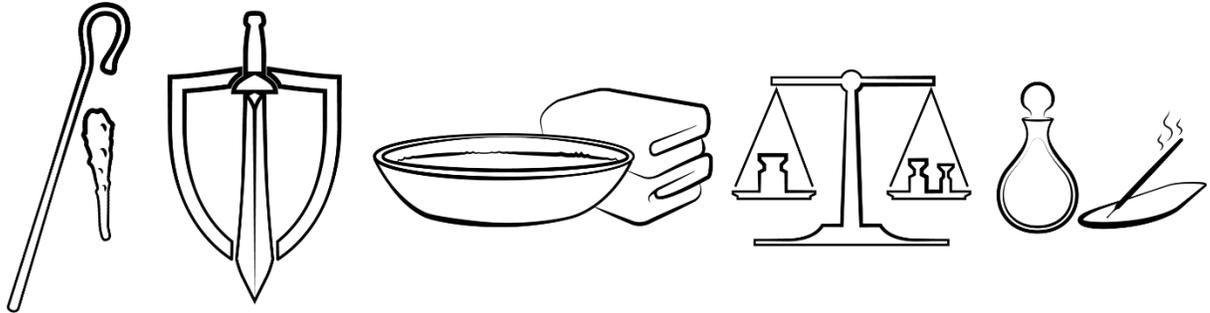


BECOMING AN INTENTIONAL, GODLY PARENT

“FAMILY TOOL TIME”

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting well is one of the most challenging undertakings a person can face. For most of us, we will be better prepared to face the process of childbirth. What are we supposed to do when we get the baby home? How do we make the most of the “wet cement” years of one to five, even though our children will probably remember almost nothing of them? How do we help them navigate the teenaged years, which many of us would never want to go back to? How do we help raise our children in the training and instruction of the Lord?

This workbook is designed to help you think through the five most critical sets of tools a parent can have. Each of these two-part tools help a parent fulfill a God-given role that they are to play in their child’s life. These tools are introduced in the “Family Tool Time” teaching series (available as video or audio recordings). It will be most helpful if you take the time to listen (or watch) each segment and then work through the related materials. However, reading through this guide, working through the questions, can itself be life-changing.

The reflection questions in each section are usually designed to apply to both single parents and to a couple. The focus on single parents in certain questions deals with the realities of our day and age. The couple portion then recognizes that it is best if the Mom and Dad are on the same page and are able to “tag-team” their parenting with consistency.

The critical application step is creating a TOOLBOX LIST for each of your children. The last page of these materials gives you an example as a starting point.

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THE ROD AND STAFF

OF TEACHING (AND DISCIPLINE)

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4 ESV). Both parents are responsible to train and teach their children. The focus of the biblical commands to do so center firmly on the fathers. Dads are accountable to God for their children being disciplined and instructed, especially in the ways of the Lord.



Most of us will discipline our children the way we were by our parents. Or, some will swing the pendulum in the total opposite direction because we definitely don't want to be like our parents! The role models that we have had will have a powerful influence on us, for good and bad. It will take a Holy Spirit energized, intentional effort to change for the better. But how do we do that?

Reflection Question: How were you disciplined and taught as a child? What patterns and specifics do you want to see repeated in your own parenting? Which ones do you definitely NOT want to see?

As a couple: Share your answer to the reflection question and then discuss the strengths and weaknesses from each of your families of origin. Make a list of what you together decide you want and don't want to pass on to the next generation.

The shepherd would use their staff to guide the sheep and their rod to fend off the enemies of the flock. One of the critical roles of a parent is to be the Shepherd-Teacher of the children. The local church can help supplement and encourage the child's development, but it remains the parents' responsibility.

Having the right attitude is vital to using the “rod and staff” well. The Bible gives to us models of a good shepherd, especially the example of Jesus. These help us by challenging us to look at our attitudes toward our children and the process of parenting. Consider the following passages and reflection questions.

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. (Ezekiel 34:1-4 ESV)

Reflection Question: The bad shepherds (leaders) of ancient Israel made it all about themselves rather than all about the sheep. How could a parent make fulfilling their role all about themselves and NOT about the welfare of the children?

As a couple: Discuss what would be the most likely way you could make parenting about yourselves. For example, we can parent so that we look good in front of others. Or we might parent so that we are loved by our child, filling a hole in our lives. How should you bring this up if you see it happening in your spouse?

