

Raising Your Child: From Birth to Age Twelve

By Paul Meier, M.D.
and Donald E. Ratcliff, Ph.D.

This book was originally released in 1977 as *Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development* and was developed from a graduate seminar held by Paul Meier. The first edition went through many printings, as it was one of the few child-rearing books written from a psychological perspective by a Christian back in the 1970's. In 1993 Donald Ratcliff rewrote the book at a somewhat easier reading level, adding many personal illustrations and reorganizing the book according to age ranges. The name of the book was changed slightly in an attempt to appeal to a broader audience: *Child-Rearing and Personality Development*. This new edition of the book also included a chapter by Frederick Rowe on common medications and therapies for children. Two years later the revised book was released in paperback with the original title *Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development*. In 1999 a smaller and shorter version of the book was released with the new title *Raising Your Child: From Birth to Age Twelve*. This edition of the book omitted the chapter on adolescence as well as the Fred Rowe chapter. In addition a section that was misunderstood by some reviewers was omitted, a tongue-in-cheek description of "How to Develop Emotionally Disturbed Children." While the introduction to the section stated that "These are trends that have been found, with many exceptions," some took this material to suggest that there was a cause and effect relationship between certain child-rearing practices and problems, which would be going beyond the limitations of correlation research. Some experimental approaches approach cause and effect, but correlation research can only describe associations--a point that, in retrospect, probably should have been emphasized to a greater extent. The shortened version of the book has now been translated into Russian and is scheduled to be translated into at least one other language in the near future.

In 2004, Paul Meier and Donald Ratcliff signed releases that permitted Baker Books to make a reversion of rights of the shortened version of the book to the original authors, so the book could be made available on the internet without charge. Unfortunately, the editing done by Baker Books has been lost in this online version, and thus the wording is not as smooth as in the published editions. Although all editions of the book are now out of print--other than the new translations--copies of most of the editions are still widely available at low prices on the used book market.

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-Don Ratcliff, September, 2004

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Introduction

Bill and June couldn't help but notice how the new neighbors treated their children. "Get into the house this minute," bellowed the mother to a four-year old that was covered with mud. "I don't wanna," the equally irate youngster responded. Meanwhile, a six-month-old screamed inside the house. "You get in here right now or you'll beat your bottom." The preschooler couldn't care less. "Oh, shut up," he said. The exchange of yells continued for several minutes, and eventually the mother brought a sandwich out to the child, who promptly threw it on the ground. "I want ice cream!" the youngster demanded. "When we have kids, I sure never want to be like that," Bill commented. June nodded her head, yet there was an inner pang of sympathy for the woman who appeared to be overwhelmed with child-rearing. They both wondered, "how can we do better?" never suspecting that the neighbor wondered the same thing.

In today's local newspaper I read horrible stories about the abuse of two children. The first was only seven weeks old, but had already suffered broken bones, mutilation, and sexual abuse. After being hospitalized several times, only to be sent home for more abuse, the child was killed by its parents. The second child was also murdered by parents, using the metal post from a bed. Tonight I watched a television program on abuse and neglect of children in day care centers. The program suggested that these problems are far more prevalent than anyone would suspect.

These extremes shake us, and so they should. If the people in the stories really understood children, wouldn't they have acted differently? At the same time I know that many parents in our society are uncomfortable with the way they rear their children. With most of us only having one or two children, by the time we get some experience we have finished the job. We may not abuse our kids, but perhaps we wonder if we disciplined the children the best way. We may not neglect them, but just maybe we feel a twinge of guilt now and then about not spending enough time with them. Parenthood can be frustrating for anyone, but especially for parents who want their faith to shape the way they treat their children, and who want their children to affirm that faith.

I read the first edition of this book shortly after it was published in 1977. I was impressed that this was, without question, the most scholarly, biblical, yet readable account of child rearing and development I had ever read. It definitely set the pace (along with James Dobson's work) for many future books on the topic. Even as I write this, 15 years later, that original edition is still head and shoulders above the rest. The fact that it went through twenty reprintings shows a lot of people must have agreed with me! It is a great privilege to be able to do some summarizing, rearranging, updating, and expanding of the original work. We have also tried to make it even more readable for the average parent.

This book will attempt to accomplish two huge tasks. First, we want to help Christians develop biblically sound parenting skills. Second, we want to outline some of the aspects of child development that will encourage a better understanding of children. A knowledge of what your kids can and cannot do at different ages should, in turn, help you be a better parent. We need to know what to expect of children, but not expect more than they can reasonably produce. An accurate understanding of youngsters can also help us marvel at the beautiful, though sometimes difficult creations God has loaned us, our children.

The first edition of this book was an outgrowth of a graduate class in personality development taught by Paul Meier. It was the first of many books he was to author and coauthor over the years. Dr. Meier, cofounder of the Minirth-Meier Clinic, blended his own training, experience as a houseparent in a youth home for delinquent and disturbed children, and other professional counseling experience with his own parenting of three children. When he wrote the first edition, all of his children were school-aged or younger.

I am also the parent of three children, all school-aged or younger. This is the third book I have worked on with Dr. Meier (the other two included Dr. Frank Minirth as coauthor). My work on the revision is the result of my training and teaching in child psychology, as well as my personal experience as a parent. Dr. Meier's experience in counseling, and my emphasis on normal development, complement one another in many areas.

We have been appalled by the number of psychologically disturbed Christians who were reared by relatively normal Christian parents. These parents, however, often used very poor judgment in their child-rearing. Their judgment was not only psychologically unsound, but even more importantly, Scripturally unsound. As a result we have written this book integrating scores of scriptural passages with hundreds of research studies on healthy and unhealthy child-rearing techniques. We have also drawn lessons from our counseling work, experiences of our students, and our own child-rearing.

We have seen many dramatic changes in the families who have put these scriptural and psychologically sound principles into practice. It is our sincere hope that soon-to-be married and young married couples, in particular, will read this book before their children are too old to change. It is our firm belief that much of the adult personality is formed during childhood, especially the first six years. This is not to say that it is too late to correct emotional problems in adulthood. No, it is not too late, but it becomes increasingly more difficult the older one is. What takes minor correction in early childhood, takes even stronger measures in later childhood, and the same problem may require extensive counseling if not dealt with until adulthood.

This book is intended to prevent problems that often show up in psychiatric clinics and in counselor's offices. We are thoroughly convinced that if parents will get the help they need (personally and in their marriages) and use biblically sound child-rearing methods, the next generation will be far better off than we are today. It is always easier to prevent problems in the first place than to cure them after they develop.

Donald Ratcliff
Toccoa Falls, Georgia

Chapter One Preparing to Parent

All parents and parents-to-be need to improve their parenting skills. Every parent is "preparing to parent." We expect doctors to have many years of education before they begin to practice, and we also expect those in practice to update their skills regularly. Should we expect less of the most important task we can have -- rearing children?

Before we go further, let's see what kind of parent you are now (or might be in the future). Mark the response you think you would most likely make in each of these situations.

1. For the first time in her life you place a small piece of lasagna on your fifteen-month-old's tray. "Try some of this yummy new food," you say. The youngster picks up the food, examines it curiously, then states, "no like." You then:

- A. slap the child and demand she eat it.
- B. ignore the statement and continue eating.
- C. say, "You don't like the food? That's ok" and you take it off the plate.
- D. say, "You might not like the food, but you should at least try it."

2. Your preschooler has been watching his favorite TV show. It ends at bedtime, but he pleads "Will you read me a story?" You respond

- A. "Forget it, you know the rule about bedtime."
- B. "I don't have time to read you a story."
- C. "Whatever you want, sweetheart." After the story is read, the same request results in another story, and then another.
- D. "One short story, but then it's to bed." And you follow through, regardless of protests.

3. Your school-aged daughter is again complaining about doing her homework. "Why should I do this stuff?" she asks. You respond

- A. "Because that's what the teacher says, and that's just the way it is."
- B. "Go ask your mother" (or father if you are the mother)
- C. "Tell me how you feel about it." After all, you reason, feelings are more important than whether it gets done every day.
- D. "I know it gets boring, but very few things in life are interesting all the time."

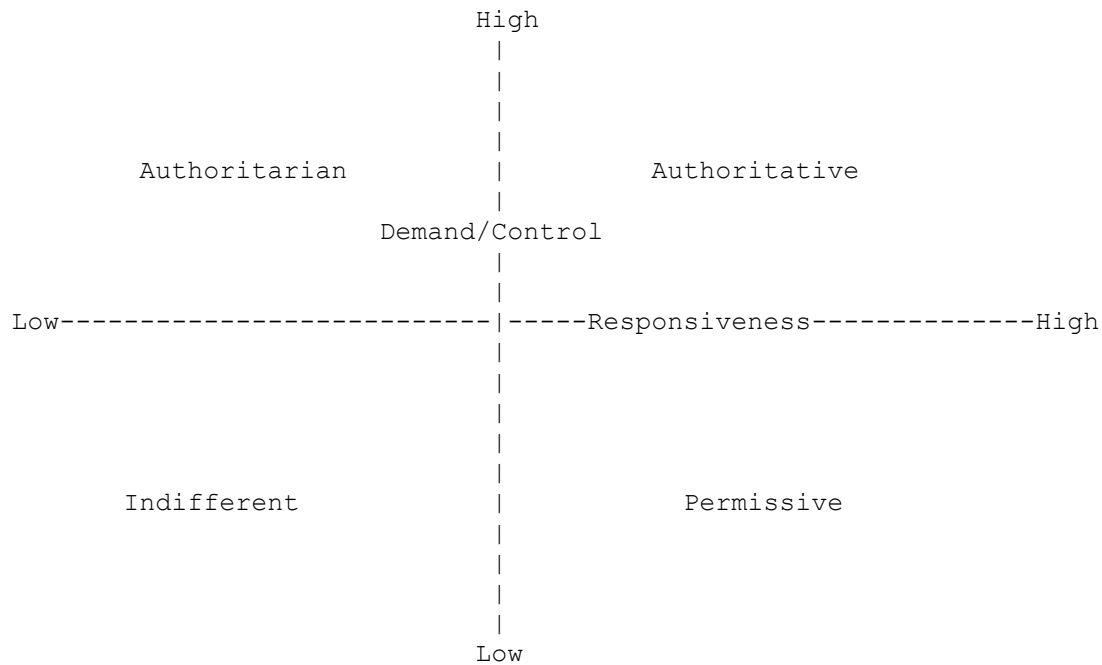
4. Your thirteen-year-old son rushes into the room. "There's gonna be a terrific party at Ron's house tonight, can I go?" You ask, "will there be girls there?" and he answers, "yeah, I think so." "Will any of the kids be drinking?" He hangs his head a bit. "I don't know for sure." You then ask, "will his parents be there?" and your son says "no, they're on vacation." You decide to

- A. ground him for even suggesting such a thing.
- B. let him go -- after all, you need a quiet evening alone.
- C. let him make up his own mind, so he will become more responsible.
- D. talk with him about the dangers of such a situation, and then calmly say "not without a responsible adult present."

Four Styles of Parenting

What kind of parent do you plan to be? What kind of parent are you already? Researchers (Schaeffer 1959, Maccoby and Martin 1983, Baumrind 1990) have found at least four styles of parenting, based upon how demanding and responsive the parents are. Look at chart 1-1 as we consider the various styles of parenting.

Chart 1-1. Parenting Styles



The first style, is called the authoritarian approach. These rigid parents demand a lot of their children and have quite a bit of control over them. However, they are less sensitive to the needs and desires of the kids, so they are not as responsive to them. Authoritarian parents want obedience and will punish their children, often severely, if they do not immediately obey. They have little or no concern about helping their children become independent and self-sufficient. Children are expected to accept what the parent requires without question; parents rarely if ever explain why a rule is made. The authority of the parents is supreme. If the young child breaks a beautiful vase, these parents immediately spank the child without any explanation or concern about whether it was an accident or not. If you marked mostly A's in the quiz at the beginning of this chapter, you probably are (or will be) this kind of parent.

Moving down the chart, the indifferent parent makes very few demands upon the child, but like the authoritarian parent does not respond much to the child's needs or wants. They are simply uninvolved with their children, preferring to spend most of their time with other things. The idea of being an involved parent is too inconvenient, and the idea of setting rules (or at least enforcing them) seems a waste of time. If anyone does much parenting, it is probably the grandparents, neighbors, or babysitters. These kids are likely to be left at an all day infant care center from even the earliest months of life. When the flower vase gets knocked over, these parents may yell at the child but do nothing else, or else they are not there to react. You are probably inclined towards this style if you marked mostly "B's" on the quiz.

Across the chart from the indifferent is the permissive parent. They are far more concerned about the needs and wants of their children, but they make few demands upon them. As with indifferent parenting, the kids are often out of control, even though the parents want to help them. They may not even expect the children to obey them; they want to be friends not parents to their children. Mom and dad try to reason with the kids and let them have a lot of input into the decisions that are made -- indeed, sometimes the children make most of the decisions in this kind of family. But there are few standards and rules for these youngsters, and so they basically do what they want. The broken vase in this home brings concern for the child, even if he or she broke it on purpose. Permissive parents tend to mark "C's" on the quiz.

