

article comes, she says, from the heart, and the writing of it with a feeling of personal inadequacy for the awesome parental responsibilities to which she draws the attention of our readers. It is God, however, not men, Who gives the increase; and for that she expresses her own gratitude. Serious-minded parents will appreciate Mrs. Terpstra's insights.

Building the House: Raising Discerning Children

Eileen Terpstra

I would rather the editor had asked for a good chicken soup recipe, or "Ten Easy Steps in Organizing Your Housework" than the topic assigned me. The topic was intimidating to me. In writing an article, such as this one, there is the danger of sounding as if you have all the answers, or that you are doing everything right. This is not the case, let me assure you, for the more one becomes involved in the awesome task of rearing covenant children, the more one is struck by the fact that it is truly weakest means that fulfill God's will. Much to our shame, it is often in spite of us and not through us that God "builds the house" (Ps. 127:1). For the beautiful fruit that we have seen on our labors we give God humble thanks. But rejoice in these fruits we must, and with thankful hearts for God's great gift of salvation and His covenant promises we gladly assume our

covenant responsibilities and train our children to be discerning and spiritually sensitive — those who are alive to and able to perceive spiritual truths. In this way we and our children bring glory to God's Name.

A frequent complaint regarding child-rearing articles from a Christian perspective is that they are so idealistic. The lament is heard that the picture is too "rosy" and that their homes fall far short of this ideal. That is pretty typical of how we all feel, I think. It is fitting however that we be idealistic, for God's Word is idealistic. He calls us "to be holy: for I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 20:7). Although we know we can never, in this life, be perfectly holy, we must strive to be so. This is what perseverance and the Christian struggle is all about. We must teach this to our children. We find that we often feel inadequate, untrained, or are

found wanting in many areas. How reassuring to know that we do not go about this task of "building our house" in our own strength. The God of Jacob is also our Help. He equips us by His Word and Spirit, never leaving or forsaking us in our effort. How diligent we must be in using the means He has given us. Unfaithful parents cannot bring up faithful children. This nurturing must be done by spiritually mature parents. Love for God and our children must permeate all of our efforts, and this love is rooted in Christ. These children are God's precious gift to us but they are given with this command, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

That *way* is one of obedience to Him. It is the *way* of fearing God, keeping His commandments, and sorrowing over sin. It is the *way* to the Cross. We must teach our children about a thankful walk and show them that it is pleasant and delightful to serve their Heavenly Father. We will teach them about the blessed privilege of drawing near to God in prayer. On this path of instruction we will teach them to be discerning.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema makes these observations in the *Reformed Dogmatics* in the chapter "The Preaching of the Word": "Modern educators stress the im-

portance of surrounding the child even in its cradle with objects, sounds, shapes, and colors and smells that are calculated to make the most favorable impression upon the little infant. Why then cannot the Holy Spirit in connection with the living Word of God impress the little child with all the influence of a truly covenant home, the singing of psalms or hymns, the playing of sacred music, the simple prayer uttered by the parents at the cradle, the folding of the little hands of the infant in prayer at the table in the high-chair, and many other influences of the Christian home, to bring the faculty of faith in to some sort of conscious activity?" (page 653). So then, we realize the importance of beginning at a very early age to instruct and foster a zeal for the Kingdom of God.

First of all, parents must be equipped to "build this house." We must be faithful in using the means God gives us to prepare us for this labor. We must first seek the Kingdom of God in order to teach our children to do so. We do this by faithful and diligent attention to God's Word in the preaching and in our own Bible study. We spend much time in prayer. God's Word is our rule of life, it is "able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15b). It is profitable for all

things and addresses every circumstance in our life (II Tim. 3:14-17). God equips us by His Word and Spirit in this way and blesses our labors. Without this blessing, we "labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

In speaking to other parents, especially mothers, I conclude that an area of preparation that we often neglect is our own personal devotions. We become so busy in taking care of our daily chores that this very important part of "seeking the Kingdom of God" is pushed aside. Do we wonder, then, why we are not having a very good day or that everything seems to go wrong? Did we not have time to pray this morning? Lord's Day XLV, Q and A 116, tells us that prayer is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires, not only, but "that God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desire continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them." Are we ready to take on the awesome responsibility of training covenant youth without these blessings?

