

Parents & Crosslink

Enjoy the Blessing

Benjamin Berger

Mom, Dad, do we have to go to church today? It's boring!

Have you ever heard such complaints at your house? In his explanation to the Third Commandment, Martin Luther encouraged God's people to "fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it" (Luther's Small Catechism). But then, Luther never met my kids, or yours. The question for us is: *Can we really teach our children to gladly hear and learn God's Word?*

We shouldn't be surprised that our children resist hearing God's Word. Like us, they were born with a sinful nature. The apostle Paul described this natural condition as "hostile to God." On top of that, Satan and the sinful world are also working hard to pull our children away from God and his Word.

A New Nature

Thankfully, God has given our children a second nature, a *new man*. By the power of his Word, God not only drowns the sinful nature in our children; he also fills them with Christ and his Holy Spirit. As believers in Jesus, our children now have a new desire to hear God's Word. They want and need to hear their heavenly Father say "I love you" every day. They need to feel the reassuring hug of his forgiveness and to grow in their confidence that he is always with them. Though they may not always show it, God's children do want to spend time with him in his Word. And it's our job to help connect them to that Word.

Just as you are becoming more and more like your parents, so also are your children reflecting you. One morning as I was eating breakfast with my daughter, she watched me extend my chin over my cereal bowl. Moments later she extended her chin over her cereal bowl in the same way. Children reflect their



Illustration: Sally Springer

parents. That's true about our attitudes toward God's Word as well.

Like our children, there are times when we don't want to go to church. We don't feel like reading our Bibles. We'd rather do something else. It's then that we do well to confess our sinful attitudes

Watch how your children begin to reflect your new attitude, even in the expressions they use.

to God. But we can also confess our sins to our children. We can tell them that we know how they feel. We can ask them to join us in acknowledging those attitudes as sinful and confess our sinful attitudes together. Then we can remind one another of God's forgiveness.

Talk About God's Word

It's also helpful to discuss the benefits and value of hearing God's Word. "Son, how often do you talk to your girlfriend?

You talk with her *gladly*, don't you? You want to talk with her because you enjoy spending time with her. God wants to spend time with you too. He wants a relationship with you. He talks to you through his Word. He tells you when you've hurt him. He offers you forgiveness. He celebrates blessings with you and gives you a shoulder to cry on. He declares his love for you and his desire to have you spend eternity with him."

Through the gift of prayer, you can also ask the Holy Spirit to give you new attitudes. Have you ever noticed that once you decide something will be boring it usually is? And if you decide something will be fun or beneficial, it becomes that. Ask the Spirit to help you decide that listening to God's Word will be enjoyable, meaningful, and beneficial.

A New Way to Think and Speak

As you change the way you think, you will also find that the way you talk is changing. Do you ever catch yourself saying, "We **HAVE TO** go to church tomorrow"? Instead, say, "We **GET TO** go to church tomorrow." Watch how your children begin to reflect your

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Enjoy the Blessing . . . cont.)

new attitude, even in the expressions they use.

Encourage this new attitude by connecting God's Word to life. Learn about the different parts of the service. Why do we confess our sins at the beginning? What's the point of the song after the pastor forgives our sins? Who chooses the three Bible readings, and how are they connected? What's the history of the creeds? What's the best way to listen to a sermon? Who writes the prayers? Why do we always end with the blessing?

When you get to church, participate. Sing, pray, and confess with enthusiasm; remember that you decided this would be enjoyable and beneficial.

Hear the Word and Then Live It

Take God's Word home with you. On the way home, ask everyone to share one thought from the sermon or readings or hymns or prayers. What stuck with you?

Use the bulletin and pick one reading each day for family discussion. Sing the family's favorite hymn of the week. Pray with and for one another. Bless one another. Every night before my daughter's bedtime we pray the Lord's Prayer and either her mother or I bless her. As we bless her, we make the sign of the cross on her forehead. One night she turned and touched my forehead. I can't wait until she understands the blessing so that she can bless us.

Connecting to your congregation's ministry will also encourage your children. Give them opportunities to serve with the adults. Make them part of the congregation's life as early as possible. My shy daughter already loves shaking hands after church.



