

Your Child's Incredible Potential—Are You Helping Him Achieve It?

Part Two

How may we best help our children attain their incredible potential in the coming Family of God? Here are practical guidelines.

By Ellis LaRavia

God does not give us a responsibility without revealing to us how to accomplish it.

When God dealt with ancient Israel, He gave the nation His commandments, statutes and judgments — His laws. In short, He gave them all the instruction they needed to achieve national greatness, though they didn't have the power of His Spirit to accomplish the goal.

In like manner, God has given us a special role to perform as parents. God could have designed another method of reproduction and family system of government. But He didn't. God ordained the family.

We as parents must learn to operate in a family atmosphere, for we

will all be part of the God Family, which will live and rule as a family unit forever.

We who are called now have the role of the firstborn. Anyone who has been the firstborn of a large family knows the requirements of that role. The demands are great upon the first child to mature early and assist the parents in the care of younger children.

So is it also in God's plan!

God provides essential instructions to us as parents in order to comprehend and fulfill our responsibilities. Following are some of the major requirements we must fulfill as guardians and caretakers of our children.

Love them

The instructions in this area of love are manifold. The major command-

ment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39) is a basic tenet of being a parent.

What commandment could apply more significantly to our children? There is no one who needs and requires love more than do our offspring. Outgoing concern must be demonstrated daily, whether for a newborn baby or a youth who just turned 15.

Physical requirements vary with our children's ages, but love is required continually. Affection, attention, outgoing concern are key ingredients in all relationships. But children most assuredly shrivel up and die inside without these things.

Most parents love their children a great deal, but many do not understand the needs of youths. Some compete with their children; others live their lives vicariously through them. Many will not let go of their children and allow them to develop and mature.

But the needs of children are ever changing. Love makes the growth transitions possible.

I knew well one family that was so possessive of its single offspring that the young man today, at age 40, is a

Photos by David Dale Dickey



dependent “child” on the one remaining parent. He never developed his own identity or became a mature individual. The parents protected and stifled him, not realizing the devastating result of denying him a normal growth process.

Some few parents abandon their newborn babies at birth. They did not want the baby. It only came as a natural consequence to selfish, unfeeling parents. Of course, many abandoned babies are born out of wedlock.

Still other parents retain possession of their babies but abandon them just the same, even though they dwell in the same household. They neglect the fruit of their marriage because they don’t understand the needs of the children nor their parental responsibilities.

Prepare them for life

To love our children means to prepare them for life.

First, of course, to prepare them for this brief, physical, temporary, chemical existence by instructing them in the purpose of life from the Creator God’s standpoint. God is reproducing Himself. Teenagers must know that God has a purpose

for every human — that every human is to become like Him. But the greatest expression of our love is to do our part as physical parents to prepare our offspring for that ultimate relationship with God in the God Family.

Does this sound too spiritual?

The full understanding of this basic purpose of human life is spiritual, but we must plant and nourish the seed. Love must permeate our relationship with our children. We must love them at every age, at every stage in life, through every trauma and anxiety — not just when it is convenient.

If we want our children to be part of God’s Family and view our role from that perspective, our parental responsibility takes on new meaning. If we ourselves want to be part of God’s Family, we must take the performance of our responsibility as parents seriously!

Teach them

Solomon was the wisest man, apart from Christ Himself, who ever lived. God granted him wisdom to rule over Israel (I Kings 10:23-24). But Solomon did evil in the sight of God. He

had great knowledge and wisdom, but lacked the necessary character to apply it in his own life.

When Solomon wrote the Proverbs to his son or sons, he could warn against a great many wrongs from firsthand experience. No doubt the Proverbs were written with great feeling.

God commands us to teach our children. He is specific as to what we should teach them. God commands us as parents to teach our children the commandments of God, that their lives may be prolonged (Deut. 6:1-2).

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (verse 7).

God is specific about both what we shall teach and when. God relates that it is imperative to speak of the things of God continually.

Why? It is by these teachings that our children learn of the basic necessities for life. Our children must be continually reminded of God, lest they forget. These are more than food, clothing and shelter; they include God’s commandments, statutes and judgments and the meaning and purpose of life.

