

CHAPTER I



Introduction: Setting the Stage

The fact that you are reading this book suggests you probably want to be a great parent or grandparent. You might also be concerned about whether each of your children will grow up to love and honor God. Unfortunately, today there is a lot to be concerned about! Parenting has never been an easy task. However, the world in which we are raising our children today contains ubiquitous temptations, pressures, and dangers unlike anything our parents could have dreamed of when they were raising us. We live in an age when we desperately need God's help if we are going to succeed in raising our children to become godly young adults.

Though this book is written from the context of modern American culture, the principles God uses when working with families are not limited to a particular era or cultural context. God's standards for the home remain the same, regardless of the generation or culture. The application of those principles will be unique to each home, but they have proven effective time and again as a means of building God-honoring homes and spiritually healthy families.

In this book we will apply the Seven Realities outlined in *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* to the crucial task of raising children. To be honest, we have written numerous books before, but it has taken a long time for us to feel comfortable enough to write this particular one. There are several reasons. For one, while we have been leaders in numerous settings, being a parent has been one of

the most challenging assignments we have ever undertaken. We have collected a bucketful of lessons on what not to do! However, we have always believed that if there was one thing we wanted to “get right,” it was to be a good parent. To that end we have spent the last three decades learning everything we could on the subject, regardless of how painful some of those lessons were! We have finally come to the place where we believe we have gained some valuable lessons that need to be shared with other parents. Second, we wanted to wait until our own children had successfully “survived” our parenting failures before we ventured to put our thoughts on the subject down in writing! Both of us are married to our first wives and we each have three children (ages thirteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-five, and twenty-seven). You’ll hear more about them later, but as of today they are all walking with the Lord and doing great. We sincerely hope that the truths you learn in the following pages will result in a profound blessing for your family.

Throughout this book, we’ll refer to our families. Often we do this not because we believe our families or our parenting skills ought to necessarily be emulated, but because we want to show how we have implemented biblical principles in our own homes. Our children provided the laboratory for our child-rearing research! (They may have wished we had used mice!) In this book, we’ll relate to you some of our successes. Sometimes we got it right! But we’ll also share some of our failures. The key is not so much what we did but the biblical principles we learned and experienced.

The Current Situation

As we begin, let’s quickly review the context in which we are raising our children. The following statistics and summary statements are fairly current to the publication of this book. They were taken from a variety of research organizations, government sources, and Christian organizations that pertain to the family in North America. See if is anything surprises you.

Family Statistics

Marriage/Divorce

- Sixty-five percent of kids grow up in a home with two married parents, and 35 percent of all children in North America are affected by divorce.¹
- Only 45 percent of children grow up in a home with both of their biological parents.²
- Divorce rate: in US 46 percent, in Canada 43 percent.³
- Living common-law increases the chance of a marital breakdown by 50 percent. Marriages preceded by a common-law union are distinctly less stable than those that began at the altar.⁴
- Religious belief decreases the chance of divorce. People who attend religious services during the year have between a 10 percent and 31 percent lower divorce rate.⁵
- In general, the predicted likelihood that a marriage will succeed is higher for people who marry in their thirties, did not live common-law before the wedding, have children, attend religious services, are university educated, and believe that marriage is important if they are to be happy.⁶
- Problems experienced by children of divorced couples:
 - Increased alcohol and marijuana use
 - Greater likelihood of problems with peers and authority figures
 - Less likely to marry and more likely to divorce
 - Twice as likely to experience anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues

*Bullying in Schools*⁷

- One in four teens are bullied; one out of five kids admits to being a bully or doing some “bullying.”
- As many as 160,000 kids stay home on any given day because of bullying. Fifteen percent of all school absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied at school.
- Forty-three percent of students fear harassment in the bathroom at school.

- Each month 282,000 students are physically attacked in secondary schools.
- Forty-three percent of kids have been bullied while online. Ninety-seven percent of middle-school students admit to being bullied while online.
- Every seven minutes a child is bullied. One out of every ten students who drops out of school does so because of repeated bullying.
- Every thirty minutes a teenager attempts suicide due to bullying. The leading cause of death among children under the age of fourteen is suicide. *Bullycide* is the new term for suicide as a result of being bullied.⁸

Rates of Obesity

- One out of three kids are considered overweight or obese.⁹

Internet Addiction

- Cybersex Addiction—compulsive use of Internet pornography, adult chat rooms, or adult fantasy role-play sites impacting negatively on real-life intimate relationships.
- Cyber-Relationship Addiction—addiction to social networking, chat rooms, and messaging to the point where virtual, online friends become more important than real-life relationships with family and friends.
- Net Compulsions—such as compulsive online gaming, gambling, stock trading, or compulsive use of online auction sites such as eBay often result in financial and job-related problems.
- Information Overload—compulsive web surfing or database searching, leading to lower work productivity and less social interaction with family and friends.
- Computer Addiction—obsessive playing of off-line computer games, such as Solitaire or Minesweeper, or obsessive computer programming.¹⁰
- Internet Porn Stats:
 - The largest consumer of Internet pornography is the twelve to seventeen age group.¹¹