The Bible says that it's a parent's responsibility to "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Eventually our children will become adults and will have to take responsibility for gladly hearing God's Word on their own. Until then we can help by keeping them connected to God's Word, modeling our own positive attitudes toward God's Word, and encouraging them to make God and his Word a regular part of their lives.

Benjamin Berger serves as a pastor at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Appleton, Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife, Heather, and their 18-month-old daughter, Eliana.

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To add thoughts and continue the discussions about these questions and answers, go to

www.parentscrosslink.net.

Help! I'm a single Christian parent, and I work two jobs. I feel I am losing the "love battle" when it comes to raising my two kids.

Working two jobs takes a lot of time. Check your schedule, and when you do have free time, invite one child to go to the park, a movie, or out to lunch or dinner with you. Discuss things that are going on in the family, home, or church. Then find another time to take the other child. This will give you opportunities to get to know your kids again. Talk about school, things they struggle with, how to handle situations with girlfriends or boyfriends, the correct response to a problem. But don't talk only about problems. Make sure you save time to discuss the things they enjoy, their dreams, and their hopes. Quietly tell your kids how much you love them. Saying it is important! It doesn't matter how busy you are. Your kids just want you, your attention, your guidance,

your love. Make sure they know you love them too. Find time. Or make time. Pay attention. Listen. Share yourself.

What can I do to help my child develop a strong conscience?

Sin is a terrible thing. Without God's own personal plan for intervening, our sin would separate us from him forever.

The world wants us to believe that sin doesn't really matter. But making light of sin weakens a conscience, robbing us of the urgency to either be forewarned about temptation or to be repentant for sins we've already committed.

It is very important that Christian parents help their children understand sin for what it is. We can do that by consistently providing boundaries that follow the lead of God's Ten Commandments and then reminding our children of the consequences for crossing those boundaries.

The most effective tool for strengthening a conscience is God's Word. When we use God's law as a mirror, showing sinful behavior for what it is, a child's conscience is sharpened. After we have felt the sharp sting of the law, the gospel can do its healing work, reminding us of God's forgiveness and motivating us to live within God's boundaries. The more time we spend in activities

like devotions, Bible study, and attending church, the stronger our consciences will be.

My children have been witnessing to our unbelieving neighbors lately. One neighbor says she wants them to stop. What should I tell my kids?

Leave it to children to share what they know about Jesus to lost souls without all of the baggage we adults carry. We have the message that freely offers eternal life. Unfortunately, adults find it difficult to share this life-giving message for fear of offending someone. Children, on the other hand, don't have that filter: "Jesus loves me, this I know. . . . Now let me tell you about him."

We have marching orders from our Master: "Go and make disciples." There is a life-and-death urgency to proclaiming the gospel. Encourage your children to witness to anyone and everyone who will listen. But if your neighbor asks them to stop, it is probably best to respect the request. Your children can also "preach" an inexplicit gospel by showing kindness, gentleness, cheerfulness, and demonstrating a Christlike love in their daily lives. The Holy Spirit uses these loving acts as a powerful testimony.

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Living Shadows

Katrina Brohn

Mommy, will you color with me?" asked a little girl who was sitting at a table just her size, her brown hair pulled neatly into two ponytails. A coloring book and crayons lay opened, ready for fun. Her brown eyes begged Mom to come, sit, and color; but Mommy replied, "Not now, honey. I have laundry to do." The little girl didn't understand. Laundry and dishes and floors to wash meant nothing to her. Those things just got done. Coloring was fun, and Mommy was the best colorer she knew.

Forty years later another brown-eyed little girl with ponytails asks, "Mommy, will you color with me?" She sits at a table, coloring book and crayons ready. "Not now, honey. I have laundry to do and dishes to wash," I say. The words echoed back to me from the past. I sounded just like my mother!

I have become like my mother. Like her, I like a clean house. I like to hang laundry outside. And I am rather possessive of my, um, "our" kitchen.

I have some traits of my father too. I tend to get angry quickly. I like to be in control and have things my way. I'm a good packer and have this urge to label everything with a black marker.

At one time or another, we all have probably caught ourselves sounding or acting just like our parents. We may even find ourselves falling into the same mistakes as our parents. As soon as the words are off our lips, we regret them.

