



# PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL PARENTING

Cultivating Citizens of God's Kingdom

BIBLICAL PARENTING SERIES, BOOK 1



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# Introduction

God instructs parents to talk about his Word with their children all the time: when they sit, when they walk, when they lie down, when they rise ([Deuteronomy 6:7](#)). Helping our kids learn to love the Lord and grow into his gifts as we send them into the world is, of course, the key job of a parent. And it's a lofty goal.

But God knows parents do a lot, day after day, of sitting and walking, lying and rising, coming and going, listening, speaking, and doing. Pouring ourselves into our children every day for years is exhausting and often bewildering.

Kids don't come with an owner's manual, so this booklet is an attempt to provide advice on a particular aspect of parenting from a biblical perspective. In it, we, the team of pastors, therapists, and authors at *Family Fire*, share scriptural instructions and the best pastoral advice we can find.

This ebook sketches some universal and overall ideas that undergird parenting at all ages. Children are ours to disciple for only a time; then we send them into God's world to honor him with their gifts. That's rather different from a marriage, which grows ever deeper until death do us part. Providing, protecting, and pruning with intention is God's call on parents as we show them how to be citizens of God's kingdom.

It's our prayer that this primer on parenting blesses your family as you raise your children into the next generation of God's people.

Grace and peace to you all.

*Revs. Steven & Deb Koster,* editors

# Scriptural Truths for Parents

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

When I was handed my baby the first time, there was so much I did not yet know about being a parent. Most parenting I learned by living into being a parent and doing my best to do it biblically. Our children are not delivered with a detailed owner's manual of what to do in every situation, but the Bible does offer some valuable perspectives, guidelines, and encouragement.

Here are some scriptural truths for parents:

## They Belong to God

Our children are not ours; they belong to God. You adopted them, or gave birth to them, and you refer to them as “my kids,” but the truth is that our children do not really belong to us. They may have our looks or

*“God designed the marriage relationship to be lifelong”*

attitudes, but the ultimate image they carry is that of their Heavenly Father. God has made each of us in his image and called us to behave like his children. We all belong to our God and not just to earthly parents; “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from

*“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies”*

God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” [\(1 Corinthians 6:19-20\)](#).

## They are on Loan for a Season

Our children are on loan to us for only a time. Our children remain connected to our hearts for a lifetime, but they only live under our direct influence for a season. God designed the marriage relationship to be lifelong, but our hands-on parenting ends as children leave their parents' home and become one with their spouse. There will and should be a time when our kids move out. Some of those parenting seasons can feel overwhelming as we struggle with colicky babies, defiant toddlers, rambunctious tweens, or rebellious teens. Scripture tells us that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. If we can live in the moment and keep an eternal perspective, the difficult season is less likely to overwhelm us. It also means that as our children reach adulthood, we parents must become much more advisors and less directors of the choices

our children make. Particularly once a child is married or independently living on their own, parents are no longer directly involved in decision making.

## We are Disciplemakers

Our job is to introduce our kids to their Heavenly Father. The most fundamental job parents have is to show their kids who God is and who we are in God's world. We raise and release them to be citizens in God's world. We talk about God when we rise up, and when we lie down, when we are at home, and when we travel on the road ([Deuteronomy 6:7](#)). God desires that we love him with all of our being and that we spill that love over to our children. We represent God to our kids, and we are instructed to talk about our faith in our coming and going so that our children will learn God's commandments and experience his love.

## We Provide, Protect, and Prune

Like a gardener, we can't make things grow, but we can create the best possible conditions for healthy growth. We can nourish the soil, helping children mature by providing what they need physically, emotionally, and intellectually. We can pull weeds, protecting them as best we can from outside troubles and predators. And we can prune, cutting short the unhealthy growth of their own selfish and sinful tendencies.

## Discipline is Necessary

Discipline is one of the ways that we create disciples. God models for us the importance of discipline for molding our character for service in God's kingdom. "If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all" ([Hebrews 12:8](#)). Parents bless and invest in their children by insisting on good behavior. The writer of Hebrews goes on to describe that "discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" ([Hebrews 12:11](#)).

## God Walks with Us

You are not alone. God equips us for the challenges that we face and walks with us through every trial. Jesus promised to be with us to the very end of the age. He has placed his Spirit within us so that we are empowered and guided through whatever difficulties we face in this life. We can walk through the valley of the shadow of death because God is with us, comforting and encouraging. No parenting challenge is too overwhelming to the God who created everything out of nothing.

Parenting is never easy. It will bring us our greatest joys and our most painful heartaches. As parents, we come to understand through the Bible how much our Heavenly Father loves us and persists with us despite our defiance. The scriptures give us encouragement and guidance to navigate the challenges of parenting. Choose to listen to God's Word.

