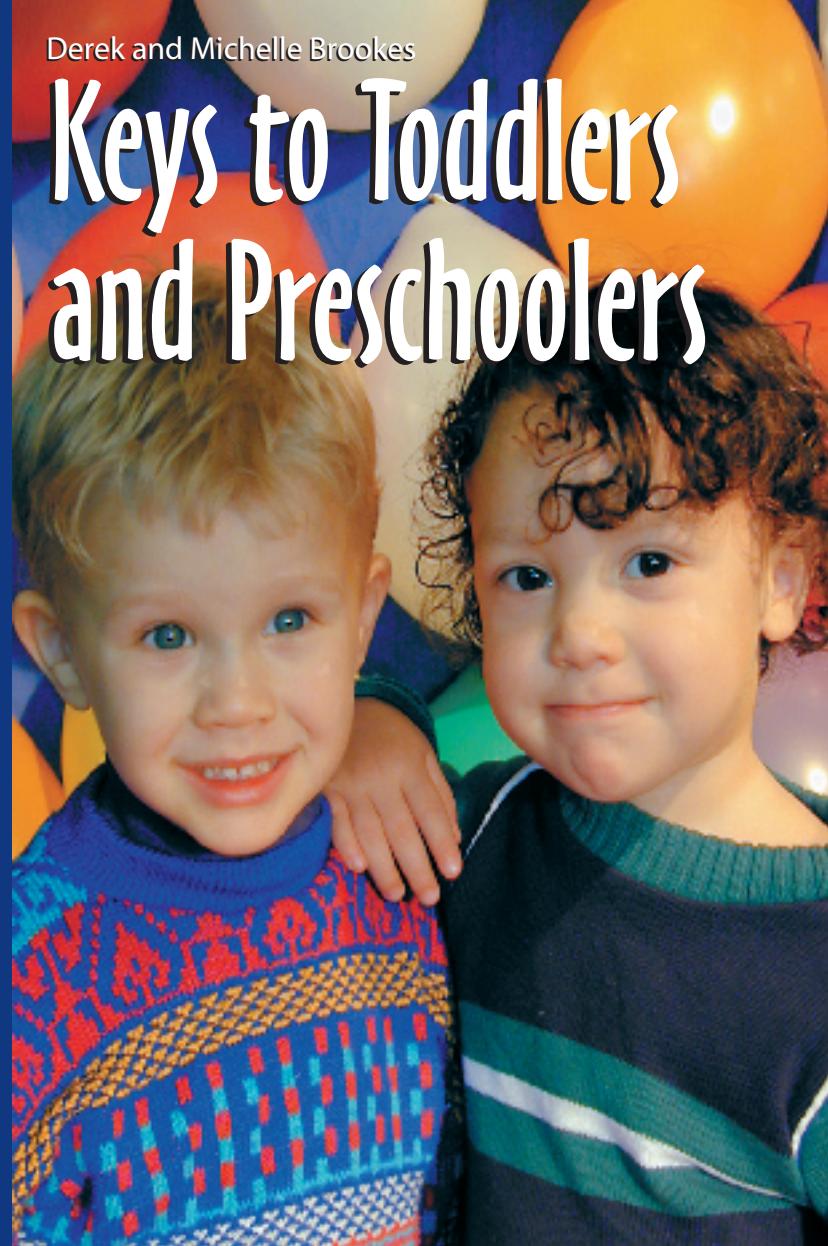


Derek and Michelle Brookes

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Keys to Toddlers and Preschoolers

Derek and Michelle Brookes

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he
is old, he will not depart from it.*

—Proverbs 22:6

A Keys to Parenting book

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By Derek and Michelle Brookes

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INTRODUCTION

“Being a parent isn’t easy!” said someone who had been there. “It takes the strength of Samson; the wisdom of Solomon; the patience of Job; the insight of Daniel; the courage, determination, and leadership of King David; the faith of Abraham—and most of all, the love of God!”

Parenting has *never* been easy, but today’s fast-paced, complex, and ever-changing world makes it all the more difficult. Yet the secret to successful child-rearing remains the same as it has always been—love! The miracle of God’s love, the love that you have for your children, their love for you, and the love that they will in turn learn to have for others. Love is what will motivate your children to make the right choices and decisions in life. Love will keep them through the ups and downs of growing up. Love is the antidote to the negative influences they will be exposed to throughout their lives. Love will give them purpose and a passion for life.

Throughout this book, for convenience in writing, the pronoun “he” is always used to refer to the child, although both girls and boys are obviously intended.

GOD'S GIFT

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,” the Bible tells us, and “the fruit of the womb is His reward.”¹

One of the greatest gifts God could ever bestow upon anyone is a child—an eternal soul to love and be loved by. If God has given you a child or children, congratulations! You are richly blessed! In return, He expects you to care for, teach, and train your children, and to be an example of His love to them. He wants you to teach your children His Word and His loving ways so they will also be a reflection of His love to others. It’s hard work, but whatever you give your children in the way of time, attention, teaching, good personal example, or love, He will bless.

One of the secrets of happy parenting is to never let a day go by without thanking God for His most special gifts—your children.

¹Psalm 127:3

Living Clay

I took a piece of plastic clay
And idly fashioned it one day.
And as my fingers pressed it still,
It moved and yielded at my will.

I came again when days were past;
The form I gave it still it bore.
And as my fingers pressed it still,
I could change that form no more.

I took a piece of living clay,
And gently formed it day by day,
And molded with my power and art,
A young child's soft and yielding heart.

I came again when days were gone:
It was a man I looked upon.
He still that early impress bore,
And I could change it nevermore.

—Author unknown

HOW TO TEACH TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

The importance of early learning

Toddler age (1 to 2 years) is probably one of the most difficult stages for parents or caregivers. Baby is growing up and has new powers and abilities to explore! Preschoolers (3 to 4 years) are of course more competent than toddlers in their physical skills and abilities, but they are also nearly always ready and happy for any attention and input you can give them.

The importance of early education can hardly be emphasized enough. It's now an accepted fact that a child learns more than half of all that he will learn in his lifetime by the time he's five years old. So it is important to begin teaching your little ones early and to teach them the *right* things during those first formative years.

Every single day is important, because learning new things every day is the main "occupation" of small children. They can usually learn a lot more with a parent's guidance than if they are just left to figure things out for themselves. Motor skills, a wide range of practical skills, and language learning are the main areas to focus on.

Small children should not be overburdened with tedious scholastic preparation, but a surprising amount of groundwork and preparation for later learning can be done in these early years. They should not be forced to learn something they don't want to learn—but you will find that there is very little that they do not want to learn about. They seem

the most happy and contented when they are busy learning. They are such educational enthusiasts, in fact, that they can soon wear their tutor out!

Getting help when you need it

A toddler or preschooler will consume as much time and attention as you have to offer, and you may find that your child's demands and learning needs at this age are more than you are able to meet. If this becomes the case, you may need to seek help for your sake and your child's sake. Ideally a caregiver for your child should not only help him learn practical things, but also back you up in his moral and spiritual training. Make time, even though you may be very busy, to have some heart-to-heart communication with your child's caregiver(s). Be sure they are in agreement with you, not only concerning the need for diligent teaching and daily care, but especially in their love for God and their desire to pass on this love to your child.

If you have to leave your child in the care of others during the day, try to avoid those TV-centered, plop-and-play, mini-madhouse daycare facilities. Older but active people whose children have grown can often provide more personal attention to a child, teach him a lot, and as a couple, often have the combined patience to answer some of your child's many questions with wisdom gained through experience.

Remember to pray for your child's teachers or caregivers, and ask the Lord to help them in their task of caring for him. Also be sure to let anyone who helps with your child know how much you appreciate them and their help. The love and encouragement you give them will make their job easier, and also

help them to treat your child and other children in a more loving and caring way.

Make it fun, make it lively!

In order to capture and keep a little child's attention, you have to put everything you've got into what you're doing. The best teachers are those who make learning fun. Whatever children enjoy learning is what they will learn the quickest and the best. Great teachers are idea people who inspire children with a desire to learn. They have a knack for turning every situation into a learning activity so pleasant and enjoyable that the children almost beg to learn.

We parents may not be all that gifted, but there is a lot we can do. Children like to be kept busy. They like to do things, but they sometimes have a hard time thinking up things to do. So we have to continually think up new ways to channel their energies into productive endeavors. We have to have animation; we have to have enthusiasm—lots of action, lots of motion, and lots of sound effects! We have to really illustrate and put a lot of meaning and interest into what we're teaching! Call it what you like—inspiration, charisma, talent, personality, or God's Holy Spirit—we have to have something that brings us and them to life! If we ask God to inspire us, He will!

A teacher once asked the mother of an especially large and happy family to observe one of her kindergarten classes and offer any tips she might have.

For fifty minutes the mother watched as the teacher tried to work with her young class. Finally, the bell rang, and the teacher heaved a sigh of relief that it was over.

When she asked the mother how she thought it had gone, the mother asked, "Did it ever occur to you

that you're really competing against God?"

"No," the teacher replied, "and I certainly don't intend to do that!"

