change your child-raising philosophy? Your present course has eliminated an entire area of your life, and a major one at that, from aiding you in drawing near to your child through personal involvement. How many more areas are eliminated, either consciously or subconsciously, by the behavior of your child? Why continue to cheat yourself and your child of a close intimate and yes, fun, relationship?

### **The Key— Child:**

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You can see that much (if not all) of this presupposes a child who is well-behaved and self-controlled. It is an absolute rule of thumb: the better behaved the child, the more creative the play and affection can be. The poorer the behavior of the child, the more restricted and less spontaneous the play and affection can be.

Whether you accept it or not, your instinctive reaction, either positive or negative, towards opportunities to do something with your child is governed by your basic subconscious survival guidance system. The system immediately asks the question, “What will my little darling behave like in that situation?” The more disciplined and well-behaved your child is, the more times your subconscious will respond, “Fine. Go ahead. Go for it! You will have a fun time together.” The more ill-mannered and ill-tempered your child is, the more frequently you will decide against it. So many times, in fact, that you have stopped thinking in the positive about any type of play except highly-structured play.

### **The Key— Parent**

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It is also important to remember at this stage of the game that what is fun for the child will probably bore you to death. What is fun for you will probably be equally as boring for the child. If your objective is to draw near to your child through personal involvement in his life, and you do not make the changes so that his involvement is fun, then you will accomplish the exact opposite. True, your fun and the child’s fun are not mutually exclusive, but it is also true that for the parent the joy must be in the child, not the activity.

### **Be There:**

Finally, you can just rip this whole section out and throw it away, along with most of the first eight chapters of this book if you, the mother, have decided to return to work while your child is of preschool age. You cannot expect to draw near to your child through play and affection when you are not even around your child most of the day and when you are, you are both tired and preoccupied with other things. In addition, if a dog knows when his master has left him alone and gets into the trash or chews up a slipper to punish the master, don't think your child cannot figure out that, after having him, you do not want to take responsibility for him, but would rather get back to work as quickly as possible. Do not be surprised when your child begins to act out his anger and his loneliness.

Now I know that in some cases of divorce, abandonment or tragedy, the mother is forced, for survival reasons, to place the child in the care of strangers and go back to work. I also know that in the majority of cases, this is not the situation. The mother returns to work out of a desire to exchange her relationship and responsibility to her child for adult relationships at work and for material acquisition. It may be because she is bored with the child and just does not see the nurturing, raising, and care of her child as important as her "job." Whatever the reason, you can be sure that the child quickly realizes it and acts accordingly.

*Jacob was a fine young businessman who had recently immigrated to the US. Both he and his wife, Sarah, had advanced degrees and were reveling in the prosperity that these brought them in their newly-adopted country, the good ole US of A. In order to allow Sara to work, they had opted for a nanny, rather than a preschool program. One day Jacob asked me, very sincerely, what I thought of this arrangement and I answered him honestly.*

*I told him that he and Sarah were well-educated and strong Christians. They had an excellent vocabulary and were articulate in speech, and gracious in their social etiquette. They were well-dressed and very sophisticated. In fact, they were model Christen professionals. Their children, however, were being raised by someone on the lowest end of the economic and educational social strata. (Don't kid yourself, no body goes to college to become a nanny or preschool worker). Their children spent most of their time around this person. As a result, their children reflected this in their actions. They used poor grammar and they had poor social skills. They had adopted some of the superstitions of their nanny, and were left to themselves much of the time.*

*Their nanny, though truly loving the children, could give them none of the social and educational and spiritual benefits with which God had provided Sarah, their mother. They were, in fact, stunted in their social, spiritual, and cultural growth. Jacob and Sarah took this to heart. When I saw their children one year later, I would not have recognized them, their behavior, or their speech. The variable, the mom, whom God had specifically gifted and prepared to raise them, was now making the difference.*

*Jimmy shared a story with me without asking for comment and editorial, so I did not give him any. His daughter, Tricia, was in a daycare/ preschool program. When it was time to go in the morning, she threw a fit, but when he went to get her in the evening, she again threw a fit because she did not want to leave. "Wasn't that funny?" Jimmy mused, "She just doesn't remember from one day to the next how much fun it is." Now this was the greatest job in self-denial that I had heard in a long time. A child who got a shot a year ago, still hates the doctor. A child that went to the dentist 6 months ago, still never wants to go back. The same child wants to go to McDonald's every day and wants to hear the same tape in the car, yet can't remember what she thinks about preschool from day to day. I believe they call it Specific Infants Alzheimer Syndrome, or, more specifically, Parental Stupid Reasoning Breakdown. Tricia put up a stink everyday because she hates being stuck with a bunch of strangers while her mom goes off to live her own life. In the same way, she puts up a stink in the evening to punish her father for dumping her off every day.*

## **IV. The Elementary School Years**

Things change when your child goes to school. The child becomes a social being with a conscious life apart from Mom and Dad. Your child learns about the world, and about his social likes and dislikes. At first, like in preschool, play and fun is doing anything with Mom and Dad. Slowly, though, play and fun begin to take on a meaning of their own.