Children can learn anything and will. But we must be certain of what their educational diet consists just as surely as we are concerned about their physical diet.

Children are like sponges. They readily absorb virtually everything. We must provide an environment in which they absorb the proper and appropriate things.

Do we inspire and exude enthusiasm about the things of God? We have a tremendous example in the Old Testament. Moses was given the responsibility of teaching the children of all the Israelites who died in the wilderness. This was a new generation, who didn’t personally experience all the miracles God used to deliver Israel out of Egypt and by which He had sustained them for 40 years.

Moses was to teach them, though he was not permitted to go into the promised land. God took away the leadership of Israel from Moses for a single, foolish sin. Moses struck the

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rock twice to cause it to deliver water, rather than speak to it as God commanded. Yet Moses had to teach the Israelites with conviction and inspiration, knowing he himself would not enter the promised land.

What a lesson for us!

We, too, must teach our children what God regards as important. We must do it because we, too, regard it as important and because we consider our responsibility a command from God. We must identify with God and His ways and teach them to our children.

Set an example

God disciplined Moses and had him relate it to all Israel. Moses had to communicate the incident and the penalty to all of the people, who numbered in the millions.

Moses related to the people that God was upset for their sakes, because Moses had sinned and had not given the glory to God (Deut. 3:26). God doesn't condone sin, even in His appointed leaders. God condemns sin because it destroys. It demands a penalty.

We as parents must set a godly example to our children. The most confusing thing parents can do to cause disrespect and disobedience is to be hypocritical.

Hypocrisy is the leaven of which we are all to rid ourselves (I Cor. 5:7-8). Christ condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matt. 23).

There is not, and indeed cannot be, any respect when a parent teaches one thing but lives another. We can teach our children all day long, but the greatest impact on them comes from seeing how we live.

We see an outstanding biblical example in this respect. Both Judah and Israel had many leaders and kings. When these kings restored order and began to obey God, so did the people.

This is an outstanding example for us to follow, for we can obey God even in spiritual truths.

Spend time with children

Young children initially seek attention and affection from their parents and want their parents to participate in their activities. But if parents are continually unresponsive, many children will seek alternatives. They will turn to television, drugs and alcohol and submit to peer pressure and Satan's influence.

Children enjoy exciting activities like going to amusement parks, but what they really want, by nature, is the attention of their parents. And they will be content with almost any activity in which the parents are involved.

A recent poll revealed that parents on the average only spend 19 minutes a day with their children. With this little association, parents and children can become virtual strangers.

Watching television is not quality time. It is like sitting in a theater with dozens of people you don't know. Time spent in front of a television is basically lost time, and we cannot afford to lose this precious time.

One of the real crimes in today's families is the unsupervised time so many children spend. Letting your child have unsupervised time at nearly any age is like holding a revolver to your child's head and playing Russian roulette.

We as parents must know where our children are and what they are doing. This doesn't mean we spy on them or overly protect them. It is just a simple fact that children will get into trouble or difficulty without supervision and concern from their parents.

Even with teenagers, we must know their activities and involve them and approve their activities.

Lack of guidance and direction can be devastating at any age, but partic-

ularly during the teenage years. Teenagers who are permitted to roam the streets, who make all their own choices and who are never required to report to their parents will find themselves in trouble.

Children in homes where no one cares — or in homes where it appears that no one cares — will experiment and gravitate to wrong involvements.

Satan does not go to sleep at the switch. We as parents do, but not Satan.

Most serious crimes are committed by teenagers. Because they are neglected, many purpose to do something wrong just to get attention, or to prove their worth.

Serious crimes do not appear that extreme to youths, especially when they continually see violence on the television screen.

Youths cannot be neglected. They have developing minds and bodies but are still quite immature. They are not prepared to handle all the serious things of life alone, especially with Satan's keen sense of timing to lead them astray.

The apostle John wrote to the fathers and the young men who had overcome the wicked one. He told the young men that they were strong and that the Word of God abode in them and that they had overcome Satan (I John 2:13-14).

But our children are not converted. They need our help to understand what they must fight and how. We must help them overcome the evil one and build human character until God does give them His Spirit. And of course, God will work with our children even now if they seek Him (I Cor. 7:14).