"Well," the mother went on, "God made these children with an attention span of about four or five minutes. All the time you kept saying to them, 'Keep quiet,' 'sit still,' but God kept saying, 'Wiggle.' And what did the children do? They listened to God every time!"

Put yourself in their shoes

To understand your child, put yourself in his place and think how you would feel if you were him. Make a habit of trying to see things through *his* eyes and his understanding. Ask yourself, "What if this were me? How would I want to be treated in this situation? If I were only four years old and was being laughed at by the adults, how would I feel?" What may seem cute or funny to adults may be very embarrassing and humiliating to a child. Most of us know what it's like to be embarrassed, slighted, or hurt by others. Realizing that such unpleasant experiences can be even more traumatic and painful to small, inexperienced children should cause us to do our best to spare them from such incidents.

Try to view the world from your child's point of view. Of course, the *best* way to see things from your child's perspective is to pray and ask the Lord to show you. He knows your children inside and out. He understands exactly how they feel and what they're going through, and He will show you if you ask Him.

With small children, it sometimes helps to physically come down to their level when you talk to them; squat, kneel, or sit on the floor next to them. On their eye level, you don't seem so distant. Seeing

the world from a child's perspective also helps you understand why he sometimes feels intimidated when others tower over him, and most of the action is going on beyond his reach. To a small child high shelves may as well be ledges far up the face of a sheer cliff; adults seem like giants two stories high who fill their dwellings with equally huge furniture and facilities often completely inaccessible. An unfamiliar house can seem like a land of giants to a tiny child. As much as possible, try to keep his things down where he can get them. You may not have a "child-sized" room and furniture, but at least provide stools (or sturdy boxes) for him to climb up on to get to the sink and other places he needs to be able to reach.

Realize that a child's experience is limited

Even tiny misfortunes often get blown out of proportion in young children's minds. Experience helps put things in perspective. You've learned through experience that certain things aren't worth getting all upset or worried about. That cut finger will soon stop bleeding and hurting. Feelings of disappointment and loss will pass, and new joys will come in their place. Bad weather does eventually pass.

But small children don't have your confidence that things generally work out in the end. They don't have that frame of reference, because they haven't experienced life enough yet. They need reassurance. They need you to explain things to them and comfort them.

Understanding this simple lack in children can help you be more patient and compassionate. You'll be less likely to snap back in frustration when your small child cries each time you have to leave him, or when he gets upset if his cracker breaks, or when

he loses his temper when someone knocks over his blocks.

Small children live in the moment. *Now* is where everything is happening. *Now* is all that matters. As they grow older, they will understand the principle of time and words like “tomorrow,” “later,” and “after.” Learning to survive disappointment—even everyday little things that seem so minute to us grown-ups—takes time and experience, and for young children it can be a painful process. It can also be painful for parents. It hurts to see your child get so upset, insecure, and disappointed when his expectations aren’t reached, but you can speed up the healing process by showing sympathy and praying with him. It is just as important to encourage and reward him when he shows faith and confidence that things are going to work out.

When you know that your child is going to have a hard time with something, it is always good to prepare him a bit before the event so it does not come as such a shock. Anticipate a crisis coming on and try to preempt it: “Mommy is going to have to turn the video off soon because it is nearly time for your nap. You can watch for a little while longer, then we have to turn it off.”

Keep your word—it will build your children’s confidence in you

Little children are naturally trusting, so it’s very important to keep your word to them. Don’t make promises that you can’t keep. If plans change and you’re not able to keep your word, make sure you give them a good explanation and make it up to them later, if you can.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”¹

Your example is your child's best teacher

Parents tell a child but never teach,
Until they practice what they preach.

Children are great mimics. This is largely how they learn—by imitation. Children seldom forget what they see. They go more by what they see than by what they hear, more by your actions and attitudes than by your words. Your children are a reflection of *you*. Your own attitudes and example of faith become a standard to your children, and their actions and reactions will largely depend on yours.

Few others will have a greater impact on your child's life than you, but the examples of others can have a big influence. TV viewing can have a pronounced effect on your child. TV is the modern world's handiest, cheapest, and most relied-upon babysitter—but *not* by any means the most trustworthy or reliable! Many of the bad habits and ungodly attitudes that concern today's parents when they see them in their children are the result of the children imitating the negative samples that they see on TV. It is wise to limit the influence of television, and monitor what your children—and you, in their presence—watch. Stick to programs or videos that you have previewed and that you know are not harmful. This may require time and effort on your part, but failure to do so will take a lot more of your time in the long run in correcting bad attitudes. What children see on TV and the bad examples that they see in others—especially children

¹ Proverbs 13:12

Little Imitator

There are little eyes upon you,
and they're watching night and day.
There are little ears that quickly
take in everything you say.
There are little hands all eager
to do everything you do,
And a little boy who's dreaming
of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol;
you're the wisest of the wise.
In his little mind about you
no suspicions ever rise.
He believes in you devoutly,
holds that all you say and do,
He will say and do in your way,
when he's grown up just like you.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow
who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open,
and he watches day and night.
You are setting an example
every day in all you do,
For the little boy who's waiting
to grow up to be like you.

—Leslie Hale

“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”¹

¹ Philippians 4:9

their own age or older kids they look up to—can quickly undo a lot of the good attitudes and behavior that you have worked hard to instill in them. Be vigilant!

Pushing the praise button

Children thrive on being praised. It's more important to praise a child for his good behavior than it is to scold him for his bad behavior. Try to accentuate the positive. Praising children for their good qualities is the best way in the world to get them to try harder to be good. Push the praise button, and they will do almost anything to please you. Sincere praise also helps them feel better about themselves, which is crucial to their growing up happy and well adjusted.

All children need to know they're special to their parents in their own special way!

We *all* need to feel special to somebody. That's why men and women marry and why people have special friends, so each can feel special to somebody—and children need that feeling of being special too. They also need to know that they're important and loved and looked up to by somebody, just like the rest of us do.

There are times when you have to show each child that he or she is special, and not treat each one exactly the same all the time. Even if you have lots of children, you can still treat each one a bit differently. You can give each one something special. They should all feel they're special to you in some way!

—*Maria David*

When a young girl was asked which of the three

children in her family was her mother's favorite, she promptly replied: "She loves Jimmy best because he's the oldest, and she loves Johnny best because he's the youngest, and she loves me best because I'm the only girl." And she was absolutely right!

But come to think of it, that's just the way our heavenly Father is with us. He sees something special and unique in each of us, that causes Him to love and cherish us in a way not quite like anyone else who has ever lived.

—*Author unknown*

WHAT TO TEACH TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

Activities that develop body skills

EXPLORING THE SENSES

- Water-related activities provide much fun for small children—though they can get very messy. They like to help wash their own dishes standing on a sturdy chair by you at the sink. (But don't leave them alone at this activity!) Washing windows or the car together can be a lot of fun too, and don't forget watering the plants!

- To help your child explore his sense of taste, prepare a tray with bits of food he can taste. Talk to him about the different foods and flavors.

- Listening games are fun to play almost anywhere, at any time. Help your child get quiet for a moment while he listens to the sounds around him and tries to guess what they are. You can have him sit looking the other way while you do something behind him that makes a distinct sound. Ask him to tell you from the sound what you are doing. He'll soon want to do something himself and have you guess what he is doing. Try it! You can play the listening game while out on a walk. Help him identify all the different sounds he hears.

- Whisper game: If you have more than one preschooler, you can turn your back and say the children's names softly along with certain instructions for them to perform if they can hear you. Also, whispering a certain set of directions from child to child, for one child to perform, helps encourage care-

ful listening and recalling what was heard. (If you find that one of your children is not able to hear some things, you may need to have his hearing checked by a professional. Sometimes children who have hearing problems are sadly misdiagnosed as mentally impaired, when the problem is simply that they cannot hear well.)

- Find a bag that you cannot see through, and put into it an assortment of safe-to-handle objects from all around the house. Invite your child to reach into the bag and identify each item before pulling it out of the bag. Teach him each item's name and purpose, or help him learn how to describe the item in terms of size, weight, color, use, what it is made from, etc.

- Make a game of copying animal sounds and imitating their actions.

- A good exercise for improving listening skills is to put various materials (salt, beans, marbles, rice, etc.) in small opaque containers (such as empty film canisters). Be sure the containers are securely closed so that the contents don't come out while your child is playing with them or shaking them. Encourage the child to rattle the containers and guess the contents, or match containers that sound alike, or put the containers in order of their loudness and softness.

- Give the child plenty of opportunities to listen with some definite purpose in mind. Can he identify certain sounds, words, etc.?

- It is a good idea to try simple sight tests. (Cover one eye and have the child read a letter, or word, identify a picture, or indicate the direction an object is moving.) Keep in mind that some people are color-blind; if this is the case, it may affect your child only slightly, or it may be quite serious. If you have a question about your child's eyesight, have it checked by a professional. Poor eyesight will affect his progress in many areas, and can often be corrected quite easily.

