

Parenting With Intimacy: ***Experiencing Great Commandment Love In Your Family***

Congratulations! You've made an important decision that will have far-reaching, even life-changing results. Considering all the other demands on your time, your willingness to tackle a workbook on parenting demonstrates that your family is important to you.

We realize that this will require an investment of your time which could otherwise be spent on other more personally pleasurable activities such as pursuing a favorite hobby, piloting through cyberspace, or perfecting your armchair quarter-backing skills. We promise to make it worth your while.

It's a decision you won't regret.

Getting the Most From This Workbook

This workbook is designed to be used by individuals, couples, and groups who want to learn how to make their family relationships more intimate, nurturing, and caring.

If you have picked up this workbook, you likely have a desire to see continued growth in your family relationships. You may even personally desire to learn how to have an intimate relationship with each of your children.

Each chapter contains practical ideas and thought-provoking exercises to help you develop a closer, more intimate relationship with your child or children. In addition to reading the text . . .

- You will be invited to “**Stop and consider**” something you’ve just read. You will have space to reflect and write your thoughts and feelings about important concepts and principles.
- You will be invited to specifically “**Apply the principles**” to your own children. You’ll define how the principles could actually work in your own family relationships!
- Opportunities for **Scripture Reflection and Prayer** are found in several chapters which invite you to deepen your experience of God’s love and care for you.
- Each chapter also contains an “**Experiencing Biblical Truth**” section where you will be guided to respond to and incorporate scriptural truth into your personal and family life. This is how lasting change occurs—as we experience Scripture, “being doers of the word!” (James 1:22).
- Finally, you will be given “**Homework For Your Home**”—assignments to help you develop and deepen “Great Commandment Love” as family lifestyle.

In addition, each chapter includes “**Special Thoughts for Single Parents**” and “**Special Thoughts for Blended Families.**” We recognize the greater challenges and complexity of family life for all members of these families.

To get the most from this workbook, we urge you to do the following:

1. Set aside time each week to read the chapter and work through the “boxes” personally. All exercises are for individual work. Your personal preparation will prepare you for “Homework for Our Homes” exercises.
2. Discuss the chapter with another person.

If you are married, we urge you and your spouse to prioritize time each week to work on and discuss the exercises in this workbook.

However, if you are a single parent or your spouse is not available, we recommend you find a trusted friend, counselor, or pastor who is willing to be your **partner** as you work through this workbook.

Because it is not good for anyone to be alone (Genesis 2:18), we all need someone with whom we can share, cry, laugh, hurt, and be comforted. This is part of God's plan—no one alone.

A good partner is someone who *cares for us*. We're not going to share our hurt with someone unless we're convinced of that person's care for us. We need someone who will stay close enough to know what we're going through and someone who will consistently be available to help. We must sense that our partner cares for us just because of who we are, not because of what we do. It's good to know that in addition to God there is at least one other human who really cares for us.

This person should be someone *we can trust*. We'll be reluctant to vulnerably share our hurt with others unless we know we can trust them. A trustworthy partner must be committed to not talking about us to others without our permission, respond with compassion and acceptance to our hurts and pain, and not use anything we've shared against us.

Availability is also important. We may have friends who care about us and are trustworthy, but if they are not available when we need them, we'll still hurt alone. This is one of those times when availability is just as important as ability.

Do you have a caring, trustworthy, and available partner? As you begin this parenting journey, identify a special person who can share this experience with you. This might be your spouse, pastor, counselor, or a special friend within the body of Christ. If you're married, significant benefits will be experienced if both you and your spouse embark on the journey!

Take time now to think about who your partner is going to be. After giving prayerful consideration and talking with your partner candidate, write your partner's name here: _____

The following “Personal Commitment” page clarifies what will be expected as you seek to make the most of your experience with this workbook. We suggest that you read it over carefully and discuss it with your partner before making this commitment.

Personal Commitment

1. I will set aside time each week to complete the individual exercises in this workbook, with honesty and sincerity.
2. I will prioritize time in my schedule for group meetings, discussing this material with my partner, and implementing principles with my child(ren).
3. I will participate in both the giving and receiving of support and care.
4. I will acknowledge and respect any differences in our stages of growth and will refrain from making comparisons with my partner or other families.
5. I will focus on my own thoughts, feelings, and actions rather than those of others as I seek to be accountable to God as the Divine Author of the family.
6. I will be open and willing for God to show me how I can relate more intimately with Him, and how I can meet needs in my partner's life and the life of each child.

Name:

Date:

Name:

Date:

Using the *Parenting With Intimacy* Workbook With a Class or Group

The majority of exercises in this workbook are designed to be done on your own or with your partner. However, you can gain a great deal by discussing what you're learning with others, especially with other parents.

A series of companion resources are designed to enhance your experience with this workbook in class or group settings:

***Parenting with Intimacy* Video Series**

These video tapes feature David Ferguson, Terri Snead and Paul Warren teaching all eight chapters of *Parenting with Intimacy*. Each lesson is approximately 25 minutes in length. Small groups and classes often let the videos "teach" the group and then facilitators lead in group discussion. These videos also serve as supplemental resources for leader preparation.

***Parenting with Intimacy* Audio Series**

Cassette tapes taken directly from the video series. Excellent for personal reinforcement of the content, "drive-time" preparation, exposing others to the principles, or as "make-up" for those who miss a class or group session.

***Parenting with Intimacy* Teaching Curriculum**

Detailed lesson plans with specific learning objectives, reproducible masters, and supplemental ideas for each of eight chapters of the workbook. An invaluable tool for those who teach and lead classes and small groups.