Another key attitude check is whether we will take the time to really get to know our children. And then, whether we will lay down our lives for each child, following the example of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Read through the following passages.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (John 10:1-6 ESV)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:11-15 ESV)

Reflection Question: Jesus knows His sheep and as the good shepherd is willing to lay down His life for them. Most of us will not have to die for our children, and yet there is a certain “dying daily” that is involved in good parenting. Teenagers often want to talk just when you want to go to bed, so a good parent asks God for help and then stays up. What sacrifices do you think will be the most difficult for you to make?

As a couple: One of the best gifts that parents can give to their child is to sacrificially love the child's other parent. Giving a child the security of having a mom and dad who won't even let the thought of divorce come near is a powerful thing. For the sake of the children (though there are many other reasons as well), will you make sure that your marriage survives and thrives? Will you agree to get help quickly if you get stuck? What could keep you from doing this?

The final attitude check is found in a key teaching passage to parents found in Moses' book of Deuteronomy. Note that parenting, including teaching and discipline, is not a hit and miss kind of thing. Rather, it is 24/7/365.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV)

Reflection Question: As you think back to your childhood, how consistent and intentional were your parents to teach you at every possible "teachable moment?" What would it take for a parent to be that focused? How will you keep this directive in front of you?

If we have the right attitude, we have made a great beginning. But we still need to use the "rod and staff" well. We often feel overwhelmed by all the various parenting experts and are tempted to give up. But there really are only a few core "skills" that we need to remember.

We will have the dexterity that we need to TEACH our children well if we make sure we are **INTENTIONAL** and **CONSISTENT**. Review again the key passages we saw at the beginning of our study.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV)

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:20-21 ESV)

For so many parents it seems like the time so flies by that all that they had intended to teach their children never happens. Even being ready to take advantage of the “teachable moments” requires a level of intentionality. One helpful idea is to create a “toolbox” list for each child. There will be basic tools that all children need and then there will be the specialty tools that particular kids ought to have.

Reflection Question: Brainstorm the basic tools that you think every child should have in their toolbox. This could include basic skills, like reading and writing, but should focus on tools that would fit in with “the instruction of the Lord” (see the sample TOOLBOX LIST at the end of these materials).

Reflection Question: What will you do to at least annually review your toolbox list for each child? This would be an intentional time of evaluating which tools you have put into their toolbox and which tools you should focus on for the coming year.

The other key dexterity that we mentioned, in addition to being intentional, was being consistent. Someone said that we all should have to train a dog before we take on training a child. As one put it, “A great master = a good dog.” The key to training an animal is consistency. We can’t keep changing what we demand or what we will reward and then expect them to figure it out. Children are much smarter than dogs, but they thrive best when there is consistency.

Good teaching means that we don’t exasperate our children by being “hot then cold” in our teaching. We must let our “yes” be a “yes” and our “no” be a firm “no.” This integrates with the tool of discipline that we mention below. Discipline is actually just remedial teaching (corrective teaching that often uses consequences).

The dexterity of consistency in using the rod (as a symbol of discipline) helps us see how teaching and discipline go hand-in-glove with one another. When one reads through the Proverbs in the Bible, it becomes obvious that God repeats the instruction to discipline our children again and again. While Proverbs is a compilation from different authors, it seems that an additional reason for this repetition is that we parents need to be reminded again and again. Read through some of the texts below.

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (Proverbs 13:24 ESV)

Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death. (Proverbs 19:18 ESV)

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. (Proverbs 23:13-14 ESV)

Reflection Question: Often parents will repeatedly give their child a command, raising their voice each time. Finally, they take action. What does this type of scenario teach the child?

Reflection Question: Some parents have said to their child who is being disciplined, “This hurts me more than it does you.” What do you think they could mean by that? What makes consistent discipline so hard?

As a Couple: Discuss how you would like your spouse to point out to you that you seem to be slipping in the area of consistency? Remember, it is important not to do this in front of the child but behind closed doors.

Discipline that is consistent by being firm all the time, even though it is no fun to do so, really helps. But we must also integrate this with our earlier attitude check. Effective discipline also must be done **REDEMPTIVELY**. This means that the parents’ hope is for the child to have a repentant heart that leads to the actions or fruit of repentance and a fully restored relationship.

In the passages we read above, Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21, we saw warnings against the opposite of disciplining redemptively. When we discipline out of anger we often do it harshly. And when we do it only when we feel a certain way, we do it discouragingly. There will be times when our kids push our buttons and we respond with anger. We must ask God to help us deal with that and discipline redemptively. There will probably be times when you have to apologize to your child saying, “You deserved to be disciplined, but I was wrong to discipline you out of anger. Would you please forgive me?”

