

# Stewards of God's Heritage

by Marilee LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

Nineteenth century American author, Mark Twain, had a radical philosophy for raising children. It went something like this:

"Things run along pretty smoothly until your kid reaches thirteen. That's the time you need to stick 'em in a barrel, hammer the lid down nice and snug, and feed 'em through the knot hole. And then, about the time he turns sixteen, plug up the knot hole!"

Even though Mark Twain was a creative writer, it doesn't sound to me like he knew very much about raising children. Nor did he have God's perspective on the children of believers.

God's view of our children is stated clearly in Psalm 127.

*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)*

Our children are a heritage from the Lord. They belong to Him. As parents we are simply stewards given the noble task of raising young boys and girls to be godly men and women. God has given us the assignment of raising our children for Him,

*...in the training and admonition of the Lord.  
(Eph. 6:4)*

Raising godly children doesn't just happen because they grow up in a Christian home. Raising a child is like building a house. First, we must have a blue print, or vision. We must ask ourselves, "What's my ultimate goal for my children?" Jesus Christ gave us the highest goal when he was asked about the greatest commandment. He said,

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37).*

Our goal is to help our children grow into adults who love God above all else. We get the "inside help" to do this by gently leading our children to faith in Jesus Christ. As cuddly and cute as our children are, the cold hard fact is that our children are born with a sin nature. They need to be saved and born again of God's Spirit. You can lead your

child to faith in Christ by instruction from God's Word and by personal example.

We must show our children the importance of daily Bible reading and prayer. Songs are also a great way to lead young children to Christ. As you lay the foundation stone of faith in Christ, then you can begin to build brick by brick the great doctrinal truths of the Bible into your child's heart. And it's never too early to start. Writing to his young associate Timothy, the apostle Paul said,

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

From earliest childhood, through adulthood, our job is to teach, reprove and correct our children according to the Scriptures. Our teaching must be consistent and thorough (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). We must teach our children God's Word,

*... precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. (Isaiah 28:9)*

A hodgepodge of Bible stories is not enough to enable your children to withstand against the wiles of the devil. Only a finely sharpened "sword of the spirit" (Eph. 6:10-18) can do the job. By helping your children commit many Scripture verses to memory, you will be strengthening their spiritual arsenal.

But teaching our children must also be more than a set of rules and laws. We need to dig deeper in every situation to reach the child's heart. Changing behavior is not the only benchmark of success; we must also deal with issues of underlying attitudes and motivations. Keep your priorities on matters of the heart, striving to build a godly character rather than emphasizing only surface issues of their outward actions and works.

A delicate balance is called for. While we want our children to learn to love and obey God's Word, we don't want to give the impression we love them only when they do the right thing! God's love for us is limit less and endless. We need to be sure that our children understand that our love for them is also

unconditional. That's a term that's often repeated but seldom practiced. In our zeal to teach our children God's Word, we can easily give the unspoken message that they're more righteous when they perform well. That's teaching works, not the saving grace of the blood of Jesus Christ!

Maintaining a spiritual atmosphere in our homes is essential. One of the best ways to do this is to establish a daily family worship time. When a family goes through an entire day without acknowledging and praising God together (and a quick prayer before meals is not what I'm talking about here) we're teaching a subtle lesson. We say to our children, "We may talk about God, we may have Bibles around the house, and go to church on Sunday, but He doesn't really affect our everyday lives in any significant way."

Family devotion time need not be intimidating. It can be kept very simple and yet be profoundly powerful. Sing a hymn together, read a chapter from the Bible out loud, let each one read a verse, and then pray together. That's a family worship time. Evening works best for some families, at the morning breakfast table is better for others. One family I read about piles up the supper dishes in the center of the table after eating, and stays right at the table for their family prayer time. It was the one time of the day that everyone was usually all together. When and where doesn't matter – just choose a time and start! Perhaps read through an entire book of the Bible, one chapter a day, together. Then take the

time to discuss the chapter, answer questions your children may have.

Above all, rely on God's holy Spirit working in you to train up His children (Philippians 2:13). Have the courage to show your children that even you can't succeed when relying on your own strengths and abilities. Be humble and open in your prayer times together; expose your heart before God in prayer for your children to hear. It will help them realize in a very powerful way that they, too, must open their hearts to their heavenly Father.

We have been entrusted with great truths from God's Word, we need to ensure that the next generation continues to trust in the Lord, as well as future generations. If we are faithful to do our part as parents God will assuredly be faithful to do His part. As the psalmist said,

*But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To such as keep His covenant. And to those who remember His commandments to do them. (Psalm 103:17,18)*

As stewards of the most precious of God's possessions, His little lambs, let us be found faithful.

### **Recommended Books on Children and Family**

1. The Five Love Languages For Children, by Gary Chapman, Published by Northfield Pub.
2. Family Life, by Chuck Swindoll, Published by Multnomah Press