



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 9 |
| <i>Section 1</i> <i>Winning Our Children's Hearts</i> | 13 |
| Chapter 1 What We Need to Succeed..... | 15 |
| Chapter 2 What in Their World Is Going On? | 20 |
| Chapter 3 The Results of Affection | 25 |
| Chapter 4 Discovering Their Dreams..... | 30 |
| Chapter 5 Review and Revisit, Chapters 1–4..... | 35 |
| Chapter 6 A Most Powerful Motivator..... | 39 |
| Chapter 7 One-on-One, Part 1..... | 44 |
| Chapter 8 But It's Not My Birthday!..... | 49 |
| Chapter 9 Review and Revisit, Chapters 6–8..... | 54 |
| Chapter 10 Invest in the Best..... | 59 |
| Chapter 11 Learning Their Limits | 64 |
| Chapter 12 A Secret Life | 69 |
| Chapter 13 Review and Revisit, Section 1 | 74 |

| | | |
|------------------|--|-----|
| <i>Section 2</i> | <i>Leading Our Children's Hearts to Christ</i> | 83 |
| Chapter 14 | One-on-One, Part 2 | 84 |
| Chapter 15 | An Invitation | 89 |
| Chapter 16 | A Friend Loves at All Times | 94 |
| Chapter 17 | Review and Revisit, Section 2 | 100 |
| | | |
| <i>Section 3</i> | <i>Developing Christian Principles at Home</i> | 105 |
| Chapter 18 | Soul Power | 106 |
| Chapter 19 | Winning Worship | 111 |
| Chapter 20 | The Connection That Counts | 117 |
| Chapter 21 | Review and Revisit, Chapters 18–20 | 123 |
| Chapter 22 | Me, Myself, and I | 128 |
| Chapter 23 | A Sword Fight With the Devil | 133 |
| Chapter 24 | Organizing Confusion | 138 |
| Chapter 25 | Review and Revisit, Chapters 22–24 | 143 |
| Chapter 26 | Building on Success | 149 |
| | | |
| Appendix 1 | Devotional Bible Passages | 154 |
| Appendix 2 | Encouraging Bible Verses | 155 |
| Appendix 3 | Resources | 158 |



Introduction

As parents, we desire to give our children the best. Their happiness during childhood and youth and their future success as adults are important to us. Yet, deep in our hearts, we know our children are not the priorities they should be. Yes, we provide them with material things, but we are allowing our own busyness to steal time and training that are rightfully theirs.

God never intended parenting to be filled with missed opportunities, regrets, and frustrations. Oh, how He longs to make our homes places of joy and places to help our precious children become respectful, obedient, and happy. But for children to develop their potential, parents must learn to do their part!

The Connected Family is a practical twenty-six step program designed to help parents make their children high priorities, lead them to make commitments to God, and teach them the tools for Christian living.

Section 1, chapters 1–13, is dedicated to teaching parents how to win the affections of their children. A solid relationship with our children is the foundation of successful parenting. Without our children's affections, our progress in parenting will be slow and laborious. When we have won our

children's hearts, our parenting becomes not only more effective but also the rewarding experience God intended it to be.

The second section, chapters 14–17, builds on the close relationship gained in section 1 and teaches parents how to lead their children to make commitments to follow God.

The third and final section, chapters 18–26, introduces valuable principles that unite the family. It teaches both parents and children how to advance in the practical Christian life.

Each chapter contains an informative reading, a Step Forward section, and a Journal Questions and Answers section. The Step Forward section outlines assignments for each day. The Journal Questions and Answers section gives opportunity to evaluate our progress and journal our thoughts and activities.

The Connected Family is not primarily a book you read. *It is a book you do!* Reading the chapters without wholeheartedly engaging in the activities will not bring maximum results. Remember, we learn to swim in the water, not by standing on the shore!

Each chapter is intended to bring tangible results. You are not left to read long passages of theories and then figure out how to apply them to your parenting. Each chapter is concise, practical, and rewarding for both you and your children.

