

101 WAYS
to strengthen the
PARENT-CHILD
Connection



Devotions, Tips,
& Activities

Michael & Tiffany Ross

gotandem.

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Starting Point: Keys to Unlocking Your Child's Heart

How to Connect and Nurture Spiritual Growth

While we all want childhood to be a carefree time for our kids, the world has become a more dangerous and stressful place. Gone are the days when it was safe for a kid to ride his bike endlessly up and down the street or disappear all day at a friend's house. Tiffany and I cringe when we think about our twelve-year-old son walking home from school alone. While he's a big, tough kid, some bigger threats lurk in our neighborhood.

"Dad, what's a gangster?" he nonchalantly asked us when he was seven.

"Where'd you hear that word?" I asked, my heart skipping a beat.

"At school."

"Was it in a book you're reading—or a story your teacher shared?"

"Nope," Christopher said. "This boy told me his brother is a gangster—and that he's going to be one, too."

I groaned. Here I thought moving from a city to a small town would protect my family from stuff exactly like this.

Remember the days when making the basketball team or the cheerleading squad was among a kid's greatest challenges? But the world in which our son is growing up is filled with more insidious and unpredictable threats: kidnapers, shooters, terrorists, bullies (physical and virtual). . .and, yes, Midwest gangs. Every day he's hit with repulsive messages that bombard him in cyberspace.

For some of his friends, life isn't any better or safer on the home front. Financial uncertainty and joblessness have torn families apart. And there's more, *so much more*: addictions, eroding values, gender confusion, "political correctness," lukewarm faith. . .the list goes on and on. All this stuff chips away at the foundation of civilized society: *the family unit*.

Here's how sociologist Daniel Yankelovich explains our plight:

Americans suspect that the nation's economic difficulties are rooted not in technical economic forces (for example, exchange rates or capital formation) but in fundamental moral causes.

There exists a deeply intuitive sense that the success of a market-based economy depends on a highly developed social morality—trustworthiness, honesty, concern for future generations, an ethic of service to others, a humane society that takes care of those in need, frugality instead of greed, high standards of quality and concern for community.

These economically desirable social values, in turn, are seen as rooted in family values. Thus the link in public thinking between a healthy family and a robust economy, though indirect, is clear and firm.¹

Your kids want a deeper connection with you. They need to hear “I love you,” “I’m proud of you,” and “I won’t give up on you.”

They need you to be there for them.

Most of all, they need you to guide them into a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ.

Many children are stressed. Many are anxious. Far too many feel constant pressure; now, more than ever, they need change. They long to be accepted by their peers, but most importantly, whether or not they're in a place to admit it, they hunger for family support and connection.²

They're counting on you to teach them, protect them, and look after their well-being in this often frightening world. They need you to equip them to navigate life as Christ-followers, secure in their true identity and trusting in the promises of the one true God. My (Michael's) mom did everything possible to shape me into a man who was ready to face the world with confidence. She planted seeds

of faith in my life and sparked in me a vision for my future. The influence my mom had on my life was *utterly irreplaceable*—and it’s the same in your home.

Here are two key ways a parent influences the lives of their kids:

PARENTS NURTURE THE ABILITIES OF THEIR KIDS

When I was seventeen, Mom bought me a camera. On other occasions, she had given me a typewriter (encouraging the writer in me) and an oil painting set (sparking the artist in me). She seemed to zero in on my talents—then looked for ways to nurture and develop them. Likewise, moms share with their husbands the important role of developing a child’s abilities. A parent is both a *coach* and a *mentor*.

A coach teaches, inspires, demands, encourages, pushes, and leads. Good coaches can create great performances in ordinary people. A mentor is a tutor and a model—a person who takes a special interest in the life of another. A mentor possesses the skill to teach and a willingness to do so.

Pause for a moment and think about your child. Who is this kid? What abilities has God given your child? Now think of ways that you can nurture those talents.

Please avoid a common mistake: Keep in mind that nurturing the abilities of your child doesn’t mean fitting your child into *your* ideal image of who *you* think he or she should be. Help your child to discover God’s will for his or her life, then encourage your child to strive for excellence.

PARENTS PLANT SEEDS OF FAITH

In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

Even though Timothy’s mother, Eunice, was Jewish, she had

married a non-Jewish man who was hostile toward the things of the Lord. Timothy's father would not even allow him to be circumcised (Acts 16:1–3). It appears that Eunice shouldered the entire responsibility of raising her son in the faith; she often thanked God for the support of her own mother, Lois. Right from her son's childhood, she made sure that she taught him from God's Word (2 Timothy 3:15), and Timothy ended up becoming a dedicated Jewish man.

Every godly parent is a Eunice to their kids. They set the spiritual tone and provide the example and instruction children need.

That seemingly clueless kid who leaves his dirty socks on the bathroom floor could one day change his generation for Christ (all because he has a God-fearing, praying parent). God is using you to mold your child's character. And whether or not you realize it, your child is tuned in to what you're teaching.

This book can help you maximize every priceless moment together.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL FIND ON EACH PAGE. . .

This fast, fun resource is jam-packed with 101 creative ways to help you connect with your kids. . .and nurture their spiritual growth. These must-read pages are like three books in one: a daily devotional, a family activity guide, and a parent-child conversation starter. Age-appropriate object lessons bring to life Bible verses about the character and the promises of the Lord, and three key categories guide you through spiritual basics: "My Relationship with God," "My Trust in God," and "My Faith in God." Inside you'll find tips and talking points for. . .