Authoritative parents have strong expectations of their children, and so they make and enforce rules. They are clearly in control, but they are also realistic in their expectations. They are sensitive to the characteristics of children at different ages and want to know what the child needs and wants. The needs of the child are more important than holding to every rule in every situation, but the wants of a child are generally overruled by parental standards. Parental reasoning is combined with parental control. There is some give and take in discussions, but parents have the final say. No two children are considered to be alike, and independence is encouraged within the limits set by parents. These parents react to the broken vase by asking the children how it happened, describing their own feelings about losing it, and punishing the deed if it was intentional or encouraging the child to be more careful if it was an accident. If you marked "D" to most of the questions on the quiz, this is probably your style.

Just because two parents have the same parenting style does not mean they are exactly alike. Some authoritative parents demand and control more than others and some respond more than others. There can be many other differences as well, of course. One parent can demand a lot in the child's school life, but not in the area of athletic ability, while another parent could reverse these. But the four styles at least give us a general way of understanding some of the differences in parenting.

With each of the four styles of parenting, there are also seriously unhealthy extremes. If an authoritarian parent is extremely demanding and controlling but makes almost no response to the child's needs and desires, the danger is cruelty. That is the parent that is in the extreme upper left-hand corner of the chart. The indifferent parent that makes almost no demands or has very little control over the child, while making little response to them runs the risk of neglect. Neglect, which with cruelty is considered a form of child abuse, would be way down in the lower left-hand corner of the chart. Parents who never control their children, yet always try to give in to their desires are likely to indulge ("spoil") them. Put them in the extreme lower right-hand corner. Highly demanding and controlling parents who are very responsive to their children run the risk of overprotecting their kids. They are in the extreme upper right-hand corner. There are seriously unhealthy extremes with all four styles of parenting.

Which Style is Best?

As we look at the chart, what kind of parenting is most biblical? Over and over the Bible is very clear that parents must exercise control over their children (we deal with this at length in chapter 3). Yet the Bible also seems to suggest that we should be sensitive and responsive to the child's needs. For example, Ephesians 6:4 says that Christian parents must not exasperate their children. This may imply that reasoning with and listening to children is important. Proverbs 29:19 might suggest that explanations, appropriate to the age of the child, are important (though we should insist upon obedience even if the child does not understand why). Certainly the father of the prodigal son was highly responsive, both in giving him the inheritance and in the warm welcome home. God's concern for children is quite evident throughout scripture. They are gifts from God (Psalm 127:3). The disciples thought Christ was too busy for children, and may have thought that "children should be seen and not heard." Yet Jesus rebuked the disciples for this attitude (Mark 10:14), and insisted upon holding the children (Mark 9:36, 10:13 & 16), healing them (Matt. 17:18, Mark 9:27), and encouraging others to welcome them (Matt. 18:5). Children are examples of humility that should be imitated (Matt. 18: 3-4). Taken as a whole, these Bible verses would suggest that parents should be responsive to their children. The authoritative style of parenting seems to be the most biblical.

A number of research studies have been conducted on these four styles of parenting. Permissive and authoritarian homes are more likely to produce children that have a wide variety of severe psychological disturbances, (Rousell and Edwards 1971). Hall, Lamb and Perlmutter (1986, 405-406) have summarized much of the research on the most common results of different parenting styles. Children raised with the authoritarian style are often overly dependent, with hostility likely by boys, and withdrawal, low self-expectations and lack of goals by girls. Children whose parents use the indifferent style often have high amounts of aggression, obey less, and demand more. The permissive style of parenting is more likely to produce children who, like children of authoritarian parents, are hostile, withdrawn, or dependent. They are especially unlikely to tolerate frustration very well. As might be expected, the biblically preferred

authoritative form of parenting has far more positive results in the research. Social responsibility and a healthy amount of independence characterize these children.

Characteristics of Mentally Healthy Families

We have seen that demand, control and responsiveness (without overprotection) are aspects of good parenting. When we look at mentally healthy families, we find characteristics that tell much the same story, but also give us a more complete view of what good parenting is all about. A home with these five factors is more likely to help children grow into adults who will be happy and mature, both emotionally and spiritually.¹

Love

Mentally healthy families have parents who love their children and love one another. In fact, some research suggests that the parents loving each other is even more important than their love for the youngsters. Look at chart 1-2.

Chart 1-2
Percentage of Children with Psychological Problems

		Parent-Child Relationship	
		Good	Poor
Marriage Relationship	Good	5%	25%
	Poor	40%	90%

The above research by Michael Rutter (as cited by Larson 1985, 246) shows that the lowest number of psychological problems are found in families where parents have good relationships with one another and their children, while the highest number of problems are where both relationships are weak. But if you compare the other two boxes, the children are more likely to have problems when the parents do not get along -- even more problems than if the parents do not have a good relationship with the kids!

One of the main reasons that troubled parent-child relationships develop is that there is already a psychologically disturbed relationship between the husband and wife. Sometimes when a mother brings her disturbed child to Paul Meier, I put the mother on tranquilizers and the child gets better! Most of the time children improve when parents learn better ways to live and love. If the husband and wife are not getting their love needs met by their mates, they will look elsewhere for satisfaction.

To see how a poor marriage can seriously harm children, consider the story of Ron and June (this account combines the stories of several actual couples). Ron becomes involved with another woman (or perhaps overly involved with his work) and so June turns to her son Tommy to provide the missing love of her husband. The love she wants from Tommy is very unhealthy, however. June is so desperate for love that she becomes afraid to spank Tommy -- she reasons that spanking might cause the child to stop loving her for a few minutes. She insists that Tommy sleep with her, literally taking the place of Ron. June becomes overprotective, unconsciously not wanting Tommy to grow up, because she has an unrecognized fear that he will leave her eventually, ending the only love relationship June has. Tommy is smothered with attention and is never allowed independence. Tommy becomes afraid of school because he is so over-

involved with his mother psychologically. Later, as a teenager, Tommy turns to drugs and alcohol because of the unconscious desire to escape the unhealthy relationship with his mother. Tommy hates his mother, at least unconsciously, and remains emotionally immature -- perpetually childish, just as June encouraged him to be. If Tommy marries and has children, June will attempt to manipulate and smother the grandchildren and divide the parents. The unhealthy pattern affects generations to come, simply because June and Ron did not love one another in a healthy manner.

If, in contrast, it is the mother who refuses to love the father, he may react in a somewhat similar pattern, sometimes with the addition of a sexual relationship with a child or another woman. Or he may retreat from the husband-wife relationship by getting too involved with work. Another possibility is that he may leave the unhealthy relationship through desertion or divorce.

What is love, anyway? Genuine love does not develop without help; it is learned. Love requires some degree of maturity -- children have an immature variety of love that is still quite selfish, and sometimes they try to use it to manipulate and avoid punishment. Within marriage, genuine love is emotional -- a feeling that is rekindled from time to time by acting in a loving manner. Sometimes there are contrary emotions in marriage, such as anger, but anger does not become sin unless the husband and wife fail to deal with it before bedtime (Eph. 4:26). Holding grudges can interfere with genuine love (Col. 3:19). Marital love is also physical, involving in gentle caresses and consummating in sexual union (I Cor. 7:3-5). Finally, love is spiritual, seen in showing patience, being kind, seeking the other person's benefit, and expecting nothing in return (I Cor. 13). This level of mature love, with all three aspects, is found in only a minority of adults; very few people ever reach their true love potential in the marriage relationship.

While genuine love between the parents is extremely important for the mental health of children, it is also important that parents love the children. Parental love includes the spiritual aspects mentioned above. It is also physical, with plenty of hugs and kisses. Children must have attention and stimulation -- if they can't get it by good behavior, they will get it by bad behavior. Parents who praise their child frequently for good behavior -- such as sharing with brothers and sisters -- will encourage that good behavior. The Don Ratcliff's oldest boy was praised early in life for hugging his sister (he may have sometimes squeezed her to get even with her!), and today he is one of the "huggiest" people we know. Parental love is also emotional, although -- like the love in marriage -- it can exist even if the person does not feel that love at a particular moment. Children need to be treated as significant people, no matter how young or immature they may be. It is easy to ignore our children and treat them as though they are unimportant. We have both had to work on this aspect of love, especially when we are writing books or watching television.

Discipline

The Bible clearly states that genuine love also includes discipline: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24). When undisciplined children grow up, they are usually immature and inadequate -- they break laws, they use drugs, they have improper sexual behavior, they literally bring shame to their parents (Prov. 29:15). They generally hate their parents, often before they are teenagers.

Good discipline is not just punishment, although it certainly includes punishment. Good discipline includes spanking a child when there is rebellion against parental authority. Spanking is especially appropriate for young children because it is quick and then it is over. It needs to occur immediately after the offense, so the young child knows what the punishment is for (Eccl. 8:11). Taking away privileges for something that was done wrong is better for older children because little kids may forget what they did wrong after a few minutes and thus not understand what the punishment is all about. There are a number of other methods of discipline as well, including some that are more positive. We will consider the subject of discipline in detail throughout the chapters that follow.

Consistency

Discipline, as well as many other aspects of the child's life, needs to be as consistent as possible. A chaotic family life that is unpredictable and constantly changing is very unhealthy for children. Likewise, some children get away with doing something bad one moment, only to receive punishment for the same thing a few minutes (or hours) later. Emotional problems are not as closely linked to the amount of

discipline received as they are to how consistently the discipline is given. Husbands and wives must provide a united front. If you disagree on discipline, don't do your disagreeing in front of the children. Talk it out privately and arrive at some compromise. We must be flexible as we negotiate with the spouse (someone once said, "All women, and a few great men, change their minds!"), but always be consistent with your children. A godly person "honors those who fear the Lord, and keeps his oath even when it hurts" (Psalm 15:4) -- consistency, even when it is unpleasant, is vitally important in child-rearing.

Example

Our children learn their behavior from us. In the end, they do what we do much more than what we say they should do. Paul Meier once heard an alcoholic parent brag about the discipline he practiced with his children. The parent said he made them go to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and every Wednesday night. He made them read their Bibles every day. He made them study for at least one hour every night after school. And he would not let them watch any television, because there were too many beer commercials. Unfortunately he did not do any of these things regularly. He was obviously setting a very poor example for his children, and in all likelihood his children turned out the very opposite of what he wanted. He was telling them one thing and practicing another. This kind of hypocrisy ruins children. To quote Dr. O. Quentin Hyder (1971, 96), a Christian psychiatrist:

It is not surprising that, as they get older, children from Christian homes tend to rebel and fall away from the faith of their parents. They can see the hypocrisy, the inconsistency, and the prejudice in their parents' lives. Unhappily, they then tend to equate these with the church, and in rejecting their parents' faith they also reject Christ in their own lives. By contrast those Christian homes in which love is paramount produce sons and daughters who themselves devoutly propagate the faith to their own children."

The Apostle Paul told his converts to follow his example; to do as he did (Phil. 3:17). Parents who follow God's commandments not only profit personally, but also have children who profit from parental obedience because of their godly example (Deut. 5:29). Do you want your children to be truthful? Then speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Do you want children to forgive one another and you for your mistakes? Then forgive them and others in your life (Eph. 4:32). Whatever qualities you want in your children need to be portrayed in your own life.

Fathering

A domineering, smothering mother and weak father lie at the root of the vast majority of mental illnesses (Meier, Minith and Ratcliff 1992). Almost as bad is the fatherless home, either because of divorce, separation, an unwed mother, or excessive hours at work.

God is very clear about who should lead the home. Consider these verses: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18), and "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:23). The wife was created to be a helper for the husband (Gen. 2:18), and "he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Submission, respect for the husband, purity, modesty, and a gentle quiet spirit are marks of the godly wife (I Pet. 3:1-4).

Of course there are parallel commands for the husband: the need for consideration, respect (I Pet. 3:7), love, and giving of self (Eph. 5:25-33). Some have suggested that this requires equality between husband and wife. The Bible does say men and women are equal in value: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect . . . as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life" (I Pet. 3:7). We are equal in importance in the eyes of the God who created us for each other. God has merely given us different responsibilities. We are made in such a way that our families will be healthiest if the husband assumes the ultimate leadership in the home. Husbands need to be able to give in once in awhile, but if you are unable to reach a compromise, God has established the husband as the leader in the home. But time and again we have seen that great hesitancy by the wife about a major change in family life can be God's attempt at redirecting the husband. Husbands need to listen carefully to the wife's opinion, and honor her views. Of course, if the

husband physically abuses his wife or children, he has forfeited the right to being head of the house. The husband needs counseling, and the wife and children may need legal protection.

As we will see in subsequent chapters of this book, high quality fathering is one of the greatest needs today. Good fathers are vital to emotional and spiritual growth in children. Some of the best guidelines for fathers can be found in scripture: "We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God" (I Thes. 2:11-12). The best fathers comfort their children and encourage them regularly. Spiritual development is also a strong concern of good fathers (Deut. 11:18-19).

Other Qualities of Healthy Families

Researcher Nick Stinnett (1985), now at the University of Alabama, pioneered important research on what makes families strong. He believes that many of society's problems can be traced to unhealthy families. So he decided to do a thorough study of what makes families strong and happy. He looked at families throughout the United States, as well as several other countries. He also considered single-parent families, black families, and other ethnic families. Using questionnaires and interviews with 3000 healthy, strong families, six qualities consistently surfaced. In order, those characteristics are:

1. commitment. The family was top priority, family members could be counted on, and each member was 100% for the others.

2. time. What they did as a family was not always expensive or complicated, but they spent considerable time together and they enjoyed being together.

3. communication. The family talked to one another quite a bit, although the conversations were not always deep or profound, and they were good listeners, even though they might sometimes have conflicts.

4. appreciation. They often complemented one another; they looked for things to complement in one another.