● Many exercises require the child to determine or compare size and shape. Try giving your child a card with a circle on it, and have him find another circle from a set of cards bearing different shapes; or have him find a circle the same size from a set of different-sized circles. Such exercises require thought and careful observation on the child's part. Plastic or wooden educational toys that teach these important perception skills can be found in many toy stores: nesting cups, stacking rings, shape boxes, etc.; or you can make your own teaching materials from cardboard or whatever's handy.

● Make games out of daily routines. For example, play "Find your snack bag." Make a little snack package and hide it. Give your child clues to help him find it. Toddlers like little treasure hunts and mysteries, and they especially like little snacks!

● The "I Spy" game is an all-time favorite with toddlers, and a great way to teach all sorts of listening and visual discrimination and classification skills. For example, have the child look for all the things in the room that start with a certain sound, or that are a certain shape or color: "I spy with my little eye something in this room that is blue and has a square shape."

SEEING, FEELING, UNDERSTANDING

The toys that children usually like to play with over the longest period of time are often the simplest things that let the child be in control, active, and creative. Some expensive and high-tech toys are soon set aside when the novelty has worn off or there is just no more that the child can learn from them. When there is nothing more a toy can do or that can be done with it, children return to the simple joys of toys that they can do anything with: sand boxes with buckets and shovels; toy cars; crayons

and paper; dolls and tea sets; water and containers; marbles; blocks and balls.

Many of the basic discoveries children make and the skills they acquire come to them naturally through play and the common activities of life. It is important to give young children the chance to see, feel, and try things out for themselves. For example, young children enjoy making comparisons, discovering differences and similarities. Adults find it hard to understand or even believe that a young child is not necessarily able to understand or appreciate size relationships just by looking at things. As much as possible, a child should be allowed to *feel* things as well as see them, in order to grasp the concept of size and come to understand why big things do not fit in small containers, etc. Think about the difficulty that you may have finding the correct wrench to fit a certain nut or bolt if you are not familiar with the tools—and you have years of observation and trial-and-error experiences behind you!

There are many different qualities an object can have: rough/smooth, big/little, long/short, round/square, black/white, hot/cold, loud/quiet. Help your child learn to appreciate and be able to describe these differences. It is good to give small children many experiences and examples when you are trying to help them understand something. For example, if you want the child to understand “big,” make many comparisons throughout the day, such as comparing his small bed with yours, a saucer with a plate, a spoon with a ladle, a toy car with a real car, etc.

Maria Montessori (1870–1952), noted for her advances in early childhood education, believed in presenting children with items and materials that clearly demonstrated some physical quality, and allowed the children to compare those objects with similar yet slightly different ones. She believed that

for the best intellectual development, children needed a foundation of physical experiences that gave all of their senses practice in evaluating different objects and experiences. As the child progressed through a guided series of experiences, they were also taught appropriate words or expressions to describe the objects involved or the experiences they were having. Some of the teaching tools she used were the following:

- Colored rods, wooden blocks, and cylinders of varying size and weight to teach comparison and simple mathematics
 - Sets of colored tablets to teach colors
 - Small jars containing different fragrances
 - Various fabrics and surfaces with different textures for children to feel and identify by touch (e.g., rough and smooth)
 - Objects that appeared to be the same shape and size but were of different weights
 - “Sound cylinders” with various items in matching opaque containers, which made distinctly different sounds when shaken (or using two sets of sound cylinders, to find pairs that made the same sound)
 - Wooden puzzle-like objects in varying sizes that children could learn to put back into their proper place
 - Puzzle pieces with tiny knobs that required children to develop very fine muscle coordination to handle

It is not necessary to own or purchase such fancy equipment, but we mention these here so that you will be able to keep these teaching principles in mind when you come upon several stones of different sizes, or leaves of different colors, or fabrics that are all different to the touch, or color swatches—anything that you can use to let your children experience and learn about the many qualities and contrasts found in the things around them.

ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE MUSCLE COORDINATION

A child needs to learn not only the coordination skills involved in walking, running, and balancing, but he also needs to develop the fine muscle coordination that he will need in writing, moving gracefully, and using his hands and other parts of his body in certain ways.

- Encouraging a child to do physical exercise is important. Good exercise involves running, jumping, crawling, rolling, hopping, throwing, dodging, and so on.

- The more refined movements come with practice. It is good to have him practice balancing by walking on a small board or line drawn on the floor with chalk or colored tape, perhaps even carrying something at the same time. Have him do water-pouring exercises (or bean-pouring at first, to save water spills): from pitcher to cup, cup to cup, transferring it with a spoon, pouring into a funnel, etc. Increase the weights and amounts he has to handle as he improves.

- Eye-hand coordination is an essential part of the early education of any child, and without it he will have difficulty in many areas. Building things that need good eye-hand coordination is ideal. There are many activities and games a child can do to develop eye-hand skills. For example, standing dominoes on their ends in a row (if you knock one down they all topple); games involving guiding a marble across a course and trying to keep it from falling into a hole, or trying to get several marbles into an arrangement of holes. Look for exercises that have this challenge built into them, and that make your child exercise his coordination skills. (Caution: Marbles can be very dangerous! They can cause choking or suffocation if swal-

lowed, and can be very difficult to dislodge if stuck in a child's throat. Be sure your child is past the stage of putting everything in his mouth before giving him marbles. Or use large marbles for increased safety.)

- Prepare your child for writing by giving him lots of little exercises for the thumb, index finger, and middle finger of the right hand (or left). Encourage the child to grasp small objects with these fingers and have him hold crayons and other pencil-like objects as he would to write. Puzzles and toys with small knobs are good too.

- Beanbags are fairly easy to make out of old socks or scraps of cloth. Fill the bags with dried beans, rice, lentils, or popcorn, then sew them shut, and let the child toss them into a bucket or wastepaper basket. You can also teach him to balance the beanbag on his head while he walks. He can also use them to learn to catch.

- Rolling balls to very small children helps develop good eye and hand coordination. Have a set of three or four small rubber balls of different colors that you can use for indoor play time. There are all sorts of ball games you can invent that will hold the toddler's interest. For plastic bottle bowling, set up small plastic bottles like bowling pins. Roll balls down an incline to knock over a small object set in the way. Throw all the balls into the bathtub at one time and guess which ball will come to rest on the drain hole first (be sure the balls are larger than the drain). Play simple marble games using the balls. Roll them off the table trying to get them to land in cups or egg cartons.

- Freeze dancing is a fun game to play with small children. Everyone dances while music is being played, and then when you stop the music everyone has to "freeze" on the spot, trying not to move.

- Play games with your children that involve lots of movement, decision-making, observation: skip-

ping, follow-the-leader, ball-catching, hide and seek, tag, etc.

Teaching the practical skills of life

Living involves learning thousands of skills—everything from pouring water to turning off lights when they're no longer needed—and toddlers are at the ideal age to begin learning those skills. Your home contains countless skill-learning opportunities for your young child. You can make each room and each item in the room a learning activity for him if you simply stop for a few moments to show him how something works and let him try it for himself. Listening to explanations, trying out new things, and learning to use something for the first time help children develop both physically and intellectually.

TAKING CARE OF THINGS

One skill that toddlers and preschoolers need is learning how to take proper care of their belongings and surroundings. Make a place for toys to go after they are played with, for clothes to go when they're not being worn. Then help your child get in the habit of picking up his things when he is done, and hanging up his jackets, folding and putting away his pajamas in the morning, etc. Make learning these habits fun by being lavish with your praise for a job well done.

Orderly surroundings give young children a greater sense of security and help them get an early start in forming good habits of their own. Your child's environment will have a direct effect on his spirit (and yours too), so try to keep it clean, bright, and cheerful. Involving your small child in

maintaining that order, beginning with little things, teaches him responsibility for himself and his surroundings. Helping him learn to perform the skills and tasks needed in everyday life also helps him learn new skills, improves his coordination, and teaches him consideration for others.

Small children are usually very happy to help around the home and can assist in many needed chores that provide learning experiences. Teach your toddler the art of moving things, such as his small table and chairs, safely, skillfully, and quietly. Teach him to count as he hands you clothespins while you hang up the laundry. Let him help Daddy wash the car. Teach him about food, vitamins, and the importance of cleanliness as he helps prepare the salad for dinner.

Daily household chores can be fun learning activities for little children: dumping the waste baskets, cleaning, tidying, sweeping, polishing, dusting, folding clothes, setting tables, washing dishes and clothes, and making beds. When it's time to clean his room, your toddler or preschooler can help wipe down his toy shelf and wash the plastic toys. Low hooks and shelves for his towel, washcloth, soap, toothbrush, and clothing can turn a dependent, whiny child into a more content and helpful one!

Teach your child the proper way to do each task from start to finish. Studying all the different aspects of folding clothes or wiping up dust is very interesting, even absorbing, to a child of two and a half to four years old. He will need time to learn to do it himself. His first tries can't be expected to be too proficient, but children will gladly try to imitate the correct way of doing things if they are carefully shown how to.

TOOLS AND UTENSILS

Learning the proper use of simple tools and utensils is important. Mastering the use of eating utensils, for example, is among the first implement skills a child learns. Everyday activities such as sorting, carrying trays, and putting away food are surprisingly good exercises to help prepare him for writing and even for reading.

