

# Parents & Crosslink

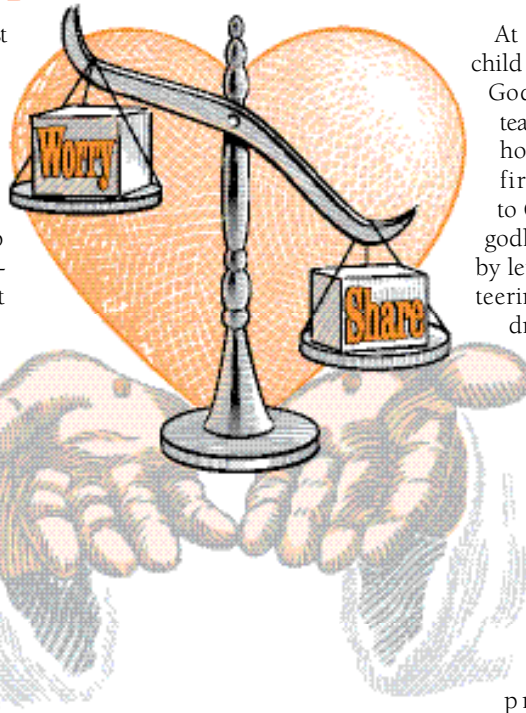
## Worry Less. Share More. Enjoy What You Have.

Sondra Retzlaff

**C**hristian stewardship is a concept most of us learn by following someone's example. Every Sunday morning I watched my dad write out a check and place it in a church envelope. My parents decided how much money to put into the envelope together. Of course, there's a lot more to stewardship than generous giving. We are also exercising biblical stewardship when we trust in God's promises to provide for our daily needs, live lives of contentment, and daily give thanks for the many blessings God showers on us. But learning godly stewardship almost always begins with a model that a child can observe and mimic in life.

### "It's mine."

Little Megan and Emma pretended to go shopping while their mother worked nearby. It didn't take long before the two toddlers were engaged in a full-scale battle over who was going to push the plastic shopping cart to collect make-believe groceries. "It's mine," argued Megan. "No, it's mine," Emma shot back. "But Mom gave it to me" was Megan's return volley. Finally, the girls' mom intervened. "The shopping cart doesn't belong to either of you. It's God's, and he wants you to share. Now let's take turns." Then she made sure each of them took a turn "shopping." In this way the girls' mother reinforced the truth that everything belongs to God. And taking turns is just another way of sharing, so the teachable moment enabled Megan and Emma to apply what they had just learned. What a great lesson addressing the sins of selfishness and jealousy!



The concept of sharing begins to take shape in a child's mind when he has opportunities to observe small gestures of kindness. Initially the gesture might be as simple as a father giving a bite of his donut to his son at breakfast. That same evening the child might offer a part of his graham cracker to his father . . . and maybe to everyone else at the table as well. This kind of learning by observation and then mimicking generates a ripple effect among children who are soon sharing their things with one another in school and on the playground. And there can be a natural transition from learning to share personal property with others to returning (sharing) a portion of one's time, talent, and treasure to God.

At first it may be tempting for a child to spend first and give back to God later. But again parents can teach by example by demonstrating how they carefully determine the firstfruit portion they plan to return to God each week. They also model godly stewardship of talent and time by letting their child see them volunteering for working at a local blood drive or singing in the church choir.

In the simplest of terms, this teaches the concept of budgeting all of one's God-given resources.

### "But, what if . . ."

At some point every child should begin to have a source for personal income. This helps to increase the number of choices she can exercise when deciding how to care for the blessing of money. As toddlers grow to preadolescents and preadolescents to teens, the responsibility for handling money increases. For teens, getting a driver's license increases the need for good stewardship habits. Gas money, additional car insurance, clothing, ice cream, and pizza runs all vie for dollars. Eventually the cost of a college education, a new car, or an apartment can loom on the horizon, placing new demands on a young adult. This growing responsibility can, and often does, give rise to worry.

