

## Acorns to Oaks: Farming the Field of Your Child's Heart

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Christian evangelism begins in the home. During a child's formative years, it is essential that Christian parents communicate the gospel in a loving and compassionate fashion. As parents, our responsibility is to plant the seed of truth in our children's minds, to think often of their spiritual condition, and pray that God will bless our evangelism. Parents are to make every effort to protect childlike belief, while trusting God to ultimately grow the acorn of their children's faith into a strong oak.

One evening when my family was at a park and my kids were running around, I struck up a conversation with a mom who was pushing her young son on a swing. When I asked about her family, she said that she had a teenage son who wanted very little to do with her. "He just goes into his room and only comes out when he's listening to his iPod," she said with disappointment. "He never wants to talk. He never wants to do anything with me anymore. I don't know what happened . . ." Her voice trailed off. I could tell she was deeply affected by her son's disinterest, and was sad that she had "lost" her son without knowing why.

We exchanged some more small talk, and then she pointed to the four-year-old she was pushing in the swing. "Joshua's going into preschool this fall. I can't wait. It'll be such a relief." Her words shocked me, in both their honesty and their blindness. All parents have moments of frustration, but few express that to a complete stranger. I was powerfully struck by this mom's seeming inability to connect her vocalized apathy toward her preschooler to the indifference of her teenager.

Christian parenting needs to be substantially different from this kind of selfish and shortsighted disinterest. However, many Christian parents are fearful that they too will "lose" their kids when they get older—that they will lose them to the world. But such loss and hardship is not inevitable. It should encourage you to know that Christian parents are not helpless when it comes to protecting against such sin and rebellion.

Consider two basic facts about parents and kids. First, it is natural for parents to love their children. Second, it is natural for children to love their parents. God naturally places in parents and children a heart of love for each other. Still, many parents feel inadequate and fearful. Parents, take heart: the fields of parenting evangelism are white for the harvest (John 4:35).

It is common for people to be intimidated by evangelism. Talking to co-workers about the gospel can seem out of place. Neighbors come and go, and there never seems to be the right time to have a spiritual conversation with them. And many people are just terrified by the thought of evangelizing strangers. I do not want to excuse these excuses, because Christians should be passionate about the gospel to the extent that it overcomes those barriers; however, there is another mission field closer to home. Every Christian parent has an open and God-given invitation to evangelize their children.

When children come into the world, they are separated from God by their sinful nature, but they also do not know anything about the world. While morally they are already corrupt, intellectually they are a blank slate. Christian parents have the ability to pour into their lives, and teach them the truth about the world, God, and the gospel. This, if you think about it, can be more overwhelming than a three-minute conversation with a neighbor.

Occasionally, the apostle Paul also felt overwhelmed by the ministry God had entrusted to him. Yet Paul overcame his inadequacies because he had a confidence that came from God. He wrote, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves

to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5-6). Paul's source of adequacy for his gospel ministry to pagan Corinthians is the same source of our adequacy for the gospel ministry to our children. Reliance on God gave confidence to Paul, and it should give confidence to us as well.

## THE DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN PARENTING

Christian parenting really should be defined as parenting-evangelism, because a Christian parent's primary responsibility is to disciple and evangelize the child. The Great Commission should be lived out in the home first, for "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). This principle of providing for one's household does not just apply to physical needs; it also applies to spiritual needs.

Christians innately have a desire to see their children walk with Christ. Accordingly, parents must remember the responsibility of discipleship. God grants us the privilege of caring for our children by teaching them what a gospel-centered life looks like. Parents should see their children as their primary evangelistic field.

The process of parenting is just that: a process. Parents have their children's entire childhood to teach them to recognize their own sin, the gospel, and how to live a Christian life. It is not a one-time opportunity, and is not a single conversation. It is very much like how Paul portrayed evangelism in 1 Corinthians 3:6. There he described how the Corinthians came to know Christ: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." The analogy of planting is appropriate because, like evangelism, it is a process that takes time, effort, and that is ultimately dependent upon the Lord.

