

known within the family, is wrong. Your child needs to know that they can tell you about this. As the abuser will often tell the child that the abuse is a secret, it is important for the child to talk to the parents. Children will usually feel that the abuse is their fault. Your child needs your protection and needs you to believe what they are telling you, so do not push aside what you are told as of little importance. Believe your child and act. Social Services will help you in sorting

the matter out, because it is too big an issue to deal with on your own.

This article has just touched on many of the issues involved in teaching your child about sex, and it has not been possible to deal with those issues in depth. You may find two books of help: *Sex and the Bible Believer*, which is compiled and published by Christadelphians,¹ and the *Parent Talk Guide to Your Child and Sex*, published by Hodder and Stoughton.

The changing scenes of life

Preparing our children to leave home

Having passed through the turbulent times of adolescence, it is not long before our children are ready for their next adventure. Simon and Helen Collard (Cambridge, UK) guide us through the basics of getting our children ready to leave home. It's a process that begins, not when they are approaching 18, but as soon as they are born.

"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Lk. 16:8).

PEOPLE IN THE WORLD are often better at preparing for the inevitable than we are. This is typified in the way that provision is made for a child's future financial needs. With the cost of university education and property rising quickly in most countries, tax-free savings accounts are started in the child's name at the earliest possible moment. There is nothing particularly wrong with this practice, of course, but we, as "children of light", should be equally diligent and timely in our spiritual investment for our children, so that they are prepared for the day when it will be needed.

Taking the financial analogy a little further, few people have the resources to make a single down-payment for their child's future welfare. Most have to put a little sum away into a 'safe' place each month or week so that the value can accumulate and appreciate. A spiritual investment cannot be made in a single day; a little has to be prepared

each day of the child's life, "precept . . . upon precept; line upon line" (Isa. 28:9-11). This daily building up of a child's knowledge will certainly accumulate, and will prove to be of inestimable value in later life.

Spiritual preparation should begin at the earliest opportunity. As soon as the midwife departs to allow the parents time on their own with their newborn baby, a start should be made. Make sure one of you has a pocket Bible ready (preferably the father, because it is his responsibility). Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the safe arrival of His gift (Ps. 127:3) and do a short reading. (One of our children was born on 11 January, and Psalm 23, the middle reading for the day, was just perfect for the occasion.) At this point the words of Peter become exquisitely appropriate: "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). We should start as we mean to go on. That child should never know a time when the Word of God and voice of prayer is not heard in the household.

Training a child

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

At what age would you be prepared to let your child leave your home and live away? Parents who want the best for their children would say as late as possible, in order to make the best use

of influencing them in the right ways. So here is a test for us: would you be happy letting a child go at five years old or less? Would our spiritual instruction of that child be sufficient for them for the rest of their lives? Would the training in "the way he should go" be sufficient that "he will not depart from it" when he gets old?

Jochebed probably had less than five years to instill a fear of the God of Israel into Moses before he was taken into Pharaoh's house. Hannah certainly had no more time with Samuel before she lent him back to the Lord. But, in both cases, there can be no doubt that the influence of the parents, and particularly the mother, was a lasting one. We should aim to lay all the foundations before a child is of school age, because this is when the influence of the world will really begin.

Advising and listening

"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19).

In what way should we give advice to our children about living away from home? In our desire to teach them there is a real danger that we will give them a series of lectures. We might want to tell them everything they should and shouldn't do in a prescriptive fashion. This will surely lead to resentment and a desire to get away from all these restrictions. Advice and instruction should flow naturally throughout childhood, and should become more attuned to the practical issues of life as children grow into adulthood and the prospect of leaving home approaches.

It is a parent's duty to point out the pitfalls of life. We know our children better than anyone else. We know their weaknesses (they are probably like our own!). We can see their immaturity and naivety. These are the things we can help them with while they are still with us. We should find time to discuss the importance of selecting friends who will not lead them astray; the dangers of alcohol and other intoxicating substances; how to avoid situations where they might be tempted into immorality; the importance of spending money wisely, etc. Many of these issues will arise naturally from the readings, and the opportunity to talk about them should be seized and not lost. It is also important to stress the positive side of any issues that are discussed, as well as pointing out the dangers.

Listening is an important virtue for a parent. We should be prepared to hear what our child's

problems are and to discuss any subject, no matter how difficult we might find it. And these are the times really to bring home the Scriptural perspective into the things of life. If discussing life's difficulties has become the norm at home, then our son or daughter is much more likely to be able to open his or her heart to us from afar when life away from home gets tough.

Some Scriptural examples

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments" (Prov. 3:1).