Many household and kitchen utensils and implements require skill and practice to learn to use properly; for example, using tongs, pouring water into a cup up to a certain level, using an eye dropper, spooning or measuring ingredients, using tweezers, spreading butter, taking nuts off bolts, opening locks and different doors and drawers, opening and closing various containers. (Be sure to point out dangerous liquids and containers not to touch—as well as keeping these well out of reach! Take every opportunity to teach safety awareness.)

Look closely around the child's living area and bedroom, and you will discover hundreds of skill-learning activities to practice, and safety awareness details to point out to him.

TAKE A "CHILDVIEW" OF LIFE

Remember that a child often has a different reason than an adult would have for doing something. Often he simply enjoys *doing* the activity and is not as outcome-motivated as adults tend to be. The activity itself is often reason enough for doing something; finishing what he starts is not so important to him. Sometimes adults become impatient with children for their slowness in doing a task. They can't see why a child doesn't just hurry up and finish what he is doing. The child may have a very good attention span for his age, but he may not be focusing his attention

on the same thing you are. You may want him to finish some activity because you need to move on to something else, but he may not be so interested in rushing through a perfectly enjoyable activity or moment just to begin something else. If you need to hurry him along, you should take time to explain why you want him to speed up, and how he also will benefit.

Try not to rush your child through his day and constantly be pulling him away from absorbing things he is engaged in. Give children time to learn, time to observe, explore, and experience. Don't rush them through a nature walk, or you may miss something very important. Take full advantage of God's creation: the sights and sounds, creatures small and great, wind and weather, sunshine and rain. Think back and remember what experiences you had as a child that stand out in your memory, such as going barefoot in rain puddles, or pretending leaves in the tiny stream were boats on a wild river. Give children time and opportunity to learn from the greatest teacher of all—the Creator and His creation.

PERSONAL CARE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The more you can help your toddler learn to be self-sufficient and able to care for himself early in life, the more time you will have for doing other things together. Be prepared that when your little ones are first learning to do these things for themselves, it can seem to take forever—and can be frustrating if you're trying to go somewhere. The solution is to slot plenty of time and try to let them do it as much as possible. (Of course, there will be times when you have to do it for them, but they usually don't like those times so much!)

Learning to protect and take care of their own bodies involves training and practice. Young children

need repeated personal health, hygiene, and safety lessons in almost every area of life: washing up; care of teeth, hair, and clothing; cleaning ears (using nothing smaller than a washcloth on a finger); using the bathroom and washing their hands each time; learning how to use buttons, buckles, snaps, and zippers; combing or braiding hair; polishing shoes; dressing; learning how to eat nicely; learning how to cross streets safely, etc.

Learning to tie their shoes is often a milestone achievement for young children. You can use the following shoe facsimile to teach your child to tie his shoes: Trace an outline of a pair of lace-up shoes onto a piece of cardboard. Then draw in the general design of the shoe, clearly marking the eyelets where the laces go. Punch holes through the cardboard for the eyelets, and then lace up and tie these cardboard shoes.

Social development

(care for and consideration of others)

There are many practical and social skills that small children can learn. Learning these skills helps direct some of their energies into positive pursuits, and makes them feel needed and an important part of a family team or work effort.

Begin teaching children consideration for others at an early age. For example, they should learn to respect other people's privacy, say please and thank you, say excuse me when they need to interrupt others, learn to greet new people, and to be less vocal when other conversations are going on.

Learning to set the table properly is another part of caring for others. Small children can learn how to prepare and serve food and drinks, such as

juice or milk or simple sandwiches. It's best to use unbreakable serving pitchers, plates, and drinking cups. Have a tea party with your toddler. You can use water, milk, juice, or herbal tea rather than caffeinated tea.

Try some simple food preparation activities with your little ones. You will need to work closely with them on any kitchen adventures. Toddlers can help you form no-cook cookies made from peanut butter, oatmeal, etc.; add fruit to a fruit salad; lay out bread slices for sandwiches; mix cake or pancake batter. (Cooking at a stove, however, is too dangerous for small children.) Lessons on hygiene in food preparation, and healthy eating, can be mixed in with your cooking activities

Encourage young children to do good things for others. Work with them to prepare a special surprise for someone they love or who needs some extra love and attention. Children enjoy doing deeds of kindness, as it is very rewarding. Being kind and considerate is learned largely from seeing good examples and from being expected and encouraged to be that way themselves. Children quickly learn to want to do helpful things for others, to tidy up when Mommy is feeling under the weather, to bring Daddy his slippers, etc. Reward them with a large measure of love when they show others kindness and consideration, and praise them and thank them for the good they do. This reinforces good behavior and encourages them to develop good manners.

Schooling

Following are a few suggestions that will help you direct some of your toddler or young child's unbounded energies and channel his abilities into useful learning activities.

BOOKS ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Books introduce children to a wider vocabulary, and open up new worlds of experiences about people, places, and things that are beyond their own environment or daily life. You'll find that at first children respond best to pictures of familiar objects.

The left-to-right orientation of printed English (and other western languages) is important to keep in mind when working with babies and children. Children do not automatically look from left to right when they look at books; that is a skill they need help to learn. To make future reading progress easier, encourage your child to turn the pages in the proper direction, and when you read to him, point out that you are reading words in order from left to right. You can point out periods at the end of sentences and explain, "This little dot means that sentence is over, so I pause a little when I see that dot. These dots are called periods. Go down the page line by line and from left to right just like I do when I read to you, and point out each period on this page." (You can take his index finger and guide it along the lines, stopping at each period.)

A toddler should learn how to handle a book properly. Try to be consistent in how you handle a book when you read to a child. He will soon imitate you. Teach him proper respect for books, and do not allow him to tear pages or leave books lying on the floor. (If a book is accidentally torn, repair it together.) Even very young children can be taught to put their books back on the shelf by themselves. It takes work and consistency to help small children develop good habits, but they soon

enjoy the sense of orderliness and accomplishment that comes with tidying up.

When telling stories or recounting events to small children, it is good to tell things in the order they happened. Learning to understand and follow a sequence of events can be a real challenge for young children. You can encourage the development of this skill by telling a child short stories (for example, stories from the Bible), and then have him tell the story back to you. It helps to have a storybook with pictures that clearly show the sequence. Even sets of simple drawings of events are very useful. Encourage him to arrange the pictures about the story in the same order as you told the story.

READING AND WRITING PREPARATION

Put up word cards in your child's play area of some of the new or favorite words he is learning to use. For example, put up the names of his favorite toys. This helps your child begin to learn to read. Attach word cards you make to interesting pictures you cut out of magazines to show him during quiet moments, or you can put them up on the walls in his rest or play area.

Use educational games and toys that give practice in reading and counting, and other skills as well.

Help your child make a scrapbook where he keeps his best drawings, photos and cutouts of things he likes. Print captions for him to learn to read. He will greatly enjoy creating his own book.

Toddlers like to "write" letters to all sorts of real or imaginary people. (One little girl even wanted to write to her own imaginary children.) Encourage your child to dictate his letter to you while you write down each word. Have him take his letter to others and ask them to read it to him. This activity strongly reinforces the

connection between the spoken and written word, and encourages a child to want to read and write.

A quick in-the-kitchen activity is to put some salt onto a dark colored tray or dinner plate and let the child do some simple finger drawing in the salt. Just shake the plate or tray to erase the last picture and begin again.

INTERPRET PICTURES

Give the child a simple illustration or photograph of some event and have him tell you what is happening or is going to happen. If the child can understand, he is demonstrating that he has the mental power of imagery, and can readily appreciate and understand more abstract materials and stories.

COMPREHENSION

“A sample, not a sermon” is the best way to teach a child to better understand what you are talking about. Actions speak louder than words, though you must include the words too.

Talking to a very small child can be like communicating with a foreigner—you have to use all the ways you can to get him to understand you. Have you ever had to resort to taking out a paper and pencil and drawing what you mean to get someone else to understand what you are trying to say? Try it with your children. Keep a notepad handy when you are explaining things. The more senses you can involve during your explanation the better. Acting something out along with your explanation is very effective.

If the child tries, but does the wrong thing, show him again how to do it. If you are doing something with your hands, it sometimes helps to put the child

on your lap and reach around him so your hands are in the same position as his to do the task; for example, how to tie a shoe. It is nice to show him how to do something from his own perspective.

SPEECH

Do all you can to be a good sample of correct speech. Try to get toddlers to respond orally and help them make correct sentences. Make a game of saying certain sounds they have trouble with. You can put their hands on and off of their mouths to get a different sound effect for them to hear, or let them babble into a hollow tube to get an echo effect. Even older children chant out loud when they realize there is an echo.

Try recording a toddler's speech and let him listen to himself; he will be quite surprised and often encouraged to make more sounds.