The planting is not supernatural, but the growing of the seed is. Just as the farmer cannot physically make his crops grow, he can be faithful to plant, water, and care for the seed. The God who makes a tiny seed grow into a large, fruit-bearing tree should receive all the glory. In evangelism, Christians are privileged to plant, water, and tend the plants of Christian growth. But it is God alone who has the miraculous prerogative to create growth, and He alone deserves the glory for performing the wonderful work of salvation.



So how does Paul's point relate to parenting? In this: the goal of parenting is not the salvation of your children. That is outside your capacity and control. The goal of parenting is faithfully teaching your children what the gospel is, and how it should affect their lives. The parent plants the seed and provides the water. God gives the growth. This simple verse also provides parents with a threefold strategy for evangelism: prepare the soil of your child's heart, plant seeds of truth, and pray and protect the crop from enemies.

### PREPARE THE SOIL OF YOUR CHILD'S HEART

I will never forget one sunny Friday morning when a few close friends and I went to breakfast with Dr. Sinclair Ferguson. One of us asked Dr. Ferguson for counsel about parenting, and his response was profound. He said, in his deep Scottish brogue, "As Christian parents, you must make sure you wrap more than one cord of love around your child's heart." He went on to explain that he knew of many parents who catechized their children very well and yet had not formed a strong relationship with them. He spoke of the essential value of crafting with our children a biblical and well-rounded relationship of love.

As parents we must provide soil for our children to grow. One factor that greatly influences the productivity of any plant is the soil in which it is planted. For example, the hydrangea plant features a beautiful bloom, and I have seen hydrangeas in many colors. Did you know that the color of the hydrangea bloom is dependent upon the acidity of its soil? Soil also is a determinative factor in the yield of a fruit-bearing plant. In Matthew 13, Jesus teaches that although the seed of the gospel is pure, not all soils are equally receptive and fruitful. Accordingly, as Christian parents, our goal is to prepare the soil of our child's heart. We want to make the best possible environment for our child to be receptive to the gospel.

The soil of your child's heart is the relational environment of your home. Just as the hydrangea bloom is influenced by the soil in which it is planted, so our children are shaped by the relationships in the home. While poison in the soil would kill a plant, hypocrisy in the home could adversely affect your child's heart. Conversely, when a home is marked by integrity and love, children see the authenticity of the gospel. At the heart of a godly relationship is love—

true biblical love. This kind of love is to fill the home, and it can be cultivated through discipline, encouragement, humility, and enjoyment.

### *Discipline*

One practical way to demonstrate love to children is through discipline. While it may seem counterintuitive to demonstrate love to a child through discipline, the fact is that discipline is a form of protection for children. By teaching them right and wrong from a young age, you prepare them to recognize their own sin.

A house without discipline produces a child who does not recognize that certain things are simply wrong in this world. Lying, disobedience, and selfishness are basic wrongs that children must not only learn to recognize, but to associate with punishment. When they see that the standard is truth, delightful obedience, and selflessness, then they are prepared to recognize their own inability to behave.

The goal of discipline is not merely correction. A parent could train his children like he would train his dogs—a parent can get children to come, stay, and be quiet. But this is of course not the point. The aim of discipline is to prepare the child to realize that when he or she sins, the child receives punishment. This basic association establishes in a child's mind the concepts of right and wrong, sin, and pain associated with sin. These rudimentary concepts are critical elements of preparing the soil of a child's heart. Beyond that, discipline prepares children to realize that the standard is beyond their reach. Not only do children need to obey completely the first time they are told anything, they also need to do so with joy. As children learn this, their hearts are prepared to understand how far short they fall of God's commands.

Of course, godly discipline is balanced with mercy. James writes, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). James's point is clear: in God's dealings with His beloved children, His mercy overrules judgment. By balancing discipline with mercy, we also prepare our child's heart to understand that while they fall short of God's standard, God also is prepared to offer mercy.