Chapter 1

Let the Journey Begin! (God's Design for Relationships)

Congratulations! You're about to embark on an exciting exploration of a new dimension of parenting--*parenting with intimacy*.

"Exploration? I didn't know I was signing on for an exploration. I was just looking for the latest *Top 10 Tips for Shaping Up Your Kids!*"

Don't panic. Take some deep breaths. You can do this. Admittedly, parenting with intimacy is not for the fainthearted, weak-kneed, or self-centered. It's hard work. But you're not afraid of hard work, are you?

"Well, no. I guess not."

Great! We're glad to have you on our journey. Rest assured, along the way we will be offering some of those "tips" you're seeking. And yet discipline, while an important aspect of parenting, is not the number-one issue.

Truly knowing your child, allowing your child to know you, and becoming caringly involved in his or her life are the true keys for developing an intimate, loving relationship between parent and child. Remember, loving your child is not a feeling—it's an action. We're going to ask you to take action by digging deeper into relationships than you may have before.

Truly knowing your child, allowing your child to know you, and becoming caringly involved in his or her life are the true keys for developing an intimate, loving relationship between parent and child.

What's that? No one told you to bring your excavation tools? Not to worry—we'll be sharing the important tools we all need for meaningful intimate relationships—relationships which reflect our love for God and for each other!

Before we get started, we'd like to introduce you to your traveling companions: The Warrens: Paul, Vicky and Matthew. The Fergusons: David, Teresa, Terri, Robin, and Eric. And the Sneads: Terri (Ferguson) Snead, her husband Wayne and their two sons, Brad and Michael. Throughout the ensuing pages, we'll be sharing true-life "Adventures in Parenting" of the Warrens, Fergusons, and Sneads—up close and personal.

It would be ego-enhancing to infer that we have "arrived" as parents. Ego-enhancing? Decidedly! Dishonest? Definitely! It's been said that confession is good for the soul but bad for the reputation. Be that as it may, we want you to know that we've made mistakes—lots of them!

No one has parenting totally "figured out." We're all fellow-sojourners on this journey. Some may be a little farther along, but we're all still "works-in-progress."

Now that we've introduced ourselves, let the journey begin! First on our itinerary is an assessment of where we are—a "**priorities check.**"

Priorities—everyone has them. Regardless of whether we've written ours down or even thought about them, we're living out what's important to us. When asked to list our priorities, most of us know some version of the "correct answer:" (1) God, (2) Family, (3) Ministry, (4) Work. We may pass this particular exam, but how are we doing on the "living exam?"

The following self-assessment tool will help us assess our true priorities. If we have to "hedge" our answers or if we respond with several "no's," we probably need to do some restructuring of our priorities. Let's ask ourselves, "What's going to genuinely matter ten years from now?" "What are the most important things in this life?"

Parenting with Intimacy Self-Assessment Inventory

Yes *No*

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|----|--|
| ___ | ___ | 1. | (If married) I spend meaningful, uninterrupted time alone with my spouse at least once a week. |
| ___ | ___ | 2. | I spend uninterrupted "meaningful-to-my-children" time with each of my children at least once a week. |
| ___ | ___ | 3. | I know who my children's friends are. |
| ___ | ___ | 4. | I know what my children are doing in school. |
| ___ | ___ | 5. | I know what stresses my children are under. |
| ___ | ___ | 6. | My spouse and children know me; I regularly share both joys and concerns with them. |
| ___ | ___ | 7. | I am approachable to my spouse and family; they are not hesitant to vulnerably share their thoughts, opinions, and feelings with me or to approach me when I've offended them. |
| ___ | ___ | 8. | I keep up with and give priority to family birthdays and other special family occasions. |
| ___ | ___ | 9. | I spend regular, quality time deepening my intimate walk with God, seeking to experience the truth of His Word. |

- ___ ___ 10. I seek to model Christlikeness to others through my words and by my example, starting first with my own family.
- ___ ___ 11. My checkbook, ministry commitments, TV, and reading habits reflect my love for God and devotion to my family.
- ___ ___ 12. I often use my discretionary time to "enter into my family's world," doing what they want to do, seeking to mutually know and enjoy each other.

Stop and Consider:

Review your responses to the twelve statements above and write out any changes in priorities that may be needed. *In order for me to truly know my spouse and children and develop intimacy with them, it will be important for me to give more time and attention to:*

Take time to reflect on what you've just written. In a prayer, ask God for His guidance and strength. Write your thoughts and prayers to God here: (Ex: *Dear God, as I consider the changes I need to make, I need your guidance and strength to ...*)

Now, let's get serious about these changes, knowing that, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippines 1:6). May the material in this workbook equip us to more fully live out God's priorities for our families!

God's Design: Born Needy!

A fundamental concept for parenting with intimacy is: Every child and every parent has needs! We all come into this world needy, whether we want to admit it or not. God created each of us with physical, spiritual, and relational needs. In order to survive and thrive **physically**, we need at least air, food, water, shelter, and rest.

Spiritually, we all need eternal life, God's truth, fellowship with God and others, and because we sin, forgiveness. We don't survive and thrive spiritually apart from having these needs met!

Do we have any other kind of needs? Yes! God created us with other needs which can only be met relationally—needs which when met provide rich experiences of love and care. We call these *intimacy needs*.

As with physical and spiritual needs, because He loves us, God then provides for these needs to be met. How? He always directly meets our needs. And, He also meets these needs through other people.

For example, He tells us to give each other **acceptance**, just as He accepts us: “Accept one another, just as Christ has accepted you.” By meeting our need for acceptance, He has validated that it’s all right to need acceptance!

