

RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY ONE

Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31

You can't be richer than having a mother who loved you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MODERN families are stressed out! Budgets creak under the strain of rising costs, and many parents are forced to take multiple jobs and work longer hours to make ends meet. To get it all done, parents have learned multitasking—and moms are pros at this.

A typical day consists of taking a business call while carpooling the kids to school. Ordering groceries while sitting through an online training event. Watching a livestream videocast of the kids' after-school program while rushing through the take-out line to pick up dinner.

On the way home, mom texts dad to remember to grab the dog at doggie daycare while she picks up the children and swings by curbside delivery at the market. Finally, all the family members converge in the kitchen for a fast meal followed by homework, chores, bath, story time, bed, and the finish line—mom and dad collapsed in front of the TV . . . and that's a smooth day!

Amid the hectic pace, God's Word offers stability. This *Searching the Scriptures* series can help you shore up your family's foundation so that your home can stand secure against life's demands and culture's shifting winds. Mothers, we begin with your indispensable role in the home and the encouragement the Scriptures have for you. This study is a tribute to mothers . . . and *anyone* who seeks to follow God's way of wisdom.



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S01
1

Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, ask for the Lord to give you wisdom in your parenting role.

Father, Your Word is my treasure . . . “more desirable than gold” (Psalm 19:10). I receive it thankfully, asking You to walk beside me and show me the way to parent my children in the way You wisely, graciously, and faithfully parent me. I want to learn whatever You may teach. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We turn to the last chapter of the book of Proverbs as wisdom's grand finale. Throughout Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman, and Proverbs 31 contains a storehouse of womanly advice. In this passage, an actual mother was addressing her royal son, “King Lemuel” (Proverbs 31:1). This mother embodied Lady Wisdom, warning her son to avoid vices that ensnare others:

Do not waste your strength on women. (31:3)

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, to guzzle wine. (31:4)

Rulers should not crave alcohol. (31:4)

She challenged her son to use his power and position for good:

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves;
ensure justice for those being crushed.
Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless,
and see that they get justice. (31:8–9)*

And then, King Lemuel's mother painted a portrait of “a virtuous and capable wife” (31:10)—the kind of queen whom any mother would seek for her son's wife. Let's take a closer look at the verses that followed, which were written as an acrostic poem. Each verse began with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet to aid memorization.



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31



Searching the Scriptures Method and Resources

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible study method that includes observing the passage, interpreting the meaning, correlating with similar passages, and applying the principles. For helpful instruction, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).” There, you can also follow the [link to purchase a copy](#) of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.



Observation: Wisdom in Action

In the observation phase, we examine what the biblical passage says. Take your time as you read. Notice the action words. Observe contrasts and comparisons, descriptions, and poetic patterns. Careful observation is the key to accurate understanding.

Her Value before God—Proverbs 31:10, 29–31

The portrait in Proverbs 31:10–31 gracefully models three treasures that wives and mothers hold within their grasp. First, notice that the poem begins and ends by proclaiming women’s exquisite value.

Compare [Proverbs 31:10](#) and [31:29–31](#). From God’s perspective, what gives women lasting value? What doesn’t?

Consider your value before God, which is easy to forget amid all the things you’re responsible for as a mother. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31

Her Roles as Wife and Mother—Proverbs 31:11–12, 28–29

While the thin veneers of charm and beauty might catch the world's eye, the Lord recognizes a woman's inner character . . . and so do her husband and children. According to [Proverbs 31:11–12](#) and [31:28–29](#), how do they honor her in her roles as wife and mother?

When a husband respects his wife, he listens when she speaks. He values her opinion. The best advice he will get is from his wife. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Her Character on Display—Proverbs 31:13–27

If this woman looked in the mirror, she would see herself adorned with value from God and honor from her family. No wonder she stepped out in confidence, as the lengthy center section of the poem illustrates.

In what ways do the woman's actions in [31:13–27](#) display her character, abilities, and personality? Observe the repeated themes and vivid descriptions.

Here is a woman who is neither fragile nor fearful. She has great character. She is secure. She is “clothed with strength and dignity” (31:25). She’s comfortable in her own skin. She’s not trying to be the woman next door. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31



Interpretation: A Realistic View of Womanhood

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand the meaning of the passage. Instead of seeing Proverbs 31 as a list of to-dos for modern moms, let's try viewing it through the lens of biblical wisdom literature and find a clearer interpretation.

The Proverbs 31 woman illustrates themes woven through the preceding thirty chapters of Proverbs—beginning with the core theme. She is “a woman who fears the LORD” (Proverbs 31:30), a concept which ties back to the opening chapter of Proverbs:

*Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)*

This is *the* foundation stone for a sturdy home—*fear of the Lord*—anchoring family members to a relational, reverential, and responsive walk with God.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? For help with the answer, consult your [Bible study tools](#), or for online help, consult [Constable's Notes](#) on Proverbs 1:7 on netbible.org.

What happens in families in which the fear of the Lord is absent? What substitutes for God do family members follow instead?



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31

The virtuous and capable wife in Proverbs 31 drew her identity from God and followed His ways. *Proverbs 31:25–27* summarizes the results of her close walk with God. Write down the qualities she exhibited because she feared the Lord.

If the woman described in Proverbs 31 could speak, what main message would she give to today's wives and mothers?

Some people have the mistaken idea that if a woman is godly, she is servile and retiring. That doesn't sound like the women in Proverbs 31 to me. Godliness is a broad perspective. It fits every personality. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31



Correlation: Characteristics of a Woman Who Fears the Lord

In the correlation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we can enhance our interpretation with principles from similar passages.

What additional wisdom from Proverbs can we learn about fearing the Lord? Write down what each of the following verses teach you about the qualities of a person who fears the Lord.

Proverbs 8:13: _____

Proverbs 14:26: _____

Proverbs 23:17–18: _____

The point of Proverbs 31 isn't to raise an impossible standard and dare you to achieve it. Rather, it is to encourage you to lay the right foundation for your life. Fear the Lord, see your value in Him, walk in His wisdom (not the world's) . . . and then be the capable person God made you to be! Isn't that a freeing thought?