Worry has an insidious way of sabotaging the best of stewardship attitudes. Jesus spoke directly to the heart of the matter: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear" (Luke 12:22). The godly examples that parents set in this regard go a long way to helping young

*(Continued on page 2.)*

(Worry Less . . . cont.)

people overcome their worries. With positive parental models, children learn to trust in a loving God who lives up to his promises to provide for their needs. Conversely, parents who are constantly obsessing over financial obligations send negative messages and, consequently, negative examples to their children. A preoccupation with making ends meet undermines the Bible truth that what God does for us far surpasses the attention he lavishes on the flowers of the field. Teaching careful stewardship is important, but that lesson must be tempered by the many lessons that teach children to trust in God's providence.

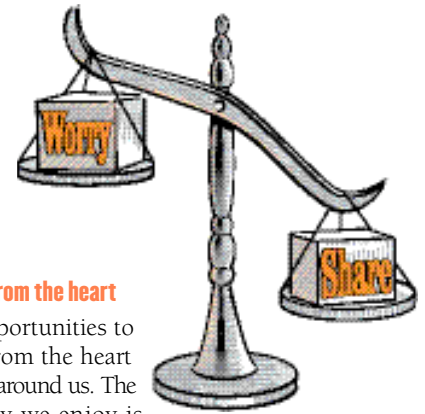
**"It sure would be nice to have . . ."**

Learning how to spend money often proves to be the greatest challenge to exercising godly stewardship. In an affluent society such as ours, kids often have to face the temptation to scratch a self-gratifying itch. I recently hosted my teenage godson for a weekend. He wanted to buy a pair of swimming goggles, so we went shopping together. One particular pair appealed to him, and he

planned to purchase it. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a cooler, more expensive pair. The internal struggle over how to spend his money was evident, but he settled for the less expensive pair. Later I asked how the new goggles were working. He said with a humble smile, "They're great. I guess I didn't need the other ones. These are pretty cool too."

Contentment is an expression of appreciation for what we have or even what we can afford. What God gives, he also wants us to enjoy. Saint Paul wrote, "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

Media images and commercial advertising make us want and want and want some more. Children have those same desires. It doesn't help when the adults that kids admire most indulge in self-gratifying excesses. Godly stewardship includes the hard lesson that Christians are selfless, as was Jesus. Young people need a lot of parental guidance in this regard. Even more, they need a consistent example showing them how and when it is appropriate to spend their money on themselves.



**Given from the heart**

Opportunities to give from the heart are all around us. The bounty we enjoy is best used when we honor God with it. Trusting God's promises for his constant care and keeping makes giving back to him much easier. An attitude of contentment deepens a child's personal relationship with God. As God works for us and his Spirit works in us, Matthew 10:8 becomes a way of life: "Freely you have received, freely give." That's what Christian stewardship is all about.

*Sondra Retzlaff is a member of Saint Mark Lutheran Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She is the author of several children's books about Christian stewardship.*



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

[www.parentscrosslink.net](http://www.parentscrosslink.net).

**Our eight-year-old boy is a real worrywart. He is always convinced the worst is going to happen. Does the Bible have anything to say about such negative thinking?**

The Bible gives us examples of negative thinking and pessimistic attitudes. Elijah was convinced that he was the only believer left. The people of Israel complained that Moses had led them out of Egypt to die in the desert. Neither of these are examples of God-pleasing attitudes.

When glass-half-empty thinking threatens, a self-centered attitude is usually the cause. It's because we only see our own corner of the world. God sees and controls the big picture. Point your son to the greatest display of God's love for us—his Son, Jesus. Then remind him of the promises that God gives. Romans 8:28-39 is a great place to find such promises.

Christians will always face hardships (Acts 14:22), but we will not want to use that as an excuse to be negative. God's Word encourages us to see a good purpose in all events of our lives, even our troubles.

**How can we prepare our daughter to visit a friend who has a rare form of cancer and frequently is in the hospital?**

A six-year-old is in that magical time of life when make-believe play and looking forward to the "snack of the day" is their entire world. The two

friends will be able to relate in that world no matter what, which will soon make the surroundings of a hospital seem insignificant to your child.

You may want to make an initial visit to the children's ward to become familiar with sights, smells, and sounds. Those are the kind of things that might make your child uncomfortable. Also discuss the best way to be of help while spending time with her friend. Can they take a walk? Read get-well cards together? Play games? Read books? Bringing a small treat to eat might also provide something to talk about, and it's a nice gesture as long as there are no food restrictions for the child she is visiting.

