

HOW TO RAISE A **MODERN-DAY**  
**JOSEPH**

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR GROWING GREAT KIDS**



**An Awana Resource**



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HOW TO RAISE A MODERN-DAY JOSEPH

Published by David C. Cook  
4050 Lee Vance View  
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C. Cook Distribution Canada  
55 Woodslee Avenue, Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3E5

David C. Cook U.K., Kingsway Communications  
Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

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ISBN 978-1-4347-6531-4  
eISBN 978-1-4347-0027-8

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The Team: Terry Behimer, Thomas Womack, Sarah Schultz, Jack Campbell, and Karen Athen  
Cover Design: Amy Kiechlin  
Cover Image: Getty Images, The Image Bank, John Coletti

Printed in the United States of America  
First Edition 2009

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# INTRODUCTION

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## A JOURNEY WORTH PLANNING

For parents like you ... in churches like yours ... this book is a practical guide for a child's spiritual development—a journey in which parents *and* churches work *together* to raise kids who know, love, and serve the Lord.

Much of the vision and purpose for such a journey is discussed in my friend Larry Fowler's book *Raising a Modern-Day Joseph*. The book you hold in your hands—*How to Raise a Modern-Day Joseph*—focuses more on the *practical* side of that. It gives parents a workable plan for putting this vision and purpose to work in their everyday family life.

## NO GUARANTEES?

Like Larry's book, this one is needed because we're in the midst of a crisis. The statistics stagger us as we read about, hear about, and see young people walking away from their faith.

We are surprised that this could be happening, since after all ...

- our churches provide nurseries, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, Awana, youth ministries, and every other kind of kid and youth program imaginable.
- our children's ministry curriculum is more entertaining, colorful, and professional looking than ever before.

- the market is flooded with “Christian” action figures, mugs, pencils, wallpaper, wallets, posters, linens, T-shirts, and toys, many decorated with clever “Christian” sayings.
- radio stations play Christian music twenty-four hours a day, and television channels broadcast a never-ending selection of messages from both local churches and polished, smooth-talking televangelists.

And here’s an even tougher dilemma: Why does a kid from one home walk away from the Lord, while a kid in another home stays true to Him—yet the families in both homes have attended the same church, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, Awana program, etc.?

What happened? What’s the difference?

Before going further, I need to say this:

No plan,  
no curriculum,  
no humanly written book,  
no pastor,  
no teacher,  
no parent ...

can absolutely *guarantee* that a young person will *not* walk away from what he or she has been taught.

God works with His people individually, and each individual must make the choice to trust Christ as Savior. Each one chooses to walk with the Lord or to walk away from Him. After all, even with the first two kids we read about in the Bible, one had a criminal record.

The absence of such a guarantee is due to sin.

Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (Galatians 3:22)

So yes, unfortunately, children don’t come with guarantees.

But God’s Word *does* come with a guarantee: If we trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, believing that He died and rose again, we’re promised ...

- the forgiveness of sin (bridging the separation between imperfect people and a perfect God).
- eternal life.
- a future in an unimaginably perfect heaven.

*That's some guarantee!*

No, we as parents don't have guarantees, but we do know that children who grow up in strong, Christ-centered homes—where God's Word is both taught *and* lived—are more likely to live godly lives as adults.

But let's take a glimpse at what is typically going on in many families.

## **A CHURCH AND PASTOR PROBLEM?**

I grew up as a preacher's kid and, as an adult, became a preacher's wife—I know firsthand how often the preacher and the church get blamed for parental failures.

I remember one Sunday morning after the church service when my husband was shaking hands with people filing out of the auditorium. Suddenly a visibly upset mother stormed into the lobby, yelling. She said her son had been knocked over by other boys in the parking lot.

My husband's first reaction was to call an ambulance, but the mom said that wasn't necessary; her son just scraped his knee. "But," she shouted, pointing to my husband, "this is *your* fault."

"Why?" he asked. He could see our own two kids talking with friends nearby, so they weren't the ones who had knocked down the woman's son. So why was the incident his fault?