Application: Sparkling Beauty of the Rediscovered Jewel

Have you been chasing perfection to earn your worth? What does it mean to you that God values you?



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31

In what ways does secular society devalue you? How can you turn off those negative messages and fill your mind with God's wisdom?

What is one way you'd like to put wisdom into action amid your hectic pace?

Perhaps you have a person in your life who needs wise counsel. Who is this person? What godly wisdom can you pass along? Pray about what you'd like to say, and then write down your thoughts in your own "mother-to-son" letter.

The world often lures wives and mothers away from their invaluable role by promising a more glamorous life outside their God-given identity. "A wise woman builds her *home*" (Proverbs 14:1, emphasis added). There's nothing more worth pouring your life into than your home and the precious ones in your care.



Encouragement for Mothers and Others

Proverbs 31:10–31

The answer to life's busy-ness isn't to get *savvier* but *wiser*—less focused on time-saving “hacks” and more focused on bringing God into the time we have. Family life may not slow down, but family time can become richer as we put into practice these biblical principles for the home.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You have given me wonderful gifts and none are more valuable than the people in my home. Guide me in nurturing them with wisdom and caring for them. Help me to see my value in You, to set my heart on the things that last, and to give myself wholly to following Your way. In Jesus' name, amen.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY TWO

Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

Where do we start if we hope to have a strong and healthy marriage? We need to seek the advice of the One who originated marriage—God Himself.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MARRIAGE was born in the heart of God and instituted at the dawn of creation. Genesis 1 contains the account of God fashioning all things. After each burst of creativity, God paused to size up His handiwork and then declared it “good.” First, the light was *good*. The ground and seas, *good*. The plants and trees, *good*. The sun, moon, and stars, *good*. The animals, *good*. All things perfect for their purpose and pleasing to their Creator! Until . . .

God created the garden of Eden and put Adam in it to help Him finish the work, which was when God noticed and then declared that something was *not* good: “It is not good for the man to be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)

Adam was not merely *alone*. He was also *incomplete* for God’s larger purpose for humanity. Adam was like a puzzle piece with no adjoining match. So, in a final creative flourish,

The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21–22)

Fashioned from Adam’s rib, Eve was Adam’s perfect counterpart. God brought her to Adam as a father might walk his beautiful daughter down the aisle. It was a joyful wedding for Adam and Eve—and for us because in their God-designed relationship, we find a plan for building strong marriages today.



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Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Embedded within the Scriptures are timeless truths that lead us into a fuller understanding of marriage. Say this prayer as you begin your study:

Thank You, Father, for revealing Your truth to me through Your Word. Receiving the truth isn't always immediate or easy, so please grant me the wisdom to understand Scripture and the humility to accept its teaching on this profound and foundational institution You created. I pray in Jesus' true name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Genesis 2 echoes the creation account of Genesis 1, focusing on the creation of Adam and Eve and the garden of Eden. Genesis 2 records that God placed Adam into the garden to tend it and enjoy its wonders, but with this privilege came a caution. What did God *free* Adam to do and what did God *forbid*, according to [Genesis 2:16–17](#)?

With this context in mind, let's take a closer look at the climax of the chapter, [Genesis 2:18–25](#).



Observation: The Origin of Marriage

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we begin with observation. Pastor Chuck Swindoll encourages us to use our senses when we read: “Pay attention to the sounds in the Scriptures. . . Listen to the words, and feel the emotions.”¹



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

The Need for Marriage—Genesis 2:18–20

What did God say Adam needed according to [Genesis 2:18](#)? Read this verse in several other [Bible versions](#) and write down the different ways the translators have tried to capture the key Hebrew words for *helper* and *just right* for him.

Instead of immediately creating the woman, what did God do in [2:19–20](#)? What was the purpose behind Adam's task, which is highlighted in the last line of 2:20?

Read [2:21–23](#) and write down your initial observations. Then reread the passage and write down more observations. Keep observing until you see every element in these verses.



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

When Adam received his precious bride, Adam expressed the intimate nature of their union in his exuberant response:

“At last!” the man exclaimed.

*“This one is bone from my bone,
and flesh from my flesh!
She will be called ‘woman,’
because she was taken from ‘man.’”* (Genesis 2:23, emphasis added)

Bone from bone. Flesh from flesh. No other union between humans is like the marriage bond formed by God!

When God brought Eve to Adam, Adam said, in effect, “This is the one!” God knew what He was doing. Men, you didn’t just reach into the pool of humanity and find some available woman. Women, you didn’t notice a man here or there and chose one. Knowing you and knowing what your spouse could provide, God brought you together.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Essential Building Blocks of Marriage—Genesis 2:24–25

Read [Genesis 2:24–25](#). Put in your own words what the author of Genesis was communicating to his audience. What did he want us to know about marriage from God’s perspective?

Adam and Eve’s union reflects the essence of God’s design for marriage. Let’s dig deeper into the meaning of these verses.



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25



Interpretation: Essential Elements in a Healthy Marriage

As an architect might design pillars to brace a building, the Master Architect included in His marriage blueprint four essential elements for a strong and lasting union between a husband and wife.

Below each of the following phrases from Genesis 2:24–25, write down an essential element of marriage and define its meaning.

“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother . . .” (2:24)

“. . . and is joined to his wife . . .” (2:24)

“. . . and the two are united into one” (2:24).



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

“Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25).

How do these essentials work together to form a complete picture of marriage?

I urge you to keep these four principles in mind. Without them, your marriage will never work. They are essential for the survival of a happy, healthy, and strong marriage.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Jesus' Affirmation of the Essentials of Marriage

When asked about His views on divorce, Jesus turned to this same section of Genesis to give His answer. What essentials of marriage did Jesus affirm in [Matthew 19:4–5](#)?



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

Then Jesus applied God's original design for marriage with a principle that gets to the heart of God's intention for marriage. What did Jesus say in [Matthew 19:6](#)?

When sin threatens to weaken the bond that God formed, we must call upon the original builder to patch the cracks and repair the damage. Who is more qualified to restore a couple's marital union than the One who created it? Invite the Lord right now to mend the fractures in your relationship with your spouse.