The child begins to have favorite things he likes to do, and a way of doing them. Similarly, he develops feelings about things he does not enjoy.

Part of the child's spiritual and emotional development will be in the area of still being able to have fun, to be gracious socially, even when engaged in activities that are not his favorite. Nevertheless, it behooves you as the parent, to discover those favorites and to structure your fun time around those activities in order to draw near to your child through play and affection.

#### A. VERBAL AND PHYSICAL AFFECTION:

Here, it is the same as in the preschool years. The child needs constant reinforcement of your love, pride and confidence. The harsh realities of the world will take care of themselves. If you do not take care of verbal and physical affection, it will not get done.

Now that the kids are in school, don't fall into Satan's trap of having a conflict, fight or giving the child a scolding every morning before they leave for school. Have the child prepare their lunch (yes, a first grader can prepare his lunch). Have them put up their old clothes, lay out their school clothes, (and find the shoes and socks the night before, not one minute before it is time to leave). Have them lay out their books and school supplies all neatly the night before. Then, the morning can be a truly pleasant time together before they walk out the door.

The last thing they should hear is praise and love. The last thing they should remember is a hug and a kiss. On their return, the first thing they should hear is praise and thanksgiving. The first thing they should receive is a hug and a kiss.

Mothers of young school-age children make a big mistake in returning to work right away. It is very important to the young child to have Mom available during these early years. Pants get ripped. Earaches develop. Spills soil clothes. Children fall down and get cut. A hundred and one little tragedies occur that call for Mom to be on the scene. It has been my observation, that during the school hours, after about third grade, children begin to handle themselves pretty well in school and Mom is pretty much on her own during these hours. I have no problem with her working outside the home, as long as either Mom or Dad are at home, waiting for the child when he returns from school. No elementary or junior high child should return to an empty home. As the child enters high school, things change a little. There are after school activities, sports, jobs, church committees, and youth meetings. Your child often does not come home after school or keep regular hours. I can certainly

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*I asked Tammy how it was working out, caring for the neighbor's child in her home. Her neighbor wanted to go back to work. Tammy was committed to staying at home with her children, and they could really use the money. Tammy confided that the mother had moved her child to a group-care situation. This surprised me, since the child was not yet two years old. "What happened?" I queried. "Well, she came to get he baby, and her baby didn't want to go. She kept clinging to me and crying. She left with her child, screaming, 'No! No! Me want Mommy!'" Tammy's neighbor realized the problem. The solution, of course would be for her to stay home and assume the personal responsibility of her child. Rather than do that, she placed the child in an even more impersonal environment. The application being, "You can't have me for a mother, true, but you sure aren't going to have anyone else either."*

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*"I am sorry to ask you again Mrs. Mahon, but we really are desperate for a mom to be there for this activity. You see, all the other moms work outside the home. Could we impose on you just one more time."*

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(One of many teachers, recounting the same plea to Eleanor one of countless times.)

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make allowances here, but those preschool, elementary and junior high years are very important times for the parent and the child. The child needs to know they are coming home to a refuge.

## B. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

Again there are many similarities here with the preschool years. Many parents make the mistake of passing up valuable opportunities for drawing near to their child, simply because the child is able to do the activity himself. The child can read. The child can get their homework done. The child can get themselves ready for bed and go to bed. The child can feed himself. As the child matures through the elementary years, he becomes increasingly able to care for himself. This does not mean that he does not need the care of the parents, nor that you have to pass up a lot of shared fun memories simply because of the growing self-sufficiency of the child.

### 1. Reading to the child

Many fathers cease to read to the child once they can read themselves. I would caution you against falling into this trap. Be an internal part of the reading process. Your child will love it, and it is a great way to have fun with your child on his level.

Of course, that little note was sent in a tongue-in-cheek gesture. I knew Mrs. Johnson well, and knew she would get a kick out of it. It does serve as a reminder though, that when reading with your child, it needs to be fun for him, and that often means boring for you.

As a general rule, when the kids are learning to read, I like them to read to me every school night before they go to bed whether they are required to by the teacher or not. In addition to this, at bedtime I read to the children through the elementary years.