Finally, remind your child that they can always talk about God and his unending love for us. Together they can celebrate eternal life in Jesus.





Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.  
Let these gifts to us be blessed.  
O, give thanks unto the Lord,  
for he is good,  
For his mercy endures forever.  
Amen.

## The Uncommon Table Prayer

Emily Kratz

Sometimes called the common table prayer, these words have prefaced countless meals over the years. It's been said with amusement, as someone throws off the prayer's natural rhythm by adding an extra *and* or switching *unto* to *to*. It's been said with embarrassment, as an individual begins to return thanks in a household where they actually also recite a prayer *after* the meal is finished. And, if there are children in the household, you can be sure it's been said mischievously.

When I was a child, the common table prayer was an important part of our daily routine. Sometimes we were so hungry that we couldn't wait to finish the prayer before sampling our food. If my mom ever caught us doing some before-prayer snacking, she would say with a hint of sarcasm, "It'll taste better after you pray." (I always concluded there was no discernable difference in how the food tasted before or after the prayer.) The comment pretty much guaranteed that we would try to somehow sneak a nibble.

The mealtime prayer was also prime time for teasing. There's a lot of temptation anytime you have five kids gathered in close proximity and both Mom and Dad have their eyes closed. My little sister was always my primary target. For some reason she would cry anytime someone stared at her. Now, the staring thing wouldn't have been an issue if our own eyes had been closed. As things were, however, the table prayer would barely end and accusations were immediately being cast like stones at a

toddler's face when she said, "They know our prayer!" It was nice to know that she thought of it as our prayer with so many other believers reciting it with us.

In our family we sometimes just make prayers up right on the spot. It forces everyone to give a little more thought to how we want God to bless us on this particular day. Once I overheard my oldest daughter praying, "Thanks for making Grandma take us to that cool restaurant today." After a long pause she added, "And thank you for making her take us there again tomorrow." Her optimism seemed to give new meaning to the Bible's promise that God always answers our prayers.

**There was a lot of temptation at the table for the five of us when Mom and Dad had their eyes closed.**

When I need to be reminded of Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians to "be joyful always; pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:16,17), I remember the example of my youngest daughter. Our meals were frequently interrupted by her little voice praying over each of the food groups on her plate. I had to draw the line at praying before every bite. We'd be at the table for hours.

The common table prayer has been said over fancy lobster dinners and humble bowls of oatmeal. But wherever and in whatever situation these words have been uttered, they have always been heard. And we have always been blessed.

Praying together at mealtime is a good way to ensure that we regularly take the time to thank God for his blessings. Sometimes the kids have insights of their own to add. Gathered together for a potluck at church, we began the meal with the common table prayer. I'll never forget the look of excitement on my

toddler's face when she said, "They know our prayer!" It was nice to know that she thought of it as our prayer with so many other believers reciting it with us.

Our meals were frequently interrupted by her little voice praying over each of the food groups on her plate. I had to draw the line at praying before every bite. We'd be at the table for hours.

Emily Kratz lives near Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband, Benjamin, and their four children: Hannah, Lydia, Norah, and Thaddeus.



# BREAKING T

**L**et me catch you before you blush with embarrassment . . . or before you dismiss the topic because you think *sex education* is a school's responsibility . . . or before you declare your unworthiness because sexual sin is part of your personal history. Before you turn the page, consider the cost of silence.

There are many loud voices that will gladly speak to our children about their sexuality. Are you willing to let Satan use the words and images of the world to mold your child's concept of his or her own sexuality just to remain in comfortable silence?

God has much to say about being male and female. How our children see themselves as boys and girls and how we relate to one another as men and women has everything to do with the promises and plan our Creator has connected to his gift of sex.

