

## Lesson 7

# Long Days ... Short Years

*Every moment your kids are at home is precious.*

### ***Before you begin:***

#### **Read the Following Passages:**

- Judges 13.7-8
- Psalm 127.1-3
- Proverbs 22.6
- Ephesians 6.4
- Matthew 6.33
- Deuteronomy 6.6-9
- Proverbs 20.5
- Colossians 4.6
- Proverbs 19.18
- 1 Peter 4.8

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6574 days.

This is the number of days from birth to a child's 18th birthday. We could also break down this amount of time in months (216) or hours (157,776). Someone has said that parents spend nine months wondering *when* their children will get here and then the rest of their lives wondering *where* they have gone. They spend the first few years wondering when they will *turn in* and the rest of their years wondering how they will *turn out*. They spend the first few months teaching their children how to *walk and talk*, then the next fifteen years telling them to *sit down and be quiet*.

The years certainly fly by. For us, our kids were home between 1996 and 2021. 25 years... in what feels like the blink of an eye. Now, don't get me wrong... there were some very long days that I won't get into detail here. On these days, or series of days, we wondered how we would ever get through. Looking back now, some of the problems we faced we can laugh about now. Others would bring tears to your eyes. But we persevered. We got through it all. And, it's turned out to be one of the greatest blessings of life. If I had to do it all over again, *I most certainly would...* difficult days and all. What I'm finding out now as the years march on, is I remember mostly what was good. And there was a lot of that. Special memories that will last a lifetime.

Parenting is often a tough job, a difficult undertaking. It is ironic that the awesome task is something first-time parents begin without previous training. It can be overwhelming. Manoah, Samson's father, certainly felt this way upon receiving news that an angel had visited his wife, informing her that she, formerly barren, would have a child.

He said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Therefore, do not drink wine or beer, and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth until the day of his death.' " Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, "**Please, Lord, let the man of God you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born,**" Judges 13.7-8.

Can you identify with Manoah? How many parents have prayed hard for God's guidance and help? Probably more than you can count. For me, even after my two children have both become adults and moved away, I find myself still praying for help and guidance on how I can influence them for good. I pray for them daily and talk to them often. Every moment I am with them now is precious. Goodbyes, when it is time for us to go back home, are tough. It will be this way from now until the end of my life.

Parenting is not only difficult, it also brings an awesome responsibility, because in the home, children become what they are to be for the rest of their lives. Your baby is a gift from God, Psalm 127.1-3. As a parent, you have the opportunity to unlock the unique talents and abilities of your child. You can either bring those out or hold them back. Your children will spend much of their life benefiting from or recovering from your influence. To a large extent, parents determine the attitudes, outlooks, and philosophies of the people who grow up under their care. That is a sobering thought. You have probably witnessed the good and the bad of this.

One of the things that makes parenting so challenging is how it often grows tougher as your children grow up. This is because as they mature they change and the entire process of parenting has to adapt just to keep up. Someone has said you can force a three-year-old to sit in a time out in the corner, but that will not work with a teen. So we have to learn to be flexible... and take advantage of *every* opportunity to nurture and guide them, no matter their age.

## ***Keeping the Big Picture in Mind***

When parents have healthy relationships with their children, those children tend to embrace the moral and spiritual values their mother and father teach. In a previous lesson we have considered Solomon's writing in Proverbs 22.6:

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he grows older he will not abandon it, NASB.

This passage is a proverb, not an absolute. There are never any guarantees in parenting. What Solomon does express here is the **likelihood** of a child turning out right. When children learn right and wrong at home under the nurturing, loving, training of parents, they tend to adopt their parents' values and beliefs. But again, it's not an absolute. As a mom and dad you can do your absolute very best in training your children the right way – and then your children can still make the very worst decisions in life. Because every child has free will, they will ultimately get to decide which pathway to pursue. This leads to great joy or... great heartbreak. Solomon's principle in

Proverbs 22.6 reinforces the idea that children are far more likely to embrace a meaningful relationship with God if their parents are positively involved in their life. Paul echoes this in Ephesians 6.4:

Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

A strong relationship with mom and dad is key to a strong Christian faith.

The second thing we must always keep in mind while parenting is helping our child view the world through the lens of truth. Jesus called Satan the father of lies, John 8.44. Satan's primary weapon is deception – trying to get us to believe and live according to lies rather than God's truth.