We recommend you read a chapter each day. If some of the Step Forward assignments take more than a day—and a few of them will—feel free to take extra time to accomplish them before moving on. Some of the Journal Questions and Answers responses will be best recorded after the day's activities or at the beginning of the following day.

We encourage you to go through *The Connected Family* with your spouse, if possible. You will have the best results if you each obtain a copy. Having your own copies will allow both of you to answer the questions and journal your thoughts privately before coming together to discuss what you found and how to practically carry out the latest step. If that is not possible or if you are a single parent, then consider going

through this book with someone in a similar situation—perhaps another single parent or a friend. You can encourage each other and share your progress!

Implementing the principles taught in *The Connected Family* will not be easy, but the book will provide you with an opportunity and a challenge to become the parents you have always longed to be. Your children will thank you someday!



SECTION 1

Winning Our Children's Hearts



CHAPTER 1

What We Need to Succeed

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.
—Ecclesiastes 9:10

In 1914, British explorer Ernest Shackleton set sail aboard the *Endurance*, seeking the last unclaimed prize in polar exploration—crossing the Antarctic continent on foot.

As the *Endurance* neared the Antarctic coast, the ship became immobilized in pack ice. Shackleton and his twenty-seven men faced the grim reality that they were trapped. Solid ice surrounded them as far as the eye could see.

Locked in ice, they drifted north for the next ten months. As pressure from the ice increased, the wooden ship twisted and groaned until it tilted at a thirty-degree angle. Shackleton acknowledged the inevitable: what the ice gets the ice keeps. He gave orders to abandon ship. Men, dogs, lifeboats, and supplies were unloaded. A few weeks later, the *Endurance* went down. The crew was now stranded on a giant ice raft in the Weddell Sea, three hundred miles from land.

Shackleton's focus became the survival of *all* his men. His first instinct was to walk across the ice to safety, but he soon realized the utter impossibility of traversing the jagged ice floes with their supplies and boats. They were forced to set up Patience Camp and wait for an opportunity to escape the grip of the ice. As weeks rolled into months, the ice began to

break up. The swell of the sea could be felt once more. Five months after being forced onto the ice, the floe on which they were camped broke in two, and Shackleton gave orders to launch the three boats. Elephant Island, one hundred miles to the north, was their destination.

The next seven days at sea were almost unbearable. Bitter cold, along with wild winds and waves that repeatedly drenched the men, threatened to end their miserable existence. It took constant effort to stay afloat. Mind-numbing exhaustion almost extinguished all hope of survival. But finally, for the first time in 497 days, all twenty-eight men set foot on land, the barren and uninhabited Elephant Island.

Knowing there was little chance of ever being rescued from their current location, Shackleton decided to go for help. Taking the largest lifeboat, the twenty-two-foot-long *James Caird*, and five men, he set out to cross some of the roughest seas known to man. This time, their destination was South Georgia Island, an intimidating eight hundred miles away!

On the rough sea, the *James Caird* became dangerously coated with ice, both inside and outside, requiring hours of tedious chipping to keep it afloat. Overcast skies made star-based navigation challenging. But after seventeen days in stormy seas and hurricane-force winds, the *James Caird* miraculously landed on the west coast of South Georgia Island.

They were agonizingly close to their destination. Their goal, a whaling station on the other side of the island, was still twenty-two miles away. With frostbitten feet, Shackleton and two others set off across uncharted mountains. South Georgia's nine-thousand-foot peaks were considered impassable. Glaciers, crevasses, and precipices turned the tired men back time and again. They were forced to descend a steep icy slope just as night was falling. Hacking each step with an ax made progress so slow that they risked freezing to death. The

alternative was another incredible risk. The men linked together, forming a three-man toboggan team—minus the toboggan. Not knowing what lay ahead, they hurtled down the slope for a hundred heart-pounding seconds. Their laughter when they landed in a snowbank revealed their relief.

The thirty-six-hour hike finally brought them to the whaling station, where they made rescue plans for the remaining men. Three months later, all twenty-eight men were reunited. Not one was lost.