As a child I didn't play with dolls. I tagged along behind two older brothers, playing in the sandbox and riding bikes. So it didn't surprise me that our daughter never played with dolls either. I figured she was a tomboy like her mother. Then came daughter number two. Out came forgotten dolls. As I carried around baby sister, one step behind me was my little shadow. I watched Kati Lin gently lift her doll, carefully place it on her shoulder, just so, to pat and burp her.

"There, there, little pumpkin. It will be all right."

Had I really said that? My husband assured me that those were my exact words. They sounded so funny coming out of the mouth of a three-year-old. One day my husband caught her "breastfeeding" her doll. He struggled to keep from laughing as he looked down into her serious face. It was then that it struck me how closely she was watching my every move, recording my every word. By my example, I was raising a future mommy.

I got to thinking. What traits was I passing down to our girls without even knowing it? And how do I pass on desirable traits to my children while discouraging undesirable ones? Often we pass down our traits, both good and bad, without even knowing it. Example is a powerful teacher.

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My mother is afraid of heights and can't even climb a chair. Yet she carefully hid her fear from me, and I never knew until I was much older. Because I grew up not being afraid of heights, I can enjoy activities like rock climbing, climbing to the top of lighthouses, and helping my husband put a new roof on the house.

Just as children learn from shadowing their parents, I realized I needed to shadow Jesus. I know I cannot be the example for my children that I should be unless I learn to follow the example of my Savior. Jesus encourages, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29).



Vrrrrrrrr! The noise of a vacuum cleaner annoys me, especially early on a Saturday morning—a day many people sleep in. Not at the Brohn house! Saturday is get up and at the housecleaning day. At least it is for my husband. That's what his father always did. "You would hear the vacuum coming down the hallway and knew you'd better get up and get your room clean before Dad got there."

I retreat to the bathroom, where the noise of a shower helps drown out the vacuum. As I come out, I see Daddy finishing the vacuuming, wearing our baby dangling from a Snuggli with a big grin on her face. Our preschooler is trailing along behind, pushing her popper toy vacuum.

Maybe becoming more like our parents can be a good thing after all.

Katrina Brohn is a stay-at-home mom, just like her mother. She lives with her husband, James, and daughters, Kati Lin and Laura, in West Bend, Wisconsin.

Considering Bathtubs

John D. Kolander

Consider bathtubs. When we look back at the great societal changes of the past one hundred years, bathtubs rank near the top in the list of impact items. According to *TIME* magazine, in 1900 only one out of every seven households in America had a bathtub. More than a century later, not only do we assume that every household possesses at least one bathtub; we also trust and hope the tubs are used on a regular basis by every member of the family. Yes, bathtubs have made an impact on the way we live.

Of course, family hygiene is not the only thing that has changed in the past one hundred years. In 1900, the average life expectancy of a newborn was 47 years with 140 out of 1,000 infants dying in the first year of life. Today average life expectancy is 76 years with a 6 out of 1,000 infant mortality rate in the first year. In 1900, 42 percent of all employment was found on 5.7 million farms. In 2000, 3 percent of the workforce was employed on fewer than 2 million farms.

The past has impacted parenting and the family lives of our present world. Families may vary in size, structure, and organization, but all are influenced by changes in recent generations. While our heavenly Father's purposes for the family have not changed, a variety of forces have combined to alter families as well.

The Changing Parental Role

The parental roles of being a potter, gatekeeper, jurist, and resource alloca-

tor have been affected by many changes over the past one hundred years. Let's take a look at how parenting has changed since our grandparents were children, always remembering that God's plan for the family has not changed.

The Parent as Potter

One hundred years ago the family was a little society all by itself. Everyone contributed to the economic, material, social, and spiritual needs of the other family members. Parents were educational leaders in the teaching of skills, habits, morals, and spiritual truths. As a potter takes clay and molds it into a desired shape, parents had tremendous control in the shaping of their children's lives.