Toddlers love to hear rhymes, and will often join in the fun of trying to find words that rhyme.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Generally you should not encourage children to waste food, but once in a while it is fun to do something fun with food besides eating it. Dry rice, macaroni, spaghetti, and raw potatoes all can serve to turn a rainy inside day madhouse into a calm, fun, non-TV-centered playtime activity for toddlers. Raw potatoes can be cut and the surface carved to create pattern-making stamps. Form shapes such as diamonds, squares, circles, hearts, plus signs, minus signs, equal signs, etc., on the potato surface. A small sponge soaking in a washable paint mix can serve as the stamp pad.

Hollow noodles (uncooked) can be painted and threaded onto string to make simple necklaces.

Grains of rice, lentils, spaghetti, flaxseeds, etc., can be used to create patterns or pictures on cardstock. The surface the seeds are set down on can be first covered with a paste mix made from flour, salt, and water. Aprons are called for in all such gooey activities. This is a good activity to help toddlers develop their fine finger and arm muscle movement skills, as they set the tiny objects in place one at a time.

You and your toddler can make some funny-looking potato figures using toothpicks or straws or small sticks for legs, etc.

THE ART OF CORRECTING TODDLERS

—Rules, Reasons, and Repercussions

When you correct a small child who wants to do something that would be dangerous, try not to overly frighten him. Show him the danger and explain what could happen, and if possible try to show him the correct or safe approach to take.

Keep in mind when correcting a child over some small matter (such as breaking something) that no matter how valuable the item was, it is important to not shake his confidence that ultimately he is more valuable and precious to you than the item. Children need to have this personal sense of security that no matter what, you love them and they are very special to you. Explain your hurt or upset to them as much as possible. “My mother gave this to me when I was little like you, and it is very special to me, and now I am very sad that you’ve broken it.”

Children need guidelines. A child’s scream, for example, should be reserved for emergencies—when there is danger or the child is seriously hurt. Toddlers should be corrected when they scream simply out of frustration, displeasure, or anger.

Parents don’t need to think too long or hard to come up with good reasons for the “no screaming” rule: Anyone within earshot needs to know that a scream signals a drop-everything-and-rush-to-help emergency, not a child’s temper tantrum. Children also need to learn to control themselves in order to live in harmony with their families and peers here and now, and with the rest of the world as they grow older.

The reasons for a rule are obvious to us as grown-ups, but children may not immediately understand or embrace such wisdom. So what is a parent to do when their child doesn’t obey rules that are set down

with good reason? Here's where consistent, loving, godly discipline comes in.

According to the Bible, it is the God-given duty of every parent to exercise firm but gentle and loving authority in the lives of their children—to establish boundaries and guidelines for behavior, and to administer correction or punishment when those boundaries are crossed.

Problems multiply and escalate quickly when there are no boundaries or discipline, so parents who lack a standard of discipline are only making it difficult for themselves and their children. Putting down specific guidelines makes it much easier for everyone.

Children can become very “selective” listeners, especially if what you tell them conflicts with what they themselves prefer to do! At times like this, they do not even seem to “hear” or “understand” or respond when you speak to them. Sometimes they truly are very engaged in what they are doing and seem not to hear or do not want to be disturbed just yet. Break into a child's personal activity time with respect, but if there is something he needs to do, then it's not good to let him simply ignore you.

At times you may wonder if something is wrong with your child's ears. It is good to have them checked, but another way to estimate a child's hearing and comprehension is to observe his behavior throughout the day as he acts and reacts in various other situations. This will give you a good scale to measure his known ability to respond if he wants to.—The next challenge is to get him to want to!

Children can develop bad listening habits very quickly if you allow them to not respond to what you say, and if you get into the habit of just saying things again and again rather than insisting they respond to you the first time. Capturing a child's attention and getting him to respond to your

request—usually for a change in his behavior—can be hard work. He has to learn that you mean what you say, that it is important to you and to him or you would not bother saying it. Help him to learn that you do expect him to respond and will act if he continues to ignore you after reasonable warning or time to comply.

Make it easy to be good

Parents are responsible to keep situations that warrant discipline to a minimum by making it as easy as possible for their children to keep the rules. For example, little children shouldn't play with matches, but parents shouldn't leave matches within a child's reach.

Applying some common sense and "childproofing" your home will spare you and your children a lot of discipline. It will also keep your small child safer and you saner, as you won't have to always be telling him not to touch this or that, or having to make too many rules.

"The best way to avoid accidents," someone once said, "is to make it impossible for them to happen!" Of course, with very active little children it's practically impossible to remove everything that could be harmful, but parents should do what they can, like keeping dangerous or breakable objects out of their children's reach, and not leaving the children unattended in potentially dangerous situations.

In this and all other areas, once you've done your part, you can then teach and enforce basic rules. Enforcing certain rules is something you will need to do for the sake of your child's training and your own peace of mind. There are varying opinions and in some places laws on what are good and acceptable methods for correcting children. How you enforce a

rule with your children will need to be according to your personal situation and convictions.

“Time out”—having them sit down and away from their current activity for two to five minutes—is usually effective for little children, as is missing a snack or special activity. A correctional tap or swat or two on the hand or bottom can also help reinforce the importance of keeping the rules, especially if it concerns their safety, such as walking out into the street or touching the stove. With small children, whatever method you use usually needs to be put into effect right away so that they clearly understand that what is happening to them is a direct result of their misbehavior. Once your children understand the rules and the consequences for disobedience, they will be less inclined to disobey.

Five simple steps to follow when correcting a toddler

Small children like to do things with you. Try to help them work on a solution to the problem.

1. Stop their activity and explain the problem.
2. Suggest a solution.
3. Appeal to them for help.
4. Help them do what they can to correct the problem.
5. Praise and encourage them for doing well, and sum up the lesson they learned and how they will now be able to help others who might make that same mistake, as well as avoid making it again themselves in the future.

Serious situations

Small children are not able to determine how serious or life-threatening a situation may be. They do

not see the danger of the oncoming car; they only see the ball as they run after it into the street. They do not see the danger of running with a sharp object in their hands or playing too near water, or leaning out a window many floors up, or sampling a bottle of pills, or drinking from a bottle under the sink, or poking things into the electric sockets. There will be times when your child's instant obedience can save him from serious injury or even death.

Sometimes you can give your children quite a bit of independence, letting them move along at their own pace, working things out in their own time and in their own way, but at other times they have to learn to work together closely with you, to stay close and obey.

Children often need help tuning into the seriousness of a situation, especially if they have been used to letting you handle all the business details of life. When you as a family are faced with a very serious situation, it is good to stop for a moment if you can, explain to your children what is happening, pray with them, and assign different responsibilities. Tell them clearly what you expect from them, and if necessary what might be the consequences if they do not follow your instructions closely.

With older children you could perhaps develop a family code word or phrase when something serious is happening that concerns them. If you have the opportunity you could say something like, "Okay, children. Please get quiet now and listen carefully. We are in a 'team-time' situation here. This is a time when we need to pray and obey and all work together and not get into play. What is happening is that ..." Life has its serious times, and children need to learn how to tune into times of danger and work with you to get your "team" through safely. Even when there seems to not be much that children can physically do to help, they can always help by

praying together and praying for you and those who are trying to handle the crisis.

Some areas need clear guidelines

Children develop respect for parents who take a firm stand on things that are important to them. Your children often use you to evaluate something, to see what is right and wrong. Small children will constantly test you by their words and actions to see what you will do. They want feedback. If you do not react, they assume what they are doing is okay. When they see a sudden change in the seriousness of your spirit, your face, your eyes, your voice—if your children have been brought up to respect and respond to you, to be sensitive to you, to be accustomed to looking to you for guidance, then they will be able to quickly realize when something is not good, or is dangerous and to be avoided.

When they do something that is wrong or dangerous, take the time to explain to them why it is wrong. For instance, never allow cruelty—cruelty to animals, cruelty to the baby, cruelty to others. Simply do not allow it.

When you love your children enough to correct them, it teaches them not only to be more sensitive and compassionate, but more emotionally stable and socially well adjusted. It helps them be able to get along better with others, because they are accustomed to being considerate of others and being mindful of the needs and desires of the people they live with.

Teaming up with your toddler

Working as a team together with an adult or older child in a serious way helps children mature quickly,

as well as learn to appreciate the skills other people have and the contributions they can make. Whether the task at hand is building a sand castle at the beach or trying to get a kitten out of a tree, it is important to learn to work together. Learning to share, to be considerate, to set aside their own wants and ways for the sake of others is the stuff maturity and sound character are made of.

Teaming up with you to learn about life helps them grow in observation skills and to know that you love and trust them. From babyhood onwards you can help your children learn team skills, such as the following:

To be helpful ("Please, hold this for Mommy while I brush your hair.")

To be more patient with others ("I will get you a glass of juice in a moment, but first I have to turn the stove off.")

To share their toys ("You have two cars. You could let Bobby play with one of them.")

To cooperate ("Roll the ball back and forth to each other.")

To consider how their actions are affecting others ("Grandma is sleeping right now, so we need to be very quiet so she gets a good rest. Let's find something fun but very quiet to do.")

Children need direction, correction, explanations and consistent reminders on how and when to show consideration to others. Learning to keep the noise level down when others are working, resting, or discussing things is a very challenging undertaking for some small children, but they can learn. Daily progress charts with stars or moving markers that indicate their progress and zero in on some particular act of consideration, such as saying please and thank you when they request something, can help them develop better habits.