5. spirituality. Strong families saw themselves as committed spiritually, related their faith to everyday life, and most of the healthy families attended church.

6. problem-solving. They could deal with crisis situations in a positive manner, sometimes with the help of others outside the family.

By combining the control/demand and responsiveness aspects of an authoritative family, with the five factors found in mentally healthy families, and the six qualities of strong families, we have some definite guidelines for becoming the best parents we can. None of us can accomplish everything at once, and we suspect that most families fall short in at least one of these areas, but perhaps the aspects that need to be worked on will be made clear by looking at the total picture.

Developing a Healthy Self-Concept

We have all been told in many ways, throughout our lives, that we are inferior. Sometimes we have been told in words, such as a child saying "You're a real dummy" to a playmate on the playground. Sometimes we are told without words, such as the ignored daughter asking her father for help while he is reading the newspaper. Some of the messages, like the child on the playground, are intentional. At other times the messages are unintentional, as represented by the father and daughter example. We believe very firmly that our first and most important calling from God, if we are parents, is to be the kind of parents that God would have us be. No matter if you are a doctor, pastor, missionary, business person, or whatever you are -- your family comes first! Whatever time you have left over from being the right kind of parent -- that's the time you can use to accomplish whatever other callings God has given you. And one of the most important things we can do for our children is to develop within them an emotionally healthy and scripturally accurate self-concept. Without self-worth, our children will not only have a miserable life, but they will also be unable to reach the potential given by God. Parents also need an accurate self-concept, since children tend to imitate the actions that come from the self-concept. Misery from a poor self-concept may make it easier to act in a way that will hurt children emotionally. We saw 59 examples of this in the previous section of this chapter. We believe that all emotional pain ultimately comes from three root

sources: (1) lack of self-worth, (2) lack of intimacy with others, and (3) lack of intimacy with God. A poor self-concept can significantly hamper us in all three of these essential areas.

There are two extremes to avoid, when we speak of a healthy self-concept. Many people have a poor self-concept, feeling inferior and worthless. They feel unable to do anything of value because they do not feel God gave them much to start with. They undervalue themselves, and believe God shortchanged them. Others have an exaggerated self-concept, seeing themselves as better than they really are. Psychologists sometimes call these people narcissists. This word comes from an ancient Greek story in which a man named Narcissus walked by a pool of water and fell in love with his own reflection. We can love ourselves in a healthy way (when it is balanced by an equal love for others -- Matt. 19:19), but when we come to think we are better or more valuable than others, we fall into the sin of pride. An accurate self-concept develops by avoiding both extremes, the sin of pride and the error of a poor self-concept. We must value ourselves because God created us, but realize we are nothing apart from God.

During the first years of life, children often feel inferior because they are inferior in many ways. They are smaller physically, more clumsy, more ignorant of the facts, and make mistakes in their interpretation of the facts they know. They are also inferior in authority, with parents ruling over them and often older brothers and sisters bossing them around. Once they enter school, they start receiving red marks on their papers, usually marks showing them where they are wrong. Even when the teacher marks an 80 or 90 percent on the papers, they realize that means they got 20 or 10 percent wrong. Instead of emphasizing what they have learned, the overwhelming message communicated by many schools is negative -- "see what you did wrong" (Glasser 1969).

False Values

Feelings of poor self-worth often come from the false values held by parents, schools, and society in general. We may tell children these values are not important, but they see the values we actually live by. What are some of these false values?

Materialism is emphasized constantly on television commercials. Most of the people portrayed on television live in very fine homes, and almost every commercial tells us we need another expensive product to make us happy. Of course the commercials are lies, most of us realize that at some level, but we still buy more and more things. The children see our spending, and they hear the bragging of their friends at school, and quickly pick up this false value. They also see our frustrations about not having more money and things, and before long they are measuring their own self-worth in their possessions -- bikes, clothes, video games, and spending money. If they do not have these things, they feel worthless. Even if they have them, they can find someone with more money, a newer fancier bike, more expensive clothes, and so on, so they still feel inferior. There is no winning with materialism -- unless you reject the value altogether.

We want to make it clear that it is not a sin to be rich. But it is a sin to base our self-worth on our riches. Some of the godliest people in the Bible were wealthy -- Abraham, Joseph, David, and many others. But their self-worth was based on their faith in God, wisdom, and godly character traits. The Apostle Paul experienced both riches and poverty, but he "learned the secret of being content . . . whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil. 4:12). The secret was rejecting the false value of materialism.

A second false value is education. There is nothing wrong with good grades, and we should encourage our children to do well in school and get all the education they can. Paul Meier learned to draw house plans when he was young, and my father rewarded me by building the house I designed and moving our family into it! That certainly contributed to my own self-worth. But we have also seen an emphasis upon education get out of hand. One man earned a Ph.D. degree from Duke university, but felt like a failure because he did not go for the M.D. degree his parents wanted. Many people with doctorates carry around bad feelings about some course where they received less than an "A." Another young man was determined to become a doctor, even when he flunked introductory biology, because his parents expected it -- he was setting himself up for life-long failure and a poor self-concept. As with material wealth, there is nothing wrong with intelligence and education, as long as more important things take priority.

Some parents go to the other extreme, caring little about the accomplishments of their children. There is a place for praising our children when their grades improve. We should encourage them to get an education

that honors the Lord's calling on their lives. But the person who has many years of college is not worth more to God. In fact, if a person is drawn away from spiritual things by attending a college, it might be better not to get that education (or perhaps find a better school). God can use a good education if the person is not ruined spiritually in the process, or ruined emotionally by attempting something they simply cannot accomplish.

Athletics can be another false value that sets our children up for a poor self-concept. As with education, athletic ability can be a wonderful asset and actually increase self-worth if the child does not make athletics the most important thing in life. Participating in sports can help a child by gaining the respect of peers, encouraging teamwork, helping the child learn to win graciously and accept defeat, and learning to play by the rules. A youngster can also learn that practice brings improvement. All of these positive traits can carry over to the rest of life.

But athletics can also destroy a child's self-worth. Parents and coaches who continually criticize the child's mistakes, and give little praise for doing things right are not providing the acceptance the child needs. Are parents and coaches developing character and healthy competition, or teaching a "win at any cost" philosophy that will later be applied to other areas of life? We can also ask too much of our children in this area, expecting them to succeed in areas where we were weak. Our youngsters should be encouraged to try out for sports, but if they do not make the team they should be praised for having the courage to give it a try. Neither Paul Meier nor Don Ratcliff have much natural athletic ability -- much of that ability is inherited -- so we both learned to do well in other areas instead. We need to teach our children the same thing: learn to compensate by doing well in the areas where you have ability.

By the way, sports are not just for boys -- girls can benefit from athletics just as much as boys, but don't try to make your daughter into a boy since this can hurt her sexual identity. Some fathers prefer sons so much that their daughters try to become boys to gain their acceptance. This produces long-term emotional conflicts and can even result in sexual problems later when the daughter gets married. But do not be overly concerned if your daughter is a bit of a tomboy in the pre-teen years, which is fairly common. Just don't encourage her to try out for left tackle on the high school football team!

A fourth false value is physical appearance. This, along with materialism, is perhaps the most often promoted value in society. Again, how many commercials and television programs feature beautiful people? How many top stars (other than comedians -- people we laugh at) are homely? There is nothing wrong with being beautiful, and it is noted positively several times in the Bible, but taken to the extreme an emphasis on beauty can ruin the self-concept. For example, we fear the message communicated by beauty contests, especially those for children. It won't hurt to praise your children occasionally for how nice they look. But, as we saw earlier in this chapter, praising appearance over and over again with no concern for character and behavior can produce life-long personality problems -- the daughter (or less often, the son) may become a histrionic. When thinness is overvalued, the child may become anorexic.

Children easily learn to base self-worth on appearance. Even if the child is attractive, there is always another girl who has a prettier face, a better figure, less knobby knees, and so on. There is always a fellow who is more handsome, flexes larger muscles, and has a better voice. In many cases the more attractive the person is, the more inferior he or she feels deep down, perhaps because their parents and others place more emphasis upon the child's appearance. What a difference it would make if parents would primarily praise the child's good character and behavior! Character and behavior are correctable, physical defects usually are not. Valuing desirable behavior and attitudes can help the child develop self-worth, which is vital to mental health.

Some children and adults do not recognize hidden bitterness and resentment toward God because God did not design us the way we would like. We need to realize God made us the way we are because he knows our appearance -- whatever it is like -- is basic to his purpose for our lives. We are not wiser than God; he does not make mistakes. On the other hand, we should do the best we can (without going to extremes) with what we have been given. We can usually change things like being overweight. Teenage girls can use a bit of makeup if need be. Clothes can be tasteful, clean, and ironed, even if inexpensive. We can encourage our children to correct the correctable areas of appearance, and accept the rest as part of

God's plan. We can also teach them healthy compensation, learning to concentrate upon the areas where they are more gifted.

The Healthy Church

These and other false values in society contribute to a poor self-concept in children and adults. Unfortunately, certain church activities can also make children feel inferior. Even good people can fall into unhealthy religious practices.

Some active church laypeople, preachers, and missionaries are so busy helping others that their children develop terrible feelings of worthlessness. Paul Meier's sister went through a temporary stage of rebellion because our father was spending too much time doing church work and too little time with the family. Because his daughter was unruly my father resigned his position (in keeping with Titus 1:6), and as a result my sister is now a godly woman who has the highest regard for the father she once rebelled against. Some have suggested that a layperson should only hold one position in the church so that job will be done well and the rest of one's spare time can be spent with the family. We think this is a great idea. Likewise, a minister or missionary who cannot say "no" sometimes for the sake of the family should serve the Lord in some other profession (I Tim. 3:4-5, 5:8). Church members can assist their pastors by little things such as not calling him at night, hiring people to relieve him of mundane chores, and telling others about Christ and encouraging our fellow Christians rather than expecting the pastor to do it all. When all of God's people share the work of the ministry, we are following the example of the early church.

The local church you attend can become one of the major influences on your children's self-concept. If you attend a negative, legalistic church that neglects God's love and forgiveness, you need to go somewhere else! It will permanently damage your child's self-worth. These unhealthy churches somehow convey the idea that God is a mean old man holding a whip, just waiting for us to break one of his rules so he can snap us with the whip or throw us out. How very different from the loving, forgiving God in the Bible! For example, one man known by Don Ratcliff was told by his church that he would go to hell if he missed church three times in a row. After he skipped church a few weeks in childhood, he decided there was no use in returning -- regardless of what he did he was convinced he was bound for hell. He did not attend church again for nearly thirty years. Fortunately he eventually found a loving, accepting church that corrected the misconception.

On the other hand, you may be in a liberal church, hoping to save the sinking ship. You may find that your children will sink with it! Harsh churches tend to attract people who had parents who were rigid, overly demanding, critical, and punished too much. Liberal churches tend to attract people whose parents pampered and indulged them, hardly ever corrected them, and rarely punished their children. You need to be in a church where the Bible is central, where people are coming to Christ, where Christians are growing spiritually, where genuine love is practiced, where the pastor preaches both forgiveness and justice, and where healthy entertainment and other activities are available for your children and teenagers. Children are ruined by rigid churches that stand for the wrong things, or liberal churches that don't stand for anything (for other characteristics of healthy churches, see Getz 1975).

The Bible can help us find a healthy balance in church life. For example, it says that every one of us is less than perfect. We have "dross," the impurities of sin, emotional problems, and other areas of imperfection. God says, "I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities" (Isa. 1:25). We fall short and need improvement. But it is important to see the whole picture biblically. In Proverbs 25:4 Solomon asks God to "remove the dross from the silver, and out comes material for the silversmith." While there is dross, the basic material is silver. How beautiful that God moved Solomon to describe us as such a precious substance! Removing the dross, the sin and other problems, results in "material for the silversmith" -- pure silver for our Maker. The rigid church only sees the dross, while the liberal church only looks at the silver. We have both. Those of us who come from more rigid church backgrounds must never forget that underneath the dross, each of us (and our children) is a silver vessel. Not one of us is inferior to anyone else, although we each have a different, unique design. Every one of us is extremely important to God (Matt. 10:29-31).

A Healthy Self-Love and a Positive View of God

Sometimes parents and churches teach children that self-hatred is a virtue rather than a sin. Many people seem to believe that salvation is the result of obeying certain rules and regulations, tithing, hiding emotions, attending all church services, and constantly reminding themselves of how worthless they really are. These Christians are likely to be chronically depressed -- we see them often in our counseling. They may become withdrawn from others or even become psychotic -- completely out of touch with reality -- because reality as they see it is too painful to bear. They may constantly worry about losing their salvation instead of having the assurance of eternal life (I John 5:11-13). They believe God requires them to be absolutely perfect to be acceptable, so they never really feel forgiven. Those who cannot accept themselves are usually very critical of others as well -- you cannot truly love others until you learn to love yourself in a healthy way.

What does it mean to have healthy self-love? First, the Bible recommends taking care of your body (I Cor. 3:16, 6:19-20, II Cor. 6:16). Healthy eating habits, as well as adequate exercise and recreation, are crucial. We also need healthy sleeping habits -- sleeping not only provides needed rest, but also allows us to dream, which can help us reduce emotional tensions (Bonine 1962, 229-230). The average adult needs between six and ten hours of sleep each night, teens need about nine or ten, elementary aged children need about ten or eleven, preschoolers about twelve, and babies about sixteen to eighteen hours each day. Recreation, such as hiking, camping, and playing games with friends is also important to self-love. Even Christ himself spent much of his three year ministry camping out in the mountains, sometimes with his disciples and sometimes alone.

