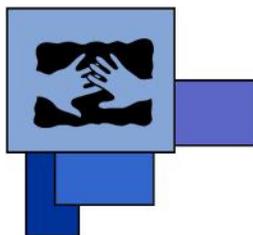


# Parenting the Challenging Child

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Help for Busy Parents of Strong Willed, Oppositional Defiant and  
Attention Deficit Hyperactive Children

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**Parenting the Challenging Child**  
*Help for busy parents of challenging children*

**About the Author**

Arvin and his wife Nancy are the adoptive parents of three grown children. Arvin felt called to become a Christian counselor at a children's home when he was still in high school. He received a foundation in Bible from Manhattan Christian College in Manhattan Kansas. He earned Masters and Specialist degrees from the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services at Georgia State University and completed a doctorate level psychology internship at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids Michigan.

He worked as a counselor and as an administrator for 14 years at Illini Children's Christian Home in St. Joseph Illinois and for over 14 years at the Oblong Children's Christian Home in Oblong Illinois where he is currently employed.

The book began as a list of 13 fundamental principals for professional houseparents. Financial donors were so generous in giving to the Oblong Children's Christian Home that the author wanted to give something back to the donors. A one page description of each of the 13 principles was created and mailed with giving receipts. The description could not be one word longer than would fit on a single page so every word was carefully selected. Today's busy readers will benefit from this effort to be brief.

***From the Author:***

***A special thanks to my wife Nancy, office manager Bev Kirk, and most of all to my special friend Janie Bond for their very important editorial talents.***

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## **Parenting the Challenging Child** *Help for Busy Parents of Challenging Children*

### **Parenting on the Chattooga**

When I was in graduate school at Georgia State University, the recreation department organized a raft trip down the Chattooga River. I was excited about the opportunity and immediately signed up. Even though I knew my wife Nancy was afraid of water, I encouraged her to sign up too. We had previously enjoyed spending lazy Sunday afternoons together floating down a river with a similar sounding name—the Chattahoochee, a river on the outskirts of Atlanta. I convinced her that the Chattooga in North Georgia would be just about like the Chattahoochee. In my efforts to persuade her to accompany me I made an incredibly stupid statement—“You won’t even get wet.”

Nancy consented to go with me, but on the day of the trip she backed out. I left for the North Georgia mountains alone thinking that Nancy was going to miss out on a wonderful day of “row, row, row your boat gently down the stream.”

When the other students and I arrived at the Chattooga, I thought, “It is too bad Nancy didn’t come.” We loaded into the rafts and rounded the first curve in the Chattooga when I heard a roaring noise that sounded like several jets preparing to take off. As we approached the first rapids the water changed from placid to a turbulent roller coaster. Huge swells crashed over the raft, sweeping most of the occupants overboard. We soon learned to brace ourselves in the raft and hang on for dear life as our bucking bronco raft plunged through a series of rapids and crashed into boulders.

We continued down the stream from one relatively placid pool to thundering rapids that made our raft feel like a tiny cheerio in a giant garbage disposal. My words kept ringing in my head, “You won’t even get wet.”

After six years of graduate training in counseling psychology, and teaching several parenting classes, and counseling many parents, I expected my own parenting experience to be a row, row, row your boat gently down the Chattahoochee. I should have realized that I was not on the Chattahoochee when my oldest son refused to be born until he was three weeks overdue and then fought valiantly for life as the doctors struggled for 8 minutes to get his lungs cleared out allowing him to take the first gasp of air. His arrival into the world described his future personality—oppositional and strong willed. But, I was still expecting a leisurely trip down the Chattahoochee.

We soon found that we had to hold his arms in tight and often rock for hours to get him to go to sleep, and then he would awake crying only a few hours later. I also noticed that when we played together it had to be on

his terms. Play times seldom ended peaceably because they didn’t end on his schedule, but I still thought I was on the Chattahoochee. I should have realized before he was 1 year old that I wasn’t on the Chattahoochee when he began to climb out of his crib at night. Nancy would put him back in his crib and rub his back until he appeared to be asleep. After doing this 10 times in one night, my psychology training suggested that she was reinforcing the undesirable behavior by giving him lots of attention. I decided he needed a father’s firmer hand. I would scoop him up and put him back in bed with a firm command to stay in bed. After doing this 10 more times, I decided to resort to my father’s style of discipline. I put him back in bed and told him firmly, that if he got out of bed again he would get a swat on the leg. After 22 swats on the leg and 22 trips back to bed, morning finally came. I felt like a failure and a child beater. After a couple more similar nights, we got a net to tie over the crib to prevent him from getting out of bed and hurting himself as we slept.

Parenting the challenging child involves changing your life to meet the child’s unique needs. When our oldest son graduated out of the crib, he would wake us up each night wanting to climb in bed with us. Sensing his need to be close to us, I compromised. While he could not get in our bed, I would go to his room and sleep the remainder of the night in a twin bed right next to his.

With each new stage of development have come similar challenges. Between the challenges are periods of quiet water, maybe just for hours or minutes.

The Lord blessed us with two more children—a girl and another boy. The second boy is also attention deficit hyperactive (ADHD). He is more distractible than his older brother, but not as oppositional. Our daughter faces the challenge of living in a family with special needs siblings and imperfect parents. I truly thank God for all three of our children. I am also thankful for the many children I have met in over 20 years as counselor and director for Christian children’s homes. These children have taught me so much about children, God, and me. We continue to journey down the Chattooga with them. Although this may not be the river we expected, it is a much more exciting river that is teaching us understanding for other parents on the Chattooga.

### **Who is the Challenging Child?**

The challenging child is a broad term that covers a variety of characteristics such as strong will, impulsiveness, lack of desire to please parents, being slow to learn from discipline, and high activity level all of which make the child a challenge to parent. The challenging child is 90% like every other child, but for those in close contact with the challenging child the 10% difference is an important difference that often keeps their lives in turmoil. Those who have a more casual relationship with the child likely won’t even see the

differences and they often have little understanding or compassion for the parent who deals with the challenging child on a daily basis.

The challenging child engages in many of the same behaviors as other children, but the difference is often in frequency and intensity. The challenging child may challenge his parent's authority on a daily or even hourly basis while the compliant child only occasionally challenges authority. The intensity of the challenge and the reaction when the challenging child does not get his way is many times more intense with the challenging child compared to more compliant counterpart.

