

**“WHAT KIDS NEED” - Part 2**  
Raising G Rated Children in an X Rated World  
Deuteronomy 4:5-14  
October 5, 2008

How can we raise G-Rated kids in an X-rated world? It's not easy. But the Lord has given us certain principles. We can look at childhood as the apprenticeship into adulthood, and the process is similar to the way the Apostle Paul mentored young Timothy. We need to look at the principles that Paul used. Last week we established some goals for our kids. We look at the characteristics that we want them to develop in order to become people we can be proud of. We lifted up the 5 C's of Confidence, Character, Conviction Compassion, and Competence. But how do we develop those characteristics?

There are 10 things that our kids need. We have already listed the first two. Kids need belief. They need to know and see that we believe in the importance of parenting, and that we take that task seriously. And kids need presence. We need to make time with our children a priority. It is one of the most important tasks we have in life. Children are both a gift and a responsibility, and we need to take both gift and responsibility seriously. And then the list continues.

### **3. Kids Need Memories.**

Good kids have good memories. When I look at my life I am thrilled that the good memories overwhelm the bad. I remember times with my family and friends, at scouts, in sports, at church, in school, at camp. I remember the victories and the losses, and knowing that everything comes together to make me, me. Through it all, the joys overwhelm the sorrows. That's good because in many ways, our lives are nothing but a museum of memories. Each memory is like a frame in the film of life that adds to the identity, health, confidence, character, and conviction of who we are. But not everyone has had my experience. Some don't have good memories. For some there was pain and abuse, and the picture of those growing years is not very bright. I'm sorry about that. I don't even pretend to understand the pain that you must have gone through. But what I do understand is the power of memories and that we can redeem those negative memories by making positive memories in the life of our kids. For memories make up the foundation of who we are.

Not only are memories important to us, they are also important to God. I know that because we were created with the ability to remember everything. We may not be able to recall everything, but we do remember it. We remember scents, scenes, and situations. And when I look through the scriptures, God often gives us lessons to remember. After the flood the Lord said that He would put the rainbow in the sky so God would remember to sustain humanity; to remember how much He loves us. Today we celebrate communion to remember that Jesus gave himself up, He died on the cross for us. And in Deuteronomy 4, we read how important memories are: *“Only be careful and watch yourself closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”* We remember how good God is, and we teach our children to remember as well.

As parents, we build memories in our children. The question is, are those memories good or bad? When the frames of experience are all spliced together, will it be something to hold on to, or to run away from? Was mom playful or painful? Was dad a pleasure or a pest? Did parents devote themselves to one another or destroy one another? And grandparents, what will they remember about you? You're a significant influence in their life. Will they remember gentle grandpa or the grouch? Grandma's cookies or her obsession for cleaning? What are the memories that we are building in our kids?

And how do we create good memories? We can do it with traditions. Growing up, my family's tradition was to go to Grandma's every Sunday, where the extended family gathered. We were connected to one another and it was special. A good memory. So in my family, every Sunday we would go to my parents' home to meet with my siblings and their families. We grew together and our kids grew together, giving support and joy to one another. On Nancy's side one tradition is taking a vacation together. Again the kids grow close to one another. That tradition is so ingrained that today, even though those kids are all grown, they still look forward to getting away together. It is an important tradition for them. Good memories. Establish traditions where your children can gain a sense of normalcy and belonging, that those memories might warm their hearts and souls.

Or create memories by going on adventures. As a child my father would sometimes gather the whole family in the car, and starting with the oldest, each one would choose the direction we would go at the next intersection. There was no telling where we might end up because we usually chose the direction long before we got to the intersection. And being the youngest, I never knew where we were anyway. Those adventures are part of my good memories. Jump in the car. Go some place you have never been. Give your child the adventure of a new experience. I believe that kids would rather be in a Yugo headed toward an adventure than in a Mercedes parked in the driveway. It is all a part of their memories.

Another practical idea for memories, is to capture them. Take pictures and videos. Remember to save them on computers and CD's. I had some pictures on my computer when the computer crashed and I lost them. So back them up, but first we must take them. Each one holds a memory. Each picture tells a story. And each story points back to one of the five C's. Or we can make memories by writing letters, because at some point, every kid reaches a stage when they wonder, "Does anyone love me? Does anybody care? Am I just a number on this planet?" Wouldn't it be nice for that kid to reach under their bed and pull out a box of letters from Mom or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa. All of a sudden, here's exhibit A. You are loved. That is huge. As memories are huge. Building memories will get us an A+ in parenting and it's never too late to start.

Find ways to make memories. Get ideas wherever, from whomever you can find them. And don't be afraid to seek help, for Proverbs 2 tells us, "*Cry out for wisdom, and beg for understanding. Search for it like silver, and hunt for it like hidden treasure. Then you will understand respect for the Lord, and you will find that you know God. Only the Lord gives wisdom; He gives knowledge and understanding.*" Go to the Lord for help. For in order to raise G-Rated Kids in an X-Rated world, kids need belief. They need presence. They need memories, and ...

#### 4. Kids Need Encouragement

Do your children need encouragement? Here's a test. Take a mirror and put it under their nose. If they are breathing, they need encouragement. Encouragement is one of the deepest cravings that we have. In all my years of working with people I've never met anybody who said, "Stop encouraging me. Please. I've had it up to here with encouragement. Just stop it!" Nobody does that. We need encouragement. We crave encouragement. Encouragement is food for our souls.

