

Chapter 1 Let's get practical

1. To be shaped as well

Don't just skim these important questions, take them seriously. Spend the necessary time to answer them and write down your answers. Both you and your children deserve your carefully consideration of these questions.

- Am I connected to the True Vine?
- Am I prepared to be shaped in my capacity as a parent, and to face mistakes that may need correcting?
- Am I going to allow parenting to stretch my heart or am I going to keep my heart to myself and embark on parenting in such a way that my heart is locked-up and guarded?
- Which areas of my life need pruning if I want to be a good (better) parent?
PLEASE LEAVE SPACE FOR NOTES
- Which things in my life might the Lord want to prune urgently?
- Do I understand that setting an example of imperfect dependence on the Lord is worth more than a facade of perfection?
- Am I prepared to admit my mistakes, or am I going to conceal them?
- How can I be a better follower of Jesus so that my children can follow me?
- Am I prepared to be honest about my mistakes and be lenient with my children regarding theirs?
- Is my experience of a bond with Jesus real enough for my children to see it in my life?
- Am I prepared to learn as much from my children as I expect them to learn from me?
- Am I prepared to change at least as much as I expect my children to change?
- Have I embraced the fact that I need to be shaped if I want to obtain the right to shape the saplings in my house?

What are the characteristics and actions of love of the Gardener (the Father) that become apparent from the following Scriptures?

John 15

Hosea 11

Lord, let us become more like You! Please give us your kind of nurturing love.

In the space provided below, write down a practical plan to prepare for one aspect of parenting. Focus on an area that requires pruning. Write it down in three parts: the WHAT?, the HOW? and the WHEN?

Here is an example:

WHAT?

I am going to work just as hard at keeping my own temper under control as on my child's outbursts.

HOW?

I am going to find out, in prayer, where my anger comes from and find better ways of dealing with it. I am going to try and understand what the reasons for my child's outbursts are so that I can be stricter or more lenient where necessary.

WHEN?

Tonight, before I go to bed, I am going to start praying, and for two weeks I am going to make notes in my diary: "How are you managing your temper and how is _____'s outbursts improving?" If we haven't made any progress in two weeks' time, I am going to make an appointment with someone who can help us.

2. Exchanging the past for a new vision

I am going to ...

What?

How?

When?

If, after answering these questions, you realise that you need help, you have to get it for your children's sake!

- What is my worst memory of discipline from my youth?
- How does this affect my attitude towards and actions in my own family?
- What is my fondest childhood memory?
- How can this influence my future behaviour as a parent?
- What are the three most important mistakes my parents made that I want to avoid in my parenting?
- Do I still need to forgive them for these mistakes?
- What are the three most important things I want to give my children?
- Why are these things so important to me?
- Are these really the most important things according to my vision for and feelings about child rearing, or are they just reactions to a lack in my own childhood?
- What kind of parents do I want my children to become?
- How do I want my children to remember me?
- What is the biggest mistake that I have ever made as a parent?
- Have I forgiven myself yet? If not, how can I get to a point where I can put it behind me?
- Should I get help to get rid of my baggage?
- Are there parenting failures in my family history that need to be broken in the Name of Jesus so that my family can face the future without the consequences of a vicious cycle? (For example, domestic violence, addiction, divorce.)

- Which building blocks have I gathered during my childhood that I can use to build on in future?

3. Taking responsibility – forever

- Is my child more of a burden or a pleasure?
- Do I feel that my child is holding me back?
- Which sacrifices have I made to show my commitment to parenting?
- Do I like passing responsibility for my child's care onto other people?
- Do I act like the parent who keeps ignoring their child as long as he or she doesn't have obvious problems?
- How does my practical prioritising show that I place my children ahead of my career?
- Am I prepared to share the responsibility when my child messes up?
- Am I planning to be a parent for my children in every phase of their life or am I counting down the years until they turn 18 or 21?

How do these Scriptures illustrate the relationship between responsibility and unconditional love?

John 3:16

Isaiah 5:1-2

1 John 3:14-19

Read the Scriptures below, then mark the statements as true (T) or false (F) and discuss your answers with someone.

Eli's story in 1 Samuel 2:12-4:22

Ezekiel 33:8

- Eli didn't discipline his children because he felt that they were mature enough to decide for themselves how to act.
- The Lord expected Eli to still correct his grown-up children.
- The children's behaviour leads one to believe that they weren't disciplined enough when they were younger.

- The townspeople were fed-up with the children's behaviour because they had been causing problems since they were young.
- To be fair, the Lord would have had to reprimand Eli's wife as well for their sons' behaviour.
- The children deserved to die on the battle field.
- Even in this serious situation the Lord had mercy on Eli because Eli was God-fearing.
- The death of the children was partly Eli's fault.
- The Lord will also call on us to account for our children's behaviour.
- It is our fault if our children don't serve the Lord.
- Eli's collapse after hearing the bad news reflects the fact that he truly loved his children and God.
- Even parents who love their children very much can be incompetent parents.

In the space provided below, write down an action plan according to which you will take on more responsibility as proof of your love for your child. Keep it practical and realistic.

Example:

I am going to take my child to school one day a week even if it is not normally my responsibility; I am going to have a conversation with my children to find out whether or not they experience me as too busy; I am going to switch off my cell phone on Sundays and make sure that I have one meaningful conversation with each of my children; I am going to pay closer attention to things happening in my child's life and find out what his interests are; I am going to stop wishing my children would grow up, and enjoy every phase of their lives instead.

I am going to ...