



VICTORY **AT HOME**

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# THE INTENTIONAL PARENT

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**IT  
TAKES  
WORK**

## ***GIVING A STRONG SPIRITUAL LEGACY***

Every believing parent hopes his or her child will embrace the faith and grow deep spiritual roots, but studies tell us that over half of those growing up in Christian homes will back away from Christian commitment by the time they leave the teen years. Too often parents “outsource” the spiritual formation of their children to the church. While a good church is very important, God designed the family to be the primary place where faith is nurtured. So parents need to understand four principles that can help them become more intentional about their child’s faith.

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### ***THE LEGACY PRINCIPLE***

The scriptures tell us that what we do today directly influences the multi-generational cycle of family traits, beliefs and actions – for the good and the bad (Exodus 20:5-6, Psalm 78:5-8). Passing a strong faith to our children begins by having a strong faith ourselves, and modeling the gospel in our marriages and in how we relate to those closest to us. One of the most important passages of scripture, Deuteronomy 6:5-7, commands us to love God with everything we have and teach our families about His ways at every chance we get. By doing this and breaking off old ways of thinking, we can leave a better legacy for the next generation.

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## ***THE LIKELIHOOD PRINCIPLE***

The good news is this: in the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the values of their parents. Proverbs 22:6 tells us that when children learn right from wrong at home under the nurturing, loving training of parents, they tend to adopt mom and dad's beliefs. While there are no guarantees because every child has a free will, kids are far more likely to embrace their parents' faith if they enjoy their parents' company! That's a big part of the reason parents are warned not to "provoke your children to wrath" but "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The bottom line is that a strong relationship with mom and dad is key to a strong Christian faith.

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## ***THE LENSES PRINCIPLE***

Jesus taught that our enemy's primary weapon is deception—getting us to believe and live according to lies rather than truth (John 8:44). When someone is deceived, he or she doesn't know it! Our children are growing up in a culture that bombards them with lies. An hour or two per week at church is no match for the hundreds of hours spent with media, school, and friends. That time cannot compete with a child's fallen nature that often wants to rebel against what is good, true and beautiful. A parent's job is to equip children with the corrective "lenses" of truth so they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

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## **THE LEARNING PRINCIPLE**

Our children can only learn what we teach them in a manner that will reach them. In other words, we need to vary our approach based upon their unique personalities, learning styles, and most importantly, stages of development. Children fall into one of three stages that should guide the methods we choose for discussing our faith and values at home.

### **THE IMPRINT STAGE** *birth to elementary*

Small children are all ears. They will believe it because mom or dad said it, much like a baby gosling that imprints itself onto its mother and follows her wherever she leads. Young children soak in what we tell them, so this is an ideal season for teaching them basic Bible stories, memorization, and other building block truths of Christianity.

- **Parent / Child Dedication**

### **THE IMPRESSION STAGE** *elementary to preteen*

During this season children no longer accept what we say at face value. They may question us, push back, or even argue. During this season children do need to know what we believe, but they also need help understanding the rationale behind those beliefs. While more work, this is a positive part of their faith development because it means they have grown past blind acceptance and are ready for deeper understanding.

### **THE COACHING STAGE** *early teen to young adult*

Our job changes when the kids enter the coaching period. We can motivate, encourage, challenge and advise. We can't force feed. We can help them clearly articulate what

they believe, challenge their thinking, remind them of the “basics” learned during the “practices” of the imprint and impression years. We can provide a safe environment to wrestle with, even question, the values they’ve learned. Maintaining a strong relationship and frequent dialogue are the keys to your influence now.

In light of these realities, parents can become intentional about creating and capturing opportunities to nurture the roots of faith in their children.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***It Starts At Home*** (by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope) helps parents understand the process of faith formation at home and a practical plan for becoming intentional.

***Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*** (by John Trent, Rick Osborne and Kurt Bruner) offers a road map for parents to shape the faith of children under twelve years old.

***Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens*** (by Joe White and Jim Weidmann) helps parents coach the faith formation of older children.

***Your Heritage*** (by Kurt Bruner & J. Otis Ledbetter) shows how to give children a strong spiritual legacy, including an assessment of the legacy parents received themselves.

***Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*** (by Paul David Tripp) presents a big-picture view of God's plan for us as parents.

**RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

***HeritageBuildersGlobal.com*** provides resources, such as the Family Night Tool Chest series, to help parents instill faith in their children.

***MovieNightChat.com*** recommends films and spiritual discussion ideas for parent/teen movie nights.



# **SINGLE PARENT**

## ***RAISING CHILDREN ALONE***

One of life's greatest blessings and sources of joy is being called somebody's parent. However, if you find yourself raising children alone, you know better than anyone else that parenting is a job meant for two. That's why Dr. James Dobson calls single parenting "the toughest job in the universe". Few understand the loneliness and emotional hurt many single parents carry, or how exhausting the role can be. So how can you be hopeful and experience joyful success as a parent despite more challenging circumstances?

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***PRIORITY ONE:*** *Keep your child's best in mind.*

Every parent is called to lay aside his or her own interests for the children. That calling takes extra commitment when you're going it alone. You may still be working through the painful circumstances that led to becoming a solo parent, dealing with an ex-spouse who is a negative influence on the children, or who tries to turn them against you to cause even more pain.

Regardless of the emotions your specific circumstances may be causing, you are called to place your child's needs above your own. Give them as much stability and nurturing as possible within your limitations, even when they don't seem to appreciate the sacrifice you're making. Be assured that the Lord receives your selfless caring as an act of worship to Him because it reflects the spirit of Christ who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2).

Being a servant includes doing your best to maintain a Christ-

like attitude when you go through the headaches of court appointments, seeing your ex with a new romantic interest, juggling financial challenges, maintaining a home, or having people ask awkward questions about your family.

Putting your children first is also a priority if you don't have custody—if you are limited to small windows of time together. Those times are your opportunity to show love and influence, and not to get caught up in disagreements over parenting differences. In your visitation, in your support and all other connections, your first priority is serving the needs of your children.

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***PRIORITY TWO: Choose good relationships.***

Few people understand the load you carry. You're likely to be under stress with extra work and the constant demands of parenting. You know how your loneliness and desire to be loved can lead you toward relationships with the opposite sex that may be harmful, only adding to the uncertainty and anxiety. If you are not ready to marry, be very cautious about dating during this season of life. You want healthy, Christian friendships that can help you face this emotional maze and to make wise decisions through it all. You need to be a part of a community of believers committed to forgiveness, redemption, and growth. Your children also need the support and modeling of other Christians. God can make your next chapter better than the last.

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### ***PRIORITY THREE: Become intentional.***

Be careful not to see yourself as a “second class” parent. Raising children alone is harder, but the goal is the same for you as it is for two-parent families—to nurture Christian faith and values in your children. That means becoming intentional about building a strong relationship, modeling Godly character, and creating occasions for meaningful interaction about life’s most important truths. Remember that it is no accident that God gave you the blessing of children. He is also eager to give you the grace to be the parent your children need.

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### **GOING FURTHER**

#### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***Successful Single Parenting*** (by Gary Richmond, a single parent pastor) provides practical help and Biblical principles for balancing your needs with those of your children.

#### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

***Focus on the Family*** – [focusonthefamily.com](http://focusonthefamily.com)

***Parenting*** – [parenting.com](http://parenting.com)

***Crosswalk*** – [crosswalk.com/family/parenting/single-parents/](http://crosswalk.com/family/parenting/single-parents/)



# **GRANDPARENTS**



## ***YOU'VE BEEN PROMOTED!***

Grandparents hold a unique and exalted position when it comes to the process of spiritual formation in the next generation. Other than mom and dad, no one else carries the stature or inherent authority in the lives of children. In fact, not even mom or dad can fill the role a grandparent fills. That's why it's troubling to see so many modern grandparents squander their opportunity thinking, "I've finished the parenting task." Hardly.

You are not called a "grandparent" because you've been retired from the parenting process. You are called "grand" because you've been promoted! That means your task is to do everything possible to help your family achieve success in their most important assignment. Regardless of what business you may be in, your "family business" includes a clear purpose. Specifically, those blessed with the gift of grandchildren are called to inspire and nurture the faith of the next generation as life's greatest privilege and priority.

The scriptures command moms, dads and grandparents to give the next generation a framework for living rooted in the knowledge of God and in relationship with Him. It is our job to support and reinforce the role of parents as they fulfill the command of Deuteronomy 6.

### ***DEUTERONOMY 6:6-8***

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...

It seems that this generation of grandparents mentally checks out or skims past this vital passage of scripture because they assume it only applies to mom and dad. When did that change?

Prior generations of grandparents understood this mandate of being the patriarchs of faith in their extended families. We need to recapture that understanding today if we are going to fulfill our God-ordained role in the faith formation process.

How do you start? Put in place regularly scheduled times when you get to invest in your grandchildren, such as:

- Put a weekly “touching base” call or text message reminder on your planner to prompt “spontaneous” encouragement or conversation.
- Plan once-a-month, twice-a-month, or once-a-week sleepovers.
- Host a once-a-year entire week or more with grandchildren.
- Create grandfather/grandson, grandmother/granddaughter events or dates.
- Establish birthday traditions (like breakfasts with them).
- Help grandchildren pick out and purchase Christmas gifts for their parents.
- Create a Fall Festival celebration each year.

- Observe annual celebration of their salvation.
- Establish Easter traditions.

The key is creating recurring meaningful experiences that, once they have been instituted, take place fairly automatically. Leverage the suggested tools and resources to make influencing the faith of the next generation easy.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Extreme Grandparenting*** (by Tim & Darcy Kimmel) – Are you ready to take grandparenting to the next level? This book offers tested and timeless principles for grandparenting in the 21st century.

***It Starts At Home*** (by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope) gives grandparents practical suggestions for influencing the faith of their grandchildren.

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

***Children's & Youth Ministries*** – Victory offers a variety of programs to assist parents in their efforts to instill faith in their children, including age-appropriate weekend ministry and events. To learn more, visit [victoryatl.com](http://victoryatl.com).

***Small Groups*** – Victory offers a variety of adult Small Groups for those who are in the grandparenting season of life. Consult the Small Group page at [groups.victoryatl.com](http://groups.victoryatl.com).

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.



# **INFLUENCING GRANDCHILDREN**

Grandparents in the 21st century face a mix of new opportunities and challenges. Extended life expectancy has dramatically changed the length and look of the empty nest years. Many grandparents now have greater opportunities for work and travel. Tight-knit family relationships have increasingly given way to family members spread over wide geographic distances. Some grandparents face the challenge of getting time with grandchildren because of divorce. A growing number of grandparents have watched circumstances drive them to take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.

In this context it's become less clear what role grandparents can best play. Are they just a good source for gifts and free babysitting? What's the most important thing a grandparent can do?

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***STEP ONE: Be there for them.***

A grandparent's first priority is to "be there" one way or another. For the active grandparents whom the Wall Street Journal has described as "having a full slate of work and travel", it means stopping to remember how much you depended on grandparents when you were younger and knowing how critical your presence is. For others, "being there" means taking on the challenge posed by distance or strained relationships that might be keeping you from your grandchildren. Technology solutions such as video chatting have helped some grandparents close the gap.

Being there gives you the opportunity to show the kind of unconditional love that even parents can struggle to maintain on

a consistent basis. It gives you a chance to tell the family story—the people, places and plot twists that have made your family distinct. Being there also allows you to teach things that parents may not have found time for—how to skip a rock, how to build and fly a kite, how to make fudge, and other priceless lessons.

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**STEP TWO:** *Nurture their faith.*

Most importantly, being there and making memories with your grandchildren gives you the opportunity to impress your faith on them. Psalm 78:5-7 presents a concept of extended spiritual heritage:

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

Nothing you can give as a grandparent is more valuable than your spiritual legacy. Your gifts, time, games, food and other contributions find their primary value when they are offered in the context of a spiritual heritage. Be very intentional about creating opportunities to nurture faith during the years your grandchildren are receptive to your influence.

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# **MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS**

We become like those we spend time with. That's why mentor relationships are important for everyone. Use the following suggestions whether you are seeking someone to invest in you or find yourself ready to pour into the life of someone else.

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## ***FINDING THE RIGHT MENTORS***

The ideal mentor is someone who is a bit further along in his or her faith journey. They do not necessarily need to be older, but life experience usually brings greater wisdom. Nor do they need to be an expert in every aspect of being a successful Godly man or woman. It is ok to ask someone to mentor you on marriage, for example, and someone else to coach you on fatherhood, your work, etc. Here are a few ideas on finding a mentor:

1. Ask God to help you identify someone you respect and are building relationship with to speak into your life at a deeper level.
2. Decide what specific areas you would like to have this person mentor you in—marriage, ministry, finances, spiritual growth, parenting, etc.
3. Determine how long the mentoring relationship will initially last. Timeframes will help both of you know what the pace will look like and give you an idea of how you can measure the success of your mentoring relationship. At the end of that time, you can honestly talk about what the future of your mentoring relationship will look like and if you wish to commit further.

## **FINDING OTHERS TO MENTOR**

Who can you encourage and coach toward becoming a more Godly person? Some people are hesitant to ask for a mentor. That's why those who are willing and able to do so should pour into younger people. Look for someone who is FAT—not heavy, but someone who is Faithful, Available, and Teachable.

- **Faithful:** They've demonstrated maturity and you see greater potential if given the right encouragement and coaching.
- **Available:** They seem hungry to learn and would take your investment in them seriously.
- **Teachable:** They usually respond well to coaching and instruction.

When approaching someone to mentor, use similar guidelines to those you would use when asking to be mentored. A few suggestions are:

1. Ask God to help you identify someone who would benefit from your encouragement and coaching.
2. Decide what specific areas that you would like to invest in this person. (i.e. marriage, ministry, finances, spiritual growth, parenting, etc.)
3. Don't feel awkward about making the offer. Your goal is not

to say, “I’m so brilliant. I think you need me to mentor you.” It is rather to say that you see potential in him that you would love to help unleash. For example, “Would you consider me mentoring you in this specific area for this certain amount of time? I will set the meetings and I will provide you with a list of things to be thinking about before we meet.”

4. At the end of the specified mentoring season reassess whether both of you would like to continue for another specified period of time.