## Three scenes from a child's life

SCENE #1: A woman in the check-out aisle next to me placed items methodically onto the conveyor belt with one hand and rattled a teething ring in front of her infant with the other. Then, from the mother's side, came the tentative voice of a fledgling young reader, asking, "Mommy, what is *o-r-a-l stim, stim* . . ." You get the point. We may think that with enough parental blocks and Internet security devices, we can avoid sexually explicit material from crossing our child's line of vision. But eventually our children will be confronted with sexually explicit material, just as we were. One of the first lessons we need to learn is, *Don't be naïve.*

SCENE #2: How would you react if you overheard your eight-year-old in

either of these conversations? "Let's look at the movie I found in Uncle Jack's basement last weekend," or "You won't believe what's on this Web site." What power Satan has gained if pornography is your child's first exposure to detailed sexual information! The lesson here is, *Be proactive; stay ahead of the curve.*

SCENE #3: I spent 60 minutes one evening watching two sitcoms on a major television network. In one hour I was encouraged to view premarital sex between two high school students as commendable because they were *in love*, view fathers as foolish and unworthy of respect, and think that feelings should determine sexual decisions. The messages I was exposed to contradicted God's plan and undermined the beauty of his design. A third lesson for Christian parents is, *Know the boundaries God established when he created us male and female.*

## Going with the flow

Parents have a unique opportunity to satisfy their child's natural curiosity with honest, age-appropriate, God-pleasing dialogue about sexuality, starting in infancy. The goal is to create plenty of quality communication opportunities so that our children feel comfortable asking questions. Patient listening is frequently rewarded with a chance to express God's truth to a listening pair of ears.

## Attitude

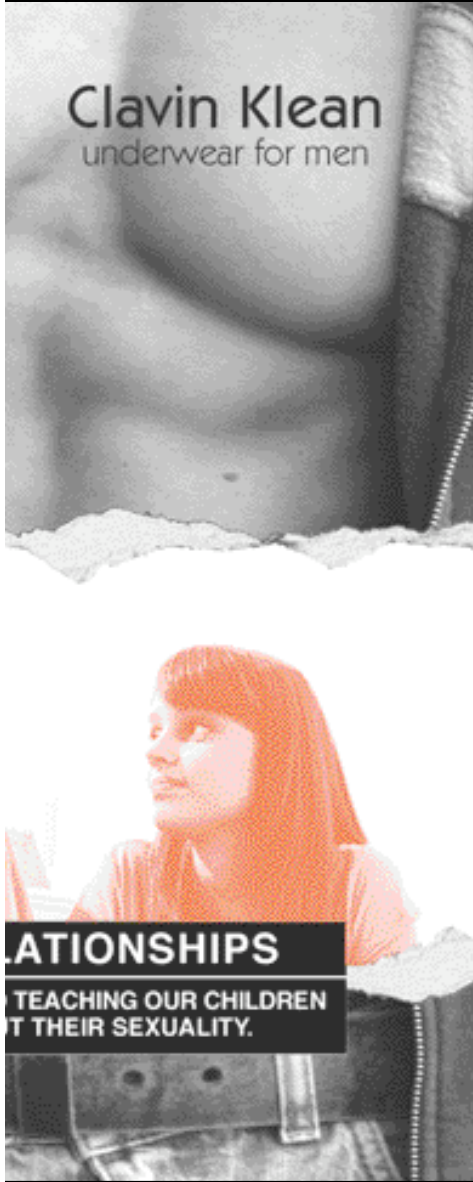
A primary premise is that our sexuality is God's intentional design. He knows you have a sexual dimension because he "knit [you] together in [your] mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). Furthermore, sex is not dirty or shameful; everything God created was good (Genesis 1:31). Lust and all the other deviations from God's plan for his gift of sex became a

human problem only after sin entered the world. But we also know in faith that the guilt of these sins is no longer our burden. Christ earned our forgiveness. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).



# THE SILENCE

Rachel Urfer



*Kids about Sex* walks moms and dads gently through the process of discussing their own sexual experiences with each other. Though these are not always the easiest conversations to have, they are well worth the effort. Such conversations build confidence and define the way we want our children to learn about their sexuality. The remaining chapters of Laaser's book offer examples and helpful suggestions for having conversations with children, from infancy through young adulthood.

## Openness

We've all heard it said that good communication starts with listening. This is not just a pop-psychology cliché. The apostle James emphasized the same point when he wrote, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry" (James 1:19). And the foolishness of speaking before listening is highlighted in Proverbs 18:13 where we are told, "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame."