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26 ESV)

This passage talks about a pastor or elder dealing with someone sinning in the local church. Note how they are told to be “gentle.” The hope is that God would grant them repentance. The same could be said of parents as they “pastor” their children.

Reflection Question: What sort of disobedience really “gets to you?” When it really “gets under your skin,” how does it impact your ability to discipline redemptively?

As a Couple: What are the signs that you see in the other person that indicate they may be getting a bit “hot under the collar?” How will you help each other to not speak out of your anger and “make the best speech you’ll ever live to regret?”

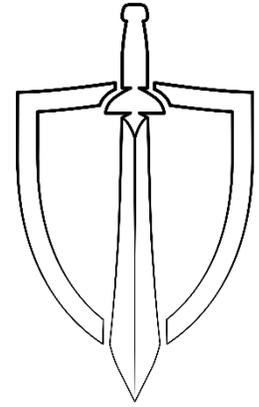
Here are **a few recommendations** for you to consider in your role as Shepherd-Teacher:

- If you have been lax or inconsistent in teaching and disciplining your children, apologize to them and let them know you want to do better with God's help.
- Make sure you work hard at actively listening to your kids so that your discipline really fits what is going on. Do not discipline their poor methods (what they did) like they were poor motives (why they did them) . . . sometimes kids are just childish and not rebellious.
- Accept your responsibility but use all the tools and gifted people to help you (your spouse, books, church programs, etc.).
- Consider making a competencies list that has some of the things you want to put into your child's toolbox before they leave home (see the TOOLBOX LIST at the end of these materials).
- As your children get older, help them know how they can ask you for clarification about the discipline you are giving them . . . without seeming to be rebellious and getting you upset. Set a pattern that will help them learn from the process by asking questions without seeming to “talk back” to you.
- Remember God's pattern for dealing with His people. The Law was given to lead us to our need for grace (Galatians 3:24). As a parent (teacher), it is wise to “lay down the law” firmly and consistently and then use it to lead your children to see their need for grace.

Reflection Question: Which two of these recommendations do you think will be most helpful to you? Why?

THE SWORD AND SHIELD

OF PROTECTIVE PRAYER



Most of us realize that we should pray for our children. And we do, especially when they get sick or are facing some very difficult situation. But why does the godly mother and father keep praying daily for the child even when everything seems to be going well? How do such parents maintain a **SENSE OF URGENCY AND VIGILANCE** in their prayers for their kids?

The imagery of the sword and shield helps us to see that our prayers are protective, as well as proactive. From the models we see in the Bible, we must understand the importance of “protecting” our children from the HOLINESS OF GOD. We must plead the blood of Christ and ask for God’s mercy since none of us, including our children, could stand for a moment in the presence of the holy, holy, holy Creator. Read the following excerpts to see that God is looking for someone to “stand in the breach (gap).” Then note how Moses and ultimately Jesus are our examples.

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 22:30-31 ESV)

“So I lay prostrate before the LORD for these forty days and forty nights, because the LORD had said he would destroy you. And I prayed to the LORD, ‘O Lord GOD, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin,” (Deuteronomy 9:25-27 ESV)

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25 ESV)

Reflection Question: “The fear of the Lord” is a profound respect and reverence for the holiness of God. We sometimes imagine ourselves or our children (especially when very young) to be “innocents.” But we all are born with a sin nature and when old enough we practically sign up as sinners by choosing to sin. If this understanding of things really penetrates our hearts and minds, how will that be expressed in the urgency of our prayer lives?

The term “protectorate” is a term Gerhard deBock has suggested to describe those folks for whom God has made you responsible, especially in offering them the covering of prayer. Remember that the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8 that Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Your protectorate will always include your immediate family, whom you should pray for daily. Your protectorate will also include others for whom God has given you a consistent burden to pray. We are all called to pray for many people. But those in our “protectorate” must be the focus of our consistent taking up of “the shield and sword” of prayer.

We must also protect our kids (and others in our protectorate) from SATAN’S UNHOLINESS. Our battle and the ultimate danger your child faces is not merely sickness or physical death. It is not coming to a saving faith in Christ, and not becoming an heir of eternal life. Consider these passages. The Ephesians 6 text tells us of the nature of the battle. The others show us Jesus as a model of Priest-Warrior who protects those entrusted to Him.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Ephesians 6:10-13 ESV)

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:11-12 ESV)

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:15-17 ESV)

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32 ESV)

Reflection Question: In Colossians 4:12, Paul talks about Epaphras’ prayer life for those back home in Colosse (his protectorate?). He is described as, “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.” It is often easy to imagine that a powerful prayer life will be breeze and not a struggle, but that is a lie. And it is common to miss the main point, praying that people would “stand mature (complete) and fully assured in all the will of God.” What commitments are you willing to make to work hard, even struggle in prayer, on behalf of your children?