See below for specific contexts in which you can connect with other men or women you might mentor or ask to mentor you.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***Intentional Mentor Relationships*** (by Mason Randall with Kurt Bruner)

### **MENTORING CONTEXTS:**

***Men United*** – Learn more about men’s ministry at [victoryatl.com/menunited](http://victoryatl.com/menunited).

***Victory Women*** – Learn more about women’s ministry at [victoryatl.com/women](http://victoryatl.com/women).

***Children’s & Youth Ministries*** – Victory offers a variety of programs to assist parents in their efforts to instill faith in their children, including age-appropriate weekend ministry and

events. To learn more, visit [victoryatl.com](http://victoryatl.com).

**Small Groups** – Victory offers a variety of adult Small Groups for those that are looking to grow as a disciple of Jesus. Whether you're looking for someone to mentor you or perhaps mentor someone else, it all starts with relationships and that can only happen in biblical community. Consult the Small Group page at [groups.victoryatl.com](http://groups.victoryatl.com).

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# **PARENTING YOUNG CHILDREN**

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# **PREPARING FOR BABY**



## **PREPARING FOR BABY'S ARRIVAL**

Congratulations on the exciting stage of life you've entered! Whether you've recently had a new baby or are counting down to your due date, you've likely noticed that parenthood is an entirely different world. In the midst of all the joy and anticipation comes a whole new level of stretching (not just your belly) and character development. You may be wondering if life will ever be the same. In many ways it won't. So become intentional about this season by preparing yourself to take three important steps for the transition to parenthood.

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### **STEP ONE:** *Buckle up.*

As new parents, you've strapped yourself into a roller coaster of adventure—with highs you could have never imagined and lows that can push you to discover abilities and courage you didn't know you had. Along with God's blessing of children comes His calling for you to lay your life down for your child (Philippians 2:3-11). Things you once took for granted—like sleep, eating a warm meal or a spontaneous get-away with your spouse—are now things you will often sacrifice. While your friends without children sleep in on Saturday morning or hang out at the local coffee shop, you will be taking on what one sociologist called the “bone-wearying” work of a parent.

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## **STEP TWO:** *Give up.*

When you give sacrificially as parents you probably won't get the same kudos you'd get in the workplace, or even the same recognition you would have given each other for similar efforts before the kids arrived. You're moving into a time of life where such sacrificial giving is just something you have to do often and without expecting much fanfare. But it's in this aspect of your new mission—losing your life—that you find your life (Matthew 16:24-25). It's here that you develop “servant muscles” through the ongoing exercise of selfless giving. You'll also find that parenting is an arena for Christian discipleship with a “dailyness” and intensity like none other.

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## **STEP THREE:** *Team up.*

A couple entering into the journey of parenthood usually discovers a sense of purpose and shared accomplishment that can push their relationship into greater joy, but they can simultaneously drive each other crazy. Adjusting to less sleep, sex, money and time for each other can be a blow to marital satisfaction. Worse still, the two people that need each other the most often find themselves taking their frustration out on the only other adult in the house. Your marriage can survive this adjustment and you can experience the joy of parenting if you choose to be a team—if you lay your lives down for each other (Ephesians 5:22-33) and give each other an extra measure of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) and grace (2 Corinthians 9:8).

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***Your Marriage Can Survive a Newborn*** (by psychologist, Glenn Williams, and occupational therapist, Natalie Williams) helps couples thrive during the stress and strain of having a newborn. With chapters about anxiety, expectations, money, sex and fun, the Williams' speak from their own experience of having three children, as well as from the stories of other overextended parents, to show couples how to nurture their relationship even as they nurture their new baby.



# **YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOLING OPTIONS**

Parents today often feel like they fail to measure up in their responsibilities, especially in something as challenging as giving their children a good education in an increasingly complex world. As you evaluate the many schooling options available to your family, reflect on the following questions to help apply Biblical wisdom to your educational choices.

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**QUESTION ONE:** *Who has ultimate responsibility?*

Children are wired to observe and learn about all kinds of things in life—from friends, family, church, television and so on. But what is your role? What part do you play in what they learn and how they find their place in the world? Is one form of education better than another? Is your child okay in the public school system? Is a private school or homeschooling better?

The answer will vary from situation to situation. The most important thing to remember is that you have ultimate responsibility for the education of your child(ren). Deuteronomy 6:6-7 tells us: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Parents in all different times and places have found value working with other people (including schools) to partner toward a strong education, but delegation does not remove the responsibility of oversight. It takes diligence to make sure that the people to whom you grant some of the training work are performing well and enhancing, rather than undermining, your efforts.

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**QUESTION TWO:** *What is best for each child?*

Your oversight of each element of your child's education should be coupled with an annual assessment of your child's education needs. You should evaluate each child at the start of every school year and then commit to the plan that works best. Some parents move from one option to another based upon what they believe will best meet a child's needs, rather than feel "locked in" to any one approach. Remember, the same schooling option may not be the best for every child in your family.

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**QUESTION THREE:** *How do we keep faith a priority?*

Everyone wants his or her child to succeed in life, but what does success look like? Does getting into a great college and then landing a dream job define success? Is it about being well rounded with skills in a broad range of extracurricular activities? Too often well-meaning parents seeking to give their children an edge for the future load up their schedules with activities that can squeeze out time for family and faith. But it's the investment in family time that deepens the roots of faith, character, relationship and other non-academic priorities - which ultimately leads to a life marked by choices for significance rather than only success.

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**QUESTION FOUR:** *Who can give advice and guidance?*

It is always wise to ask those who have chosen different schooling options (including public, charter, private and home education) for insight on the good and bad of each. Since all of us tend to advocate for the option we have chosen, you may encounter those who seem to have a “one size fits all” perspective. That’s okay. Just listen and learn so that you can gain as much insight as possible as you prayerfully evaluate your own child’s situation.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***The Handbook on Choosing Your Child’s Education: A Personalized Plan for Every Age and Stage*** (from Focus on the Family) helps readers survey today’s educational choices and then make an informed decision about the best path for their children. Features include a checklist to determine individual pros and cons for each child, reproducible worksheets, a resource list, and frequently asked questions. The book also includes information on gifted children and children with special needs.



**INTRODUCING  
YOUR  
CHILD  
TO  
CHRIST**



The fact that you're reading this indicates that you are concerned about your child's faith. As you care for your child's daily needs and work to prepare him or her for success in life, there's nothing more important than caring for their spiritual needs and helping them prepare for eternity. It's likely that you are reading this because, like many parents, you don't know quite how (or when) to go about introducing your child to Christ. Parents who worry that they don't have the training or understanding to lead their children to salvation may be tempted to just leave it to the "professionals"—to rely on people at church or ministry events. That's understandable, but God has given you the most important and most influential role when it comes to influencing your child's path to salvation. All it takes is a little training for you to feel more comfortable about the when and how of introducing them to Christ.

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**STEP ONE:** *Lay a foundation.*

A child's decision to follow Jesus is rarely a one-step process. Your son or daughter grows in their understanding of God by developing a foundation (hearing the stories of the Bible, learning scriptures, singing about Jesus, and so forth), as well as experiencing life in your home (watching your example, feeling your love, learning right from wrong). These two ways of learning work best when they are connected in your home and integrated into your family life. We see it in Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

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**STEP TWO:** *Discern readiness.*

Do your best to discern when your child is mature enough to put the pieces together. Avoid the temptation to push him or her too fast, making sure they are ready and can truly understand the gospel.

When you feel they are ready, ask a few questions to help gauge your child's level of understanding. Read Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." Then ask questions like, "What is sin?" "How does your sin affect your relationship to God?" and "How can you be right with God?" How they respond can help you sense whether your child is ready, as well as help your child apply the gospel to his or her own life.

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**STEP THREE:** *Guide your child in prayer for salvation.*

Romans 10 tells us, "...If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved." (Romans 10:9-10). If you sense your child has a basic understanding of what sin is and what it leads to, and what it means to accept God's gift of salvation and His Lordship, then you can guide your child to pray along those lines. Instead of quoting specific words for your child to repeat, it's best to prompt them to use their own words—to tell God they are sorry

for their sins, to ask for His forgiveness, and to ask Him to be Lord over the rest of their life.

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**STEP FOUR:** *Prepare them for baptism.*

Once your child has understood and decided to accept God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, it is time to guide them toward following Christ in believer's baptism. Learn more about baptism at [victoryatl.com/baptism](http://victoryatl.com/baptism).



# **DISCIPLINE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

The scriptures command parents to raise children in the training and instruction of the Lord. We begin “training” a child from a very young age by the ways we respond to their actions and attitudes. The primary purpose of discipline is to consistently direct your child toward right relationship with God and others. Several practices contribute to that process.

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***PRACTICE #1: Establish your authority.***

Children need a clear answer to the question, “Who is the boss?” Mom, dad or guardian embodies the security and limits that come from submitting ourselves to a loving heavenly Father. God has delegated oversight of your child’s welfare and development to you, placing you in a position of authority over them.

Starting when children are very young, parents need to model clarity and consistency. Unclear rules and sporadic reinforcement breed insecurity. You must say what you mean, mean what you say and act upon it. Don’t overlook defiant behavior just because the specific issue seems minor, or because it is a hassle to stop and discipline at the moment. Children are commanded to obey their parents and parents to train their children even when it is inconvenient to do so (Colossians 3:20-21).

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***PRACTICE #2: Discipline rather than punish.***

Punishment is negative, making someone pay for what they’ve done. Discipline is positive—training toward a better future. Like

touching a hot stove, we learn from the consequences of our actions. Discipline in childhood helps children avoid “learning the hard way” later in life.

Many parents ask about the use of spanking to help shape a child’s will. The scriptures teach that “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” (Proverbs 22:15, 13:24 and 29:15). Administering “the rod” apart from Biblical principles, however, can cause more harm than good. Corporal discipline should only be used within guidelines such as those offered by Christian parenting experts. Several books can help you learn to apply spanking, time-out and other methods of discipline in healthy and productive ways (see “Going Further” resources).

Regardless of which form of discipline you use, the key is consistency. As author Ginger Plowman explains, it is not the severity of punishment but the “certainty of consequence” that makes the difference.

God holds parents accountable for how they use the authority He has given them. The scriptures instruct parents not to “exasperate” or “embitter” their children (Colossians 3:21). Do not treat childish immaturity the same as willful defiance. Parents should never discipline children out of embarrassment, frustration or anger. Accidentally spilling the milk or waking the baby is not an occasion for stern discipline, but ignoring direct disobedience can make a child vulnerable to an ongoing spirit of rebellion.

Parents are called to protect their children from the ruin of an undisciplined life and point them to their need for a savior (Proverbs 23:14 and Romans 3:22-24). Ultimately, the discipline

you apply should be used in a way that restores right relationship. It should provide a consequence that leads the child to repentance (sorrow for their wrong behavior) and restoration of the relationship with mom, dad and others.

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### ***PRACTICE #3: Lovingly instruct.***

Starting in the preschool years discipline and instruction should become a package deal (Ephesians 6:4). Don't make the mistake of allowing your desire for changed behavior to replace your desire for a changed heart. Use simple, probing questions and share specific scriptures about wrong choices to instruct your child toward repentance. After disciplining a 2-year-old temper tantrum, for example, you might explain that "God wants us to obey." With a 4-year-old you can go further by explaining self-control, reading Titus 2:6 and asking the child, "Do you think that you were self-controlled or out-of-control?" Such loving instruction after discipline helps train your son or daughter to think like a follower of Christ rather than merely to behave in order to avoid punishment.

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### **GOING FURTHER**

#### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

*Shepherding a Child's Heart* (by Tedd Tripp) explains the process of shaping a child's heart rather than simply correcting their behavior.

***Don't Make Me Count to Three*** (by Ginger Plowman) provides specific, practical strategies for discipline.

***The Strong-Willed Child*** (by Dr. James Dobson) helps parents who are dealing with a particularly strong-willed child.





# **PRODIGAL KIDS**

## ***WHEN THEY REJECT YOUR BELIEFS***

Every teen and young adult goes through a season when they try to establish their own identity by distancing themselves from their parents' tastes and preferences. What do you do when your son or daughter rejects your faith and embraces beliefs or behaviors that you know could be harmful?

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### ***AVOID BLAMING YOURSELF.***

Rejection brings pain, especially when the son or daughter you've poured your life into walks away from everything you care about or transfers their loyalty to a group of strangers. It is normal to second-guess yourself, wondering what you should have done differently. But even if you did everything perfectly, your child can choose to rebel. They may follow the pattern of Adam and Eve who, despite having the only perfect parent and living in paradise, still chose to sin. "I reared children and brought them up," God says through the prophet Isaiah, "but they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2b).

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### ***STAY ENGAGED.***

You may be thinking, "They don't listen to me. Everything I say seems to make matters worse. What's the point in trying?" Don't throw in the towel! As far as you are able, stay engaged in relationship. "[They] in fact still very badly want the loving input and engagement of their parents—more, in fact, than most

parents ever realize,” writes Christian Smith in his book *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Smith demonstrates that parents have far more long-term influence than they realize—more than friends, youth pastors, professors or anyone else. He explains that “just at the time when [they] most need engaged parents to help them work out a whole series of big questions about what they believe, think, value and feel...parents are withdrawing.”

Stay engaged as much as possible by writing brief cards, calling, sending text messages, etc., but use words that demonstrate humility and affirmation rather than hurt and judgment. Your efforts may go unacknowledged for some time, but they still serve as deposits for the future by saying, “I will always love you and be here when you are ready.”

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### ***BALANCE GRACE AND TRUTH.***

The greatest influence you can have on your son or daughter is to reflect both God’s grace and truth (John 1:14). It can be difficult modeling both, especially when dealing with prodigal children.

Following God’s model of patient love with His rebellious people, you can show love even when facing rejection. Ephesians 5:1-2 explains, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Pray daily that God will use this painful season for good in both your child’s life and your own.

However, showing grace does not mean subsidizing a child's poor choices. Some parents continue to pay all of the child's bills. Others go so far as to bail their kids out of trouble, letting them avoid the consequences of their sins. Sometimes parents must show tough love by allowing the natural fallout of wrong choices to take effect. Remember the Biblical story of the prodigal son. It was not until the boy became hungry that he "came to his senses" and returned home to ask forgiveness. Don't interfere with the events God may use to help your child come to his or her senses.