### **Where does the Challenging Child Come From?**

The causes of challenging behavior are many. Some of these causes we currently understand; some we may never understand. Research indicates that the most influential component is probably genetics. Identical twins raised in very different environments turn out to be amazingly similar. Other factors that may contribute to the development of challenging behavior may include:

- Negative peer group
- Lack of spiritual training
- Lack of structure in the home
- Absence of a parent, divorce, or death of a parent
- Division in the parenting team or intense conflict between parents
- Adoption
- Small brain injuries (Minimal Brain Dysfunction)
- Mental health issues such as depression, bipolar disorder, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder), and ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) all may have a brain chemistry component. These mental health issues are often best managed by a combination of drug intervention and the behavioral interventions outlined in this book.

### **Dealing with the Challenging Child**

While trying to untangle the multiple causes of challenging behavior may make an interesting discussion, it probably will not be particularly helpful in managing the day to day behavior of the child. In short whether the challenging behavior is caused by some combination of genetics and ADHD, lack of attachment, divorce, adoption, or any of many possible causes there are some fundamentals that will help the parent manage the child's behavior and help the child grow towards being a productive adult.

Mastering these universal fundamentals is what this study is about. When parenting the challenging child, the fundamentals must be applied with much more consistency and skill than would be required with a less challenging child.

If a football team is playing an average opponent the team can get away with some mediocre fundamentals. On the other hand if the team is playing a challenging team their fundamentals must be very sound if they expect to win the game. This book is about 13 fundamentals that will help you and your challenging child win the game of life.

**Scripture:** [In the world you will have trouble. But courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world. \(John 16:33 N.E.B.\)](#)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Before you had children did you think parenting would be more like a smooth boat ride down the relatively peaceful Chattahoochee or a turbulent ride down the Chattooga? Where did you get these expectations?
2. How have your expectations been confirmed and how has your experience been different from your expectations?
3. How have the challenges of raising your child helped you grow as a person?
4. From the scripture, has God promised us a smooth ride? Why do you think people expect a smooth ride even though scripture says to expect troubles in this world?
5. How strong of a role do you think inborn temperament plays in your child's challenging behavior?
6. What are some factors other than genetics that you think have contributed to your child's challenging behavior?
7. How does John 16:33 encourage you?
8. How can this group encourage you as a parent?

## **Principle 1: Take Care of Yourself Both Physically and Spiritually**

Your first response to this principle may have been the same as my initial response, “I am at the end of my rope.” I desperately need something to help my child today, and you are talking about taking care of me. Cut through the fluff; get to the practical!”

Just prior to take off on an airline trip, the flight attendant gives emergency instructions. Some of you have heard the instructions so many times that you could give them yourself. The flight attendant explains that in case of cabin depressurization, oxygen masks will automatically drop down from the overhead compartment. For parents with small children, whom does the flight attendant instruct to put the oxygen mask on first—your child or yourself? Right—yourself. Why? Because if you have adequate oxygen, you can then care for your child.

Parenting the difficult child takes a tremendous amount of energy. Parenting is a marathon—not a 50-yard dash. If you are spiritually and physically exhausted, you cannot give them what they need. I find that most blow-ups in our family occur when my wife or I are physically or spiritually exhausted and unable to deal with the special needs of the challenging child.

In Deuteronomy God gives his instructions for how the faith shall be passed on to the next generation. You may be familiar with the verses. **And these words I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise** (Deuteronomy 6:6,7). Note that scripture specifically states that before we can teach our children, God’s word must first be on our hearts. Only when God’s word is fresh and vibrant in our own hearts are we prepared to pass it on to our children.

The first principle of parenting is to take care of yourself both physically and spiritually.

**Scripture:** **Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy and that temple you are.** (I Cor. 3:16-17)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did you feel about the first principle focusing on yourself rather than something you do to your child?
2. What are you currently doing to take care of yourself physically and spiritually?
3. When parents are already exhausted meeting the demands of their children and work, how can they find time to take care of themselves physically and spiritually?
4. If this principle of taking care of yourself was taken to an extreme, it could lead to a selfish focus on oneself.

How do you draw the line between a healthy taking care of yourself and self-absorption?

5. Why do you think it is important to take care of yourself physically & spiritually?
6. What negative lessons might a child learn if a parent does not show self respect by taking time to meet his/her own needs?
7. The amount of sleep that most Americans get has dropped considerably over the last 100 years. What do you think are the causes? How does sleep deprivation affect you ability to parent?
8. Recent research has found that exercise tends to prevent or delay the onset of glaucoma, Alzheimer’s, stroke, heart disease, type II diabetes and arthritis. It also improves you immune system and improves mood. What motivates you to exercise?
9. Even with the best exercise program, we will all die and meet our God. What motivates you to grow spiritually?

### **Action Plan**

Write on the **Action Plan** page (It is the last page in your workbook.) one thing you are going to do differently this week as a result of today’s discussion. If you are going to make a change, it is very important that you write it down. Who will help hold you accountable for carrying out your plan?

## **Principle 2: Love the Child Unconditionally**

*Review Principle 1: Take Care of Yourself Both Physically and Spiritually. Discuss how each participant carried out his/her action plan developed in the last session*

Our model for good parenting comes from the way God parents us. His love is unconditional. *But God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). God does not say, “If you are good enough, then I will love you,” but rather He says, “I love you just as you are.”

Unconditional love provides the environment for healthy development. Carl Rogers rephrased this biblical concept into “unconditional positive regard” and became famous for providing a core condition for psychological growth.

It is sometimes tempting to use withdrawal of love as a motivational method to change the child’s behavior. With some children, it may get temporary results but it is a very bad idea for the following reasons.

- Conditional love creates insecure kids that perform for approval. This may delight the parent of the young child, but how will the parent feel about a 15-year-old daughter who performs for her boyfriend’s approval? Insecure teens are ill prepared to deal with peer pressures such as drugs, alcohol, or sexual impropriety.
- Some children who initially perform for their parents’ conditional love eventually give up, saying, “What I do is never good enough to please them, so why try.”
- Strong willed children could care less about pleasing their parents. Withdrawing love just doesn’t work, baffling the parents who attempt to use this method.

**Parents of difficult children should spend more time figuring out how to love the child just as he/she is than trying to change the child into a more lovable child.** Paradoxically when we achieve the goal of figuring out how to love the child we often find that the second goal of developing a more lovable child has been achieved in the process!

**How do I communicate unconditional love to the child?** What is the child’s unique love language? Every child is different. Chapman and Campbell’s book, **The Five Love Languages of Children** describes five different activities children interpret as love. For some children love may be time spent with them. For others touch, such as a bedtime back rub, best communicates love. For still others, words of affirmation, acts of service or gifts may be the hallmark of love.

Timing is very important; many children will receive love at bedtime tuck-in. Some children accept unconditional love after a disappointment such as

breaking up with a boyfriend or losing a ball game while others might react very negatively if a parent attempted to express love at such times.