How does Shackleton's heroic story relate to parenting? While we may not face Shackleton's polar-expedition challenges, it's no easy task to raise children. Ice and wind may not block our progress but plenty of things do. This modern secular world is filled with temptations and difficulties we must learn to recognize and overcome. Like Shackleton, we can lead our children to safety. Not one needs to be lost.

Shackleton's family motto was *fortitudine vincimus*, "by endurance we conquer." In the delicate work of raising children, we will need to add three additional requests to our prayers for endurance. We need to ask God for power, determination, and commitment.

Praying for power

God has more than enough power to carry us through the upcoming weeks of focused parent training. To receive this power, James 4:2 tells us we must pray for it. "You do not have because you do not ask." A simple prayer may be, "Thank You, God, for this opportunity to be a better parent. Give me Your power daily to rise above my old habits and to respond more appropriately to my children. Thank You for answering my prayer. Amen." With God's enabling power in our lives, we can succeed where we have previously failed.

Praying for determination

Shackleton was determined. This same attitude is needed in raising our children. Difficulties will come. We can count on that. Seemingly insurmountable roadblocks will hinder our progress, but God stands ready to fill us with determination. To receive it, we must personally ask God to make it a reality in our lives, and He will!

Praying for commitment

Are you willing to commit the next four to six weeks to your children? This commitment will mean some other pursuits will have to be postponed. Plans may have to be altered. To have the depth of commitment that will make this endeavor a success, we need God's help. For the benefit of our families, we will need the commitment to put aside our individual plans and desires. We will need commitment to overcome our children's possible disinterest and indifference. Again, we must ask God for the commitment needed to achieve our goals. He is willing and waiting to answer this prayer!

Praying for our children

Chapter 15 will guide us in asking our children to make a deeper commitment to Christ; and although we will spend the next couple of weeks working toward this goal, the Holy Spirit is the only One who can change hearts. In addition to praying for power, determination, and commitment, begin praying specifically that each of your children will choose to follow the Lord.

Step Forward

- Pray specifically to be filled with God's power, determination, and commitment.
- Pray specifically for each of your children by name.

Journal Questions and Answers

1. Rewrite Ecclesiastes 9:10 in your own words: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.”

2. Which quality do you feel you need the most—power, determination, or commitment? Why?

3. What are the main issues that need to be addressed in each of your children? Did you pray specifically for them and yourself in these areas?



*Success seems to be largely a matter
of hanging on after others have let go.*

—William Feather



CHAPTER 2

What in Their World Is Going On?

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds.

— *Proverbs 27:23*

When children become interested in activities their parents struggle to relate to, we give the disconnect a name. We say there is a generation gap. It does not happen overnight, and usually it is not the fault of the youth. This difference in values and attitudes often results from the parents' insufficient effort to stay connected to the expanding world of their children. We frequently are not half as interested in our children as we need to be in order to make our parenting successful. Overcommitment in some areas and laziness in others lead us to neglect our children in a variety of ways. Over time, as a natural consequence of our neglect, the children grow away from us and away from our influence. If this pattern is not corrected, eventually our young people will conclude, *Mom and Dad just don't understand. They are from a different age and on a different page.*

Such distancing doesn't have to be our experience. How we connect and stay connected with our children is the object of today's activities. We need to become more observant. We need to know what is going on in our children's world. We need to listen carefully to their conversations. What do they like to talk about with their siblings? What do they discuss with their friends? What topics spark their interest when we

engage them in conversation? Once we have an understanding of these things, we will be able to connect with them more intelligently.

Each room in the home will tell us something about our children. We may see their favorite beverages in the refrigerator or notice a new shirt in the laundry; but of all the rooms in the house, their bedrooms will tell us the most about their world. Take a tour of your children's rooms when they are not present. What is on their walls, in their closets, and in their dresser drawers? Ignore the mess for now and take in all the objects. Take time to peruse the books on their shelves and flip through any magazines or other reading material you come across. What type of clothes do they like to wear? If they have a TV, note which channel was viewed most recently. Which DVDs and CDs appear to be their favorites? If they have an iPod or MP3 player, what music or videos have they downloaded? These careful observations will give us valuable insight into their world.

