

Raising Children of Purity

By Libby McCurley, Ph.D.

As a parent, have you ever thought that in order to keep your children spotless from the world it might be easiest to lock them in their room and just avoid all contact with the outside? To choose their friends and select their future mates? Although, sometimes this might seem to be the only answer in helping our children to remain pure, we also know it is not reality. We must live in the world, but we are not to be of the world. So how do parents help their children achieve this?

I teach health and fitness and I often am aware of many parallels between living a healthy physical life and having a healthy spiritual life. I believe some of the principles used to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors can also be applied when helping our children lead godly lives amid a world of sin. We all know there are countless benefits to exercise and a healthy diet including improved quality and quantity of life. Similarly, there are countless benefits to leading a godly life such as joy, peace, and eternal life. Even though the majority of people are aware of these immeasurable rewards, there are few who choose to follow the lifestyle required to receive the payoff. Why is this? For most people the lure of instant fleshly gratification is more powerful than a reward that is delayed. For instance, the immediate taste of that double bacon cheeseburger may overpower the long-term goal to lose weight just as the physical pleasure of premarital sex may outweigh the delayed benefits of remaining pure until marriage. In Hebrews 11:25-26 we see that Moses chose to be mistreated with God's people rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, for he was looking to the reward. This is precisely what we should be striving to instill in our children: to choose what is right even when it is not the easiest or most popular thing to do. It is easy for our children to lose sight of the long-term reward and become distracted by what is right here, right now. However, there are several things that I believe parents can do to help mold and encourage purity in their children. Three of the most powerful tools in developing positive lifestyle behaviors include motivation, modifying one's environment, and having strong social support. There are several examples in the Bible that show the implementation of these concepts encouraged and strengthened individuals as they faced worldly temptations.

Motivation is crucial to human behavior. Individuals who have the proper motivation are able to achieve great things, be it physical or spiritual in nature. Motivation can be in the form of tangible rewards, praise from others, or from internal satisfaction from a job well done. Parents often underestimate the power of their praise and approval of their children, but we see two examples where God verbally praises Christ, both of which were at critical times in His life. One was after His baptism by John where God proclaims, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). This encouragement was given just as Christ was beginning His ministry and just before His temptation in the wilderness in which He would face trials and rejection. The second occasion was at the transfiguration where, again, God speaks from a cloud of His praise and approval of His Son (Matthew 17:5). This time the reinforcement comes near the end of Jesus’ earthly life as He is anticipating the suffering and ridicule He would soon endure. One might argue that the purpose of these statements from God was solely for the benefit of others present to verify Christ’s identity, but certainly it was also a source of encouragement for Jesus as He carried out God’s will here on earth. In the same way, our children can be encouraged by our praise and approval. If we see our children making good choices, we should never neglect an opportunity to let them know that we are proud. This reinforcement will increase the likelihood that a positive behavior, or avoidance of an undesirable behavior, will be repeated. Over time, as positive choices are made and reinforcement is given, the motivation becomes internal as our children develop a personal relationship with the Father.

The next principle is that of altering or modifying one’s environment. One of the most common examples I use, when talking about making healthy dietary choices, is to avoid going to the grocery store when hungry. When hungry, you are in a weakened state and will be more likely to buy on impulse, to buy unhealthy items, and to buy more than you would otherwise. Similarly, parents should not allow their children to be in situations or environments in which they are likely to compromise their purity. I don’t imagine there are many parents who would knowingly send their child into a burning building, but by allowing them to dress immodestly, hang out with the wrong crowd, go on unsupervised dates, or attend unchaperoned parties, we are putting them at just as much risk. 1 Corinthians 15:33 tells us, “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Help your children by monitoring with whom they associate. Be an informed parent. Know where your children will be and, yes, occasionally check up on them to see if they really are where they should be. It may embarrass them at the time, but it will keep them on their toes,

and they will appreciate it as they get older. Probably the greatest concern parents have in relation to purity with their children is sexual purity, and yet many allow their children to have too much privacy and alone time with their boyfriends or girlfriends in relationship, or allow them to dress immodestly. This is another instance where we are putting our children into a situation that may compromise their purity. My children are not yet at dating age, but I plan to model with my children the approach used by a Christian family I hold in high regard. They reared three wonderful, Christian children who have gone on to begin Christian families of their own. In this family, most “dates,” especially early on, were family based. This was a very active, involved family and date night was going as a family to a ballgame, dinner and a movie, or game night at home. This allowed the parents a chance to get to know the person their son was dating and also allowed the young couple a chance to get to know each other without the temptations which come by being alone. By being aware and involved in our children’s lives and by setting and standing by rules for modesty, dating, and friends, parents have the power to influence their children’s behavior positively.

The third and final principle is that of having a strong support system. When referring to exercise or eating habits, having someone who shares your goals provides a sense of accountability and encouragement. It is easier to make the right choices when we are surrounded by others who share the same values. Christ chose twelve companions to help Him in His ministry and to eventually take over His work. The early Christians served as encouragers for one another as they faced possible death over their belief in Christ. A strong support system begins at home. Our children should always know where we stand Biblically and we should encourage and teach them to study, pray, and serve. Also important in your child’s support system are their friends. If they have strong Christian friends, it will be easier for them to make wise decisions, and they will be less likely to find themselves in compromising situations. As our children grow and mature in their faith and in their relationship with God, He will become their greatest source of encouragement and support.

As a parent just beginning to experience raising a teen, I am not claiming to be an expert and I am sure my children and I will make mistakes along the way. However, it is my and my husband’s responsibility to do everything we can to help them get to Heaven someday. Our children are only ours for a few short years and our ultimate goal is to give them back to God as

servants for Him just as Hannah did with Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11; 26-28). Parents should look to God through His Word and through prayer for guidance in rearing Christian children.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

“He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Proverbs 13:24).