I would read the Bible and religious stories, but I would also read to them the classic tales which every child should read. This is great fun for the child and you will enjoy it as well. When Sam and I were reading, "Men of Iron," "Silver Chief," "Robinson Crusoe," "The Lord of the Rings," and the biographies of great statesmen, we both equally looked forward to my reading to him. In addition, we would read the Bible, Christian biographies and Christian books. I encourage you to read Christian books to your children. There are however many good and wholesome books, written by Christians or moral men and women, which give great lessons of life, which are not necessarily "Christian" books. Neither are they pagan. These are great works of literature which have stood the test of time. Read these to your

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*Dear Mrs. Johnson, I love to read with Sam in the evenings. I think it is great the way they get a star for every story they read. Sam loves to read and he loves to try and get the most stars. If, though, I have to listen to "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" one more time I will go bonkers. Please send him home with reading books that do not have this in them. I would be greatly appreciative*

Sincerely, Rev. J. S. Mahon

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*"Wow, Dad, when you read the battle scenes, you really get into it."*

*Sam, after I read to him a particularly exciting chapter of "Men of Iron."*

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*"You pick the book, Daddy. You always read longer when you pick it out."*

*Megan, as she snuggled up against me for our evening reading.*

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*"I want to become a Christian and a missionary, just like Friday did. Daddy, can I become a Christian now?"*

*Sam, to me, after finishing the chapter where Robinson Crusoe leads the native Friday to Christ and he returns to his tribe as a missionary.*

children. The quality and genius of the author will raise your child’s standards and make movies and TV seem like the mush they are.

We made our home a library, and we made reading fun. Even now, one of the most enjoyable times for us is to sit together in the living room and read, and be together as a family. We are reading, working on homework, doing projects, talking now and then... just being together. This is all greatly helped by the “no TV after 6 P.M. rule, (or dinner which ever comes first.)”

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*“Someday I am going to be a missionary to India, just like Amy Charmichael.”*

*Becca, after we finished reading her biography. Becca, later went on to adopt an orphan through World Vision, and gave babysitting money each month for her care, until the little girl left the orphanage. Then, while in college, she went with Campus Crusade for Christ to the mission field for the summer. It all began with our reading the biography of Amy Carmichael together each night.*

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Recently, I recommitted myself to reading in the living room. I had been fatigued from some speaking commitments and had gotten in the habit of going in my room and watching TV in the evenings. I found that if I would stay in the living room and read, the kids would end up there as well. More importantly, I was visible and there was much more spontaneous discussion and give-and-take in the relationships.

## 2. Lunch at school

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One of my kids’ greatest memories is the time I would take each week to eat with them at school. Very few men eat at their desk at the office, or on the job site. Most go somewhere to eat. If at all possible, eat with your child one day each week, right there at school. If not, take time off from work, at least once each quarter, and eat with your child. You do it for the dentist, and eating with your child is a lot more fun. I used to bring my child a happy meal from McDonalds and, later, a burger, fries and drinks. It was a real hit. Then I would bring extra fries for the other kids. Having Liz’s dad for lunch on Fridays was a real hit and all the kids looked forward to it.

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*“Mr. Mahon, open my milk for me, pleeease.”*

*Whenever I ate with the kids, all of a sudden, these independent children needed a helping hand.*

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*“I get to sit by Lizzy.” “No, me.” “No, me.” “My turn, you did last week.”*

*How to make your child popular: eat with them at school once a week; eat with them at school.*

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*“Rev. Mahon, you’re the only father I know who is regularly in this building with his child.”*

*Liz’s principal*

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Afterwards, take time out to walk your child back to class or out to recess. It will make your child a star. When they had class afterwards, I would walk back to class with them, holding my child's hand and then let them show me their desk and any work they were doing. They were so proud. If they had recess, I would go out with them and let them beat me at tetherball, or time the kids at races for a few minutes before I had to leave. Sam's class would always check out the football when I came on Fridays. The guys loved to get down on one end of the field and have me kick it and they all scrambled to catch it. Even now, with Sam in college, it brings a smile to my face as I think of this.

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*"Dad will you come have lunch with me this week?" I had taken Becca up on her offer to eat with her three weeks in a row. She was in the first grade and loved for me to join her once each week. "No darling, we have 12 years to eat together, once or twice a month is fine, I don't want you to get tired of it." Ahhh, the naïveté of inexperienced. I thought we would be eating all through elementary, junior high, and high school. Little did I realize that there comes a time when it is not cool to have Dad sitting across from you at the lunch table. That day when Becca said, as kindly as she could, that she was too old to have a parent eat with her, was a real wakeup call. I never again turned down an offer to eat with the kids. I established the routine of weekly lunches as long as they wanted to, alternating among them for as long as they would have me.*

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### 3. Dates:

Continue the tradition of dates and let the kids choose. Sam and Becca always wanted to go by themselves. Megan and Liz wanted to go together. Sam wanted to go to see some action, like the fire station, the airport, or go fishing, then ice-cream afterwards. Becca wanted to go window-shopping and then have a light snack. Megan and Liz, when they were little, loved to go the park for a little picnic and play time. These were very special times together and we all remember them with fondness. Remember, too, that after a really fun time, as you drive back in the silence and safety of the car, it is often those last few minutes, right before you get home, that your child will begin to really share his heart with you.