- *Toddlerhood to Preschool*—emphasizing God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit
- *Kindergarten to Third Grade*—emphasizing God’s love, acceptance, and justice
- *Fourth Grade to Seventh Grade*—emphasizing three key issues: self-identity, self-esteem, and acceptance

And each entry offers four creative ways to connect. . .

- *Family Quest*—easy-to-follow activities based on scripture
- *Talk It Out*—questions to get your child talking
- *Parent-Child Connection*—key points to cover and tips on leading a kid-friendly devotional lesson
- *Talk to God*—ideas for how you can pray together



Part One

**My Relationship
with God**

He Is...

MY COUNSELOR

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

ISAIAH 58:11

FAMILY QUEST

Create a safe environment so you and your family can play a fun game of trust. Take turns having one family member wear a blindfold over his eyes so he cannot see his surroundings. Then give him simple instructions to guide him through the room. Tell him things like, “Take three steps forward, feel the wall with your left hand, and take one step to your right.” Make sure you give him good instructions to get him across the room safely. Then trade places and let your child guide you across the room while you wear the blindfold. This will build trust.

TALK IT OUT

- Did you like to be blindfolded?
- Did you have a hard time trusting my instructions? Did you think I was going to trick you and make you fall or trip?
- Was it fun to give me instructions? Were you tempted to trick me?
- Do you think God wants to help you make good decisions? How does He help us out?

PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION

Today’s activity opens the door for a creative discussion about the Third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit. Help your child understand that He is our Guide, Helper, Strengtheners, and Advocate, sent by Christ to live in us and to counsel (or guide) us. Like the Father and the Son,

the Holy Spirit is to be believed and obeyed. Say something like this: “In times of trouble—especially those moments when everything and everyone seems very scary—the Holy Spirit of God comes close to you, comforts you, and guides your steps.”

TALK TO GOD

As you pray, encourage your child to (1) thank God for always wanting what’s best for us and (2) thank Him for the many ways He reaches out to us every day.

2

MY CREATOR

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

ISAIAH 40:28

FAMILY QUEST

Take a look at a globe or a map of the world. Find your hometown and compare its size to that of the whole world. Next, do a Google search and learn how many people live on Earth right now and imagine how many have lived on this planet throughout all time. Each and every one of us has been handmade—each of us is a beautifully unique creation. It's amazing!

TALK IT OUT

- Have you ever seen two people who look exactly the same? Why or why not? (Even twins have differences, right?)
- Next, instruct your child to study his hands, and then say (or read) this: “One-fourth of all your bones are in this part of your body. With them, you can create the most delicate painting or lift heavy weights. And your very own fingerprints are uniquely yours. Now think about your brain. It's so complicated that even the most advanced computer is nowhere near its efficiency. It not only controls your body, but with it you think, you create, you feel, you love, and—along with your spirit—you reach out to God.”
- Read Genesis 2:4–25. Point out the important job God gave Adam—naming every living creature (verses 19–20)—and ask your child to spend some time thinking about names of people. Do you think our names help to make us unique individuals? Do

you think God knows the name of everyone who has ever lived?
(Answer: Of course He does!)

- Read John 3:16. Based on this verse, how precious are people to God?

PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION

Help your child begin to grasp the wonders of our Creator. Help her see that God is infinitely greater than what our minds can comprehend and that we must approach Him with faith—not courtroom-style facts that skeptics sometimes demand. Emphasize that the God in whom we have come to trust is the *infinite, holy Creator* who has always existed and who made the universe by the power of His word (Hebrews 11:3). Explain that in the Bible (Exodus 3:14) God told Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” Point out that there is only one true God (Isaiah 45:5). He is the sovereign Lord, the God of the Bible, who acts in His creation and who involves Himself intimately in our lives.

TALK TO GOD

As you pray, encourage your child to (1) thank God for creating the world and (2) consider the amazing uniqueness of each human.

Ideal for Kindergarten to Third Grade
and Fourth Grade to Seventh Grade

3

MY EXAMPLE

*Follow God's example,
therefore, as dearly loved children.*

EPHESIANS 5:1

FAMILY QUEST

Instruct your kids to draw cartoon panels of Jesus helping others. Encourage them to create a visual story and share it with the whole family. Next, draw another panel that shows how they can help others.

TALK IT OUT

- Do you think Jesus' life was easy? Why or why not?
- How do you know what Jesus was like? Stories in the Bible?
- What does it mean to be Jesus' hands and feet here on earth? (In other words, what does it mean to do what Jesus would do if He were physically here on earth?)

PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION

Emphasize *service*, *giving*, and *kindness*. Explain that Jesus wants us to share God's love with those around us. Ask this question: "*What do people see when they look at your life?*" Explain that others should see "big smiles," nice words, kindness, goodness, friendship—an example that Jesus has set for us! Point out that it makes God sad when we hurt others and use mean words. Obeying parents and elders, and treating friends and family with love and respect, shows that we love God.

TALK TO GOD

As you pray, encourage your child to (1) thank Jesus for being our example and (2) discuss the many ways we can show His love to the world.