Being convinced of the importance of the protective work of prayer helps to motivate us to get down to the hard work of being an intercessor for our kids. But the battle is long and hard and we need to STAY motivated and active in prayer. What can we learn from the Apostle's imagery in Ephesians 6?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:10-20 ESV)

In order for us to daily pick up the Sword and Shield of prayer, we must ask the Lord for two critical things. First, we need to develop a **BATTLE MENTALITY**. The imagery of the Roman soldier taking up his armor highlights for us that this is no walk in the park. And, beyond that mentality, we need an ever-present sense of **VIGILANCE** – praying at ALL times, with ALL prayer, with ALL perseverance, for ALL the saints!

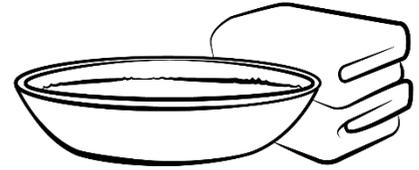
Reflection Question: What are evidences that a person has lost a “battle mentality?” What will you do to help you “keep alert” in your prayer life, especially for your children?

As a Couple: Do you think it is fair to say that a husband and father who has not prayed for his wife and kids each day has left them unguarded and open to being spiritually raped and pillaged? Is that language too strong or just strong enough? As a wife, share with your husband how important it is to know that he is faithfully praying for you (and the kids).

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THE TOWEL AND BASIN

OF SERVANTHOOD



When we looked at the Rod and Staff, we learned that we are teaching our children ALL the time. Some of the opportunities will be formal, while some will be informal. But they all need to be intentional. One of the critical set of tools we have that will help us raise godly children is what Jesus used to wash His disciples' feet, the towel and basin.

The goal for the parent who is being a Servant-Example is to create a culture of Other-Centeredness. The best way to do this is to make sure our children **SEE, HEAR, and DO** this challenge of taking up the tools of a slave of God.

The Servant-Example creates a culture of Other-Centeredness in the own lives so that the child can **SEE** what servanthood looks like. That is exactly what Jesus did for His disciples. He **MODELED** the actions of a servant.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." (John 13:1-7 ESV)

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:12-15 ESV)

Reflection Question: What have been some of the most powerful models of servant-hood that have impacted your life? What can you learn from these so that you can be an effective model as well?

Reflection Question: Christ gave us the ultimate example of a servant, are you willing to serve your spouse and children daily? What are some good ways that you can serve your spouse and children on a daily basis?

The Servant-Example must do more than just SHOW or MODEL what servanthood looks like. They must also explain the “why” behind this culture of Other-Centeredness. This allows the child to **HEAR**, even as we hear Jesus’ teachings about why we are to be servants. We are to **TEACH** the principles of servanthood.

And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:24-28 ESV)

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12 ESV)

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” (Mark 9:33-37 ESV)

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:24-27 ESV)

Reflection Question: What servant activities are you involved with that would give you a good reason to tell your child “why” you do what you do?

Reflection Question: If all of your servanthood is aimed only at your children (saying that you have no time to serve in the local church or the broader community), what could your child misunderstand about servanthood?

As a Couple: Affirm each other for the acts of service you have noticed the other person doing for you. How could we be more attentive to these acts and multiply the number of “thank you’s” in our home?

A child may SEE our example of servanthood, and they may HEAR our reasons for those actions, but our hope has to be that they will actually DO the Christ-like acts of “foot washing.” This is true in our homes and then beyond our homes in our church and community. Until a child comes to the place where they have personally put their faith in Christ, their servanthood will be very limited. They may serve but it will not be from the highest motivation. It will not be as an act of worship, having the same attitude that Jesus had.

And so we come back to the Sword and Shield of prayer. We must pray for the attitude of Jesus in our own lives and in the lives of our children. We must pray in light of Philippians 2.

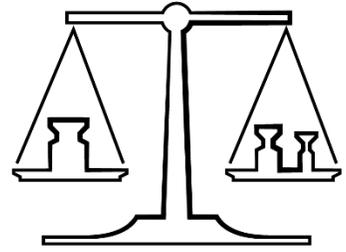
So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:1-8 ESV)

Reflection Question: Really serving others is so hard, so against our old way of life. And it is hard for your children. What do you think are the top things you could do to encourage your child to have a servant’s heart?

