



No Greater Joy

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DEDICATION

This book is lovingly dedicated to my dad who thought that his five children were the most special children that God ever created. Although Dad was not a Christian at the time, he knew the basic Bible principle that “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” and he would never let us believe that we were anything but wonderful. What a blessing it would be if every child born into this world had someone who thought the same about them!

During the last year of his life, Dad was baptized into Christ. He had lived with courage, overcoming great obstacles, and he died with courage when cancer finally won the battle over his earthly body. Several weeks before his death he said, “Sheila, I wish I could go away. I don’t want all of you to see me die like this.” My heart ached. I said, “Dad—it is not how you die that we will remember—it is how you lived!”

I dedicate this book to that precious life that had so much to give to so many. He would have rejoiced with me upon the completion of this book as he rejoiced with me when each of my children was born and I rejoiced with him when he was born into Christ.





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INTRODUCTION

“I have no greater joy than to hear that
my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

This book was written to be read by Christian mothers everywhere who are trying to raise God-fearing children in an extremely selfish and materialistic society. The problem is that many times everyday life and our culture get in the way of our view of eternity for our children. However, from experience I can assure you that there is no greater joy than knowing that your children walk in truth.

To a great extent, this book excludes the role of the father in the home and focuses on the responsibilities of the mother. The thirteen chapters are based on the Word of God, which is the ultimate manual for a Christian mother, and are replete with personal experiences from my own life while raising three children. This second edition has been updated to include most of the original text with additional experiences and insight.

Using the discussion questions and short assignments at the end of each chapter, one can grow spiritually and emotionally while gaining confidence as a Christian mother. The last chapter is written woman to woman, discussing how to become the wife of a happy husband within God’s institution of marriage. This chapter has been very well received and is much needed in our feministic/unisex society. My classes on “How to Be the Wife of a Happy Husband” have been extremely well attended, and many



women have expressed sincere appreciation for my candor on this topic. One of the greatest gifts a woman can give her children is a happy, secure home life. Dr. William Menninger put it this way: "It is difficult to give children a sense of security unless you have it yourself. If you have it, they catch it from you." This contagious sense of security is not only true in our home life, but also in our personal relationship with the Lord.

Realizing these things, it is important that we pattern our roles in this life after the greatest parent in the world, our Father. By emulating His love, studying His Word, and practicing His patience and long-suffering to the best of our ability, we stand the greatest chance of raising children who will stand before Him in judgment and hear Him say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

In Genesis 44:34, Judah fearfully asked Joseph: "For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me?" As Christian mothers, we need to prayerfully ask ourselves, "How shall we go up to the Father, and our children be not with us?"

It is my prayer that, through reading this book, mothers will realize what an awesome responsibility and unique role God has given us and also find some practical suggestions for handling the everyday stresses of motherhood. There is no greater challenge than being a mother, and there is no career more rewarding. This book is intended to be an inspiration and a springboard for one's growth as a Christian mother.

—Sheila Keckler Butt
September 1999



Chapter One

DEVELOPING INTIMACY WITH YOUR CHILDREN

“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Luke 12:7).

The Bible teaches that the “very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Our Father knows us completely. How well do we know our children?

Instant Coffee, Instant Breakfast, Instant Mother

A woman does not become a mother by merely having a baby. That is only the beginning. I realized this clearly when we were faced with the decision of whether or not to bring an eight-year-old foster child into our home. Our immediate response was, “Yes, we would love to!” As the days drew closer for her to come into our home, many doubts flooded my heart and mind. Had we made the right decision? How would this girl affect a home that had always been built around boys? How would I ever really know her? Would I be able to look into her eyes and tell if she was lying, or hurt, or in need of some special attention? Would I be able to know from her actions that something was wrong? Could I trust her? Could I understand the thoughts and emotions of a child who had known insecurity all of her life?



I realized that I would not instantly be able to be a mother to her. Sydney J. Harris made this observation:

The commonest fallacy among women is that simply having children makes one a mother—which is as absurd as believing that having a piano makes one a musician!

A real mother—a good mother—knows her child. She knows not only the color of the child's eyes and hair, but also the color of the child's very nature. Is he a bright and cheerful child? Does he tend to be melancholy? Is she a questioning child or an accepting one? Will he be easily brought to the Lord? Am I willing to invest years of time and constant teaching in order to help the child come to know the Lord and then be patient enough to let that same child make his or her own decisions?