Often the times the child needs love the most is when we feel least like giving it. At such times we have to whisper a prayer, “Lord help me to express our love to my child.”

### **Unconditional Love Questions**

1. Do you feel like your parents’ love was conditional or unconditional?
2. At a gut level do you feel that God’s love for you is conditional or unconditional?
3. Why is unconditional love especially important for the challenging child?
4. How can a person give love if a child’s actions do not make feel love for him/her?
5. What is your love language (gifts, acts of service, words of affirmation, quality time, touch)? What is your child’s love language?
6. Is your and your child’s primary love language different? If so what might this create?
7. When is your child most open to love?

### **Action Plan**

What are you going to do this week to help your child experience unconditional love? Write your answer on the “Action Plan” page. Then share you plan with the group.

### **Principle 3: Teach God’s Truth through Both Formal and Informal Instruction**

#### *Review Principle 2: Love the Child Unconditionally*

A mother said to Pastor Howard Hendricks, “I will guarantee you that every time the Church doors are open my children will be there.” Initially Hendrix was quite pleased by this mother’s comment but as he thought over the underlying implication he realized that this well intentioned mother had been deceived. She intended to hand over to him the religious education of her children. **If the only place your child receives religious instruction is in the Church, chances are that the only place he/she will practice his religion is in the Church. The Church having the primary responsibility for the religious education of the child was never God’s intention.**

God’s plan for religious instruction is stated in Deut. 6:6,7. *And these words I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.* First, God’s Word must be on the parent’s heart before the parent can teach it to the child. This means that the parent must be in the Word not only on Sunday but also throughout the week. **You can’t give away what you don’t have.**

Next the scripture instructs the parent to “teach diligently.” The Hebrew word used for “teach” indicates formal instruction. Daily devotions are a good way to carry out God’s **command** for formal instruction.

**Please note that there is to be “diligent” teaching--Not just when it is convenient. The challenging child is not going to smile at the idea of turning off the TV for devotions. Expect a battle!** This battle is worth the energy it takes to win. It may take some positive rewards for cooperation during devotions and some clear consequences for disrupting. When my children were younger they got to spend a dollar at the Dollar General Store after Church on Sunday if they knew the memory verse for the week. It is surprising what treasures they can find for just one dollar!

While the first section of this verse instructs parents to “teach,” the second section uses the word “talk” indicating informal instruction—grasping the teachable moment throughout the day (when you walk, lie down and rise). Two major research studies on the factors that led to

children following in the parent’s faith came to identical conclusions. Families that talked informally about how God’s Word applied to daily life, tended to have children who remained in the faith while families that did not talk informally about their faith had children who left the faith.

**To accomplish informal instruction you must set aside time to be with your child--to play with your child.** (Watching television or watching ball games, even if your child is playing, doesn’t count because there is so little opportunity to talk). I find it necessary to schedule time individually with each child. Individual time is especially important with the challenging child. When other children are present, competition will lead to having to discipline the challenging child and likely ruining the time together. **The challenging child thrives on individual attention and it is a great time to teach values through example and words.**

As indicated by school children shooting other school children for the thrill of it, we live in a society that has not passed on the values of civilized society from one generation to the next. Research on the amount of time parents spend with their children indicates that most children are learning their values from their peers and the TV.

In summary, God’s plan for instructing children is to first have his Word on our own hearts then for teaching it to our children through formal instruction as well as grasping the teachable moments in daily life.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you identify with the mother who came to Pastor Hendricks thinking that spiritual training was somebody else’s responsibility? How have your views on spiritual training affected your children?
2. What are you presently doing to help yourself grow spiritually? Is there anything else that you think would help your spiritual growth?
3. What do you and your child enjoy doing together? How would you like to increase the time you spend with your child?
4. What are you currently doing to teach your children both formally and informally?

#### **Action Plan**

**What one thing are you going to do differently to become a more effective spiritual teacher for your child? Write down your plan on the “Action Plan” page.**

## **Principle 4: Establish Clear Rules with Consequences**

*Review Principle 3: Teach God's Truth Through Both Formal & Informal Instruction*

**Scripture: Galatians 6:7 Ephesians 6:4**

James Dobson, founder of *Focus on the Family*, illustrates children's need for rules by comparing rules to the guardrails on a bridge. Without guardrails most drivers would fearfully creep across the bridge, hugging the center of the road. A few would see how close they could get to the edge; sometimes plummeting over the edge. In contrast, drivers crossing a bridge with guardrails whiz right across the bridge without fear knowing that the limits created by the guardrails will protect them. Rules are like the guardrails on a bridge. They give children the freedom to explore all the territory between the guardrails without fear or danger of plummeting off the bridge.

### **Rule Making**

Rules need to be set in a calm setting, not in the heat of a battle. Rules that are laid down in the heat of a battle are associated in the child's mind with the parent's anger and are automatically opposed. In contrast, a father can say in a family meeting, "We are having a lot of conflict over morning shower times. I end up yelling at you to get out of the bathroom and most mornings somebody goes to school mad. Your Mom and I have developed a schedule for shower times." Expect at least one child to be unhappy with any solution offered; some negotiation may be allowed. The key to success is not unanimity but that both parents in a two-parent family are in agreement and will support one another in enforcing the rule. Older children may be allowed to suggest a solution themselves under the condition that they have 25 minutes and it must be a solution to which everyone agrees. If they don't develop a solution in 25 minutes parents will impose their solution.

### **Clear rules**

Challenging children do not pick up or heed the cues given out by others that their behavior is nearing the point where others' tolerance will end. They seem to be constantly surprised by others' reactions. It is therefore doubly important that the challenging child have clear rules. In addition, parents need to have the rules clearly defined so that the parents can enforce them regardless of their own mood—tired, upset, angry, or happy.

### **Enforcing Rules**

The scriptural principle that parents need to teach through enforcing rules is "as you sow so shall you reap." In other words **behavior has consequences**. A common mistake made by busy parents is inconsistent enforcement of rules.

Inconsistent enforcement leads the child to conclude that consequences are dependent on the other's moods not on his behavior. The child keeps testing inconsistently enforced rules hoping that there will be no consequence. Thus, these parents spend even more time enforcing rules than parents who consistently enforce rules. The child, who does not learn the basic life principle that his behavior affects what happens to him, enters adulthood severely handicapped.

A second common parental mistake is to use anger rather than consequences to enforce rules. Anger is ineffective, destroys the relationship and harms the person using it.

A third mistake often made by peace-loving parents is to give repeated warnings in an attempt to avoid the temper tantrums that often occur when the challenging child does not get his way. If parents waver on rule enforcement to avoid blow-ups the child quickly learns that threatening a tantrum works. The child may push the situation so close to the brink that by the time he realizes that his parent is not backing down this time he may be unable to regain control of his emotions and has the threatened temper tantrum.