Another example, especially relevant when we are struggling with the inevitable pain of living in a fallen world with fallen people: According to II Corinthians 1:3-4, God “. . . comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we might comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The fact that He comforts us means **comfort** is a legitimate human need.

Our needs for acceptance and comfort are not physical needs, nor are they spiritual needs. They are relational, *intimacy needs*.

Unfortunately, in our “pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps,” “you-better-take-care-of-yourself” culture, neediness conjures up visions of weakness and inappropriate dependency. Horror of horrors that we should be dependent on or need anyone!

But let's reason this out. If we're born needing something, are we selfish or weak because we need it? Think about it. Few people apologize for having physical needs—"I'm sorry to be using up so much air. I know it's selfish of me, but I just have this need to breathe." Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet many of us tend to feel guilty for having intimacy needs and conclude that, if we do, we must be flawed in some way. This self-condemnation is based on a lie—that there must be something wrong with us if we have needs. If we believe this lie, we will end up either painfully self-condemned or we will try to pull off the “I don’t need you” self-reliant, ruggedly individualistic lifestyle so exalted in our world.

The apostle Paul states confidently in Philippians 4:19, “*And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*” How could he say this with such certainty if we're not supposed to have needs? The verse makes no sense apart from the reality that we all have needs that were placed within us by our Creator.

The truth is, we really need God, and He has created us to also need each other! It’s OK to be needy, because God created us this way.

But has it always been that way? Or is our neediness the result of sin?

Let's travel all the way back to the Garden of Eden and take a look at the first human being..

Adam's Dilemma

In Genesis chapter one, on six different occasions God observed His creation and commented that what He saw "was good." But in Genesis chapter two, after creating Adam, God made a startling statement. For the first time in Scripture, He said, "*It is not good,*" (Genesis 2:18). And when God says something is not good, **it's not good!**

What's startling about this statement is that Adam seemed to have everything going for him:

- ◆ He had a *perfect environment*. No pollution, traffic jams, or diseases!
- ◆ He had an *exalted position*. God had given him dominion over His creation. He had no insecurities, jealousies, or pressure to perform. He was the C.E.O. of the Garden. According to modern-day standards, he was at the top of the ladder!
- ◆ He *possessed everything*. All of creation was there for his use and enjoyment! No problems with daily provision, monthly salaries, the IRS, or retirement plans. Everything that God had created was his (Genesis 1:28-30)!

So let's get this straight. Adam had a perfect environment, an exalted position, and unlimited resources, and yet God said, "It is not good." We live in a society that believes that these three areas are what you need to live a fulfilling life. So we strive for a more perfect job, a larger income, a bigger house, a higher position on the ladder of success in order to be happy. The lesson we can learn from Adam is that in spite of having all of these things, something was still missing. Something was not good.

Was there something wrong with his relationship with God? It may be a shock to realize that **even Adam's relationship with God was perfect**—he had not yet sinned. He had intimacy with God!

So what in the world was "not good" about Adam's situation? What was his problem? Apparently just one thing: **Adam was alone. Adam needed a human relationship.**

A sovereign God, free to create Adam any way He desired, chose to fashion him in such a way that Adam needed to relate intimately to both God and other human beings. God had created Adam not only with physical and spiritual needs, but also with relational needs which Adam could not meet on his own. These needs could only be met through meaningful relationships with God and other people.

In Genesis 2:18 God also declared that He would solve Adam's dilemma, and He did so by creating another human, someone with whom Adam could be intimate. God said, "*I will make a helper suitable for him.*" God ministered to Adam's aloneness by giving him a human relationship, Eve.

There are two very important concepts to embrace here:

- ◆ God created Adam, so his aloneness and subsequent need for relationships were no accident or flaw in design. Nor were they the result of sin—since sin doesn’t even enter the picture until later as recorded in Genesis 3.
- ◆ God provided for Adam's aloneness (he met his need) through Eve.

Thus we can reasonably draw the following conclusions:

- ◆ It must be OK to have needs.
- ◆ It must be OK (and, in fact, important to God) to have our needs met.
- ◆ God is committed to meet our needs—both directly and through others.
- ◆ God established marriage as one of the relationships through which He ministers to our needs. Later, he established families (Genesis 4, Psalm 127) and then close friendships (“fellowship”) among His people within His church (Matthew 16).
- ◆ God can be trusted to meet our needs—and our needs will challenge us to exercise faith.
- ◆ God wants to involve us in giving to the needs of others—out of our gratefulness for the abundance of His provision for us.

These conclusions provide insight into establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. Intimate relationships involve deeply "knowing" another person, just as God deeply knew the inner aloneness of Adam. And they require caring involvement at the point of need, just as God ministered to Adam's need. So, as we begin our journey in parenting with intimacy, we will be challenged to truly *know* our children and to become *caringly involved* in giving to their intimacy needs (acceptance, comfort, and several others).

Stop and consider: Take a moment and write down any thoughts or reactions you may have to the concept of your "neediness." We've proposed that all of us are created with certain physical, relational, and spiritual needs. We have suggested that we all need both God and other people. How do these key concepts strike you? What response(s) come to mind?

Be sure to share your reflections with your spouse or partner!

Unwrap Your Gift!

Imagine being presented with an exquisitely-wrapped package. You receive it with thanks and proceed to carefully place it on the shelf. Six months later the giver returns to your home and is

disheartened upon observing that the gift has remained unopened. What would be the logical conclusion? You're uninterested and unappreciative. You've taken the gift--and the giver--for granted and missed a tremendous blessing. What a waste!