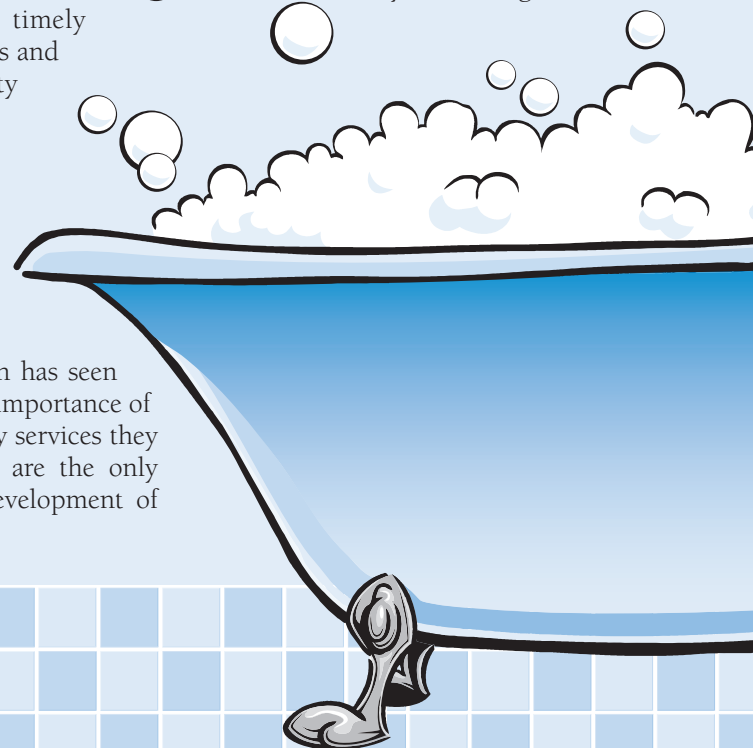
Today's parents, for the most part, work outside the home. They kiss their children good-bye each morning and send them off to excellent schools or quality day care centers that provide valuable and timely instruction. On weekends and in summer, community recreational departments offer countless activities designed to expand a child's skills. Family members have their own various clubs and organizations that appeal to their interests.

The present generation has seen a tremendous rise in the importance of institutions and the many services they offer. Parents no longer are the only forces that shape the development of their children.

The Parent as Gatekeeper

In 1900 there was limited access to the outside world. Parents found it somewhat manageable to control what came into the home in the same way as a gatekeeper of long ago controlled what went in and out of a city. Gatekeeping parents of a century ago had assistance as well. Neighbors or extended family members living nearby all served as surrogate gatekeepers for one another's families. Information from the outside was limited, many times incomplete, but strongly controlled.

The present generation has seen a tremendous increase of information available to all members of the family. Radio, television, movies, books, magazines, and the Internet all contribute to sharing the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of the outside world with your children. It is truly fascinating to learn



about the wonders of God's creation or to watch a live news event unfold before our very eyes. However, the ability of parents to control what goes in and out of the home has diminished with the explosion of the information age.

The Parent as Jurist

A century ago it was assumed that parents knew what was best for their child. Each home had a variety of rules and regulations that were strictly followed by the members of the family. Fathers and mothers were viewed as the lawmakers, police officers, judges, and juries of the home, declaring what was right or wrong and administering punishment to fit the crime.

In the last generation, a great deal of valuable information regarding child development has aided parents in making wise choices regarding their children. However, an assumption that parents are unqualified and unable to raise their children has invaded our society. Experts who are eager to offer their advice on all aspects of child development and family life bombard parents. The temptation for God-fearing parents to seek the approval of secular experts in decisions regarding the rearing of their children is stronger than ever.

The Parent as Allocator of Resources

God blesses each of us with special gifts, resources for carrying out whatever purposeful mission in life that he has ordained before he created the world: time, talents, and treasures. When our grandparents were children, their parents continually sought ways to provide for their needs. Most resources were directed into the family for the purpose of survival.

What a difference one hundred years makes! Survival for most is now a given. We are living in a time of plenty never before seen in this world. Ironically, the wise use of our resources is needed now more than ever. Today parents have unlimited choices on how to spend their time, where to spend their money, and how to use their talents. The family economy often wrestles more with the problems connected with an overflow of blessings than it does with a shortage. Prosperity offers challenges to a Christian parent unknown to families a century ago. Today, parents often must find ways to withhold rather than struggle to provide.