# How Can Boundaries Help My Family?

BY REV. STEVEN KOSTER

Good fences make good neighbors. Boundaries drawn lovingly around our marriages, kids, and families set limits that can bless all of those involved. Should your brother have a key to your house? Should your parents come for dinner every week? Is it okay for grandma to feed the kids ice cream for breakfast? Should your adult children live in the basement forever?

## Boundaries Create Healthy Relationships

Setting boundaries appropriately clarifies expectations of who is in charge of what (especially when those who should not be in charge have too

*“Each family faces their own unique set of boundary questions as they work to blend the cultures of their respective extended families”*

loud a voice). Each family faces their own unique set of boundary questions as they work to blend the cultures of their respective extended families. Sometimes

relationships that should change over time change too slowly. Sometimes relationships that should be top priorities become neglected. Sometimes people who should be in second or third place wield too much influence. We show our love for one another when we care enough to set limits to protect each other, and you'll be healthiest and happiest when you keep your priorities in order and are willing to draw a line.

## Boundaries Clarify Your Priorities

Our relationship to God should always be first in our lives, but how do we prioritize our human relationships? Families are intertwined webs of relationships, and each of us plays multiple roles—child, parent, cousin, spouse—often all at once. So it's hard to know which role to prioritize. Normally, your spouse gets your attention first, so that you're on the same page. Your kids' needs come second as you parent together. After that, everyone else's opinion comes third, including your parents.

## Spouse First

Generally, your first priority is your marriage. In marriage, your spouse becomes your new center of gravity. The Bible reminds us that we leave our father and mother and cling to our spouse ([Genesis 2:24](#)).



Second only to God, your spouse is most important—this relationship is intended to last a lifetime. Your spouse is your key decision-making partner, and your spouse's opinion outranks everyone else's. You might debate and negotiate in private, but to the rest of the world, you stand as one.

Prioritizing your marriage means listening carefully to your spouse's concerns. Having grown up in a particular family, we may have a comfort level with their behavior that our spouse does not share. What might seem normal to you may seem uncomfortable to your spouse. You might be okay with your parents dropping by unannounced, but your spouse might value having prior notice. You may not care if your friends want to plan the

*"You and your spouse will want to be on the same page about house rules. Your children don't get to set their own rules"*

only two weeks of vacation you get in a year, but that might not sit well with your spouse. Your first decision partner is your spouse, so understand how your spouse is experiencing those around you. Be willing to listen even if the words are difficult to hear.

Also, be honest about limits you would like to see set. Maybe you are feeling the stress of not getting time to connect with your spouse and you need a change of routine—a break from extended family, or a vacation not centered on your favorite sport. Maybe you want to reserve some limited time to be with friends, or even to be alone. Maybe your spouse is okay with your brother coming for dinner twice a week, but it is still valuable to talk with your brother about how often is too often. Whatever the limit, talk about it together, listen to how your spouse is feeling, and set a boundary together. You might disagree with your spouse and have to

compromise a bit, but to your children, in-laws, and friends, you want to be a united front. Don't disagree or denigrate each other in public. Apply your house rules consistently.

## Kids Second

And as you honor and respect your spouse, you also protect and honor your kids, raising them to launch eventually from your home and to serve with their gifts as citizens of God's kingdom.

Ideally you parent together, living by consistent house rules and discussing plans and discipline together. You and your spouse will want to be on the same page about house rules. Your children don't get to set their own rules, and their grandparents don't get to override you as parents. Your children need your guidance for now, but they are supposed to launch and likely cling to another person someday. Be prepared to take second or third place when the time comes. Also be prepared to nudge a reluctant adult child to take more responsibility for themselves.

## Everyone Else Third

You also seek to honor your parents and siblings, but they are not your key decision-making partners. They're also adults responsible for their own choices. You are free to say no, and so are they. This does not mean turning your back on your extended family—you are still called to love and honor them too—but their happiness and convenience are not your first concern. All of these relationships need boundaries to be healthy.

## Boundary Setting Works Best in Relationship

It is the job of each spouse to draw limits around their own people. Limits are more warmly received in the context of a loving and long-term relationship, so take the initiative with your family to have the difficult

conversation necessary to establish healthy limits with your family and friends.

It is easy to get defensive when it comes to our families, but that's a conversation you and your spouse should have in private. Appropriate boundaries are something you negotiate with your spouse and then inform others about. Choosing to defend a spouse can feel like betrayal of our parents, family, or friends, but sometimes the "rules" of the family need to be rewritten to reflect a new reality. Again, your spouse is your center of gravity and your key partner for decision making. Be unified with your spouse in front of others, and never blame or complain about your spouse regarding the boundaries you set together. And don't allow others to complain about your spouse either—you are one flesh before God in marriage. Discuss, argue, and negotiate with your spouse in private, but always stand up for each other in public.