Psalm 127:3 says, "*Behold, children are a gift from the Lord.*"

An integral part of parenting with intimacy is taking your child—your gift—untying the bow, undoing the wrapping, enjoying and getting to know this child deeply and intimately. This workbook is designed to help us as parents do just that. Unwrap your gift carefully—with a sense of awe—that you have been entrusted with such a treasure!

Don't miss this: A crucial step in the process of "unwrapping our gift" is understanding your child's intimacy needs and how these needs can be met.

Remember bringing your newborn home from the hospital? It wasn't long before you realized that the little bundle of joy needed more than just air, food, and water. Baby's cry often signaled a different type of need: "Mommy/Daddy, I need to be held, rocked, cuddled. I need attention. I need to be comforted." Our intimacy needs cry out for someone to be attentive, to take the initiative to become caringly involved.

The rest of this chapter will identify and define ten key intimacy needs and offer some practical ways that we can meet these needs in the lives of our children. We'll also see how meeting needs was an important part of Jesus' ministry and how God continually meets these needs in our lives.

Ten Key Intimacy Needs

Acceptance: Receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other's behavior has been imperfect. Being willing to continue loving another in spite of offenses. (Romans 15:7)

Affection: Expressing care and closeness through (non-sexual) physical touch; saying "I love you." (Romans 16:16; Mark 10:16)

Appreciation: Expressing thanks, praise or commendation. Recognizing accomplishment or effort. (Colossians 3:15b; I Corinthians 11:2)

Approval (Blessing): Building up or affirming another; affirming both the fact of and the importance of a relationship. (Ephesians 4:29; Mark 1:11)

Attention: Conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care; taking thought of another; entering another's "world." (I Corinthians 12:25)

Comfort: Responding to a hurting person with words, feelings, and touch; to hurt with and for another's grief or pain. (Romans 12:15b; Matthew 5:4; II Corinthians 1:3-4; John 11:35)

Encouragement: Urging another to persist and persevere toward a goal; stimulating toward love

and good deeds. (I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24)

Respect: Valuing and regarding another highly; treating another as important; honoring another. (Romans 12:10)

Security (Peace): Harmony in relationships; freedom from fear or threat of harm. (Romans 12:16,18)

Support: Coming alongside and gently helping with a problem or struggle; providing appropriate assistance. (Galatians 6:2)

Now let's consider each of these needs in more depth, and especially how we might give to meet these needs in our children's lives:

Acceptance

Receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other's behavior has been imperfect. Being willing to continue loving another in spite of offenses (Romans 15:7).

The human heart cries out for acceptance. "Don't insist that everything about me be like you or anyone else. Accept me as significant, unique; love me for who I am, in spite of my behavior. Don't equate my *worth* to you with my *performance*. Demonstrate your love toward me *while I'm yet a sinner!*"

Here are some practical ways to demonstrate acceptance. Quickly forgive your children when they offend you. A lack of forgiveness short-circuits acceptance. Don't pout, reject, or ignore them as punishment. Our need for acceptance is accentuated when we experience a failure or disappointment. Notice when your children experience disappointments or failures (real or perceived) and minister to their need for acceptance. Give empathy—don't minimize, ignore, or ridicule your child's pain. Acceptance is based upon a person's innate value to God as a person of special worth and not on their performance or productivity.

Love your children with God's unmerited, unconditional, and unlimited love. God's love for us is unmerited (we don't deserve it and can't earn it), unconditional (it's not based on what we do or don't do), and unlimited (it will never "run out" or be detained). We should accept and love others in like manner.

Jesus met our ultimate need for acceptance in that "*while we were yet sinners*" He died for us (Rom. 5:8). He looked beyond our faults and saw and met our needs. During His earthly ministry, Jesus accepted people where they were regardless of background, race, or condition; helped them deal with their failures; loved people with unconditional love; and forgave freely.

Stop and consider: How is your child different from you? (Consider each child individually.)

What are the areas that are the most difficult for you to accept about your child?

How have you shown acceptance to your child lately? Have you communicated that you love your child even if he doesn't change? Have you shown love that isn't connected with performance? Write recent demonstrations of acceptance here:

Affection

Expressing care and closeness through (non-sexual) physical touch; saying "I love you" (Romans 16:16; Mark 10:16).

Affection can be expressed by looking into your child's eyes and verbalizing your love: "I really love you!"

It's also giving hugs and kisses. Little children run around with their arms out wanting to be hugged—"Hold me! Cuddle me! Rock me! Touch me!"

As kids grow older, it often becomes "uncool" to admit one's need for these things, but the need is there nonetheless. Parents can be tempted to reduce their affection as kids appear not to "enjoy" it. Resist this temptation! Continue to show affection through touch and hugs--even if they're going through a stage where they don't hug back. Continue to offer affection in age-appropriate ways and doses. Verbalize your love at times of celebration and disappointment. Notes of loving care are great for teenagers. Send e-mail from the office or drop a card in the mail. It's never "uncool" to enjoy getting mail!

During His earthly ministry, Jesus felt free to touch others affectionately. He sometimes healed

people, touching them in the process (Matthew 8:3, 8:15, 9:29). He reassured His frightened disciples accompanied by physical expression (Matthew 17:7). He ministered to children through physical affection (Mark 10:16, Matthew 19:13). Through out the pages of Scripture, God verbalizes His love and care for His people (Isaiah 40:11, John 3:16, Ephesians 5:1-2, I Peter 5:7 and many others).

Stop and consider: Which of your children could benefit from more affection? Who gives the most hugs and “I love you’s” in the family? Who wants to receive hugs and “I loves you’s?”