In his book *How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen*, Christian family therapist H. Norman Wright promotes this practical listening tip: Spend at least five minutes one-on-one every day just listening to each child in your family. Put everything else aside, maintain eye contact, and ask open-ended questions to elicit more sharing. Wright also urges parents not to direct where the conversation should go and to resist the impulse not to wait for your turn to speak. It's important to let children choose what and when they want to share. Active listening sends this message: *I care about your thoughts, I want to know who you are, and I am excited to learn how you see yourself.* Some children take longer than others to open up, but the sharing is inevitable once kids recognize that a parent is making a genuine effort.

## Curriculum

Book time at our house is often filled with potential for intimate discussions. The six-volume series entitled *Learning about Sex* from Concordia Publishing House is a wonderful resource. This series is a simple way to discuss the mechanics of gender and sexuality in the context of God's creation. It is Christ-centered, addressing the major issues and questions of children from early childhood through the teen years. The series also has optional home videos that can be very helpful, especially in group settings. One of the advantages of using a series like this is that parents get to decide when a child is ready to learn the concepts at each new level.

Sometimes questions about sexuality are less obvious than "Where do babies come from?" On the changing table, your toddler might be surprised to find that where his diaper usually is, there are body parts he doesn't normally see. This is a great time to talk about the anatomical differences between boys and girls. It's also a great time for a parent to explain that God has a special plan for every boy and girl. When they grow up, some will choose to marry a person of the opposite sex according to God's design. Some will have children as the result of their marriage union. Some will remain single. Ultimately this conversation provides a way of explaining that we give glory to our Creator by honoring his wishes about how to approach our sexually related choices in life. So go ahead. Break the silence, and just start talking.

*Rachel Urfer is a part-time student of psychology and theology. She makes her home in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, with her husband and two children.*

## Demeanor

A second part of the equation is demeanor. A parent's calm attitude—void of fear, shame, or anger—sends a clear message before any words are even said. The first three chapters of Dr. Mark Laaser's book *Talking to Your*



# Viewpoint

## A True Success Story

Andrea Indahl

**I don't feel successful these days. We recently moved into a 1916 fixer-upper home in a beautifully restored area of Omaha, Nebraska, called Dundee. We bought it to fix it and flip it. Since then we have had a few *minor* setbacks. Now, two years later, I don't see much improvement. What I do see, however, is how little I know about home repair. What I also see is a skewed view of success. These past years I often focused so much on my to-do lists that any slow-ups made me feel like a failure.**

**I used to focus so much attention on my to-do lists that any glitches along the way made me feel like a failure.**

how I do it. If I have checked everything off my list at the end of the day but was angry with my kids in the process, I didn't have a good day."

Go Rachel! She is right. Life is about serving God and honoring his name by helping other people in the process. For starters, we stay close to God, letting the Holy Spirit work in our hearts by getting into his Word often. And we

make sure we are getting our kids into the Word. We pray with them and for them. We attend church, Sunday school, and Bible classes. Most important, we openly talk about God to our kids, and not only when it is necessary to point out sin. They need

to hear the good news of Jesus' love for them.

My mother-in-law spoke to her children in tears one night, expressing how proud she was of them.

"Why?" her daughter asked. "Because we graduated from college and have decent jobs?"

"No," she answered, "because I never dreamed your faiths would shine like they do."

That's a true success story—one for which God gets all the credit.

*Andrea Indahl lives in her fixer-upper in Dundee, Nebraska, with her husband, Scott, and their four children: Sydney, Emma, Jackson, and Anika.*



## family MATTERS

### Fill 'Er Up!

Joel Nelson

Think of your child as having a love tank that is like a car's gas tank. When you fill your child's love tank with a love that reflects the unconditional love you have been given in Christ, your child and your home will run more smoothly. Here are a few practical things to remember when a love tank needs to be topped off.