Scripture gives us some very relevant examples of young people leaving home. Joseph was seventeen years old when his home life was shattered. The instruction he had received had to be sufficient to sustain him through a period of trial and loneliness that few of us are required to suffer. Daniel was probably of similar age when he was marched off to Babylon. His experiences can hardly have been less painful than Joseph's, and yet he retained a devotion to his God that he never departed from, even when he was an old man in the lions' den.

Perhaps we can say that Daniel's case was made a little easier because he had three friends with him who shared the same faith. This must be a consideration when our children come to decide where to go for university or other training. If at all possible, encourage them to go to a place where they will enjoy the company of others who share the same faith. Few of us would claim to have the strength of faith of Joseph. We look back to our own experiences and remember the influence that our friends have had on us, for good and bad. So why encourage our child to go to a place where we know there is no ecclesia?

Another similarity between Joseph and Daniel was the stand they had to make for their faith. Their early training in spiritual matters enabled them to maintain a separation from the world and its ways. Joseph, entrusted with all that Potiphar had, knew it would be a sin against God to touch his master's wife. Daniel, with a choice of diet that only recently would have been just a dream to him, chose not to be defiled by the king's meat. Both were prepared to face the consequences because they feared God more than those apparently powerful people around them.

They "endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). This is surely an important lesson to teach any child, but do we teach it by our example? We should never expect our children to do anything we are not prepared to

do. We should also praise them when they tell us that they have had to make a stand. It could be politely to tell a teacher, "We don't believe that you go to heaven when you die", or even to refuse a sip of 'communion' wine in a church service, as a child of ours had to do.

Of course, things can go wrong. We may have done our duty, and they still leave home and want nothing of the things of God. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is helpful here. Unlike the preceding two parables in Luke 15, where the person responsible for the loss has to make a search for the lost item, this parable shows that the lost person was responsible for his own predicament. The son was allowed to have his inheritance and allowed to go and use it as he wanted.

There comes a point where no amount of reasoning or argument can dissuade a child who is bent on leaving home, come what may. We have to let them go and find out for themselves. It is only when the son is feeding the husks to the pigs that he comes to his senses—a hard lesson for the son, but surely an even harder time for the loving father. His natural inclination might well have been to go after the boy to try to get him back. But this would not have helped before the turning point. In fact it would probably have hindered. Perhaps the lesson for parents is to be always ready and waiting for that knock on the door. Let there be no recriminations on the day when a son or daughter comes back in obvious repentance (Ps. 103:8-13).

Conclusion

It is impossible to prepare a child for leaving home by giving a five-minute talk after loading the car!

Some argue that if children are brought up in a state of separateness from the world, a reaction will set in when they grow older which will cause them to plunge headlong into ways of worldliness. If that idea be sound, then a child who is to be brought up honestly and virtuously, to avoid a similar reaction, should from time to time be placed in the company of the dishonest and licentious. Such a notion is opposed to experience. It is inconsistent alike with common sense and the examples and precepts of Scripture . . . Joseph . . . must have been brought up to value the world and its doings at their true worth. Removed at the age of seventeen from his father's house into a strange land, he displayed, in word and deed, a righteousness which many of his elders might strive to emulate. Whether in Potiphar's house, in prison or before Pharaoh, his utterances and actions were characterised by an open recognition of God. His integrity, allurements could not seduce, adversity could not blight and prosperity could not benumb. His faith was not the outcome of a sojourn amongst a wicked, idolatrous people. Neither was it the evolution of his own natural mind. Faith has but one source—the Word of God. Joseph's history speaks volumes for the impressions which had been conveyed to his mind in his early youth.

Clara H. Jannaway, *The Christadelphian*, 1898, pp. 16-17.
Reprinted in *Family Life in the Lord*, p. 204.

When the inevitable day comes it should be the next step for that young person on a road which has already been clearly defined and understood while at home in our care. It is our duty to lay a good Scriptural foundation and to draw from it all the lessons of life. If we really care for our son or daughter we will not shirk the responsibility to get to grips with the difficult issues and give good advice. We should be watchful and 'nip in the bud' those things which we know could cause them to stumble when left on their own.

When the time does come, we must be prepared to let them go. After all, isn't this the day we knew would come? They don't stay babies for ever! The sad fact is that some parents can't let their children go. The natural instinct to protect becomes distorted out of all proportion. Bringing children up is a continual process of letting go: allowing greater freedoms and responsibilities; allowing greater use of their own judgement in the matters of life. If they are faithful in these small matters they can be allowed responsibility over greater ones.

Children learn from their parents' example. If we want them to behave in a godly way when they are away from us, let us show them how to do it when they are with us. They can soon distinguish between sincerity and hypocrisy. If we fervently pray to our heavenly Father, read His Word and enjoy fellowship with our brethren and sisters, then there is a fair chance they will do the same. Let them see us practising what we preach.

"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9).