Parents of prodigal children may experience pain when they read, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from it." But Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise. It summarizes a general pattern. Besides, your child's story is not over. You have made an impression and laid a foundation. Your child's story is not yet finished. Stay engaged in coming days by balancing grace and truth, while anticipating a new chapter in your wayward child's life.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ*** (by Rob Rienow) provides much needed encouragement and practical advice for parents dealing with the grief and challenge of an older "prodigal" child.

***Grace Based Parenting*** (by Dr. Tim Kimmel) offers a refreshing new look at parenting. Rejecting rigid rules and checklists that don't work, Dr. Kimmel recommends

a parenting style that mirrors God's love, reflects His forgiveness, and displaces fear as a motivator for behavior. As we embrace the grace God offers, we create a solid foundation for growing morally strong and spiritually motivated children.

**DADDY  
AND  
DAUGHTER  
MOVIE  
NIGHT**

## **WHY MOVIE NIGHT?**

**BEST USE:** as a movie night discussion guide with a younger daughter

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** triggers a faith discussion between father and daughter

**ADVANCE PREPARATION:** Select whichever of the following Disney princess movies you consider most appropriate for your daughter and have it ready for special evenings together.

- Snow White
- Cinderella
- The Little Mermaid
- Sleeping Beauty
- Beauty and the Beast

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## **SERVE IT UP**

### **STEP ONE:**

Invite your daughter to get dressed up for a special dinner together. You can do something fancy like dinner at a nice restaurant, or simple like fast food or home cooked fish sticks. Just be sure to make it an early dinner to leave time for you to watch and discuss the movie.

### **STEP TWO:**

Make sure you have a Bible handy, pop some popcorn and enjoy the movie.

**STEP THREE:**

Discuss the questions below in order to highlight the story written on every heart—the story that points us to the true happily-ever-after story of God’s love for His bride.

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**DISCUSS IT**

After watching the film, ask your daughter the following questions.

1. Describe the girl’s life at the beginning of the story. Is she happy? Does she wish for something more?
2. What danger does the girl face? Is there anyone who wants to harm her or make her unhappy? What kind of obstacles (problems) must be overcome?
3. What magical things happen to help make the girl’s dreams come true?

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**THINK ABOUT IT**

Read each Bible passage, then talk about the way princess stories reflect the true story of God.

**READ 1 PETER 5:8**

Comment: Our real world has a villain named Satan who deceives us and creates other obstacles to keep us away from our happily-ever-after destiny.



**READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55-57**

Comment: God defeated the villain with the “magic” (actually, the miracle) of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Now we can escape the darkness of sin and “marry” the Son of the King!

**READ REVELATION 19:7**

Comment: Little girls hope for “happily-ever-after” with a handsome prince because it points them to the true story where God invites us to live happily-ever-after as His bride.

*For more ideas, visit [MovieNightChat.com](http://MovieNightChat.com).*



# **RAISING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Only those with firsthand experience truly understand the blessing and challenges of raising a child with special needs. Parenting is hard work under the best of circumstances. The addition of managing the needs of a child with physical or mental disabilities can bring a whole new level of physical and emotional stress for parents. But it also brings a level of joy others rarely comprehend.

Whether you have just recently received a troubling diagnosis, are moving into a new stage of care, or have just started attending this church, we want to be a source of encouragement and hope as you fulfill your calling to parent a child with special needs.

We believe every child is a gift from God, made in His image and reflecting His dignity. We also consider those caring for children with special needs worthy of special honor and support. To become intentional about your unique situation, we encourage you to reflect on your blessing, your call and your challenge.

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### ***YOUR BLESSING: A Special Connection***

Those nurturing a child with special needs often encounter the heart of God in ways that can only be described as a spiritual mystery. While these children may be unable to participate in certain physical and/or academic pursuits, they can thrive in the most important arena of life—the spirit. Even those who can't understand the written word of God embody what it means to love and be loved as one totally dependent upon the Giver and Sustainer of life. Those honored to serve these children are given a unique connection with the God whose image they

bear—seen in a gazing smile, a shrieking laugh, or an unspoken moment of delight that proclaims “the refreshing water of God’s joy is available to us all.”

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### **YOUR CALL:** *Laying Down Your Life*

You have one of the most difficult yet vital callings in the kingdom of God, but how can you maintain the ongoing energy and passion needed to parent a child with special needs? There’s no other way to do it than to daily embrace the call to lay down your life.

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

– Philippians 2:5-8

All Christian parents are called to mirror Jesus by taking on “the very nature of a servant” at home, but it is especially real in the midst of the never ending sacrifices demanded of those caring for special needs. Even if those around you never understand the load you bear, you play a part that is immensely important from God’s perspective and is credited as serving Christ himself (Matthew 25:40).

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## **YOUR CHALLENGE:** *Finding Support and Replenishment*

Whether your child has mild or severe needs, you require replenishment in order to stay faithful and avoid burnout. You need practical help and spiritual nourishment. Stephen Covey talks about the importance of “sharpening the saw”—prioritizing physical, emotional and spiritual restoration so that your efforts can be fueled with new strength and purpose. Following that advice is an extra challenge for you, but even more essential. You and your child need periodic breaks. Of course, making that happen can be difficult because very few offer to help and those who do may not understand what to do, your child’s unique needs, or just how hard it can be. That’s why this church offers a variety of ministries for families just like yours.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

#### ***Victory World Church Special Needs Ministry***

**Norcross** – during 9am, 11am, 1pm services (ministry is located in our Preschool Wing)

**Hamilton Mill** – during 9am service

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It’s for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.

# PARENTING TEENS

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**PREPARING  
YOUR  
CHILD  
FOR  
ADOLESCENCE**



“Enjoy ‘em now, because they’ll drive you crazy when they’re teenagers!” That’s the warning parents of pre-teens often hear. The implication: the teen years will be excruciatingly, unavoidably rough for everyone concerned. Obviously you and your pre-teen are in for a lot of change, but turmoil isn’t inevitable. You have the opportunity—before the transition from childhood to adulthood begins—to intentionally navigate your son or daughter through that change in a proactive and positive way.

The best way to prepare your child for adolescence is for you to set the stage—for a mom and her daughter or a father and his son or a single parent and either sex to spend time together dedicated to giving their pre-adolescent the framework for what’s coming. The best hope for a good outcome is when you—the parent—are the one to explain what it means and how to make the most of this vital time in life. Here’s a quick guide to the when, what, and how of that time together.

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## **WHEN**

Often parents are concerned that they will overwhelm their pre-teen or encourage premature curiosity if they jump the gun in preparing them for adolescence. A greater concern, however, is the likelihood that someone else will beat you to it. Children are typically ready before their parents are. Doctors report puberty starting as early as age 9 among some girls, and the average age for first exposure to pornography among boys is around the same age. Of course, not all children are the same. That’s why it’s important to spend time with your pre-teen to get a sense of where they are developmentally and to make the timing of

your conversations a matter of prayer. Your prime opportunity will generally fall somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12.

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## **WHAT**

In your conversation about the years ahead, you should plan to address the many areas of change your son or daughter will encounter during their transition to adulthood—in their body, their decision-making, and their relationship with you.

### **BODY**

It's important to frame the physical changes ahead as much more than a plea for sexual abstinence. Your son or daughter needs a vision for how the internal and external changes ahead are preparing them for the joys of marriage and the miracle of creating new life.

### **DECISION-MAKING**

Increasingly, your child will have to make and assume the responsibilities for his or her decisions. As you maintain your overall family values in media choices, individual responsibilities (chores, homework, etc.), and alcohol/drug use, you also need to direct your son or daughter in how to make good decisions for themselves. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs can be a helpful guide for teens learning to discern between wisdom and folly.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO YOU**

Helping your son or daughter understand and embrace the changes in his or her body while challenging them to

bear the responsibility of decision-making will be different from the role you've played before. Instead of communicating like a teacher who teaches the right answer, you should explain to your pre-teen that over the next decade your role will be progressively changing to that of a coach who is there to guide them in their transition into independent development.

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## **HOW**

So what's the best way to talk about this with your child? Fortunately, there are several great tools available for parents looking for recommendations on how to be intentional and effective in their efforts.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Preparing for Adolescence*** (by Dr. James Dobson) is the classic Christian resource for this transition.

***Teaching Your Kids Healthy Sexuality*** (by Jim Burns, PhD)  
A trusted family authority provides a simple and practical guide for parents to help their children develop a healthy perspective regarding their bodies and sexuality.

***Raising a Modern Day Knight*** (by Robert Lewis) focuses on fathers preparing their sons for manhood.

***Raising a Modern Day Princess*** (by Doreen Hanna) In the same tradition as *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, this book is designed to equip parents to cultivate strong relationships with their adolescents. *Raising a Modern-Day Princess* stresses the importance of creating a rite of passage for teen girls—a defining moment in which girls can be blessed by significant adults in their lives, and a call for their families and communities to celebrate and support them as they enter womanhood. This book offers practical help in raising a generation of women to see themselves as God sees them—as daughters of the King.

**RECOMMENDED KIT:**

***Passport to Purity*** (by Dennis and Barbara Rainey) provides tools for a meaningful getaway during which parents discuss puberty, sex and other “preparing for adolescence” issues with a son or daughter.

**RECOMMENDED WEBSITE:**

***FamilyLife.com*** provides suggestions for parents to help their children win at purity. Type ‘sex education’ in the search field for resources.

**MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

***Victory Youth's High School*** ministry meets weekly at each campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/highschool](http://victoryatl.com/highschool) for service times at your campus.

***Victory Youth's Middle School*** ministry meets weekly at each campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/middleschool](http://victoryatl.com/middleschool) for service times at your campus.



# **OLDER CHILDREN: OPENING DIALOGUE**

## **OPENING DIALOGUE WITH YOUR TEEN**

**BEST USE:** as a “cheat sheet” for a parent trying to open up meaningful communication with his/her teen

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** helps parents push past the sometimes awkward process of talking to a teenager by sincerely listening to what matters to them

**ADVANCE PREPARATION:** Schedule a short road trip and a fun destination such as hunting, camping, shopping, hiking, or whatever your teen would enjoy. Bring the list of twenty questions below. Use or edit whichever of these questions seem to fit your situation.

**DRIVE-TIME COMMUNICATION:** While driving to your destination, ask several of the following questions. It is sometimes easier for a teen to open up while you both watch the road than it is face to face.

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### **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TEEN**

1. What is something you want me to know about you?
2. In what ways do you feel that I do not understand you?
3. How do you hope that our relationship can improve over this next year?
4. How can I do a better job listening to you?

5. What are several ways I can be a better parent to you?
6. What are some new things that our family can do together for fun?
7. In what ways would you like for me to consider giving you more responsibility and freedom?
8. Who are your most important friends right now and why?
9. Who do you look up to right now?
10. What is your biggest worry?
11. What do you think that I think about you?
12. What one word best describes you?
13. If you could change something about your school, what would you change?
14. When do you feel most alive?
15. What would be the best day of your life? The worst day?
16. If you could have one super power, which super power would you have and why?
17. What is your strongest emotion?
18. What do you want to be remembered for?

**19.** What is your best childhood memory?

**20.** How can I do a better job serving you?

Keep in mind that the goal is to listen and learn, not to correct their impressions or “fix” anything too quickly. Remember that your teen may feel awkward talking to you about some of these concerns if you have not had similar chats before. Be patient and don’t worry if they struggle opening up. Simply move on to whatever fun experiences you’ve planned and try again later.



# **OLDER CHILDREN: PARENT REPORT CARD**

## **PARENT/CHILD DIALOGUE**

**BEST USE:** as a tool to surface unique areas of need in your child and/or areas to become more intentional as a parent

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** meaningful dialogue on how your child perceives your parenting

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Complete the attached report card on yourself while trying to assess what each child would say. Keep in mind that the goal is to surface your child's perceptions, whether they are accurate or not. Two children can have entirely different opinions of the same parental patterns. Understanding a child's perceptions of our actions helps us do a better job of meeting their unique needs.
- Decide upon a context within which to ask your child(ren) to grade you. You might consider the day after your child brings home a school report card or progress report. Shore up your courage in order to humbly accept input that may surprise you or even sting.

### **SET IT UP:**

- Say: "Tonight I want you to fill out a report card that will help me understand areas in which I might need to 'study' a little harder. There are several things the Lord expects me to do as your father/mother and I want your input on how well I am doing."
- Do NOT comment on any of the input. Thank the child and discuss the input with your spouse and/or a trusted friend who can help you create a "study plan" to strengthen the relationship with your child.

# PARENT REPORT CARD

<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>GRADES</b>
Shows me he/she loves me	
Shows concern for my feelings	
Spends enough time with me	
Listens to what I say	
Gives me appropriate trust	
Enjoys being with me	
Is truthful with me	
Makes the family a priority in his/her life	
Is fair in his/her decisions	
Gives me the right number of chores	
Disciplines me when I deserve it	
Admits when he/she is wrong	
Controls his/her anger and words	
<b>OVERALL GRADE</b>	

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, what kind of relationship do you want to have with your parent? (*circle one*)

**1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10**

Considering all things, on the same scale, where are you today in your relationship with your parent? (*circle one*)

**1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10**

What are 1-3 things your parent could do for you to make your relationship better than ever?

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**



# **A DIFFICULT TEEN**

## **NAVIGATING REBELLION:** *Dealing With a Rebellious Teen*

There is little in life that creates more anxiety than having a teenager who seems out of control. Experiencing emotional outbursts, being lied to, or staying up at night worrying about their safety can greatly damage your relationship with your teen. You may have tried different approaches to help them—being tough one day and then trying to show mercy the next—but nothing really seems to make a difference. Watching your teen continue to make bad choices can leave you torn between wanting them to just learn the hard way and being afraid of what they might do in a moment of irresponsibility. What steps can you take now to best help your child?

///

### **STEP ONE:** *Assess your relationship.*

As teen expert, Josh McDowell, has said, “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.” Considering that your teen’s emotions and behavior are being affected by a surge of changing hormones, it’s vital for you to maintain as strong a relationship as possible in the midst of whatever they may be going through. If you have a solid relational foundation, you can build from there. Like the father in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), you can hope that your unconditional love and forgiveness will ultimately draw your teen back. So ask yourself several questions to evaluate the status of your relationship, such as:

- Is our relationship generally healthy with a few bumps, or generally unhealthy with rare moments of connection?

- Am I spending time with my teen doing things we enjoy together to create a solid foundation for when tensions occur?
- Does my child feel deeply loved or heavily criticized? (1 Peter 4:8)
- Are my spouse and I on the same page, or is there increased tension because we are not growing together?
- Has the relationship deteriorated to the point we need pastoral or professional guidance?