How have you shown love recently through gentle touch and tender words? Have you hugged your son recently? Have you told your daughter that you love her? Write about some recent occasions:

Appreciation

Expressing thanks, praise or commendation. Recognizing accomplishment or effort (Colossians 3:15b; I Corinthians 11:2).

Meeting children’s need for appreciation requires thought and effort. Because of the seemingly endless demands on our time and energy, we may tend to focus on correcting our kids only, rather than looking for ways to express appreciation. Misbehavior does need to be addressed and dealt with appropriately, but kids also need to hear an occasional "Well done!" and "Thank you" when appropriate choices are made. No parent wants to feel taken for granted—Kids are no different!

Appreciation might sound like this: "I really appreciate the way you took care of your younger brother this afternoon. I know you had other things you could have done with your friends that would have been more fun. You're a great big brother and a wonderful son."

"I've noticed how much effort you've been putting into keeping your room picked up this week. I really appreciate your helpfulness. It feels great that we're all a team."

God met our ultimate need for appreciation as the Bible affirms us as saints and joint-heirs

(Romans 1:7, 8:17) and royal priests and people for God's own possession in I Peter (I Peter 2:9). During His earthly ministry, Jesus continually voiced appreciation to individuals: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28), Mary of Bethany (Mark 14:6), a Roman Centurion (Luke 7:9), and He commended John the Baptist to others (Luke 7:28). Finally, God has promised ultimately to appreciate and reward all who are faithful (Matthew 26:34-40, I Corinthians 4:1-5, 2 Timothy 4:8 and many others).

Stop and consider: Make a list of things that each of your children have recently done, for which you could express appreciation.

How have you communicated appreciation lately? When was the last time you thanked your son? praised your daughter? When have you noticed their efforts and said, "Great job!"?

Approval (Blessing)

Building up or affirming another; affirming both the fact of and the importance of a relationship (Ephesians 4:29; Mark 1:11).

Affirm your children privately and publicly as being of great value to you and to God. Acknowledge them privately and in public for *who they are*—not just for *what they do*. This is the difference between a human "being" and a human "doing."

"I'm sure proud that you're my daughter."

"You're my beloved son in whom I am well pleased!"

"God could not have given me a more special son/daughter."

Identify character strengths of each child and praise them for these qualities: "Bill, you are one of the most responsible people I know! Your diligence and thoroughness are excellent qualities." (See list of qualities on page ____ for possible qualities to commend your children for.) Our approval for character qualities helps free them from having to seek approval by competing with siblings or other peers. As children grow in the security of parents' approval, they experience freedom to grow and mature without fear of failure.

God the Father met His Son Jesus' need for expressed approval at His baptism: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased!" (Mark 1:11). He affirmed the **fact** of their relationship ("You are my Son") and the **importance** of their relationship (You are my beloved Son). And God has met our ultimate need for approval, affirming us as saints (Rom. 1:7), sons of the Most High (Eph. 1:5), joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), royal priests, and people for God's own possession (I Peter 2:9), and as His dearly loved children (Ephesians 5:1, I John 3:1).

Stop and consider: What is special about each of your children? What are the character traits of your son or daughter that make you proud?

How have you met your child's need for approval recently? Have you told her you are proud of her? Have you told him how blessed you are to have such a special son? How have you expressed the pleasure of having/receiving your child?

Attention

Conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care; taking thought of another; entering another's "world" (I Corinthians 12:25).

Whatever their age, it's impossible to meet our children's need for attention without entering their world and investing the valuable commodity of T-I-M-E.

Several years ago, Josh McDowell Ministries conducted a monumental study in which they surveyed 3,795 church-attending youths (**Right from Wrong**, McDowell & Hostetler, 1994). Each youth completed a confidential survey on a variety of topics.

The results were startling! These youth reported spending under four minutes a day in meaningful conversation with their mothers and two-and-a-half minutes a day talking things over with dad. Sadly, far more time was likely spent disciplining these youth than was reportedly invested in meaningful time getting to know them!

Our world is raising a generation of children whose concept of "father" is a person they do not know and who does not know them, entering their world to "discipline" them. Ephesians 6:4 admonishes fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. One of the quickest ways to provoke children to wrath is to discipline them without first establishing a loving relationship with them. In fact, enforcing rules without the foundation of an intimate relationship frequently leads to a child's rebellion.

It's impossible to truly know our children without spending time with them—entering into *their* world. Jesus gave us the perfect example when He chose to give up His position in heaven and entered into our world so that He could know us and we could know Him. As parents, we are similarly challenged to leave our adult world of work, career, hobbies, ministry, and friends to enter into a child's world:

- a world of make-believe, stories, and toys
- a world of play, silly games, and laughter
- a world of technology, thrill-seeking, and heartaches
- a world of disappointment, "strange music," and insecurities

Stop and consider: What is your child's "world?" Is she into nail polish, dolls, or soccer? Does he like video games, baseball, or dinosaurs? For each child, name at least three aspects of that child's world:

How have you met the need for attention lately? How have you entered his/her world or done what he/she likes to do? Write about some recent occasions:

How might you more consistently invest time with each of your children, entering their worlds in ways they would enjoy and find meaningful?

Comfort

Responding to a hurting person with words, feelings, and touch; to hurt with and for another's grief or pain. (Romans 12:15b; Matthew 5:4; II Corinthians 1:3-4; John 11:35)

Sit on a bench at any playground and you'll observe a perfect example of a child's need for comfort. When children fall down, they typically look around to see if anyone's watching. If they find an empathetic witness to their plight, do they say, "No big deal!" and go right back to playing? Hardly! They pucker up and open the floodgates! If the observer happens to be a loved one, the child will usually rush into their arms for a hug, some cuddling, and a kiss to "make it all better." Hurting children not only need the physical expression of comfort, they need to hear comforting words as well. The message might sound like, "I'm sorry you're hurting. I'm here for you."