Besides promoting healthy self-love, we as parents can encourage an accurate self-concept by helping our children have an accurate view of God. The view of God is to some extent related to the concept of the parent. We need to accept our children, complete with their imperfections, spend time with them, and punish them when they do things we know are bad for them in the long run. As a result this should produce a concept of God that is loving, accepting, listening, and disciplining. An accurate concept of God also helps our children have an accurate self-concept, because they are more likely to see themselves as they really are -- which by definition is how God sees us.

True Versus False Guilt

One of the things that can help children have an accurate view of God is to help them separate true and false guilt. True guilt is the uncomfortable, inner awareness that we have violated a moral law of God. It is partly the result of conviction by the Holy Spirit, and partly the conscience. The conscience is molded by many influences in the environment, such as what our parents taught was right or wrong, what they practiced, and what our church taught and practiced. It is also shaped by what our friends said and did, and what we learned from our teachers. The Bible can influence the conscience, although we are also influenced by our own interpretations and sometimes misunderstandings of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is always right, but our consciences can be very wrong. If the conscience is immature, we can do something wrong and not be bothered by it because we do not know it is wrong. Or we can have an overgrown conscience and then the conscience will bother us even when God does not consider what we did to be wrong. This is called false guilt; feeling guilty for something that God and his Word do not condemn.

True guilt is valuable, because it leads us to repentance and right living so we can stay in fellowship with God, as well as have a better self-concept. Some people have a poor self-concept because they need to turn from their sin -- they feel guilty because they are guilty. But others experience false guilt, especially Christians from legalistic churches. They feel guilty for things the Bible does not condemn. For example they may feel guilty for being tempted. It's no sin to be tempted. Even Christ was tempted (Heb. 4:15). But it is a sin to dwell on temptation and yield to it. Paul Tournier (1962, 64) states that false guilt " . . . comes as a result of the judgments and suggestions of men. 'True guilt' is that which results from divine judgment . . . Therefore real guilt is something quite different from that which constantly weights us down, because of our fear of social judgment and the disapproval of men." Hyder (1971, 64-70) adds that "The causes of false guilt stem back to childhood upbringing . . . too rigid expectations or standards imposed by parents."

Satan's Lie

One of Satan's lies is that we are inferior and worthless. The Bible clearly states that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14) and that even the hairs on our head are numbered (Matt. 10:29-33). God sees us as being of value -- not worthy of salvation, but worthwhile, valuable because he created us. We have no right to condemn ourselves, only God has that right, and Christians should leave judging and condemning to God alone. We need to set new goals for ourselves and our children that are realistically attainable, and no longer compare ourselves or our children with others who are more gifted in specific areas. We should compare our performance with what we believe God expects of us. God does not expect us or our children to achieve absolute perfection in this life. But he does want us to seek and follow his will for our lives to the best of our abilities (Hyder 1971, 121-122).

Parenting for Future Generations

A basic idea throughout this book is that how you rear your children makes a great deal of difference. Not only will your child-rearing affect your children, but also generations to come. Consider this warning from God: "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5-6).

Clearly this does not mean that the children are held responsible for what the parents do (Deut. 24:16, Ezek. 18:20). As you study healthy and unhealthy parent-child relationships, the meaning is very clear. It simply means that if we, as parents, live sinful and psychological unhealthy lives, there will be a profound effect upon our children, grandchildren, and perhaps other descendants as well. God is not punishing our offspring for our sins, we are, by not living the right way.

On the other hand, we need to focus our attention on the positive promise in Exodus 20:6 -- God promises to show "love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." A valuable legacy can be left for generations to come by good parenting, an inheritance more valuable than any amount of money we could leave our children.

In the chapters that follow we will continue to examine parenting, with emphasis upon age-specific aspects of child-rearing and child development. We will begin with the child before birth and progress, stage by stage, all the way to adolescence. Seeing specific characteristics and guidelines for each age will help us in "preparing to parent."

Footnotes

1These five factors are described in the following research studies: Aston and London (1972), Bennett (1968, 1971a, 1971b), Clavan and Vatter (1972), Ford and Herrick (1974), Gerber (1973), Greenbaum (1973), and McDanald (1967). They are also considered at a more popular level by Christenson (1970), Getz (1974), Gothard (1972 and 1973), Hunt (1970), Merideth, Timmons, and Dillow (1973), and Narramore (1968).

Chapter Two A New Life Begins

Don and Brenda had been trying for a third child for several years. "Perhaps we should be satisfied with two healthy boys," they thought, but deep within both of them was a longing for a little girl to complete their family. An infertility specialist was not very encouraging. One evening they even went forward in church to have the elders pray for them -- although they were too embarrassed to tell them the request for a baby.

Two weeks later a missed period heightened the excitement. Not too much, though, because there had been several of these false alarms before. Early one morning, Brenda assembled the pregnancy test, and waited for the answer. The minutes seemed like hours, but finally the time was up. The test was positive! For a few moments she savored the fact that she was the only person in the whole world that knew she was pregnant. Finally she decided to wake up Don with the news. They hugged one another, and dared to ask "But will it be a girl?"

Life Before Birth

For you created my innermost being;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 your works are wonderful,
 I know full well.
 My frame was not hidden from you
 when I was made in the secret place.

Psalm 139:13-15

Long ago the psalmist reflected upon the developing child in the womb, emphasizing God's part in the process of growth. This is a particularly interesting scripture considering the fact that little was known about how children developed before birth until the last couple of decades. In the past some even thought the baby was already formed in the father's sperm and simply grew larger as time went by. However, the recent development of photography within the womb shows how beautiful and amazing is God's "knitting."

From the uniting of egg and sperm comes new life, a cell often termed the "ovum" for the first two weeks. The original one cell multiplies repeatedly, although the total amount of space the cells take is no more than the original single cell. By the end of the first two weeks the baby is about the size of the period that ends this sentence.

At about two weeks the cells begin to look different from one another. This is because they will take on different functions with some becoming legs, others becoming the head, still others the arms, and so on. At this point the baby is called an "embryo."

Different parts of the body begin forming at different stages of development. The nervous system, including the brain and spinal cord, and the heart begin developing first. By the fourth week the arms, eyes, legs, and ears can also be seen. At six weeks portions of the mouth and the genitals are forming (Schickedanz, Hansen & Forsyth 1990, 80).

The mother's care for the baby is extremely important at this time. She can care for her child by taking care of herself, avoiding things that can harm the child, and getting good prenatal care. Physicians have discovered that a mother's illness, injury, or exposure to chemicals, drugs, or x-rays can directly affect the unborn child. The potentially serious harm to the developing embryo is generally in the areas of the body that are developing at the time.

For example an injury during the third week of pregnancy is most likely to affect the brain, spinal cord, or heart, and less likely to affect other areas of the body. In contrast, an injury in the eighth week is more likely to damage areas of the mouth, genitals, or ears (although defects in other areas can also result). Injury that occurs after sixteen weeks of age is likely to produce physical defects but not major structural problems.

Fathers, too, must be careful for the sake of the child. If they smoke, they need to quit as soon as possible since children with fathers that smoke are much more likely to develop cancer (John, Savitz and Sandler 1991). Firemen, welders, those who work with paints and solvents, and fathers in the aircraft industry may sometimes breathe toxic fumes. The result can be defective sperm and children more likely to have birth defects (Davis 1991, Peters, Preston-Martin and Yu 1981). A father's use of alcohol may possibly produce birth defects as well (Zigler and Stevenson 1993, 132).

At the ninth week the child is termed a "fetus." At this point the appearance of the baby is clearly different from the fetuses of all other creatures on earth. By the twelfth week the heart is pumping blood throughout the tiny three inch, one ounce body. Four weeks later the mother can begin to feel the movements made by the fetus, although movement actually began long before this point. By twenty weeks hair begins to form (although it is often lost again prior to birth). At twenty-six weeks, six months after conception, the child is sucking, opening its eyes, and can survive outside the womb.

The last five months had been exciting but also a bit unpleasant at times for Brenda. The nausea of morning sickness had begun almost right away, but before long had subsided. Now she felt new energy because of the new level of hormones in her blood.

At the next appointment with the doctor, the whole family watched as an ultrasound picture of the baby was made. How amazing that sound waves can be projected into a woman's body and the reflections make up a picture. "What will it be, a girl or a boy?" Brenda asked. "I cannot be absolutely certain, of course, but it sure looks female to me." Five-year-old Stephen asked, "Does that mean it's a girl or a boy?"

From this point until birth the child continues to grow and the bodily organs mature until he or she is completely ready for life outside the womb. If the baby is born before the full term of pregnancy is complete, special care will probably be needed for the premature infant. Over half of children born in the seventh month survive (Fitch and Ratcliff 1991, 24).

Birth

It is not known what starts the birth process. The first stage of labor, lasting eight to twenty hours with the first child, involves the enlargement of the cervix through which the baby must pass to be born. The enlargement of the cervix occurs through contractions, which at first are mild and irregular, often about fifteen or twenty minutes apart and lasting one minute or less. With time they become more intense until they occur about two minutes apart. As a result of the contractions the cervix expands ("dilates") until it is ten centimeters wide and is large enough for the baby to pass through.

The second stage of birth involves the movement of the child through the cervix and into the outside world. This may take an hour or more with the first child. Generally the head is born first and then the remainder of the body. A few minutes later the mother expels the afterbirth, the third stage of birth.

Giving birth is hard work ("labor" is an apt term) and is painful -- as God said it would be (Gen. 3:16). However it can be a good experience or bad experience depending upon what you make of it. The expectations a mother has greatly influences how she will experience the birth. There are tribes in Africa that migrate from place to place to find food. If one of the women goes into labor while the tribe is migrating, she goes to the side of the road, squats down and has her baby, and then catches up with the rest of the tribe. In Europe, as in most of the world, women generally use natural childbirth, simply gritting their teeth during labor and enduring the pain rather than taking medications. Natural childbirth has also become popular with many American women. Research indicates that cultures that consider birth something to be hidden and fearful tend to have births that are long and difficult. In contrast if birth is considered easy and open to others, brief and less problematic labor is more likely (Mead & Newton 1967). For this reason, Lamaze methods that minimize the expectation of pain, and a hospital birthing room which is open to the father and perhaps others, have proven to make birth a more positive experience for many families.

The boys were praying every night that mommy would have a baby girl. Don and Brenda were careful to tell them, after their prayers were finished, "But we'll love him just as much even if it's a boy." They wondered if the young faith of John and Stephen would be shaken if God blessed them with a son. But, deep within them, they too hoped for a girl. It would complete the family.

Brenda had been leaking water (amniotic fluid) all day, but the doctor was not encouraging. Two weeks overdue, and the baby was making momma very uncomfortable. "Will this baby ever be born?" they wondered as Don and Brenda tried to get to sleep. Suddenly, water came gushing out and they knew it was time to get to the hospital. Once at the hospital, Don and Brenda began several hours of walking up and down the hallways trying to encourage the baby's birth. Finally active labor began, and when she reached ten centimeters Brenda was told to push. After a number of exhausting contractions, the baby's head appeared. A squeeze bulb cleared the mouth and nose, and then the rest of the little one appeared. "It's a baby girl!" the doctor said quietly. With tears in their eyes, Don asked "Are you sure?" For years afterward the couple laughed about that question.

Mental Development

Can an unborn baby learn? Research (Spence and DeCasper 1982) has found that if mothers read a simple story to their unborn babies every day during the last three months of pregnancy, the baby shows a preference for that story shortly after birth. This does not, of course, indicate that the infant understands the story, but rather that they were able to recall (and preferred) the earlier sounds.

There is some relationship between birth weight and IQ (intelligence test) scores. However, there are many exceptions to this: some geniuses weigh only a few pounds at birth and some mentally retarded persons weigh quite a bit when born. If your child did not weigh much at birth, don't worry about it. If the child gains enough weight during the first six months of life there should be little effect on intelligence. To avoid low birth weight, expectant mothers should eat protein every day, drink some milk, take vitamin tablets with iron, and avoid things that can hurt the baby (see chart 2-1).

Chart 2-1

Things to Avoid in Pregnancy

1. Caffeine. Several cups a day can endanger the child mentally and physically. Some doctors allow their pregnant patients a cup or two per day, but excessive use of caffeine has been linked to birth defects (Elan 1980). One researcher claims that the only safe amount is one-tenth of a cup each day!
2. X-rays. Because of the danger for the unborn baby, x-ray technicians use a special apron on every woman who is examined, just in case she is pregnant and does not know it. If the woman knows she is pregnant, it is best to avoid x-rays altogether.
3. Drugs. Many medications that are generally helpful to people become a great danger to the unborn child when the mother takes them. Even aspirins should not be taken without a doctor's approval. Illegal drugs are, of course, also extremely dangerous to the baby's health.
4. Poor Nutrition. Pregnancy is a bad time to go on a diet. While the mother should not overeat, as this can make the baby's delivery more difficult, it is important to get a good balance and adequate amount of the right foods so the child will not be physically deprived. A woman needs to gain at least 27 pounds during pregnancy to avoid having a low birth weight child (Fitch and Ratcliff 1991, 39). Most of that would be gained during the last three or four months.
5. Disease. The mother should be extra careful during pregnancy to avoid being around others who have contagious diseases. Particularly dangerous are German measles and venereal diseases, as these can produce serious birth defects.
6. Smoking. Evidence is accumulating that smoking is dangerous to the unborn. Smaller babies and miscarriages have been associated with mothers smoking. Stillbirths, convulsions, and accelerated heart beat in the newborn are also associated with the mother smoking (Bolton 1983). There is evidence that children can also be physically affected by either parent smoking after birth because the child must inhale some of the smoke.