"Because it's *your* church," the woman screamed. (Well, that wasn't true; the church belongs to the people as much as to the pastor.) "And so they're *your* responsibility."

However, that true story is a picture of what many people do spiritually.

Just as many parents leave the physical well-being of their children up to the church (the drop-them-off-in-the-parking-lot syndrome), so many parents do the same with their children's spiritual well-being, training, and guidance: They drop them off in the parking lot and let the church do the nurturing (whether or not the parents are even in the same building).

Maybe you feel this way too—at least to some extent. After all, you make sure your children go to church for every kids' activity possible, so you figure the church's pastors, teachers, and leaders

are covering that spiritual-training part of your kids' lives. You're busy doing other things, like working long hours to provide for your family, which *is* your responsibility.

Deep inside, you hope those people at the church are doing it right. And if your kids walk away from the Lord someday, you'll certainly have something to say about the church's failure, since spiritually raising your kids is its job.

Right?

Well ... no!

## **FROM THE START**

Let's review some essentials of what the Bible says about the family.

### ***The Family Is the First Group God Created***

The family unit came before towns or countries and before churches, youth programs, basketball teams, or Facebook. God immediately created the marriage partnership; in fact, by the second chapter of Genesis, God had already established marriage:

For Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:20–22)

And already by the fourth chapter in Genesis, we learn about children.

### ***The Family (Marriage Partnership) Is a Picture of Christ and the Church***

Paul says it this way:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:21–27)

### ***Family “Rules” Are Listed Throughout the Bible***

Here’s an example:

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (Colossians 3:18–21)

### ***Family Members Need to Encourage Each Other***

Paul pointed to family encouragement as a model for the entire church:

We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.... For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11–12)

The family has the *primary* responsibility in the spiritual training of children. But families also need the church to come alongside them to nurture their kids, to provide Christian friendships

from like-minded families, and to give complementary spiritual training. (We'll look at all that more closely later.)

### **SOMEONE WHO KNEW, LOVED, AND SERVED GOD**

The goal of Awana (the ministry I serve with) is to train children and youth to grow into adults who *know, love, and serve the Lord*. We've come to see that this is also a priority goal for parents in training their children.

And as a biblical example of a young person who grew up to know, love, and serve the Lord, it's hard to find a better example than Joseph in the Old Testament—not that he came from a perfect family.

Most children know about Joseph. They know he received a unique coat from his father—and our perception of that is a knee-length coat with rainbow-colored stripes. But why would grown men (his older half-brothers—see Genesis 30:1–25) care about their little brother's multicolored coat? The Hebrew word here for “coat” refers to a full-length tunic—sleeves to the wrist, the hem to the ankles. This was the style of coat worn by rich young men. They didn't have to work (they had slaves or servants to do that), and they had a position of honor both in the home and in the community.

Joseph's full-length coat was probably made of white linen, with bands of colorful embroidery as trim. By contrast, working men wore plain, looser-fitting, shorter garments so they could climb over rocks and take care of their sheep—they needed to move quickly and not be hindered by long clothing. So the brothers weren't jealous of the colors of Joseph's coat but rather the implied position Joseph held in wearing such a garment.

Joseph lived in Hebron. The word *Hebron* means “community” or “fellowship.” Joseph had fellowship with his father, but this wasn't a family that had a lot of fellowship with one another. I don't think dinnertime conversations were leisurely discussions about the price of sheep feed or the Hebron weather.

The truth is, Joseph came from a dysfunctional family. This is obvious when you read in Genesis 30 about the intrigue involving his mother, his mother's sister, their servants, and drugs (mandrakes, which were seen as narcotics or aphrodisiacs). Rachel and Leah were both jealous women who were willing to have their servants lie with Jacob so they could win the who-can-have-the-most-sons race. And when

Reuben brought home some mandrakes, Rachel desired them so much she was willing to “sell” Leah a night with Jacob to get her hands on them.

This of course isn’t part of the biography we read about in Sunday school, but these events are worth noting here. Out of this mess, the Lord brought Joseph, a young man who never wavered from the assurance that God was with him; a young man with a true heart desire to know, love, and serve the Lord.