Have you ever thought about that word *deception*? When a person is deceived, he or she doesn't know it! At younger and younger ages our children are being bombarded by a culture that pumps lies into our homes via the internet, television, and books. Two to four hours per week at church is no match for the hundreds of hours spent with the media, school, and friends. It is the job of parents to equip their children with the corrective "lenses" of truth so that they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

Part of this is approaching your parenting with the tenacity and boldness of Joshua. From the very outset of their arrival in the promised land, he set the standard for his family:

As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord, Joshua 24.15.

This is our mission, and to it, we must be uncompromising. We must let nothing distract us or get us off course. Your course of parenting will find itself with many off roads that, without proper diligence and attention, will lead your family away from its spiritual commitment. While something may seem harmless at the time, down the road you will wish you hadn't gotten off track as you fight to get things back on course. The Lord comes first... *in all things*.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you,  
Matthew 6.33.

As we move into the next part of the lesson, we want to think about the process over the long term. Maximum flexibility is required. Prayer and applied wisdom from the Word of God and other wise Christians is indispensable. Your children will only learn what we teach them when you do so in a way that will reach them. The approach needs to be flexible, based upon their unique personality, learning style, and stage of development or maturity.

As they grow up, children fall into one of three stages that should guide how the parent discusses faith and values in the home.

### ***The First 84 Months: The Imprint Season - Toddler to About Age 7***

Having lived in the Midwestern suburbs over the last twenty years, I am amazed at the number of ducks and geese that are here year round due to the prevalence of small drainage ponds around large subdivisions and businesses. We've just come through another season of birth with a new

generation of birds coming on strong. It is perfectly normal to be stopped in traffic while a mother goose leads her goslings across the road at the slowest possible pace. As they march in line across the street, the father is in behind to make sure they all reach the other side safely. I have always been amazed at a goslings' total trust... following the mother hen wherever she goes. Their trust is unquestioned... despite the danger of predators *and* impatient drivers all around.

Small children have some similarities to those goslings. As they grow into toddlers and small children, what is true in nature is true for us. Where the parents go, the little ones follow. What the parents are, the kids want to be. What the parents say, the kids repeat. They are all ears. If mom or dad say it, they will believe it. They soak in what they are told. They will repeat what they hear. Here and there through the years I have seen young parents in the world laugh at their children repeating the curse words they've heard. The parents think it is funny or cute. I suspect some think they can correct the behavior later at an older age. That is faulty thinking. Seeds have already been planted... which will make for great difficulty down the road.

The first season of parenting often requires a good amount of discipline. Andrew Linder<sup>30</sup> says it is important to understand the principle that says "more control now, less control later," or "if you'll deal with more while they're younger, you'll deal with less when they're older." It is very tempting to get this backward. In some ways it seems easier to give into leniency during the early childhood years, thinking that as the child grows up that they can get things under control down the road. Most of the time this simply does not work.

For example, a parent rationalizes, *they're just kids. They'll grow out of it.* Usually, it is the other way around. Behavioral issues not dealt with from the start will not get easier over time, they will actually become more solidified and harder to correct. Another parent thinks, *just let it go, that way we can have some peace around here.* Again, the opposite is true. Dealing with problems promptly and consistently is what will produce peace and harmony.

Discipline your son while there is hope; don't set your heart on being the cause of his death,  
Proverbs 19.18.

Discipline your child, and it will bring you peace of mind and give you delight, Proverbs 29.17.

Remember, "more control now, less control later." And finally, Linder reminds us of the most deceptive thinking during the early stages of a child's life: *I still have plenty of time, I can deal with it later.* Between the age of 2-5 there is a prime opportunity to influence a child's early foundational worldview. What they learn during those three years will serve either as a springboard or a stumbling block to their future. "Training up your children right in the younger years will set you up for parenting success in the older years."

During this time it is important that we awaken their senses to God. Let's look at Proverbs 22.6 again:

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he grows older he will not abandon it, NASB.

The word *train*, as used in the New American Standard translation, has a notable background. In

other places, the word is used to describe the action of "rubbing the palate of a new-born child with date-juice or oil."<sup>31</sup> This was done to help the baby begin the sucking impulse. The juice, consisting of crushed grapes or dates was rubbed on the baby's gums. It would trigger their thirst and also clean their mouth of any amniotic fluid.