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THE SCALES AND WEIGHTS

OF A WISE-MENTOR



The godly parent desires for their children to become wise. That is, knowing and practically doing the smart thing in all the situations of life. The specifics that we will mention could certainly be added to your “toolbox list” for your kids, if they aren’t there already. This involves teaching (like the Rod and Staff) but the focus here is on more “tangible” things. As a Shepherd-Teacher we want our kids to know about the “instruction of the Lord,” including how to come to faith in Christ, walk in Him daily, study His Word, worship, etc. (think of the 6 W’s of Healthy – Word, Warmth, Worship, Witness, Works, and Wisdom). Actually, the last W, **WISDOM**, is the focus of this set of tools.

A wise-mentor passes on to their children the need to **PURSUE** wisdom . . . they have to want it. Then to **PRAY** for wisdom . . . they have to ask for it. Then to **PRACTICE** it . . . if you don’t use it you lose it. Our powers of discernment are trained by constant practice.

And, then at the heart of it all, the wise-mentor hands over the baton of the **FEAR OF THE LORD**. It is this reverence-fear that is the very beginning of wisdom. It must be modeled and mentored. Consider the following passages from which these points come from.

(Wisdom is speaking) I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. (Proverbs 8:17 ESV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5 ESV)

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14 ESV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10 ESV)

Reflection Question: Are you known as someone who has wisdom? How does your life model a pursuit of wisdom?

These general concepts then have to be made specific in a number of areas. In a sense, the five areas listed below are tools (competencies) that belong in your child's toolbox before they leave home. It is important to create opportunities to help your children weigh-out, with your guidance, their choices in these venues.

First, we must help our kids learn to weigh-out **MORAL MATTERS**. The truth is that some things are more important than others. A child's natural black-and-white thinking has to mature (this often happens around the time of junior high school). Jesus pronounced "woe" to those who never learned to do this.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (Matthew 23:23-24 ESV)

Another thing the wise-mentor gives to their protégé-child is the wisdom to weigh-out their choices in **TIME MATTERS**. Our days in this life are very limited and therefore we must seek to redeem them, making the most of the opportunities God gives us to live out and share the Gospel of Jesus. A young adult needs to know how to use a calendar and a prioritized to-do list to help take the focus they have gained and then practically sustain it.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12 ESV)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16 ESV; see also Colossians 4:5)

A third vital skill of practical wisdom that each child would benefit from is knowing how to weigh-out their choices when it comes to **MONEY MATTERS**. We must be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us since He is still the Owner of all.

Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. (1 Chronicles 29:12 ESV)

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24 ESV)

A fourth ability that a wise person has is the insight to weigh-out their decisions about **WORK MATTERS**. Our jobs, whatever they may be, must be done as unto the Lord Himself. We must do our work heartily, serving Jesus. Passing on a healthy work-ethic to our children is part of good parenting.

"Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded." (Exodus 36:1 ESV)

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 ESV)

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 ESV)

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:22-24 ESV)

A fifth area that wisdom is required in is in weighing-out **GRAY MATTERS**. This are secondary issues that Christians often disagree about and can cause needless and harmful division in the church. As parents we can and must establish the choices we believe are wise for the rules of our home (those that go beyond the clear commands of the Scriptures). But we must also NOT MAKE ABSOLUTE WHAT THE BIBLE DOESN'T. And we must NOT EQUATE WHAT WE BELIEVE IS UNWISE WITH WHAT THE BIBLE LABELS SINFUL. It may be wrong for us to do it because we cannot do it out of faith. That doesn't mean the same is true for all Christians. Being faithful to live under God's Word and yet be wise in these matters is a difficult challenge.

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4 ESV)

In review, before our kids leave home they should be able to . . .

- Make tough ethical decisions,
- Manage their time well,
- Be good stewards of their resources,
- Work as unto the Lord,
- Show discernment in disputable matters.

Reflection Question: How many of the above questions were you able to answer positively by the time you left home? Which ones were you weakest in and what consequences came of this lack of practical wisdom?

Reflection Question: At approximately what age will you intentionally try to help your child become wise in these areas? How will you do so? Capture these in the TOOLBOX LIST at the end of these materials.

THE INCENSE AND OIL

OF THE HEALER-LOVER



Life can be so very hard. “The world erodes faith, dissipates hope, and corrupts love.” No matter how hard we try to protect them, our children will be wounded. Some physically, but all emotionally. There will be times when some of them just want to give up hope. The godly parent, who seeks to reflect the very attributes and actions of God, will take up this set of tools, **INCENSE AND OIL**.