We must spend quality time with our children, literally to help them survive. Wholesome family activities are important. Get involved as parents. Involve the children in sports and other outdoor activities with you.

Children are not chattel for us to rule over and use all of our lives. We are to temporarily oversee them, until they are prepared to become parents and raise children and continue the process God is performing.

Children belong to God

Our children belong ultimately to God. They are not ours to possess and use or abuse however we see fit.

God outlines our responsibilities as parents. We are to love them, teach them, train them and prepare them for the ultimate purpose of life — to become spirit-born members of the God Family.

There is a tendency to misconstrue our parental functions. We tend to discount children and consider them second-class citizens. On the other hand, parents may place children on a

symbolic pedestal. Both approaches are wrong.

We must always view our children as potential Gods, not just as our physical offspring. Children are given physical lives through the physical reproduction process, but their ultimate purpose is to attain spiritual life as sons and daughters of God in God's Kingdom (Ps. 82:6). God expects us as parents to care for, teach and train them for Him and His purposes.

God reminds us to "provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:21). God is very concerned about little children. Christ was and is. We are in the role of God as parents, but according to His purpose, not ours. Proverbs 22:6 states that we must "Train up a child in the way he should go." God deter-

mines this way. We must carry it out.

Help children appreciate themselves and others

There is a theory that an individual under our influence will fulfill whatever image we have of him. This is no doubt true in many instances.

If we expect little of children, they will oblige, or if we think a child is no good, our image will be fulfilled. Contrariwise, if we think well of children and encourage them, they can achieve even above their aptitudes.

God wants all of us to become His children in His Family. God devised this plan before man's creation. God will accomplish it. We can fulfill a dynamic part in making this occur in our children's lives, not by trying to convert them ourselves, but by teach-

Why Did God Create The Family Relationship?

Couldn't mankind get along without the family relationship? Couldn't God have given man another way to live?

After all, man is the only creature on earth to partake of the family relationship anyway. Sure, certain animals and birds may dwell together at certain times, but their relationships are just not on the same plane as is the human family. Why is the family institution so important to man?

God ordained the family from the very beginning, when He created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Men and women, as husbands and wives, are to develop the most close-knit and intimate of relationships. They are to dwell together and become as one, working as a team. God intended that the human family typify the God-plane relationship, which is also a family.

The first verse in the Bible indicates that God is a family. The word *God* in Genesis 1:1 is translated from the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a uniplural noun meaning more than one. Further, in verse 26 God says, "Let us make man in our image." God is a family made up of, presently, two members, God the Father and Jesus Christ. God's great purpose is for

every human being to become a member of God's Family.

If we are led by God's Spirit in this fleshly life, then we are God's begotten children (Rom. 8:14). The Church is portrayed as the mother who nourishes and teaches us, preparing us for the Family of God.

But why? Why has God given humans the family relationship? The answer: to prepare mankind to be part of God's Family. How well are we doing?

Paul, inspired by Christ, recorded the specifics of the family structure. The husband, for instance, is to head the household. He is to be the loving leader, loving his wife as his own flesh, even as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:23, 25). Have any of us as husbands yet achieved this as the heads of our families?

The wife, on the other hand, is to be subject to her husband (verses 22-24) and learn to be the true help God intended her to be (Gen. 2:18).

It was and is God's purpose that a man and woman develop a harmonious, loving relationship, becoming as one in every way. Is this occurring today? No! Divorces and homosexuality are rampant. Even when husbands and wives remain together, friction, abuse, hatred and unhappy families often exist.

There is a vast gulf between the happy family God intended and how well man has done in achieving it.

When God created Adam and Eve, He intended that they build a happy family, composed of a loving husband and wife who would "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Children were to be born into this loving family relationship.

What kind of family relationship were your children born into? What is your family relationship like now?

The first husband and wife did not fulfill the family relationship as God intended. Adam sinned. He partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He chose to decide for himself what he should be like as a husband and father. Eve chose to wrongly influence her husband rather than submit to him and be a positive force in the marriage.

These decisions affected not only Adam and Eve but their immediate offspring and every human being and family in every generation to the present.