The challenging child wants control. Clear rules and consequences help the child have a sense of control because life is predictable.

### **Discussion questions**

1. Use your creativity to draw two paddles; one symbolically representing how your parents enforced rules and a second one representing how you enforce rules. Explain the paddles you have drawn.
2. What are some obstacles that you experience in enforcing rules and how do you overcome these obstacles?
3. Read Ephesians 6:4. What abuses of rule making or enforcement do you think create the most anger in children?
4. Write one new family rule and the consequence for breaking the rule.

### **Action Plan**

What one change do you want to make in the administration of rules in your family? Write down your plan on the action plan page.

## **Principle 5: Pray for Your Child**

*Review Principle 4: Establish Clear Rules with Consequences.*

### **Principle 5 Scripture: I Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Billy Graham has said, “There are three keys to successful ministry, prayer, prayer, and prayer. Since parenting is a ministry, his statement applies equally well to a huge evangelistic organization or to a one-child ministry.

Often prayer for our children is viewed as a desperate, ineffective, last resort after every-thing else has been tried. We hear people utter a big sigh and in a voice that trails off say, “All we can do now is pray”—implying that God is the last recourse when all other solutions have failed. How peculiar that we view as a last resort the act of appealing to God—our great God, who spoke the universe into existence, yet knows precisely the number of hairs on our child’s head.

In our effort to nurture, guide, and discipline our child, prayer is our most effective tool. Who can possibly be better qualified to bring the needs of the child to the throne of God than the parent or grandparent?

The well known clinical psychologist and expert on child care, James Dobson, considers prayer so important that he fasted and prayed one day each week for his children.

### **For What Should We Pray?**

- Thank God for your child. Thank Him for the talents, temperament, and abilities that He has given him.
- Pray for the salvation of your child.
- Pray that your child will not be led into temptation.
- Pray for wisdom as you guide your child. A friend prayed that God would reveal to her any behavior that needed correction. It was amazing the things this parent discovered in the strangest ways! Her children were convinced of the Scripture “Your sins shall find you out.”
- Pray for your spouse. If you are divorced, also pray for your child’s stepparent.
- Pray for your child’s friends. Many proverbs indicate the importance of choosing good friends. Pray, not only that your child will choose good

friends, but also for the salvation of his/her non-Christian friends.

- Pray for your child’s teachers and especially his/her coach. The coach is the most influential person in the school.
- Pray for your child’s youth pastor and Sunday school teacher as they assist you in teaching God’s Word.
- Pray concerning your child’s strengths—that these gifts will be developed and used for God’s glory.
- Pray about the weak points in your child’s personality—that Satan will not have the opportunity to entangle your child in sin. God can turn these weaknesses into strengths.
- Pray now for a caring, Christian future spouse for your child. His/her values and habits are being formed today.

If you have several children you may want to pray in depth about just one child each day.

Samuel Chadwick said, “The one concern for the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayer-less studies, prayer-less work, prayer-less religion” (and prayer-less parenting). “He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.”

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why don’t many Christians pray regularly for their children?
2. What is the best time for you to set aside to pray regularly for your children?
3. What do you think are the most important things to pray about regarding your children?

**Action Plan: Share with the group your plan to continue regular prayer for your children for at least one month.**

## **Principle 6: Help the Christian Child See Himself as a New Creation**

### *Review principle 5: Pray for your Child*

*How has God answered your prayers for your child?*

**Scripture:** Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

As a child I was overweight. I survived gym class by running just fast enough to avoid total humiliation in front of my peers, but slow enough to avoid a heat stroke as I plodded along lugging those extra pounds.

In my late 40s I took up jogging—if you can call plodding along for half a block and then walking for a few blocks “jogging.” Each day I would “jog” a few steps further until I was jogging 3 miles. Over time, 55 pounds jogged off. I then tried to reduce the time it took to jog the 3 miles. Try as I might, I just could not do it. I would jog faster for a short time but quickly found I had to slow down to catch my breath.

Then the problem became apparent. Despite the weight loss, I still had been jogging as if I was overweight. I was still waddling—short steps, arms moving side to side instead of forwards and backwards. In my head I was still overweight, thus, I was just plodding longer.

When I began to think of myself as a thin person, I jogged with spring in my stride, “hang time” between each stride, and with at least a little rhythm. By continually reminding myself that now I was thin, I increased my speed.

This life experience illustrates the basic principle that we behave consistent with our self-concept. If children believe they are bad, they will generally act that way. But if children believe that Christ has made them good, they will most often act in a good way. How do children get a negative or positive identity? It is a reflection of how they think others view them.

When a child accepts Christ as Savior, he/she is a new creation. The old nature is dead, and the child has been given the righteousness of Christ. As parents we need to affirm this new identity. If we don't affirm this new identity, just as the thin jogger continued to plod, the child continues to live a life consistent with their old sinful identity

### **Helping the child Realize Their Identity**

- **Teach his/her Scriptural identity in Christ.** (See Romans 8:1, 2.)
- **Catch the child doing something good and celebrate, celebrate!!!**
- **Tell your spouse, the grandparents, friends, and**

**anyone else who will listen the good things that the child does.** When possible, report these good things when the child can “overhear.”

- **Celebrate small successes.** “I really enjoyed eating out together tonight.”
- **When the child misbehaves, remind him/her that “This is unlike you.”** If a child has stolen 3 times in a month, the parent might mistakenly say, “You are always stealing. You are a thief!” Remember, the next time the child is tempted he/she will probably act consistent with that identity—thief.

Instead, the parent who desires to build a positive identity might say, I am disappointed, you are normally honest. As a child of God, it is unlike you to steal.” If a child stole three times in a month, this means that 27 out of 30 days (90 percent of the time) he/she was honest.

The principle of celebrating the positive also applies to children who have not made a commitment to Christ. Even in the unsaved there are many God given good qualities that need to be celebrated.

There are some special challenges to building a positive identity with children who are on medication to help control behavior. Because of the problems that lead to the need for medication, the child has probably already received a lot of negative feedback. Then there are the regular trips to the doctor (something has to be wrong with you to go to the doctor) where the parent recounts the child's negative behavior in front of the doctor and the child.

When the child must go to the school nurse's office for medication with all the school “trouble-makers,” he may feel he too is a “troublemaker.” Parents of children on medication should do all they can to avoid drawing attention to the medication routines. The new time release medications such as Concerta can keep medication giving from being a public humiliation.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you think you child has a positive self identity? Why?
2. What does it mean to be “a new creation”?
3. Are there any differences in the way you would affirm a Christian child verses one who has not identified with Christ?
4. How might affirming the non-Christian child bring the child a step closer to accepting Christ?
5. What have you found helpful in affirming a positive identity in challenging children?
6. How can you teach a child to affirm himself?