Some kids seem “easy” but many are hard and deeply hurt or disappoint us. While we may feel justified in “writing them off,” this is not what the Lord desires of us. When Israel was so very wayward, God could have been done with them and no one would have been able to find fault. But Hosea the prophet tells a different story. God could have treated them like the two cities destroyed (see Deuteronomy 29:23) but His love for His children restrains Him.

*How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; **my compassion grows warm and tender**. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. (Hosea 11:8-9 ESV)*

When God says that His “compassion grows warm and tender,” He is describing the first step of being a Healer-Lover, namely, to **AROUSE COMPASSION** within our hearts for our children. This step is similar to fighting for the Judgment of Charity by entrusting ultimate judgment to God, lowering our self-defenses, and making a way by imagining the best possible motives for their poor choices. This is also achieved by remembering that there are spiritual dynamics involved that we cannot see. Our kids become confused, tempted, and trapped. If we are to be there to help them, we must ask the Lord to help us arouse compassion for them.

Practically, the way to arouse compassion for our child, when at the moment we really don’t “like” them very much, involves several things. We must be willing to initiate reconciliation by not letting the sun go down on our anger anymore. We then must seek to heal any wounds they have they are making them so self-defensive. And, finally, we build strength and hope into them by reminding them that God is in the business of restoring people.

Reflection Question: How is asking God to help you arouse compassion for your child NOT the same thing as letting them “get away with murder?”

As a Couple: Which one of you is quicker to “arouse compassion?” How do you think this difference might play out with your children? How can you use each other’s strengths and cover each other’s weaknesses?

The other key step to being a Healer-Lover is to **SHOW DELIGHT** in your children. It must be your aim to make sure that your children are secure in your love. They must know that you love them and that you will arouse compassion for them, even as the father of the prodigal son ran to meet his errant child come home. Martin Luther caught the sense of Zephaniah's words when he explained, "(God) will cause you to be silent so that you may have in the secret places of your heart a very quiet peace and a peaceful silence."

*The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; **he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.**" (Zephaniah 3:15-17 ESV)*

In a similar passage, the LORD talks about His people who will be called "My Delight is in Her."

*The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called **My Delight Is in Her**, and your land Married; **for the LORD delights in you**, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken. (Isaiah 62:2-5, 12 ESV)

Some of the ways that we can SHOW DELIGHT in our children is to:

- Make sure there are lots of times when we give them our full attention,
- Give them your public commitment to never abandon them, let them see you being "proud" of them,
- Encourage them with the hope that comes from hearing what your future dreams are for them. This is not about putting on pressure to fulfill YOUR dreams, but rather to regain the hope of believing that God has a future of promise in store for them as they seek Him.

Reflection Question: How have other people shown delight in you? What kind of impact does it have to know that others "believe in us?"

Reflection Question: Ask the Lord to bring to mind some different ways of showing delight in your child. What did He bring to mind? Why do you think He did so?

CHILD DEDICATION

The Importance of Family

The family is a divine institution ordained of God from the beginning of time (Genesis 1-3). Children are a heritage of the Lord (Psalm 127:3) committed by Him to their parents for care, protection, and training for His glory (Ephesians 6:4; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:7, 11:9; Psalm 78:4; Proverbs 19:18, 22:6, 29:17; 2 Timothy 3:15). It is important that all parents recognize this sacred obligation and their responsibility to God in this matter.

The Old Testament Roots

Jochebed of old trained her child Moses after having given him to the Lord (Exodus 2:1-10; Acts 7:20; Hebrews 11:23). Hannah recognized that her child Samuel ultimately belonged to the Lord God (1 Samuel 1:1-2, 11). Joseph and Mary also brought the infant Jesus to the temple (Luke 2:22-38). In the Old Testament parents brought their sons to be circumcised as a sign and seal of the covenant of God (Genesis 17:1-14). This sign meant that they were part of the covenant community. It did not automatically make the children right with God, for the Apostle said that "not all Israel is Israel" (Romans 9:6-7).

The Example of Jesus' Blessing the Children

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. - Mark 10:13-16 (ESV)

Compared to Infant Baptism

In some traditions infants are baptized, usually being sprinkled with water. This ceremony means many of the same things that we understand a child dedication to mean, with an emphasis on the baptism being a sign and seal of the covenant. However, our church has chosen to allow the child themselves to decide when they will be baptized with water, believing that baptism is to be a public expression of what has happened inwardly in the child's heart. Baptism becomes the expression and outward sign of the believer's faith. Child dedication is the expression and sign of the believing parents' faith and commitment to raise the child in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Not a Means of Salvation

Parents are not presenting their children in order to "save" their children. Children who have not reached the age of accountability and die are entrusted to God's grace. Children who have reached the point of accountability need to be presented the Gospel so that they can make a personal decision of faith. Salvation is not something one can do for another. The Apostle Paul so loved his countrymen that he would have given up his salvation so that they could be saved, but that is not what God has ordained (Romans 9:1-3). No one can decide for another. No one can choose for another.