You enter into a relationship with your spouse like you do with no one else. You are married to only one person “till death do us part.” To no other relationship do you pledge with such a commitment. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Shoring Up the Foundation

Pastor Chuck Swindoll sums up these essentials in four memorable words. Included with each is a question for reflection.

- 1) *Severance*: husbands and wives separate from their parents physically and emotionally to form a new family unit. Are there ways I need to shift physically and emotionally from my parents to my marriage partner?
- 2) *Permanence*: the Hebrew word for *joined* means to glue together. God designed marriage as a secure, unbreakable bond. How can I strengthen the divine bond with my spouse?
- 3) *Unity*: through mutual acceptance, husbands and wives operate as one by affirming each other's strengths and gifts. How can I better work as one with my spouse, appreciating his or her differences?
- 4) *Intimacy*—complete trust and transparency characterize the couple's physical and emotional union of unconditional love for one another. How can I further cultivate an open, vulnerable, intimate relationship with my spouse?



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

Which of these essentials would you and your spouse say is solid and healthy? Recall examples and habits of this quality, or qualities, in practice.

Which of these essentials would you and your spouse say needs some attention? Recall examples of the quality lacking or bad habits where opposing qualities are at work.

Brainstorm with your spouse how to make marriage improvements. Write down your ideas and steps to put these ideas into action.



Healthy Marriages Start Here

Genesis 2:18–25

God delighted in meeting Adam's need by forming Eve as the perfect fit for him. God made the man and woman to complement each other and, together, to make a whole.

If there's anyone who can strengthen your marriage bond, it's the One who originated marriage and brought together you and your spouse. Conclude by praying for the Lord's help to shore up the foundation of your marriage.



A FINAL PRAYER

Write your prayer in the space below.

Father,

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 96.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY THREE

Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

One of the greatest things you can do for your child is to help your child know who he or she is, and, first, you have to find that out.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOUR child may be yours by birth, adoption, or marriage. He or she may be your grandchild, nephew or niece who lives with you. God has placed this amazing, one-of-a-kind boy or girl under your care to nurture and guide. Until he or she reaches maturity and leaves the nest, one of your top parental priorities is to *really* know your child.

Knowing your child takes time, openness, careful and sensitive observation, diligent study, and prayer. When you invest yourself in this journey of discovery, you will be amazed at the precious little one God has given you.

Oh, the wonders of your child! Her heart is so tender and pure. His mind hums like a power plant with imagination and curiosity. Her personality sparkles with laughter and joy like a multifaceted diamond. What a delight to explore the hidden universe that lies within your child! To unlock the secrets! To unleash the child's God-given potential! And then, to release your child to be the capable, confident adult that God intended him or her to be.

Are you ready to follow God's leading in the journey and joy of parenting? Let's dig into His Word to find the way.



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S03
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Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, open your heart to receive His wise counsel on rearing children. Reading His words may cause memories of your own childhood to surface—positive recollections as well as negative. Take a moment in prayer to invite the Lord to minister to you as you enter what may be a sensitive part of your soul.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading the passage carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. Read [Proverbs 22:6](#) in three Bible versions, noting below the differences and similarities in the translations.



Observation: Key Features of Proverbs 22:6

Now, let's make some observations of the verse as it reads in the New American Standard Bible. The Hebrew word translated "way" in the New American Standard Bible is an important concept to understand, and in the next phase, interpretation, we will unlock its meaning. For now, simply identify the verse's features. In the chart below, fill in the words from the verse that fit the description.



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

*Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6 NASB)*

Component	Words from the Verse
The command (<i>what</i>)	
The recipient of the action (<i>who</i>)	
The specifics of the action (<i>how</i>)	
The end of the action (<i>when</i>)	
The outcome of the action (<i>then what</i>)	

The observation phase of Bible study should spark some questions to answer in the interpretation phase. Here are some questions to fuel your thinking:

- What is the nature of the training?
- What is the duration of the training?
- What is the implementation of the training?
- What are the results of the training?



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

Can you think of other questions you'd like to explore? Jot them down in the space below.



Interpretation: A Deeper Understanding of Proverbs 22:6

Let's look closer at [Proverbs 22:6](#) to find God's answers.

"Train Up"

What is the nature of the training? The word in Hebrew translated "train up" is *hanakh*. To explore the meaning of the Hebrew word, Pastor Chuck used a Hebrew-English lexicon, in which a root form of the word refers to a midwife rubbing the "palate of [a] new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck." Also, it can refer to making "submissive . . . as one does a horse by a rope in its mouth." The Hebrew word also means to "dedicate, consecrate [the] temple" (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chronicles 7:5).¹

Consider these vivid metaphors: a midwife stimulating a newborn's natural desire to suck; a trainer guiding a horse; a king dedicating a temple to the Lord. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from these metaphors?

Parents are to cultivate a thirst in children for spiritual things, develop an appetite for that which is right and good, while shaping their will and bringing it into submission.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

“A Child”

What is the duration of the training? The Hebrew term for “child” is *na’ar*. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. In each of the following verses, at what stage of childhood is the child: *Genesis 34:19; 37:2* (NASB); and *1 Samuel 4:20–21* (NLT)?

What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child’s life are you responsible to train him or her?

The time covers infancy through young adulthood. During those years while they are under our roof, we are to train our children. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“In the Way”

What is the implementation of the training? The NASB offers an insightful footnote translating literally the Hebrew phrase for “the way he should go” as, “according to his way.” Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a wise and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her God-designed personality, abilities, or natural interests.



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

So which interpretation is correct? Should we train a child in the wise way he or she should go? Or according to his or her way? Or perhaps both?

For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition:

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)

In the amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or “bent.” What does it mean to train up a child according to his God-given “bent”?

To further explore the meaning of this concept, we’ll compare the word with other Proverbs in the correlation phase. Until then, let’s consider the final line in Proverbs 22:6.

“Even When He Grows Older”

What are the results of the training? “Even when he grows older he will not abandon it.” The root meaning of the Hebrew word for *older* suggests an age of maturity when children become young adults and are able to make it on their own.