Early childhood is the urgent time to build a clean and healthy thirst for Him and the life He has uniquely designed for that child. The stress here is on parental opportunity and duty. They must start their child on the right way in order to steer him or her away from danger. Elsewhere in the Old Testament *train* or *start* (CSB) is associated with the word *dedicate*, such as to dedicate a house (Deuteronomy 20.5); temple (1 Kings 8.63); etc. The imprint period is a critical time of development for your child and must not be ignored.

## **The Next 72 Months: *The Impression Season: About Age 8 to Early Teen***

During this season, children begin to question the advice and instruction of their parents. They will no longer accept what is said at face value. This can be seen in the way they question, talk back, or even argue. During this season, it is important for them to know what we believe. They also need to understand the rationale (the why) behind those beliefs. They are moving beyond the stage of blind acceptance and are growing more and more prepared for deeper understanding.

During this time, a parent's primary priority is to help shape their child's worldview. Your child's worldview most likely started developing around the age of two and by the time your child reaches age 9, their moral foundation is generally in place. In fact, George Barna says, "by the time they turn 13, their worldview is practically set in stone." In tracking religious beliefs and behavior of children into their adulthood, their worldview changes very little, if at all, as they get older.

Barna says:

Social scientists have known for years that the moral foundations of children are generally determined by the time the individual reaches age nine... Anyone who wishes to have significant influence on the development of a person's moral and spiritual foundations had better exert that influence while the person is still open-minded and impressionable – in other words, while the person is still young... The older a person gets, the more difficult it is for him or her to replace existing moral and spiritual pillars... More often than not, what a person decides about truth, sin forgiveness and eternal consequences during the preteen years is the same perspective that person carries to the grave and beyond, wherever that may take him or her.<sup>32</sup>

The war for the minds of our children today is real. Like no time before in our country's history has the enemy been so blatant and open about their intentions. And yet,

One of the greatest victories won (so far) by God's enemy has been the ability to convince most people—even most Christians—that there is no war being waged, so we might as well relax, feel good and enjoy life. Please know that the foundation of the war for people's souls, minds and hearts is waged against our children. If they can be persuaded when they are young, then it is incredibly difficult to change their allegiance as they age. And you, as a parent or spiritual leader, bear the primary responsibility for how that battle turns out.<sup>33</sup>



The social left is coming after our kids. They know if they can get to our children at the youngest of ages, they will have a better chance of success in swaying the worldviews of the next generation on abortion, homosexuality, transgender issues, euthanasia, and marriage, etc.

This second season of parenting is extremely critical, and it is an opportunity we must not miss. Before 13, a child is *defining* what he or she believes. After 13, a child begins to *defend* those beliefs.<sup>34</sup> Barna says that an average of 66% of 13-year-olds in our country argue that they will not alter any of their core beliefs in the future. In other words, they are closed to learning new biblical insights or correction regarding erroneous perspectives.<sup>35</sup>

This is where the principles of Deuteronomy 6.6-9 come into play:

These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead.

Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

Spiritual development during this season of your child's life is a continual process. It is not to be a once-a-week routine, but a 24/7 way of life.

Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up, Deuteronomy 11.19.

## **The Final 60 Months: *The Coaching Season: Early Teen to Young Adult***

During this season, the focus of parenting changes to something similar to that of a coach. Parents can motivate, encourage, challenge, and advise. But force-feeding at this age will not be effective. In fact, it may lead to profound ramifications. During the teen years, parents come along side their children and help them better articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking, and remind them of the basics they were taught during the formative years. Maintaining a strong relationship and frequent and healthy dialogue are the key to parental influence at this stage.

Sometimes, parents are mistaken in believing that the teen years are a time for giving their child more space so they "can become their own person." This is faulty thinking and is a critical mistake. The teen years are the time when parental engagement is needed possibly more than ever before. Disengagement happens in many homes today and usually a good sign of it is when your child begins to close the doors to his or her room and almost separate themselves from family life. It is never a good thing to lessen your influence as a parent during this time of life. One writer mentions these are not the years for increased parental permissiveness, but rather for increased parenting intentionality.

One aspect of being intentional is engaging in conversations, asking questions, holding them accountable, and engaging in their interests. The parent who demonstrates a genuine interest in their life and passions will have plenty to talk about. You need to be talking about money, friends, tech, God, relationships with the opposite sex, school and sports activities, and countless other

things.

Counsel in a person's heart is deep water; but a person of understanding draws it out, Proverbs 20.5.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person, Colossians 4.6.