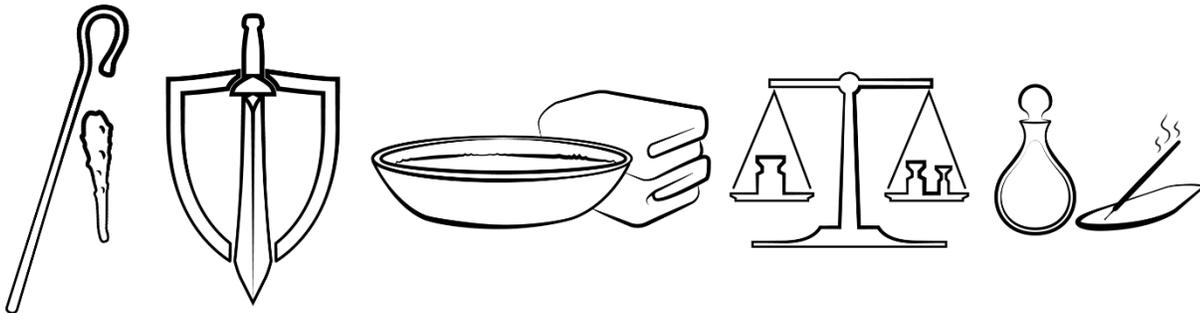
What Parents Need to Understand

These parents today understand that all life is a gift from God and sacred because each child is made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). They also know their own weaknesses and their desperate need for the strength of the Almighty to help them to be and do what these children need. They seek the Covenant-faithful God's blessing and protection, especially asking that He would grant their children tender hearts of faith that will accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior at a young age.

What Parents Are Asked to Commit Themselves To

Parents, who have worked through this packet of materials (Becoming an Intentional Godly Parent), will meet with a pastor or an elder to review the following:

1. Their own personal commitment to Christ.
2. Their understanding of what child dedication means (and what it does not mean).
3. What they have learned through the preparation process of going through these materials. Reviewing areas of confusion or concern.
4. AND to verbally commit to the following components of being a godly parent:
 - *Will you commit to shepherd your child faithfully, teaching and disciplining him/her intentionally, consistently, and redemptively?*
 - *Will you commit to protect your child by praying for them every day?*
 - *Will you commit to raising your child in the reverent fear of God, teaching them to be wise in the daily choices of life?*
 - *Will you commit to be like God is for His children, an encourager that seeks to revive passion and hope in your child?*



What the Parents Ask of the Congregation by Presenting their Child

These parents realize that they need God's help, especially through the prayers and encouragement of the body of believers. So we ask them to come and let have a pastor or elder lead the congregation in prayer for them and their little one(s). This public prayer is scheduled as part of the pastoral prayer time during a regular Sunday morning service.

BAPTISM

Important Biblical Texts

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:3-5

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Colossians 2:11-12

Who should be baptized?

Based on the command of Christ in the Great Commission (the first text listed above) and on the historical picture seen throughout the Book of Acts (which captures the history of the early church), it seems that all believers in the early church were baptized. The idea of an un-baptized believer did not fit in with their understanding of the role of baptism.

Baptism is always closely associated with an individual’s conversion. But there is no evidence that it was ever seen in the Bible times as a means of salvation, that is, a way to earn favor with God. Rather, baptism is an external expression of what has happened on the inside of a new believer.

Those who are baptized publicly need to have made a clear profession of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They must share their testimony in detail with one of the pastors or elders of the church.

What does baptism mean?

The second and third passages listed provide us with our basic understanding of baptism. Romans 6:3 clearly states that baptism is an identification with Christ in His death. Jesus’ death made the payment for our sin and made it possible for us to be brought back into a right relationship with God. Our baptism is a physical expression of our inward desire to be united with Christ in His death, so that the payment He made would be reckoned to our personal account before God.

Colossians 2:12 makes reference to our joining ourselves with Christ in His death and burial. But the text adds that we also identify ourselves with Jesus in His resurrection from the dead. Both the texts from Colossians and Romans make it plain that because our “old man” has been put to death we should now live in “newness of life.”