### **Application**

Write down what you are going to do to affirm your child's positive identity then share it with the group.

## **Principle 7: Treat Your Child with Respect**

*Review principle 6: Help the Christian Child View Himself as a New Creation*

**Scripture:** Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people: but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:13-15)

It is human nature that the strong take advantage of the weak. Powerful countries conquer their weaker neighbors. The rich and the powerful take advantage of the poor and the powerless. Big kids pick on their smaller peers. The scenario of the boss chewing out the employee, who takes his frustration out on his wife, who in turn yells at the child, who kicks the dog has become so much a part of our experience that it has become trite.

This is not God's plan. **God is the special protector of the powerless.** The prophet Nathan expressed God's judgment when he told King David a story of a poor man who had raised a single sheep. His rich neighbor took the poor man's only sheep. David was angry at the injustice. Nathan then informed David that the story was a parable for what David had done (2 Samuel 12:1-15). God punished David severely.

Even Jesus' disciples, who had observed Jesus ministering to the poor and the sick, disrespected children. **The children wanted to come to Jesus. His disciples, thinking that Jesus had more important things to do, shooed them away.** Jesus rebuked his disciples. He told his disciples to let the children come for such was the kingdom of Heaven. **By inviting the children to come to him, Jesus demonstrated that little people were important, just like big people.**

Have you ever observed a parent talking to a child in a very angry disrespectful tone; the telephone rings and the parent answers in a completely different tone of voice? I have not only observed it; I have done it myself. Why do we often give our best to those outside our home while we treat those within our own home with less respect?

When the challenging child is showing disrespect, it is very difficult to show respect towards him/her. It is important that the parent does not return the disrespect because the challenging child is often easily hurt and will strike back with even more disrespect. A vicious cycle develops between parent and child with disrespect initiating more disrespect.

Instead, the parent needs to be like Jesus, who did not return the insults hurled at him. After the challenging child has cooled down, the parent may need to give the child consequences but the consequences are given in a respectful manner.

**God is the Protector of the powerless. If we want His blessing, let us treat our child with respect. By demonstrating respect, we are teaching the child by example to respect others--perhaps even teaching our child to respect us when we become old and weak.**

### **Discussion**

1. Why are children often disrespected?
2. Under what circumstances (pressure at work, when tired, when late, when angry, during premenstrual tension and etc) are you most likely to be disrespectful to your child? What can you do about it?
3. When you are disrespectful to your child, how does he respond?
4. Is there one child in your family that seems to elicit from you a sharper tone of voice? Why do you think this happens? How can you prevent it from happening?
5. Have you ever asked forgiveness from your child? What were the circumstances? Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for now?

### **Application**

**Write down one way you are going to show more respect for your child this week.**

## **Principle 8: Avoid or Win Control Battles**

*Review principle 7: Treat Your Child with Respect.*

**Scripture: Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4)**

Children come into the world with unique temperaments. Some love to please while others have a very strong desire to do things **their way**. The latter are called “*strong-willed*” and in extreme cases—“*oppositional defiant*.” These children are practically born saying “no” and seem to move directly from the “*terrible 2s*” to the *rebellious teens*.

The first step in working with the strong-willed child is *not* to view the child as “bad” or yourself as a failure because your child is not compliant like some other children. The strong-willed temperament is a gift from God. As parents, you are not going to change a strong-willed child into a compliant child, nor should you try. Christian psychologist, James Dobson, has said that trying to change a child’s God-given temperament has all the rewards of “trying to spit into the wind.” God created strong-willed children to stand alone like Daniel and Paul.

On the other hand, the strong-willed temperament must be polished or its excesses will destroy the child. **There are two rules to parenting the strong-willed child—choose your battles carefully and win the battles that you choose.**

### **Avoiding Control Battles**

A friend told me of “**Grandpa’s rule**”—“*Is it worth the hassle?*” Not every battle is worth fighting. Every parent is going to have personal opinions on what battles are not worth the hassle. Some battles to consider as “not worth the hassle” include food preferences, clothing styles (even for Church as long as they are modest), hairstyles, and room décor.

Another way to avoid power struggles with the strong-willed child is to give choices. “You can either do your homework before supper or after supper. Which do you prefer?”

The most effective tool in avoiding power struggles is to tell the child what **you** are going to do—not what **he** must do. Instead of screaming, “I am tired of waiting on you all the time; hurry up and eat your supper right now!” Calmly say, “I am leaving for the game at 7:00; you can go with me or stay home with Mom.” When we tell the strong-willed child what to do, he hears “you think I am too dumb to think for myself” and responds with “I am going to prove to you that I can think for myself,” and he will prove it at all costs.

### **Win the Battles You Choose**

Winning the battle with the strong-willed child does not necessarily mean instant compliance. It means

gaining compliance in the long run. Often the strong-willed child needs a cooling off time to disengage from the power struggle. If a child refuses to clear the table at night the parent might consider stacking all the dishes at the child’s place on the table with a note that breakfast will be served as soon as all the dishes are in the dishwasher and the trash is taken out. If a child refuses to clean his room, a simple statement such as “I will be glad to take you to ball practice as soon as your room is clean” is often effective.

In cases where the child rampages through the house, hitting other people, or destroying property the father may need to calmly hold him to the floor until every ounce of fury has dissipated and the child is ready to comply.

When this technique is first used, frequently the child will renege on his promise to comply and the parent must restrain again. Do not use this technique unless you have excellent control of your own anger and are willing to see it through to completion. Professional instruction is needed on how to protect the child from injury before using this technique. Calling the police when the child is destroying property is another option.

In summary, with the strong-willed child, we must adapt our parenting style to the child’s God-given temperament. This means learning to avoid many control battles, and also learning techniques to gain compliance in important issues.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you have feelings of failure when you are around parents of compliant children? How do you cope with these feelings?
2. Reread the scripture. Why do you think scripture tells us not to provoke our children to anger? What techniques have you heard today that might help prevent a strong-willed child from being provoked to anger?
3. In what ways is a strong-willed temperament a gift from God?
4. What are some of the excesses that can destroy a strong-willed child’s productivity?
5. What are some control battles that you are choosing not to fight?
6. How has giving choices worked for you?
7. Why do you think telling the strong-willed child what you are going to do is more effective than telling the child what he/she must do?
8. Give an example of when you might not press for instant compliance but would set up a situation to gain eventual compliance?