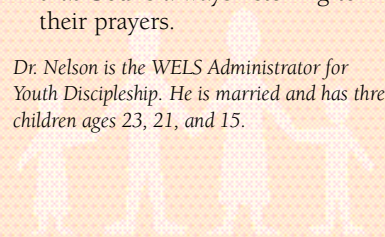


**Eye contact:** Some people call our eyes windows to the soul. But sometimes all our children see in our eyes is anger, upset, annoyance, or irritation. Consider what your eyes are communicating. Get down at your child's eye level and make positive, warm, loving eye contact. Let them see Christ in your corneas!

**Physical touch:** Our culture is rightly concerned about abuse, but so much positive comes from appropriate touch. Hugs, pats, squeezes, tugs, rubs, holds, and tussles can help fill the love tank.

**Active listening:** Our children often come to us at the worst of times with a problem. That's when listening can become work. Stop what you are doing, paraphrase the things they have said, give a clear indication that you have listened. Thank them for coming to you. They'll keep coming back for more of the same. And it reminds them that God is always listening to their prayers.

*Dr. Nelson is the WELS Administrator for Youth Discipleship. He is married and has three children ages 23, 21, and 15.*





Kenneth Kremer

**S**ome values of today's young people are so radically different that they call for a redoubling of our efforts to pass the salt to our children.

Since 1991, Dr. James Norwine and his colleagues have been studying the worldviews of 30,000 undergraduate students in about 30 colleges and universities around the world.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of the institutions studied are affiliated with religious denominations. The rest are either state universities or private schools. The study shows that over the last 15 years many traditional values are still holding the line. But there are at least two significant ways in which today's youth view things in a drastically different way.

Norwine calls the first of these shifts the *radical equality of all ideas and values*. (PCL will be discussing the second shift in part two of this two-part series.) For a growing number of young people, for example, Buddha, Confucius, Allah, and the true God are seen as having equal value; or, the gay lifestyle is valued in the same way as the biblical concept of marriage. Fully 50 percent of public university undergraduates agreed that "teaching any particular value as better than another is wrong."<sup>2</sup> The percentage was a bit more encouraging for the church-affiliated group (13%). But Norwine says there's every indication that "postmodern values have made inroads everywhere, including the most 'orthodox' (conservative) Christian colleges. For example, 20 percent of parochial college students agreed that "heaven is the here and now," and 26 percent affirmed that "humanity is the center of things."

Speaking to Christians like us, Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Now it's up to us to understand how to apply this little Bible metaphor to life in a world that is increasingly opposed to placing any kind of value on values.



*Pass the Salt, Please.*

Industrial analysts claim that today salt has more than 14,000 uses. Two thousand years ago that was not the case. In Jesus' time salt was used mostly as a preservative to keep foods from spoiling. That's the comparison Jesus intended when he called us *salt*. And by calling us the "salt of the earth," it is clear that he wasn't interested in how we preserved our foods. He wanted us to understand that we are to be salt to the entire planet, preserving it from the corrosive effects of sin and unbelief. Without our salty presence, the rotting influence of natural man's evil inclinations would quickly bring a premature end to God's plan. But God is in control.

**GOD KEEPS BELIEVERS  
LIKE US HERE ON  
EARTH IN PART TO  
RETARD THE ROTTING  
PROCESS OF EVIL  
AND MINIMIZE THE  
SPOILAGE FROM SIN.**

One of his reasons for keeping us here is to retard the process and minimize the spoilage so that still more people can be brought to saving faith in Jesus.

As salt, God gives us the power to influence our decaying environment. Our lives serve as models of godliness to an ungodly world. We uphold the law, treat others with respect, live as upright citizens. We speak out against violence, lawlessness, and chaos; oppose promiscuity, dishonesty, and hatred; seek justice and mercy. All of these require values that have the integrity to stand in judgment above all others. And they do because they come straight from the Bible.

The sinful worldview that would do away with value judgments threatens to render young Christians as hopelessly *unsalty*. We must not allow that to happen. Christian parents will have to bear most of the responsibility for passing the salt.