Thus, while baptism does not save us, it does provide a physical expression by which we show our union with Christ and His saving work for us. Baptism allows us to follow in obedience to Christ’s command in

Matthew 28. It also gives us a very definite date on which to look back as our public identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection. This does not mean that you are not converted until you are baptized, but rather that God has met our real need as physical creatures to have a physical, tangible demonstration to help prevent doubts from nagging us.

How we practice baptism

While there are no hard and fast rules given in the Scriptures on how to perform a baptism, Trinity Fellowship has chosen to practice immersion baptism (dunking a person under the water) for the following reasons. The word “baptism” itself means “to plunge, dip, immerse. Additionally, it accords with the example of Christ’s baptism (see Matthew 3:13-17 — Jesus comes up out of the water). It also lines up with the clear examples of other baptisms that are recorded in the Scriptures (Mark 1:5 — baptized “in” and not merely “by” or “near”; John 3:23 — the usefulness of plentiful water only makes sense with immersion; Acts 8:36 — the Eunuch and Phillip went “down into” and came “up out of” the water; Acts 19:3 — “into what were you baptized” suggests immersion). Lastly, the symbolism described previously (with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection) seems best manifested through baptism by immersion. If a person is physically unable to be immersed, an alternate method will be used.

What if I think my child should be baptized?

Since we believe baptism is for believers, a parent should not force their child to be baptized against their will. Some children will come to faith at a young age and will witness baptisms and they themselves will desire to be baptized. This is right and good.

There is a workbook, available from the church office, that helps a parent work through the questions about baptism at a younger child’s level. The pastor or elder who does the interview must be convinced of the child’s clear understanding and faith in the gospel. The parent’s role is to give testimony of a changed life and of expressed faith on a daily basis.

There is no set age requirement, but our desire is to affirm a child’s faith and NOT to mislead them into thinking they are saved if they indeed are not.

Some parents will choose to have their child wait to partake in Communion (The Lord’s Supper) until they have been baptized. While there is no biblical demand for this, many have found this a good way to keep the importance of baptism (declaring publicly their faith) before their children.

THE TOOLBOX LIST

Use this list as a starter for your list for each of your children. Set a time, at least annually, to review your progress and plan the next year's action steps to putting these tools in your child's toolbox.

ALWAYS

- Teach my child their need for a Savior and the great provision made for us through Christ.
- Model and teach them to love God, His Word, and His Church.
- Show delight in my children and help them feel secure in my love.
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PRE-SCHOOL +

- Discipline my kids so that they know I mean it the first time.
- Model for them and encourage them to be vitally involved in the ministry of the local church.
- Model and invite them to join in being a servant, at home, in the church, and in the community.
- Teach them to be attentive to the needs of others and proactive in meeting those needs, not just waiting to be asked.
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ELEMENTARY +

- Help them understand that the Christian life is impossible without Jesus.
- Teach them the Gospel and how to share it clearly.
- Teach them about being filled daily with the Holy Spirit.
- Teach them to work hard and as unto the Lord. Help them be great employees.
- Teach my child how to ask for clarification about some discipline WITHOUT coming across like they are "talking back" to me.
- Teach them about the X-Changed Life (The Four Components of Practical Change).
- Teach them how to handle with Word of God so that they can study for themselves.
- Help my child pursue and pray for wisdom, knowing that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.
- Teach them how to deal with conflict and the importance of forgiveness.
- Practically help them know how to give, budget, record, save, and invest with eternity in view. (Begin "Raising Money Smart Kids" by about age 9)
- Help them understand the Biblical perspective on sexuality, understanding its powerful pull, as well as the great pain if God's principles are violated. Help them brace for the onslaught from our culture, especially in the areas of pornography and promiscuity. (The "Almost 10" Talk)
- Give them an introduction to what God is doing around the world, encouraging them to develop a global mindset.
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JR. HIGH +

- Help them understand the 6W's of the Healthy Christian (Word, Worship, Warmth, Witness, Works of service, Wisdom) and how to have a reflective self-evaluation under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
- Help them weigh-out the moral matters of life. Help them know right from wrong and then practice so that their powers of discernment are trained.
- Instruct my child in being a good steward of time, understanding life is short and only what is done for Christ will last. Help them have a system that works for them (calendar, to-do).
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HIGH SCHOOL +

- Teach them the basics of Biblical Theology so that they can wisely choose a church home and leaders to serve under when they leave our home. (Junior-Senior years)
- Wrestle with them through the "gray matters" that Christians often disagree about. Help them understand how we've come to our conclusions.
- Help them not make absolute what the Bible doesn't BUT never make relative what the Bible makes clear.
- Review the principles and practices of decision-making in the will of God.
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