But what does comforting really look like? Here's a short interaction between mother and daughter which illustrates what this need is and how it can be met:

When Lucy's mom picked her up from school, Lucy's dress was torn, her knees skinned, and her cheeks streaked with tears.

"Lucy, sweetheart, what happened?" her mother asked. (So far, so good.)

Haltingly, between sobs, Lucy replied, "Sarah pushed me down on the playground and called me

a name in front of all my friends."

What does Lucy most need to experience with her mother at that moment? Comforting words like, "Honey, I know how much that must have hurt your feelings. I'm sorry that happened, and I feel sad that you're hurting." She needs for her mother to take her into her arms and hold her, lovingly soothing her body and spirit.

What does Lucy NOT need from her mother? "Well, what did you do to make her to do that? I'm sure you must have done something to provoke her!" She also does not need: "That little brat! I'm going to call her mother about this!" or "Well now honey, don't cry. This is no big deal. You're not that hurt!" or "I'm sure Sarah was just having a bad day. Somebody was probably mean to her, too." These kinds of responses inflict even more pain through minimizing, blame, and condemnation.

What an irony—when loved ones are hurting they don't need what we often are most inclined to give: facts, logic, advice, criticism. What they need is *comfort*—an emotional expression that we care—weeping with those who weep, mourning with and for those who mourn.

Jesus ministered comfort throughout His earthly ministry, often identifying with the hurts of others to the degree that He wept with and for them (John 11:35, Luke 19:41). Even on the eve of His death, Jesus comforted His disciples (John 14:1,18; 16:33).

We are reminded that God is the "Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3) and the Holy Spirit is often referred to as the "Comforter" as in the Gospel of John 14:16, and John 15:26.

Stop and consider: When your child is hurting are you tempted to respond with logic, advice, or even criticism, instead of simply giving comfort? Explain your thoughts here:

How have you given comfort to your child recently? When have you eased hurts with your tender words and listening ear? When have you let them know you care about the things that cause them pain? When have you said, "I'm sorry that happened. I feel sad when you are sad."

Encouragement

Urging to persist and persevere toward a goal; stimulating toward love and good deeds (I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24).

All children need a fan club; and the most active members of their club need to be their mom and dad. When parents are cheering them on, it provides a tremendous impetus that propels them toward reaching a goal. Give them your wholehearted blessing to reach for the stars.

Kids need the obvious heart-to-heart conversations in which we spur them on in the face of discouragement, but just as important are the more covert messages of encouragement: the “You can do it!” notes mom leaves on the refrigerator door, or the “Son, I have confidence in you!” note that dad leaves on the dashboard of the car. Encouragement might be a special night out, a timely phone call, or a loving prayer prayed on another’s behalf.

God meets our need for encouragement by providing us with an abundant life through Christ (John 10:10) and by promising us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). During His earthly ministry, Jesus continually encouraged His disciples and those who were downcast and discouraged. He appeared to the men on the Emmaus road and to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem—and in so doing, removed their feelings of hopelessness and discouragement (Luke 24:13-53). God continually encourages us through the ministry of His word, the presence of His Spirit, and answered prayer.

Stop and consider:—What goals or wishes have your children identified? What areas of discouragement or disappointment have your children encountered?

(For instance, Elizabeth has talked about wanting to try out for the basketball team; Jeremy was really discouraged last week when he discovered the price for the stereo system. His savings plan just got extended; Erin showed interest in swimming lessons this year.)

How have you urged your child to persist and persevere? Write about a recent time you have built her/him up and inspired her/him toward a goal. Write about a recent time when you've said words like, "You can do it. You can do anything God wants you to do through Christ who strengthens you!"

Respect

Valuing and regarding another highly; treating another as important; honoring another (Romans 12:10).

The need for respect is not something that magically appears when a person turns twenty-one. We all need to be valued—God says we are to honor one another! From day one, even small children need respect.

Every child is a unique creation of God. Their value is greater than just being the son or daughter of their earthly parents. They're on loan from God, and He has a special plan for each of them. Part of meeting your child's need for respect is recognizing that many of their characteristics are part of their unique design. (Chapter 3 will address this in more detail.)

Children also need to experience respect in at least three distinct areas: their feelings, their opinions, and their possessions. They need to hear from their parents:

"I'm listening. Your thoughts and feelings are very important to me."

"We'd like to know what you'd like to do on Saturday. We value your input."

"I understand your need for privacy and your need to have things that belong to you."

"Shawn, you need to ask your brother's permission before you play with his toys."

During His earthly ministry, Jesus ignored all the social prejudices of His society by showing respect to tax collectors, Samaritans, the poor, lepers, and women. He treated all people as those with intrinsic value and worth—created in God's image. And let's not forget that He valued us so much that He was even willing to die for us!

Stop and consider:

What would respect "look like" to each of your children? What feelings and opinions have they expressed recently? Have these been heard, received, considered? Have there been disagreements or conflicts about personal property? Could these conflicts stem from a lack of respect?

security needs are met when parents make sure the doors are locked at night, seat belts are fastened, and rules are enforced to prevent physical harm.