It is virtually impossible to make salt *unsalty*. People have known about this property of salt for thousands of years. Jesus knew it. Because of its remarkable changeless quality, salt had already been used for many centuries before Christ in symbolic rituals that marked the sealing of business contracts. Jesus followed his opening statement in Matthew with an idea that didn't make much scientific sense; nevertheless, it was intentional. "If the salt *loses its saltiness*, how can it be made salty again?" he asked, adding, "It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Anyone who heard Jesus understood the point: If you are my disciple, your role as the world's preservative is a changeless role. If, on the other hand, you were to somehow defy the laws of nature and shed your saltiness, of what value are you to anyone? Then you deserve to be tossed out into the street where everyone can walk all over you.

The world will not always love us for being salt. Sometimes it will seem as though we are more like salt being poured into an open wound. But salt is what we are . . . because we follow Jesus. This vital role is one that God's people must continue to nurture generation after generation.

*Kenneth Kremer is the editor for Parents Crosslink. He and his wife, Marlis, are members of St. John Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.*

*This is the first in a two-part series about salt and light based on Matthew 5:13-16.*



<sup>1</sup>Dr. James Norwine is Regents Professor of Geography at Texas A&M University in Kingsville, Texas.

<sup>2</sup>*The Lutheran Educator*, Volume 47, Number 4, May 2007.

# REPORT CARD

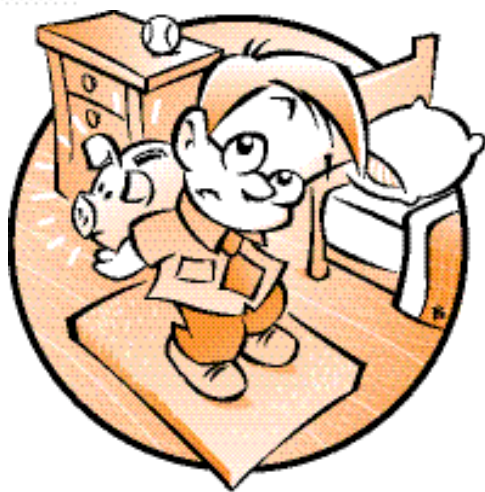
Janet Fredrich

How involved are you in your child's education? Parent-teacher consultations provide outstanding opportunities to get more involved. They give you a chance to make sure you and your child's teacher are on the same page. Here are a few ideas about how to pray, think, question, listen, and follow through on your next conference.

GRADE	SUBJECT
	<b>PRAY</b> for wisdom, patience, and good parenting judgment as you approach the conference. Remember, you will be meeting with your partner in your child's education. Ask God to bless your relationship with your child's teacher(s). Pray too that you'll learn more and that you will apply the lessons you learn.
	<b>THINK</b> about the blessings of education. If your child has had difficulties adjusting to a new school or a new grade, jot down any concerns you might have about the new environment. Consider whether you have been less than actively engaged or too active. Think about how you might improve as a parent to your child and as a partner to your child's teacher.
	<b>QUESTION.</b> Ask your child's teacher to offer some suggestions about what you could be doing. Try to focus your questions on your child's academic, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Find out how the school's teachers, in general, feel about your child's style of learning or motivation to learn. Probe to learn more about your child's strengths or weaknesses. Ask about any ideas that your child's teacher might have to help you focus on specific things you could do to nurture the strengths and overcome the weaknesses.
	<b>LISTEN</b> carefully to the messages your child's teacher is sending. Is the teacher encouraging you, reminding you, asking you for help, making an observation, noting some recent successes, identifying a problem? Write notes during a conference or right after it is over. If you aren't sure about something that's been said, ask for a clarification. Listen with an open mind and as little emotion as possible. If there is a difference of opinion, take the time to discuss the teacher's views. Then share yours. Work it out. Neither you nor your child's teacher will succeed if you aren't on the same page.
	<b>FOLLOW UP</b> Parenting is 24/7. Be consistent. Be persistent. Be prepared to follow through. If the two of you have decided on a strategy aimed at helping your child, make sure you are carrying out your end of the strategy. And expect to hear from the teacher for signs of progress or regress. HINT: Sometimes progress will be slow, and active patience is the best kind of follow-up.

 **READ MORE @**  
[www.parentscrosslink.net](http://www.parentscrosslink.net)

Cartoon by Steve Edwards



"... but Jesus doesn't need MY money..."

## 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](http://www.parentscrosslink.net).

Kenneth Kremer, PCL Editor

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