*If they're not talking to you about these things, they are talking to someone about them.*<sup>36</sup> Be intentional by:

- Scheduling one-on-one time with your teen to talk about life and the issues they're facing.
- Eating together with them regularly around the dinner table.
- Continually remind them of your care for them and concern about what is going on in their life.

Linder writes, *teens most often drift away from their parents not because they've chosen to, but because their parents have inadvertently allowed them to. It is very hard for a child's heart to drift from the heart of an engaged parent.*<sup>37</sup>

Finally, during the season of the teen years, your children need to feel and experience your unconditional love and patience. Your child will test your boundaries. They will make mistakes. It is during this time they need to know they have an open door to come back through after they fail and that your love will *cover a multitude of sins*, 1 Peter 4.8.

## **What Can We Take Away?**

In conclusion, parenting is a journey that spans different seasons and requires intentional effort and flexibility. The years from birth to adulthood pass by quickly, and it is important for parents to make the most of the time they have with their children. During the early years, parents have a crucial role in shaping their child's worldview and establishing a strong foundation of values and beliefs. This involves being a positive role model, teaching them right from wrong, and providing consistent discipline. As children enter their pre-teen and teen years, parents need to adapt their approach and engage in open and meaningful conversations, helping their children navigate the challenges of the world while instilling a love for truth and a relationship with God.

Throughout the parenting journey, it is essential to keep the big picture in mind. Children are influenced by their parents' actions, beliefs, and values, and a healthy relationship with mom and dad is key to nurturing their faith. The responsibility of parenting is significant, and parents must recognize that their influence extends beyond the home and into their child's future. While there are no guarantees, investing in the spiritual development of children during their formative years increases the likelihood of them embracing a meaningful relationship with God. Parenting requires continuous prayer, wisdom, and the willingness to adapt to the changing needs of children as they grow. By being intentional, demonstrating love, and fostering open communication, parents can guide their children towards a life rooted in truth and faith.

## **Pray For:**

1. Pray for strength, wisdom, and guidance as you navigate the challenges of raising your

- children, and to cherish the precious moments in your parenting journey.
2. The development of a deep understanding of your role in shaping your child's worldview and spiritual development, seeking God's discernment to teach them truth and protect them from the deceptions of the world.
  3. The ability to maintain strong and open relationships, engaging in meaningful conversations, offering guidance, and demonstrating unconditional love and patience throughout the critical years of raising teens.

### ***For Thought and Reflection***

1. How does the concept of time and the fleeting nature of parenting impact your perspective on raising children?
2. Can you relate to the feeling of wondering where your children have gone after spending years anticipating their arrival? Share your experiences.
3. How have you found prayer to be a source of guidance and help in your parenting journey? Discuss your reliance on God's wisdom and support.
4. In what ways do you actively pray for your children's well-being and positive influence in their lives? How often do you engage in conversations with them about faith and values?
5. Reflect on the profound responsibility parents have in shaping their children's attitudes, outlooks, and philosophies. Share examples of how your parenting has impacted your children's worldview.
6. Discuss the challenges of parenting as children grow older and change. How do you adapt your parenting approach to maintain a strong and nurturing relationship with your



children?

7. How do you approach the task of helping your child view the world through the lens of truth? How do you counter the deceptive messages and influences they encounter?
8. Share your thoughts on the importance of parental commitment and unwavering dedication to faith and spiritual values in the face of societal pressures and cultural trends.
9. Consider the three stages of parenting discussed: the imprint season, the impression season, and the coaching season. Which stage do you currently find yourself in? How do you navigate the unique challenges and opportunities of that stage?
10. How do you balance being intentional and involved in your teen's life while respecting their need for independence? Share strategies for maintaining open communication and demonstrating unconditional love during the teenage years.

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<sup>30</sup> Linder, Andrew. "More Control Now, Less Control Later." Godly Parent. July 25, 2016.  
<https://godlyparent.com/more-control-now-less-control-later>

<sup>31</sup> Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000.

<sup>32</sup> Barna, George, and Bill Hybels. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Barna/Hybels, p. 60-61.

<sup>34</sup> Linder.

<sup>35</sup> Barna/Hybels, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Linder, Andrew. "3 Lessons Learned in 3 Years of Raising Teenagers." Godly Parent. July 28, 2018.  
<https://godlyparent.com/3-lessons-learned-in-3-years-of-raising-teenagers/>

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*