7. Alcohol. Mothers who drink alcohol are likely to have a baby with "fetal alcohol syndrome" which involves physical abnormalities and retardation. Any amount of alcohol increases the likelihood of this syndrome.

8. Stress. A great deal of stress upon the mother can affect the unborn child because chemicals are released in the mother's body that can be passed on to the child, producing abnormalities such as cleft palate (Stearns and Peer 1956), infant apathy (Newton and Newton 1962), and digestive disorders (Sontag 1941).

9. Poisons. Drinking contaminated water, breathing chemicals from certain sprays, or ingesting poison in some other manner, may result in the unborn child being poisoned.

10. Anesthesia. Lethargy has been noted in many babies born to mothers who received pain-killing medication during birth. Forceps delivery is also more likely. The least amount of anesthesia possible is the preferred amount.

Babies are born intelligent. A great deal of research in recent years shows that newborns can recall sights and sounds several seconds after they experience them and even relate those to new experiences (Freidman 1972). They are also motivated by immediate, repeated rewards for simple actions, such as sucking a nipple more than usual to make a mobile move.

Social, Emotional and Personality Characteristics

What can parents do before the baby is born to assure good emotional and personality development? Nothing can absolutely guarantee health in this area, of course, but it is a good idea for you to work on your marriage and relationship with your parents. This can help you avoid passing on unhealthy influences to your children from your marriage or family of birth. Read *Passages of Marriage* (Minirth, et al. 1991) with your spouse, and take the time to deal with the difficult areas from your past and present. Contact a counselor if you need more help. You'll have your hands full after the baby is born just caring for its needs!

Our advice to parents is that it is much better to wait awhile after marriage before having a baby. You need to be emotionally ready for children. Couples are more likely to get divorced if they have a child during the first two years of marriage than if they wait. It takes a couple of years merely to adjust to living with each other. If you have been married awhile and your marriage is floundering, the idea that having a baby will bring you closer together is nonsense. It will probably drive you further apart. Work out your marital problems first; think about a family later.

From the moment of birth, babies have different personalities. Some cry a great deal, others cry very little. Some sleep quietly, others are restless in their sleep. Some are easier to sooth than others. There are cuddlers, but some babies do not want affection. However, sometimes some aspects of personality change as children develop. Activity level, for example, tends to be quite consistent throughout childhood (Walters 1965).

As noted in chart 2-1, the mother receiving anesthesia during birth affects the newborn baby's activity level. While the effects on the baby's behavior are temporary, the first impressions by the parents are significantly affected. Mothers of these babies feed them less often, respond to them less, and show less affection to them. Mothers report that these drugged babies were also harder to care for, and they related to them quite differently at two weeks of age (Osofsky and Connors 1979). Of course there are different degrees and kinds of anesthesia, and a bit of pain-killing medication just prior to birth may not affect the child at all.

Breast Feeding

The newborn is best able to focus its eyes at a distance of nine inches, which is the distance between the baby and the mother's face during breast-feeding. Breast-feeding is better than bottle-feeding in many respects, especially during the early weeks of life. During the first few days, however, the baby does not get

much milk from the mother because the infant doesn't need it. The fluid from the breast (colostrum) contains millions of maternal antibodies that help protect the child against infections. In addition mother's milk contains proteins missing in other milk, as well as being sterile and inexpensive.

There is also an emotional warmth between the mother and baby during breast-feeding. Whether it promotes bonding or not is debatable. Breast-feeding does cause hormones to be released in the mother that cause the hips to pull back together, restoring her normal figure (Willson, Beecham, and Carrington, 1966, 613). These hormones also serve as a natural tranquilizer for the mother, encouraging feelings of acceptance toward the child (Lidz 1968, 130).

Research indicates that early infant feeding may help teach the baby to take turns (Kaye and Wells 1980). The pauses and bursts of sucking are thought to prepare the child for the taking of turns in conversation, thus aiding the long-term social development of the child.

It is important that breastfeeding not be accompanied by stress and tension. A relaxed approach will make the experience more pleasant for baby and mother alike. One study (McGrade 1968) indicates that babies that have a satisfactory breast-feeding experience as newborns (marked by high but unstressful activity after nipple withdrawal) are more active, happier, and less tense at eight months of age. Newborns that cried and thrashed upon nipple withdrawal were more tense and withdrawn by eight months. Nature has no more beautiful sight than a loving mother breast-feeding her totally dependent baby.

At this writing little Emma Beth is half past two. She gave up breast-feeding over a year ago. Brenda enjoyed the experience, and sometimes has deeply moving memories of her suckling baby daughter. While breast feeding is preferred, it is not always possible or desirable. A child is unlikely to be hurt emotionally if you choose to bottle feed. There was also a closeness for Brenda with their son Stephen, who could not be breast-fed because of a milk allergy.

As your baby gets older, be sure you don't overfeed. Extra fat cells made early in life may never be lost -- if weight is lost later in life the extra cells only shrink but do not go away. As a result there can be a continual battle with being overweight throughout life. There may be danger in joining the "clean your plate" club.

Social Development

A number of research studies confirm the significance of the social relationship between the mother and child. Tape recordings of newborns were played to their mothers forty-eight hours after delivery. All of the mothers were able to select the cry of their own infants from more than thirty that were recorded (Formby 1967). This researcher also found that by the third night after birth mothers almost inevitably woke at the cry of their baby but not to the cry of other babies. These studies are a beautiful illustration of how strong mother-baby relationship can be.

Mothers become attached to their babies in a gradual sequence. Robson (1970, 976) found that until six weeks of age the average mother "experienced impersonal feelings of affection toward her infant, whom she tended to perceive as an anonymous nonsocial object." In the second month, when the infant began to smile and look at things longer, mothers reported stronger feelings of attachment and viewed the baby as a unique individual. After three months had passed, the absence of the infant resulted in unpleasant feelings by the mother and "his imagined loss an intolerable prospect" (Robson 1970, 976). In this study mothers who did not develop an attachment or developed it later than normal generally did not want their baby or had babies with unusually negative behavior.

Children are not only developing a social relationship with the mother, they also have the rudiments of social relationships with others. Researchers have found that newborns can distinguish tape recordings of other infants crying from their own crying (Martin and Clark, 1982). They are also more likely to start crying when they hear other babies cry (Sagi and Hoffman 1976), possibly indicating the early development of feelings for others.

Ambivalence and Depression Among Mothers

The emotional condition of the mother, both before and after birth of the child, is also an important consideration that may influence the child's development. Pregnancy, especially the first pregnancy, can be quite an anxiety-producing experience. All women have ambivalent feelings about pregnancy when they are

pregnant. That is normal. The worst thing a pregnant woman can do is feel guilt about these ambivalent feelings or try to convince herself that she does not have them. If she keeps them pent up inside, they can cause physical changes in her body that can potentially damage her health as well as influence the physical and emotional development of the baby.

The best thing a pregnant woman can do is be aware of her ambivalence -- such as the positive and negative aspects of having a baby and fears of the delivery -- and talk them out with her husband and other significant people in her life. It is especially good to talk with another woman who has gone through the same experience. There is absolutely nothing abnormal or sinful about having these feelings. It would be abnormal if you did not have them. They will not do you any harm if you talk them out and resolve them. It is also important to have your emotional and spiritual needs met -- have devotions every day, get plenty of rest, go out with your husband once a week or more, listen to relaxing Christian music, and continue having sexual intercourse as often as before pregnancy. Some medical textbooks recommend discontinuing sexual relations in the eighth month of pregnancy, while others indicate that sex can continue until delivery.

After the birth of the child it is not unusual for the mother to experience depression. If extreme, it is called "postpartum" (after-birth) depression. This serious form of depression begins soon after delivery and can last for months. Women with such extreme depression need antidepressant medications followed by long-term counseling sessions to help them accept motherhood.

On the other hand, most women feel somewhat let down after delivery. This is partly because they have lost some blood and are somewhat anemic. They also face getting up all hours of the night to change and feed the baby. But if the mother gets some help, eats right, catches up on her sleep, the depression soon leaves. It also helps if the baby settles down to a more regular schedule in a few weeks. If the child does not develop a regular schedule by one or two months of age, it may be necessary to let the baby cry itself to sleep. Before you resort to this, be certain there are no physical problems that are involved.

Problems at Birth

Bill and Karen's (not their real names) second child was unusual. The infant needed a special feeding tube to eat, and seemed unusually lethargic. As months went by, they realized she was not developing like other children. At two years of age she still needed help to sit upright. At four she still had not said her first word, and still could not eat solid food. It was clear that the youngster was severely retarded. While they occasionally shed tears about the difficulties, Bill and Karen came to accept the child as she was, and even take pride in the very small advancements she made. "Perhaps God gave her to us so we can more effectively minister to others who have children that are less than perfect," they concluded.

Difficulties can develop during pregnancy and at birth, producing birth defects in the newborn child. God has arranged a mother's physical body so that most fetuses with birth defects result in miscarriages during the first three or four months of pregnancy. The average mother will have about one miscarriage in every four or five pregnancies. But God allows some of these children with handicaps to be born.

There are a number of reasons for birth defects. Down's syndrome, for example, is a genetic problem producing unusual facial characteristics, a large tongue, and usually some health problems. Most are mentally retarded to some degree. The mother drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome, resulting in slow growth, retardation, and deformities in various parts of the body. There are a number of possible physical causes for birth defects, many of which can be minimized by good prenatal care and following the guidelines in chart 2-1.

Why does God allow birth defects? There are a number of possible reasons (Ratcliff 1980 and 1985b). Birth defects are the result of natural processes that are less than perfect because of the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden. Because Adam and Eve sinned, both human nature and the natural world are now abnormal, different from what God intended. Birth defects are the result of our abnormal, fallen world, a side-effect of human freedom. Yet God can sometimes use this abnormality for good -- Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop (1979) note that disabilities have the potential of bringing out compassion and caring from caretakers, characteristics that might not otherwise exist.

In the end, however, none of these explanations helps parents much because the problem is not as intellectual as it is emotional. Perhaps the best that can be done is to acknowledge that no one has the entire

answer (Deut. 29:29) and affirm Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

One can expect parents to go through predictable stages of disbelief, anger towards God (or doctors, or spouse, or others), anger towards self, and grief as they attempt to cope. Hopefully the stages will conclude with resolution of the conflict, marked by greater maturity and understanding than before. Sometimes, however, parents can deny the problem completely or withdraw from others.

The families of children with birth defects must sometimes deal with placement and care issues as well. Is it better to try to help the child at home, find a special school, or place the child in a special facility? The answer is not always obvious, and we must be careful not to criticize a specific parent's decision. As Christians, we should do everything we can to help shoulder the burden of those who have children with birth defects (Ratcliff 1985b and 1990).

Spiritual Development

Tony and Adina prayed every night for their soon-to-be-born child. Sometimes Tony would lay his hands on the bulging tummy of his wife, fervently asking God to protect and guide their child both during the pregnancy and throughout life. After he was born, the couple affirmed their commitment by bringing the child forward in church for formal dedication.

The development of the child's spiritual life begins very early. At one time people thought that there need be little concern about such things until adolescence or at the earliest during the school years because the young child cannot understand theological abstractions. More recently greater attention has been given to the earliest aspects of spiritual development, even in infancy (Ratcliff 1992a).

What has often been overlooked by parents and Christian educators is that spiritual development is not just a mental understanding of religion (such as reciting the Lord's prayer or making an affirmation of faith). While understanding is important, much of our later spiritual thinking and acting is built upon the early feelings, impressions, and experiences related to God, church, and our parents. For example, a person may have a difficult time trusting God because parents are inconsistent and unavailable during infancy. The mental, social, and emotional foundations laid by the parents, good or bad, can make it easier or harder for the child to have faith in God.

McDonald (1981, pp. 31-35), a Christian psychiatrist, believes he has traced some of his patients' spiritual and emotional difficulties to experiences in the womb. While this may seem far-fetched at first glance, there is increasing evidence that the emotions felt by the mother influence the developing baby (David 1981). This influence occurs because of the chemical reactions of the mother that accompany traumatic events or other very negative emotional experiences. The chemical reactions in the mother can easily be transferred to the infant through the umbilical cord along with the nutrients from the mother. The result is a possible emotional influence that may affect the child throughout life, unless he or she receives counseling and therapy.

What can parents do to help the child spiritually during pregnancy and immediately after birth? The best spiritual foundation is good physical, mental, and emotional health. Guidelines for accomplishing these have been emphasized throughout this chapter. The mother should take care of herself emotionally and physically to give the baby every advantage spiritually. Spiritual development cannot be completely separated from other areas of development at any point of life, and especially in the earliest years.

An emotionally healthy home environment is just as important after the child is born. Both the mother and the father need to give the newborn the care that is needed. The presence of a lot of tension and discord may not be understood mentally by the infant, but can cause distress. Many researchers have found a link between the understanding of the parents and the understanding of God (Hyde 1990). This underscores the importance of a strong emotional bond between the parents and the child -- those early feelings of attachment (or lack of attachment) very easily and unconsciously may transfer to God and spiritual faith. We have met numerous clients in our counseling experience who mentally want to have faith and confidence in Christ, but are emotionally troubled by long buried childhood and even infant experiences that

keep them from vibrant spiritual living. We will examine the role of infant experiences upon spiritual development in greater detail in the next chapter.