Parents who are reluctant to show mercy to their children are in danger of creating a home environment that is not only harsh to the child, but antagonistic to the gospel. J. C. Ryle explained it this way: "It is a dangerous thing to



make your children afraid of you. Fear puts an end to openness of manner; fear leads to concealments; fear sows the seed of much hypocrisy, and leads to many a lie.”<sup>1</sup>

As Paul tenderly cared for his spiritual children, so parents must be tender with their children (1 Thess. 2:7).

To be sure, godly discipline is an integral aspect of faithful parenting (Prov. 23:13–14; Heb. 12:4–11). Discipline, however, must be practiced in a compassionate, merciful environment. For more insight on parental discipline, I strongly recommend *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp.<sup>2</sup>

### *Encouragement*

Just as a flower does not open under gloomy skies, so a child's heart will not bloom under harsh conditions. Our children need warmth, care, and encouragement to gain the courage to open up. You want the soil of your child's heart to be richly fertilized by frequent, Christ-magnifying encouragement, which shows love in a powerful way. Paul highlights the significance of paternal encouragement in his own ministry when he writes, “You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children” (1 Thess. 2:11).

Consider Colossians 3:12–13 (NASB): “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.” Here, Paul gives hands and feet to the notion of encouragement. It is this type of encouragement that should fill Christian homes like a pleasant aroma, because generosity and love are powerful motivators. Build on the positive. Children respond powerfully to affirmation, so love them by encouraging them.

Ryle correctly pointed out that “children must be wooed with kindness, if their attention is ever to be won. . . . Just so you must set before your children their duty—command, threaten, punish, reason—but if affection be wanting in your treatment, your labor will be in vain.”<sup>3</sup> So, as Ryle suggests, it is important to encourage your children with enthusiasm and joy.

### *Humility*

Pride is an inhibitor of gospel growth in your child's heart and an assured path to destruction. Pride is the opposite of the safe path to salvation (Prov.

16:18), because God resists the proud person (1 Peter 5:5) but draws near to the humble (Ps. 138:6). Knowing this, perhaps the single way you can prepare the soil of your children's heart is by demonstrating humility.

Jesus provided that example to us. In Matthew 11:29 He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Notably, this is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus defines Himself with adjectives. The gentle and humble Teacher commands us to learn from Him expressly because He is humble. We should follow His example and teach our children with humility, desiring that they will "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [their] souls" (James 1:21).

Humility can only be cultivated with deliberate steps. Here are four examples of actions that can demonstrate humility as a means of preparing your child's heart to understand the gospel:

1. Find a more mature Christian to disciple you. If you want to show your children how much they need wisdom, show them how much you need wisdom by humbling your heart and pursuing a mentor to teach you.
2. Admit when you are wrong and seek forgiveness when you sin against your family, including your children.
3. Meditate on contrition, humility, brokenness, spiritual hunger, and dependence. C. J. Mahaney's book *Humility* is a great resource for further study.<sup>4</sup>
4. Demonstrate dependence on God's holy Word. Isaiah 66:2 (NASB) teaches an important truth: "To this one I will look, / To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Your children should see you reading the Bible, and they should hear you talking about it to others.

When a parent models these behaviors to her children, she is in fact demonstrating humility. The parent is teaching her children that there is a limit to human wisdom, and that godly wisdom comes when sought after with a humble heart. This prepares your children to realize that God's wisdom is higher than their own limited understanding.



*Enjoyment*

Christ enjoyed the presence of children (Matt. 18:1–6; 19:13–15). Can you imagine Him blessing them through pursed lips and a veiled frown? No. He loved the presence of children.

Parenting should be fun. If you delight in being a parent, you are preparing the soil of your child's heart by demonstrating the joy that God gives those who are obedient to Him.

What does it mean to enjoy parenting? It means to have fun with your children. Get on the floor with them when they are young. Join them in their areas of interest as they mature. Joyfully join them in their world, enthusiastically relishing their activities and games.

Preparing the soil is crucial to future fruitfulness. Parent-evangelists should be fertilizing the soil of their child's heart with discipline, encouragement, humility, and enjoyment. All of this arduous preparation is designed to create the best possible environment for the seed of truth.