### **Application**

**What is one thing you want to do differently with your child between now and the next lesson?**

## **Principle 9: Spend Time Doing Enjoyable Activities with Your Child**

### *Review Principle 8: Avoid /Win Control Battles*

There is a parenting principle that is as true as any mathematical law:

### **Discipline – Relationship = Rebellion**

(Discipline without relationship equals rebellion.)

Last session we talked about winning important control battles. While the long term effects of consistently winning selected control battles leads to improved relationships, the short term effect is normally relationship stress. Even well constructed, well carried out discipline takes its toll on the relationship. Unless you are counterbalancing relationship negatives with relationship-building activities, the discipline will eventually destroy the relationship, and the child will rebel aggressively or passively.

Think of this same principle in relationship to your employer. If your boss does enjoyable things with you, and if you know he genuinely cares about you, it is relatively easy to take his/her direction and correction. In contrast, if all your boss ever does is criticize your work, you will rebel and despise him/her, or you will find another job—so will your child.

**You have to earn your right to discipline your child day by day.**

Finding a mutually enjoyable activity is not an easy task. My idea of recreation is to hoe the garden—not exactly my son’s idea of a fun time! Ask your child for suggestions on what he/she would enjoy doing together with you.

I find that playing with my children is generally more enjoyable if I do it one child at a time. I must keep a written record of whose time it will be for the next special time together so that each child knows that his/her time will come in turn.

No one reaches the end of his life and says, “I wish I had spent more time in the office.”

As I write this article, I am convicted once again that I am spending too many hours at the office and not enough time playing with my kids.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. On a 0 to 10 priority scale, how important is playing with your child? How consistent is your behavior with your priority.
2. What gets in the way of spending enjoyable time with your child and how can you overcome this obstacle?
3. How can you spend enjoyable time with your child if he/she is not currently living with you?
4. Share with the group one enjoyable activity and one frustrating attempt to spend mutually enjoyable time

with your child.

5. If your child does not want to do activities with you, what can you do to build relationship?
6. Write your plan on the back of this page to increase the positive time spent with your child.

## **Principle 10: Teamwork**

*Review all 9 Previous Principals.*

**Principle 1:** *Take Care of Yourself*

*Physically and Spiritually*

**Principle 2:** *Love the Child Unconditionally*

**Principle 3:** *Teach God's Truth Through*

*Formal and Informal Instruction*

**Principle 4:** *Establish Clear Rules with*

*Consequences*

**Principle 5:** *Pray for Your Child*

**Principle 6:** *Help the Christian Child View*

*Himself as a New Creation*

**Principle 7:** *Treat Your Child with Respect*

**Principle 8:** *Avoid /Win Control Battles*

**Principle 9:** *Spend Time Doing Enjoyable*

*Activities with Your Child*

**Scripture:** [Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up \(I Thessalonians 5: 11\).](#)

Successfully parenting the challenging child requires teamwork between parents and between others working with your child. In the absence of teamwork, the child will divide and conquer and everyone will lose.

[Relationships around challenging children are what I call "high maintenance relationships". If you don't put forth extra effort to maintain the relationship, it will deteriorate.](#)

When a sports team is winning, there is normally very little conflict between team members, but when a sports team is having a difficult season, there is a natural tendency to blame each other. Unless the team pulls together it will never win.

### **Teamwork between Spouses**

While challenging children should not be blamed for breaking up marriages, they can be like water that seeps into any existing cracks in pavement, freezes and breaks the pavement. When parenting the challenging child, you must continually seal the small cracks in the marriage.

[Parents of challenging children must not become so overly invested in the child that they neglect their marriage. When they do, the child loses.](#)

Parents need time together to build the relationship so they will have the strength to parent the child. This may mean investing in a weekly babysitter or becoming involved in marriage strengthening groups such as Marriage Encounter.

Spouses need to be sensitive to one another's stress load and give evenings out so that each can have a break.

[Supporting one another's parenting decisions is an absolute necessity with the challenging child.](#)

### **Teamwork with the Ex.**

Many divorced parents think that there is no way they can team work with the Ex-spouse. True, tremendous hurt and distrust may have developed in the relationship

before, during and after the divorce. The child, who has the power to play the spouses against each other and the power to avoid consequences by moving back and forth between the parents, is set up to have major problems. For the sake of the child, [find a way to work as a parenting team.](#)

### **Teamwork with the Teacher**

At the beginning of the school year before problems develop, get to know your child's teacher and form a solid alliance. Talk directly with the teacher—do not allow communication to be distorted by going through the child.

### **Teamwork with the Counselor**

I seldom recommend individual counseling with a challenging teen especially if the counselor is young and inexperienced. The secrecy of the counseling situation gives opportunity for the teen to play the counselor against the parent. I believe that family counseling where the counselor hears all sides of a conflict is far more productive.

Support and encourage the counselor, the teacher and your spouse for their hard work. Your child will benefit from your teamwork.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. From your experience, what is meant by "relationships around challenging children are high maintenance relationship? Why is this true?
2. What has worked for you to help maintain the marriage relationship?
3. Why is it so destructive for the child to be able to move back and forth between divorced parents when he/she gets in trouble with one parent? How do you avoid this happening?
4. What has worked for you to help you parent as a team with your ex?
5. What has worked for you in building team work with your child's teacher or counselor?

### **Application**

[Write your action plan to improve teamwork. Share your plan with the group and report next session on progress.](#)

## **Principle 11: Develop Your Child's Strengths**

### *Review Principle 10: Teamwork*

Scripture: Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.... (Romans 12:6)

I have noticed a strange thing about the way applications to our children's home are filled out. There are several questions about the difficulties the child is experiencing. These questions are completed in detail. Sometimes even extra pages are added. But the question, "What are the child's strengths?" is often left blank. Could the lack of identification and development of the child's strengths be a contributing factor to the need to be placed outside his/her home?

From your own experience, are the kids that have found some claim to fame whether it be excelling on an athletic team, scholastic bowl, scouts, music, or theater the ones that are most often in serious trouble with the law, school officials, or even their parents?

Having some area of achievement, some claim to fame, provides a measure of protection against the shipwrecks of teenage life.

Therefore, it behooves the wise parent to ask God to guide him/her in identifying and helping the child develop at least one of the child's God-given strengths.

Once the child's strength and or interest has been identified, parents need to contract with the child, clearly specifying the parent's and the child's responsibilities in developing this interest. I always contract that I will pay for all equipment, but the child must complete the season—quitting before the season is completed is not an option. There is always a lag time between hard work and success.

Many children get discouraged during this lag time and it takes the parental support (sometimes force) to bridge the gap.

With the challenging child, parents can easily become preoccupied with helping the child overcome areas of deficit. The parent's time often would be better used developing an area of strength.