Soon we will begin to see that our children are like twenty-four-hour radio stations. They are constantly transmitting their needs, desires, likes, and dislikes; but only those who are tuned in will receive the signals. Are we receiving the signals our children are consciously or unconsciously transmitting every moment of the day?

Do we know whether our children have any goals or dreams for the future? With younger children, do we know their favorite colors, their favorite foods, their favorite clothes, or their favorite places to go? Who are their closest friends? Who are they spending time with? Do we know who our older children are calling on the phone? Do we know what text messages they are sending and receiving, who they are e-mailing, and who is e-mailing them? Do we know the sites they visit on the Internet, what they have marked for quick access, and their browser history? Who are their friends on Facebook or other social networking sites? Who are they

chatting with online? What images are they sending each other? What about the language they are using to describe their world? Is it respectful, or is it filled with slang learned from friends or from what they are watching and reading?

If you have teenagers with access to the Internet or a cell phone and any of this technology is foreign to you, you need to learn about the technology and how teens use it. There is a whole new world out there, and it is our responsibility to be informed about the potential dangers. Begin with a visit to www.internetsafety101.org.

There is another side to observing our children. What do they avoid? What do they dislike? Are they encountering any problems at school? Have they expressed preferences that we have quickly and thoughtlessly criticized?

We should also examine our children's spiritual world. Are they more interested in spiritual things now than a year ago, or are they less interested? Are they maturing in Christ as the years pass, or are they becoming disinterested?

Perhaps you feel disconnected from your children and realize that you have neglected to take interest in their world. Do not be discouraged. It is not too late! This can be the day you begin to become observant, connected parents. Once you do connect with their world, you will find yourselves making all kinds of interesting observations that will help you guide your young people in the days ahead. Remember, working through *The Connected Family* is a process, and becoming more observant is just one step in winning your children's hearts!

Today's chapter has presented many questions that will require some thought to answer. Do not allow yourself to be disheartened; remember yesterday's prayer. By making the effort now to tune it to your children's world, you are closing the generation gap before it has a chance to grow any wider. By being observant and proactive parents, you are doing more good than you realize.

Note: Today is not the day to solve problems; it is a day to simply observe. Refrain from reacting to any findings with negative actions, words, or feelings. Do not confront your children with anything you found disturbing. In later chapters, we will delve into the heart of any issues that may have come to light during your observations. In the meantime, let's put into practice the verse that advises, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19).

Step Forward

- Pray specifically for God to lead you in your observations.
- Without making your motives or activities known, tune in to your children's world today.
- Take time to privately compare your observations with your spouse if possible.

Journal Questions and Answers

1. Rewrite Proverbs 27:23 in your own words: "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds." Replace *flocks* with the names of your children.

2. What areas of your life have prevented you from connecting with your children? Where have you been overcommitted or lazy? Be honest and specific.

3. What did you find in your children's rooms that surprised you both positively and negatively?



*You learn something every day
if you pay attention.*

—Ray LeBlond



CHAPTER 3

The Results of Affection

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
even as God in Christ forgave you.*

—Ephesians 4:32

Yesterday you may have observed things that cause you to be concerned. In later chapters, these issues will be addressed; but in order to obtain a favorable response from our children when we express our concerns, we must first learn the right approach. Immediately attacking the issues is not the best plan. Approaching our children with tenderness will produce more desirable results. Kindness will win children to us; criticism will drive them away. Encouragement draws them in; unnecessarily pointing out their faults pushes them away. We have much to consider before we can effectively address yesterday's discoveries.

Even though we recognize it is not the best method, we often try to improve our children's behavior by correcting their bad habits. We tell them, "Don't do this," or "Stop doing that." We may even resort to that exaggerated accusation: "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times." This approach is about as effective as trying to kill a weed by plucking off one or two leaves each day. These leaves, the bad habits of our children, grow slowly at first, but the time comes when more leaves begin to sprout than we can pluck. Once our children are teenagers, the leaves grow so prolifically that