We know that Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and that he ended up in Egypt. We know he quickly gained power and influence in Potiphar’s house, then quickly lost it when fleeing the temptations of Mrs. Potiphar. Yet even when put in prison, Joseph knew that God was with him, and he remained faithful. Later, because he interpreted the king’s dream, he was made a VIP and placed in charge of the entire land of Egypt. In that position, he was able years later to publicly forgive his brothers.

Through it all, Joseph concluded that it wasn’t his brothers who sent him to Egypt, but *God*. God had a plan for him, and Joseph listened to God and fulfilled His plan—something he was later able to testify about to his brothers: “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7).

Joseph’s life in particular reflected five godly character qualities—we’ll call them “Master Life Threads,” as Larry Fowler does in *Raising a Modern-Day Joseph*—that were woven into the very being of who he was and how he lived his life:

- *Respect* for the awesomeness and authority of God (Genesis 39:6–9)
- *Wisdom* for living life based on a knowledge of God (40:6–8)
- *Grace* in relationships with others (41:51–52)
- A sense of *destiny* and purpose that came from God (45:4–10)
- A *perspective* for life based on the sovereignty of God (50:15–21)

These Master Life Threads are also desired characteristics in the lives of our own children—as they learn to *know*, *love*, and *serve* the Lord.

We know that Joseph *knew* about the Lord. God was the God of his father, Jacob. As Joseph’s life continued in surprising new situations—as head of Potiphar’s household, as a prisoner, and finally as the man in charge of all of Egypt—he continued following the Lord. Over and over in

the biblical account of Joseph's life, we read that the Lord was *with* him, as in Genesis 39:21: "The LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden."

We know that Joseph *loved* the Lord because of the way he lived his life, refusing to be drawn into the temptations of a rich and powerful household, and because of his exemplary forgiveness toward the brothers who had wronged him: "But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them" (Genesis 50:19–21).

And we know that Joseph *served* the Lord—by making righteous choices, by administrating the seven years of plenty, and by giving food not only to the people of Egypt but to those from other countries as well. As the famine intensified and "the people cried to Pharaoh for food," Pharaoh responded, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you" (Genesis 41:55).

## MODERN-DAY JOSEPHS

What Christian parents wouldn't want their child to grow up to be a modern-day Joseph—a young person who reflects those five Master Life Threads and who knows, loves, and serves the Lord?

For many parents (and maybe this includes you), their children are already becoming Josephs. They do excellent jobs spiritually nurturing their children. They daily teach their kids God's Word by guiding them toward recognizing the need to trust Christ, praying with them, reading the Bible together, encouraging Scripture memorization, explaining difficult words and concepts, and talking about the qualities of the Christian walk. Then they live out God's Word in everyday life. They take their responsibility seriously.

Then there are other parents who simply don't think about their children's spiritual training. These parents flounder through life, not learning much themselves about what the Bible actually says, and they couldn't begin to explain the difference between Genesis and Galatians. Yet they're law-abiding citizens and church-attending Christians. They figure their kids will turn out okay. After all, they get their kids to Sunday school and even sent them once to a Christian summer camp.

But the majority of Christian parents are somewhere in the middle. They desire to be spiritual

nurturers of their children, but *they don't know how*. They might be intimidated that they won't choose the right words. (What if my child asks me to explain eschatology or something?) Or they don't know where to find a plan that shows them how to be a spiritual nurturer. (They may not even realize they should *have* a plan.)

Furthermore, you probably know some adults who grew up without any spiritual nurturing in the home, yet who are now pastors, missionaries, church leaders, or shining witnesses in the secular workplace. The Lord used someone besides a parent to mentor that child or gave the child a desire for Bible study that transformed her into someone who truly wants to know, love, and serve the Lord.

## GOAL AND PLAN

If our destination is having a child who develops Joseph-like characteristics—knowing, loving, and serving the Lord—what's the itinerary or plan for that journey?

