

# Gospel-Centered Mothering

## Gospel-Centered Parenting for Real Life

by Janelle Bradshaw

My son, Hudson, will be two in November, and while he brings his family tons of joy, his sinful nature is on full display. He has mastered the art of screaming and throwing himself on the floor when he doesn't get his way. And when he's really angry, he tries to hit me and pull my hair. Good times.

Caly and MJ—my two girls—are 6 and 4. They are at that really fun age where we can create family memories and build relationally. But they both struggle with emotional self-control and sometimes it feels like they cry all day long. Many days I just want to cry too.

Then I hear the phrase “gospel-centered parenting” and I want to crawl into a hole and never come out again.

It feels like yet another thing I'm *not* doing very well. Am I really supposed to explain God's righteous wrath toward sin and the wonders of substitutionary atonement to MJ as she wails in despair because Caly won't give her a turn with the toy cash register? Does gospel-centered parenting mean I have to remind Hudson of his desperate state as a sinner before a holy God, helpless to change without the power of the Holy Spirit, while he screams on the floor with one eye cocked to see if I'm taking in the performance?

Not to mention these things are happening *all day long*. If I am preaching the gospel to my children every time they sin, the health inspectors will soon be showing up at our door, because nothing else is gonna get done around here.

Please don't misunderstand. I believe that all our parenting must be gospel-centered. But I think sometimes our idea of what that should look like gets muddled (at least mine does!). We can easily add on all kinds of additional and frankly unrealistic practices that aren't in Scripture and then we feel overwhelmed by guilt that we are not “doing it right.”

But God's commands are not burdensome ([1 John 5:3](#)). Sure, motherhood is *hard work*—the hardest job around. But if motherhood becomes a *burden*, it may be because we have added our own requirements to God's commands. And thus, in

our attempts to practice gospel-centered parenting we unintentionally miss out on grace.

We have a few more thoughts on this topic, but right now I gotta go. Hudson is throwing a fit.

## What Your Kids Know

by Nicole Whitacre

So many of you faithful, exhausted, moms wrote in following [Janelle's post last week on gospel-centered mothering](#). We hear ya because we are right there with ya! And we've had several encouraging conversations with Mom over the weekend that we hope to share with you in the days to come.

Yesterday we were so blessed to have [Dr. Tom Schreiner](#), his wife Diane, and several family members join us for our Sunday service. [Dr. Schreiner preached](#) from [Romans 3:21-26](#) on the glorious gospel. At one point, Dr. Schreiner, spoke a word directly to dads, but it was a great reminder to me as a mom as well, so I took the great liberty of changing "dads" to "moms":

"Moms: The most important thing as a mom is the tone in your home, that tone of joy and gladness. Your kids will know it. Your husband will know it. No matter what you say, they'll know if you're happy—fundamentally a happy person. You can't fool children. You can tell them all kinds of things but they know it, don't they? That gladness comes fundamentally not from our circumstances but from the gospel. From knowing God. From knowing what God has done for us. Then we'll be thankful."

As we talk about gospel-centered mothering, let's not forget that our happiness as mothers comes not from our circumstances but from the gospel. So may God help us find great joy in the truth of these words today:

*"But not the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."* [Romans 3:21-26](#)

# After Awful Errands

by Carolyn Mahaney

“Just wanted to say thanks for Janelle’s post yesterday,” wrote one mom:

“I just got home from an outrageously awful trip to run errands with my 5 and 3 year old. There was complaining, arguing, rude talk, mean faces (probably from me too, I didn’t have a mirror), a couple of “in your face” disobedience moments, a small melt-down, and a moment when I started praying for help because I literally thought my 3 year old had been taken at the post office, but no she was just hiding behind something because she didn’t want to come when I asked. On my way home I kept thinking, “what is wrong with me?” “Why am I failing at parenting?” We got home, I fixed everyone a snack, let the kids have a little TV time and sat down to read your blog. And that was when I read the post from yesterday for the first time. Thanks for being real and speaking DIRECTLY to my situation today!”

Oh my, can I relate! I can still vividly recall some of those “outrageously awful” errand runs when my girls were little! Those are days as a mother that you don’t easily forget.

As moms, we are quite familiar with the meaning of our Lord’s words in [Matthew 6:34](#): “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Scripture tells it like it is. It doesn’t present some kind of happy-go-lucky picture of the Christian life. No, it says we will have trouble. And each day will have enough of it’s own. In other words, “outrageously awful” errand runs are to be expected.

There may be a massive dis-connect between my own expectations of motherhood and what happens in real life, but there is no disconnect between Scripture and reality. The harder life and motherhood gets the more we see how relevant Scripture is.

And because an “outrageously awful” errand trip is just about as much as we can handle for one day—not to mention that it may be on top of other, more significant, trials we are facing—Jesus warns us not to do something that me, this mom, and most all of us are prone to do at a time like this: worry about the future. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself” ([Mt. 6:34](#)).