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*"Dad will we be having lunch together this week?" Megan was in high school, but we were still having lunches. The difference was that I was now picking her up, checking her out of school during lunch and taking her to a fast food restaurant. These were great times together and although it may not be cool to have your Dad sitting across from you in the cafeteria, it certainly is cool to be able to go out for lunches on Fridays...*

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### 4. Play:

Play begins to be more complex and your child will begin to be more particular. Oh, for the days when a Popsicle and a push on the swing was as good as Disney World. The child will begin to have preferences in games and sports. Entertainment becomes more complex. Movies, cultural events and sporting events all make great dates. Once the child reaches puberty, the time for tickling is well past. For us, it was before then.

Rough housing is for boys only, and then with affection. Remember, he will be larger and stronger than you are in just a few short years. You will be stronger than him for about the first 20 years and then for the rest of your life, and his, he will be stronger than you. Do not instill a root of bitterness or a taste for revenge through the way you play with your child— especially in rough housing, or playing sports— with your

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*Your beauty...should be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God*

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1 Pt 3:4, teaching that young girls must learn the feminine attributes of a gentle, quiet spirit

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sons. Do not develop a harsh sense of competition and a lack of consideration for the weak. Instill the attributes of mercy and patience in the way you play with your children. You can be sure that you will reap this later on.

In terms of roughhousing with other adults or relatives, teach your children to be sensitive to both the appropriateness of the situation, and to know when enough is enough. As far as the girls are concerned, it is especially important that restraints be put on roughhousing. Between the kids, if one of the girls is hurt, and Sam is involved, he always gets in trouble. Young men must learn to deal with women in a tender and compassionate way,

*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered*

1 Pt 3:7

Play within the family should be fun, but not competitive. Competition brings with it the possibility that either side, if driven by enough will and determination, might win. This is not true with your child. He will never beat you on a level playing field. I was the coach, the friend, the haven, the loving father, the safe refuge, the team mate, the best buddy, but never the enemy. I tried to make sure the way we played did not develop character attributes in my children which they would one day regret and have to undo.

### 5. Activities:

Walks become adventures and you can begin to include biking as well. Errands, too, can still be a fun way to spend time with each other as long as you make it fun. As long as you leave time for your child and a little spontaneity in your life. Work can be fascinating for your child at this age. You can include yourself more and more in your child's "career," his school, his sporting events, and his hobbies.

*Eleanor and I wanted to learn to country western dance. We also knew that this was the big thing at the school dances. The local community college offered a course, so each Wednesday night we went for our lessons and took Sam and Becca along as well. We all learned to dance together, had great fun and drew really close through the experience. At first, we had to make Sam, but he later appreciated it and really warmed up to it.*

Again, all this presupposes a child who is well-behaved and under control. It presupposes a child that has learned to control his emotions to a degree and enjoys the relationship he has with his parents. It presupposes a parent, and in all probability, a father, who places the worth of the child above the activity or project. It presupposes a father who genuinely loves his children and wants to spend time with them so much that the activity pales before the relationship. This mixture maximizes the opportunities for drawing near to your child through play and affection during the elementary school years.

## V. The Transition Years Into Adolescence

### A. VERBAL AFFECTION

How will your children react when they reads this verse? Will they say, "Yeah, I can relate to that. My dad was my greatest coach. He was a great encourager, my greatest fan, he was so proud of me and never stopped believing in me. Even now I can hear his voice." Verbal affection and encouragement is so critical at this crucial age.

*Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

(1 Thes. 2:11, 12)

**The world has three objectives for your children:**

*If she is a girl, it is...*

1. She is ugly, and needs to spend lots of money to be pretty.
2. She is inferior, and needs to spend lots of money to be popular.
3. She is dumb, and needs to spend lots of money to keep from being laughed at.

*If he is a boy, it is...*

1. He is not a “boy”... he is a “person” and he should spend his money without consideration of his masculinity.
2. He is inferior, and needs to spend lots of money to get ahead in life.
3. He is dumb, but if he spends lots of money he can still entertain himself.

Your children hear these messages over and over again a thousand times a day in a thousand different ways. No matter how wrong we all agree this is, it is true. No matter what kind of community you are attached to, there are only two people in the world who have both the motivation and the opportunity to counteract this onslaught, and that is you, their parents. If you will not take an active and verbal role in their lives, then you give them up to these messages without a fight.