Although they may deny it, kids derive a sense of security from knowing where the limits are and knowing there are people in their lives who care enough to set rules and actually enforce the limits through loving discipline. Therefore, appropriately disciplining our children ministers to their need for security. We shouldn't hold our breath waiting for them to thank us, but we can be confident that we are, indeed, meeting one of their deepest needs.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus offered security to those who were close to Him by continually meeting their physical, relational, and spiritual needs. At times He even performed a miracle to meet physical needs such as the need for food (feeding of the five thousand.) God meets our need for security by promising never to leave us or forsake us (Joshua 1:5, Matthew 28:20). He has committed to meet needs for food, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:25-32), and those who trust Christ as Savior have the security of spending eternity with Him (John 10:28).

Stop and consider: Which of your children have felt insecure about finances, physical safety, changes in plans, or the harmony of relationships? Who may be feeling exposed to physical or emotional danger?

How have you recently reassured your children about the harmony in your relationships?

How do you demonstrate your commitment not to harm your child physically or emotionally? How often do you take initiative to meet your daughter's/son's need for security? When have you said words like, "I'm here for you." or "I promise to take care of you?" How have you recently helped them work through one of their fears or insecurities? Write your thoughts here:

Support

Coming alongside and gently helping with a problem or struggle; providing appropriate assistance (Galatians 6:2).

Kids need a partner who will walk alongside them to help navigate the hazards on their path toward maturity. This does not mean completely shouldering the load for them. In the long run, doing so would actually become a hindrance rather than help because it would convey the message, "This is too scary, too difficult for you. You'd better stand aside while I take over." But neither should it mean standing at a distance while your child struggles alone. Rather, offering support involves conveying, both through words and actions, that you are with your child—that you want to assist with the heavy loads—no matter what. Looking down the road towards maturity can be a frightening prospect. Your child needs to know he won't be traveling alone.

God met our ultimate need for support by anticipating the great burden that we could not bear ourselves (the payment for our sins), and by providing for us through the life and death of His Son, Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus invited the multitudes to “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*” (Matthew 11:28). When Jesus completed His earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit was given to believers as the “One called alongside” who supports us, comforts us, guides us and intercedes for us (John 16:12-15, Acts 9:31, John 14:16, Romans 8:14, and Romans 8:26).

Stop and consider: What challenges and struggles are your children experiencing? (For instance, Jill is trying to decide which college to attend; Joey is struggling with his Science Fair project; Amanda wants to learn to play tennis.)

How might you come alongside your child to assist with a current problem or struggle?

The Priority of Needs Is Different for Every Individual

While we all seem to have the same needs, the *priority* of those needs is different for each

person. Your greatest need may be for *affection*, while your partner's greatest need may be *security*. One child may have an acute need for *comfort* while her sibling's greatest need may be *approval*.

If we're not careful, we'll treat everyone as if they have the same priority of needs. We might also try to meet other's needs based on our own priority. For instance, if your greatest need is for affection, you may gallantly and sincerely inundate your partner with affection without realizing that it may be at the bottom of his/her own needs list. You might become somewhat indignant if your partner isn't overwhelmed with gratefulness for your affectionate giving. It would be an innocent, well-meaning mistake, but a mistake nonetheless.

An important aspect of learning to love individuals as individuals, particularly our spouse and children, is taking time to know them and to discover their unique priority of needs. This is perhaps part of what Peter meant when he admonished husbands to, "*Live with your wives in an understanding way*" (1 Peter 3:7). It may also be a part of how a woman, "*Looks well to the ways of her household*" (Proverbs 31:27). It seems like an important part of truly getting to know our children as we unwrap them as "gifts from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). God's plan for our lives involves a connectedness with one another. We need to relate to each other in a close and loving way. Intimacy is spawned, maintained, and deepened when we, in humility and faith, draw upon God's unlimited resources and then lovingly give to meet one another's needs.

Apply the Principles: Review the descriptions of the Top Ten Intimacy Needs. Then, keeping in mind the uniqueness of each child, fill in your "guess" as to each child's top three needs. Have your partner fill in his/her "guess" as well.

You might also spend time reviewing your own top three needs and the needs of your spouse (if married). After discovering each person's priority of needs, as a family, look for ways to meet other's needs.

Acceptance	Comfort
Affection	Encouragement
Appreciation	Respect
Approval	Security
Attention	Support

Child's Name	My Guess of Top 3 Needs		
<i>Ex: Andrew</i>	<i>attention</i>	<i>comfort</i>	<i>approval</i>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Child's Name	Partner's Guess of Top 3 Needs		
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Child's Name	Child's Indication of Top 3 Needs		
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

[For further evaluation of your family's intimacy needs refer to **The Intimacy Needs Assessment Tool** in the Appendix.]

If Any Of You Lacks Wisdom

Parenting with intimacy is an awesome calling. As you begin your journey, ask the Lord for wisdom. He promises in James 1:5 to give it generously and without reproach. He knows we need Him and is just waiting for us to invite Him to be our constant companion and omniscient guide. He's the only One who knows what lies ahead. He knows every bend and curve in the road, every pothole, every detour. Don't start your journey without Him.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." James 1:5

Special Thoughts for Single Parents

As a single parent, be sure to replenish your own emotional "bank account." We understand the enormous pain of trying to remove a child's aloneness while experiencing loneliness yourself. Involving yourself in positive adult activities, support networks, and Christ-centered friendships will help remove your aloneness. Maintaining these relationships will allow God and others to minister to you and your needs. Keeping your emotional resources at an optimum level will enable you to continue giving lovingly to your children.

Special Thoughts for Blended Families

There's a normal but mistaken tendency to try to compensate for a broken home by prioritizing the children. Prioritize your marriage relationship, then give to your children. Children from divorced homes have already experienced the loss of security that results when an adult man and woman cease to sacrificially and permanently love one another. As a blended family you now have the opportunity to minister to this loss by reaffirming the secure relationships between married partners. Therefore, make it a priority to meet your spouse's intimacy needs.