- The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.¹²
- Twenty-one percent of teens say they have looked at something on the Internet that they wouldn't want their parents to know about.¹³
- Seventy percent of sexual advances over the Internet happened while youngsters were on a home computer.¹⁴

Sex

- Forty-two percent of high school students admitted to having sex without a condom.¹⁵
- The abstinence education program *Choosing the Best* is 47 percent more effective at delaying a teen's first sexual encounter than condom-promoting sex education programs.¹⁶
- Adolescents who take virginity pledges are less likely to experience teen pregnancy, are less likely to be sexually active while in high school and as young adults, are less likely to give birth as teens or young adults, are less likely to give birth out of wedlock, are less likely to engage in unprotected sex, and will have fewer sexual partners.¹⁷

Understanding This Generation

The statistics are sobering. We don't need to convince you that the Internet, smartphones, and Wi-Fi are dramatically altering the parenting playing field. Children are growing up being bombarded with Internet messages and advertisements. We know a church youth minister who did an experiment. He randomly texted six teenagers from his youth group at 9:15 a.m. on Monday. That was thirty minutes into their first class period when all cell phones are to be turned off. He received answers from all six students in less than two minutes! Your children are living in a world filled with temptations, pressures, and bullying that you never dreamed of when you were their age.

The problem for our families, however, is not necessarily that society has become technologically saturated. The real issue is that society has grown from being secular to being increasingly anti-Christian. Today,

public schools teach curriculum that often mocks Christian beliefs and values. Modern society does not obtain its views of the family, morality, or sexuality from the Bible. Rather, modern society upholds that people are free to do whatever they want—with exceptions, of course. If an artist wants to exhibit a grotesque picture that blasphemes Jesus Christ, it is praised as a work of art. But increasingly, putting out a manger scene at Christmas is being condemned as bigoted and hateful. Today, celebrities are enthusiastically cheered when they promote same-sex marriage, but if a business donates money to support healthy marriages between men and women, they run the risk of being boycotted. Our children are growing up in a society that is becoming increasingly *anti-Christian*. This will have profound consequences for our parenting.

In the midst of the rapid secularization of society, many parents sincerely want to raise their children to love and serve God. Many Christian parents yearn for their children to grow up experiencing God's blessing on their lives. Though the challenges are many, solutions *are* available. In fact, the blacker the pitch that society reaches, the more determined God is to use Christian families as lights on a hill (Matt. 5:14–16). God is just as interested in working through families today to extend His kingdom as He was with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse, Mary, and Joseph.

In the following pages, we will give you tools to help your family be God-centered, God-directed, and God-blessed as you navigate through the many obstacles and challenges your family is facing. As you read the following pages, ask God to open your heart and mind to how He wants to guide and enable you to experience God's best for your family.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

1. If you were to rate the current health of your family on a scale of 1 to 10, what number would you give it? Why?
2. Of all the issues identified in this chapter, which one concerns you most for your family?
3. What is one way you are using technology for the benefit of your family?
4. What is one way you find technology detrimental to your family life today?

5. In what ways are the Christian beliefs and values of your family currently being attacked? How might you better prepare your children for what they will be facing in a secular society?

Notes

1. See <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/famsoc.asp>.
2. Susan Jones, "Fewer than Half of American Children Growing Up In Intact Families, Survey Says," CNS News (December 15, 2012), <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/fewer-half-american-children-growing-intact-families-survey-finds>.
3. See <http://www.separation.ca/pdfs/divorcefacts.pdf>.
4. See <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2006001/9198-eng.htm>.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. See <http://2011bullyingprogram.weebly.com/bullying-statistics.html>.
8. See <http://www.risk-within-reason.com/2012/03/06/bullying-facts-statistics>.
9. See http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/body/overweight_obesity.html.
10. See http://www.helpguide.org/mental/internet_cybersex_addiction.htm.
11. Internet Pornography Statistics. Internet Filter Review, 2004.
12. Ibid.
13. "A World of Their Own," *Newsweek*, May 8, 2000.
14. "One in Five Kids Has Been Propositioned for Cybersex," *Legal Facts*, vol. 2, No. 3, 2000.
15. "Teens, Sex, & the Media," *Media Scope*, 2001.
16. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 2004, www.cdc.gov.
17. Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson, and Jennifer Marshall, "Teens Who Make Virginity Pledges Have Substantially Improved Life Outcomes," The Heritage Foundation, September 21, 2004.