What if the relationship is weak? Maybe you've been relationally disconnected for a long time, or maybe your teen is a stepchild who has never really accepted you as his or her parent. Even under these and similar circumstances, you earn respect by building a relationship. Making yourself available, listening, and trying to understand will increase your ability to have influence. Dr. James Dobson stresses the value of routine family connections as a way to cultivate relationship.

He cites research showing the positive difference parents make when they are available for their teens in the morning, after school, at dinnertime, and at bedtime. If your current routine is making these connections difficult, it may be time for a change.

///

**STEP TWO:** *Be the parent.*

Some parents interpret the need for relationship as a call to be

good friends to their teens, but you need to be the parent—the one who brings stability and structure to their lives by setting boundaries and expectations. Showing that kind of authority can be difficult for some, but it is an essential role of parenting. It can also be challenging to direct your teen in a way that doesn't exasperate him or her (Ephesians 6:4) when you feel disrespected. As the adult, you need to sacrifice your hurt feelings and anger to do what's best for your teen. You are called as the parent to lovingly direct your teen through the challenges leading to adulthood. Ephesians 4:15 directs us to "speak the truth in love". Ask God to show you when it's important to be tough and when you need to lead with gentleness and compassionate love.

///

**STEP THREE:** *If serious, seek professional help.*

In this church body, you are surrounded by parents who have raised teenagers—many of whom faced challenges similar to yours. There's no reason to be embarrassed by the challenges you have or to strive to keep the veneer of a perfect family. You need the support and wisdom of those who have been where you are. Do you find yourself asking any of these questions?

- How can I find out if my child is using drugs or alcohol?
- Is my daughter having sex, and if so, what should I do?
- Why does my child seem so depressed?
- I think my son is looking at online pornography. What do I do?



Problems such as alcohol or drug use, pornography addiction, sexual experimentation, severe depression and other challenges may fall beyond your understanding and require the help of counselors and experts who can bring Biblical wisdom along with professional understanding of teens and risky behavior.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No*** (by Dr. John Townsend) offers advice on how to deal with disrespectful attitudes and irresponsible behaviors in your teen, how to set healthy limits and realistic consequences, how to be loving and caring while establishing rules, and how to determine specific strategies to deal with problems, both big and small.

***Yes, Your Teen Is Crazy*** (by Michael Bradley) explains that the most advanced parts of brain development aren't completed until adolescence is nearly over. As a result, teens can appear unstable, dysfunctional and unpredictable, with temporarily impaired judgment and decision-making processes. The good news is that parents do make a difference, and Bradley clearly explains how parents can encourage and guide their kids through these tumultuous years. (Disclaimer: This book contains some strong language describing difficult situations.)

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

***Victory Youth's High School*** ministry meets weekly at each

campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/highschool](http://victoryatl.com/highschool) for service times at your campus.

**Victory Youth's Middle School** ministry meets weekly at each campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/middleschool](http://victoryatl.com/middleschool) for service times at your campus.

**Fusion**, Victory's Young Adult ministry, for both single and married adults ages 18-30, meets weekly on Tuesdays at our Norcross and Hamilton Mill campuses. Visit [victoryatl.com/nextgen](http://victoryatl.com/nextgen) for service times.

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.



# **LAUNCHING YOUNG ADULTS**

After years of saying, “When I grow up, I’m gonna be…” there comes a point at which your children start going through the steps of actually making it happen. Dr. James Dobson calls ages 16 to 26 the “critical decade” as young people transition from childhood to adulthood. We’ve all heard the phrase “failure to launch” describing young men and women who don’t make that transition for one reason or another. Unfortunately, more and more parents are inadvertently keeping their children from growing up by protecting them from the risks necessary for adulthood. How can you be intentional about successfully launching your older children?

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**STEP ONE:** *Be a good coach.*

As the parent of a teen on the verge of adulthood, you are in the prime of the coaching years. You can motivate, encourage, challenge and advise, but you can’t force feed. You can help your son or daughter articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking and remind them of the “basics” they learned during their earlier years, but the time has come for them to truly own their beliefs. Through that process, you can provide a safe environment to wrestle with and even question the values they learned as children. The key to your influence at this point is in maintaining a strong relationship and frequent, open dialogue.

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**STEP TWO:** *Give perspective amid their big questions.*

Making the transition into adulthood, your son or daughter will face big questions like: What kind of work should I do? Where should I live? What should I do with my life? The most important thing you can do during this season is direct them back to overarching Biblical principles. The last words of King David to his son Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:9) provide a model for parents advising emerging adults: “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.”

In the midst of the practical advice parents may offer on setting goals, choosing a job, finding a spouse and so forth, we must also elevate God’s principles, such as:

- Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. (Psalm 127:1)
- Lose your life to find it. (Luke 9:23-24)
- So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)
- Seek first the kingdom of God. (Matthew 6:33)

///

**STEP THREE:** *Give a vision for marriage and family.*

Parents today often go to extremes to help their children get

ready for college and the workforce, but don't know exactly what they can do when it comes to preparing them for the more important work of marriage and family. While a small minority will be called to life-long celibate service, most are called to marriage and family (Genesis 2:18-24). We sometimes overlook how much marriage and family serve as the organizing structure of life and the prime arena for our spiritual development. Even if the culture discourages you from taking an active role in this transition, you have a vital part to play in helping your children "leave and cleave". Actively modeling a Christian family is the foundation, and daily prayer for your child's future spouse and children is an important commitment. But our highly sexualized and anti-marriage culture also makes it essential that you provide guidance and oversight to help your children form strong families as a key emphasis of their launch into adulthood.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

*Life on the Edge* (by Dr. James Dobson) offers Biblical principles to help young adults face "crucial questions about identity, education, marriage, career, God's will" and more.

### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITE:**

*Boundless.org* webzine provides young adults with a community of mentors and fellow believers throughout the season of transition from high school to starting a family.

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

*Fusion*, Victory's Young Adult ministry, for both single and

married adults ages 18-30, meets weekly on Tuesdays at our Norcross and Hamilton Mill campuses. Visit [victoryatl.com/nextgen](http://victoryatl.com/nextgen) for service times.

**Financial Peace University** – Learn practical ways to handle your money. This 9-week, life-changing program empowers and teaches you how to make the right money decisions to achieve your financial goals and experience a total money makeover. This class is offered twice a year. Visit [victoryatl.com/fpu](http://victoryatl.com/fpu) to learn more.

**PreMarried Life** meets twice a year for a 6-week class at the Norcross campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/premarriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/premarriedlife) to learn more.

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.

# **STAYING CONNECTED**



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# **YOUNG CHILDREN**

## **CONNECT WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

**BEST USE:** as a family night activity with younger children

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** helps children understand that even good things can be negative when they distract us from what's really important, like God and our families

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Schedule a family time.
- Gather items: Bible, blindfold or glasses (with lenses covered), beach ball or other soft ball, pillows/chairs/items to make a simple obstacle course

**SERVE IT UP:** Follow the simple steps below for a great experience

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### **STEP ONE:** *The Set Up*

Tell your child(ren) that you want to have fun connecting and hanging out together, but that they must watch out since there may be some distractions.

///

### **STEP TWO:** *The Distraction*

Take turns being blindfolded or wearing the covered glasses as you do one or all of the following activities:

**PLAY BALL** Tell the blindfolded person that you are going to play a fun game of “catch” and to keep his/her eye on the ball. Softly toss the ball a couple of times while they (obviously) miss it.

**OBSTACLE** Set up a small obstacle course using pillows, chairs, etc. for the blindfolded person to navigate. Have another family member say that they are going to “lead” them through the obstacle course using only hand motions to guide them.

**FACE TO FACE** Sit the blindfolded person across the table from one other person who will make different facial expressions showing an emotion. Have the blindfolded person try to guess if the other person is feeling sad, happy, upset, silly, etc.

///

### **STEP THREE:** Ask

After each family member has taken a turn being blindfolded, ask:

- Was it hard when you were “distracted” by covered eyes?
- Was it hard to follow a leader you couldn’t see?
- How about connecting with the person’s emotions? Was it hard to know how he/she was feeling?

///

#### **STEP FOUR:** *Read & Discuss*

Read Matthew 14:28-30 aloud. Explain that when Peter's eyes were focused on Jesus he was able to walk on the water toward Christ, but as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, Peter started to sink. What are some things that often distract us from keeping our eyes on Jesus? What distracts us from focusing on each other? (Mention the computer, video games, mobile devices, etc.) While it is fine to do a little bit of these things, we shouldn't let them become our main focus and distract us from what matters most.

///

#### **STEP FIVE:** *Pray*

End your time together thanking God for your family and asking Him to help you stay connected to each other and focused on Him.



# **OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENS**

## **CONNECT WITH OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENS**

**BEST USE:** as an activity with older children and teens

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** discussing how to use technology in a God-honoring manner

**ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Schedule a time to connect with your child over a favorite treat.
- Gather items: Bible, computer and/or mobile device

**SERVE IT UP:** Follow the simple steps below for a great experience.

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**STEP ONE:** *Talk about it.*

Use this time to connect with your child through conversation about positive uses of technology.

///

**STEP TWO:** *Play*

Ask your child what game they like to play on a technology device. Play that game or find a new game that you can enjoy together. Consider playing a game like Yahtzee, Scrabble, Family Feud or several other free versions of games in the mobile app store.

///

**STEP THREE:** *Listen*

Ask your child what song(s) they enjoy listening to. Spend time searching and listening to music while looking at the lyrics. Ask them which current, popular songs have offensive, questionable or God-honoring lyrics. Check out the top Christian songs together and the free AirOne or The Fish app for a good variety of current popular music.

///

**STEP FOUR:** *Read*

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31 together: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

///

**STEP FIVE:** *Discuss*

Discuss how to use technology in a manner that honors God. End your time together thanking God for your family and asking Him to help you stay connected, and to help you avoid using technology in ways that might dishonor Him.



**BEFORE  
YOU  
BUY**

## **CONNECT WITH OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENS**

**BEST USE:** as a guide to assess the pros and cons of buying your child a smart phone or other technology device

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** Mobile devices have become the “status symbol” of early adolescence. As a result, younger and younger children think they should have the latest and greatest technology. But it is the parent’s job to decide whether they are ready, and to establish healthy parameters and guidelines.

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Work through the following questions to assess the need, risks and guidelines for giving a child his/her own device.
- Set a time with your child to discuss your decision and your guidelines.

///

## **WHAT DO THEY NEED?**

- If you want your child to have a phone so you can reach him/her and for emergencies, a simple phone is the least expensive and least risky option.
- Do you want your child to have full access to the web using a smart phone? If not, a basic calling service with a limit on texting or a pre-paid phone might be best.
- Ask yourself, “What is my child going to gain from owning his or own device?”

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## ***ARE THEY READY?***

- As a parent, you must determine what is best for your child and if they have the maturity to handle such a device.
- Is your child ready to be responsible for an expensive device? Do they take care of their belongings?
- Does your child respect limits and adhere to rules and boundaries you have put in place in other areas of his/her life?
- Are YOU ready? Can you model healthy habits for your child and commit to taking the time to set boundaries and teach your child about safety and appropriate content?

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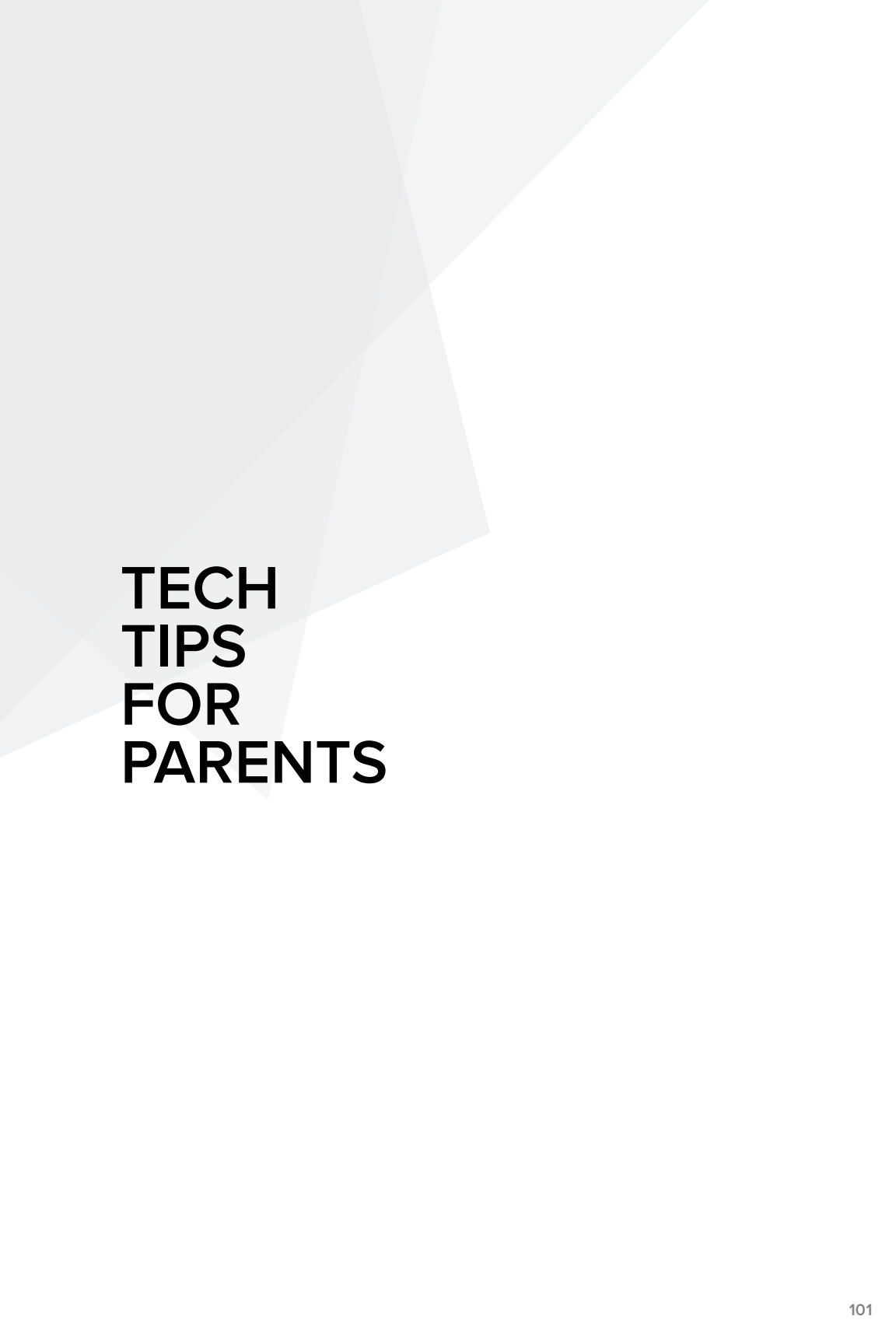
## ***WHAT ARE THE RISKS?***

- Every device with WIFI capabilities (such as a smartphone or basic iPod Touch) gives children unrestricted access to the Internet.
- Mobile devices are more difficult to monitor/restrict than a computer.
- 24/7 access to texting, web surfing, games, social media, etc. has become a source of continual distraction and often addiction.