In order to develop this familiarity, the Christian mother must make a lasting commitment to spend time with her children. If there are several children, then each child must have his or her own time. We have heard so much in the past few years about the quality of time being so much more important than the quantity of time. I firmly agree that quality time spent with our children is very important, but they need lots of it! One of the most precious memories of my own childhood is that my mother was always there when we came home from school in the afternoons. It was not necessarily the quality of time that we spent at that particular time of day. It was the mere fact that I could open the door, yell "Mom" and get an answer. She was home. That was all that seemed to matter at the time.

As the years passed and I began dating, it was still important to me that my mother was available. Many nights I would sit on the side of her bed and briefly tell her about my date. The truth is, now that I am a mother, I am not sure how much she even remembered the next morn-



ing. But the important thing to me was that she was there to listen!

Training Takes Time

The highest priority for the Christian mother is to train her children in the way they should go. It is virtually impossible to do that if she is not in the home much of the time. The main ingredients for training anything are time and patience. We must be available for our children, and we must give them a big portion of our lives for several years. To lose the soul of one of our children to Satan could have a devastating effect on our ability, our confidence, and our effectiveness in teaching others about the Lord. We must invest years of love, discipline, and training into the precious souls that God has placed in our care. After we have done that, our service to God after those children have left our home will be more richly rewarding and useful to our Father. We will have put first things first. We will have no regrets, and each of us will feel free to be at the disposal of others whenever they need us, knowing that hand in hand with God, we have given back to Him those lives which He entrusted to us.

The Baby Is Perfect

Intimacy with our children often begins with the first movement or the first sound of the baby's heartbeat. My sister called one day to tell me that she had just had an ultrasound. It was her fifth month of pregnancy. She had seen the outline of her baby on a monitor and she was delighted. "The baby is perfect," she said "and I loved him the minute I saw him on that screen!"

Do you remember the first time you heard your baby's heartbeat in the doctor's office or felt the first good kick? Your intimacy with that child began being established at that moment and has affected your life profoundly from



that time. You became suddenly aware that there was life. In most cases it was only after the child was born that you realized the magnitude of your responsibility as a mother. The thought may frighten us at first, but we need to look at each child as a challenge and an opportunity to bring another soul to Christ to be used in His service.

Holding On to Intimacy

One of the greatest challenges to us as mothers is to grasp intimacy with our children while they are very young, to strengthen that intimacy through the childhood years, and to be able to hold on to an intimate relationship throughout the teenage years. This needs to be accomplished for our children to be able to talk with us about the things that are most important to them in every growth period of their lives. During the younger years, we need to show an interest in bugs, animals, dolls, toys, nature, and Happy Meals. During the middle years, there will be greater emphasis placed on being liked by others. As peer pressure becomes a factor, hopefully, we will have established in our children a strong sense of self-worth by teaching them that they are made in the image of God and that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” There will be times to talk about his or her own sexuality as well as the opposite sex. This must always be done with emphasis on the fact that sexuality is not new and it is not dirty. Sex is what you are, and your sex was created by God. No one knows any more about the subject than God, and it needs to be dealt with in light of His Word. God created every aspect of our sexual lives, and He fully understands the questions of our children. Never lie to them. We must pray with them and talk with them openly about this subject whenever it is necessary, at any age. Sometimes children will ask questions. At other times you will want to initiate the conversation. Take every opportunity to teach your



children that they were created by God, and He created our bodies for procreation as well as enjoyment within the marriage bond.

By the time our children enter high school, they should have had considerable sex education from us. If we haven't taught it to them by then, more than likely they have learned from unhappy experiences, friends, and bathroom walls. It is my plea that, as a mother, you will not leave this beautiful subject and God's place for it in our lives to television, teachers, and friends. We need to have an intimate relationship and comfortable environment in which we can talk to our children about every aspect of their lives, and certainly every aspect of their particular sex. It is frightening for a child not to understand his or her own body or God's intended purposes for it.

Every Child Is Unique

In order to accomplish this, we must learn to understand the lives of our children and to nurture them in the Lord. Each child will have his or her own personal idiosyncrasies. Understanding each child will help a mother to know how best to teach and train that particular child, and how to express love and affection for that child. Every child is unique. As we have mentioned before, we need to spend time alone with each child. We need to watch our children playing together and truly listen to the things they say. A friend of mine told me that throughout her years at college she would often ask people, "Who are you?" They would simply answer, "Fine." They were not listening.