If a child can find one area of success, often many of the problem areas will also improve. For example, if the child finds success on the basketball court, he will often find the motivation to keep up his/her grades or control his/her temper. The key to success is a "can-do attitude". When the child learns he can succeed through hard effort on the basketball court, it often carries over to other areas of his/her life.

Developing a child's strength may mean a large time investment including transporting the child, attending events, and assisting the child in practice, but **wouldn't you rather be watching your child at a basketball game or dance recital than watching your child in the courtroom?**

(For more information on developing your child's self-esteem, read *Hide or Seek* by James Dobson.)

### **Discussion**

1. What do you see as your child's strengths?
2. Do you spend more time focusing on your child's strengths or weaknesses? Why?
3. When a parent sees strength but the child does not want to put in the effort to develop the strength, how hard should the parent push?

### **Action Plan**

Write on your action plan your child's strength and your plan to help the child develop it. Share your plan with the group.

## **Principle 12: Prepare Intervention Options for when the Child is Defiant**

*Review principle 11: Develop Your Child's Strengths.*

Scriptures: If you refuse to discipline your son it proves that you do not love him; for if you love him you will be prompt to punish him. Discipline your son in the early years while there is hope. If you don't, you will ruin his life. Discipline your son and he will give you happiness and peace of mind. (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 29:17 The Living Bible)

Prior to the 1960s, society supported the authority of the parents. Parents could threaten that if the child did not do what he was told, "he wouldn't be able to sit down for a week." Parents seldom had to carry through on such a threat because the child knew the parent could. If the child continued to rebel, courts could determine that the child was incorrigible and sends the child to reform school. Again, such drastic measures were seldom taken because children knew they could be taken.

Today if parents threaten to "tan a child's hide" the challenging child may feel perfectly within his/her rights to say, "Try it, and I am calling the police." Today, the legal system often supports the rebellious child and gives only meager support to the parent.

While discipline that worked just one generation ago may still be effective with the compliant child, it may no longer be effective with the challenging child. Today's parents must be smarter, better educated, and better prepared to carry out God's instructions to discipline the challenging child.

Interventions that parents can use with the defiant child are listed in progressive order to give parents options depending on the severity of the defiance and the nature of the child.

1. **Talk and listen.** Sometimes when a child defies authority, the conflict area is not the real issue. The child may have had a terrible day at school, and the parent is just the safe target to vent frustration. Or, perhaps a root of bitterness has developed because of a real or imagined hurt. If parents can listen and withhold judgment, the real issue may be revealed.
2. **Allow cool down time.** Children can't think well when they are angry. (Most parents can't either.) Just as you would never argue with a drunk, don't try to settle an issue with a child when he/she is drunk on adrenaline. During a calm time with your child, agree on a cooling off place—time out chair, a room, or location outside. If a child is given cooling off time, he/she will often decide to comply.
3. **It often is more effective to tell the defiant child what you are going to do rather than what he/she must do.** For example saying, "The car is leaving in five

minutes," is often more effective with the challenging child than saying "Get in the car now!"

4. **Give two choices both of which will make you happy.** For example you might say, "You may stay here and we will try to resolve the issue in a respectful way, or you may go to your room and cool off. The choice is yours." It is easier for the child to obey if he/she feels there is some choice.
5. **When the child won't respond, you may have to tolerate defiance for a time, but give a consequence later so that the child knows that he/she did not get away with the defiance.** This seems to be the way that God often parents us. He allows us to break His rules for a time but there are always consequences. For example, if the child refuses to do his/her Saturday morning job, the parent may choose not to address the issue until the child asks, "What's for lunch?" Then give a very calm explanation that lunch will be prepared as soon as the job is completed.
6. **Calling in additional help is an important option that takes some advance preparation.** Agree with a friend that if your child persists in defiance that the friend will come over. The friend may be a prayer warrior while the parent continues to deal with the issue, or the friend may talk with the child. Often just the presence of a prayerful outsider will change the child's behavior. It is absolutely essential that the friend support the parent in front of the child.
7. **In severe cases a back up temporary family is essential.** This family's home is where the child will go if he/she gets locked into such an intense power struggle that living in the same house is temporarily impossible. Generally, one or two days away will give a new perspective to the problem and a solution can be found. This is often a good solution when combined with "tough love." For example if a teen persists in violating his/her curfew, the teen could be told that the door will be locked an hour past curfew. When the teen arrives home two hours past curfew, he/she finds the door locked and a note on the door that says if the teen wants a place to sleep he/she can go to the "Smiths" who are expecting him/her.
8. **The challenging child needs to know in advance that if he/she breaks the law that the parent will not protect the child from the legal consequences for his/her behavior.** The parent will call the police if the child persists in destroying property, assaults someone, uses or is found with illegal drugs, or steals repetitively.

Many times parents feel that they have no options with the defiant child, but if the parent is willing to think in some new ways and do advance planning, the parent has many options.

## Discussion Questions

1. How do you think society has changed since you were a child in relationship to parental authority?
2. Share at least one creative discipline that has worked for you.
3. Is it hard for you to give cool down time when the child is angry? What are the consequences of not allowing cool down time?
4. How do you feel about contacting a friend to be a backup person? Who would you call? How would you feel if someone asked you in advance to be a backup person?
5. What are the pro's and con's of calling the police when the child has broken the law?
6. What attitudes or factors would you consider in deciding if legal intervention was appropriate for your child.

## Application

Use ideas suggested in today's session to plan a discipline intervention for a common problem in your family. If your spouse is present, work together. Make sure that both parents are in agreement before implanting the plan. Write the plan on your action plan page. Share the plan with the group and allow the group to make suggestions.

## **Principle 13: Keep On Keeping On**

### ***Review previous sessions***

***Principle 1: Take Care of Yourself***

***Physically and Spiritually***

***Principle 2: Love the Child***

***Unconditionally***

***Principle 3: Teach God's Truth through***

***Formal and Informal Instruction***

***Principle 4: Establish Clear Rules with***

***Consequences***

***Principle 5: Pray for Your Child***

***Principle 6: Help the Christian Child View***

***Himself as a New Creation***

***Principle 7: Treat Your Child with Respect***

***Principle 8: Avoid /Win Control Battles***

***Principle 9: Spend Time Doing Enjoyable***

***Activities with Your Child***

***Principle 10: Teamwork with Others Working***

***with Your Child***

***Principle 11: Develop Your Child's Strengths***

***Principle 12: Prepare Intervention Options***

***for when the Child is Defiant***

In the first chapter we studied that parenting challenging children is often like taking a trip down the Chattooga River. (The North Georgia River where the movie, *Deliverance*, was filmed.) There are rapids in the Chattooga where turbulent water swirling around huge boulders threatens to overturn the boat. Interspersed between the crashing rapids are stretches of quieter water.