## Grace is Needed for Boundary Setting

Limits need to be set graciously; everyone deserves to be treated with love and respect. Be direct about your concern but gentle in tone. Describe behaviors that are not acceptable, but do not attack someone's character. Saying "please call before you come over to see if it's a good time for us" is much better than saying "you're too controlling!" Affirm your love and affection

for your family, but state your limits clearly. If at all possible, seek some middle ground so everyone can feel respected. Other boundaries may need to be firmly held. "You may not visit if you have been drinking" or

*"Setting limits is one of the ways that we care for our families. Your marriage will be more secure when your spouse knows that you love enough to protect the relationship"*

"you may not call my spouse names." You might expect your family or friends will be upset with the limits you set, but that is okay. Eventually, your family system will adjust to your boundaries and everyone will be healthier for it.

Setting limits is one of the ways that we care for our families. Your marriage will be more secure when your spouse knows that you love enough to protect the relationship. Establishing boundaries demonstrates confidently where we stand in our relationships. We don't have to wonder if we are overstepping, we know clearly where the lines are drawn. Boundaries will give everyone more security in the relationship.



# Living into the Authority God Established for Families

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Who's in charge at home? God cares about the flourishing of families, and calls us to be accountable to one another in our roles, in society and at home. Healthy families need structures of leadership, and we all have authorities in life to which we answer. Consider the authority that God has set in place and evaluate how your family is embracing a biblical model of authority.

## Everyone Answers to God's Authority

We are all accountable to God, and we should live in obedience to God's Word. "For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne" ([Psalm 47:7-8](#)). We serve in obedience under God's authority. Our lives should reflect an obedience to God's commandments. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" ([Matthew 28:18](#)). If we can recognize that the authority of this world is placed into hands that we can trust, we may more easily relinquish control.

## Honor the Authority God Has Instituted

In society, we have a responsibility to respect those with authority over us and model respect for those

God has commanded us to obey. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" ([Romans 13:1](#)). Parents have an opportunity to model respect for authority by how they live under the authority of the church and the government. Protest should be appropriate and leaders held accountable, for all people bear God's image, but it should still be respectful. The obedience and respect that we model will be the obedience and respect we'll see in our kids.

## Be the Parent: God Placed You in Charge

God has placed parents in a position of authority in the home (it's even one of the Ten Commandments!). The goal of parenting is to raise and release godly kids, so parents are responsible for using their power to help their children grow into healthy, productive, respectful adults.

Parents can feel helpless when a newborn is placed in their arms and entrusted to their care. When a child's behavior is baffling, parents may feel clueless about how to parent well. Parents may wish to remain forever young and not act like their own parents. But none of that alters the call of parenting or the position of authority that God gives parents in the home.

Exercising our authority and disciplining is a demonstration of love to our families. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” ([Proverbs 13:24](#)). It is in your power, and even duty, to say no to things, to set limits, and to expect a basic level of respect and obedience from children. As those given authority, it is okay to say no to things that interfere with making God central in our homes. Parents can delegate age-appropriate responsibilities to help their children learn responsibility, but they should not neglect the role of being in charge.

You are the grownup, and help is available. Sometimes parents need each other. Sometimes we lean on God in prayer for strength. Sometimes professional resources through Christian counseling centers can be very helpful, whether seminars or counseling. God promises to give wisdom to those who seek it.

## Ignored Responsibility Is Harmful

Our culture has made an idol out of childhood. We are fixated on youth culture, averse to becoming adults like our parents, and tempted to defer to the wishes of our children. We love our children and desire that they would feel our affection, but can slide into the vanity of wanting to be the cool parents. We dote over children trying to provide them with every new opportunity. But when a child's happiness, rather than their character, becomes the focus, children become entitled, expecting others to serve them. Children take on an authoritative role in the home as parents defer to their desires.

But this is not how God established the authority in the home. Parenting is not about meeting children's expectations or giving them choices that are unhealthy for them. Parents should take into consideration the needs of everyone in the home, but ultimately it is the adults who exercise decision-making authority. Indulgent parenting is harmful to children in that it gives

them responsibility that is beyond their capabilities and fails to prepare them for a servant-hearted adulthood. God placed parents in the position of leadership in the home, and we should not neglect the responsibility God has given us as parents.

We harm kids when we do not serve them by being in charge. Children should have age-appropriate decision-making power, but they shouldn't be responsible for parenting siblings or be left without resources for meeting their own needs. Absent or neglectful parents raise anxious and directionless kids since structure provides the support that children need for success. Children should have age-appropriate responsibilities without being put in a position to carry a burden that is beyond their ability. The brain of a child is still developing and is ill-prepared for seeing the consequences of actions, so do not give them authority that God did not entrust to them.