The lack of such a plan often becomes *the* roadblock in our children's spiritual development—and getting past that roadblock is what this book is all about. This book is not a step-by-step itinerary but more of an atlas where you pick and choose which stops to make in your own family journey—because we know all families are different, with different schedules, different interests, and different personalities.

Our desire is to give your family (and your church) ideas—*lots* of ideas—for helping to spiritually nurture your children. But as the parent, *you* need to devise the route.

It's a plan that involves *both* parents—and the church as well.

### *Dad*

The father is the head of the house and the God-ordained leader of the home. Dads and moms need to work together to spiritually raise their children.

A spiritually strong dad will ...

- pray with his children.
- lead the children in Bible study and worship.
- take an interest in what the child is learning at church.

- teach his children Bible verses, Bible concepts, and Bible truths.
- discuss challenging questions, cultural events, and concepts with his children.
- model a Christlike attitude in his daily life.

Unfortunately in too many homes, Mom is by herself in doing all of this. Dad might drive the family to church, but he doesn't take any real responsibility in the child's spiritual development.

If you're a father, know this: God has given you a job to do. Your responsibility is to do it. You can't expect your child to grow into a God-honoring adult when he sees you ignore the Bible, find every excuse possible to avoid church, and live a life that's inconsistent with what God says in His Word.

### *Mom*

Children need *both* parents involved in their spiritual training, and that's the basic scenario presented throughout this book. It's a sad situation when Dad is faithfully living for the Lord, but Mom doesn't want any part of it.

Mom needs to be an active part of the praying, teaching, discussing, and modeling too. For example, sometimes Mom's the one who spends a half hour before or after school helping her children work on a memory verse, and when Dad gets home, he can enthusiastically listen to the children recite the verse. This is a joint effort. Both parents are huge influencers.

You might be a single mom and already feel defeated because you don't have a husband to help you out. You can still teach your children from God's Word and live an exemplary life. In your situation, the partnership of the church may be more important than usual. Hopefully your church has good male role models teaching younger children, so your children can profit from a masculine influence.

A good example of one parent spiritually training a child is that of Eunice and her son Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4–5). Eunice did have the help of her own mother, Timothy's grandmother, but she didn't have any help from her unbelieving Gentile husband. Timothy's mom and grandma taught him the Old Testament Scriptures and exemplified godly lives. When the apostle Paul came along and taught Timothy about the Son of God and His sacrifice on the cross, Timothy was ready to trust Christ as Savior. Timothy became Paul's son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2), and Paul recognized the foundation that Timothy's mom and grandma had laid.

Many single parents do great jobs in spiritually training their children. If you're a single parent, or

your spouse isn't interested in God and His Word, you need to surround yourself with adults who can give you and your children support and encouragement.

### *Fitting into Your Schedule*

When, where, and how do we spend time spiritually training our children?

The following verses from Deuteronomy give clear instruction that we should look for teaching opportunities to spiritually train our children every moment of our lives.

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:18–21)

In a real sense, spiritual training in the home is ongoing and never ending. It's really a part of everything you do.

But we also need to set aside specific times when we come together as a family to pray to, honor, and worship the Lord and to study and memorize His Word. Some families enjoy singing or playing instruments together. Others read a page from a devotional book.

One teenager said, "Our family wasn't musical, so that wasn't part of our activities. But we did other things, such as making rebuses of Bible verses."

You might set aside a time each day for spiritual focus—at the breakfast or supper table or before bed. Or you could plan family nights when an entire evening is dedicated to a lesson, an activity, and a special treat. (Be careful you don't present the activity as more important and fun than the lesson. Bible study can and should be a great experience.)

Maybe your family's schedule is so complicated that you can't have a regular set time for spiritual focus, but you can still conscientiously meet together as opportunities present themselves to pray to, worship, and learn about the Lord.