**Your children should constantly hear...**

“You’re pretty” “You’re handsome”

“You’re so lovely” “You’re a real man, a tough guy”

“We are so proud of you, we would not do anything to change you..”

“You’re so smart, you are a real whiz”

“We love you and will always love you”

Look at this list. Are these things you purposefully say on a regular basis to your children? Copy them down on an index card and put them on your mirror, the fridge, or the dash. Get in the habit of praising your children, of “exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children”— since you are, after all, the parent.

**B. PHYSICAL AFFECTION**

At this time in your children’s lives they will alternatively either crave or abhor physical affection and you need to take it as it comes. Every now and then, the tough guy needs a hug or cuddle with his mom. That sophisticated young lady needs to sit on Dad’s lap again and be his little girl. *It would be unhealthy for*

*“Do you know what Sam did on the way to class today?” I could tell by the inflection that this was going to be interesting. Eleanor continued, “I dropped him off at school, gave him a kiss, and then as he walked away, do you know what he did?”*

*I reached up and nonchalantly wiped my cheek.*

*“That’s it! He wiped my kiss off!”*

*“No, hon,” I countered, “Not your kiss..., your lipstick. He’s just scared to death of facing his buddies waiting outside for the bell to ring for class with a big red set of lips on his cheek. He loves you, it’s the lipstick that’s got him.” From then on Eleanor got a kick out of watching Sam wipe his cheek. For the rest of his time at home, on the way to school, being dropped off for the big game, she played this little game. What made it cute was that Sam was careful not to reject his mother’s affection, or hurt her feelings. That was settled a long time ago with the wooden spoon, so he would just sneak that grubby little hand up there just to make sure there was no lipstick.*

*“I am not wiping it off, I’m rubbing it in.”*

*480  
Sam’s reply to his mother’s observation.*

*you to promote this regression*, but in the same way do not reject this sharing of affection by your children as they hearken back to special memories of their childhood. The child, as I have said before, does not get to reject the parents' affection. It is not honoring to a parent for the children to act embarrassed at the affection shown them. The parents can be sensitive to the social needs of the children, but, in any case, the child should never reject genuine parental love.

### C. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

During the transition years, you begin to realize that you just have five or six more years with your child at home. The unfortunate thing is that many parents who fail to begin to make the transition with their child into adulthood maintain a controlling attitude in their personal involvement with their child. As a result, from their child's perspective, they are just not that much fun to be around. I have seen it over and over again; I call it the Rudeness Permission Syndrome. It is at work in the husband and wife relationship, with spouses who would never dream of speaking or treating their friends and co-workers in a rude or manipulative manner consistently giving themselves permission to treat their spouse that way. The same is true for parents of pre-teens and teens. They would never dream of being as bossy, picky or condescending to their children's friends as they are to their own children.

Your child is moving into adulthood with adult emotions and adult memories. If you want your child to enjoy being around you and to want to be a part of your life, then you will have to begin making the transition in your behavior patterns to give your child the dignity and respect you give others of the same age. Ask yourself, "If my child was an employee and was not doing his job right, how would I address him?" Then, think of the way you discuss with your child his failure to work around the house. What kind of dignity and respect is he getting?

As parents, we face the same dilemma as we do as spouses. Many married couples receive affirmation, respect and dignity on the job and in the work place. They come home to be treated like no one has treated them or spoken to them since they were pre-teens. Then their spouse wonders why they spend so much time away from home. Your teen is treated with respect on the athletic field, in his youth group, at work and at school. More and more, the outside world is affirming and reinforcing his growth into

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*Bill was obviously panicking as we talked over a cup of coffee. All of his life, his career had come first. He worked long hours, traveled, and kept the cell phone always at his side. The financial rewards had been great, but he realized the family had suffered. Now, he was cutting back and he wanted to make it all up. The problem was, when he was really needed on site, to be in control, to be the rock... he was gone. His wife has grown in her independence and ability to care for herself. His children, now teenagers, were wanting to grow up and leave home, not re-entrench. I have seen it played out many times. When the family wants to huddle, Dad is away. When the family begins to disperse, Dad decides he wants to be at home and be in charge of the family.*

*He really had two choices. He could have been a part of the process of letting go and accept the fact that he had cheated himself out of a big part of parenting. Or he could have been a part of the process of letting go and talk his wife into having another family so that he can legitimately enjoy the role he now craves.*

*One option was not his, yet it is the one he was taking. He cannot roll back the clock. This action is responsible for conflict with his wife, and turmoil with his kids. He chose to relate to the family as if his three teens were in their elementary years and the family was consolidating and bonding in its early formative years.*