## Wield Authority With Love

We should not neglect our role as parents, leaving our children without leadership or abuse our role by being harsh or self-serving with our authority. It is important to listen to the voices of everyone involved and allow opportunities for other voices to be heard. As [Ephesians 6:4](#) says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Neglectful or abusive parenting is as destructive as indulgent parenting. Parents who exercise authority without love are too enamored with their own power. Our children should obey not just because we say so, but because they know that we love them and want what is in their best interest.

Negotiating the authority in the home can be challenging, but God has established his channels of authority to bless us. If we are all fighting for control then the result is chaos. Following God's design brings us to a place of orderly function.

# Establishing Justice at Home

BY REV. DEB & STEVEN KOSTER

Family life is chaotic at times and sometimes even a little unjust. But as people who are made in the image of a just God, our hearts are wired with a desire for justice. God “loves righteousness and justice” ([Psalm 33:5](#)), and we intrinsically know that; our hearts are wired to recognize justice. God’s loving justice brings order to the chaos of our world, and as his children, our hearts should desire his passions.

*“Simple rules like ‘no hitting’ and ‘no name-calling’ set expectations about respecting one another”*

Often we think about justice on a mass scale, but we can create order under our own roof and guide our children to better understand equity for all. Discipline is all about helping our children become disciples of God and his merciful justice. In our own families, whose voice might we need to intentionally seek out in order for it to be heard? Do we need to be more proactive about mediating sibling rivalry or pay extra attention to the concerns of a small child? How can we pursue more justice at home?

## Establish Guidelines

Parents set expectations for acceptable behavior not only by what they say, but also by what they do. Bring order to your family by teaching children how to respect both God and others in your home. Basic rules, consistently enforced, are a blessing for families because they set the standard for how we are going to care for one another in community. It can start with treating others the way you wish to be treated. Simple rules like “no hitting” and “no name-calling” set expectations about respecting one another. Rules help us see beyond ourselves and appreciate how our behaviors impact others. It is easier for children when the rules are spelled out clearly and they don’t have to guess whether they are being disobedient or not.

## Enforce the Rules

Letting a child’s bad behavior slide isn’t good for anyone involved. It is hurtful to the child when a parent

*“When parents do not enforce consequences children can perceive it as permission to ignore the needs of others”*

lets bad behavior persist without correction. We benefit when we are redirected to live as God called us to live. Letting selfish behavior go unchecked will only lead to more of that behavior.

When parents do not enforce consequences children can perceive it as permission to ignore the needs of others. It is one thing to call out the bad behavior and choose a light, grace-filled response, but ignoring an offense communicates that you don't care enough about either the perpetrator or victim to follow through with consequences. A parent who is a push-over has neither their children's respect nor their obedience. And once you've established a pattern of poor enforcement in your home, it becomes even harder for the parent to intervene and redirect bad behavior moving forward.

## Three Strikes, Then Action

When a child misbehaves, call it out and calmly tell (don't ask) them to stop. Put it down, give it back, quiet

*"If they still persist after two warnings, take action. Follow through. Every time. Take it away, put them on timeout, intervene, etc"*

down, turn it off, leave them alone, etc. Maybe they just need a little redirection. If they persist, warn them again with a second chance, but now the behavior is edging towards defiance. If they still persist after two warnings, take action. Follow through. Every time. Take it away, put them on timeout, intervene, etc. But follow through. If you need to have a private conversation about why they needed to be redirected, have that conversation, but you should expect compliance, not

beg for it. When my kids were young, I would count their warnings, saying, "knock it off, that's a 1," and then "I said, knock it off, that's a 2!" It didn't take long at all for them to realize they didn't want to get to 3. Counting became a clear, and eventually humorous, way for us to communicate about expectations and their behavior.

## Practice Restorative Justice

When most people think of discipline, they think punishment. But disciplining bad behavior should always involve compassion and nurture. The difference between punishment and discipline is that punishment is not interested in fostering better future behavior or in repairing relationships. Instead, punishment is focused on retribution or revenge for past behavior.

Discipline, on the other hand, focuses on how to create better understanding so there is better behavior going forward. A child who has to face their victim, apologize, and make amends for their bad behavior is less likely to repeat their error than a child that simply receives a spanking. Everyone wins when the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated in our lives and practiced in our relationships.

## Listen Well: Empathy Is Your Secret Weapon

Empathy is a parent's secret weapon in enforcing the rules. Empathy is simply acknowledging your child's

*"Discipline, on the other hand, focuses on how to create better understanding so there is better behavior going forward"*

feelings, listening for and naming their emotions, even as you also enforce discipline. Paying attention to what your child is feeling is an excellent skill for parents at the best of times, but in the midst of conflict, it can mightily defuse resentment from a child who is misbehaving.