Man forsook the opportunity to receive God's spiritual knowledge concerning human relationships, of which the family is foremost. As a result, men today don't really know how to be loving husbands and fathers. Neither do women know how to be loving wives and mothers. Couples choose to decide for themselves what family relationships ought to be, rather than believe God.

But God has revealed to His Church the truth about the family. We must hear and heed, as Christ said in Luke 6:46-49.

ing them, setting an example and helping them to attain their great potential.

We must teach our children to have self-respect as well as an appreciation for others.

King David had self-respect, yet didn't consider himself greater than he was.

When King Saul was pursuing him in the wilderness, David considered himself a flea or a dead dog in comparison to God's anointed. David was a man after God's own heart, a young man of character who believed and wanted to obey God. God saw a heart that was right (I Sam. 16:18). David wasn't perfect, but he sought to obey God.

King David truly had a right respect for himself and others. Having such respect is the only way we

can love our neighbors as ourselves. David showed his great love and respect for Jonathan, Saul's son, even after Jonathan was killed. David still honored his pact with Jonathan and cared for his offspring.

David fulfilled the law of loving your neighbor as yourself. We, too, must teach our children to have a right respect for themselves as members of the human family and as potential members of the God Family.

Chasten in love

God teaches us that "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).

Foolishness undeterred will cause a child to embarrass his mother and father and can lead him to commit a serious crime or do violence to another

human, or even cause death to himself.

Chastening or spanking is difficult to get in perspective. Christ places it in proper focus, if we will grasp His instruction.

Disciplining is a vital part of our role as parents, even as Christ corrects us.

Parental discipline should be a forerunner of self-discipline. Only through self-discipline will anyone build character. In Proverbs 16:32, God states that he who rules his spirit (has control over his mind) is better than the mighty warrior who takes an entire city.

The home should be the training ground of moral discipline. God commanded the first parents to be fruitful and multiply and to administer on a human plane God's government in a family atmosphere. Godly discipline

How else will we turn the hearts of the fathers — our hearts — to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers (Mal. 4:5-6)? This is to be one of the major signs of this Church era.

Now we come to one of the most significant aspects of the family relationship. God is a family, and He wants us to become members of His Family.

The physical family today is for our spiritual training. God has given us an important job to fulfill. Together, as husbands and wives, we are to share a profound role that we may have overlooked.

If we have been truly called of God, our children are sanctified — set apart for a holy purpose. Our children have the special blessing of having access to God if even one parent is converted (I Cor. 7:14). We can teach them spiritual knowledge.

We have a special role as parents. With conversion, God gives us spiritual knowl-

edge. This knowledge is absolutely vital for building and maintaining happy, abundant family relationships.

A strong, spiritual family relationship can only be built with spiritual truth and understanding and with God's Spirit. Man can only deal with *things* with his carnal mind, but a spiritual mind comprehending spiritual knowledge is required to fulfill a family relationship that involves father, mother and children — *people*. Man of himself doesn't know how to develop these relationships.

Now comes the heavy spiritual obligation. God expects us to provide a spiritual environment for our children. Our children are physical, not spiritual, not yet having the mind of God. But we are to provide a spiritual environment in which our children can grow up.

We can do this only as husbands and wives working together spiritually with singleness of purpose. Our children are to

experience this godly relationship with parents who are obeying God. This is the home environment in which our children can grow up and come to perceive God and His way in action.

Children don't have the Spirit of God. They don't discern spiritual

truth with their carnal minds. But they do perceive the way we live. It is God's purpose that we live in harmony with God. When we do, our children see it. They learn during their formative years how a family relationship should be.

This gives our responsibility as parents great meaning. It gives weight to Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

God expects us as converted parents to prepare our children for God's calling. God knows when and how He will call our children, but are we providing the spiritual family environment to properly prepare our children?

We must not overlook this most important spiritual obligation in the family relationship. We must teach our children in the spiritual environment of a loving family that is obeying God.

This is how our children are sanctified — set apart by God for a holy purpose. As we fulfill this most vital human relationship in the family environment, our children are learning God's way.

Paul wrote, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). God is revealing to us our great purpose and how we can enhance and help fulfill the same purpose for our sons and daughters.

When we do so we help fulfill the tremendous purpose for which God gave us the family relationship. — By Ellis LaRavia □



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