## PLANT GOSPEL SEEDS

The most important aspect of farming is the seed that you choose to plant. If you sow peach pits, you will never reap a harvest of plums, no matter what else you do. Successful farmers take great care with their seed. We should protect the seed of the gospel much more. There are two main ways to plant seeds of the gospel in a child's heart: speak with words of biblical integrity, and live a life of gospel credibility.

*Words of Biblical Integrity*

Galatians 6:8 (NASB) teaches a clear and powerful principle: "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

This passage highlights that all Christians carry two seed bags, and we must ensure that we are casting seed from the Spirit, not of the flesh. The last thing that our children need is for us to sow seeds to the flesh in their lives. So much in our children's lives, including their own wayward hearts and the world, sows seeds to their flesh. As parents, we are called by God to protect the grove of their lives and to plant and cultivate godly trees. When we act



in a consistently fleshly manner, what hope do they have of reaping a harvest of godliness? Where are they going to get seeds of the Spirit unless we spread those seeds liberally in their lives? Charles Spurgeon said: "You are teaching children, mind what you teach them. . . . Take care what you are after! . . . It is a child's soul you are tempering with. . . . If it be evil to mislead grey-age, it must be far more so to turn aside the feet of the young into the road of error, in which they may for ever walk."<sup>5</sup>

When we take the opportunity to explain the gospel to our children, we are sowing seeds. This includes everything from the long, patient, and thorough conversations, as well as the brief daily comments. Every reference to the gospel is seed that is sown. This seed is then corroborated by actions.

It is important to look for occasions to explain the gospel to our children. These conversations can be habitual—such as a devotional every night, or a family time once a week—or they can be spontaneous, as the parents teach through the normal course of life.

A parent should not feel like she has to include all elements of the gospel in one conversation, because she is parenting for life. If the parent has a long-term view, she can go deep on specific elements (such as the Cross, resurrection, repentance, sin, the nature of God, the humanity of Christ, etc.) as the need arises. A parent has the child's entire life, so drill deep and over time you will cover the breadth.

With this approach, there is no need to water-down or minimize the message to your children. Obviously, we should use age-appropriate terminology. But when Scripture talks about teaching children spiritual truth, the emphasis is on thoroughness: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:6–7).

Oversimplification is a greater danger than giving too much detail. Do not soften the parts that are unpleasant, such as Christ's death, atonement, or the effects of sin in a person's life. But take the time to carefully explain how these elements relate to the gospel, while constantly reminding your children of the centrality of the lordship of Jesus over the world.

When a parent makes important decisions in life, he should explain to his children how the gospel influenced that decision. Use the differences between

your family and others to explain the gospel. Explain why you do not buy certain things, do certain things, or want certain things, and constantly point back to the gospel as the motivation. When you see disturbing news on TV, or are confronted with suffering, take those opportunities to explain sin and forgiveness. Essentially, parents are constantly on the lookout for the right occasions to teach their children about the gospel. All these conversations are forms of scattering the seed.

### *Lives of Credibility*

Once we spread God's seeds, we must water them with prayer and the words and works of God. We must cultivate the soil with biblical care, love, and friendship. But since the seed is the most critical thing, we need to know what it is, and how to tell good seed from bad seed. In other words, we need to become experts in the gospel.

If we desire to teach our children faithfully, we must first master the curriculum. Because we cannot teach well what we do not know well, we need to be experts in the gospel. Since Christians and non-Christians alike need the gospel, our children should hear gospel themes regularly. Study the gospel, and trust in its power (Rom. 1:16).

Speaking words of biblical integrity is only half of the gospel equation. That is why 1 Timothy 4:16 commands "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

Paul extends an amazing promise: if our lips preach the gospel with theological accuracy, and our lives are filled with integrity, others will be drawn to Christ. Gospel words plus consistently godly lives is the most potent combination in evangelism. If our children can understand the truth of the gospel because of our clear, accurate, and loving explanation, and can see the power of the gospel because of our earnest, prayerful, and Spirit-enabled desire to imitate Christ, we have faithfully discharged our duty to sow the seed of the gospel into our children's lives.