It doesn't have to take long and can be as simple as saying out loud what a child feels or wants. "I understand you want to stay up late and don't want to miss anything, but now is bedtime," or "I get that you're angry with your brother's behavior, but hitting is not an acceptable response." Misbehavior often emerges from a child's frustration, and acknowledging that original frustration can make it easier for the child to accept correction. Now they know at least that you noticed their experience that led to their misbehavior. Listening does not mean you have to change your rules and modify a consequence you've established, but it does show that you care enough to notice them and how they feel, not just their bad behavior.

A parent who simply demands blind obedience without allowing children to process their feelings will have a hard time maintaining control as children gain independence. Teens tend to rebel against authority when their voice isn't honored. Parents help children to live under God's authority by modeling God's love for his people. We are called to behave like God in our

relationships with others, and nowhere is this more important than in our relationship with our children. So choose patience and grace!

## No One Is Above the Law

Even parents need to obey the house rules and accept discipline when they mess up. You will make mistakes, and you can be a powerful model of restoration if you can receive correction with a generous heart. If mom or dad says a bad word, they should accept the same discipline they would give to their children. Sometimes a parent can benefit from a few moments in the time-out chair to remind them that they too need to live by God's rules for their life. Parents who follow the house rules and bear the consequences make a powerful statement about justice to their families. If we can create an environment where everyone is accountable for their behavior, then everyone's behavior improves.

Our homes can become places where we see God's justice enacted and where we all learn to live our lives with God's grace. It is a blessing to our families when we live according to God's justice. [Psalm 106:3](#) says, "Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!"

# Protecting Your Children After Divorce

BY MELINDA HAMMOND, PSY.D.

In God's perfect plan, marriage is forever. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world and sometimes divorce is inevitable. When children are involved, divorce becomes more complicated, but there's hope. Studies have shown that how parents relate after a divorce can act as a protective factor for children and is often more connected than the pre-divorce relationship. Children whose parents maintain a cooperative relationship after divorce are protected from many harmful effects.

So, when divorce happens, how can you protect your children?

upon us. So when life feels out of control and your instinct tells you the other person deserves punishment for their failures, take a deep breath or a walk, and focus on what you can control. You can control the rules in your own home, the environment you create for your child, and the type of relationship you cultivate in demeanor and boundaries.

*"This is not the place to point out faults and shortcomings"*

## 1. Focus on Your Own Behavior

When we're in conflict, our first instinct is to focus on the other person: what they've done wrong, what they should change, or how they've hurt us. But you cannot change or control that person's behavior. You can control only your own. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" ([Romans 12:18](#)). God calls us to cultivate peace in the areas that depend

*"When we're in conflict, our first instinct is to focus on the other person"*

As you read this list, you may have the urge to point out where your ex-spouse has fallen short. Don't. Focus on your own behavior, since you cannot change anyone else's.

## 2. Communicate

Find a low-conflict way to communicate with your co-parent, but not through your children. This may be through a shared calendar, emails, texts, phone calls, or even a website set up specifically to facilitate communication. This is not the place to point out faults and shortcomings but to make a plan for the benefit of your children with minimal drama. If a spouse is



abusing a communication channel, like texting every few minutes and demanding a reply, put boundaries on when that channel may be used ("I'll talk to you after work and not before"), or switch to another channel ("I've blocked you on text. I'll call you after work").

### 3. Avoid Talking about the Other Parent

Your child is a sponge; he or she soaks up what you say. Your child is made of 50% you and 50% the other parent. So if you speak ill of your ex-spouse, your child may feel like they inherited those bad characteristics. Kids are smart. If your ex is truly a bad person, your children will figure it out on their own. If what you have to say isn't necessary ("time to go to your mom's!") or unequivocally positive ("your dad was really good at badminton, so I bet you'll be good, too!"), leave it unsaid.

### 4. Keep "Grown Up Land" for the Grown Ups

Kids don't need to know about child support payments or who is supplying their needs. Furthermore, children need to feel like the people in charge are confident in their choices. With few exceptions, visitation, living arrangements, and other adult topics should be left to the adults. Don't be afraid of letting kids give input, but the ultimate decision should lie with the adults, and the adults should agree in front of the kids. Finally, your child cannot be your go-between. Kids should never be forced to bring messages, correspondence, or anything else between their parents.

### 5. Don't Fight in Front of the Children

This one seems obvious but is much harder in practice. If drop-offs and pick-ups are full of tension, kids will have a more difficult time adjusting. Practice firm boundaries such as "we're not talking about this now." If an argument does break out, avoid calling your partner names or threatening him/her. Better to walk away and talk as adults later.

### 6. Stop Worrying about Who Is Right

No one wins a divorce. Unless you want to be stuck in that pattern forever, you'll have to learn to let go of the ways you were wronged and the ways you might be wronged in the future. Put boundaries in place to minimize bad behavior, but you may never get an apology or vindication. God will have justice in the end. Move on, if not for your own sake, for the sake of your children.