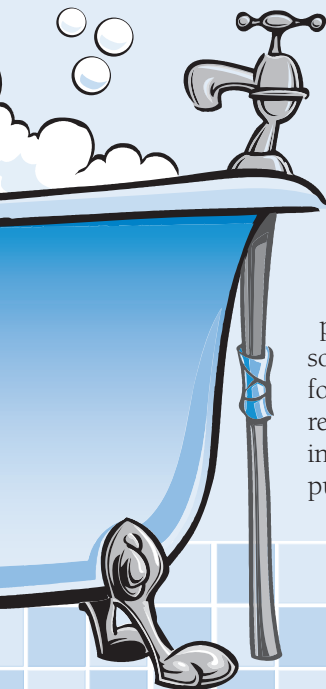
The Parent as God's Representative

While so much has changed in society in the last one hundred years, God's plan for the family has not. Parents are still the representatives of a loving and gracious God. Our heavenly Father gives children to parents as gifts for them to love and cherish. Parents still are directed by God's Holy Word to train up their children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. A home ruled by Christ is a blessed institution where every member lives to God's glory on earth and looks forward to the eternal joys of heaven.

The next time you are relaxing in the bathtub, searching the Internet, or watching a live sporting event from across the world, reflect on the many changes the Lord has caused to happen in the last one hundred years. Each one brings wonderful opportunities and special challenges. Christian parents will meet societal changes the same way God-fearing parents have dealt with change for thousands of years—moving forward with the Lord and under his direction.

John Kolander serves as provost at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

While our heavenly Father's purposes for the Christian home have not changed, a variety of forces have combined to alter the roles and relationships within a family.



Viewpoint

He Who Dies With the Most Still Dies

Vera-Ellen Cook

Every Sunday morning our newspaper brings a stash of advertising fliers announcing weekly sales in the area. Pawing the pages, we plot our purchases and head off to hunt for the bargains. Last week a car passed us on our way to the mall with a bumper sticker proclaiming, "He who dies with the most stuff wins." Judging from the way most of us conduct our lives, it would seem we agree.

The national economy may be slumping, but consumer spending soars. "Affluenza" runs rampant. A culture obsessed with consuming lives up to its reputation for being materialistic and greedy. We indulge ourselves well past the point of basic need. We especially cater to our kids, causing previous generations to look on in disbelief and declare our offspring spoiled. Regardless of income limitations, we are relentless in pursuing that insatiable four-letter word: *M-O-R-E*. Have we a solution? We're a culture so lost in self-indulgence that we've even convinced ourselves that the only escape from the empty hole of materialism is to head for the nearest mall to buy more stuff. If nothing else, it makes us feel better and distracts us from the presenting problem, which lies deeper within our own self-serving hearts.

It is not newspaper ads, credit offers, or children with a bad case of the "gimmies" who are creating this buying frenzy. The responsible party for the largest per capita debt in history is staring back at us in the mirror. Yet, wallowing in all that bloat, the old Adam that is still lurking in each one of us remains unsatisfied.

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To that Jesus asks a penetrating question: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Christians familiar with the parable of the rich fool in Luke chapter 12 know exactly what happens to those who build bigger barns for themselves but are not rich toward God. Our faith in Jesus takes us down a whole different path, lifting us out of our wanton grubbing and the shameful pursuing of mountains of more stuff. In faith we trust him to send his Spirit to give us hands that are moved

to reach for something far better—the spirit-fruits of thankfulness and contentment.

God's promise to provide for all our needs sets us back upon the narrow road. When has he ever failed to keep that promise? His faithfulness changes our attitudes about material things. And with that change, he loves to see his children, young and old, enjoying his gifts and expressing their thankfulness.

A Christian's model for living remains Christ himself. Jesus took his wealth and hung it on a tree so that you and I could really live, satisfied with all that God has done for us and grateful for everything that he has given us. He alone is the measure of what matters. He alone has the capacity to fill us up with the stuff our souls hunger and thirst for. His love, his forgiveness, his goodness will endure forever. Jesus satisfies beyond our own wildest hopes and dreams. So forget newspaper ads this week. Fold your hands and bow your head in humble thanks instead.