## **HOW CAN YOU PROTECT THEM?**

- Protecting a child from unrestricted access to the web on a mobile device requires the extra expense of a service such as:
  - ***covenanteyes.com***
  - ***norton.com – Family Control***
  - ***NetNanny.com***
- You may also want to protect your house at the router by using ***OpenDNS.com***, which is free and easy to configure.

Protecting a child from the possible dangers of technology requires parental engagement and clear guidelines. Consider establishing a contract with your child BEFORE you buy, because that is when they are most willing to comply with rules such as: “Charge it at night in the parents’ room”, or “Parents will always know the password and review activity at a moment’s notice.”



# **TECH TIPS FOR PARENTS**

## ***TECH TIPS FOR PARENTS***

***BEST USE:*** planning how your family can adopt healthy technology habits

***TECH REALITIES:*** Extensive access to the Internet has become part of our culture, but if leveraged well technology can be used to serve rather than control your family. Use the following tips to help protect your home and begin using technology in a God-honoring way.

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### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no screens in kids' rooms including televisions, video games and mobile devices.
- The AAP also recommends less than 1-2 hours a day of screen time for children over the age of two and no screen time for those under two.
- According to the Parenting in the Age of Digital Technology report, 84% of children have over 2.5 hours of screen time a day.
- A study by the AAP showed that the average 8-10 year old spends nearly 8 hours per day on media, and teens spend more than 11 hours per day.
- As of March 2013, over 78% of teens have a device and

over 97% of children/teens have access to and use the Internet according to Pew Research Internet reports.

- Focus on the Family reports that the average age a child is introduced to pornography has dropped to 8 years old.
- According to the NPD Global Research Group, the average household has 5-6 Internet connected devices.

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### **TECH TIPS**

- Invest in software services such as Net Nanny to help protect your family when using a computer, smart phone, gaming system or any other device that can access the web. This is money well spent!
- Go to the store and ask questions to learn how to navigate and set restrictions on any device you purchase before allowing a child access.
- Ask your child questions about their technology use including what they posted that day, who they talked to, etc. Keep the lines of communication open between you and your child.
- Ask your child about technology and new sites and programs that are “in” or popular in the mobile device and gaming world. Have them show you to better understand the benefits and dangers of new applications.

- Set a timeframe (such as 8pm through 7am) when every one will charge their devices in a particular place like the kitchen or parents' bedroom.
- Set time limits for each family member for how long each person can be on devices, including you. (Exceptions may apply for time spent for school and work.) Consider tools/apps to help monitor the time.
- Have kids' rooms be tech-free zones to protect them and help them get a good night's sleep.
- Put your device down and connect with your child. One day they will grow up. Model now what you want them to do in the future.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:**

**NetNanny.com** – #1 rated parent filtering software

**OpenDNs.com** – *Family Shield* router configuration software

**Apple iOS Parental Control** – for iPhone devices





# **SCREEN-FREE FUN IDEAS**

## **TECH TIPS FOR PARENTS**

**BEST USE:** as a list of easy and constructive ways to connect and have a great time together

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** Technology can distract us from connecting with the people right in front of us. Put down those devices and have some real fun with your family and friends. Check out the following list for fun, screen-free activities.

///

### **THAT WOULD BE FUN!**

Choose from these activities that your family might enjoy doing together for real connection. Let the screen-free fun begin!

\_\_\_\_\_ Read a book

\_\_\_\_\_ Play a game

\_\_\_\_\_ Cook together

\_\_\_\_\_ Ride bikes

\_\_\_\_\_ Do a puzzle

\_\_\_\_\_ Blow bubbles

\_\_\_\_\_ Paint a picture

- \_\_\_\_\_ Plant a garden
- \_\_\_\_\_ Go bowling
- \_\_\_\_\_ Go camping
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visit the zoo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Play sports
- \_\_\_\_\_ Watch a sporting event
- \_\_\_\_\_ Go swimming
- \_\_\_\_\_ Build a fort
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do a service project
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fly a kite
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write a letter to family or friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make instruments and have a parade
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make puppets and have a puppet show
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visit a museum
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have an ice cream sundae party
- \_\_\_\_\_ Create art with sidewalk chalk

\_\_\_\_\_ Make up stories

\_\_\_\_\_ Do a craft

\_\_\_\_\_ Bake cookies and take to a neighbor or friend

\_\_\_\_\_ Learn a new Bible verse

\_\_\_\_\_ Dress up in costumes

\_\_\_\_\_ Redecorate something in your home

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer to serve together

\_\_\_\_\_ Have a tea party

\_\_\_\_\_ Make something with play dough

Don't stop now! Come up with your own connection ideas and see what great fun you can have together.

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# **FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT**

## ***FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT***

***BEST USE:*** as a movie night discussion guide for the family

***NUTRITIONAL VALUE:*** triggers a faith discussion to talk about healthy and God-honoring technology habits

### ***ADVANCE PREPARATION:***

- Rent, borrow or purchase the Disney/Pixar movie *Wall-e*. It is recommended to always prescreen any movie before allowing your child(ren) to watch. This also helps prepare you for guiding the conversation.
- Review the listed questions to be ready for the discussion.
- Make sure you have a Bible nearby.

///

## ***SERVE IT UP***

Follow the simple steps below for a great experience.

### ***STEP ONE:***

Invite your family to a special movie night. You can make tickets to give to each member for added fun.

### ***STEP TWO:***

Make sure you have a Bible, pop some popcorn and/or gather some favorite movie candies, and enjoy the movie selection.

### ***STEP THREE:***

Discuss the questions on the next page.

///

## **DISCUSS IT**

After watching the film, ask your child the following questions.

1. What did you notice about how the people used technology? (i.e. constantly in front of them, got whatever they wanted at the touch of a button, kept them from connecting with others)
2. Despite getting what they wanted at the touch of a button, what things were the people missing out on? (i.e. fun, health, relationships)
3. What happened when the two people disconnected from their devices? (i.e. eyes opened to others/surroundings, fun playing at the pool, connecting with each other)

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## **READ**

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 aloud as a family: “Everything is permissible for me’ – but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’ – but I will not be mastered by anything.”

///

## **TALK ABOUT IT**

- In what ways can technology control us or become unhealthy for us?

- How might it distract us from connecting with each other?  
With God?
- What harm could come from spending too much time looking at a screen?
- What might we miss in life if we give technology most of our attention?

///

## ***PRAY***

End your time together giving thanks to God for your family. Ask Him to help each of you make wise and God-honoring choices as you work to disconnect from technology and connect better with each other and with Him.



# **PRE-MARRIAGE**

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125	HOPE TO MARRY
131	LIVING TOGETHER
136	ENGAGED

**SINGLE**

## **SHOULD YOU PURSUE MARRIAGE?**

As an unmarried person, you have distinct opportunities to grow in your faith and to make a substantial contribution to the kingdom. In fact, the season you're in has the potential to be the most formative period of your life. How can you best honor God in this time?

Many Christians wonder if they should move toward marriage or embrace the kind of single life the apostle Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 7. In order to evaluate your situation, ask yourself two questions.

///

### **QUESTION ONE:** *Have I been stalled?*

Popular American culture tends to discourage marriage, implying people can live a more exciting, fulfilling life by remaining unmarried. Even Christians with the best intentions often drift into a single lifestyle marked by recreational relationships, hyper-individualism, consumption and leisure. Following this cultural path, it's no surprise some Christian singles find their lives stalling out to loneliness, a series of broken relationships and a general lack of purpose. Those who find themselves in this cycle need to pause and reflect on how to become intentional rather than passive with regard to the single life.

///

## **QUESTION TWO:** *To what am I called?*

In the scriptures, God calls adults to follow one of two callings—either a path to Biblical marriage or a life of celibate service (Genesis 2, 1 Corinthians 7). The best way to honor God in your singleness is to be intentionally set apart for His purposes, recognizing that His call to both marriage and singleness is much different from the popular single culture because it includes a commitment to absolute purity, active engagement in Christian community, and faithful stewardship of your talents and resources.

Singles who cultivate such qualities find it easier to discern if God is calling them to Biblical marriage or celibate service.

### **CELIBATE SERVICE**

Dr. Al Mohler of Southern Seminary explains that celibacy means sacrificing the companionship of marriage, the pleasures of sex and the blessing of children for your entire life without being bitter about it. In that context, serving God in celibacy makes full engagement in the body of Christ—giving and receiving fellowship—vitaly important. It is not a “consolation prize” for those who haven’t yet found a spouse, but a purposeful life devoted to serving others as worship and “being Jesus” to others.

### **MARRIAGE & FAMILY**

Singles who don’t feel called to celibacy should pursue a Biblical marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33) with hopeful preparation. While one may not know how and when they will marry, they can become intentional about eliminating roadblocks. They can remain faithful in purity,

stewardship and community. They can also take initiative and pray purposefully for a good marriage despite living in a culture that dishonors marriage. For men it means moving beyond passivity and taking the initiative to “leave and cleave” (Genesis 2:24) and to “find” a wife (Proverbs 18:22). For women it means preparing for marriage in prudence (Proverbs 19:14), in purity (Ephesians 5:1-5), in community (Titus 2:3-5 and Ephesians 4:11-16), and in prayer (Matthew 7:7-9 and Matthew 21:21-22).

Whatever the circumstances of your life, you can find purpose and fulfillment as you break away from a stalled culture and honor God in hopeful pursuit of either celibate service or a God-honoring marriage.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Get Married: What Women Can Do to Help It Happen*** (by Candice Watters) makes the case that a Biblical marriage is an honorable pursuit, one that women can help nurture along. Her book helps women see how they can “live like they are planning to marry”.

***A Guy’s Guide to Marrying Well*** – *Boundless.org* has put together a short, practical guide for men to help them become proactive about whether, how and who to marry (available as a free download at [boundless.org/guys](http://boundless.org/guys)).

### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

**Boundless.org** webzine offers young adults encouragement to live abundantly as singles while seeking God's best in either celibacy or marriage.

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

**PreMarried Life** meets twice a year for a 6-week class at the Norcross campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/premarriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/premarriedlife) to learn more.

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# **THE INTENTIONAL SINGLE MAN**



## **SHOULD YOU PURSUE MARRIAGE?**

As an unmarried man, you have distinct opportunities to grow in your faith and to make a substantial contribution to the kingdom. In fact, the season you're in has the potential to be the most formative period of your life. How can you best honor God in this time?

Many Christian men wonder if they should move toward marriage or embrace the kind of single life the apostle Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 7. In order to evaluate your situation, ask yourself two questions.

///

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///

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In the scriptures, God calls adults to follow one of two callings—either a path to Biblical marriage or a life of celibate service (Genesis 2, 1 Corinthians 7). The best way to honor God in your singleness is to be intentionally set apart for His purposes, recognizing that His call to both marriage and singleness is much different from the popular single culture because it includes a commitment to absolute purity, active engagement in Christian community, and faithful stewardship of your talents and resources.

Single men who cultivate such qualities find it easier to discern if God is calling them to Biblical marriage or celibate service.

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Whatever the circumstances of your life, you can find purpose and fulfillment as you break away from a stalled culture and honor God in hopeful pursuit of either celibate service or a God-honoring marriage.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Are You Called or Stalled?*** by Kurt Bruner

***A Guy’s Guide to Marrying Well*** – *Boundless.org* has put together a short, practical guide for men to help them become proactive about whether, how and who to marry (available as a free download at [boundless.org/guys](http://boundless.org/guys)).

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**HOPE  
TO  
MARRY**

## ***PROACTIVELY PURSUING MARRIAGE***

Most of us are called to marriage. It's the natural design for fulfilling our drive for companionship and sexuality. If you aren't called to celibate service (1 Corinthians 7) then a significant priority for this season of your life is preparing for and moving toward a Biblical marriage. An intentional path to finding a mate recognizes that God is at work, but we also have a responsibility to be faithful in our part of the process. How does a person who hopes to marry become intentional?

///

### ***STEP ONE: Seek direction within Christian community.***

We live in a day of hyper-individualism where people feel very little sense of obligation to others. God calls us, however, to vibrant community within our families and within the body of Christ. That community is the source for much of our growth as Christians, and it's one of the best means for meeting a potential spouse and receiving guidance and support toward marriage. Even in a day of online dating, marriage experts still consider matches made by friends, family and churches to be among the best.

///

### ***STEP TWO: Move beyond recreational relationships.***

One of the clearest messages for singles in the Bible is the call to sexual purity (1 Corinthians 6:13-18, Ephesians 5:3 and Colossians 3:5). That is proving to be a difficult challenge in a day when only

a quarter of Christians are virgins when they marry. Sexual purity, however, is the primary means for intentionally moving toward marriage in a recreational relationship culture. Couples who stay sexually pure not only honor God but they avoid much of the confusion that plagues many of today's relationships and can push good marriages out of reach.

///

***STEP THREE: Seek the right kind of soul mate.***

A study by the National Marriage Project found that 94% of young adults believe the person they marry should be their soul mate first and foremost. That pursuit leaves many looking in vain for the perfect person who is specially designed to complete them. Both the Bible and marriage research show that the more important "soul" mate to seek out is someone who shares your spiritual commitment. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians that a potential spouse "must belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). One pastor put it nicely when he said singles should seek someone with whom they are able to better serve God together than apart. A Christian seeking a mate who shares his or her Biblical values know that "all have fallen short" so there's no sense in holding out for a perfect person. Furthermore, they know that instead of seeking someone to complete them they are called to lay down their life for another. That makes for a much more realistic path to finding a good fit for marriage.