### 7. Take Care of Yourself

Your children need you. Not only that, but they need the best you. If you're not taking care of yourself, no one else will. Make sure you're eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising. Find some new hobbies that feed your soul. As parents, it's often easy to forget about our own needs, but if our needs aren't being met, it's difficult to meet the needs of our children.

Divorce is difficult for everyone involved, and unfortunately its impact is often biggest on children. By providing them a safe, stable environment and caring for yourself, you can minimize their suffering.

# Establishing Discipline in the Blended Family Home

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Blended families come together with unique challenges. Not only do they bring unfinished business from previous relationships, they also face the stress of blending two families into a new one. The new relationship has to mesh the traditions and parenting styles of two different families and often in a pressure cooker of emotions. So here are some thoughts on parenting in blended families:

## Strive to Keep a United Front and Work Together

There needs to be excellent communication between parents. If you as parents disagree on an issue, do so behind closed doors and not in front of the kids—parents need to support each other in front of the kids. It will undermine both the marriage relationship and the parenting if one parent rescues their children from discipline rather than following through with the consequences that you established together.

## Biological Parents Should Take the Lead in Discipline

First, check your own biases. It can be very difficult for a parent to support their spouse if they have an enmeshed relationship with their biological children.

Parents who are too close to their kids can endanger their marriage by supporting their kids over their spouse. Second, rules will be more readily accepted when established and reinforced by the biological parent who already has an established, loving relationship. It is difficult to make or enforce rules outside the context of a relationship. The stepparent

*“Parents need to be on the same page about how they are going to handle discipline. Discipline should be discussed prior to entering into a relationship together to assure you have compatible parenting philosophies”*

needs to be empowered to act as a parent and intervene when needed, but as much as possible allow the biological parent to take the lead with discipline. Having the biological parent handle discipline will prevent the new stepparent from being vilified as the bad guy. Third, since discipline is better received within

the context of the relationship where trust has already been established, let the stepparent take time to invest in the children and their interests so trust can be built. Listen to your stepchildren's fears and concerns about the new family structure.

## Consistency Is Important for Discipline to Be Effective

Parents need to be on the same page about how they are going to handle discipline. Discipline should be discussed prior to entering into a relationship together to assure you have compatible parenting philosophies. If one parent is strict and another is a push over, work out a compromise so all children have consistency to feel secure. Be careful to enforce the rules for all kids at an age-appropriate level. If the rules are always changing, children never know where they stand, producing much anxiety within the family.

## Prayer Will Be an Essential Ingredient

Prayer is a powerful tool for impacting our families. Prayer guides us to turn over to God the things that we are unable to change. God can soften hearts, build

bridges, and impact things outside of our control. We free ourselves when we give God control. Prayer is also very beneficial to our marriages. Couples who pray together significantly reduce their risk of divorce. Praying together for your children will unite your heart with that of your spouse. We are blessed when we can share the concerns on our hearts with God and with one another.

## Seek Support

Seeking support from a trained counselor can be very beneficial in managing the delicate balance in blended families. Couples need to seek support early on in the relationship before animosity is burned into the fibers of the relationship. Children and parents enter these marriages still carrying the baggage from the previous relationships and benefit from professionals guiding them through the unpacking. Connecting with a small group or joining a book study can provide valuable support. Many resources are available at [SmartStepfamilies.com](http://SmartStepfamilies.com).

In short, the rules for parenting are not fundamentally different for blended families (unity, consistency, relationship), but the webs of blended relationships present pointed complications which need to be handled with wisdom.

# Spiritual Parenting: Catch the Passion

BY REV. STEVEN KOSTER

In scripture parents are told, “Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). Our mandate as parents is to help our children grow into their identity as citizens of God’s kingdom and to inspire them to live a life of faith, using God’s gifts to reflect his love. But how do they come to know this as their identity?

*“Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”*

In studies like Christian Smith’s [Soul Searching](#), it’s clear that parents are the most influential people in a child’s life, especially when it comes to spiritual

*“It’s clear that parents are the most influential people in a child’s life, especially when it comes to spiritual formation”*

formation. More than pastors, youth leaders, or the friends they hang around with, a parent’s spiritual beliefs are the most formative for children, and that influence continues into young adulthood.

## Children Are Passion Detectors—They Care about What You Care about

Some years ago, our family joined a mass bike tour. My kids were so excited about biking across Iowa as a family. You would not think that pedaling hundreds of miles in the hottest week of July would be something teenagers would anticipate gladly. So why were they so excited to spend a week in the heat of the Iowa sun? They caught our enthusiasm for the adventure! They had heard us talk often about previous trips. They saw all of our pictures. They knew our biking friends. They heard us laugh about the fun times and brag about some of the challenges we had weathered over past trips. We had shared our love for this place and activity, and they wanted to experience it for themselves. Our passion became their passion.