Churches also have a role in helping the family with a newborn. The dedication of babies often includes promises to nurture the child spiritually, pledged by both the parents and members of the church congregation. What can the church do for newborns and their families?

We can help expectant and new parents by providing classes on the care of babies. These classes can encourage authoritative parenting of newborns (see chapter one), reading and discussing good books on parenting, talking with experienced parents to learn from their experiences. Those in parenting classes should commit themselves to being good parents by drawing up specific guidelines they want to follow as parents. Teachers of such classes should help prospective parents imagine themselves in specific problem situations and deciding how they should respond. It may help to supplement the classes with hands-on experience with children, perhaps in the nursery, teaching Sunday school, or babysitting, and then reporting back to the class on what happened. We have driver training for teenagers, so why not training for prospective parents? Isn't being a good parent as important than being a good driver?

What else can churches do? Brenda and Don will never forget the kindness of church members providing meals for the first few days after release from the hospital. Those meals eased adjustment to life with their beloved newborn. The church can provide practical help such as counseling, understanding, and sometimes even financial help for parents of children with birth defects. Finally, the church should be sure that the quality of newborn care in the nursery is the very best possible, not just an afterthought.

The months of development before birth and the new presence of a baby in the house are an exciting time for many couples. Don Ratcliff, the "Don" of Don and Brenda, would not trade anything for the joy and excitement of being present at the birth of all three of his children. The first author of this book shares in the excitement about birth; he enjoyed delivering babies more than any other experience during his medical school training. With the psalmist quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we too stand in wonder of God's "knitting."

Chapter Three

Babies and Toddlers

Emma Beth, now two and one-half years old, has drastically changed since she was born. She grew from a helpless little baby who even needed her head supported, to the young girl who cannot imagine why one would walk when you can run. She once loved to be cuddled all day long, but now only cuddles when she first wakes up -- the rest of the time she is constantly occupied with other things. The helpless infant could only cry to help us guess what was wrong, our toddler not only tells us what she wants but keeps up a running dialogue on everything all day long. She tripled her weight in two years (let's hope that never happens again!) and should gain another 11 pounds by her third birthday.

Of course not all children develop at the same rate. Sickness that lasts over several weeks can slow down the growth, although after they get well these children grow faster to make up for lost time. There are wide variations in normal growth rates. By the way, there is almost no relationship between the speed or amount of physical growth and eventual intelligence.

Dr. Lidz (1968, 117) at Yale University comments that life changes more during infancy than at any other time. If parents fail to provide proper physical care, the child will suffer with ill health, perhaps for the rest of life. It is especially important to beware of dehydration, in which the baby loses water through vomiting or diarrhea -- severe dehydration requires immediate hospitalization or the child may die. Social interaction during infancy and toddlerhood is also important -- neglect in this area will result in emotional problems and inadequate intellectual growth.

An improper diet can influence the infant's intellectual capacity, since all of the brain cells a person will ever have are produced by six months of age (Ziai 1969, 48). After six months of age, brain cells may enlarge but no more new cells will ever be formed. This is why the infant needs plenty of protein, primarily from milk, during those first six months. Some mothers in poverty feed their babies Kool-Aid because they cannot afford much milk. The result is fewer brain cells for their children for the rest of their lives. Even programs like Head Start cannot make up for these kinds of deficiency because they come too late. How much better it would be if they would breast-feed them! Satisfying physical needs is extremely important during infancy and toddlerhood.

Mental Development

Jean Piaget (1950), the famous Swiss researcher, described the infant as being in the sensory-motor stage of development. This is because the baby gains so much ability in using the senses (hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, etc.) and learns so many motor skills (crawling, walking, and so on).

During the first month, the baby learns by repeating the reflexes with which he or she is born, such as sucking, crying, blinking, and breathing. During the second month, the infant learns that he or she can control some of these activities. The baby sticks the thumb in the mouth, stares, sucks, and makes noises at will. During the next few months play, imitation, and investigation of objects with the mouth and hands begin. Before long children start crawling, and babies often begin walking by the end of the first year. He or she tries to directly experience everything available because this is the only way of learning at this age.

To deal with the natural and desirable interest in everything within reach, parents should childproof the house. The average American home contains many poisons and medications that an exploring infant could get into, such as furniture polish, aspirins, and insecticides. The major cause of death in infancy is accidents, often because they investigate these dangerous things. Yet infants who grow up in homes where they are constantly getting their hands slapped for investigating tend to become adults who are rigid in their thinking and fearful of exploring new ideas. We personally know of one infant who died from drinking furniture polish when he was supposed to be napping. It can happen to any one.

The average one-year-old can say about one or two words, like "dada" and "momma." Some can say a few more words than this while others do not start speaking until several months later. The rate of speech development does not predict the amount of intelligence the child will eventually have, unless the infant is

very far behind. Do not push your infant -- accept and enjoy the child as he or she is. Even Albert Einstein was said to be a late developer. Just give the child a wide range of experiences, and he or she will move on to the next stage when physically ready to do so.

The toddler is in the second stage of mental development, according to Piaget, when he or she learns that words stand for objects and actions. During infancy most children babble a great deal. Even at six months of age they understand the tones of language, as well as what the natural rhythms of speech (Kaplan and Kaplan 1971). At the beginning of the toddler stage, about fifteen months of age, most children are using single words to name some familiar things such as "mommy," "daddy," "dog," and "eat." They combine such words with babbling until they start putting two or more words together, usually at about eighteen to twenty-four months of age. The average child can talk in sentences fairly well by three years of age, which marks the end of the toddler stage. Language development depends a good deal on how much the parents talk to the child, as well as whether he or she has older brothers and sisters to learn from. Parents should encourage their child's speech by listening to their sometimes halting statements, and restating words and phrases that are unclear (do this without scolding or criticism). Toddlers learn to think out loud by talking to themselves, which is perfectly normal.

Yet toddlers are also very self-centered, believing that the whole world revolves around them. An eighteen-month-old's logic consists primarily of impulses to carry out selfish desires. He or she cannot think ahead to the future and thinks primarily of the present, frequently forgetting the lessons learned from recent experiences. Some adults in today's society still appear to be operating with the logic of the toddler! Gradually, children surrounded by a healthy family environment learn that the universe does not revolve around them. They learn that they are important to God, even though they are not the center of everyone's attention. As the psalmist stated:

"When I consider your heavens,
 the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars,
 which you have set in place,
 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 the son of man that you care for him?
 You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings,
 and crowned him with glory and honor."
 (Psalm 8:3-5)

Social and Emotional Characteristics

Socialization and affection are just as important as physical needs for the infant and toddler. As noted in the last chapter, the ability to trust develops during infancy. At this time they will either become basically trusting of others or basically distrustful. What makes the difference? The answer is how trustworthy the parents are in meeting the child's basic needs (Erikson 1963). The baby is among the most helpless and dependent of all God's creatures and without enough support the infant will struggle for emotional survival. Later, during toddlerhood, too much support can lead the infant to be overly dependent. At that point the parents must strike a balance between too much and too little support.

The Need for Stimulation

During World War II, many European infants were placed in foundling homes due to the death or disappearance of their parents. They were cared for by nurses at a ratio of one adult for every eight to twelve babies. They were fed well and received good medical attention, but received very little stimulation because the nurses were so busy. As a result of this lack of stimulation thirty percent of them died of malnutrition within the first year. Most of those who survived could not stand, walk, or talk by the age of four, and had become permanently and severely mentally retarded (Spitz 1945). This condition in which the infant refuses to eat and literally starves itself to death is known as marasmus, also called "failure to thrive."

Marasmus also exists in the United States, generally in homes where parents are physically abusive or where the father is an alcoholic. Sometimes these babies must be legally taken out of their homes and placed in foster homes, either permanently or until their parents learn to take care of their children. But if

caught in time, and given a lot of physical stimulation, some of these infants recover and live fairly normal lives afterward (Evans 1972).

Paul Meier knew of a very small, thin six-year-old boy who illustrates the result of little stimulation. As a baby, his mother worked long hours and left him daily with his grandmother. Unfortunately the grandmother could not tolerate children, so she put him in a crib in front of a TV every day. The television was in a small room with nothing and no one else in it; the TV was his sole companion. Throughout the day his only human contact was when his grandmother brought in food and laid it in the crib. By age six he was the size of an average three-year-old and could not talk except for repeating TV commercials, which he did over and over again. When asked questions, he would spout some TV commercial quite accurately. While a number of people at the psychiatric hospital tried to help him, he was permanently injured physically and mentally. After his mother received some training, he was returned to her custody.

This "TV Kid" is an extreme example of the widespread neglect of children, that is more common than many of us would like to think. Young children can be seen playing outside much of the night in some inner city areas, and even if they are inside they get little attention. We weep for them.

What are some other effects of little stimulation of infants? Perhaps some research with animals can give us some clues. Puppies who were restricted to cages developed very unusual behavior when they grew up. When allowed to leave their cages, they became overly excited by anything new in their environment. They began to whirl so violently that they would skin their heads against nearby walls. They also ran around the room, going from object to object but failing to pay very much attention to anything for long. These deprived dogs also had great difficulty getting along with normally reared dogs that were near them (Melzack 1969). Perhaps this suggests that hyperactivity and poor social relationships can sometimes be related to lack of stimulation and neglect during early childhood. Without question, people -- like animals -- are powerfully affected by the amount and type of stimulation received in infancy (many other studies also show this fact -- see Hall, Lamb and Perlmutter 1986, 193-194).

Mother Substitutes

Can anyone take mother's place? Thirty or forty years ago the question would have seemed crazy, but today many seem to feel that the mother's role is not all that important. At present about half of mothers go back to work before the baby is one year old. About 45% of these youngsters are cared for by relatives other than parents and about the same percentage stay in private homes that offer day-care. During the second year, only 28% are with relatives, while nearly 20% move into group care (day-care homes stay at 45%). Group care escalates even further during the third year (Bachrack, Hown, Mosher and Simizu 1985).

What are the effects of mother-absent care of infants? Most of the studies that show no problems (and sometimes positive results for deprived children) are conducted in extremely high quality centers run by university researchers. These nearly perfect situations are a far cry from typical day-care homes and centers in the United States, where staff are underpaid and there is little individual attention for babies. Not only is disease much more likely when babies are in day care, but Belsky (1988) shows that they are more aggressive, obedient, withdrawn, and not as attached to parents. These tendencies last at least into the school years, when they also get lower grades.

While it may be unpopular to say this in our modern era, infants need at least one consistently available person for security and socialization, or there will probably be some kind of permanent emotional and intellectual damage. For most families this would be the mother (natural or adoptive).

We strongly advise those of you who are married working mothers, especially if you have a baby, to quit your jobs. Don't be afraid to deprive your children of material things if you can give them your time instead. Personal, loving attention is far more important than having the latest and fanciest clothes and toys.

As in infancy, mother substitutes during the toddler years present a serious problem. Any prolonged separation from the mother during this stage can result in a loss of initiative or even the determination to survive. Many children in the United States are being farmed out to day care centers, many of which are very detrimental to the child's mental health. High quality day care, with adequate staff and good materials for learning, possibly may be beneficial for underprivileged children. But the cost of day care is usually so expensive that it does not pay for the mother to work outside the home.

What makes for high quality day care? Some researchers suggest that there be at least one teacher for every three children. Second, the adults need to talk to each child a great deal (Belsky 1988, Hall Lamb and Perlmutter 1986, 414). Third, care must be taken to minimize the spread of disease. In other words, the best day care is as much like a good home as possible. We are sure few day care centers can accomplish even these three guidelines consistently. Why not simply stay home and be sure your child gets what is needed? If you are a single parent, perhaps a relative can take on the parent role while you work, but this is clearly a second-best alternative to parental care.

The importance of the parent staying home was emphasized in a study of prisoners that was done by distinguished London psychiatrists (Brown 1966, 1048). They concluded that the main factors contributing to the criminal behavior of the prisoners were "multiplicity of care and lack of stable parent figures in childhood." Fathers are also important to young children. Another study showed that boys whose father were not present for a considerable amount of time during toddlerhood and the preschool years had "more antisocial behavior than those whose father [were] consistently present" (McCandless 1967, 173). Either father or mother absence has many negative results on children (Hall, Lamb and Perlmutter 1986, 416-419; Youst 1992, 23-30).

Ideally, toddlers should have their mothers home with them during the day, and both parents home to interact with during evenings and weekends. The high divorce rate in America is separating children from their fathers, and in most cases the mothers are forced by economics to go to work, so children are deprived of a stable relationship with their mothers. The psychological toll on children of divorced parents is enormous, and lasts for many years, as we will see later in this book. God's word says, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mark 10:9).

If a child loses one or both parents through death, it is time for grandparents, other close relatives, or close friends to step in and help the toddler re-establish a close mother- or father-child relationship as soon as possible, even if the close relative or friend does not live in the same house. Children need two parents! In these circumstances, the surviving parent should seriously consider remarriage to a stable Christian person. As the Apostle Paul stated, "I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander" (I Tim. 5:14).