///

## **STEP FOUR:** *Be proactive.*

Living in purity and Christian community makes it easier to find a mate who shares your spiritual values, but there's more you can do as a steward of your future marriage (Matthew 25:14-27). Titus 2 strongly encourages young men and women to learn from older men and women. In addition to Christian discipleship, you can also ask mentors for candid feedback about how you can improve in a variety of areas to be more prepared for marriage. Additionally, there's nothing wrong with asking mentors to keep you in mind as they become aware of other singles seeking a Godly spouse. Some of your best opportunities to be proactive will grow out of faithful prayer. As you pray—about your role in finding a mate, for the single men and women in your life, for the help of parents and mentors and for God's glory in your path to your wedding day—He will open your eyes to opportunities you may have missed to take proactive steps toward marriage.

It's important to note that men have a distinct responsibility in proactively finding a mate. Genesis 2:24 says that a man will leave his parents and cleave to his wife. Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife, finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord." Notice it doesn't say "he who stumbles over a wife" as if it is a happenstance occurrence. God calls men to do their part in seeking out women of character and showing leadership in pursuing a woman for marriage. Specifically, men should be willing to take the risk of rejection. No one likes to hear "no," but it's a risk men of faith and leadership should be willing to face.

///



## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Get Married: What Women Can Do to Help it Happen*** (by Candice Watters) explains why marriage is an honorable pursuit and shows how women can live like they are planning to marry.

***A Guy's Guide to Marrying Well*** – *Boundless.org* has put together a short, practical guide for men to help them become proactive about whether, how and who to marry (available as a free download at [boundless.org/guys](http://boundless.org/guys)).

### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

***Boundless.org*** webzine offers young adults encouragement to live abundantly as singles while seeking God's best in either celibacy or marriage. Its most popular articles are those about finding a Godly spouse and dating according to Biblical principles.

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

***PreMarried Life*** meets twice a year for a 6-week class at the Norcross campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/premarriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/premarriedlife) to learn more.

***FORWARD*** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.





# **LIVING TOGETHER**

## ***THE LIVING TOGETHER OPTION***

Prior to the 1970s it was rare for an unmarried man and woman to live together. Today it is much more common, and is accepted as an important “next step” for couples before committing to marriage. We often assume living together can help us avoid making a mistake that could lead to a painful divorce, but is that assumption correct? How should a follower of Jesus Christ view the living together option?

///

## ***THE RESEARCH***

Over 75% of young, single adults include marriage as a significant life goal. Couples who move in together, however, actually decrease the possibility of creating a strong marriage. The divorce rate among those who live together before marriage is 50% higher than it is among couples who don't. Extensive research conducted by university professor and psychologist, Dr. Scott Stanley, revealed that couples who live together undermine a strong bond by trying to keep their options open. While many of these couples eventually slide into marriage, their relationships demonstrate the lowest marital satisfaction and survival rates and report higher rates of domestic violence and unfaithfulness. When a cohabiting woman becomes pregnant there is a high probability the man will end the relationship within two years. Three-quarters of children born to unmarried couples will see their parents split-up before the child turns sixteen, dramatically higher than the one-third born to married parents. These children are also much more likely to experience abuse. The overwhelming conclusion of most research suggests that if your long-term goal

is a happy marriage and family, living together is not the best path.

///

## ***THE DESIGN***

Christianity teaches that God designed physical intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage, where the powerful bonding effects of sexuality draw the man and woman closer together. Outside of marriage, however, the bonding nature of sex confuses the relationship by implying a commitment that has not been made. Despite trying to avoid the pain of divorce, a breakup after sexual union creates similar emotional trauma. Trusting God's design and obeying his call to honor marriage (Hebrews 13:4) and to avoid sexual immorality (Ephesians 5:3) not only draws us into closer relationship with Him, but it brings clarity rather than uncertainty with one another.

///

## ***THE CHURCH***

Many couples first question the option of living together while exploring Christian faith or local church membership. This church would love to become a resource for clarity and health in your relationship because we believe marriage is a God-ordained, sacred institution. In Ephesians 5:31-33 the Bible describes the marital bond as a picture of the love between Christ (the groom) and the church (His bride). It is much easier to nurture a strong marriage while learning and growing with other believers—especially those who are a little further down the road. Couples who have been married for a while can provide guidance and

input as you make decisions about romance and marriage. They can also serve as models, which is particularly helpful to those with parents who divorced or never married. Christian counselors and church leaders can also help you determine if you are ready to shift into pre-marital counseling or if you need to re-evaluate a potentially harmful relationship. In either case, we encourage you to seek wise counsel as you pursue a God-honoring marriage and family life.

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Before You Live Together*** (by Dave Gudgel) is a short book full of helpful insight for those who are experiencing or considering the option of living together.

***The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*** (by Glenn T. Stanton) – With credible data and compassion, Stanton explores the reasons why the cohabitation trend is growing; outlines its negative outcomes for men, women & children; and makes a case for why marriage is still the best arrangement for the flourishing of couples in society.

### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

***PreMarried Life*** meets twice a year for a 6-week class at the Norcross campus. Visit [victoryatl.com/premarriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/premarriedlife) to learn more.

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any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.



**ENGAGED**



## **GETTING READY FOR MARRIAGE**

Congratulations on this wonderful milestone! Few seasons in life are filled with as much joy and anticipation as the time spent preparing to get married.

You've probably heard it said that as you plan your wedding you shouldn't forget to plan your marriage. It sounds so abstract to "plan a marriage" in the midst of the more tangible (and demanding) project of planning a wedding. How do you do it?

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### **STEP ONE:** *Learn from others.*

Research demonstrates the long-term value of making time now for marriage education classes or premarital counseling. Those efforts go even further when you supplement them by spending time with an older married couple whose relationship you admire.

///

### **STEP TWO:** *Plan with patience.*

Couples often overlook the importance of using the wedding planning season as practical marriage preparation. You can intentionally set the tone for your marriage by the values you live out in planning your big day. The transformational process of "becoming one" can occur in everything from how you assemble your guest list to how you determine a honeymoon destination.

///

**STEP THREE:** *Discover the purpose of marriage.*

A wedding is bigger than you as an individual and even bigger than you both as a couple. Ephesians 5 describes a couple laying down their lives for one another and becoming one as an icon of God's sacrificial love for His church. That's the counter-cultural call of Christian marriage. Read *The Marriage Masterpiece* by Al Janssen in order to discover the beautiful picture God intends every marriage to reflect.

///

**STEP FOUR:** *Create a meaningful event.*

To focus on the sacred nature of marriage in the early church, couples often stood during the course of a weekly service to exchange their vows. Those weddings were a part of the community of faith's worship routine and a public vow within a church body. They did not have anything resembling the grand ceremonies typical of modern weddings, focusing instead on the meaning and purpose of marriage. That's not to say big celebrations are out of order, but many risk making them so complex that they fail to honor God or the community they are uniting—both of which are the basis for a strong Christian marriage.

///

## GOING FURTHER

### RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

***The Marriage Masterpiece*** (by Al Janssen) The Bible opens and closes with a wedding and in between God uses the metaphor of marriage more than any other to describe His relationship with His people. So what does that mean for your pending marriage? Al Janssen tells the bigger story of marriage as God created it and as couples can experience it.

***Love and Respect*** (by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs) discusses a powerful Biblical model for each spouse understanding and meeting the other's most deeply felt need.

***Before You Say "I Do"*** (by H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts) explores how to clarify role expectations, establish a healthy sexual relationship, handle finances, and acquire a solid understanding of how to develop a Biblical relationship.

### RECOMMENDED WEBSITE:

***CoupleCheckup.com*** features the Prepare & Enrich tools for dating and engaged couples who want to establish a strong foundation for marriage.

### MINISTRIES & CLASSES:

Our ***Married Life*** ministry provides tools to help you achieve greater oneness with your spouse! Visit [victoryatl.com/marriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/marriedlife) to learn more.

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# MARRIAGE

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**BUILDING  
A  
STRONG  
MARRIAGE**

## ***BUILDING A GOD HONORING MARRIAGE***

No one plans to become a broken family or a miserable couple. We marry because we yearn for a life-long, thriving relationship. How can believers become intentional about building a God-honoring marriage?

///

***PRIORITY ONE:*** *Discover God’s design for marriage.*

We must understand that every marriage is intended to be a masterpiece reflecting THE marriage between God and His people. Marriage is the most frequent metaphor used in the Bible to describe God’s relationship with His people. In fact, writing to the Ephesians, Paul called marriage a “profound mystery” because the man represents Christ, the groom, while the woman represents His bride, the church. The marital union of husband and wife is a sacred reflection of the gospel itself.

///

***PRIORITY TWO:*** *Commit to a covenant marriage.*

Today’s civil marriages are much like business contracts—easy to get into and easy to get out of. God’s covenant with His people was a promise to remain eternally faithful even if His people weren’t faithful in return. In a covenant marriage, both spouses are committed for a lifetime—in sickness and health, for better or worse. They don’t threaten divorce or consider it as an option.

///

***PRIORITY THREE: Pursue a passionate marriage.***

Couples aren't supposed to just stick it out and find a way to make their marriages survive. God calls us to pursue a passionate, thriving marriage. The Song of Solomon expresses the kind of love, joy and celebration God designed for marriage. That passion is built on much more than infatuation and sexual desire. It is rooted in the physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy God created couples to experience as a foretaste of the eternal unity, communion and intimacy we can have with God.

///

***PRIORITY FOUR: Become a heroic marriage.***

Christ made the ultimate sacrifice to rescue humanity. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul connected Christ's sacrifice directly to marriage: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25) "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands." (Ephesians 5:24) In other words, mutual submission to one another requires giving up our own interests to heroically serve the other person.

///

***PRIORITY FIVE: Fight for your marriage.***

Every couple will mess up. Too often, however, they also choose to give up. Throughout scripture God fights for His relationship



with His people, remaining faithful in the face of unfaithfulness. He forgives again and again. No couple can avoid strife and arguments, but we can avoid giving the “devil a foothold” in our marriages by keeping short accounts and quickly restoring the relationship regardless of what happens.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***It Starts At Home*** (by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope) explains why marriage is a key path of our spiritual formation and provides practical advice for intentional couples.

***The Marriage Masterpiece*** (by Al Janssen) unveils the beauty of God’s design for every marriage.

***Building Your Mate’s Self-Esteem*** (by Dennis and Barbara Rainey) shows why one of the most vital ingredients in a marriage today is to build one another’s self-esteem.

***Love and Respect*** (by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs) discusses a powerful Biblical model for each spouse understanding and meeting the other’s most deeply felt need.

***The Five Love Languages*** (by Gary Chapman) describes how to discover and serve your spouse’s unique love language.

***A Celebration of Sex*** (by Dr. Douglas Rosenau) is a guide to enjoying God’s gift of sexual intimacy.

**MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

Our **Married Life** ministry provides tools to help you achieve greater oneness with your spouse! Visit [victoryatl.com/marriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/marriedlife) to learn more.

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# **A DIFFICULT MARRIAGE**

## ***FINDING HOPE AND HELP: HOPE FOR A DIFFICULT MARRIAGE***

Those who marry will have troubles. That's what Paul told the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 7:28). Even the best couples can struggle to protect their marriage vows, but what happens when marriage troubles become unbearable? Is there a point at which couples should end a bad marriage, or is there hope for something better? Walk through the following steps as you prayerfully evaluate your situation.

///

### ***STEP ONE: Discern minor versus major trouble.***

Unfortunately, today many marriages end over troubles that could have been overcome. University of Texas researcher, Norval Glenn, has found that divorces today are often blamed on problems such as “lack of commitment”, “too much conflict and arguing”, “unrealistic expectations” and “lack of preparation”. These are problems that both husband and wife should work to overcome. Despite what friends, family or popular culture might say, these issues are no reason to end a marriage—especially in light of the serious long-term impact of divorce on your children.

In their book, *The Case for Marriage*, Maggie Gallagher and Linda Waite explain that couples who think their only options are to either divorce or be miserable often find things getting better if they'll just stick it out. In fact, almost eighty percent of husbands and wives who were very unhappy in their marriage yet stayed together described themselves as very happy just five years later!

///

**STEP TWO:** *Anticipate hope after the trouble.*

Major trouble occurs when someone either abuses or abandons their role in a marriage—when they break faith with their spouse and violate their vows. While God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), He permits it for marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:1-8). In God’s grace, He allows men and women whose spouses have been unfaithful to start over.

However, God is in the business of helping couples redeem what many would see as a hopeless situation. “Even marriages that have faced one or more of the big ‘A’s—abuse, affairs or addictions—can be saved,” says Mitch Temple, a licensed counselor. Temple has led numerous intensive counseling sessions with couples that faced these major challenges, and even though they had Biblical grounds for divorce they found a way to save their marriages.

///

**STEP THREE:** *If needed, protect yourself and your children.*

If your relationship is marked by physical abuse, you may find yourself confused, frightened and unsure about what to do. The most important thing you can do right now is take steps to protect yourself and your children from harm. Even if you want to save your marriage, you should not risk the safety of your children or yourself. A period of structured and therapeutic separation may be needed and can make it possible for you to get the help your marriage needs while making your family less vulnerable.

///

**STEP FOUR:** *Seek guidance – don't go it alone.*

Whatever situation you're in, don't struggle through a difficult marriage alone. You need the church body like never before—for perspective and advice, counseling and encouragement, and hope for God's redemption. Take advantage of the resources below and the services of this church for your situation.

///

## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Love and Respect*** (by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs) discusses a powerful Biblical model for each spouse understanding and meeting the other's most deeply felt need.

***Breaking the Cycle of Divorce*** (by Dr. John Trent) helps those who had no model of marriage stability break the cycle by creating a successful relationship.

***Boundaries in Marriage*** (by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend) shows couples how to apply the 10 laws of boundaries that can make a real difference in relationships by learning when to say yes and when to say no.

***Love Must be Tough*** (by Dr. James Dobson) offers hope for marriages in crisis, including those that have an unfaithful spouse.

**MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

Our **Married Life** ministry provides tools to help you achieve greater oneness with your spouse! Visit [victoryatl.com/marriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/marriedlife) to learn more.

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.

