

to be baptized, and so they were both baptized together on the same day later that year following sound instruction by a local brother.

The foregoing has been our personal experience, and we are happy to share it, glad that by God's grace it seemed to work in our case. We know that we had ideal conditions in some respects as we were both at home at the beginning and end of the day and were able to give the time each day to reading with the children. We know that in many families this is much more difficult, but we are convinced that it is worth making

other sacrifices to ensure that the children grow up with a sound knowledge of the Scriptures. It particularly helps during the period when teenagers are inclined to turn away from their parents and perhaps may not respect them in the same way, at least for a time. The instruction we give them comes from a much greater source of authority than parents, and they have already learnt to respect that. One thing we learn from teenage children is that we as parents are full of failings, but the Word is infallible—and what a blessing it is!

## The changing scenes of life

### *Babies and toddlers*

*David and Sophie Nicholls (Solihull, UK) take us through this key stage of child development and child-parent bonding.*

**T**HE ARRIVAL of your child is a wonderful thing. There is nothing like the joy experienced when your child is safely delivered and you return home with a bundle of new life and know for sure that nothing will ever be the same again!

Babies come with baggage, and no one prepares you for the fact that this wonderful little person takes over every room in the house with clothes, bibs, nappies, toys, cots, pushchairs, etc., etc. But it is not until the family settles down and gets into a routine that the changes the baby has made to the parents' life hit home. No longer can you both go out to the Bible Class or the Sunday night meeting, sit through a meeting together, have a leisurely lie-in or a quiet meal together; and yet the blessings that your child brings far outweigh the fact that you don't have a moment to yourself or that unbroken nights are a thing of the past.

Psalms 127:3-5 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man [and woman] that hath his quiver full of them". Whether we have a quiver full (five?) or just one or two, how glad we are to be blessed with them!

This psalm begins, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it". This is the best advice to any parents with young children. Live your life in the Lord, and plan your daily lives around things linked to the Truth, and you will build your home upon that firm foundation, whose Builder and Maker is God.

Children are, as it were, a clean piece of paper, not written on, unmarked. The beauty of children is their innocence and their absolute trust and dependence on their parents. The influence we have over our children, and the example we show them at this time, are fundamentally setting the scene for their future. The things they absorb from their environment shape them as individuals.

#### **Mother and toddler groups**

A great opportunity exists while you have a babe in arms to meet with other Christadelphian mothers at a mother and toddler group during the week. This is a very healthy environment for both mum and baby, as mums can find it very difficult to be without adult company during the day, and it's good for babies and toddlers to mix with other children of the same age, as friendships between them develop. As we well know, friendships made in the Truth are the ones that last and, it is hoped, stand the test of time. The toddler groups allow the children to play and do kids' things in a very loving atmosphere, and they are always encouraged to listen to a Bible story,

say prayers before the snack, and generally be kind to one another.

### Home

The home is where, as a family, you live and grow together. It is that safe and secure environment where, together in love, you begin to bring up your children and shape their lives. The best opportunity we have to live out our lives in the things of the Truth, and put into practice the things that we preach, is within our own homes. The words of Deuteronomy 11:18,19 come to mind: "Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up".

The old adage, "The family that prays together stays together", is a true one. Prayer around mealtimes, sitting together as a family, is very important, as quite often it is the only time in the day during the working week that the family is together. Sit around the table, not in front of the TV. Begin each meal in prayer; prayer is vital for children. Little people need routine; and the routine of prayer, so that it becomes the norm for kids, is wonderful. Even the smallest child will learn respect and thankfulness for their daily food and other provision, and this will begin their relationship with their Creator. One of our friends at school told us that when our son Henry went to their house for tea he asked them why they didn't have a prayer to start the meal. Quite taken aback, she asked him to say one, and he did just that. Children in their innocence are great witnesses to God!

Mealtimes are also a great opportunity to talk about the things of the Truth in a simple way to your children. Their little minds are very responsive, and it is surprising what sinks in and what they can remember.

It can be difficult to get toddlers to sit through readings at first, so perhaps stories at bedtime with good illustrations and fun pictures (available from many good bookshops) will introduce them to God's promises and the characters from the Bible.

Singing songs and hymns, and listening to CDs like the *Praise the Lord* hymns (if the words are Scripturally sound), the *Me Too Collection* and other recordings, are also practical ways of

encouraging their minds in the wonder of praising God in 'goings out and in'. The words of the Psalms come to mind once more: "I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being" (104:33).