A couple of considerations in all this:

- Sometimes families are diligent in having family devotions, but that's the only time their children hear about the Lord. Because Dad prays and reads a page from a devotional book, he feels he's taken care of his spiritual-leadership responsibilities. Five minutes later, the children hear him swear when opening the gas bill or see him confront a neighbor because the neighbor's dog messed up the lawn. What he verbally taught is negated by the way he lives his life.
- Families are different. One guy diligently teaches his kids from the Bible, helps them with their memory verses, and consistently lives a godly life, yet he feels guilty. He knows of another family that spends thirty minutes of concentrated training at the supper table each night, but his irregular work schedule doesn't allow him to do that. He is, however, doing a great job. We need to focus on our own families, not on what someone else is doing.

We as parents need to work together to develop the itinerary for our own families, keeping our eyes on the goal of raising children who know, love, and serve the Lord.

### *Your Church*

Whether large or small, your church is your best partner in raising your children.

In fact, the size of the church doesn't really matter. Megachurches have the money and staff to provide exciting programs for both parents and children, and those programs can be good. But smaller churches can be better at giving a child a sense of security, family, and nurturing that you don't always find in larger churches.

So church size isn't important. What *is* important is the *attitude* of the church and the pastor toward kids. Does your church leadership really care about kids? Do they see the value in children's ministry and provide the necessary resources to spiritually disciple children? Do they occasionally visit children's or youth ministry programs to give the lesson, answer questions, or simply greet the participants? Do they make an effort to learn the names of the kids, or do they know your three teenagers (who have been attending the church since birth) only as the Hansen kids?

If your church doesn't see the importance of encouraging families, maybe *you* could be the catalyst to begin the initiative.

After this book's part 1 (which focuses on giving *parents* specific age-appropriate suggestions for their child's spiritual development), part 2 will focus especially on practical ways *the church* can partner

with you in this task. Be sure to explore what’s presented in part 2, and become familiar with ideas of how churches and families can work together.

**PLANNING YOUR FAMILY’S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

The ideas in this book are suggestions. No parent can do everything, just as no church can do everything. Our goal is to give you plenty of ideas to help get you started and keep you going.

So let me lay out what you’ll find in each chapter in part 1, which is especially geared for you as a parent.

*Life Threads*

Each chapter targets a different stage of a child’s life and will focus on an appropriate life thread (reflecting a quality that Joseph displayed in his life).

Here are these life threads for each age category:

Preschoolers (ages 2–5)	<i>Respect</i>
Early Elementary (ages 5–8: kindergarten through second grade)	<i>Wisdom</i>
Older Elementary (ages 8–11: third through sixth grades)	<i>Grace</i>
Middle School (ages 11–14: seventh and eighth grades)	<i>Destiny</i>
High School (ages 14–18: ninth through twelfth grades)	<i>Perspective</i>

At the beginning of each chapter, you’ll find listed again the life thread to focus on for that stage in your child’s life.

By the way, if you're looking at this list and thinking, *Great, but my child is already twelve years old!*—that's okay. Yes, you've missed some prime training opportunities, but you can catch up. Review the sections for preschoolers and elementary-age children, and teach the principles to your child using explanations and activities appropriate for a twelve-year-old. Instead of regretting what you missed, focus on the present and look to the future. These concepts are good for all ages—including adults.

### ***What They're Like***

Early in each chapter, the What They're Like section lists ten characteristics about that particular age category. Understanding these characteristics will give you a great head start in helping your child grow spiritually.

### ***What They're Asking***

The What They're Asking section in each chapter lists the kinds of questions that kids in this age-group typically ask about God and the Bible. You'll also find suggested answers to a few of the questions.

These questions came from a "Biggest Question Survey" sponsored by Awana. A few years back, we asked four thousand children and teenagers, "What's your biggest question about God and the Bible?" These children and teenagers all had some Bible background (though, after looking at their questions, we surmised that some didn't remember much of it). Then we determined the most-asked questions for each age-group.

But don't stop with reading what other kids have asked; ask your own children for their biggest questions about God and the Bible.

### ***What You Can Do***

In the What You Can Do section of each chapter, you'll find a wealth of practical suggestions for what you as a parent can do to help your child's spiritual growth in each stage. This begins with a short section about helping your child make the all-important decision to trust Christ as Savior.

***Bios and Verses***

Here you'll find appropriate Bible biographies and Scripture memory verses to explore and learn with your children.