On a Lighter Note

You can get any child to run an errand for you—if you ask him at bedtime.



Any great painting
Will leave my wife fainting—
Its beauty so powerfully enralls.
But never before
Did she slump to the floor
As at Junior's new work on our walls!



Where do kids get all those questions parents
can't answer?

THE LORD IS YOUR HELPER

If at times you feel incapable of being a parent, remember that if God has given you children, He has chosen you to be His example of love to them. Like every parent, you'll make mistakes, fall short, and won't have enough love in especially trying situations. You'll misunderstand and misjudge. But God doesn't expect you to be perfect, and He doesn't expect you to bear the burden of parenting all on your own. He offers you help that will make up for your weaknesses and failures. That loving help is found in His Son—Jesus.

If you know Jesus personally, and have received Him into your heart and life, you have ever-present, unfailing help. *You* may fail, but *Jesus never* fails! As you learn to work in parenting partnership with Him, He will always be there to make up for your lacks. Together you can raise happy, well-adjusted children.

That doesn't mean you will never again face difficulties in raising your children, but as long as you look to God for strength and the answer to each problem or question, He will be there for you and do those things you cannot do. He will help you be the very best parent you can be—the parent your children need you to be.

If you haven't yet asked and received Jesus into your heart, you can do so right now by praying a simple prayer like the following: "Dear Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God and that You died for me. I need Your love to cleanse me from my mistakes and wrongdoing. I now open the door of my heart and I ask You to please come into my life and give me Your free gift of eternal life. Please also fill me with your Holy Spirit and help me to love others as You love me. Amen."

Bring the little ones to Jesus

Bookstores these days are full of self-help books on parenting, and a lot of those books contain sound advice and interesting ideas. But unless they include God and His teachings and guidance, they can only help a parent so far. God, through His Son Jesus, is the source of all the good things your children need most—love, security, values, purpose. He's also the source of the love, wisdom, strength, and patience you need to be a good parent. He wants to be their best friend and your parenting partner.

Jesus is the one solid foundation upon which to build your relationship with your children. As dearly as you love your children and as much as you want them to be happy and have everything they need, as much as you want them to have every opportunity in life, your human resources aren't enough. Children not only need all the love, affection, security, and guidance *you* can give them, but also all that *Jesus* has for them.

It has been said that God has no grandchildren. Faith isn't hereditary. Believing in God and loving Him aren't choices you can make *for* your children. They will have to make these decisions for themselves. But you can certainly lay the foundation by showing them the way through your words and example, and by praying with them.

One of the most important things you can teach your children is how much God loves them. Children need to know that they are special to God. They need to learn that no matter what they may do, no matter what turns their lives may take, Jesus loves them and will always be there for them. Since your children will naturally look up to you in the same way you look up to God, in order to help them understand God's love you should continually assure your chil-

dren of *your* unconditional love for them. *You are your children's best proof that God loves them.* You can direct your children to the Lord from the time they are born, just by your love and your example of loving Jesus and talking about Him. It's a wonderful thing if your children can't even remember a time when they didn't know Jesus, because they've known Him all their lives.

Children can receive God's gift of eternal salvation even at an early age, by praying and asking Jesus to come into their hearts. Receiving Jesus is so simple that even a two-year-old can do it! You can hardly find anybody more sincere or believing than a small child. That's why Jesus said we must become as little children to go to Heaven.¹ As soon as they are old enough to pray the simplest of prayers—as young as two years old—they are old enough to receive Jesus.

As soon as you have taught your child who Jesus is (children's picture Bibles are great for this), you can explain: "Jesus wants to come and live in your heart. He loves you very much, and He wants to be your best friend and stay with you always. If you ask Him to, He will come and live in your heart. Then He will never ever leave you! Do you want Jesus to come into your heart?"

You can then pray a simple prayer that your child can repeat after you, the best he can. Even if your child can only manage to say the last word or two from each phrase, that's enough for Jesus, because it's the heart that counts. Simply pray: "Dear Jesus, please come into my heart. I believe in You and want to love You like You love me. Please forgive my sins, and give me Your gift of eternal life. Amen."—And Jesus *will* come in; your child will be eternally saved. That is God's promise.² It's as simple as that!

¹ Matthew 18:3

² Revelation 3:20; Romans 10:13

A Parent's Prayer

Lord, who am I to teach the way
To little children day by day,
So prone myself to go astray?

I teach them *knowledge*, but I know
How faint they flicker and how low
The candles of my knowledge glow.

I teach them *power* to will and do,
But only now to learn anew
My own great weakness through and through.

I teach them *love* for all mankind
And all God's creatures, but I find
My love comes lagging far behind.

Lord, if their guide I still must be,
Oh, let the little children see
The teacher leaning hard on Thee.

—Leslie Pinckney Hill

A child's best friend

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them," Jesus said, "for of such is the kingdom of God."¹ One way to help your children have a positive outlook on life is to instill good habits of praising and thankfulness to God at an early age. That's part of building your children's foundation of faith in and love for God, two of life's most valuable lessons. Freely express your own gratitude and love for Him with a "Thank You, Jesus" or "I praise You" or "I love You, Jesus" when you see your children happy, or they learn to do something new, or one of their prayers is answered. Joyful praise is contagious, and soon they'll be saying those things on their own.

Songs about how much Jesus loves them also reinforce a positive attitude of praise and thankfulness, and give your children's faith a boost through the songs' assurances of Jesus' unconditional love.

Continually look for ways to reinforce the fact that Jesus loves them. The more you pray and praise and talk out loud with your children about Jesus, the more He will become a part of their lives.

Pictures of Jesus help small children visualize Him and remind them of His presence. Hang a picture of Jesus next to your child's bed, or have a picture of Him that your child can handle and hold. Some small children even like to kiss a picture of Jesus when they stop to pray or thank Him for something. You could also place a picture of Jesus on a chair next to you when you read Bible stories together, to illustrate to your child that He's there with you in spirit.

Small children should be reminded often that they make Jesus happy when they act lovingly and do what's right. They also need to understand that they make Him sad when they act in an unloving, selfish,

¹ Mark 10:14

or hurtful manner. Be sure to reassure them, though, that even when they're naughty, Jesus loves them and is quick to forgive.

Yes, Jesus is disappointed and displeased with bad behavior, but the Bible tells us that He is "slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."¹ If we would only remember how patient He has been with *us*, we'd be a lot less apt to overreact with our children for their faults and shortcomings. Since very young children form their ideas about what God is like by what we are like, we need to be a sample of His love and not cause them to think that perhaps God has lost faith in them or holds their mistakes against them.

Once you have helped them see the error of their way, pray with them and give them a double dose of love and reassurance. Your children need to feel secure in the Lord's love. They need to know that He loves them always.

Little children, little children who love their Redeemer
Are the pure ones, are the bright ones, His loved and His
own.

Like the stars of the morning, His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty, bright gems for His
crown.

—*Author unknown*

A parent's best friend

Jesus also wants to be *your* best friend, as well as your mentor, your coach, and parenting partner. Just as children can be assured of His unfailing love and presence, you too can establish a sweet and close relationship with Jesus. You can speak to Him and He also wants to speak to you. He even wants to give

¹ Psalm 103:8

My Bible

A little boy's first Bible
Is the greatest thrill he's known.
There's a sweet, unique excitement
In a Bible all his own!

And yet my heart is smitten
As this touching sight I see:
Has his reverence for that Bible
Depended much on me?

As I see him with his Bible,
I bow my head and pray,
"May he always love that Bible
The way he does today."

Then I hear a voice within me
Speak in solemn words and true:
"How he cherishes that Bible
Will depend a lot on you."

I love my Bible better
Since I've seen the beaming joy
That this wonderful possession
Has afforded to my boy.

May I seek to give mine daily
A devotion he can see,
For the love he bears his Bible
Will depend a lot on me.

—*Author Unknown*

you detailed, personalized, up-to-the-minute instruction to help you raise your children by speaking to you directly! The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."¹ More and more parents are discovering that they can take their questions and problems to God in prayer and receive His answers directly as they learn to recognize His voice when He speaks to their spirit or puts thoughts in their minds.

Getting answers from God is not as difficult as it sounds. And don't worry, you don't need to be some sort of sinless saint or super-spiritual person. It's simply asking, listening, and believing. Anyone who has accepted Jesus into their life, who makes the effort to listen and is sincerely open to whatever He has to tell them, can do it. "Call to Me," He has promised, "and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."² "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."³ It's yours for the asking!

The Lord speaks to different people in different ways. Some see visions, some have revelatory dreams, and a few actually hear an audible voice. But most often the Lord speaks to people in a still, small voice that is heard only by their spirit or in their mind. Sometimes it may be as clear as a spoken message, which you "hear" word for word. Other times it may just be an impression that this or that is the solution or the right course of action to take.