## Make Your Faith Visible

Can your kids see what excites you? A sports team? Gardening? Maybe a favorite vacation spot? What

would they name as the thing that gets you excited? [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) calls us to love the Lord with every part of us—our heart, soul, and strength! Maybe you should ask your family to name your top five favorite things and see where your faith ranks. If faith isn't at the top, it is time to reprioritize.

*“We can’t expect our kids to embrace spirituality if we are spiritually malnourished”*

## Feed Your Soul

We can't expect our kids to embrace spirituality if we are spiritually malnourished. You simply can't give what you don't have. If you are uninterested in belonging to a community of faith, why would they? If you are uninterested in spiritual matters in the everyday, why would they? [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) continues by telling us to put God's Word into our hearts. Get into your Bible, and get excited about what you are learning. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with a passion to learn more about him! Get curious and dig deep into God's Word. Let it

become the guide for the way you live your life.

## Share Your Learning

After you dig into God's Word yourself, the next step is to let what you learn spill over to your children. [Deuteronomy 6:7](#) tells us to impress God's Word upon our children by sharing it with them throughout the day. Talk about how God is at work in your life if you want your kids to catch your spiritual passion. Talk about your quiet time, talk about your worship, talk about your life of service, talk about how God shines in through the cracks of the day. If you can share from your own learning, you can grow in faith together.

## Build a Community

While it's clear parents are the greatest single influence, children that feel included by a group of adults develop powerful bonds to that community. In other words, encourage your children and your church friends to get connected. Intergenerational connections is another great predictor of children who grow strong faith as adults. On a given Sunday morning, are there other adults at your congregation with whom your kids would be comfortable having a conversation?

Let your kids catch your passion!

# Building Blocks of Faith

BY REV. DEB & STEVEN KOSTER

What do kids need to cultivate a strong and growing faith? It depends somewhat on the child and their current developmental stage of relating to the world. And yet, all kids need some of the same elements to grow fully into a multidimensional faith.

In a series of books, Robert & Laura Keeley have described faith-formational building blocks—four fundamental elements out of which faith is woven that help children grow spiritually into age-appropriate levels.

## Identity: I Belong

Faith is developed in the context of relationships, so children seek out places where they feel a sense of belonging. Obviously, children are bonded to their parents, and parents remain the most influential element in forming faith, particularly fathers who take

*“Obviously, children are bonded to their parents, and parents remain the most influential element in forming faith, particularly fathers who take their faith seriously”*

their faith seriously. Yet also, children need to connect with mentors within a wider community of faith for that community to feel like theirs, and not just their parents' church. Christian mentors also serve to guide young

*“In a safe place of belonging, children are free to learn and grow in their understanding of who God is and what role they play in his big story”*

people through life's challenges. Children who connect to other adults in a faith community will feel welcomed and accepted and come to consider the congregation their own. In this context they feel safe to stretch themselves and explore their gifts as they participate in the life of the church. If your faith community engages all generations to participate together, mentoring can happen naturally as people connect with those outside of their peer groups.

## Knowledge: I Understand

In a safe place of belonging, children are free to learn and grow in their understanding of who God is



*“Young children, who tend to process experience through stories can be key to helping children know a God who is mysterious and who knows them for who they are”*

and what role they play in his big story. Children come to a knowledge of both the mystery and closeness of who God is and develop a relationship with him that will grow over the years. For young children, who tend to process experience through stories, recounting Bible stories can be key to helping children know a God who is mysterious and who knows them for who they are. For older children, some will want to debate theology as they wrestle with abstract ideas, but many mostly just want to know that they belong to the people around them. The story of God and his love for his children is heard in many different ways such as testimony, singing, and scripture reading. The rituals of sacrament are guides to point the congregation to the work that God has done and is continuing to do for his people.

## Vision: I Hope

In the faith that we embrace, our hope becomes anchored in something that is bigger than ourselves. God himself is the King of the universe, yet he wants to know us closely. God shows himself to us but remains tantalizingly impossible to understand. In the gospel we find our hope for our lives and a future that moves us beyond the despair of this world. In the gospel promise we have hope for our relationships with one another as well as the world in which we live.

## Calling: I Serve

God has gifted each of us with unique talents for serving his kingdom. As we connect in our faith community, we are encouraged to use our gifts to serve others. Offering children the chance to participate in worship, service projects, and other congregational activities communicates that they are part of God's team. The church becomes a place where we are challenged to see beyond ourselves to care for one another, our neighborhood, and beyond. In this setting we discover that God equips us for the tasks that he places before us.