I wonder if our children ever feel this way about us. No matter how unimportant or irrelevant something may seem to us at the time, we need to listen to our children. I really believe my first child was surprised when he went to kindergarten and the teacher did not have the time to give him



her undivided attention when he had something he felt was important to say. He was accustomed to having someone listen to him. Consequently, he would come home and tell me everything about his day at school, because I would listen. Throughout his high school years, I was always well informed about what was going on at school. We need to stop what we are doing, look our children in the eyes, and really listen to what they have to say.

The Family that Prays Together . . .

Another very special way of developing intimacy with our children is to pray out loud with them and to mention them often to the Father in prayer. Many times after I had begun doing this, the children would ask for Mommy to pray with them instead of Daddy. This was because each child wanted to hear what I would pray for him. Each one listened eagerly and attentively to the prayer. I would pray for the special needs of each child as well as for his strengths and weaknesses. I shared this experience with their father who also began praying for them in their presence. This practice has strengthened our family over the years and enhanced our prayer life. As the boys got older, they often prayed out loud for each other and for their father and me. It may be uncomfortable at first, but do give it a try! The benefits are well worth the effort.

I know of a father who gives each of his two teenagers a blessing every night. He asks the Lord to bless them during a test the next day, or during a track meet, or in some other of their important endeavors. When their fifteen-year-old son spends a night away from home, he calls to talk to his father and ask what his blessing is for the evening. What a beautiful relationship in the Lord!



TO mom
From Kyle

I Love you very,
very, very much. I Love
when you think your
hair does not look ~~so~~
good. I Love you
when you get mad.
And I Love you when
you come pick us up
from school.



(The short note above was written by Kyle when he was in the third grade. Sounds as if he knew me pretty well, too, doesn't it?)

*Trusting Them*

Another basic ingredient for developing intimacy with our children is to be able to trust them, and let them know it! I am not talking about blind trust that says, “My child would never do that!” We must not be naive or blind or unrealistically defensive. I am talking about the kind of trust that says: “I will ask him about it.” I am talking about the kind of trust that says, “If you are in the wrong, I’ll help you get through it.” I am talking about the kind of trust that says, “I love you anyway.”

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In the introduction, the author uses the verse, “For how shall I go up to my father, if the lad be not with me?” What significance, if any, does this have to you as a Christian mother?
2. What is the ultimate manual for a Christian mother?
3. Explain the difference between being a perfect mother and an ideal mother?
4. Discuss ways that you can spend more time with your children. Write down ideas and share them with the class.
5. Can having unfaithful children have a negative impact on our service to God in later years? Why?
6. When do you believe that intimacy begins between a child and its mother? Why?
7. What is your role as a Christian mother in your child’s sex education? How important is this role?
8. The story is told of two men who were asked to recite the Twenty-third Psalm to a congregation of Christians. The handsome, young, energetic preacher stood up first and beautifully recited the Twenty-third Psalm with perfect diction and enunciation. Then a small, stoop-shouldered old man stood up. He quietly, softly,



personally spoke the words of the Twenty-third Psalm. His voice was cracking by the time he reached the end of the psalm and tears were streaming down his cheeks. There was not a dry eye in the congregation. You see, the young man knew the psalm, but the old gentleman knew the Shepherd! We want to know our children as the old man knew the Shepherd, and in turn we want to teach our children to know God. How can we begin early to teach our children to know God?

9. What could be the value of praying out loud with children?
10. Is it important for a mother not to have blind trust in a child? What does trust mean to you? How do you let children know that you trust them?





Chapter Two

BUILDING ON INTIMACY

“Even a child is known by his doings”
(Proverbs 20:11).

Proverbs 20:11 states, “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.” This chapter focuses on our responsibility to take the time to know if the things our children are doing are pure and right.

“The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Whole Truth”

My oldest son was generally very truthful with me. I will not say that he was always absolutely truthful. Sometimes I would not get the whole story without some prodding if there was going to be retribution involved. No one willfully puts his foot into the fire. But generally speaking, I could take his word for what had happened. However, when he was in kindergarten his teacher and I had set up a system whereby I would receive a note every Friday telling me whether Stan Jr. had had a good week or a bad week in trying to control his talking. One Friday afternoon, I was waiting outside to pick him up. My parents were with me. They had driven more than three hundred miles to visit. Stan Jr. had seen them out of the school room windows and had asked his teacher if he could go to