To survive the rapids, you must remember that you are not alone in this boat traveling down the Chattooga River. In fact, God sits beside you with one oar while you hold the other oar. He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake you.

You must decide who is the captain of this boat going down the Chattooga—you or God. Only one captain can steer the boat. Only one person can decide on which side of a boulder the boat should go. Since you sit backwards in the boat seeing only what you have already passed, having little ability to see what lies ahead on the river, it might be wise to allow God to be the captain. He can see not only the river behind but He also has a clear view of the river ahead. He is the only one in the boat with captain's qualifications.

If God is the captain of the boat, we must learn to listen to Him so that we can move our oar in harmony with his as he guides the boat down the river. During the calm areas of the river, it is tempting to believe that we can row the boat all by ourselves. But it is during the calm times that we need to develop our ability to hear His voice through Bible reading, prayer and corporate worship so that when we get into the turbulent rapids again we will recognize His voice above the river's roar.

When we are in the rapids there are two great temptations. For some, there is a temptation to believe that we will be safe if we row harder and faster. This rowing-harder-and-faster philosophy can be summed up in the comment, "The 'loster' I get the faster I row." When one person begins rowing faster and harder—out of harmony with the captain of the boat—the boat spins wildly out of control, crashing into the boulders. The solution to getting through the rapid is to learn to trust and listen to the words of the captain: To row when he says to row, to rest when he says to rest. If we do this, our captain will certainly get us safely through each rapid. With each rapid we become stronger as we go down the Chattooga of family life.

Another temptation is to become discouraged and bail out of the boat. At times most parents of challenging children become discouraged and feel like giving up. I have been there.

It seemed as if I had tried everything with my foster child, yet he continued to steal daily. I had tried spanking, taking away privileges, "jail time," and praising. I finally developed a chart-game board. For every day that he did not steal he could move one space forward. Prize squares were strategically located so that at first there was nearly daily reinforcement. As he developed honesty as a habit, the prizes would be farther and farther apart. When he reached a prize square, he could choose a reward from a box kept on top of the refrigerator.

My foster son was excited about the prizes, and the first few days the system worked beautifully. As a young psychology graduate student, I was very pleased with myself.

The fourth day was Sunday, and I was looking forward to retrieving the prize box from the top of the refrigerator and allowing him to get another prize that he would earn by noon. We were sitting together in Church, and I noticed my foster son playing with a toy. As soon as I looked his direction, he hid it. I asked to see the toy and from his resistance I knew something was wrong. When I finally got the toy, I instantly recognized it as a toy stolen from the "honesty" prize box.

I was upset! Realizing that we were making quite a scene in Church, I told my family that we were leaving and marched them out from the second row from the front of the Church. I am sure the minister wondered what he had said that was so offensive.

When we arrived home, I sent my foster son to his room to "think." He probably knew that it was really Dad who needed some time to think. It seemed like everything had been tried but nothing had "worked."

On my knees, I voiced my despair to God. God quietly reminded me how many times He had taught the same lesson of faith to the children of Israel as they wandered in the desert only to have them fail again and again. God also reminded me of how many times I had told Him that I was never going to commit a particular sin

again only to fail. He reminded me that He never gave up on His children.

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, to whom I am indebted for much of the rapids illustration, notes that parents fear that around the next river bend there will be a huge waterfall that will swallow up their entire family.

Dobson notes that in most cases there really is no deathly waterfall but only a series of rapids. If parents will just stay in the boat and get the child through the turbulent adolescent years, the river will smooth out and the child, who nobody thought would ever become a mature, successful adult, eventually does.

The key to success is to remember who the captain of the boat is and keep everyone in the boat throughout the seemingly endless passage, bounding down the series of rapids.

“Keeping on keeping on” does not necessarily mean that we need to keep doing the same thing. When something does not work, most of us still try “more of the same.” Frequently we need to try something different—perhaps even the opposite of what we have been trying.

If a sixth grader continues to fail academically after all our best efforts to prod and coerce the child to study, he may be locked in a control battle to prove that we cannot make him succeed. The best strategy may be to apologize to the child for getting overly involved in his business. Tell him that from now on there will be no questions about academics. His grades are his business. If he chooses to fail, sixth grade will be offered again next year.

Children are very different—what works for one may not work for another. What may have worked for a while may not work later. We need to continually seeking guidance from our Captain.

We must not give up. When evangelist, Billy Graham’s own son, Franklin, became very rebellious and got involved in sex, drugs and alcohol, Billy Graham received some good advice from a close friend, “Don’t close the door behind him.” Dr. Graham heeded the advice and eventually his son heard God’s call and returned home. Franklin now heads up the Graham ministry.

If you have a child that goes from one problem to the next, what your child may need most is a demonstration of God’s everlasting love.

Remember the words of Christ, “I will never leave nor forsake you” and the words of Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

## Discussion Questions

1. When you are really stressed out with your children, are you more tempted to “row harder and faster” or bail out?
2. “Lo I am with you always, to the end of time.” (NEB) are Jesus’ very last words as recorded by

Matthew. Why do you think Jesus chose these words to be his last statement to His followers?

3. Have you felt like giving up on your child? What kept you from giving up? How does your faith in God encourage you?
4. What did Billy Graham’s friend mean by, “Don’t close the door behind him.” How are you doing this with an older child or how have you seen others do it?
5. What is the difference between unhelpful “rescuing” of a child and not closing the door?
6. Why do you think many parents try “more of the same” when it is not working?
7. What one principle from the 13 studied in this series is the most helpful?
8. This group is to be commended for their investment of much time and energy into making family life better. Does this group want to celebrate together? How can the group support each other even though the series is completed?

## Action Step

Write in your action plan the most important course principle that you want God’s help in applying. Share it with the group. Also, pray for one other parent in this group.

## **Action Plans**

*Write your action plans on this page.*

- 1. Take Care of Yourself Both Physically and Spiritually**
- 2. Love the Child Unconditionally**
- 3. Teach God's Truth Through both Formal and Informal Instruction**
- 4. Establish Clear Rules and Consequences**
- 5. Pray for Your Child**
- 6. Help the Christian Child See Himself as a New Creation**
- 7. Treat Your Child with Respect**
- 8. Avoid or Win Control Battles**
- 9. Spend Time Doing Enjoyable Activities With Your Child**
- 10. Teamwork**
- 11. Develop Your Child's Strengths**
- 12. Prepare Intervention Options for when the Child is Defiant**
- 13. Keep On Keeping On**