**DATE  
NIGHT:  
STRONG  
MARRIAGE  
ANNUAL  
PLAN**



## **STRONG MARRIAGE ANNUAL PLAN**

**BEST USE:** as a date night discussion guide

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** helps guide you through activities and time slots to protect during the coming twelve months for building a strong marriage

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Schedule a dinner or coffee date on or within a few days of New Year's Day.
- Bring your calendars on the date.
- Each spouse should spend time identifying several priorities to put on the calendar for the upcoming year. (see next page for ideas)

///

### **DURING THE DATE**

- Complete the questionnaire on the next page together.
- Schedule dates and times on both calendars to make sure your strong marriage priorities trump other commitments.

///

Every married couple needs to be intentional in several areas. Discuss the following questions together, then select an idea or create your own to put on your schedules.

**QUESTION:** *How will we protect routine times for non task-driven communication?*

- Schedule an evening walk together twice weekly.
- Schedule a date night twice monthly.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION:** *Should we read a book, attend a class, or seek guidance to improve a specific area of our marriage?*

- Shared vision and goals
- Better communication
- Romantic intimacy
- Managing money
- Parenting the kids
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION:** *When do we think we will feel most stressed during the coming year so we can plan a weekend get-away together to recharge our batteries and rekindle romance?*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Where would we like to go that we can afford?*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Who could watch the kids?*

**QUESTION:** *How can we help each other improve physically and emotionally?*

- Work out together
- Eat out less often and cook healthy meals at home
- Give each other time alone with God by watching the kids, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION:** *When will we incorporate the habit of praying together into our relationship?*

- Twice weekly during our evening walks
- Before going to sleep each night
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
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**DATE  
NIGHT:  
THE  
ART  
OF  
MARRIAGE**

## **THE ART OF MARRIAGE**

**BEST USE:** as a date night discussion guide

**NUTRITIONAL VALUE:** helps husbands and wives discuss the purpose and challenges of marriage

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- Schedule a dinner or coffee date.
- Each spouse should listen to the 30-minute *The Art of Marriage* audio CD or podcast.
- Each spouse should spend a few minutes writing down answers to the following section (“Affirming Your Spouse...”).
- To go further visit [victoryathome.com/artofmarriage](http://victoryathome.com/artofmarriage).

### **DURING THE DATE:**

- Spend 15 minutes discussing your answers.
- Each of you pray the following brief prayer aloud.

Father, give me the grace to treat (spouse’s name) as a gift from you and to become the gift you want me to be.

///

### **AFFIRMING YOUR SPOUSE AS GOD’S GIFT**

What are some of the qualities that first attracted you to your spouse, or that you now appreciate? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ Pays attention to detail

\_\_\_\_\_ Remains calm in tense situations

- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes to have fun
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is well organized
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stays very focused on tasks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Loves spending time with people
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good at launching projects
- \_\_\_\_\_ Wants to work through disagreements
- \_\_\_\_\_ Expresses feelings well
- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes to talk
- \_\_\_\_\_ Looks good in jeans
- \_\_\_\_\_ Looks good out of jeans
- \_\_\_\_\_ Loves to be spontaneous
- \_\_\_\_\_ Can really throw a party
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gives generously
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seemed he/she would be a great parent
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gives wise counsel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is easy to please

\_\_\_ Works hard

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

///

### ***HOW YOUR MARRIAGE TELLS THE TRUTH***

Every marriage is intended to reflect the living reality of the gospel. Check the ways you think your relationship tells the truth about God. Circle items where your marriage may be vulnerable to the enemy of marriage.

\_\_\_ Sacrificing for one another

\_\_\_ Two made one in physical intimacy

\_\_\_ Each trying to meet the other's needs

\_\_\_ Forgiving one another

\_\_\_ Open to the blessing of children

\_\_\_ Giving love to children

\_\_\_ Pleasing one another sexually

\_\_\_ Faithful to marital vows

\_\_\_ Intimate rather than isolated

\_\_\_ Loving/cherishing one another

\_\_\_\_ Honoring/respecting one another

\_\_\_\_ Partners rather than competitors

\_\_\_\_ Sharing laughter and fun

\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Share one small step each of you can take to make your marriage a better picture of the gospel in the next 30 days:





# **BLENDED FAMILIES**

## **SUCCESSFULLY BLENDING FAMILIES**

“Did you ever notice how The Brady Bunch got just about all their stepfamily challenges worked out in the first episode?” asks Ron Deal of *Successful Stepfamilies*. Ron works alongside a growing number of ministries coaching people to use Biblical principles to overcome the challenges of blending their families. Any household in which at least one spouse brings children from a prior relationship knows that it is much harder in real life than it was for the Brady family. That’s why blended families need to add an extra measure of intentionality, including several important steps.

///

### **STEP ONE:** *Recognize a higher calling.*

Even though blended families are becoming a more common family structure, making them work well remains a real challenge due to the extra logistics and emotional landmines that are part of merging two families into one. The additional challenges you face in building a strong marriage and family make following Jesus’ example of laying down your life for others even more essential. That calling is clear in the letter Paul wrote to the Philippians:

#### **PHILIPPIANS 2:4-7**

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Regardless of your circumstances—whether your new family was the result of a death, divorce, or some painful choices—you are called to lay aside your own interests in order to serve those God has placed in your home (Matthew 16:24-25).

///

**STEP TWO:** *Focus on the children.*

Various family experts stress that strong families start with strong marriages—as the relational health of the couple goes, so goes that of the children. That’s not necessarily the priority, however, with blended families. Ron Deal has found that couples must first invest in the children they’ve brought together in order to be able to experience a growing marriage. This is especially true in the area of establishing authority. Children need parents to exercise legitimate authority over them. Unfortunately, children often see the authority exercised by non-biological parents as illegitimate. When this becomes evident, step-parents are tempted to either bulldoze their way to authority or just leave most of the work to the biological parent. Either of these options leads to greater stress. Non-biological parents still need to exercise an appropriate measure of authority, but they do need to earn respect—not just demand it. Ask the Lord to give you an extra measure of patience and humility in dealing with stepchildren—especially when you know they have experienced the pain of divorcing parents or the grief of a deceased mom or dad, which can cause long-term emotional trauma.

///

### **STEP THREE:** *Allow God to redeem your story.*

In Joel 2:25, God says, “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten.” Every stepfamily brings with it the hope of a redeemed life story—the hope that difficult chapters of the past can be followed by better days. Stepfamilies quickly learn that better days don’t appear magically. However, as they submit to God’s calling and trust His ability to write their stories, they find He is still able to make all things new.

///

### **GOING FURTHER**

#### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

*The Smart Step-Family* (by Ron Deal) provides a solid Biblical framework and practical guidance for helping stepfamilies work to honor God.

#### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITE:**

*SmartStepfamilies.com* offers an exhaustive collection of resources and recommendations, as well as an opportunity to sign up for an encouraging complimentary e-magazine.

#### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

Our *Married Life* ministry provides tools to help you achieve greater oneness with your spouse! Visit [victoryatl.com/marriedlife](http://victoryatl.com/marriedlife) to learn more.

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**MARRIED  
TO  
AN  
UNBELIEVING  
SPOUSE**

## ***FOLLOWING CHRIST ALONE***

Growing in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is a source of great joy, but it can also be a source of conflict when your spouse doesn't share your commitment to Christ. When you are not both centering your life on God's will, facing life challenges, making important decisions and growing in your faith becomes more difficult.

Even when your spouse is basically a good person, the disconnect of no shared faith in Christ or worrying about your spouse's destination after death can hurt your relationship. It's even worse if your spouse is hostile to your faith.

How can you honor God when your spouse doesn't? Is there anything you can do to help your spouse become a believer?

///

## ***BE WITH BELIEVERS, BUT NOT TOO MUCH.***

Christianity is a group faith—something to be lived out among a community of believers. As a body of people following Christ, we give and receive fellowship, comfort, and encouragement (1 Corinthians 12:27, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). You need that community of believers—especially others who are following Christ alone in their marriages—but your spouse needs you as well. God designed marriage to be a source of mutual support. You are accountable to the vows you made to your spouse even if he or she is not a believer. To honor both your marital vows and your place in the body of believers, you should commit to regular church involvement that still leaves time

for your marriage. There's a better chance your spouse will come to faith if you make time to go to church, allowing he or she to see that God now has priority in your life and has changed you. If you join every Bible study and volunteer for a broad range of activities, it can give the signal that you are no longer committed to meeting the needs of your spouse—especially if you're doing those things to keep yourself occupied apart from your spouse.

///

### ***LET YOUR ACTIONS BE YOUR WITNESS.***

If you are a wife who is balancing your involvement in a body of believers with your involvement in your marriage, what can you say to help your husband become a believer? Not a whole lot. What really influences a husband more than your words are your actions. To wives of unbelievers the Apostle Peter said, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." (1 Peter 3) No amount of nagging or persuading can motivate an unbelieving husband toward faith. It might even drive him further away. The best draw will be seeing you live out your faith by showing him respect and loving care like he's never seen before. It won't be easy and there's no guarantee that it will generate an immediate response. But if you choose to love your spouse as unto the Lord, regardless of how he responds, you can leave the rest up to God knowing you were faithful.

///

## ***MAINTAIN A HOPEFUL PERSPECTIVE.***

You can be hopeful when you are growing within a body of believers and faithfully seeking to serve and esteem your spouse. You can't control the timing, but you can believe that God is able to use your commitment to win over even the most reluctant spouse.

///

## ***GOING FURTHER***

### ***RECOMMENDED BOOKS:***

***Beloved Unbeliever*** (by Jo Barry) will help you discover positive ways to approach the problem of being unequally yoked. The author uses the scriptural framework of love, as well as information from interviews with dozens of women who are married to unbelievers, to show you how to love your husband into the faith.

***Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*** (by Lee Strobel) provides hope for Christians married to an unbelieving spouse.





# **CONSIDERING CHILDREN**

Couples that are contemplating starting a family will be confronted with a materialistic and leisure-focused culture that tends to dwell on the challenges more than the joys of parenthood. Couples today tend to worry about the effect kids will have on their education, career and lifestyle more than past generations did. As a result, they are often encouraged to push family off a little longer while enjoying the perceived freedom of life before children.

What couples can lose sight of during such a cost/benefit analysis are the grand and often mysterious purposes God has for children within marriage. Even the Christian community can lack vision for just how central the efforts of starting and raising a family are to God's plan for our lives. That's why it is important to ask yourself several pertinent questions.

///

**QUESTION ONE:** *Are children part of your life's purpose?*

"Be fruitful and multiply" was the first charge God gave His creation in the garden. While each of us has distinct strengths, passions and experiences that guide what we do in life, marriage and parenting are general callings that apply to most people of faith. While having children isn't the only purpose for marriage, it is very closely tied to God's original design for marriage and should not be discarded without serious and prayerful reflection.

When we bear and raise children we cooperate with God's desire for a "Godly seed" (Malachi 2:15). Parenting is also the primary way most of us fulfill the call to lay our lives down for

others (Philippians 2:4-8). Producing and guiding the next generation is a mission that stretches us and pushes us to depend on God like few other things in life, all the while revealing and shaping our larger purpose within God's plan for humanity.

///

**QUESTION TWO:** *Are children a blessing or a burden?*

In the past few years, social commentators have used words like “ankle biters” to describe children and the stress they bring with them, but God calls children a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). Even in the face of what one writer called the “bone-wearying work” of parenting, children provide the joyful reward of marital and parental love. Studies consistently find children are people's greatest source of happiness.

///

**QUESTION THREE:** *How long should you wait?*

Magazine covers featuring celebrities having babies well into their forties can give couples the impression they have plenty of time to start their families. Unfortunately, those images have contributed to a tragically low awareness of the fertility window God designed for women. Couples today who marry in their late twenties and then spend a couple of years getting to know each other are often surprised to find that they are already pushing past their prime fertility season when they start thinking about having kids.

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## **QUESTION FOUR:** *Who is your provider?*

Couples seeking to start their families may feel overwhelmed by a variety of concerns about being pregnant, giving birth and adjusting their marriage, budget and lifestyles. This can be a natural response because babies do change everything and push couples beyond themselves, but God is faithful. Paul told the Corinthians, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Having children is a good work and gives couples new opportunities to see how God is able to supply what they need.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***Start Your Family*** (by Steve & Candice Watters) provides inspiration for those considering children and practical insights from his and her perspectives.

# **SPECIAL TOPICS**

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# GRIEVING

## ***DEATH • DIVORCE • SEPARATION • CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING GRIEF***

Nothing hurts like losing someone you love due to death, divorce, or separation. Similar feelings often surface after a major life change, such as job loss or a move. The ache inside can feel as if your soul will crush under the weight of a deep, paralyzing sorrow. You may find yourself asking how a loving God could allow such a painful thing to happen. The dull sadness often bleeds into denial or anger. Grief is unpredictable, affecting each of us in slightly different ways. While it may not ease the pain, understanding that grief is normal can help us cope a little better when we lose a special person or go through a significant change.

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### ***HOW GRIEF FEELS***

If you feel like you are losing your grip on reality, you might be a perfectly sane person enduring the confusion of grief. Perhaps you suffer with irrational fear, dread or even paranoia. You may feel empty or numb like you are in shock. Grief even causes some people to experience trembling, nausea, difficulty breathing, muscle weakness, loss of appetite or insomnia. Feelings of anger can also surface, even if there is nothing in particular to be angry about. Almost everyone tortures themselves with guilt by asking what they did wrong, how they might have prevented the loss, or some other form of self-condemnation. In short, grief makes us feel like our emotions have gone haywire because, in many ways, they have. Over time, however, you will regain a measure of equilibrium.



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## **WHY GRIEF HURTS**

God gave us the gift of pain so that we can react when something goes wrong. We limp when a leg bone is out of joint to protect us from further damage. In similar manner, losing an important person or going through a significant change can cause our entire system to react as it recognizes that something is wrong. You might say that the confusing emotions and ache in the pit of your soul are part of grief's "limp". The longer and more intimate the loss, the more severe your "limp" will be. The severity and length of your pain is a testimony to the value of the person lost or the importance of the situation that changed.

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## **WHAT GRIEF MEANS**

God made us for intimacy and life—not separation and death. When we grieve, our deepest selves declare that something is wrong with this broken world. Death, divorce and separation were not part of God's original plan for humanity. The Bible tells us these things came into our experience as a result of disobedience when our first parents ate the forbidden fruit. "For when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17) Ever since the day mankind left the perfection of paradise we have known something is wrong. So our bodies and emotions react against what should not be.