The Hebrew word for *abandon* means “to turn aside.” When you help your children know their bents, they will follow their God-given “way” and not turn aside from it. Why would they? They are living in harmony with how God made them.



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs



Correlation: The “Way” in Other Verses

Compare *way* in Proverbs 22:6 to the same word in [Proverbs 30:18–19](#) (NASB). In the space below, write down the phrases in verse 19, and substitute the word *characteristic* for *way* to highlight the metaphorical meaning.

The ways that eagles soar, snakes slither, ships sail, and even the way that a boy romances his sweetheart are all one-of-a-kind wonders . . . and so is your child!

No two children are alike; even identical twins are unique. God did not sketch Jacob, a homebody, in the likeness of his twin, outdoorsman Esau. Your children’s personalities, interests, relational styles, strengths, weaknesses are different (not better or worse, just different). Measuring one child against another is like nitpicking a da Vinci painting because it’s not a Rembrandt. Both are masterpieces—and so are your children. So don’t compare siblings.

Pause to put together the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6, as you have discovered it. Review the meaning of each part of the verse, and then write a sentence or two in the box below that summarizes God’s plan for parenting.

“Train up (the *what*) . . . a child (the *who*) . . . in the way he should go (the *how*)” (Proverbs 22:6 NASB).



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

Train up, that is, cultivate an appetite for spiritual things within your child according to his or her own individual interests, inclinations, and giftedness. When he or she reaches maturity, there will be no departure from what he or she learned during such healthy and wholesome training. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Start the Journey of Discovery

If training involves stimulating your child's spiritual thirst, latent talent, and gifts, what lays hidden within your child's God-given nature? Perhaps some particular interests? Needs or longings? A yearning for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?

When you were a child, did the adults in your life seek to know your God-given nature? How might your childhood experience impact your parenting style?

How can you discover your child today? Start by tuning in to his or her deeds: "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself" (Proverbs 20:11 NASB). A child speaks through the megaphone of his or her deeds. If you listen, you can hear him or her saying, "This is me. Please notice. I'm not him. I'm not her. Let me be me."



Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

Reflect on what you've observed in your child's deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. What have your child's deeds been communicating lately?

Biblical parenting involves training our children *according to their bents*, not shaping them like us or squeezing them into a mold God never intended for them. In what ways can you encourage your child's spiritual thirst and natural bents—his or her personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths?

Knowing your child is an adventure! Don't forget to discover yourself along the way. God has great things in store for your family as you follow His plan for parenting.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child's soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and You continue to shape and mold. Unite me with Your creative work in my child's life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person You made me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 335.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY FOUR

Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18

In the womb, God put together the one-and-only you. Think of what this knowledge does for young children when they learn that they are an “original” from God’s hand!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOUR child is like a beautiful tapestry knit together by God, the master weaver of the soul. David marveled at God’s handiwork:

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body;
and knit me together in my mother’s womb. (Psalm 139:13)*

Your child’s hair texture, eye color, voice timbre, and body shape; personality, interests, moods, and abilities—God entwines all these intricate threads into a unique pattern to create the masterpiece that is your child.

Each stage of your child’s maturation from infancy through early adulthood reveals new features of God’s design. Seeing the child’s bents accurately is the first parental task. Responding appropriately is the second.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks deeper into the concept of bents—both toward good and toward sin. Yes, implanted in your child is an inclination to sin that all humans share. We’ll examine this aspect of your child’s nature and discover the balance between *affirming* and *cultivating* the good bents while *acknowledging* and *counteracting* the sinful.



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S04
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Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalms 139:13–18



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to lead you through His Word. You may wish to pray as Pastor Chuck Swindoll prays before he studies the Word:

I often pray, “Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.”¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To grasp the context of our passage, read [Psalm 139](#) in its entirety. Now step back and look at the progression of thoughts. David composed this ancient hymn in four thematic stanzas: God Knows Me ([Psalm 139:1–6](#)); God Is with Me ([139:7–12](#)); God Made Me ([139:13–18](#)); My Response ([139:19–24](#)).

Just as God was intimately “acquainted” with David’s “ways” (Psalm 139:3 NASB), so is He with your child’s ways. The Hebrew word for *ways* is the same word used in [Proverbs 22:6](#) and includes every aspect of your child’s life . . . your child’s sitting and rising (behaviors), ups and downs (moods), and comings and goings (pursuits). Even his or her thoughts that are secret to you are pages of an open book to God. How can God read your child so well? Because He is the author of your child!

Having overviewed the Psalm, now tune your ear to the message in the section, God Made Me ([Psalm 139:13–18](#)), as you imagine God saying the psalmist’s words to your child.



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18



Observation: The Origins of Your Child's Bents

Observation is the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Reread [Psalm 139:13–18](#) focusing on each phrase and letting it sink in. Substitute the pronouns, “me” and “my,” with the name of your child. By personalizing the psalm, what do you see that you may have never noticed before? Write your observations in the space below.

Your child's personality, features, and abilities all bear God's fingerprints—but not his or her sin. Where did your child's inclination toward sin originate, according to [Romans 5:12](#)?

How did David explain the transmission of our sin nature in [Psalm 51:5](#)?

All people are born sinful. Your precious child, lovely and cuddly, soft and beautiful, has a nature that is sinful. It must be confronted, counteracted consistently, firmly, and fairly. That's the job of a parent. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18



Interpretation: The Good and the Evil Bents in Your Child

The book of Psalms is a collection of Hebrew ancient hymns that declare doctrinal truth through worship. In interpretation, we ask, “What truth did the author intend his audience to understand?”

The Good Bents—Psalm 139:13–16

Use your Bible study tools to examine the author’s intended meaning of the words referenced below in the verses from Psalm 139. For an online resource, consult [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). What truths was David describing when he penned these picturesque phrases?

“**You created . . . wove . . . skillfully formed . . .**” (Psalm 139:13, 15 NASB, emphasis added). See also, Job’s clothing metaphor in [Job 10:11](#) and the making of the exquisite curtain in the tabernacle in [Exodus 26:36](#).

“**My frame . . . made in secret . . .**” (Psalm 139:15 NASB, emphasis added).