Vera-Ellen is a wife, mother, business owner, and active lay member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.



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OUR family MATTERS

Pamela Holz

Going Home

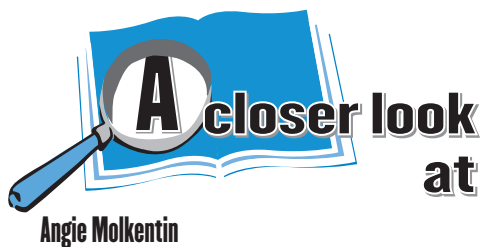


My grandparents lived in that house for over 40 years. As a child, I eagerly anticipated visiting. Crumbly sugar cookies and mouth-puckering rhubarb sauce were staples. Snuggling into bed under the slanted knotty pine, I was enveloped in the

scent of warm wood and mothballs. Sleep was sweet, surrounded by my grandparents' love, and so was that place which I associated with them. They had put down their roots there. It was home.

Looking at roots through a spiritual lens, the perspective changes. While I am blessed to live in this world, growing in one place and thriving in another, my roots need to be grounded in heavenly soil. When I hunger, I am generously fed through the Word and sacraments. The Gardener gently prunes me when I am sick or overextended, strengthening me through adversity. And when I am clinging to things of this world, he pries me away so that I can cling instead to his cross. Because he loves me, my Savior cares for me. He keeps my roots firmly planted in his heavenly garden. I eagerly anticipate returning to my roots. In that delightful home, I will live with him forever.

Having recently moved to Clarksville, Tennessee, with her husband and four children, Pamela Holz prefers to think about the move of John 14:1-3. No packing required!



Angie Molkentin

JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE



Free. It's the most powerful word in marketing. That explains why the day after Thanksgiving crowds of savvy shoppers flock to stores and camp out in line, all for the promise of getting something for nothing. They are all in search of a real deal. When anger erupts, the real deal turns ugly as human nature surfaces and someone gets trampled in the process. Wise shoppers can lose their perspective.

Losing perspective is a common flaw among us, especially around the holidays. Jesus understands our human nature. It took much of his time and patience to help his followers gain a godly perspective about his role as provider—for this life and for eternal life.

Many people followed Jesus because they saw the miracles he performed. Jesus was the real deal! But he knew the people were flocking to him solely for his miracles. It was time to set them straight.

Jesus intended to present his “Bread of Life” lesson by miraculously feeding the crowd. But to magnify the lesson, he first tested his disciples. “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” he asked (verse 5). Jesus addressed Philip, in particular, because Philip lived in a nearby town and knew what local food sources were available. But Philip also doubted that Jesus was the real deal. Later in John’s gospel, Jesus rebuked Philip for his cynicism (14:9).

True to form, the disciples noted how impossible the situation seemed. Not enough money; too many people. In the stress of the moment, they had lost their perspective. Though many of them had seen Jesus in an instant turn ordinary water into wine of the finest quality, not one of them thought of asking him to provide food now.

Nevertheless, Jesus did provide. And his little test exposed the disciples’ misguided thinking and made the miracle feeding even more memorable. In fact, when all was said and done, there was a surplus. The people were so satisfied that they

followed Jesus even more intently. When he rowed across the lake, they pursued him, camping out overnight and standing in line for the promise of even more.

They had lost perspective.

Jesus continued on his mission to set them straight: “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill” (verse 26). His message: *I have something better to give you.*

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Jesus’ miraculous signs were meant to be evidence that he was the Christ, the Son of God sent from heaven. If only the people could get past the physical needs of this world, they would see the greater promise of an eternal feast with Jesus in heaven. “Do not work for food that spoils,” he said, “but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (verse 27).

The skeptics wondered, “You mean it’s free?”

Jesus patiently explained the details of his offer: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry” (verse 35).

This didn’t make sense. A man who had grown up in nearby Nazareth

couldn’t be the Son of God sent from heaven. It seemed *foolish* to even think that.

It seemed even more foolish when Jesus continued: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood,” he said, “remains in me, and I in him” (verse 56). From our study of the Bible, we know that Jesus was talking about feeding our faith every time we study his Word. “He who feeds on this bread will live forever” (verse 58).