In beginning to teach our children we stress these same principles, applying them according to their ages. Our children must be able to observe and "feel" a love and devotion for God. It is an atmosphere that is created. Faithful church attendance, catechism instruction, and

other church related activities must have top priority in their lives also. When our children are very young we should begin to train them by reading the Bible with them, helping them to memorize special Bible verses, singing the songs of the church with them, praying with them and teaching them to pray. A good Bible Story Book such as *Come, Ye Children*, by Gertrude Hoeksema, Bible dictionary, Bible concordance, commentaries, church publications, and other literature which pastors and teachers are helpful in suggesting, are valuable aids in this instruction.

It would be impossible to list all the areas in which we should teach our children to be discerning. I am very thankful that space does not permit even attempting to do so! We will look at just a few of these areas.

It is crucial that we teach our children to be discerning in their use of spare time for, "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right" (Prov. 20:11). In this area we have the opportunity to teach him about Christian liberty also. One of the ways they can be taught to fill their "free" time is by giving them the love of reading. By reading to them and giving them an appreciation for good literature we are giving them a gift they will cherish

all their lives. An excellent little book that will help in choosing worthwhile literature is *Honey for a Child's Heart*, by Gladys Hunt.

Music should have a prominent place in our homes. Praising God is certainly commanded of us. Notice how often the Psalms speak of this. We should sing and teach them the songs of Zion. We should encourage their musical abilities and help them to appreciate good music. We are accomplishing two things by doing this — stressing proper use of time and talents.

It is important that we spend time with our children, showing them the wonders and signs in creation, pointing them to God's beauty, goodness, and faithfulness in it. "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1a). What a great way to spend time and to give them a love for God's creation.

If we pay careful attention to "building our house" in this manner then the television, VCRs, computer games, etc. will not occupy much of our time, will they? If our guide for living is God's Word, then all kinds of negative things do not have to be said about these "entertainers." Let Psalm 101:1-3 teach us. Recreation can surely be a profitable thing; but there is a proper kind of fun for the child of God, and spiritually mature parents ought to know what this is.

Another area that is very important to consider is helping our children to seek God's Will for them in their calling. We should remember Paul's words in Colossians 3:23, 24, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." This eliminates all self-seeking, doesn't it? Our goal is not riches, a great name, or social standing but always God's glory. We should certainly point them to the biographies of some of God's saints in connection with this. The self-denial practiced by Moses, Joseph, and Daniel should be an example to all of us.

We should not exclude the area of discipline. Consistent, loving, and firm correction is commanded by God. See Proverbs 29:15, 17; Proverbs 19:18; and Proverbs 13:24. In Hebrews 12:11 we read that "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Notice too, that Eli *reproved* his sons but he did not *restrain* them (I Sam. 2-4, especially chapter 4:13). Read about the terrible judgment of God because of this. We must teach our children the consequences of sin. Unruly, disobedient children disrupt the home and God does not command His blessing in a home where sin is not dealt with. Because we love

Psalms 127 and 128 give us a good picture of the house we must build. The very first thing we must do, as was mentioned before, is to seek the blessing of the Lord on our labors. And, of course, we cannot labor if we are not there! Christ tells us in Matthew 18:5 how serious it is to offend one of His little ones. Aren't we offending them when we neglect to take the time to teach them the fear of the Lord? Isn't this hiding the Word of God from them? (Ps. 78:4). Often, the excuse of fathers and mothers, when spending little time with their children is that it is the quality and not the quantity of time that is significant. God is talking about quantity as well as quality in Deuteronomy 6. In Deuteronomy 6 we read that we must teach our children the Words of the Lord when "thou sittest in thine house, and when thou

Then, because God's covenant promises are sure and because of His marvelous Grace, we will someday hear the blessed words of our Lord in Matthew 25:34b, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

What a mercy was it to us to have parents that prayed for us before they had us, as well as in our infancy when we could not pray for ourselves!

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