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*scenery. When that got old, I pulled out a box of baseball cards I bought for him. He opened them all up, sorted them out, sorted out the Cardinals and had a great time with the rest. We pulled into St. Louis and did some sights. That night, we stayed with an old college friend, got up the next morning, went into town, did some more sights and then showed up at the game as soon as they would let us in. Sam loved watching batting practice, and tried to shag balls hit to the outfield with the other boys. Later, he went down and tried to get autographs, toured the stadium, took in the game and then home we headed. It was Baseball Safari and a yearly ritual we shared.*

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adulthood. More and more, he is being given emotional space and growing room. Fewer and fewer liberties are taken on the basis of age. Yet, at home he is in a time warp. It is as if he is still a kid. He feels so grown up and respected outside the home and so repressed emotionally in the home. Does this sound like a place he will want to hang out? No doubt he is a lot younger and more immature than he feels or wants. No doubt he is a lot older and more mature than you feel or want. But the objective is for him to leave, while at the same time wanting to come back for visits. So, the envelope must be pushed in that direction, not in yours. The objective is to draw near to your child through play and affection, especially in the area of your personal involvement, as the child leaves.

There are a host of activities you can do with your child to draw near to them through play and affection. The main thing to remember is the two key parts, “drawing near to your child” (*remember this is what you are trying to do*) “through play and affection” (*it is important to remember that you are **playing** and, at the same time, **being affectionate** with your child*).

For play, develop mutual sports or activities with your children. Find something they like to do, and do it with them. If it is puzzles, then become a puzzle nut. If it is baseball, then take up the game. If it is horses, perhaps, like me, you can’t buy one, but splurge and go horseback riding at a stable or take your child to a horse farm. Look at a book on horses with them. Help them select a ceramic horse for their collection.

Each of our children has something special they liked. For Becca, it was pigs. Sam liked fishing lures or baseball cards. Megan liked ceramic horses or elephants, and Liz liked ceramic bunnies, dogs or anything to do with tea sets. Whenever I was out of town, or for a little special treat, I would turn to this list I kept in my wallet. Treats do not always have to be food.

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*Megan loves horses and has a giant scrap book of horse pictures she has collected over the years. Every once in a while, we can afford to go riding at the stables for her birthday or a special event. Once or twice we could afford Horse Camp with the “Y” or a local Christian Camp, but mainly we share this love for horses with her by being willing to sit with her on the couch and look at her scrapbook of horses. It is true, I find this really tedious. But, it is also true that nothing gives her more joy or makes her willing to spend more focused time with her dad, than to sit with her scrapbook and go over each horse, the characteristics, the breeding, and the history. Megan loved horses, and if I wanted to get really close to her, then I had to share in this love.*

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Each of our children has something special they liked. For Becca, it was pigs. Sam liked

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*The Navigators run a Christian youth camp in Colorado Springs called Eagle Lake. When I discovered they had added a “Horse Camp” to this, I checked to see about summer volunteer workers. It turned out that with Megan’s experience she qualified, and was able to spend six weeks working with the horses as a junior wrangler, joining in on the Bible study and messages and using her free time to ride and receive training in horsemanship. What a wonderful experience this was to Megan. If we had not honored her desires as best we could, she would not have been qualified for God to open this special door to her.*

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**Walks:**

Walks with children can easily turn into play, and then, shared exercise. It is important, though, to do it on their terms. The objective is to spend time with them and, when it is all over, for them to still want to spend time with you.

forgot the goal. It was not “Putting pagans in their place,” but “Leading pagans to Christ.” Thus, the goal is for the pagan, if he does not receive Christ, to want to talk again. This same mindset goes with parental play with pre-teens and teens. It starts off well, then there is conflict as the parent wants to take over, or begins to act condescendingly to the child.

All of a sudden, there is a fight. The parent wins. The thing is done the parent’s way and the teen resolves to pass up any future opportunities of this sort. The parent forgot the objective. It was not “Establishing the child’s position, so that he would know his place” but “Drawing near to the child through play and affection.” Thus the goal is for the child, whether or not there is a break through in the relationship, to want to talk again, to do this again.