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18

“Your eyes have seen my *formless substance*” (Psalm 139:16 NASB, emphasis added).

“In Your *book* . . . all the days . . . *ordained for me*” (139:16 NASB, emphasis added).

Summarize the meaning of these verses in your own words. If you were to share with someone the biblical truths about life in the womb, what would you say?

The one in the womb is alive. God has been working on a living being. When you held your child for the first time, he or she came prescribed by God. Your child is not a moldable piece of clay that can be altered as you please. It's not about your way. The child comes with his or her way as God planned it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18

The Evil Bents—Romans 5:12; Proverbs 20:11

According to the apostle Paul, the bloodline of sin's curse can be traced to the first human: "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned" (Romans 5:12). What does it mean that sin "entered" the world and death "spread" to everyone?

Sin's condition of *guilt* and sin's consequence of *spiritual death* are aspects of what theologians call *imputed sin*. No amount of personal achievement can pardon guilt or produce eternal life.

What is the gospel message according to [John 3:16](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#); and [2 Corinthians 5:17–18, 21](#)?

Write out the plan of salvation for you to share with your child. If you need help formulating the words, we recommend the [tracts](#) for children published by EvanTell.



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalms 139:13–18

Only Christ can remove your child's guilt and create in him or her a new nature that's supernaturally attracted to—and empowered to—pursue what's good. Parents partner with God to help children understand sin, sinful acts, and sin's consequences while also helping them pursue a life of faith, hope, and love. Let's examine ways to do that next.

The work of Jesus Christ in a child's heart provides an inner power that you can't provide as a parent, as much as you love your child. Christ in a child does wonders for his or her life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Counteracting Sinful Choices in Your Child

Two-year-old children may test their parents to know the limits of their emerging autonomy. This is a sign of normal child development, and parents can help their children feel secure by patiently redirecting their children and keeping boundaries firm.

As the child grows older, you will detect the difference between childishness and defiance, testing boundaries and disobedience. What do [Proverbs 20:11](#) and [29:15](#) teach about a child's sinful behaviors and how to counteract them?

Be alert, discerning, and determined to quickly resolve sinful attitudes and actions by teaching your child to obey and respect authority. If parents don't confront sin in their children, who will? Don't leave discipline for the teachers at church or at school. Parents, take your responsibility seriously—for the good of civilization!



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalms 139:13–18

In his book, *The Strong Family*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll reminds us of the importance of parental discipline in society with this quote from Dr. Albert Siegel:

“When it comes to rearing children, every society is only twenty years away from barbarism. Twenty years is all we have to accomplish the task of civilizing the infants who are born into our midst each year. These savages know nothing of our language, our culture, our religion, our values, our customs of interpersonal relations. The infant is totally ignorant about . . . respect, decency, honesty, customs, conventions, and manners. *The barbarism must be tamed if civilization is to survive.*”²

Sobering words. How do we guide our children and grandchildren in light of the complexities of who they are?



Application: The Starting Place

According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, begin by communicating over and over to your child the following four realities based on the biblical truths from Psalm 139:

- 1) *The Lord made you like none other.*
- 2) *The Lord loves you and cares about you throughout your life.*
- 3) *You are important, gifted, competent in specific areas, and have a great future.*
- 4) *Your parents and grandparents are committed to helping you cultivate your God-given gifts.*

Applaud your child's marvelous qualities when they emerge. Let your child know the wonderful ways God has made him or her. Celebrate your child's unique bents, rather than compare or show favoritism. Nurture your child's self-image as you tell the story of his or her divine design.

What can you do today to put these principles into action?



Your Child Has the Bents!

Psalm 139:13–18

Like everyone, your child has good bents *and* sinful bents. Pastor Chuck offers these points:

- 1) *Start by leading your child to Christ at a young age.*
- 2) *Be faithful to confront as well as cultivate.*
- 3) *Keep consistent in both cultivating and confronting as long as your child lives under your roof.*

Do you need to address any sin issues in your child's behavior? What might they be? How can you correct your child by speaking the truth to him or her? What types of consequences for wrong behavior fit your child's personality? What rewards for right behavior motivate best?

God Himself knit together the fine details of your child in the secret workshop of the mother's womb. Your child is no mere byproduct of biological chance, but a design of God's own hand. Recite to your child or grandchild today the wonderful truths of Psalm 139, and watch his or her face beam.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a joy it is to call You Father! Please help me to reflect Your delight and love for Your children in how I delight and love mine. Thank You for the blessing of these precious ones. Help me to dedicate them to You and guide them in the paths that You have laid for them. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Albert Siegel, as quoted by Charles R. Swindoll, *The Strong Family* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991), 74.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY FIVE

Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12

When children feel their parents accept and enjoy them, it makes a world of difference in their sense of security. There's nothing like having fun with our kids.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LOOKING back on your childhood, would you say that your home was a fun place to grow up? Were you loved and accepted? Was there lots of laughter? Did you sense that your mom and dad delighted in you?

Pastor Chuck Swindoll once asked these questions to a group of young parents, and to his surprise only two of them raised their hands. Most could not say that fun, laughter, and delight were hallmarks of their home.

Pastor Chuck's questions prompt us to reflect on our childhood . . . and to consider our parenting style. Has the stressful pace of life flattened your smile into a tense frown? Is your schedule so busy that you have no time to delight in your children?

If the delight has seeped out of your family life, how do you welcome it back? For starters, make time for relaxed fun. Also, you need help from the source of pure joy—the heart of the heavenly Father.



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S05
1

Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The face of our heavenly Father beams over His children. The psalmist declared that “He delights in every detail of [our] lives” (Psalm 37:23). David relished God’s favor, writing, “He rescued me because he delights in me” (18:19). God delights in you too. Say those last four words of Psalm 18:19 aloud: *He delights in me*.

In the space below, write a prayer welcoming the Lord’s love and asking the Father to help you reflect His heart toward your children.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The focus of our study is God’s view of children in Psalm 127, which is a Song of Ascent. Pilgrims traveled in family groups to Jerusalem for annual festivals, and as they ascended the slopes of Mount Zion, they sang their beliefs in songs such as this psalm.