# About the Authors



Rev. Deb Koster

Deb Koster is the Senior Producer, editor, writer, and speaker for [Family Fire](#). After more than 20 years as a Registered Nurse, she followed her passion for family ministry and completed a Master of Divinity degree. She has since been ordained as a pastor in the [Christian Reformed Church](#). Deb and her husband, Steven, enjoy leading marriage retreats and family seminars to encourage people in their most intimate relationships. The Kosters are the parents of three awesome young adults and reside in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Rev. Steven Koster

Steven Koster is an editor, writer, and speaker with [Family Fire](#). Formerly the Director of [ReFrame Media](#), [Family Fire](#)'s parent organization, Steven currently leads a hospitality ministry through [The Parsonage Inn](#), a B&B the Kosters created in their 1882 Victorian home. Steven has founded two consultancies: [Dutch Root](#), which provides individuals and historians with genealogical and family history research, and [The Joshua Lab](#), which helps organizations think strategically about their mission and infrastructure.



Melinda Hammond,  
Psy.D.

Dr. Melinda Hammond is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist at [Chicago Christian Counseling Center](#) and has a strong background working with children and their families. Her specialties include life changes, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, childhood behavior disorders, anger management, and child/adolescent adjustment to parental divorce. She also offers assessment services for ADHD, Autism, and learning disabilities. Her approach is based in mindfulness and values-driven therapy, allowing clients to integrate their faith into personal and psychological growth and healing.



## About Family Fire

[Family Fire](#) is a Christian ministry committed to fanning the flames of the Holy Spirit in our family relationships. *Family Fire* hosts an active [Facebook community](#) and offers a library of deeper resources on our [website](#). We also offer live teaching events such as marriage and parenting retreats. Together we explore spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy and how we should live as members of a Spirit-fed family.

[Romans 8:14-17](#) teaches us how the Holy Spirit connects us in our relationships:

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Discussing God’s design for marriage and parenting, *Family Fire* is produced by Pastor Deb Koster in collaboration with her husband, Pastor Steven. The Kosters are passionate about using God’s Word to help families nurture faith formation and navigate relationship challenges.



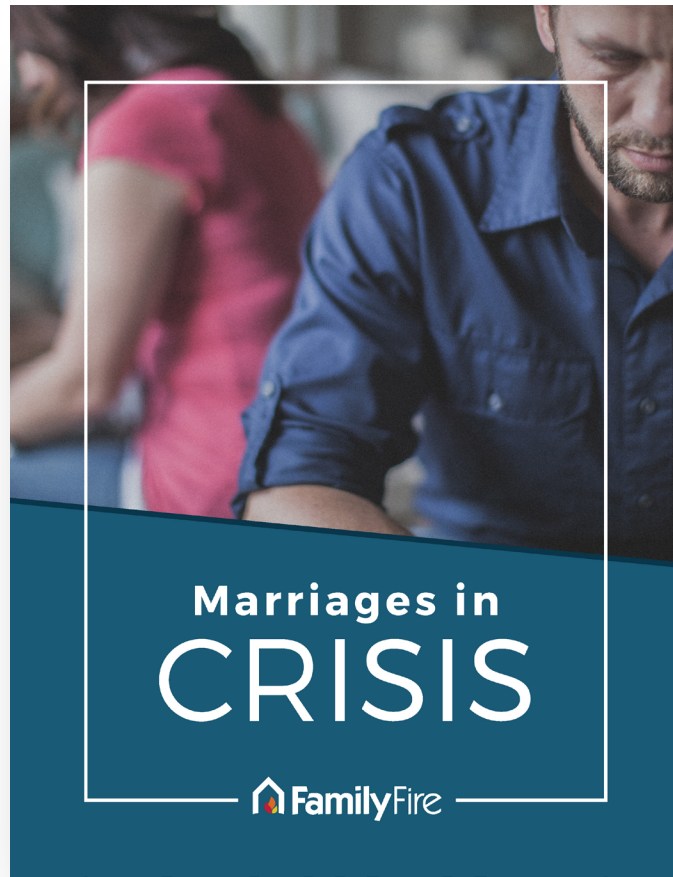
## Forgiveness: A Guide to Relationship Repair

We've all been hurt by someone close.  
Wounds can be deep. Yet, God calls us to forgive.

"Forgiveness: A Guide to Relationship Repair," an ebook from Family Fire,  
equips you to heal and repair your relationships through God's gift of forgiveness.

To learn more visit

**[familyfire.com/forgive](https://familyfire.com/forgive)**



## Help for Marriages in Crisis

Every marriage hits bumps in the road.  
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"Marriages in Crisis," an ebook from *Family Fire*, helps you find hope and see God at work in the most difficult time of your life.

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Sign up on our website to get encouragement like  
this booklet delivered to your inbox each week.



*Family Fire* is the marriage and family outreach of



**ReFrameMinistries.org**

1700 28th Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

PO BOX 7050  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

Call: 616-241-1691  
Toll Free: 800-879-6555



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