Relating to Other Children

By two years of age, the toddler should begin to develop relationships with other children. If the child has been able to trust the parents, he or she should be able to express and assert the self with others, even though sometimes this will be a bit crude at first. With encouragement and correction by parents and other adults, the toddler will begin to develop social skills (junior church can also be a place to work on social skills at this age). The presence of other children after the second birthday is very important because the toddler is emotionally ready to learn social skills by this age. This does not mean the child needs to be in day-care all day, which is too much for most toddlers. But an hour or two each week with other children, supervised with one or more trustworthy adults, can be a good experience.

One important social skill is especially important: sharing. The foundation for unselfishness, sharing, and not stealing are laid during the toddler stage. Our children have lots of sibling rivalry just like other children, but they also share because we praise them whenever they share with each other or with us. We try to set the example by sharing many of our things with them. When a toddler takes a toy out of another's hands, we slap the child's hand or spank. This is stealing, in a primitive sort of way. It is not too early to teach the toddler that coveting a neighbor's possessions is wrong.

Don Ratcliff was once contacted about a five-year-old who could not adjust to school. As I spoke to the parents it became apparent that he had never been around other children! The parents had no neighbors or relatives with children, and the boy had accompanied the parents to adult Sunday School and church all his life. It was no wonder that he was terrified by a room of active five-year-olds! I suggested that the parents take the

child out of school and gradually expose him to a few children for a couple of hours each day. After a few weeks he had developed enough social skills to attend school. How much better it would have been if he had gained those skills as a toddler!

Toddlers sometimes develop imaginary friends that they talk to. This is normal. Their fantasy life helps them practice talking and also helps them deal with conflicts they are experiencing in ways that are less threatening than real life.

Sit back and watch your children play house. It is quite revealing to see how our children interpret family activities and communication. In fact, many child psychiatrists do just that -- it is called play therapy -- to analyze what is going on in the family and is causing the child's conflicts. They use the information to help the child and the parents to resolve those conflicts. By watching the children play, parents may be able to see misunderstandings and potential problems and either correct the child or correct their own actions as needed. It is also great fun to see their recreations of family life!

Pacifiers and Thumb Sucking

Mothers frequently ask about pacifiers and thumb sucking. We think pacifiers are fine, although they can be dangerous if the parent ties them around the neck of the infant or toddler. While this keeps the pacifier from getting lost, the child could fall, catch the string on something, and choke. Also, worn-out pacifiers should be thrown away and replaced, because the rubber end of the pacifier can break loose and choke a toddler who bites through it.

However, infants and toddlers generally need a good deal of sucking and other mouth activity. Children who suck on a pacifier as much as they want during infancy and the first half of the toddler stage generally do not suck their thumbs as much when they leave these stages. We have found this to be the case with their children, and we both have had children that refused pacifiers completely even in infancy.

If your children suck their thumbs, the best advice we can give is not to worry about it -- this is quite normal. Babies even suck their thumbs in the womb! Just ignore thumb sucking and it will probably stop when they enter school, because of the teasing of other children. Some parents are afraid that thumb-sucking will result in buck teeth, but research (Ziai 1969) indicates this is rarely the case. About 20 percent still suck their thumbs even after their sixth birthday (Freedman and Kaplan 1967, 1383). If an older child is sucking the thumb because of anxiety, family counseling might be considered.

Personality Development

By the time the child is old enough to go to school, most of the personality and character is established. An emotionally healthy, reflective child will be greatly enriched by his new contact with teachers, other children, and studies. However, if the roots of anxiety are laid in infancy through lack of acceptance, the child is more likely to fear the unknown and feel threatened by school.

Mothers need to be unconditionally accepting of their babies if the baby is later to have healthy self-acceptance, a good conscience, and a belief that he or she is relatively free (McDanald 1967, 74). On the other hand, if the baby is only loved part of the time (such as only when quiet), undue anxiety, guilt and hostility are more likely which can produce compulsive or antisocial actions. In other words, if babies are not given a lot of attention and affection, they may become overly concerned with being perfect as adults, or possibly have little or no conscience.

Many years ago Harry and Margaret Harlow (1965), a husband and wife team, did interesting research that also shows how important affection is. They took a group of young monkeys away from their mothers and made them choose between two imitation mothers. One "mother" was made of wire and had a baby bottle attached which was kept full of milk. The other "mother" was a soft, terry cloth mother, but with no milk bottle. The monkeys would get milk from the wire mother, but ran to the soft terry cloth mother whenever they were frightened. The soft touch and constant, loving care is crucial in infancy. Be a soft terry cloth mother, not a wire mother!

Once the child becomes a toddler, at about 15 months, it is possible to meet his or her desires too much. Overly indulged toddlers may become too optimistic and expect the world to give them their every wish, as their parents did when they were youngsters. They may give up quickly when success does not come immediately. Parents must not become overly concerned about the effects of minor stresses on babies and toddlers. Psychological trauma and deprivation are never desirable, but some natural stress can be

beneficial. Lidz (1968, 88) notes that overprotection in early life is more likely to produce "colorless individuals," while the presence of some difficulty can strengthen the personality.

Toddlerhood is a crucial stage in the development of basic self-trust and self-confidence. A domineering, overly demanding overprotective mother will develop in her toddler a lack of self-trust, self-worth and initiative. A sense of worthlessness results from constantly not living up to parental expectations. While discipline is needed (as will be emphasized shortly), it must never be at the expense of self-worth. The parents need to recognize and praise positive, self-controlled behavior.

Sometimes parents get into the trap of seeing their child as an extension of the self, expecting him or her to complete parents' lives by living out the life they did not or could not live. This sometimes leads to overdependence and limiting the child's self-direction and independence. When the mother does this, and the husband is absent or quite passive, it can help create severe psychological problems for the child (Lidz 1972). Overprotection is a dangerous threat to healthy personality development.

Heredity or Environment?

Debates have gone on for years questioning whether heredity (genetics and other biological factors one is born with) or the environment (everyday events) influence the child the most. Two generations ago there was an overemphasis upon heredity -- people believed that a person was a criminal because of an inherited criminal mind, a head that was shaped like a criminal, and similar foolishness. Someone once said, "heredity is what a man believes in until his son begins to behave like a delinquent."

Then came a generation that blamed nearly everything on the environment and ignored heredity. Personality was thought to be purely the result of the rewards and punishments that parents provided. Today we know that there is some truth in both ideas. Babies are born with different dispositions, as mentioned in the last chapter. For example, children have an inherited activity level. Most boys are more active than most girls because they have a higher level of androgen in their blood. However, basic dispositions can be encouraged or discouraged. They can be shaped and developed to some extent by the experiences kids have in childhood, especially early childhood. As we will see in the section on spiritual development, the heredity vs. environment question affects how we see the spiritual nature of the child as well.

Birth Order and Child Roles

Does birth order make a difference in personality development? While this idea has probably been exaggerated, and we must allow for many exceptions to the rules, there are some general personality trends observed according to order of birth. Older children are more likely to have demands placed on them, so often they become perfectionists. As adults they are more likely to achieve success, but enjoy it less while wishing they could have done more. Second children are sometimes more shy and polite, trying to please everyone. They may arbitrate differences between the other children. Subsequent children are often more outgoing and enjoy life more than the first-born, but also be less successful. The youngest child is more likely to be indulged and thus may become selfish, dependent and less mature.

Don Ratcliff can recall how his children came to have some of the above trends. With my oldest son, his mother and I -- like many new parents -- were concerned that John develop normally and do well. Really we were too concerned. When he was nine or ten months old but still not walking, we began to wonder if he was ok. We encouraged him to take his first steps, over and over again. On his first birthday he took off walking on his own, with little help from us. As he neared age two we wondered why he was not talking more. Was there a problem? We worked and worked on helping him say words. Then the speech part of his brain kicked in and he has not stopped talking since then (unlike many boys, he is extremely verbal, something that often goes with being left-handed). These are just a few examples of the many times we pushed him to do well. Perhaps the extra pushing was because he was the only child taking our attention! Today, as a ten-year-old, John is extremely bright, but also a perfectionist with himself and others. Our second son, Stephen, received a more relaxed parenting approach. After all, we had learned how to do it with John, and now two children took our time and attention. We had also learned that IQ does not relate very much to physical development. We let him be a child. He seems to enjoy life more than his older brother, and is very social. But Stephen is also an

exception to the trends, as he does not fit the other characteristics of second born children. And we are purposefully trying to avoid indulging Emma Beth so she will not fit the pattern for youngest children. But we must admit it is hard, especially since she is the only girl! Parents can make the difference in whether a particular child will fit the birth order trends or be an exception. Birth order effects are clearly learned, because kids are treated differently, not the result of heredity. Perhaps that explains why there are so many exceptions to the trends.

Sometimes children take on special roles within the family, regardless of birth order, such as scapegoat, baby, pet, miniature husband or wife, and peacemaker. Most of these roles are harmful and to be avoided. Another tendency is for children of older parents to be more serious minded than children of young parents.

Twins

About one in eighty-nine births produces twins, and about one-third of these are identical twins. Older mothers are more likely to have twins (Schichedanz, Hansen, and Forsyth, 1990, 74-75). We think twins are a special blessing from the Lord. But having twins also gives parents added responsibility. The American tradition is to dress twins alike and have them do everything alike. But studies have shown that this is not the best thing for them psychologically (Freedman and Kaplan 1967, 1493). It's best to deal with them as separate individuals. Respect differences in their tastes and opinions. Don't reward, praise, or punish them at the same time, but do so individually. It is better if they wear different styles of clothing, depending on their own tastes. It is even recommended that they attend different classes in school.

Discipline

Discipline should be kept to a minimum during the first year of life. If the areas where the baby plays have been adequately baby-proofed, there will not be much need for discipline. At about eight or nine months of age parents may begin saying "no" as they pull the baby away from forbidden objects. This will need to be repeated many times for most children. After ten or fifteen times of saying "no" and pulling away the child, some parents may wonder if they have a slow learner on their hands, but this is simply the normal way children learn at this age.

Sometime after the first birthday babies learn that they too can say "no!" This is the beginning of what James Dobson (1970) terms "willful defiance," where the child challenges parental authority. He or she is saying (by tone of voice, if not using these actual words), "Oh yeah? Who's gonna make me?" The child is wanting to know who is boss, and the parent needs to let them know the answer.

Dr. Dobson makes a distinction between willful defiance and childish irresponsibility. All children are irresponsible at times, simply forgetting to do what is asked or accidentally spilling the milk at dinner. Spanking is completely inappropriate for irresponsible behavior. Cleaning up the mess or not being allowed to play for a few minutes are more appropriate reactions to these situations. Punishment using physical contact should be reserved for those (hopefully) rare situations where the child is clearly calling into question the parent's right to be in charge.

At first the punishment for defiance will be a slap on the hand. Dobson (1978) recommends that this not be done prior to fifteen months of age. We suggest that this not be a hard and fast rule -- children become openly defiant at different ages. Slapping before the first birthday is always inappropriate, and there are perhaps some children that never become defiant -- although neither of us have such a child in our families!

We do not believe in child abuse in any form. Punishment by striking a child is dangerous for some parents because their anger can make them hit harder than they intended. A good rule of thumb is that if the striking leaves a mark, it was too hard. Yet if the child does not cry, it probably was not hard enough. One thump on the hand is usually enough at this age.

The Bible makes clear that discipline is central to child-rearing. Consider these passages:

"He who spares the rod hates his son,
but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."
(Prov. 13:24)

"Discipline your son, for in that there is hope."
(Prov. 19:18)

"Folly is bound up in the heart of the child,
but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him."
(Prov. 22:15).

"Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.
Punish him with the rod
and save his soul from death."
(Prov. 23:13-14)

"The rod of correction imparts wisdom,
but a child left to himself disgraces his mother."
(Prov. 29:15)

"Discipline your son, and he will give you peace;
he will bring delight to your soul."
(Prov. 29:17)

These verses are especially relevant for rearing the two- and three-year-old, for it is then that the need for discipline really blossoms. Toddlerhood is one of the most trying stages for parents because the child is curious about everything you call a "no-no." By removing many of these "no-no's" the youngster can still be allowed and even encouraged to follow the natural bent toward exploration. During the first fifteen months of life parents should encourage the child to be as independent as possible. But during the next twenty-one months or so, the toddler stage, they must teach the child to respect limits and not give in to the immediate desires. Of course the parents should still encourage a healthy degree of independence.

Don Ratcliff and his wife Brenda were very loving and nurturing parents, and yet we remember spanking our older son or slapping his hands for open rebellion (sometimes repeatedly) during that crucial time between fifteen months of age and the third birthday. By encouraging independence and exploration, yet spanking him for willful disobedience, he came out of the experience well behaved for his age. On the other hand, he continued to have a healthy degree of independence at the same time. Some children rebel beyond their third birthday, but for our oldest son that birthday brought on a new era of relative peace -- although he still needed an occasional spanking. As he grew older he tried hard to please us, doing his chores and going to bed when asked without complaining, and he rarely needed more than a sad and scornful look to correct his behavior. We kept the paddle handy though. In addition the younger children were easier to discipline than he was, because they followed his good example. Of course, some children are more obstinate and willful than others, seemingly from birth, but consistent predictable discipline usually keeps the defiance to a minimum.

In disciplining the child and setting firm limits, which is absolutely necessary, parents must also be realistic as to what is expected in a child at this age. Parents are still learning what can realistically be expected of a child when rearing their first-born. As noted earlier, many of them become quite perfectionistic because their parents expected too much of them as they grew up.