Many of the Jews rejected Jesus’ offer. “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” they asked (verse 60).

The sinful nature within us rejects God. We are hardwired to cater to our physical needs first. But Jesus was speaking to our hearts, not our physical flesh with its sin-distorted reasoning. When the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, Jesus’ words make sense. He knew that his Spirit would work in the hearts of some people. Others—those who focused on themselves and the physical things of this world—would not believe.

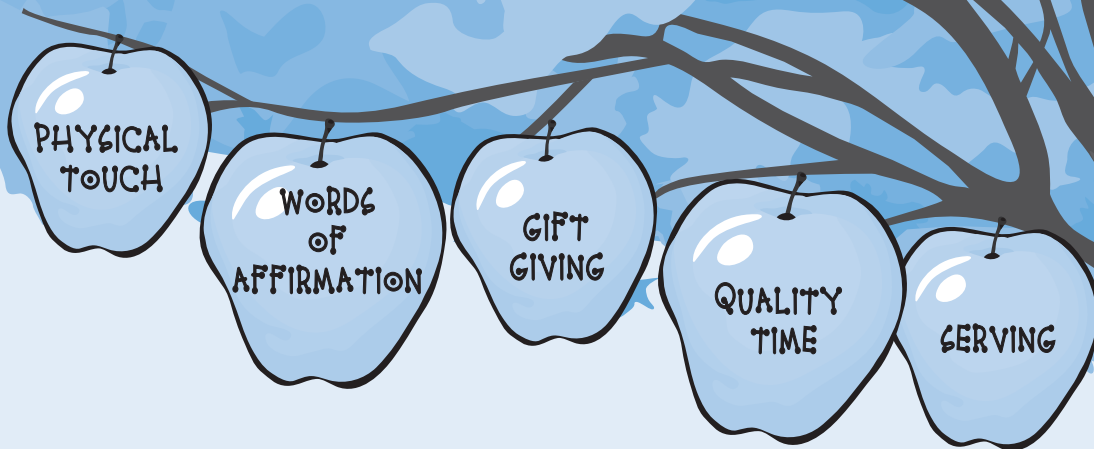
The Spirit gives life; the flesh does not. Keep your perspective.

Angie Molkentin is a freelance writer and Bible study leader. She lives with her husband, Jon, and their three children in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.



Test your perspective against the Savior’s teachings.

- Do I turn to Jesus when the task list seems insurmountable and there’s not enough bread to go around?
- Do I hunger for material things rather than crave spiritual nourishment?
- Am I consumed with the trappings of the holidays, or do I find my fullness in him?
- Will I pass this life perspective on to my children?



Sometimes I wonder if my children really know that I love them. Sure, I tell them so, but with the same mouth I bark an annoyed reprimand at the end of a long day. In their book *The Five Love Languages of Children*, Doctors Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell conclude, “The sad truth is that few children feel unconditionally loved and cared for. And yet, it is also true that most parents deeply love their children” (page 25). This raises the question for Christian parents: How do we convey love to a child?

Love is not a feeling; it is an action. God defined *love* for us when Jesus stepped into the cloak of humanity to save us from eternal death. This is what it means to love—to live for someone else! His Spirit gives us the ability to love others sacrificially, as he has loved us (1 John 4:19). The book’s authors describe five “love languages” as methods for giving and receiving love. Jesus used all five of them in his ministry. When we take the time to understand how our child best perceives love, we are fulfilling the command to *love one another as he has loved us* (John 15:12).

What does it mean to love a child?



“Three months of school and nine months of vacation would solve this fuel problem.”

Cartoon: Ed Koehler

Parents & Crosslink

DEAR READER,

Today’s parents learn from each other, sharing ideas and encouraging one another to meet the daily challenges of living in an increasingly godless society. In the context of the gospel, this is a very powerful dynamic. *Parents Crosslink* (PCL) is a response to the demand for an interactive approach to assisting parents with a biblical view of family. Please join our ongoing conversation about Christian parenting at the PCL Web site located at www.parentscrosslink.net.

Kenneth Kremer, PCL Editor

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