You just need to desire His guidance, ask Him to clear your mind of your own thoughts and wishes, ask Him to give you His leading or His wisdom, and then believe that the words or thoughts that come to

¹ Proverbs 3:5-6

² Jeremiah 33:3

³ Matthew 7:7

you are the Lord speaking to you. It takes faith and a little practice, but if you want His guidance and solutions, He will give them to you. All the answers are simple for the Lord, and all the solutions are easy for Him, so tap into His inexhaustible reservoir of wisdom. He wants to give it to you, as the Bible says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally ... and it will be given to him.”¹ It can make all the difference in the world in how you relate to, interact with, and train your children. (For a more complete explanation of hearing from God, read *Hearing from Heaven*, in the *Get Activated* series, also from Aurora Productions.)

Teaching toddlers about God’s Word

God’s Word fascinates little children when it’s presented to them in a fun way. The key is to love the Word yourself. If *you* love it, *they’ll* love it. If you’re enthusiastic about it, they will be enthusiastic about it.

It might help to establish a set time to read or relate Bible stories to your children so that it’s not missed or passed over during your day. But don’t let that time become a dry, boring routine. Keep it lively, exciting, varied.

One fun approach to teaching the Word to little children is to help them visualize what you are saying. Act out the story or have them act it out, or illustrate the story as you tell it, using simple stick figures. Almost anything can help children visualize the story they are listening to: toys, rocks, sticks, leaves, Lego figures, paper dolls, ordinary household items—whatever is handy. Children have wonderful imaginations, and once you help them “see” the story, they will more easily grasp the lesson. Many

¹James 1:5

good Bible storybooks are available, and most are full of colorful pictures that catch and hold a child's attention. Flannelgraphs are also an excellent teaching aid. Some of the best stories for teaching children come from the four Gospels: the birth of Jesus and His childhood, miracles of Jesus, the parables He taught, and His adventures with His disciples. (See the listing of Bible story favorites for little children in the "Bible Story Checklist" found in the "Bible Study Activities" section on page 59 of this booklet.)

Singing simple Scripture-based songs is another way to reinforce Bible story lessons. (Examples of such songs are found on *Great Adventures*, a two-tape series of Bible story songs for children; and the *Songs of Life* series, with some of the most important and basic verses in the Bible put to catchy tunes that will make it easy for you and your children to learn them by heart.)

It is important, of course, to teach your children the difference between what is fact—Bible stories and other nonfiction you read with them—and what is make-believe. They need to learn that while much of what they see in movies or on TV, or read in other storybooks is fiction, the Bible is absolutely true.

Bible memory time

It's easy for little children to commit Bible verses to memory if you teach them in a fun way. If you have read *Keys to Baby* (another booklet in the *Keys to Parenting* series) you may have already started your little one on the *Baby and Toddler Verses and Quotes* included therein. For toddlers and preschoolers, *Feed My Lambs* memory verses are included on page 61 of this booklet.

You will be surprised at the difference in behavior that soon becomes apparent once your children learn even a few Bible verses. You should help your children

realize that they are learning God's Word, that it is true, and that they make Jesus happy when they learn His Words and obey them. If they do something unloving, you can remind them, "That wasn't a very loving thing to do. Remember what Jesus said?" And they can help you quote the verse, "Love one another." Or if they are worried or afraid, you can remind them: "Don't be afraid. Jesus is taking care of you. You are His little sheep. Remember, 'The Lord is my shepherd.'" You will no doubt find many opportunities to bring their memory verses to life.

If you are unsure how to go about teaching your little one Bible verses, here are some pointers contributed by a young woman who was caring for a two-year-old:

When Techi was just two, she learned the first several verses from Psalm 23, and later we were sent a little picture book of the psalm. I photocopied the pages and pasted them onto cards. Whenever we learned a verse, we used those picture cards, which helped her to understand each verse better. She always looked forward to receiving a new picture card and learning a new verse with it. The older kids liked to color the cards for her.

I find it very helpful to have a set time daily to work on memorizing. (For us it's usually in the morning.)

Since she's only two and a half years old, the time spent on memory work is not very long at all, and it helps not to drag on with it. When teaching her a new verse, I like to have her full attention. Usually I sit her on my lap facing me, without any distractions. We put down any toys and turn off the tape player. Then I tell her the new verse, which usually needs some explanation. A joyful attitude in memorizing the Word is vital. I usually say the verse twice, and if it's a long verse, we go over it in parts, and I encourage her to

say it after me. I like her to first *listen* to a part of it, then repeat it, instead of her right away trying to say it along with me, which often hinders her getting it right. Since she is so active, I often hold her hands while saying the verse, and I like her to look at me while we learn it, to know I have her full attention. We end with a kiss and a cuddle, and off she goes with a new verse in her heart and on her mind.

As with other stories or poems, it is very helpful to speak high or low or louder or softer to accentuate different words. This helps bring out the meaning of the verse and makes it easier to understand. It is also helpful to say the verse with a certain rhythm, and sometimes clap to the rhythm. Sometimes we march around in a circle while quoting the verse. If the verse talks about something we approve of, we nod our head, or if it mentions something we disapprove of, we shake our head or shake a finger. We point to our hearts or point upward when it talks about Jesus or Heaven or God. All those little actions help the children understand the verse and remember it.

Putting verses to song is one of the most fun and easy ways to learn Scriptures. This is most easily done by using simple tunes the children are already familiar with; for example, John 1:29 to the tune of "Mary had a little lamb":

Jesus is the Lamb of God, Lamb of God, Lamb of God.
Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.

Scriptures about teaching children the Bible

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 And these words [of God] which I [Moses] command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your

house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Deuteronomy 11:18–19 Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul. ... Teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Isaiah 38:19 The father shall make known Your truth to the children.

Joel 1:3 Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

John 21:15b “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

2 Timothy 3:15 From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise [unto] salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Teaching toddlers to pray and praise

Little children love to pray. They love to explain their ups and downs, and they love the fact that Jesus listens to them. Others may at times be too busy for them, but Jesus never is. He’s always sympathetic and able to see the world through their eyes.

Encourage your child to pray. Help him get started, and gently guide him, but be careful not to impose grown-up formality or solemnity on a child who’s perfectly happy doing what comes naturally—being himself with a friend who’s fun and always just what your child needs Him to be.

You can teach your young children to pray even before they can talk, if you keep your prayers simple and on their level. You can hold their hands or

have them fold their hands. Encouraging children to close their eyes when they pray can sometimes cut down on distractions during prayer, but they can't be expected to keep them closed very long. Keep your prayers short and upbeat: "Dear Jesus, bless this food. Thank You for it." "Dear Jesus, please bless Daddy as he goes to work." "Thank You, Jesus, for this beautiful day. Please be with us as we go out to play." Pray with your child when he scrapes his knee or loses his favorite toy, and he will feel the Lord's comfort and love, as well as your own.

Avoid praying when it means postponing something that they want to do *right now!* Don't try to squeeze in a prayer before a treat that they can already see and almost taste. They need to learn patience and they need to learn to pray, but don't mix the two lessons, or you'll give prayer a bad reputation. Prayer should be fun. Pray a prayer of thankfulness with them as they are enjoying their treat: "Thank You, dear Jesus, for giving us this yummy snack!"

Little children have great faith. They don't have to know all the reasons or principles behind why they should pray, why they should give thanks and praise to God, or why reading the Word is so important. They just need to know that they need Jesus' help, that He loves them and that His Word is true. They just need to learn that faith in Jesus *works*. That's enough for them. And the Lord loves to answer their prayers! He's perfectly capable of doing anything they ask, but He doesn't always answer right away or exactly the way they want Him to.

This is why some parents are reluctant to teach their children about prayer. They don't want their children to be disappointed or lose faith if a prayer does not seem to be answered, and they don't want to be put on the spot to answer questions that they feel they can't. The solution is not to avoid praying in

such situations, but rather to be prepared with some answers. Here are a few for starters:

- God usually expects us to do our part, before He does His. For example, if your child has lost a toy, pray with him and then help him look for it.

- Some answers take time. That scraped knee, for example, will probably take some time to fully heal, even after your child prays for it.

- Some of God's other reasons for seemingly not answering prayer are harder to explain: It may not be the right time; God may be trying to teach your child patience or some other lesson; what your child is asking for may not be good for him; God may limit what He will do in this situation because of choices other people have made; or there may be other factors that even you are not aware of.

- Sometimes Jesus answers prayer with a "yes," sometimes with a "no," and sometimes with a "wait." But one way or another, He will always answer prayer. Help your children to learn to trust the Lord in spite of disappointments and postponements, and you will have done one of the most important things you can to prepare them for life.

One of the best ways to encourage children's faith is to talk about instances where God has clearly answered prayer, either in the Word, in their own lives, or in the lives of others they're close to. Have they prayed for an older brother or sister who was sick but is better now? Did the Lord help the baby stop crying after they prayed for her? Did they get to go to the circus or do something else they had prayed for? One good way to make prayer fun and teach children about answered prayer is to help them make a list of the things they pray for and when, and then add the date when the Lord answers each one. *(The "Bible Story Checklist" in the Bible Study Activities section at the end of this booklet has a listing of several*

examples of answered prayers that are recorded in the Bible for our encouragement.)