Read [Psalm 127](#), imagining family members—from young to old—walking hand-in-hand, singing these words. What family values stand out in your initial reading?

Let’s take a closer look at verses 127:3–5, which will help us see our children through God’s eyes.



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12



Observation: Seeing Children through God's Eyes

A helpful *observation* technique is to identify the key words in a text. These words are the stakes in the ground that brace the passage and lead to interpretation. Highlight the words in the following verses that describe *God's perspective of children*.

*Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a reward from him.*

*Children born to a young man
are like arrows in a warrior's hands.*

How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!

He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates. (Psalm 127:3–5)

Write down the metaphors you find in the space below. In the interpretation phase, we'll probe their meaning.

Psalm 127 isn't talking about literal arrows and literal warriors. This is picturesque language designed to make us imagine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12



Interpretation: The Meaning of *Gifts, Rewards, and Arrows*

The central message that these metaphors communicate in Psalm 127:3–5 is this: *children are valuable*. How does the psalmist illustrate their value? Through three primary images.

Children Are a Gift—Psalm 127:3

What does it mean, “Children are a gift” (Psalm 127:3)? How is this truth different than what the world says about children?

Who is the giver of children? Not “mother nature” or a biological process, but *the Lord*. In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we examined how the Lord forms children in the womb. Reflect on [139:13–16](#) and pay close attention to the line, “Children are a gift *from the LORD*” (127:3, emphasis added). What *value* does the psalmist give children by saying *the Lord* is the giver?

Children are a gift, not a liability. The child comes not as an accident, not as a tax deduction, not as a burden but as a gift to open and delight in. No one else can give you the child but the One who has made the child, the Lord. Children are made by God, given by God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12

Children Are a Reward—Psalm 127:3

Children are also “a reward” from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). How are children a “reward”? What does this concept imply about the way we view our children and how they view themselves?

*What a difference it makes in children when they realize how the Lord has satisfied us by bringing them into our lives. Pause and let your child know how special he or she is to you.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Children Are Like Arrows—Psalm 127:4

The next figure of speech is a simile: “Children . . . are like arrows in a warrior’s hands” (Psalm 127:4). What does this concept mean? How are children in the home of their parents like arrows in the hands of an archer?



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12

An archer aims and shoots an arrow toward a target. Likewise, parents guide their children toward a good goal. What qualities do parents need to help their children reach their potential?

Summarize how these three metaphors, “gift,” “reward,” and “arrows,” communicate the value of your children? Start thinking about how to communicate these concepts to your child, and we’ll consider ways in the application section.

Parents launch their children toward goals that are important to their children, that fit how their children are put together. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12



Correlation: Characteristics of a Caring Mother and Father

Paul compared his relationship with the Thessalonian believers as “a mother feeding and caring for her children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7) and as “a father treats his own children” (2:11). Read the full passage, [1 Thessalonians 2:5–12](#), and write down the words Paul used to describe his parental role with the believers. In what ways did Paul model a mother? A father?

What priorities for parenting can you conclude from Paul’s list?



Application: Practical Ways to Communicate Delight

How can we follow through with these biblical principles for parenting? Let’s fill our homes with joy by putting into practice four “*L*s” of delighting in children.

- 1) *Delight in **lingering** around them.* Enjoy spending time with your children and having meals with them with the television off and no distracting handheld devices.
- 2) *Delight in **listening** to them.* Pay attention when they have something to say. Ask questions and discover their dreams.



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalms 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12

- 3) *Delight in **learning** alongside them.* Do projects together, read to your children, and grow together.
- 4) *Delight in **laughing** with them.* Funny stuff happens in the family all the time. Lighten up! Laugh about life and tell humorous stories from your past. Having fun together is an essential ingredient in delighting in your child.

Which of these lessons can you apply this week in your home?

Need more practical suggestions on how to delight in your children? Here are a few. The possibilities are endless!

- Make a surprise visit to your elementary-school-aged child at school.
- Ask your adult child how you can pray for him or her each week.
- Write and frame a prayer for your child, praising God for him or her, and naming unique things that you love about him or her.
- For each of your children, write words of encouragement in dry-erase marker on their bathroom mirror.
- Take your children out for interview dates: take lots of selfies, eat yummy food, and ask them interview questions.
- Make a list of all the gifts you see in each child. Pray through them, dedicating each gift to God.
- Make sure that when you connect with your children (no matter their age), you look directly at *them*. Put ALL of your devices away and communicate nonverbally that you are listening.



Delighting in Your Kids and Grandkids

Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 3:11–12

Picture one of the children in your life. Jot down some ways that you intend to delight in him or her today.

Love cherishes and nourishes, it discovers, gets involved, and listens with care. Love draws out the other person, boosts his or her self-esteem, and is fuel for fun in your home. Relax the tension and smile! Delight in your children and fill your home with laughter that lasts a lifetime in your children's memories.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the Master Builder of my heart and my home life. By Your grace, the sun will rise tomorrow on a new day to hold a loved one's hand, to choose joy instead of gloom, to encourage, praise, and celebrate the treasures in my home. Help me, Lord, to love from Your heart . . . and laugh! In the name of Jesus, amen.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY SIX

A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24

God's Word has a lot to say about fathers. Among the most admirable fathers is the man who appears in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WOULD you like to hold her?"

His trance broken, the new father saw the nurse smiling at him. He had been gazing raptly at his daughter, now only one hour old.

The nurse bundled the baby, then lifted her to him. "Support her head . . . like this," she said.

As she placed the sleeping newborn in his arms, a heavy weight called fatherhood settled on his shoulders. Looking at the child's delicate face, he thought of her innocence. What did she know of the world and its dangers? Of the greed and the violence and the darkness? It was up to him, now, to protect and nurture her—this fragile flower.

Most fathers recall the moment they first sensed fatherhood's weight of responsibility, as well as the overwhelming feeling of inadequacy. Fathers need a role model who can show them how to be the man their children need. This *Searching the Scriptures* study highlights a dad who models the most admirable qualities of a good father—qualities anyone can emulate.