We as parents are frequently very disappointed when we have just spanked our child for getting into something forbidden, shouldn't, only to find the youngster doing it again five minutes later. The right thing to do, in our opinion, is to patiently spank him or her again, rather than to throw up our hands and scream. Children at the toddler stage have very short attention spans and short memories. They are also unlikely to understand complex reasoning, which is a waste of time at this age. Verbal reproofs are sometimes adequate, but if the child is openly rebelling spanking is more effective. Parents should be aware of these age characteristics and realize the do's and don'ts may need to be repeated many times before a toddler understands them. Although the behavior of the toddler may become exasperating, especially when it results in the destruction of some precious object, or in a mess that takes time to clean up, what the child really needs at this stage of life is calm parents.

Sometimes parents get into the habit of yelling at their children. This is a very unhealthy characteristic, as it threatens the child's self-esteem and self-worth. As James Dobson has sometimes commented, even good parents can become screamers because the loudness scares the child (at least the first few times) and temporarily stops them. Before long it takes a yet louder and louder noise to stop them until yelling at the

child becomes a way of life. It is far healthier for parent and child alike to stop the screaming and simply back up threats with action. Quietly and calmly tell children what punishment will come if they disobey, and then follow up on your promise. A single, gentle warning is enough. Screaming is unnecessary.

Discipline, as well as the general care of children, is made far more difficult today because the average family is separated from grandparents and other extended family members. With one family in four moving each year, there are fewer relatives to talk with and help care for the children. Books and television programs often provide confusing and conflicting advice (Collins 1971, 4).

One of the results is that parents frequently make mountains out of molehills, worrying about things that are absolutely normal -- especially with the first child. For example, thumb-sucking, genital play, and security objects (blankets, teddy bears, etc.) are all normal ways in which infants gain comfort.

The Bible emphasizes that children learn morality and wisdom through discipline. Young children often imitate and try to please their parents to avoid punishment for being bad, and to gain approval for being good.

Typical Problems

Crying

What can be done for a crying baby? The key, of course, is to find what causes the crying. The source of discomfort can be anything from pain to boredom. Here are a few suggestions for comforting a crying baby:

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1. Feeding the child food or milk
 2. Increasing or decreasing temperature by adding or removing clothing
 3. Singing or talking to the child
 4. Burping the child to remove gas bubbles
 5. Rubbing or touching the baby with a soft object or with your skin (sometimes holding tightly will help)
 6. Rocking the child
 7. Changing the position of the child, carrying the baby
 8. Playing a tape with pulsing sounds or soothing music
 9. Applying medication for teething pain or supplying teething toys
 10. Changing the diaper
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Sometimes what the crying child needs most is sleep. Unfortunately, they do not always realize this and so even good babies may need to cry themselves to sleep from time to time. This does not hurt the child, in fact some believe it helps them give the lungs needed exercise. By the way, a baby needs about sixteen to eighteen hours of sleep every twenty-four hours.

Can a crying baby simply be manipulating the parents for attention or to get its way? While this is certainly possible after about six months of age, it is unlikely before that point. It is generally wise to try to find the cause of the crying, and babies whose mothers quickly respond to their cries generally cry far less than other children (Ainsworth, Bell and Slayton 1972). If crying is persistent, consult a doctor.

Toilet Training

Potty training the toddler can sometimes produce emotional problems that can last throughout life. It can be rough on the child too! Parents who try to toilet-train their infants in the first year of life are attempting something that is biologically impossible. The nerves that signal the need for the potty do not mature until after eighteen months of age, and sometimes they are not ready until age four or more. To train a child before he or she is biologically ready is to invite extreme frustration for parent and child alike, and possibly contribute to long-term psychological problems.

How can you know if the child is ready for potty training? An interest in the topic is a cue. Certainly if the toddler can tell you they are going in the diaper, they are ready for training. It is a real help in training if the child has developed a fairly regular schedule of toileting.

Use rewards and not punishment in toilet training. Place the toddler on the potty --a special small stool for the child will be less frightening-- and explain that they will get a favorite reward (candy, stickers, etc.) when they go in the potty. Give them lots of pop or other favorite drinks as they sit, as well as some activities to keep them occupied. You might show them what you want by using a doll that wets itself.

If only by accident, children should be successful eventually. Immediately praise them and give them the reward. Be sure to tell them the name of what they did using whatever term you decide is appropriate. Don't be afraid to show your excitement at the child's success. The rewards will give them motivation to repeat the toileting -- but don't give too much of the reward or it will wear out quickly. If the reward no longer motivates, find a new reward that does. You might even let your child choose from several alternative rewards. Also do not give the reward at any time other than when they are successful. I have known parents that even put Cheerios in the stool to encourage toileting -- boys enjoy target practicing! If the child has accidents, correct by saying something like "no M & M's for you, you didn't go in the potty," but don't spank. You might, however, have them clean up any mess that is made (if they don't want to do this, you can put your hands over theirs as you help them clean it up).

Eventually they will learn the terms for what they need to do, and they will use those terms when they need to toilet. Do not delay taking them to the potty, and of course continue to use the rewards with each success. After they have regular successes, you can begin teaching the child to wipe and pull up and down the pants. Once these have been learned, rewards can be gradually phased out -- after a week or so of regular success, give them praise every time, but only give the reward every other time. A week or so later give them a reward every third time, then after another week give them a treat only occasionally for success. Eventually just give them praise.

Food Refusal

Refusing to eat is common during the late toddler stage. This is frequently a way of manipulating to express hostility toward the parent. But sometimes toddlers simply do not like certain foods. The oldest son of Don Ratcliff went through a stage of not liking meat when he was about two years old. He would eat everything else on his plate and leave the meat. We knew it was important for him to eat protein, so I asked a nutritionist at the medical center where I worked what she would recommend. She gave me such a simple solution I was almost embarrassed for asking. She told me to put protein and nothing else on his plate for a few days. If he did not eat protein, he would not eat. When he got hungry enough he would get used to eating meat. It worked beautifully and took only one or two meals to break him in. Don't let your toddler succeed in getting you angry by refusing to eat -- just remove the food if he or she becomes too negative or dawdles too much. It will not hurt the child to miss a meal or two occasionally -- in fact it will help in the long run. Do not give the toddler any between meal snacks unless the child has earned that right by eating a reasonable amount at the previous mealtime. Meals should be a time for developing social skills, especially between parents and toddler, as well as a time for eating. Be sure you do not substitute food for love or social interaction.

Sexuality

We recommend that you ignore genital play during the infant and toddler stages, unless your child is doing so in public. It is part of the natural exploration involved in discovering the body. If you choose not to ignore it, handle the situation tactfully by merely putting the underwear or diaper back on and telling the child to leave it on. But do not ever shame the child for it, or threaten him or her in any way, or the child may think the genitals are evil and develop poor sexual concepts later in life. This might even result in sexual fears or impotence as an adult.

When children ask questions about their bodies, and they usually do either at this stage or during the preschool years, give them truthful, matter-of-fact answers. It is generally felt best to use correct words such as vagina and penis rather than childish terms. Some parents easily become embarrassed when asked about such matters, and perhaps the parent who feels least self-conscious should do most of the explaining. It may help parents to practice by role-playing the discussion with one another. Be sure you only answer the

question being asked; it is more natural for children to learn about sexuality bit by bit than by having a long, detailed description of the whole topic.

Fears and Handicaps

Sometimes a fear of strangers develops towards the end of the first year, and sometimes a fear of animals develops as well. By the preschool years animal fears are the most common. Some children fear a large body of water and become anxious when they see the seashore for the first time, not wanting to wade into ankle deep waves. Fear of heights is probably learned by early experiences -- such as falling off the couch a couple of times!

Fears are sometimes desirable. A fear of climbing a thirty foot tree may be very desirable for a three-year-old! Fears may also tell you something needs to be corrected. Don Ratcliff's three-year-old son once displayed extreme fear of church. He would begin crying whenever the building came into view. The source of his fear was discovered when my wife observed the five-year-olds in his junior church class regularly hitting the younger children. Likewise, fear of a certain individual may possibly indicate that they have experienced pain or abuse by that person. Always try to understand the source of a fear before trying to change it.

What can be done about fears? If a fear is unhealthy, it is a good idea to gradually expose the child to the feared object, while giving them comfort. Begin by just being in the same room with the object, while holding them and talking quietly about the feared person or thing. As they become relaxed, you can move a bit closer to the feared object. Eventually, if you do this gradually enough, they should get over their fears. Extreme fears often require help from a counselor.

If you have a handicapped child, they need special attention. Even more than non-handicapped children, they require their mother's unconditional love and acceptance to prepare them for what they will face when they are old enough to go to school. If staying at home with their children is important for mothers in general, it is doubly important for the handicapped. Hospitalized children also need their mothers. Studies have shown that young children whose mothers do not come and spend a lot of time with them in the hospital have a significantly higher death rate (Lidz 1968, 150; and Lynch, Steinberg and Ounsted 1975).

Spiritual Development

In the previous section on heredity and environment, we mentioned that most specialists in child development now believe that both are important. What people think on this issue also affects how they look at the child spiritually.

For example, when Paul Meier was at Duke University Medical Center he heard a liberal theologian who taught that "children are born princes and princesses, and the environment makes frogs out of them" (Barnes 1974). He said that children are born with a good nature, rather than a sinful nature, and that their parents teach them disobedience. If this were the whole story, then our children must have missed some of the genes they were supposed to receive -- they were disobeying before they learned to talk!

The Bible does emphasize that we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27) and so there is something wonderful and beautiful about children. Even more conservative theologians support the idea of a positive aspect to human nature, calling it "common" or "prevenient" grace. But the Bible also emphasizes the fact that the image of God is badly scarred in human nature, every child is born with a sinful nature. We as parents must teach them to be good, which is against this sinful nature. As noted earlier in this chapter, discipline is an important aspect of shaping and encouraging the child to resist the natural inclination toward evil.

Encouraging children towards what God wants eventually becomes an act of the will; a decision for or against Christ. We must never forget that they (and we) will live somewhere -- either Heaven or Hell -- forever. Yet a decision about salvation is not likely to occur before the school years, although there are some remarkable (though rare) examples where people have become Christians in their preschool years. While they are infants and toddlers we must concentrate upon helping them move in the right direction

rather than making a decision they are mentally incapable of. We must pave the way so that salvation will be easier to accept later.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the home environment is vitally important for babies spiritually. Caring for the child's emotional and physical needs are foundations for spiritual development later in life. While the infant does not understand religious concepts or have religious beliefs, our religious beliefs and concepts strongly influence the way we act towards the infant. The baby can sense the overall home atmosphere and emotionally link it with our religious words and practices.

The attachment to the parents is vital to later faith because attachment produces security. When someone, usually the mother, consistently takes care of a baby's needs and gives emotional support, the child is not only more trusting (as mentioned in the last chapter) but also more able to meet the world confidently. Trust and confidence are basic foundations for faith as has been noted by a number of researchers (Ratcliff 1992a).

The understanding of God makes an interesting reversal during the toddler and preschool years. At first infants and toddlers see parents as having divine characteristics. When they are regularly available to the child, parents appear to be all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere all the time. Eventually, with good spiritual training, the child will transfer these ideas to God. How important it is that we parents set the stage for a positive understanding of God by being loving, caring, but also concerned about obedience and respect during these early years. We are the only picture of God our infants and toddlers can comprehend. If we are gone most of the day, what does this communicate about God? If parents are harsh and critical, never satisfied with the child's behavior, what does this communicate? Keep in mind this picture of God will be accepted more at an emotional level than at a mental level by young children, a picture that will influence them to some extent throughout life. The relationship with the parents powerfully affects future concepts of God.

What can we do to encourage faith in God? During these years parents can teach the youngster to say a memorized prayer, although he or she is probably thinking more about Daddy than God the Father. One must also be careful about what comes into the toddler's ears and eyes from television and music played in the home. Regular displays of violence and immorality are likely to shape the child's understanding of reality in ways that may negatively influence future spiritual development. On the other hand a few good music tapes or Christian television programs or videotapes, especially if designed for younger children, can be helpful. They need to be used sparingly; toddlers require plenty of one-to-one interaction with loving parents.

What about church activities at this age? Most of the time in church should be spent in supervised play activities. Good, safe, clean toys are a must. We need well-trained, loving teachers at this level, not just teenage girls that want to skip church. For toddlers, a simple story or two from the Bible may be good, and coloring pictures from the story can be interesting. Churches and parents need to infuse "God words" into the play of toddlers. For example, when a two-year-old puts a teddy bear or doll to bed, we can speak of being thankful to God for night and sleep. The goal is not complete comprehension, but positive associations with the words of our faith.

Toddlers can learn simple songs with lots of clapping and jumping, such as "Jesus Loves Me" and the old spiritual "I put on my walking shoes." As a special treat, the pastor may want to stop by to hold, talk to, and play with the kids.

What should parents do when toddlers refuse to stay in their Sunday School class? The key concern is whether refusal is rebellion or insecurity. Assure the child you will return. You might leave the child crying, then wait just outside the room for a few minutes to see if the crying stops shortly. If engaged in interesting activities by a loving, trustworthy teacher, it should cease within a couple of minutes. But if it doesn't, it may be best to spend a few Sundays with the child in the classroom. This will help the toddler get used to the new environment and minimize the possibility of negative associations with the church. We must never forget that the earliest impressions of church at this age can emotionally influence the child for the rest of life. Spanking a toddler for making noise in church may do irreparable harm -- quality nursery care makes a lot more sense.