

“Children spell love “T-I-M-E.” Our children thrive when we spend time with them.”

Christ, we allow them to make their own decisions, which includes allowing them to make their own mistakes. Nothing brings me to my knees, both literally and figuratively, than the fact that I no longer am in control of my kids' minor or major decisions. Even when our children are small, we do not have complete control. There can be health issues, learning disabilities, character struggles, and so much more. While we do all we can to help them to be healthy, to learn to the best of their abilities, and lovingly give consequences for sinful behavior, we still do not have complete control. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. We must go to God in prayer over both our very minor and very deep concerns for our children. To not pray for our children is doing both them and us a great disservice.

We should also pray with our children as we go through our day. If you hear that someone in your church is ill, you can stop and pray with your children about that. If you are butting heads with one child in particular on a given day, stop and pray about it together. My daughter-in-law prayed with her one-year-old that their basement would not flood during a heavy rain, as it had a history of doing. (God chose to say “yes” to that prayer, and it didn't flood.) In fact, Alissa prays with little Kate on a regular basis about both big and little things. Kate will always remember having a Mom who thought prayer was important.

From the time your children are old enough to articulate their thoughts until well into their adulthood, ask your children how you can pray for them. You may be surprised at their responses. Perhaps you have not known how to pray for what is most near and dear to their hearts. By asking them this question, not only will you be able pray more specifically for them, but you will get to know them better.

Build a Relationship with Them

I know I have said this in previous articles, but it can't be emphasized enough. Children spell love “T-I-M-E.” Our children thrive when we spend time with them. Having them “help” us with housework, even before they are truly helpful, shows them that they are more important to us than getting our work done perfectly and quickly. Sitting down and playing a game with the children in the evening, when we'd rather be relaxing on Facebook or reading, shows them that we love them more than our personal entertainment. Reading to them, even when we have to fight sleep while doing so, lets them know that we care for them dearly. They may not be able to articulate any of this, but their little hearts know when we love them enough to sacrifice and spend time with them. On the flip side, they also know when our electronics, hobbies, perfection in housekeeping, and other earthly things are more important to us, at least on the practical level, than they are.

Rather than spending a lot of money on your children and buying them expensive toys and video games, spend your time and money having quality and quantity time, adventures, and experiences with them. Minister together with them by serving others. Laugh together. As I already mentioned, pray together. As your kids get older, have long talks around the table about everything from what happened in your day, to theology, to your opinion on a movie you watched, to politics. At these times, listen and talk, give your own input, but try to avoid lecturing. If your children, especially older children, teens

and young adults feel they will be lectured or “taught” every time they open their mouths about something, they will clam up.

Part of building a loving relationship with our children is to give consequences for sinful behavior. Being an involved parent doesn't always mean being a fun parent. In fact, there are many times we should not be fun parents. As I have said in other articles, a simple statement of the sin committed and how it is dishonoring to God and to us as their parents is usually far more effective than a long lecture. There should nearly always be consequences for disobedience and sin. Occasionally there will be an extra sensitive child whose behavior is changed by a stern glance or a few words, but most children need consequences that will be remembered and deter them from doing this behavior later. Some day your children will be grateful that you helped instill self-control and obedience into them.

Don't ever be too proud to ask your children's forgiveness when you sin against them. If you speak harshly, if you discipline them in anger, if you break their confidence, you should ask their forgiveness and be very specific about your sin against them. From my personal experience (though, of course, there are exceptions), one of the biggest reasons teens and young adults become bitter is when the parents are too proud to admit that they are wrong sometimes.

Some of our children are more prickly than others. It is harder to have a close relationship with them because they are born questioning everything. They also seem to realize much earlier than our other children that Mom is not perfect. These children need a relationship with us as much as children who are easy to get along with. It is harder but, by God's grace, we can still build this relationship. While we still need to give correction when needed, it is important to let them know how much we love them. We need to smile at them when they enter a room. We need to listen when they need to talk, even if we disagree (though they should never be allowed to be disrespectful). We can and should give correction. We should admonish. We should be consistent. But ultimately, we cannot control their attitudes and behavior, but we can control our own. We can respond in love and grace, even if they are pushing every single button we have and we feel very unloving at the moment. Just to give you some encouragement, I am now very close to the child that I butted heads with for years.

Some Final Thoughts

Parenting is not for the faint of heart. Each of our children are unique. They each come with their own strengths and weaknesses. We might think we have this parenting thing figured out when God sends us another child who is nothing like the rest or a new situation might arise that we have never dealt with before. But with every child and in every circumstance, we can point our children to Christ, pray for them, and build a relationship with them.

As I ponder the last 27 years, my main emotion is gratitude. I am grateful that God gave me these five precious children. (This has now extended to a daughter-in-law and granddaughter.) I am blessed to have been able to homeschool them. I am thankful for the relationship I have with each of them. And most of all, I am so thankful that, as of now, they all love and serve the Lord. I know this is only by the grace of God, and I do not take it for granted.