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S06
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A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

This father is featured in the parable known as The Prodigal Son. Despite the name, the real focal point of the story is not the son but the dad, who exhibits a flesh-and-blood image of our gracious heavenly Father . . . to whom we pray.

Father, Your qualities shine through the teaching of Your Son, who portrayed You as the compassionate Father enfolding sinners in Your arms of grace. As I seek to emulate the father in the parable, I am really emulating You. Open my eyes to who You are and draw me near Your heart. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Through His parable, Jesus addressed widely divergent groups of people separated by a vast moral chasm. On one side, stood the “tax collectors and other notorious sinners” (Luke 15:1), represented by the younger son, and on the other ledge stood the “Pharisees and teachers of religious law” (15:2), represented by the older son.

The first group lived to please only themselves, pushing aside every moral standard that stood in their way. The legalistic Pharisees, on the other hand, lived to please a religious system, setting up moral standards as fast as the libertines could knock them down.

Any common ground between the two groups had sunk to jagged depths. Yet, from Jesus' perspective, there was really no such division. Like two brothers, their moral DNA was linked. One group had committed what we might call *detestable* sins and the other group, *respectable* sins. Both stood guilty and in need of grace before their heavenly Father, who loved them all.



Observation: The Parable of the Compassionate Father

Jesus often dispensed eternal truths in parables. Sweetened by a story, His points could more easily pass through people's defenses into their souls where the medicine could do its best work. Experience Jesus' parables with all your senses. Hear the dialogue, see the characters' faces, smell the atmosphere, feel the tension. Imagine how the audience members might have reacted as if you were one of them.



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24

In the first lines of the parable, [Luke 15:11–12](#), what do you observe about the father—his affluence, his character, and his relationship with his sons?

When a father is willing to listen to his adult children, even to something he may not want to hear, he earns the right to say things to them they may not want to hear.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What happened “a few days later,” according to [15:13](#)? What do the son’s hasty actions say about him—his personality, his character, his attitude toward his family and his Jewish heritage, and his view of God?

How did Jesus describe the son’s downward spiral in [15:14–16](#)? Hearing about the son’s pitiful state, what do you think Jesus’ Jewish audience would have thought and felt?



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24

The father didn't take responsibility for his son's irresponsibility. I'll tell you what he did do. He prayed. And he watched, looking for that familiar silhouette on the horizon.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What marked the turning point for the son, and what was his plan in [Luke 15:17–19](#)?

Jesus' parables often included an unexpected turn, elements in the story that took people by surprise. What details about the father's response in [15:20–24](#) would have surprised Jesus' audience?

What do you observe about the father's response to the older brother in [15:25–32](#)? What lesson was the father teaching his older son?

The father said not one word of blame to his wayward son—"Look at yourself. You're filthy!" None of that condemnation. The father's kisses covered it all.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24



Interpretation: Admirable Qualities to Emulate

In interpretation, we seek to understand the meaning of Jesus' parable in its context. Jesus' previous parables featured a lost sheep that was found and a lost coin that was found and the rejoicing that followed ([Luke 15:3–10](#)). The parable in our passage about the lost son who was found rounds out this set of three parables. The main point of all three was to illustrate the “joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents” (15:7). As the father told his oldest son, “We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!” (15:32).

Woven into these parables are the golden qualities of our God who celebrates when sinners repent. Write down all the qualities of God you see represented by the father in [Luke 15:11–32](#).

Summarize what you learn about your heavenly Father through the father in Jesus' parable?

Which of these qualities can earthly fathers emulate?



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24

When the son came to his senses, he thought, “I will return to my father. I don’t need a sermon from my brother. I need forgiveness and understanding. I need a loving, tender touch. I need grace greater than all my sin. I need my daddy.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Father’s Love Displayed through Christ

During His ministry on earth, Jesus embodied the love of the Father in everything He did. Read [Matthew 9:35–36](#) and write down how Christ demonstrated God’s love. Note: the same Greek word for *compassion* in [Luke 15:20](#) is used in Matthew 9:36 to describe Jesus.

How does [Colossians 1:21–22](#) explain how Christ restores us? How are we like the prodigal son?

*When you decide you’re going to come to the Father, He takes you just as you are in all your filth and mess and rebellion. It’s the original “come as you are” party.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24



Application: Four Final Questions to Ponder

The admirable father in Jesus' parable calls to fathers today to love their children as he loved his sons. If you are a father, what action does this model of fatherhood encourage you to take in your relationship with your children?

Building on this application, let these four questions offer further guidance:

1. *Is there a father you need to thank?* Don't neglect telling the father or father figure in your life how much you appreciate his tough love, grace, and forgiveness.
2. *Is there a son or daughter you need to release?* The father in the parable didn't cling to the son; he let him go. Neither did he chase after the son; he waited for him to return.
3. *Is there a prodigal you need to forgive and restore?* Show him or her grace today.
4. *Is there a celebration you need to have?* Don't place your returning prodigal on probation. Rejoice that the one who was lost has been found.

Which of these points is God leading you to apply?



A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24

The weight of fatherhood feels particularly heavy when we must deal with a prodigal son or daughter. Lean on a friend or find a wise counselor who can help you bear the load. You don't have to carry the burden alone. Mostly, cry out to your heavenly Father, who, more than anyone, understands your broken heart and who waits patiently with you for your wayward one to return.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, bring hope to every broken heart in homes fractured by rebellion. Give peace to replace anxiety, patience to support weakness, and love to cover shame. Help me wait. And please, Lord, by Your grace and mercy, bring the wayward ones home. In the name of Jesus, amen.



RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY SEVEN

Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12

God honors a broken and contrite heart. He will have nothing to do with pride.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As children grow up and leave home, parents often look back on their child-rearing years with fondness, warmly recalling that season of life. Sometimes, however, feelings of guilt cloud the memories. Parents may regretfully think: *If only I knew then what I know now. If only I could have foreseen my child's problems and intervened sooner. If only I had been less busy, less critical, less irritable, more aware, more discerning, more loving.*

The “if onlys” circle our minds like cawing crows, reminding us of our mistakes and giving us no peace. The inescapable reality is that we are all imperfect, even our children. We all fall short of God's standard ([Romans 3:23](#)), and we can't change the past, no matter how much we wish we could.