(At Awana, we substitute the word *biography* for *story* to emphasize that what comes from the Bible is true and not fictional. We explain that a biography is a true story about someone.)

***What Not to Do***

Sometimes we hinder more than we help. Each chapter includes a What Not to Do section, where you'll find common errors to avoid in each stage of your child's life.

***Checklist***

Each chapter also includes a checklist of basic attainments to look for in your child's spiritual development.

***Family Itinerary***

Finally, the Family Itinerary section in each chapter is a worksheet to help you develop your plan and goals for your child's spiritual journey in each stage.

Here are a couple of samples of completed itineraries from two families, one with younger children and one with teenagers:



## A SAMPLE ITINERARY FOR A FAMILY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

### **Our spiritual goals for the year are:**

1. *Teach Emma and Jacob that God created the world.*
2. *Teach Emma and Jacob that God loves each one of us.*
3. *Teach Emma and Jacob that the Bible is God's book.*
4. *Teach Emma and Jacob that Jesus is God's Son.*
5. *Teach Emma and Jacob that we're to obey God.*

### **Our family verse for this year is:**

*Genesis 1:1*

### **We'll also study the following six additional verses (one every two months) about God and His character:**

1. *Psalm 23:1*
2. *Psalm 33:4*
3. *Psalm 147:5*

4. *Matthew 28:20*

5. *Romans 6:23*

6. *1 John 4:10*

**We'll also study the following six Bible biographies (one every two months):**

1. *Adam*

2. *Joseph*

3. *Heman*

4. *Josiah*

5. *David*

6. *Christ's birth*

**We'll also do a more extensive study on this person in the Bible:**

*Heman in 1 Chronicles 25:5–7. We'll learn how he and his family sang in the temple. We'll learn a song together and sing at church.*

**Here are other activities our family will do together to learn about Bible characters:**

1. *We'll watch a series of DVDs on Bible characters (a set we were given that's factual).*
2. *We'll visit Grandpa and Grandma and look at the pictures they took in Israel.*
3. *We'll study Josiah and other Bible characters who served God even though they were young.*
4. *We'll do several crafts using natural materials from the outdoors as we talk about God's creation. These will include leaf tracings, pictures on sun-sensitive paper, and drying flowers.*
5. *We'll teach Emma and Jacob to identify five birds and five flowers, explaining that they were all created by God.*

**Here are some themes for family fun nights we would like to do this year:**

1. *We'll build a birdhouse together and learn about ten birds in our area of the country, and we'll thank God for creating a wonderful variety of birds.*
2. *We'll make a mural of David watching his sheep for the basement wall.*
3. *We'll invite Grandpa and Grandma to family night so they can hear Jacob and Emma say their verses.*
4. *We'll make a book of all the different Bible biographies Jacob and Emma have learned at church this year.*
5. *We'll visit the zoo.*
6. *We'll make cookies for the woman down the street who's homebound.*

**Our family has completed this year's family itinerary and met our spiritual goals.**

*(Signed by each family member)*

## A SAMPLE ITINERARY FOR A FAMILY WITH CHILDREN IN HIGH SCHOOL

### **Our spiritual goals for the year are:**

1. *Study the book of Ephesians together.*
2. *Encourage Andrew and Amanda to teach and mentor younger children, whether that's younger cousins or at church.*
3. *Discuss a biblical worldview and what that means as Andrew and Amanda head off to college.*
4. *Have open, honest discussions about difficult cultural issues.*
5. *Encourage Andrew and Amanda to write down any questions they may have about God and the Bible and to work through those questions as a family.*
6. *For Andrew and Amanda to serve by singing and playing guitar at the rescue mission once a month.*

### **Our family verse for this year is:**

*Joshua 24:15*

### **This year we'll do the following family research project:**

*We'll focus on creation. The project will culminate with a week at creation camp this summer.*

**We'll memorize this chapter from the Bible:**

*Ephesians 2*

**We'll read (either as a family or individually) the following books:**

1. Evidence That Demands a Verdict *by Josh McDowell*
2. Mere Christianity *by C. S. Lewis*

**Our family service project this year will be:**

*Serving at the soup kitchen on Thanksgiving and Christmas*

**Our family has completed this year's family itinerary and met our spiritual goals.**

*(Signed by each family member)*

**PART ONE**  
**(ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS)**

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# CHAPTER 1

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## **AT THE STARTING LINE (AGES 0–2)**

This chapter won't have all the various components you'll find later for the older age-groups, but it's important to realize how much parents of infants can do in launching the spiritual training of their children.