Remember, our responsibility is to do all we can to prepare the field of our children's hearts. Proverbs 21:31 says, "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, / But deliverance is of the LORD." In the days of their battles, Israel was responsible to depend fully on God and to do all they could to be ready for



battle. It is likewise our responsibility as parents to do all we can to become gospel experts—not only for the benefit of ourselves and the people we evangelize but also for our children. We need to live lives of gospel credibility, especially with the young people who see us all the time.

### PRAY AND PROTECT AS GOD CAUSES THE GROWTH

In agriculture, after the soil is prepared and the seed is planted, there is a lot of waiting. The season of waiting for God to cause growth, however, is not a time of inactivity, but of great effort. Remember, there is always work to do in the field of a child's heart. While you continue to build a relationship of love and emphasize the gospel with every opportunity, there are also a few more acts that a faithful and rightly motivated farmer needs to perform. A farmer waits for the growth by watching for weeds, watering, and caring for the fields. A parent, after planting, waits by praying for, protecting, and nourishing the seeds that have been planted.

#### *Pray*

Prayer is our most important responsibility and yet is often neglected. Just as Samuel considered it a sin not to pray for Israel, not praying for and with our children is an abdication of our responsibility as parents (1 Sam. 12:23). In praying, we bring our children into God's presence and leave them there for God to perform His work. Our reliance must be solely on the One who can bring about the miracle of spiritual rebirth. Pray that God would change your children's hearts and draw them to Him.

You can do this by praying with your child daily. Encourage your child to pray on his own. Give your child ideas about what to pray for, and help him express needs, failures, and sins to God. Pray with your spouse for the spiritual needs of your child. Share with your children how you pray for them, and how you see the Lord answering those prayers in their lives.

#### *Protect*

While we trust in the Lord, we also want to protect our children from weeds that can grow up and choke out the new growth. In the parable of the soils, Jesus taught that the seed that falls among weeds grows up very quickly,

but the weeds of worldliness and riches grow up and choke it out (Matt. 13:22). As diligent farmers, we must beware of weeds that will take nutrients from the soil, overshadow the seed with its leaves, and kill the sapling as it develops.

To determine threats to your child's faith, ask yourself these questions: (1) what does my child want to do more than anything? (2) in what circumstances does my child respond sinfully? (3) does he or she become angry when something is taken away or an activity is interrupted? Especially in these areas, parents should be careful of childish excess and indulgence.

When we talk about defending against the weeds of idolatry, we need to have a strong relationship with our children. We must be comfortable engaging them on a heart level, so that when idols encroach, we can intervene with truth, empathy, and love. This protection is essential.

As any parent knows, we will not be able to protect our children forever. At the end of the day, trusting in God's power is essential to sanity in parenting. We must trust God for His great work of salvation.

### *Nourish*

One of the most common questions that I received as a children's pastor is How should parents respond to their child's profession of faith? I answer this by using the acrostic GROW. Christian parents desire for their children to become Christians but need to be wary of false professions. So adopt the GROW model for responding to your child's profession of faith:

1. **G**uard your child against false assurance.
2. **R**efresh your child's interest with encouragement.
3. **O**bserve your child's fruitfulness.
4. **W**ait for mature fruit from mature trees.

### *Guard*

Protect your children against false assurance by teaching them the nature of true salvation. John MacArthur writes:

Certainly we cannot assume that every profession of faith reflects a genuine work of God in the heart, and this is particularly true of children. Children often respond positively to gospel invitations for a host



of reasons. Many of these reasons are unrelated to any awareness of sin and are apart from any real understanding of spiritual truth. If we prod children to “faith” by external pressure, their “conversion” will prove to be spurious.<sup>6</sup>

Salvation is not attained by reciting a prayer (or by any other human act). Salvation is the work of God in the heart of man and results in a lifelong journey of fruitful commitment to Christ. Many sectors of American evangelicalism accept a mere profession of faith without any reservations. However, Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Wise parents, therefore, will not assume that a child’s simply having asked Jesus into his heart means that he is born again.