How do parents in pain get past yesterday's failures? It doesn't help to rationalize mistakes, make excuses, or blame someone else. We must admit the truth about the years we can't change and take responsibility for our wrongs. That's the starting point, the foundation on which hope is built.



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S07
1

Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Three words in the following verse set the tone for our *Searching the Scriptures* study: *I press on*.

"I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us." (Philippians 3:13–14)

Now shape the words into a prayer. Begin by saying, "Lord, help me to 'focus on this one thing.'" Then take each phrase and turn it into a prayerful request. Write your prayer below.

With Christ leading us, we can move into the future with hope. Decide now to set your eyes on Him and His plan for your family's future well-being.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The central passage for our study is [Isaiah 58:6–12](#). In this context, the Lord was admonishing His people who were putting on a show of piety hoping to impress Him. They dressed in burlap rags and fasted while in ashes, but they were just "going through the motions of penance" (58:5). Their cruel treatment of people exposed the sin under their religious surface. The Lord said,

*"Even while you fast,
you keep oppressing your workers.
What good is fasting
when you keep on fighting and quarreling?
This kind of fasting
will never get you anywhere with me." (Isaiah 58:3–4)*



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12

An authentic walk with God reveals itself in how we show compassion and genuine concern toward people. In the following verses, the Lord lists specific ways His people can demonstrate true spirituality in their relationships, including those within our families.



Observation: What True Spirituality Looks Like

In observation, we look closely at Isaiah's prophecy to find key themes. What specific ways did the Lord expect to see godliness in His people, according to [Isaiah 58:6–7](#)?

What blessings would follow, according to [58:8–9](#)?

The Lord lists other godly actions followed by blessings in [58:9–12](#). What do you observe in these verses?

Let's see how these themes work out in restoring relationships in our families.



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12



Interpretation: From Guilt and Shame to Recovery and Renewal

Five main principles emerge from Isaiah 58:6–12 that we discover in interpretation.

Humble Yourself—Isaiah 58:7–8

God wanted the Israelites, who were in ruin because of their sin, to humble themselves. Which actions evidenced *humility* in [Isaiah 58:7–8](#)?

Restoration begins with humility—removing the chains, sharing, giving, not hiding from family members. Do this and the wounds will begin to heal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Pray—Isaiah 58:9

What principle about prayer can you find in the opening lines of Isaiah 58:9?

*“Then when you call, the LORD will answer.
‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.”*



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12

Isaiah urged his fellow Israelites to pray for their nation. As we try to rebuild the broken relationships in our families, it is just as vital to fervently call upon the Lord, who reassures us, “Yes, I am here” (58:9).

In prayer, ask for guidance to remember the names and identify the offense. Don't be easy on yourself. Talk straight, think, don't hide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Remove the Yoke—Isaiah 58:9

The second part of Isaiah 58:9 lists the next step. What principle can you discover from these lines?

*“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression.
Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!”*

What heavy yokes weigh down your relationship with your adult children and bind your attempts at reconciliation?

Cease all blaming. Stop all finger-pointing. Refuse to gossip about how bad your kids have turned out. That's doesn't help them or you. This is a private matter between you and the one you've offended. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12

Make Yourself Available and Vulnerable—Isaiah 58:10–11

Read [Isaiah 58:10–11](#) and write down the benefits that Isaiah listed for making ourselves available and vulnerable with our adult children.

There is great encouragement here to all of us who've blown it. God can dispel those haunting memories in the light of His grace as we list our offenses and come clean.

I suggest that you sit down with your adult children whom you have wounded and confess your offenses. In doing so, you will be released from the grip of guilt and lifted out of the shadow of shame. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Trust God to Bring Healing and Change—Isaiah 58:12

How does Isaiah describe those who seek restoration in [Isaiah 58:12](#)?

When our children see us investing our time in rebuilding the relational ruins in our families, they will see us as “repairers.” And, as God heals hearts, relationships can be whole again.



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12



Correlation: Hope for Restoration

Tragically, Isaiah's prophecies fell on deaf ears, and the Lord had to judge His people through the destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon. God, however, always held out hope. What beacon of hope did God reveal through Jeremiah, according to *Jeremiah 29:11–13*?

God sent the Jews into captivity for their sins with a promise of restoration. Tomorrow shines bright with hope for us too, despite yesterday's mistakes, failures, and sins. The process of repentance and restoration takes work, but the results are worth it.



Application: Taking the Necessary Steps

Let's review Isaiah's steps to restoration and find ways to apply them.

1. *Humble yourself.* Admitting the ways you may have offended your children, even if you had the best of intentions, is the first step toward healing.
2. *Pray.* Ask the Lord to reveal the specific offenses for which you need to ask forgiveness.
3. *Remove the yoke.* Determine to stop excusing, blaming, and finger-pointing.
4. *Make yourself available and vulnerable.* Schedule time to talk with your adult children about how you may have wronged them. Speak candidly, without expecting them to forgive you right away. Healing may take some time.
5. *Trust the Lord to heal and bring major changes.* When you take these steps, you become the “rebuilder of walls” and, as the Lord heals, the “restorer of homes” (Isaiah 58:12).



Getting Past Yesterday's Failures

Isaiah 58:6–12

Do you need to repair the relational walls of your home? What do you need to confess to your children? How will you put these steps into practice in the days ahead?

Do you, or does your family, need help from a pastor or Christian counselor? If so, whom can you contact?

As you seek to rebuild family relationships after you've blown it, don't hide anything. Go with your arms and heart open wide. Be transparent and honest. Don't hurry the response. The wounds may be deep, so give the other person time. Finally, let go of your guilt and regret. After you've done all you can to repair the past, press on! God truly does have a future and a hope for us and our children.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, hear the beat of my heart today as I come before You acknowledging my imperfections and finding refuge in You as my strong tower. Thank You for Your tender mercy and compassion on my family. Rescue me from regret and release me to love my children as You love them, to rest in Your forgiveness, and to find freedom in Your everlasting, healing grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

