

10. Child Development



Picture a newborn infant, and then picture a mature 18-year-old who is ready to be out on his or her own. Quite a contrast isn't it? You and your children's mother have the responsibility to care for and guide that child through that process. So as a parent where do you start? Believe it or not, your starting point is you. How you see yourself is one of the biggest factors that influence how you will see your children. In today's world there are many young men (and women!) who have been told the same wrong message for all of their lives – that is, that they are worthless. They have been told: “You're stupid!”, “You're lazy!”, and “You'll never amount to anything!” And if someone hears that message often enough they begin to believe it! Instead, let's take a moment to learn what God has to say about that.

In several of the earlier lessons we read in the Bible about a godly man known as King David. Psalm 139 in the Bible was written by David and says:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:13-14

Remember that you are “wonderfully made” and loved by God, and God doesn't make junk! You are valuable! God made you just the way he wanted you to be, and you have your own unique and wonderful combination of skills, talents, and gifts. Think about that truth for a few moments. And then also consider that this truth also applies to each of your children. So our central task as parents is to first discover the unique combination of wonderful skills, talents, and gifts that God has given to each of our children, and then to help them grow and mature in their use of those gifts. Just as God has a wonderful plan for your life, he also has a wonderful plan for your child's life and we have the privilege of working with God to carry out that plan!

As we do this we must constantly keep in mind that we want to fulfill God's plan, not our plan, because we know that his plan is best. As the prophet Jeremiah said:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

These truths apply to you, to your wife, and to all of your children. We can rely on these truths because God loves your children even more than you do, and he wants your children to prosper even more than you do! Also, though it may be more difficult to understand and accept, these truths also apply to “special needs” children. These children are just as valuable in God's eyes, and just as worthy of our love, nurture, and encouragement.

As your children's father you have a one-of-a-kind role to play in their lives as they grow up. For your daughters you are the most important man in their lives until the day they get married. The kind of man that you are and how you treat their mother are the biggest influences on the kind of man each will look for to be her future husband. And for your sons you are the principal role model they will follow as each grows into adulthood. How you treat their mother and the kind of father you are will show each one what a godly husband and father looks like. Most importantly, the kind of father you are will model and shape how they see God. Their earthly father shows them what their heavenly Father looks like. Those are big responsibilities but, with God's help, you can do it and you can do it well!

Finally, you can't be involved in a child's development if you are not actively involved in their life. So make sure you do everything you can to keep your family intact and together. Always treat your child's Mom with love and respect. Work in partnership with her in all aspects of raising your child. Attend their activities, interact with their teachers, play their games, laugh at their jokes!

Be a big part of their lives!

Questions for thought and discussion:

- a. What messages have you been told your whole life about your worth? Are they in line with how God sees you?
- b. Do you believe that God has a wonderful plan for your life? For your children's lives?
- c. Have you thought about how God has made each of your children uniquely different? How will that affect how you help each of them to grow and mature?
- d. Twenty years from now, if someone were to ask your children what kind of dad their father was, what do you think they would say? Is that how you want to be remembered? What can you do today to improve that?