“Listening to Jesus” time

Besides giving your children a foundation in the written Word—the Bible—it’s also important to teach them the importance of receiving the *living Word* straight from God. (See section “A parent’s best friend,” on page 48.)

You can begin to teach your children this principle when they’re very young. Sit down with them and together ask the Lord to answer questions that you or they have. Pray together with them and ask the Lord to clear your heart and thoughts of your own ideas, so the Lord can pour through His counsel. And then trust that God has promised, so you will receive.¹ The Lord’s answers probably will not be long and involved. The Lord keeps things real simple for children.

A young woman who was caring for two children of missionary families, both two and a half years old at the time, taught them about asking the Lord for help in solving the practical problems they ran into. She wrote:

One day Trevor and Olivia were fighting over a cushion they both wanted, so we all stopped and prayed about it. I told them I was going to ask Jesus what they should do. I had pen and paper in hand, and prayed aloud for the Lord to tell each of them what they should do. As I heard the Lord speak to my heart, I wrote it down and told the kids what Jesus was saying to them.

The verse the Lord gave me for Trevor was, “Wait on the Lord.” We talked briefly about that, and what

¹ Matthew 7:7

it meant in this situation. Then I prayed about what Olivia should do, and Jesus said, "Be kind and don't keep it for yourself the whole time." Then we discussed that. She was ready and willing to give the cushion to Trevor right then, but she was very happy when she realized that Jesus said she could keep it a little longer. Trevor waited patiently, and got his turn soon.

Those simple answers may sound like something I just said off the top of my head, but I honestly hadn't thought of that solution and didn't know what to do. Both of the children understood it all so clearly, and it went over much better than when I've tried to work out similar situations on my own. Jesus made it easy for all of us!

Another day while the kids were having a snack, the thought came to me to ask the Lord if He had anything He wanted to tell the kids, and I told them I was going to do that. They sat quietly while I wrote down what the Lord gave me, and then I told them. Jesus said such cute little things to them that brought smiles to their faces.

To Trevor He said: "Let your light so shine. Let Jesus shine in you. In everything you do, let Jesus shine through." Trevor really liked that because it rhymed.

To Olivia He said: "Be happy because I love you. You don't have to worry and cry, because you're My sweetie-pie." She liked Jesus calling her that cute name.

Tell the [young] boys and girls that the truths they feel deep down in their hearts are the real truths. God's love speaks to us in our hearts and tries to work through us in the world. We must listen to this voice. We must listen to it as to a pure and distant melody that comes across the noise of the world's doings. Some say, "When we are grown up, we will listen. Now

while we are young, we would rather think of other things." But with the voice of love, with which God speaks to us in the secret places of the heart, God speaks to us when we are young so that our youth may be really youth, and that we may become the children of God. Happy are those who listen.

—*Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), German-born philosopher, physician, missionary to west-central Africa, and winner of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize*

BIBLE STUDY ACTIVITIES

Bible story checklist

Jesus' life

- Birth:** Matthew 1:18–2:23; Luke 1:5–2:52.
- Death:** Matthew 26:17–27:66; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18–19.
- Resurrection:** Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20.

Miracles of Jesus

Miracles of raising the dead:

- The son of a widow: Luke 7:11–16.
- The daughter of Jairus: Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:41–56.
- Lazarus: John 11:32–44.

Miracles of healing:

- Nobleman's son, of a fever: John 4:46–54.
- Two blind men: Matthew 9:27–31.
- Hearing and speech restored to a man: Mark 7:32–37.
- Sight restored to a man: Mark 8:22–26.
- Sight given to man born blind: John 9:1–11.
- Sight restored to a beggar: Matthew 20:30–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43.

Various other miracles Jesus performed:

- Water converted into wine: John 2:1–11.
- Peter's net filled with fish: Luke 5:1–11.
- Feeding 5,000 plus: Matthew 14:15–21; Mark 6:35–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–14.
- Feeding over 4,000 people: Matthew 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–10.

- ❑ A great haul of fish: John 21:6–14.
- ❑ Wind and sea obey His word: Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:37–41; Luke 8:22–25.
- ❑ Jesus walks on the sea: Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–51; John 6:19.

Miracles connected with Jesus' life:

- ❑ Guidance of the Wise Men by a star: Matthew 2:1–9.

Parables Jesus told

- ❑ Houses on rock and sand: Matthew 7:24–27; Luke 6:48–49.
- ❑ The good Samaritan: Luke 10:25–37.
- ❑ The lost sheep: Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4–7.
- ❑ The prodigal son: Luke 15:11–32.
- ❑ The good shepherd: John 10:1–29.

Some answered prayers of the Bible

- ❑ Abraham, for a son: Genesis 15:2–4.
- ❑ Moses, for water: Exodus 15:23–25.
- ❑ Hannah, for a son: 1 Samuel 1:11,17,20.
- ❑ Elijah, for the widow's son: 1 Kings 17:20–22.
- ❑ Jonah, for deliverance: Jonah 2:2–10.

MEMORY VERSES FOR SMALL CHILDREN

You can check off these memory verses as your little children learn them

Love

- 1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails.
- 1 John 4:7 Love one another.

Faith and God's Promises

- Romans 10:17 Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.
- Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.
- Philippians 4:19 God will supply all your needs.
- Hebrews 13:5 I will never leave you or forsake you.
- Mark 9:23 All things are possible if you believe.

Salvation

- Acts 16:31 Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
- Ephesians 2:8 By grace you are saved through faith.
- Revelation 3:20 I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.

Prayer

- Matthew 7:7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find.

These verses are from *Feed My Lambs*, a series of simplified verses for young children, adapted from the King James Version in consultation with modern translations.

- John 14:14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray always.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Always be thankful.

God/Jesus

- John 4:24 God is a Spirit.
- Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- 1 John 4:8 God is love.
- John 8:12 I am the light of the world.
- John 10:14 I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me.
- John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- John 15:5 Without Me you can do nothing.

The Word

- John 17:17 God's Word is truth.

Witnessing

- Proverbs 11:30 He who wins souls is wise.
- Mark 16:15 Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Holy Spirit

- Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses.

Christian Living

- 1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.
- Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you.
- Act 20:35 It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Obedience

- ❑ John 13:17 If you know what is the right thing to do, you'll be happy if you do it.
- ❑ Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- ❑ John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Healing

- ❑ James 5:15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.
- ❑ Acts 9:34 Jesus Christ heals you.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Available from Aurora Productions, AG.

Start Early: A set of 40 brightly colored posters for young children, with simple quotes emphasizing basic Christian principles.

Stories to Grow By: A lively, colorful, fully illustrated series of storybooks for children ages 2-10, presenting godly morals in a fun and entertaining way.

Jesus and Me: A series of three books with short, lively devotionals, as coming from Jesus personally, that teach young children about Jesus and His love and care for them.

Praisin' U: A series of three books for children of various ages containing highly illustrated expressions of thankfulness to God.

Feed My Lambs: A series of six books with 90 illustrated and simplified Bible verses for children to memorize.

Great Adventures: Two sixty-minute CDs of favorite Bible stories—engaging narrative and lively songs.

Kiddie Viddie: A series of five half-hour MTV-style behavior-enhancing videos for children ages 6 months to 4 years.

Treasure Attic®: An educational entertainment video series for children ages 2–7. Lively songs and stories make learning fun!

Interactive Attic Fun: An activity-filled multimedia CD-Rom based on the Treasure Attic® video series. For children up to 8 years old.

Visit our Web site at: www.auroraproduction.com.

KEYS TO PARENTING SERIES

Raising kids right in a rough world isn't easy, but it can be done! From tiny tots to teens, the *Keys to Parenting* series unlocks the secrets of successful parenting. These booklets are packed with scores of fun, enriching, skill-building activities for children, plus plenty of practical and spiritual guidance for parents. Learn to encourage, inspire, counsel, correct, and enjoy your children, and help them to become all they can be!

Get the entire *Keys to Parenting* series for yourself or your friends!

Keys to Baby is packed with practical and spiritual tips to help assure a joyful beginning for mother, baby, and your whole family.

Keys to Toddlers and Preschoolers: Learn how to harness the energy of your pint-size hurricane to make the most of these crucial early years of rapid learning and development.

Keys to Kids: Good parenting isn't always easy, but the rewards are both immediate and eternal. As you help your child discover the right road in life, your own path will become easier and brighter.

Parenteening: "Heaven help us!" is no longer just a parent's plea—it's a reality. This booklet provides simple answers received straight from Heaven—answers to specific questions about how to raise teenagers.

Power for Parenthood: Learn how to raise your child in love, well anchored on a firm foundation of faith that will see him and you through life's storms.

The *Keys to Parenting* series unlocks the doors to understanding children and the mysteries of childcare. Anyone and everyone who has anything to do with children or young people should avail themselves of this counsel.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Derek and Michelle Brookes are professional educators and writers, who have been happily married and working together for 28 years. After several years as successful teachers, they have spent the last two decades as Christian educators and educational consultants. Their lifelong ambition to provide quality care and education to all children has taken them to nearly every continent, and brought practical help and encouragement to many who face the great responsibility of caring for children.