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## ***HOW GRIEF HEALS***

Even though it may not feel like it, grief can be a source of great hope. Your reaction against what is wrong comes from a deep yearning for things to be made right. Loss can open us to ultimate wholeness and restoration. While grieving the death of his wife, C.S. Lewis asked, “What do people mean when they say, ‘I am not afraid of God because I know He is good?’ Have they never been to a dentist?” The dentist’s drill, while an instrument of intense pain, ultimately brings health. The drill of grief fosters healing in our lives by raising ultimate issues and eternal questions such as, “Who is my true beloved?” and “Where is my real home?” As believers, we know that a much better day is coming when God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. On that day “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4)

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## ***CHILDREN AND GRIEF***

If you have children impacted by the pain of a death, divorce, separation or change, it is important that you remain attentive to their needs. You are God’s gift to them as they endure a loss that may be beyond comprehension. It is not your role to explain why it has happened. It is your role to be an agent of comfort and grace, allowing them to experience the confusing emotions of grief in the safety of your patient company.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***When God Doesn't Make Sense*** (by Dr. James Dobson) is an excellent resource for those who feel betrayed by a good God who allows suffering in our lives.

***Someone I Love Died*** (by Christine Harder Tangvald) and ***When Bad Things Happen*** (by Ted O'Neal) can help parents comfort young children through the process of grief.

***Sad Isn't Bad*** (by Michaelene Mundy) is a grief guide book for children dealing with loss.

***Praying Through Cancer*** (by Susan Sorenson and Laura Geist) is a 90-day devotional for women battling cancer or who have a friend or family member who is battling with the disease. It is a collection of stories by women who have faced cancer and, with triumphant spirits, found comfort and sometimes even joy in the midst of it.

### **GOING FURTHER** CHURCH SUPPORT

Get more information at [smallgroups@victoryatl.com](mailto:smallgroups@victoryatl.com).



# **ADDICTION ISSUES**

## ***ADDRESSING ADDICTION IN THE FAMILY***

Does someone you love seem to be self-destructing in addictive behavior? Are you watching a spouse, son or daughter abandon everything that was once important to them because of drugs, alcohol, sex or some other stimulant? An addiction or dependence is commonly defined as “a recurring compulsion to do the same thing over and over, despite harmful consequences to health, mental state or social life”. Are you seeing that trade-off in someone you care about—a compulsive pursuit regardless of the effects it has, especially on your relationship?

If you aren’t seeing clear signs of addiction, are you noticing a gulf growing between you and this family member as their thoughts, time and energy are consumed by some dominating activity?

What can you do to help?

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***STEP ONE:*** *Assess the willingness to change.*

Has your loved one admitted a problem and shown interest in getting help? If they’ve given you any sign of wanting to deal with their problem, take that opportunity to get the best of Christian counsel and direction from those most familiar with the specific addiction in which he or she is indulging.

If instead you’re dealing with denial, you most likely will need to plan an intervention—an orchestrated attempt by family and friends to motivate someone to get help for their problem. An intervention is especially necessary to help stabilize the

situation—to begin shielding your home from the emotional, physical and spiritual vulnerability of an out-of-control problem.

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**STEP TWO:** *Treat body, mind and spirit.*

Sex addiction counselor, Rob Jackson, tells families that the addictive behaviors they see are just the tip of the iceberg. Efforts to modify behavior might seem effective in the short-term, but can re-appear or show up in a different sort of compulsion if underlying issues are not addressed.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.” So those struggling with addiction need to treat problems of the body, mind and spirit—to go beneath the surface and deal with the thoughts, emotions and spiritual conflicts driving those behaviors.

James 1:14 describes how dependence progresses from desire to enticement to sin and, ultimately, to death. The most effective approach to recovery is to reverse that progression—to restore a right relationship with God (Romans 8:1-15), to have a clean heart (Psalm 51), to have a renewed mind (Romans 12:2) and, as a result, to bear good fruits in behavior (Romans 6:7).

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### **STEP THREE:** *Find hope in perseverance.*

God is able to redeem anyone and restore him or her to a life characterized by self-control (Titus 2:11-14). There is hope in persevering as a family through the struggles of recovery. Romans 5:3-4 says, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Your prayers ultimately come down to asking that God’s best will win out for your family member, remembering Jesus’ words: “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

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### **GOING FURTHER**

#### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

***A Hunger for Healing*** (by J. Keith Miller) is helpful to those dealing with addictive behaviors in themselves or someone they love.

#### **MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It’s for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.



**CARING  
FOR  
AN  
AGING  
LOVED  
ONE**



All of us know that our parents, spouse and other family members will eventually grow old and face inevitable health challenges. We even understand that sickness and death are part of living in a fallen world. But we are never quite ready for these realities to hit our own loved ones, especially when a debilitating disease gradually robs them of a once active life or seeps away their memories.

If you find yourself faced with this new reality, we understand this time will bring new stresses and heartaches for you and your family. It will be a season of finding a new “normal” as you navigate places you have never been before. It may require you to stop doing certain things so you can “be Jesus” for your loved one.

If you find yourself facing a similar situation, whether with a parent or a spouse, you can take steps to become proactive by understanding some of what this season will bring.

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### ***LINGERING GRIEF***

Long before an aging spouse or parent takes their final breath you will experience an underlying grief as you observe their loss of vitality, strength, mental faculties and other traits that make them the person you love. Mixed with the physical and emotional exhaustion this season can bring, you may even feel yourself slipping into depression. Seek help to avoid allowing these feelings to overtake you, but recognize that such emotions are normal and testify to just how valuable the person you are losing has been.

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## ***SPECIAL GRACE***

The most common duties caregivers handle are transportation, grocery shopping, household chores, help with medications, and assistance with bathing and dressing. Despite the humble nature of such activities, the majority of caregivers use words like “rewarding” and “happy” to describe the caregiving process. Clearly, God gives a special grace to those who humble themselves to serve the aging and ailing.

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## ***CHANGING ROLES***

The caregiving child gradually becomes the parent. The caregiving spouse is no longer able to rely on her husband’s strength or wife’s support. Primary caregivers can also encounter strained relationships with other members of the family who may expect input on or question difficult decisions. In one way or another, expect these relationships to change as a loved one’s health deteriorates.

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## ***FAMILY STRESS***

For those who are married and raising their own children, caring for an aging loved one can add tremendous stress to the family dynamic. There is less time, less marital energy, less patience with childhood irresponsibility, and less ability to give everyone

the attention they need. That's why it is important to involve the whole family in the caregiving experience. (Even young children can hold a hand or give a hug!) Everyone will need God's special grace, so be intentional about giving them opportunities to participate in what can be described as the ultimate family service project.

If you are in the midst of this season, our prayer is that God will give you the strength and grace needed to face the prolonged grief and quiet sacrifices required.

Dear Lord, please come alongside those of us called to care for an aging or dying loved one. Help us to "be Jesus" like we've never been before! Amen.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

*Complete Guide to Caring for Aging Loved Ones* (from Focus on the Family) offers very practical advice to those trying to navigate the many decisions and issues associated with caring for an aging spouse, parent or other loved one.



# **GENDER IDENTITY CONFUSION**

Our generation is experiencing an increased level of confusion with regard to sexual identity. When addressing same-sex attraction, gender identity concerns or a transgender disposition we must approach such struggles with several foundational understandings.

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## ***SEXUAL WHOLENESS***

Wholeness begins with the realization that sex is first and foremost a noun (what we are) rather than a verb (what we do). Each of us has been created by God to reflect His image as male or female. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number.’” (Genesis 1:26-28) Our physical design (male and female) points us to the nature of a triune God, an eternal communion of persons whose image we bear. Nothing reflects that image more than when two become one as husband and wife and enter into the intended design of conjugal love. Sexual health begins by understanding that our sex (male or female) is fixed in us at our creation and not a social construct or individual choice subject to alteration by the created person.

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## ***COMMON STRUGGLES***

Confusion over sexual identity can be common during puberty as an influx of hormones can throw the body and emotions out

of balance. This is no time to panic. Under normal circumstances the confusion clears. However, those who are encouraged to act upon such short-term feelings can perpetuate and intensify the struggle into adulthood. Far too many adolescents listen to peers, the media and even authority figures pushing them to “come out” or declare themselves to be something other than what God made them to be. This can trap them in the mistaken idea that one’s desires (even if short-term) dictate one’s identity.

Christianity recognizes that human affections can become disoriented due to the effects of the fall. As the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the church at Rome, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin...For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:14-15) Every person feels desires that run counter to our intended design, including a variety of sexual struggles like pornography addiction, same-sex attraction and others.

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## ***A REDEMPTIVE APPROACH***

The emotions associated with same-sex attraction and gender identity confusion are both real and complex. Many individuals desperately wish they could free themselves from feelings and desires that can make them feel abnormal or ashamed. Unfortunately, extending hope in such situations has become difficult because those who affirm God’s design for human sexuality are labeled “bigots” or “homophobic haters” by those with a political agenda. Loved ones and friends are told that if you don’t accept the person’s lifestyle choices you are rejecting them as a person. But Christians should love others too much to

perpetuate lies that undermine sexual wholeness. To become agents of redemption in the midst of an increasingly emotional debate, both the person wrestling with sexual identity confusion and the person who cares about them can follow a few important steps.

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**STEP ONE:** *Extend grace.*

Refuse to perpetuate stereotypes. Not everyone struggling with same-sex attraction is living in rebellion against God’s design. On the other side, those who believe God intended sexual union exclusively for a husband and a wife are motivated by truth and love—not ignorance or hate. So extend grace. Give one another permission to disagree without calling names or assuming the worst.

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**STEP TWO:** *Explore God’s design.*

Regardless of our current posture or perspective, the best starting place is to explore what it means to be created male and female in God’s image and how we can find sexual wholeness as intended by our Creator. Start with resources suggested in the “Going Further” section.

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### **STEP THREE:** *Glean from those who understand.*

Same-sex attraction and sexual identity confusion are complicated matters with no easy answers. The journey to wholeness may be a difficult and long process. Seek wisdom from those who have been where you are. Let them help you discover the joy and health that comes from pursuing God’s loving, beautiful design for human sexuality. Start by exploring the “Going Further” resources.

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## **GOING FURTHER**

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

***Theology of the Body for Beginners*** (by Christopher West) – Discover what it means to be made in God’s image, male and female.

***When Homosexuality Hits Home: What to Do When a Loved One Says They’re Gay*** (by Joe Dallas) – Grace-filled, biblical perspective on same-sex attraction from those who have left the homosexual lifestyle. Read Joe’s blog at [JoeDallas.com](http://JoeDallas.com).

***Restoring Sexual Identity: Hope for Women Who Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction*** (by Anne Paulk) – Women, their families and friends wrestling with this issue will find practical advice for healing and change.

### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

**[RestoredHopeNetwork.org](http://RestoredHopeNetwork.org)** is a Christian, inter-denominational membership governed network dedicated to restoring hope



to those broken by sexual and relational sin, especially those impacted by homosexuality.

**FirstStone.org** is a ministry leading the sexually and relationally broken into a liberating relationship with Jesus Christ. There is detailed emphasis on overcoming all forms of sexual brokenness, including homosexuality, sexual abuse and addiction to pornography.

**LiveHope.org** provides a safe place for individuals seeking restoration from sexual brokenness through support groups, moderated online support forums, in-depth discipleship programs, and partnerships with churches.

**MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

**FORWARD** will transform and challenge you to reach the next level in your life and relationship with Jesus. It's for anyone in any season of life, because no matter who you are or where you are, everyone is called to move forward.



# **FACING INFERTILITY**

“So, when are you going to have kids?” That question is invasive enough when babies are part of your plan, but what if you’ve just found out you’re unable to have children or experienced yet another miscarriage? How are you supposed to deal with the awkward conversations about kids that inevitably come up? Facing infertility can cause a woman to wonder about her identity. Looking around at other families with children you might ask, “What’s wrong with us—why can’t we have what they have?” You can feel like your marriage is missing something, or you may blame yourself for making decisions along the way that have hurt your chances to conceive. Maybe you’ve already considered or started some kind of infertility treatment, and you’re worried about the cost or risks that you’ll face.

In addition to the heartaches of genetic infertility, more and more couples are finding that time spent finishing degrees, launching careers and establishing marriages have pushed them beyond the ideal window of fertility. Whatever feelings you may be experiencing, you need to remind yourself of several important truths.

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**REMINDER #1:** *It’s okay to grieve.*

Hoping to offer comfort, some may downplay infertility and even point to the things you can enjoy as a couple without kids. If you already have at least one child, some people may not understand why you would be so sad about secondary infertility and ending your hopes for more children. Whatever your circumstances it’s common to experience a great sense of loss in finding out you can’t have a child. Infertility is a tragic reality of our fallen world,

one that rightly causes grief. Jesus told his followers that those who mourn are blessed and will be comforted (Matthew 5:4). A husband may not entirely understand what a wife facing infertility is going through, especially as her emotions are affected by changing hormones. This can be a vulnerable time for any couple. It's important to share your thoughts and feelings openly rather than stuffing them or letting your grief get lost in distractions and busyness.

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**REMINDER #2:** *It's okay to hope.*

Because of God's goodness, you are never without hope. Psalm 113:9 says, "He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children." You can't know exactly how God will choose to work in your life, but you can know He is able. He can restore fertility when it seems impossible. Or He may help you grieve your inability to have biological children, and then cultivate in you a desire to adopt and love a child in desperate need of a Christian home. Your ability to hope in God begins by releasing everything to Him in prayer. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

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**REMINDER #3:** *It's essential to be in community.*

It's tempting to avoid talking about infertility and all the accompanying struggles. Couples may want to pull away from other families, unsure what they'll think or say. As awkward as it may be, however, you still need Christian community—a safe place where you can “share your burdens with one another” (Galatians 6:2). It's in community that you also can find encouragement from others who have been where you are. That's the context of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

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**GOING FURTHER**

**RECOMMENDED BOOK:**

*Empty Womb, Aching Heart* (by Marlo Schalesky) offers hope and help for those struggling with infertility, and encouragement for couples grieving a miscarriage.

**MINISTRIES & CLASSES:**

*Get more information at [smallgroups@victoryatl.com](mailto:smallgroups@victoryatl.com).*

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