In fact, this spiritual training actually begins *before* your child is born.

### **BEFORE THE BIRTH**

I remember the day I found out I was pregnant. My husband and I had boundless excitement and energy. I remember calling my parents and in-laws, baking bread from scratch, and going on a ten-mile bike ride. We were excited and on our way to having a little person call us “Dad” and “Mom.” Immediately, we began to think about the future.

The nine months you're waiting for your baby to be born lend themselves to lots of discussions and plans for the future.

If you're in that excited, anticipatory stage, here's a list of some things to think about. (No expectant parents can decide everything at this point, but these are major questions to consider.)

- What do you want for your child? Pray together, dedicating yourselves to raising your child in the training and instruction of the Lord.
- What does God say about raising a family? Study the Bible together to find out.
- Does your church have classes for new parents? Check and see what's available.
- Does your church have a mentoring program for new moms and dads where you're paired with an experienced set of parents?
- How involved will you be in your local church? (If you haven't found a local church, what steps will you take to find one?)
- Are there differences in how you were spiritually trained? Maybe one of you grew up in a Christian home and one didn't. Or maybe one of you went to church only once a month, while the other was there every time the church doors were open. Maybe both of you grew up in Awana, but one was encouraged to learn the verses and one wasn't. All these things need to be discussed.
- Are you familiar with the church nursery? Volunteer to help. The staff will probably be glad to have you, and you'll become familiar with the other volunteers and the procedures.
- Can you be added to the church prayer list? Request prayer for wisdom as you raise your new child.
- Do you plan to set aside time as a family to study God's Word and pray, taking into consideration the ages of the children in choosing appropriate subject material?
- Will spiritual growth take precedence over other activities? Will your child miss a soccer game for church or church for a soccer game? Will you be just as diligent to work with a child on Bible memorization as you will be to teach him math?

Keep the answers to your questions in a journal or other special place. Yes, things change once that baby comes into the world—but discussing important subjects thoroughly now will help you be prepared when the situation is right in front of you.

## **AFTER THE BIRTH**

Oh, the joy of a new baby—and the sleepless nights, the endless laundry, the constant diaper changes ... and the unbelievable delight in holding that tiny person in your arms.

Study after study shows how important it is for an infant to bond with his or her parents. That's where the child finds safety and fulfillment of his needs. In forming that bond, you're creating an atmosphere that will eventually make understanding the love of the heavenly Father all the easier.

Here are some ways to get off to a good start:

- Pray with the baby before bedtime and meals. Even though the child can't understand, she becomes familiar with the pattern. Sometimes a child's first "spiritual" response is folding his hands before mealtime and then shouting "Amen" at the end of the prayer. Children don't truly understand what they're doing, but again, the parents are establishing a pattern that someday will be meaningful to the child.
- Read Bible biographies from bright-colored Bible storybooks. Even young babies enjoy hearing the sound of Dad's or Mom's voice, and looking at the appealing shapes and colors.
- Take your baby to church. Children who attend church from the beginning adjust better later on when attending age-appropriate classes. This also helps others in the church to become acquainted with your child.
- Ask a pastor or staff member to visit your home.
- Become acquainted with the children's ministries in your church.

## **PARTNERING WITH YOUR CHURCH**

Be sure to look also at chapter 9 ("At the Starting Line") in part 2 of this book for ideas of how the church can partner with you at this stage in your child's life.

Notice especially the information there about a baby dedication service—where you stand before the church and publicly acknowledge that you want to raise your child in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The congregation is usually asked to pray for you and your family.