**Family Night:**

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*Lucky, my Brittany Spaniel, and I love to walk. We have a four-mile course. She gets to think she is hunting and I get to burn calories and work on my scripture memory. It is a great 45 minutes together several times each week. One day, Becca asked if she could go along. She was taking freshman PE, and felt the need to get in shape. Becca wanted to talk. Becca wanted a more scenic route. At first, Becca wanted a slower pace. For the next three months, my scripture memory took a nose dive as my relationship with Becca soared. Soon she was ready to run. We would walk a mile, and then she would run a mile or two while we continued to walk (here I could sneak in verses) until she would show back up to walk again. I learned quickly how precious these times were and to adjust myself to Becca. We grew very close during these times. You can always find time to walk the dog or work on verses. Your teenage daughter grows up and leaves all too soon.*

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*Megan wanted to walk with Lucky and me. Now Becca was off to college. Megan is quieter. She did not want to talk. She wanted me to talk and ask her questions. Bye, bye verses once again. I have to admit, with Becca, I could daydream a little as she talked and talked. With Megan it began to be mental work. First, to talk and then, to walk in silence and yet not work on my verses. This was very important to Megan. Also, Megan liked to walk arm in arm or hold hands part of the way. True, the pace decreased, but Megan showed no interest in running. I remembered my lesson with Becca. You can always find time to walk the dog or work on your verses; your teenage daughter grows up and leaves all too soon.*

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Family night is also a great time for play. We instituted family night early in our family experience and included all the children. I can remember playing cards with the two older children. The third, too young to play, was given her own set of cards and could join in as best she could. The youngest was given a set to chew on. We all had a great time together. As they got older, we did not require Family Night once they were past 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Sometimes, they would join in. Sometimes, they had a big game or other activity. Other times, they would want to hang out on the couch or the fringes while we played, waiting for the food to appear. In any case, it was a great time for the family and we kept it up until Liz was out of the sixth grade. Even into high school, sometimes Megan and Liz will still want to do “Family Night” when there is a lag in their church or social activities. When Becca and Sam come home from school for the weekend, they will remember with fondness the “Family Night” and will often ask, “What are we doing as a family tonight?”

A big mistake many parents make is not finishing off strong. Especially if they have more than two children. When the older two have gone, they begin seeing light at the end of the tunnel. Family night peters out before the youngest is ready for it to do so. Dad begins traveling again before the youngest is really ready. Mom returns to work before the youngest is really ready. Vacations and entertainment are upgraded before the youngest is really ready. Family dinners peter out and chores are neglected before the youngest is really ready for them to do so. With your children, be sure and finish strong. Give your youngest the same attention, when she is the last at home, that you gave your oldest, when she was the first at home.

It is a common complaint of the youngest child. On the wall, in the photo album you can find plenty of pictures of the older children, but in the business of life, the younger one just got overlooked. Unfortunately, this often extends far further than the camera.

### **Errands:**

Believe it or not, errands and chores are a great time to draw near to your pre-teen or emerging adolescent. Most children this age have a real awe of their father’s work and just exactly what he does and how he acts. Take them on a business trip. Take them on a business errand. Take them when you make some calls, and include something to make it special. Open your life to your child. When the other

I have seen it over and over again. *Take, for instance, people learning how to witness. The goal is to lead someone to Christ. Yet, in their early witnessing encounters, they get in arguments. In the end, not only will the person not be interested in talking with them again, but will not want to talk with any Christians. They* *With Sam, I made a mistake. Sam was working out with a weight set to build his upper body strength for baseball. It was a rickety set he had bought from an older boy in our church. To do his bench presses he needed me to spot for him. His set was in the garage. It was night and I was tired. It was cold. I would spot for him, but did not take the time to really get into it and share with him. In fact, after about a year and a half, I found a great weight set at a sports store. It was a great combination, the maker was going out of business and the store was having an end-of-year sale. I could afford the double markdown and got it for him. He loved it and it was a mega jump in quality. Now, he did not need a spotter.*

*As I look back, I passed up an opportunity to spend quality time with Sam. You can always find time to spend a quiet evening at home. Like your teenage daughter, your teenage son grows up and leaves all too soon.*

*“This is neat; my family does not have any pictures of me.”*

A high school friend of our youngest child, Liz, visiting in our home. Almost all the children who visit will gravitate toward the hall where we have our family pictures on display, taken over the years.

*Now my dad was a salesman and he used to do this with me and my brother, but not exactly for the right reason. He was showing us the high life that can take place when you are on the road, or he wanted us to run errands for him while he made contact calls. Even so, we had a perspective of work few junior high schoolers had. I have always tried to do this with my children. When possible, especially during the summer and winter vacations, I try to take them along when the possibility permits. A junior high schooler is old enough to behave responsibly when you are preoccupied, and the excitement of being on the “inside” is immeasurable. Choose the right occasion, and it will draw you very close to your child.*

kids say, “I don’t really know what my dad does,” your child can share things they never dreamed of.