Recognize that children are likely to follow their parents’ lead and mimic their parents’ faith without understanding the gospel. Because they naturally want to please their parents, some children are naturally inclined to make a decision for Christ. Consequently, it is spiritually reckless to give them assurance of salvation based on a prayer. Our evangelical heritage has done great harm by asking children to “receive Jesus into your heart.” It is common for youth workers to lead young children in the sinner’s prayer. As parents, we need to understand evangelism to the extent that we can watch over the sapling of faith. It is far better to think of salvation as a life commitment rather than a momentary decision.

Again, MacArthur writes: “Teach children the gospel—all of it—but understand that you may be planting the seeds for a harvest that may not be mature for many years. If you mow a field as soon as it sprouts you will never be able to reap a full harvest.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Refresh*

Encouraging your children is a way to refresh their interest in the gospel. Be careful not to discourage their interest in the things of Christ. Do not drive a wedge between a profession of faith and subsequent actions by saying things like “If you were a Christian, then you wouldn’t say things like that” or “If you were truly born again, you would have a different attitude.” Also, it often is not productive to say “You are not a Christian” to a young child who is still developing. Do not discourage her interest in Christianity. When the child

says that she wants to accept Jesus into her heart, think more about what God is beginning to do in the child's heart, and less about the biblical accuracy of the child's wording. Correct your children's theology and inform them about biblical salvation, but build on the positive. So if you want to grow your child's faith, guard against false profession and refresh interest with encouragement.

### *Observe*

Examine your children's fruitfulness. Our greatest desire is for children to glorify God by bearing much spiritual fruit (John 15:8). If your child professes to be a Christian, 2 Corinthians 13:5 applies to that child: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." Also, our Savior's warning applies to all professing Christians: "By their fruits you will know them." (Matt. 7:20). Refuse to give your children a formula for salvation. If you give them a works-focused formula or recipe such as "repent and believe," even if the formula is biblical, your children can emphasize jumping through hoops without working through the central heart issues. Constantly point to the fruit of salvation (love for God's Word, joyful sacrifice for others, passion for Christ, etc.) so that they can assess their progress.

### *Waiting*

There is one more consideration in stimulating your child's profession of faith, and that is waiting. Christian parents should not expect mature fruit from young saplings but should expect to wait for maturity of the tree to produce the highest-quality fruit. Do not judge a young sapling by mature-tree standards. Yes, inspect the fruit of your child's profession. Yes, keep your eye on spiritual evidence. But do not expect a young, healthy tree to produce adult fruit.

Faithful farmers wait for God to work the miracle of growth. "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." (Gal. 6:9). Dennis Gundersen adds:

The fact is a child is very much an unfinished product. Childhood, viewed biblically, is a stage in which parents are patiently cultivating the persons their children are to become. Childhood is a time of preparation and not a time of completion, of immaturity and not of maturi-



ty, of seed-planting and not of fruit-bearing. To view things otherwise is shallow thinking about children and about evangelism.<sup>8</sup>

God is the actor in salvation. He is the One who saves us. He made us alive while we were dead, and it is because of His work that believers are found in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). We need to work while we wait for God to do His work. As parents, once again we find ourselves in a position of humble trust, waiting on God to work His miraculous power of salvation.

### THE COMING HARVEST

In the great work of parenting, God equips his parent-evangelists to prepare the soil and sow the seed. Then He enables them to pray for and protect the sapling. Because of this labor, God often chooses to grow the seed and perform His miraculous deed of regeneration. Ryle admonishes parents by saying:

Precious, no doubt, are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part which will never die. The world, with all its glory, shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; the sun shall cease to shine. But the spirit which dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, shall outlive them all, and whether in happiness or misery (to speak as a man) will depend on you.<sup>9</sup>

Ryle speaks the truth. The great endeavor for Christian parents is to sow the gospel into the souls of our children. So, Christian parents, prepare the soil, plant pure gospel seed, pray to God in trust, and protect against the weeds of this world. Perhaps, then, it may be said of our children, "So they will be called oaks of righteousness, / The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified" (Isa. 61:3 NASB). It is our desire to look out onto the fields of our families and see large trees that are robustly fruitful for the Lord Jesus Christ.