### Days out

The creation around us is a wonderful witness to the Almighty, and we can use nature to show our children the natural witness to God's almighty hand in the world. Walks in the park, playing on the swings, pushing the pram with proud grandparents, days at the seaside, going to the zoo—all of these help to educate and influence little minds to see that God is an all-powerful, magnificent God. Another verse from Psalm 104 to remember as a principle to guide our parenting is, "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (v. 24).

### Meetings

Going to the meeting can be hard when you have a very young baby, but gets easier as they grow into toddlers. Please make the effort to go as soon as you can with your newborn, however, because family life in the Lord is extended with brothers and sisters and their families. Children should be encouraged to be part of the meeting life. It is important, where possible, for both parents to break bread, so that we can renew our strength and energy for the walk towards the Kingdom.

Again, bringing up your children in a meeting environment sets the scene for their lives, gives them something stable and solid and leads to Sunday School and CYC. It is the beginning of a life in Christ and many good, strong friendships in the Truth.

The influence, love and help shown by both the immediate and the spiritual family are a great help and comfort in the sometimes difficult moments of bringing up children. The relationship is indeed two-way, because there are many brethren and sisters who take great joy in being aunts and uncles and surrogate grandparents, and their influence can be quite profound on our children. The Master himself loved children, and highlighted their pure and trusting qualities, which we should adopt as his servants (Mt. 18:3-5).

Sometimes children are not encouraged to be in the main meeting because of their potential to create noise. This can sometimes be true, and yet we are all a family in Christ Jesus, both young and old, so some level of tolerance is required. A

balance must be struck, with understanding on all sides. A crying baby and disruptive toddler can be very off-putting, and yet, as soon as you dare let your children sit in the main meeting, it is surprising how understanding and accommodating most brethren and sisters are. It is equally wonderful how much of what goes on in the service your child remembers (19:13,14).

### Conclusion

There is nothing that can quite prepare you for children, and neither do they come with an instruction manual as to how to deal with them. Yet

living your life around the things of the Truth, and applying the teachings and advice which we find in the Bible, will help us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We pray that all of our young ones will learn to love the Lord their God, will learn to see Jesus as their Saviour and coming King, and embrace the promises and covenants as their own, so that as they grow they will be as blessed as we parents are: "Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Ps. 112:1,2).

## Setting the example

*It's no good saying one thing and doing another. Mark and Mary Whittaker (Crewe, UK) remind us just how important it is to set the right standard, modelled on the pattern of Christ, as examples to our children. There is no place for hypocrisy. Setting a good example is one of the most powerful ways of teaching them what the Lord requires.*

**H**OW MANY PARENTS can still remember the first time their baby repeated back to them the word 'Mummy' or 'Daddy'? Our child will have learned that first word by listening to us repeat it many times over, eventually working out how to mimic the example itself. We may not even have consciously taught the word, but the child has learnt to copy it nevertheless, thus illustrating just how powerful example is as a tool to teach others. Through much of our lives we continue to learn in this way—by copying the examples we observe in our parents and teachers, and later on in colleagues at work and brothers and sisters in the meeting.

Our Creator knows that this is what we are like, which is why He left the example of His own Son on record for us, a perfect life that we can strive to follow. And Jesus himself made sure that his example was noted by his disciples, as when he washed the disciples' feet: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (Jno. 13:15).\*

Paul also understood the power of a good example, and ensured that, wherever he preached the gospel, his behaviour was unimpeachable, a benchmark that others could live by: "Brethren,

*join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Phil. 3:17). Where he saw brothers and sisters setting a good example themselves, like the Thessalonians, he made sure that others took note of it: "And you became followers of us and of the Lord . . . so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe"*

(1 Thess. 1:6,7).

By wanting to set the right example for our own children, then, we are following in the footsteps of our Master himself and his great apostle.

### Taking responsibility

For parents in the Truth it's important to appreciate from the start that children are both a blessing from God and a responsibility—*our* responsibility—until they reach adulthood. If we want our children to grow up with a love for God and His Word then we have to realise that laying the foundation rests firmly with us, and we only get the one opportunity to influence our children positively. If we leave the influence over our children's spiritual development to child minders and the like, particularly in the early years, we cannot really claim to be discharging *our* responsibility as godly parents, nor is it likely to set the example we want for our children. What is it that we want our children to be soaking up like a sponge in those formative years: an example that we have control over (our own), or someone else's, over which we have no control?

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\* Scripture quotations from the NKJV.