### **Memories:**

In all of this, you are building memories that will help you weather the storms of life that invariably come with the teenage years. What you want, is for your overall history to be one of closeness. For your child to look back and realize that the focused times have not been primarily ones of conflict, but of success and enjoyment. When it comes time to choose between family and the subculture of the good times with the bad kids, that though the draw is very real and the pleasures very appealing, the relationship will win out and, ultimately, the child will not trade the closeness, love and fellowship of the family for the passing pleasures of sin.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Your child is now growing up. At age twelve, he has, at the most, six more years at home. What most parents do not realize is that although they are living at home with their junior and high school-age children, if they are healthy spiritually and emotionally, you are seeing less and less of them. During this time, relationship and, as a result, leisure interaction, becomes more and more important while authority and structure begins to diminish. You now have six years to prepare your child to leave. If you have not laid the foundation of being near to your child through play and affection, then when your child leaves, there will be nothing left of the relationship. Some attempt to start at this late date to share in these leisure areas, or worse and, sadly, all too common, to fight to retain the relationship based on a childhood model of authority, even though the son or daughter is no longer a child.

Your authority will slowly diminish whether you like it or not. It picks up speed until finally, you will see the child only at their decision. It is at this point that you will want to be sure you are already best friends. It is at this point that your relationship with the child is everything.

True, the early discipline and training on the basis of authority is both needed by the child and commanded by the Scripture. It is not, however, the basis of any type of healthy, long-term relationship with the child. That basis is found in this chapter. *Draw near to your child through play and affection.* Much of the information found in the other chapters will play out, but not play and affection.

Don’t be mislead. Without discipline and authority, the groundwork for play and affection cannot be laid. Do not be equally mislead, however. Without the diminishment of discipline and authority until it finally and completely plays itself out, the foundation of play and affection cannot be built upon and the long term relationship is sacrificed.

It is the deep relationship play and affection make possible, coupled with your own willingness to let go, that allows for the change in emphasis from “Obey” to “Honor,” as your child moves through adolescence and into adulthood. This transition process is covered in the next chapter.

## **VII. Summary**

### **I. Principles At Work**

The ultimate goal of this series is three-fold:

**First:** to aid you as the parent in fulfilling the Biblical responsibilities placed before you by God, concerning your child’s training and discipline.

**Second:** To equip your child with the spiritual skills that are necessary for him to be both fruitful and fulfilled in life.

**Third:** That your child will grow up and leave home.

A. What exactly do we mean?

There are three basic keys to drawing near to your child through play and affection:

- Verbal Affection
- Physical Affection
- Parental Involvement

B. Why parents fail:

The first thing that comes to mind when I consider why parents fail in this area is just plain stinginess.

Prv 18:6 teaches us that “*A man's gift makes room for him...*” and this is true in our relationship with our children. I have seen spiritual stinginess take many forms.

C. Why parents must not fail.

*For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.* (Heb 12:6)

II. Stages- Conception through Infancy:

- A. Verbal
- B. Physical affection
- C. Parental involvement

III. Stages— Toddler through Preschool:

- A. Verbal
- B. Physical
- C. Parental Involvement

IV. The Elementary School Years

- A. Verbal And Physical Affection
- B. Parental Involvement

V. Conclusion

It is the deep relationship play and affection make possible, coupled with your own willingness to let go, that allows for the change in emphasis from, “Obey” to “Honor” as your child moves through adolescence and into adulthood. This transition process is covered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TEN

*What follows are a number of projects which you and your wife can complete. Some are to be done separately, and then the results compared. Others are to be done together. The goal is to come to an agreement on the discipline needs of your child, and then work on them together as a team. Remember, the general rule in decision-making in this area is to yield to the more conservative of the couple in arriving at a decision.*

### **Scripture Memory Verse— Lk 15:20**

**And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.**

**Last Week's Verse— Eccl 3:1,4-5,8**, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— a time to laugh... a time to dance. A time to embrace...a time to love,...a time for peace.”

## **QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

**JEREMIAH 15:16**

**THEME: PLAY AND AFFECTION**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: ECCL 3:1, 4, 5**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Lk 15:11–24**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Lk 15: 25– 32**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

## **QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

**JEREMIAH 15:16**

**THEME: PLAY AND AFFECTION**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: ECCL 5:18– 20**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: ECCL 3:11–13**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: PS 127:3 & 4**

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**



## Goals

*Go back over chapter 10. Review the appropriate age-level activities for each child you have. Write out areas you can begin to work on in terms of drawing nearer to your child through play and affection.*



## Date Night / Family Night

*Discuss with your spouse two very important rituals:*

- 1.) *A regular date night for the two of you*
- 2.) *A regular family night shared with the children.*

***In the space below come up with a plan for each.***

**Date Night:** What, When, Where and How

**Family Night:** What, When, Where, and How

## Reflecting Back

*Think back on your own childhood memories. Was play and affection part of your family tradition? What will you do the same, what will you do differently?*

My Family:

I will do the same:

I will do differently: