

What You Didn't Expect When You Were Expecting

Ann M. Ponath

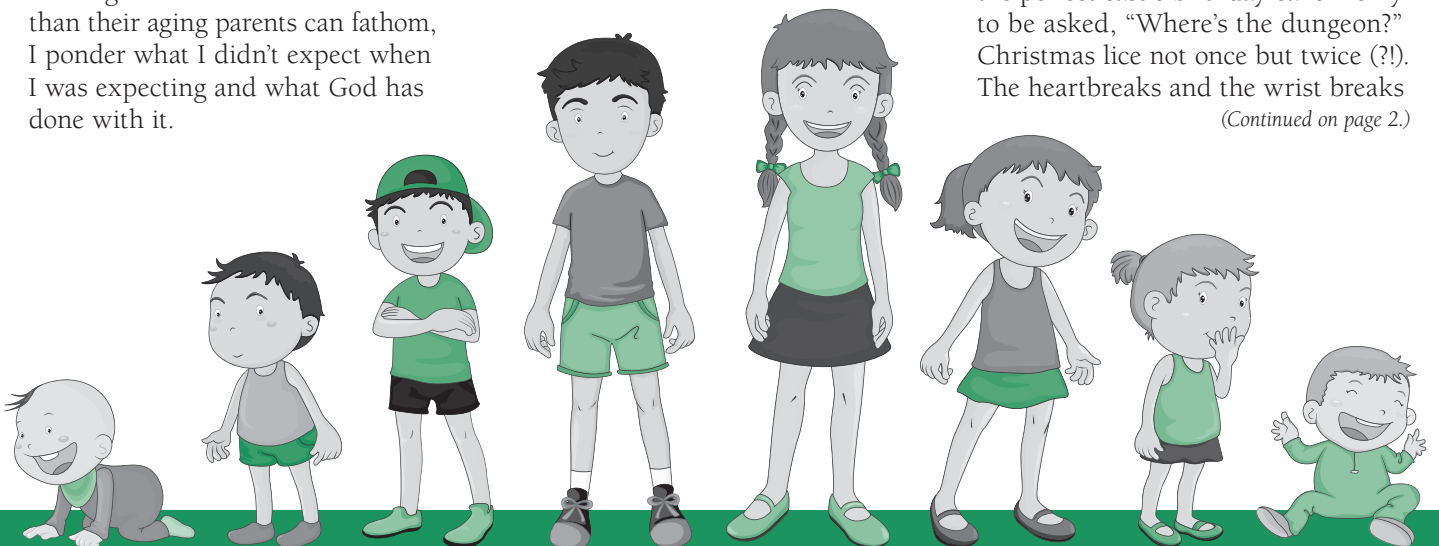
Two young boys are running teasing circles around me as I attempt to prepare their dinner. (Was there a younger sister by this time—and a big black dog too? It's all such a blur.) Suddenly it's too quiet. After a quick glance, I unthinkingly order, "Don't hit your brother with frozen meat," and go back to chopping carrots. Wait. What did I just say? The boys hardly notice, but the order is obeyed, the crisis averted, and they continue with their rambunctious play, perhaps tumbling over their little sister and the big black dog (if they indeed are part of this picture). I chop, and perhaps I muse, "Is this what the younger mom-to-be me expected as I dreamed of parenthood?" And now, a few quick years later, as those same boys wield chain saws and lawn mowers (thankfully, not at each other) and college textbooks and life choices, and their two sisters fly through grade-school and high-school milestones faster than their aging parents can fathom, I ponder what I didn't expect when I was expecting and what God has done with it.

Let's start at the very beginning. Can any parent begin to imagine the intense love and amazement the first look at your new miracle brings? or the wonder as your child is made God's child in Baptism? or the joy as you rediscover God's creation through your child's eyes? On the flip side, can anyone begin to imagine the extreme exhaustion and fear that dear little one engenders? (Am I the only mother who thought she needed to set her alarm for the midnight feeding, worried that her firstborn would sleep through the night and starve?) And then, in rapid succession, all of the firsts—from rolling over for the first time, to the first taste of peas, to the first word, to those first precious steps. Fast-forward (and it does fast-forward!) to the first solo ride on two wheels, the first day of school, the first baseball hit, the first dance, the first time driving alone in possession

of the prized driver's license. Before you know it, you are saying goodbye at the college dorm or watching newlyweds drive off into the sunset. Weaving regular church attendance, family devotions, bedtime prayers, Christian schools, and friends into their lives, we humbly try to focus our families on Christ. The Bible says, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). We watch them grow and pray this promise!

The best of times. The worst of times. Would anyone become a parent if he or she knew the sometimes harsh reality? The stomach flu that always hits on the holidays. The four-year-old with a broken leg on the first day of summer vacation. The child who will only wear one pair of shorts, even wet from the washing machine. The all-night marathon trying to create the perfect castle birthday cake—only to be asked, "Where's the dungeon?" Christmas lice not once but twice (!). The heartbreaks and the wrist breaks

(Continued on page 2.)



(What You Didn't Expect When You Were Expecting . . . cont.)

and this is the immense responsibility of the hardest job you've ever had. Not to mention all the parties—birthdays, confirmations, sleepovers, graduations—trying to smile and keep the pretzel bowls full while wondering, “How much did this horrible cake with the red and black frosting cost?” And just when you think you have one phase figured out, it's on to the next—and when the terrific

entire book of Psalms is full of fervent prayers to the heavenly Father to hear, answer, rescue, and deliver his people. (Check out Psalm 86 for starters!) What awesome encouragement to lonely, weary parents as he teaches us to fully rely on him and give him the glory when the dust settles!

Then there are those *very* difficult, unexpected things: The child with diabetes or asthma or ADHD or a

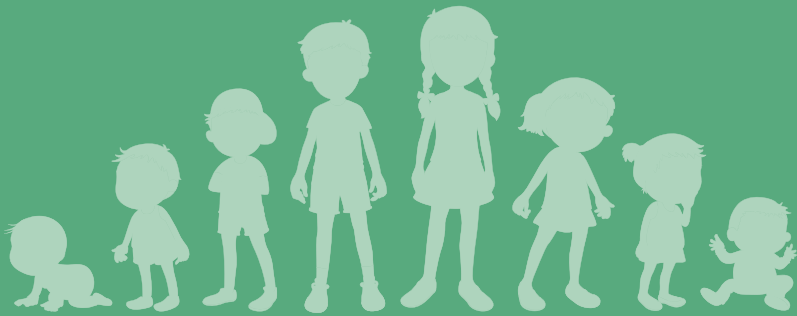
praying for strength and direction and patience. The struggling through long periods of “What is the plan, God?” before everything becomes clear—or doesn't—this side of heaven. “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear,” comforts Isaiah (65:24). There's a reason this is underlined and starred in my Bible: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Romans 8:26). (And keep reading, dear parent! Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”)

One day during the summer of his 18th year, the child who threatened to take a saw to the piano and throw it away requests lessons again; the college student comes home and asks (!) for advice; your daughter fills journal after journal—a writer after your own heart. You hear, “What a beautiful voice she has!” or you sit in a professional stadium watching your son quarterback the championship team or [insert your own proud moment here] and you are bursting with joy and amazement. Looking through the years and down the pew at so many blessings, you think, “What has God accomplished through our meager attempts? What *will* he do?” And how astonishing—God has not only raised your family to love and serve Jesus, but he has grown and strengthened the parents too!

And then you remember the day you thought the boys were creating a cute craft project out in the backyard but it was really rubber-band guns crafted with knives and saws, and you realize parenting is so much worse and so much better than you ever expected—and only by God's amazing grace.

Ann Ponath writes and lives in Stillwater, Minnesota, with her husband, David, and their four blessings, ages 12-21. She also serves as an organist, music coordinator, and teacher at Christ Lutheran Church and School, North St. Paul, Minnesota.

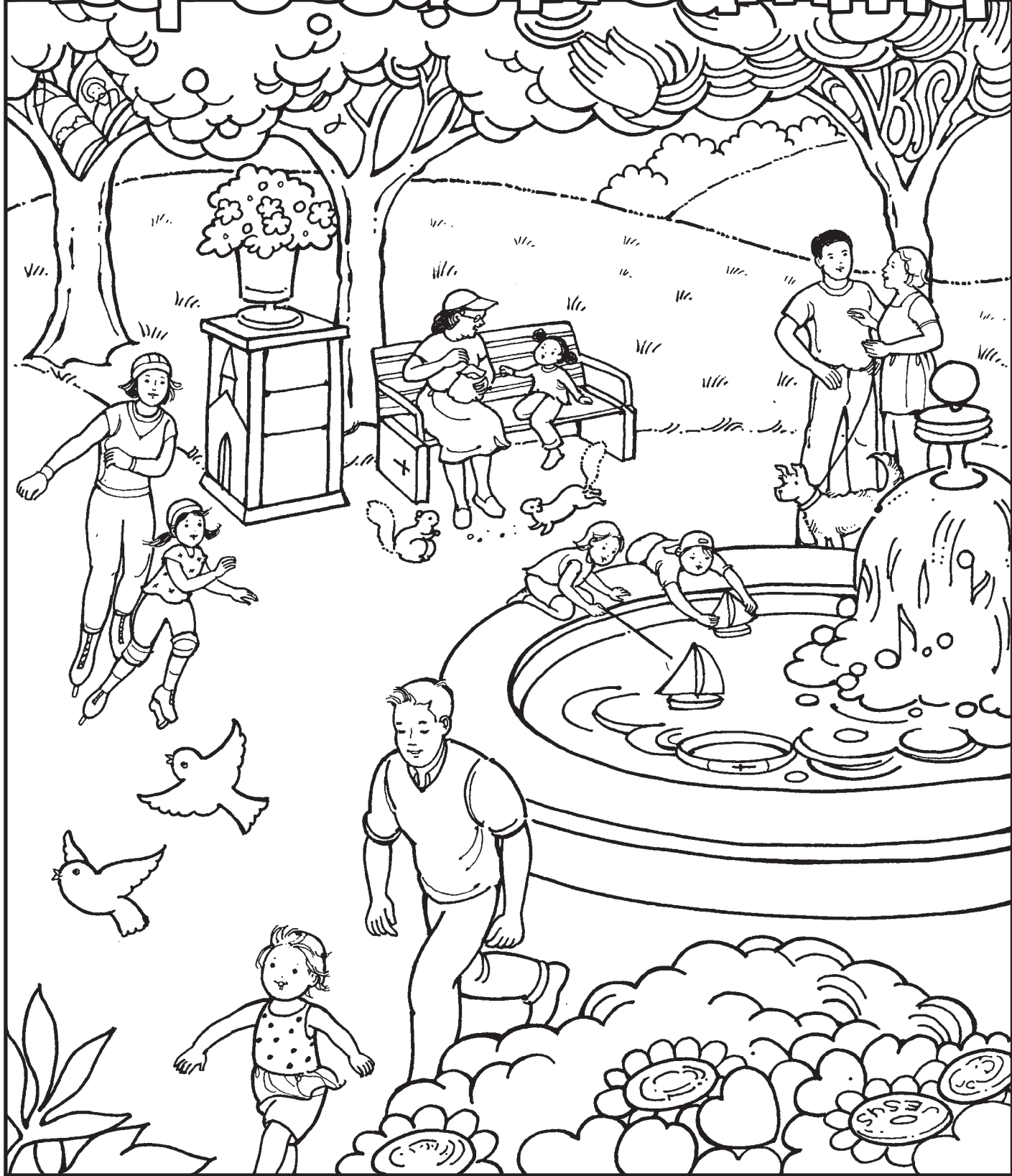
WOULD ANYONE BECOME A PARENT IF HE OR SHE KNEW THE SOMETIMES HARSH REALITY?



twos become the terrible twos with son number two, you're a first-time parent all over again. We're not even going to talk about the laundry piles or the magically emptying refrigerator or the “fun” cross-country road trips or the addition you built to house all these kids and that big black dog. And you're still not sure if the gondolier for the prom was a good or bad parenting moment. Psalm 50:15 reads, “Call on me in the day of trouble.” The

disability that carries with it a myriad map of doctors' appointments and late nights and learning things you never knew you'd need to know. The disappointment when your darlings misbehave at home or in public. The “I hate it here” text from college just after the move-in. The rebellious teen who won't listen to reason or begins to question his or her faith. The agony of trying to do what's best, but failing so many times. The falling asleep

Keep Jesus in Summer



Find the 10 hidden objects in the picture. When you're finished, you can color the picture. The answer key is on the back page.

- | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bible | 3. church | 5. musical notes | 7. religious story book | 9. T-shirt with the "fish" symbol |
| 2. praying hands | 4. CD with the word Jesus on it | 6. bracelet with a cross | 8. heart | 10. the letters VBS |

Now I Lay Me Down to . . .

Sleep

Heather Bode

Sleep. It's what we adults should spend one-third of our lives doing. For our children, it should be even more. Then why are so many of us NOT getting the sleep we need? "Sleep is one of the most important things that gets really overlooked in society. We have all this technology that we 'can't live without' and a society that pushes us to our limits. But it all interferes with our body's normal systems and how we were designed to function," says Dr. Kim Damrow.

Dr. Damrow is a primary care internist and also a diplomate with the American Board of Sleep Medicine. She has been conducting and reading sleep studies for almost 20 years. During that time, she feels the medical community has come to a realization of just how important sleep is, especially since an estimated 40 million Americans suffer from sleep disorders.

WHY WE NEED SLEEP

There are two basic categories of sleep: non-REM and REM sleep. Dr. Damrow explains that while non-REM sleep helps our *bodies* recover, REM sleep benefits the *brain*. Surprisingly, during REM sleep the brain is as active as it is when we're awake. Dr. Damrow further explains that anything which arouses us from sleep and causes sleep disruption, like when our little ones are up in the middle of the night, generates a lot of changes in our bodies.

"Your heart rate and blood pressure go up. It changes our response to insulin. It changes proteins in the blood. *Anything* that disrupts our sleep goes contrary to what our bodies want us to do."

"We just never thought to *ask* people about their sleep. Their blood pressure was getting worse; they were developing diabetes; having rhythm issues; early heart attacks—all of which can be impacted by a specific sleep disorder called sleep apnea. But there are almost one hundred different sleep disorders," says Damrow. "How much sleep we get impacts *everything*."

NOT JUST A PROBLEM FOR ADULTS

We probably tend to think that problems with sleep are an adult issue. However, children are not immune, and the consequences for them can be devastating. "Unlike adults who become lethargic, children with sleep disordered breathing will become more hyperactive," Damrow explains. "The brain keeps waking all night long. This contributes to an inability to concentrate. Think about why children get diagnosed with ADHD: trouble paying attention, irritability, [they are] inattentive in class. Teachers can't refocus them. These children are often misdiagnosed. ADHD symptoms mimic symptoms of sleep disordered breathing in children."

WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Pay Attention to the Basics: We all think we know how much sleep we should be getting. (For a chart showing the new guidelines established by the National Sleep Foundation, go to <https://sleepfoundation.org/press-release/national-sleep-foundation-recommends-new-sleep-times/page/0/1>.) If we are honest with ourselves, we know someone in our household who isn't getting enough sleep. "A set bedtime and a set wake time is needed for children and adults—even on weekends," says Damrow. "Activity is ideal earlier in the day. The later in the day, the more activating it becomes." Light exposure is important in the morning and should be avoided in the evenings. "TV, computers, and iPads shift our body rhythms and prevent us from being able to fall asleep when we want to."

2. Allow Enough Time: If your child needs ten hours of sleep, that doesn't mean ten hours of being in bed. They may not be *sleeping*. Create a relaxing bedtime routine that allows enough time for children to be in bed, unwind, and be able to fall asleep.

3. Be Disciplined: Damrow points out, "Teens especially tend to stay up late, wake early, and then sleep in on weekends. We call this a 'delayed sleep schedule.' They shift everything out of whack by doing this. It *has to be* a 7-days-a-week schedule, keeping sleep and wake times to within an hour to an hour and a half of each other. It's hard to be consistent."

4. Know Your Family Tree: While medical professionals haven't identified a "sleep gene," much involving your anatomy is inherited. Narrow airways or large tonsils can contribute to breathing/sleeping problems. If your parents or grandparents have sleeping issues, be aware!

THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF THINGS

If we go back to the Genesis account of creation, we see that from the very beginning, God planned for rest: "God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day" (Genesis 1:5).

God himself rested. Although this wasn't sleep, he found it important enough to tell us: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the

seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Genesis 2:2,3).

The first mention of actual sleep comes shortly after this: "But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:20b-22).

Our bodies were designed in a perfect state, yet even before the fall into sin, we see that sleep was already a part of God's plan. We were designed to need rest. Now that we have imperfect bodies which struggle under the results of sin, the need for rest and sleep is even greater. And because we contend with sin, we can't forget about our need for rest for the soul. But how do we get that rest?

"How much sleep we get impacts everything."

Jesus answered this for us when he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Only in Jesus and the comfort of his Word do we find relief from the burdens of our sins, our anxieties, and our shortfalls. He reassures us that he takes care of all of these things. We *need* to hear this on a regular basis. It is rest for our souls.

Perhaps the most comforting thought is that we have a God who never sleeps—and can handle it! So when we are up in the middle of the night, we take comfort in these words: "He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:3,4). We can fall asleep at night, trusting in that promise.

(See page 8 for recommendations on getting your best sleep.)

Heather Bode lives in Helena, Montana, where her husband serves as pastor for Valley View Lutheran Church. They have been blessed with five children.

"If we were away on vacation," she said, describing her childhood, "we'd stop and go to church on the weekends." That's pretty faithful church attendance, huh? But only a couple lines further along in the interview, she said, "I don't really feel that way anymore. I'm a bit more agnostic now. . . . It's just harder and harder to believe there's a God out there."

I wish I could promise that won't happen with your kids: "Take your kids to church every Sunday, even during the summer, even when you're on vacation, and *your children will never lose their faith*—oh, and someday they'll raise your grandchildren as darling little Christians too." I can't promise that. Weekly church attendance isn't a guarantee like that.

We asked Pastor to drown all our children's sinfulness dead in the water of Baptism, but their sinfulness doesn't like to stay drowned. Every time we take our children to church, their sinful hearts come too. Have you noticed? Their sinful hearts fight to keep our children from *remembering* what they hear in church, from using it as a power in their lives for holiness or maturity or joyfulness.

It's hard enough to notice when *our own* sinful hearts do that.

Church is over. What's next? Back to real life.

But all those words Pastor said, Spirit-filled words of hope and wisdom from the heart of God, shouldn't I take those words with me into my "real life"?

Everybody buckled up? Let's go! So much to do.

A few weeks ago I thought, *I need to do something to help my children get more out of Pastor's sermons.* I took an index card and pen to church. My plan: write down at least one sentence or

Their sinful hearts fight to keep our children from remembering what they hear in church.

point from the sermon that I could talk about later with my family. Then, after church, the day got really crazy and I ended up talking about the card only with my wife. I'll try it again, though. I figure the conversations will start easily enough, "What did you think when Pastor said . . . ?"

Maybe it's hard enough getting to church during the summer, and now you are reading this depressing article about how faithful church attendance probably isn't enough, about

how churchgoing doesn't guarantee you're taking God's Word home with you into "real life," about how this world's influence is so overpowering that your kids will probably lose their faith no matter what you do—wait, I didn't say *that*, did I?

No way!

Our God makes big promises to us. Here's just one: "If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will . . . find the knowledge of God. . . . You will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path" (Proverbs 2:3-5,9). *Every good path* to get your children into God's house, despite unpredictable summer schedules; *every good path* to help your children understand, remember, pray over, and put into practice what they hear in God's house; *every good path* to help your children grow up and keep believing there's a loving, trustworthy God out there—call out to him, cry aloud to him, look for it, search for it: he promises you'll find the path, every time. How big a promise is that!

(And you know what? One place where God has shown countless generations of prayerful parents their every good path is in his house.)

Christopher (Topher) Doerr and his wife, Carrie, have six sons and one baby girl at home with them, within walking distance of Miller Park in Milwaukee. Topher is Broader Reach Editor at NPH.



Every Good Path to Church During the Summer

Pastor Christopher Doerr



Kenneth Kremer

Raising children is not the same thing as raising a crop of corn. Corn doesn't have a sinful nature with which to contend. Nor does it have a personality or a whole range of personal gifts. It would be a blatant oversimplification to suggest that Christian parenting is merely a process of following a list of principles. However, there are some tenants, general truths, principles—whatever you want to call them—that guide a Christian parent. The list below is meant to stimulate discussion and introspection. Reflect on the list; then consider how you might refine your approach to Christian parenting.

1. Base your parenting on God's Word. Most parents pattern their approach to bringing up children after the approach their own parents took in raising them. Others rely on pop psychology or media experts to provide direction for their parenting. Neither model is totally reliable. The Bible, on the other hand, is. It provides the only foundation that can support a solid family structure.

2. Agree with your spouse on the fundamentals of parenting. The differing views on parenting held by a father and mother may not be evident until a child has already learned how to manipulate them. This can bring ruin to a happy Christian household (and untold harm to a child). Parents need to get on the same page. This requires some work in the form of meaningful discussions. Where God's Word gives direction, there is no room for compromise. Where it is not specific, both parents need to be prepared to compromise.

3. Be spiritual leaders. The Bible doesn't leave doubt as to who has the primary responsibility for bringing children to Jesus. Christian parents need to lead their children to the Savior by having them baptized and by maintaining spiritual activities in the home. These activities include attending church regularly, praying daily at mealtimes and bedtimes, reading Bible stories and devotions, and making use of Christian education opportunities such as Sunday school and full-time Lutheran schools. But first and foremost, parents are to teach God's Word to their children.

4. Be examples. Match the expectations you have for your child's behavior by living out those same expectations in your own life. In short, "walk the talk."

5. Communicate with your child. Genuine communication begins with listening. Listening provides background and insight for parents to respond with wise words of their own to help a child deal with life's difficult challenges.

6. Apply God's law and his gospel message of forgiveness and healing as situations call for them. This is difficult. It often means that we have to determine whether or not our child is repentant. When a child won't admit sin, or demonstrates an unrepentant attitude, we need to apply God's law. A child's conscience needs to feel the pinch of guilt if the gospel is to have any meaning at all. But when a child has recognized the sin and is sorry for having done wrong, a parent should talk about God's love and forgiveness. This is the time to bring the comfort and peace of the gospel to a young sinner's heart.

7. When admonition is in order, don't shrink from it. When we catch our child in sinful behavior, we need to exercise tough love. (But also look for opportunities to catch your child behaving correctly.)

8. Get help when you need it. Sometimes parenting problems become too big to handle alone. Help is available. God often answers the prayers of troubled Christian parents by providing people who have the experience and expertise to deal with some of the tougher parenting issues. In general, seek help from people and agencies you know agree with you on biblical principles.

9. Pray. Jesus said that we can ask for anything in his name and it will be given to us. *Anything* covers a lot of parenting needs. Be persistent. God wants us to come to him often with the complete confidence that he will provide answers to our prayers.

The above is a condensed version of an article Kenneth Kremer wrote for *Lutheran Parent* in 2001. It still applies to our parenting today.

Kenn Kremer has served in a variety of professional posts as part of the WELS education system for 47 years. He recently completed work on his sixth book, which bears the title . . . Even When Steeples Are Falling: Conversations at the Intersection of Character and Culture.

THE BIBLE PROVIDES THE ONLY FOUNDATION THAT CAN SUPPORT A SOLID FAMILY STRUCTURE.

“GET YOUR BEST SLEEP” CHEAT SHEET

FOR CHILDREN:

- Set a schedule and stick to it as much as possible.
- Allow enough time for kids to unwind and fall asleep.
- Get light exposure and activity earlier in the day.
- Avoid screens at night.
- Find out if your child snores or wakes up often at night.

If your child does snore or wakes up often, consider seeing a doctor. “There’s something abnormal about that,” says Dr. Damrow. “If you fix it for them, they usually do quite well. The first thing to do is have your child evaluated to see if tonsils and adenoids need to come out. Then if they still have problems, they may need a sleep study.” Asthma can also cause sleep issues. Consider having your child screened for this.

FOR TEENS:

- Avoid caffeine at night.
- Avoid screens at night.
- Keep a schedule 7 days a week: no sleeping in for 4 hours on Saturdays!
- Discipline yourself to make the schedule a habit.

FOR PARENTS:

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine close to bedtime.
- Avoid screens and e-readers.
- Set your own bedtime and stick to it!
- If you’re starting to develop high blood pressure or heart rhythm issues, or are prediabetic, AND you have trouble sleeping, mention it to your doctor. A sleep disorder may be triggering these responses.
- If you work second or third shift, consider this: “Shift work goes contrary to what our bodies want us to do. It is important to stay on your schedule—even on days off,” says Damrow.



“I’m going green and saving paper!”

Parents & Crosslink

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Key for Keep Jesus in Summer puzzle (p. 3)

- 1. Bible
- 2. praying hands
- 3. church
- 4. CD with the word Jesus on it
- 5. musical notes
- 6. bracelet with a cross
- 7. religious story book
- 8. heart
- 9. T-shirt with the “fish” symbol
- 10. the letters VBS