Let's go down memory lane together. There we see pictures of men and women who have influenced us in a positive way. They said words that helped make us who and what we are. Words like "I believe in you." These are the cheerleaders in your life. In a darker area are the names and faces of people who have said harmful, hurtful things. When we see those faces, we immediately remember what they said or the tone in which they spoke. Their words have left a mark. Their words have stung.

Most of us find it easier to remember the negatives rather than the positives. We remember them because they leave scars. We teach children the most ridiculous saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That's not true. Often it is much easier to heal the damage done by sticks and stones rather than words. Words we remember forever.

In Proverbs 12 we read, "*Careless words stab like a sword.*" Experience has taught us the truth of that statement. I recently heard about a study about how the brain processes pain. Basically it said that the brain doesn't differentiate between physical or emotional pain. Words can literally hurt us, just like sticks and stones. And just as physical injuries leave scars, so do emotional wounds. But I didn't have to learn that from some study. We've learned it from life. And yet as parents, we often use words that modify the lives of our kids. We say, "This is my shy daughter," and the girl disappears by hiding behind mom or sliding under the pew." We say, "This is my wild son." And he laughs and sets the curtains on fire. Our words become self-fulfilling prophecies. Words are powerful. They can build confidence or destroy hope. Kids need confidence. Kids need hope. And kids need encouragement. But how can I become a more encouraging person. A couple of ways.

##### 1. See it and say it in positive ways.

Try to catch some little one doing things right. I know that's not our nature. We lift up the negatives: "Why didn't you ... When will you ... You always ...." You can fill in the blanks. What if instead of seeing and saying the negatives, we turn it around and lift up the positive. You walk into their bed room and can actually see the floor. Or the bed is made. You go in the bathroom and toilet seat's down. Give thanks and praise. Rejoice! See it and say it in positive way.

We need to picture our kids with a tattoo on their forehead, and for some that's not a real big stretch, but the tattoo says, "Encourage me," so every time we see them it is right in front of us. Encourage me. If you're out of practice start small. "Hey! You're breathing on your own! Good job!" ... "You're dressed. I love it!" "Your nose ring matches your belt.

Terrific.” Whatever it is, offer encouragement. But don’t expect any encouragement in return. After all, you are the parent. Teach them as a parent. And they are kids. Let them be kids. And besides, if you don’t expect encouragement back, you will never be disappointed. Usually kids don’t know what to say or how to encourage. Their emotional vocabulary is very limited. They are good with short, little emotional statements like, “I hate you!” Chances are, they don’t really hate you. They just lack the emotional vocabulary to know what to say. Don’t expect more than they can offer. Just see it, and say it positively. Don’t expect anything in return.

## 2. Say it beyond performance.

Surface or superficial encouragement doesn’t help much. “Nice shirt.” So what. It doesn’t mean much. Or “I saw you at the basketball game. You don’t sweat as much as the other kids on the bench.” That’s surface encouragement. It’s performance based. Most of what we say to our kids is either shame oriented or performance oriented. And that’s not good. And most of you know that because that was the case when you were growing up. And the result is that when someone asks us who we are, we tell them what we do. Our identity is based on our actions, our performance, not on who we are. A pastor is what I do. A child of God is who I am. The time will come when I am no longer a pastor. But I will always be a child of God. That is who I am. And that is the basis of my confidence and my hope.

At times, our kids are going to fail. We all do. If their identity, confidence and hope is tied only to performance, those moments can destroy them. As a nation we have developed an attitude that says, “If you’re not the undefeated champion, you’re a loser and a failure.” How foolish. How shallow. We need to change our understanding of winning and losing; to change priorities about what is truly important; to change our perception of identity from what we do to who we are. And to do that, we have to let our kids know, without a doubt, that we love them unconditionally. That they are our child. That they are a child of God, and nothing can change that. At times, tough love may require us to turn away from them, to allow them to learn from the consequences of their choices and decisions. But most times we need to encourage them, letting them know that we love them and believe in them.

When our children were little they brought home some hideous art project and what did we say? “That’s great! Let’s put it on the refrigerator.” You loved it because it was a little piece of them. We need to continue that attitude through life. We love them and encourage them, not because of their performance, but because of who they are; because of whose they are. They are ours. And with us, they belong to God. Our kids need the encouragement that says I love you and believe in you simply because you are you, and you are mine.

Chances are, you think that’s a good idea. But we haven’t been trained that way by our parents. We haven’t practiced encouraging that way. And society doesn’t help. Where do we get the ability to encourage like we should. It comes from the heart. The words that come out of the mouth are given birth in the soul, in the heart, in who we are. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 12 “*A good person produces good words from a good heart. And an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart.*” So we’ve got a choice. We can

use careless words that stab, or we can use careful words that build up.

It is all about raising G-Rated kids in an X-Rated world. It's about helping our children develop the five C's of Confidence, Character, Conviction Compassion, Competence. To do that, kids need belief, presence, memories, and encouragement. They need more, but for now, consider and practice what we have learned, that God might be honored and praised through the words of our mouths, the work of our hands, and through the children that we raise. And in your life may it all be so. Amen.