Children of a blended family often experience the pain of aloneness when there's a loss of a parent or sibling due to divorce or death. This aloneness isn't removed just because there are more people in the house. Make a conscious effort to talk to your children about missing a loved one. Let them know it's OK to be sad and share words of comfort for their loss.

Experiencing Biblical Truth

“But that the members (of the body) should have the same care for one another.”

I Corinthians 12:25

1. Complete the following sentence: *I feel loved, cared for, and special when . . .*

For example: *I feel loved, cared for, and special when someone helps me with the chores around the house. (Or) I feel loved, cared for, and special when my wife gives me a kiss for no particular reason.*

2. Review the list of Ten Key Intimacy Needs again, noting the definitions.
3. What relationship do you see between your response to question #1 and the three or four needs you have checked? Share your reflections with your spouse or partner:

For example:

I feel loved when someone helps me with the chores because my need for support is being met—That’s one of the needs I checked as important. (Or,) I feel loved when my wife gives me a kiss because of my need for affection. Affection is one of my priority needs.

Homework For Our Homes

1. Ask each of your children to finish the sentence: *“I feel Mommy’s/Daddy’s love when...”*
Older children might finish the sentence: *“I feel loved and cared for when...”*
2. Consider each child’s answer—To what extent do their responses correspond to your guess of their three or four priority needs?
3. Look for opportunities to show love to each child this week. Make sure your demonstration of love matches the way they finished the sentence above.

But what if my children are very young? How do I know which needs are most important and how to meet them?

Key Intimacy Needs for Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-schoolers and How to Meet Them

It may be difficult to identify the most important needs of children under the age of five since they are still in the midst of rapid change and development! It may also seem as if your child needs all ten all of the time! Listed below are the ten intimacy needs and what it might “look like” to meet those needs. Take heart! You may already be meeting these needs significantly on a daily basis!

Acceptance: Receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other’s behavior has been imperfect. Being willing to continue a relationship in spite of offenses (Romans 15:7).

Looks like: letting your infant touch your nose, mouth, and eyes while feeding; giving your toddler opportunities to explore; receiving his curiosity as a gift from God; showing tolerance of your preschooler’s messes; greeting your child each morning with a smile and cheerful, pleasant words.

Affection: Expressing care and closeness through physical touch; saying “I love you” (Romans 16:16).

Looks like: cuddling; stroking your child’s cheek, smiling; kissing fingers, toes and tummy; playing “I’m gonna get you” as you nuzzle your baby’s tummy with your head; playing “This little piggy”; saying “I love you.” Wrestling on the floor.

Appreciation: Expressing thanks, praise or commendation. Recognizing accomplishment or effort (Colossians 3:15b; I Corinthians 11:2).

Looks like: saying thank you for sharing a bit of cookie; sharing a toy or taking turns; giving a sticker for a job well done or for good effort; noticing when your child obeys a rule, uses the potty, or brings you trash to throw away and then praising and thanking the child.

Approval: Building up or affirming others for who they are; affirming both the fact of and the importance of a relationship (Ephesians 4:29; Mark 1:11).

Looks like: using a warm, loving tone of voice; using positive, affirming words when you describe your child to others; singing to your child and singing with your child. “You’re Mommy’s precious baby.” “You’re Daddy’s big boy!” “You are a special present from God to Mommy and Daddy!”

Attention : Conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care; taking thought of another; entering another’s “world” (I Corinthians 12:25).

Looks like: distinguishing between a hungry cry, a tired cry, and a distress cry and responding appropriately to meet the need; cooing and babbling with your baby; playing “peek-a-boo”; playing with blocks or bubbles or whatever your child likes to play; occasionally initiating play with your child, rather than always waiting for him to ask. Listening carefully to what your child is saying, without interrupting or finishing sentences; giving undivided focus.

Comfort: Coming alongside with word, feeling, and touch; to hurt with and for another’s grief or pain (Romans 12:15b).

Looks like: snuggling or holding close when your child is upset; holding your baby securely; using a soft, soothing tone of voice; giving your child a massage; rocking your baby; singing a lullaby; rubbing your toddler’s back so she can go to sleep; kissing a hurt. Saying, “I feel sad for you that you were hurt!” Crying with your child.

Encouragement : Urging toward persistence and perseverance; stimulating toward love and good deeds (I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24).

Looks like: cheering for your child as your he or she tries something new; opening your arms and urging your toddler to take his first steps toward you; saying words like, “I know you can do it! Give it a try! You’ll do fine! Let me see you do it!”

Respect: Valuing and regarding another highly; treating another as important; honoring others (Romans 12:10).

Looks like: apologizing to your preschooler when you “blow it.”; eliminating sarcasm and hostility from your voice; using a positive tone of voice with a pleasant attitude. Keeping your promises. Responding promptly when your child needs you.

Security: Harmony in relationships; freedom from fear or threat of harm (Romans 12:16,18).

Looks like: setting appropriate limits for a child’s age and then being consistent with them; holding your infant and being confident but relaxed in the way you hold her; establishing routines for sleeping, eating, and playing. Providing a safe, “child-proof” environment in your home. Making rules, requirements, and expectations clear in advance, especially for new situations. Being careful who your child is with.

Support : Coming alongside and gently helping with a problem or struggle; providing appropriate assistance (Galatians 6:2).

Looks like: mimicking your baby’s sounds and taking turns in conversation, thus assisting with language development; teaching your toddler how to walk, march, or jump; doing hard things together like putting on shoes, getting dressed, learning colors and shapes.