Here’s a rule to live by: Never evaluate your mothering after an “outrageously awful” errand run. Oh I broke this rule a thousand times when my kids were little. Just like this mom, I asked questions like “What’s wrong with me?” and

“Why am I failing at parenting?”—questions that draw all kinds of conclusions but offer no answers.

But in these motherhood moments we need the realistic perspective of Scripture. These things will happen. They are to be expected. And they do not mean that I am a failure as a mother or that my children will never receive the gospel and follow Christ. They are simply what Scripture says: the daily allotment of trouble.

And so my first job is not to be anxious about tomorrow or predict my children’s future based on one day’s difficulty. Why? Because I know that my heavenly Father cares for me. If you too had an “outrageously awful” day of mothering today, read [Matthew 6:25-34](#) and rejoice in the God of today and tomorrow.

## The Online Mom

by Carolyn Mahaney

Before we get to some more specific thoughts on gospel-centered parenting, we want to talk about a few sources of discouragement for moms. Unruly children aren’t the only cause for despair; a big source of temptation can also come from comparison with other moms.

Meagan sent is this insightful comment about [Janelle’s post](#):

It was nice to be assured that some one else has children who throw themselves on the floor and cry as if the world is ending when they don’t get their way and that I’m not the only one who doesn’t get around to gourmet meals every night. So often all people post about or share are the great, creative things they do. Like gourmet meals and hand sewn clothes and perfectly dressed kids. And all the status updates are about the latest adorable thing their child has done. (No one posts about the latest tantrum their kid has thrown.) And please understand, I’m sure I am guilty of the very things I am complaining about! But one can walk away from all of these posts/updates thinking that everyone else has there act together and this is what it must look like to be a “good” mom and wife. And when one doesn’t measure up to these standards one’s heart can be sorely discouraged and guilt laden.

As one pastor recently [quoted Will Farrell](#) (not someone we ever thought we would be quoting here on girltalk!): “May your life one day be as awesome as you pretend it is on Facebook.”

Now I don't think most of us mean to "pretend" or even to be fake. But this raises an interesting point—both about what we as mothers post and how we interpret what others post on social media.

In our recent series, [The Connected Heart](#), we noted that there are endless ways that we as mothers can benefit from social media and the Internet. But we must also be alert to the fact that it expands the sources of temptation as well.

When I was raising my children there were only my friends and neighbors with whom I was tempted to compare my mothering. Today, with Facebook, Pinterest and the like, we measure ourselves against countless women every day—many of whom we do not know and whose "real" lives are mostly hidden from view.

So while we can glean many creative and useful mothering tips online, we can also be tempted to measure ourselves against a virtual standard of motherhood: a perfect, composite mother who doesn't, in fact, really exist at all.

## Reality Mothering

by Nicole Whitacre

So often, we moms evaluate our own mothering by our worst days and compare ourselves to other moms on their best days. But both measurements are wrong and can result in a whole lot of unnecessary (not to mention ungodly) anxiety, false guilt, and self-pity.

When we get back from [that awful trip to the grocery store](#) with three small fussy children, or endure an entire day of teenage sullenness we conclude that this "worst day ever" is the measure of our mothering: total failure.

But then we [go online](#)—where a whole lot of mothering "best days" are to be found—and assume other moms have it altogether.

We read a mom-blog with gorgeous photographs of a creatively decorated, perfectly clean and organized children's room and we assume this must be what this woman's *entire* house looks like *all the time*.

Or our Facebook feed is full of parental reports of children's latest sibling-loving, super-adorable, mature-beyond-their-years comments and we assume that this is what conversations in those homes must sound like *all the time*.

Or we pop over to Pinterest only to conclude that every other woman must serve fresh, delicious, beautiful, organic meals to her family *all the time*.

What we can't see online are the ten messy-house, fussy-children, cereal-for-dinner days for every one Pinterest-perfect moment. So we must be alert to our temptation to compare ourselves to a false standard—a picture that someone else is trying to portray, or that we have filled out in our own minds based on a single snapshot.

And if browsing routinely leaves us prone to compare, overwhelmed, and guilt-ridden, then it may be a sign we need to cut back online and return regularly and ruthlessly to Scripture: to remind us that each day (for every mom!) has enough trouble of its own (Matt 6:34), but also that “as your days, so shall your strength be” (Deut. 33:25) and that if we do not grow weary in doing good, in due season we will reap if we do not give up (Gal 6:9).

## When You Feel Like a Failure

by Carolyn Mahaney

I once saw a Family Circus cartoon that showed three children leaning on the edge of their parents' bed, watching them while they slept. The caption underneath was one child's remark: “They look so sweet and peaceful when they're asleep. You wonder how they could ever yell at us during the day.”

Do you ever wonder if this happens in your home? That your kids think of you as a mean mom? That your failures as a mother *define* you and *determine* your children's future?

When you add the feeling (or reality) of a mothering failure to the exhaustion, the endless work, and the temptation to compare yourself to other moms, you have a perfect motherhood storm.

This happened to me countless times when I was raising my children. I would fail in my mothering—either by something I did, or something I didn't do—and I was sure it was a sign I would *ultimately* fail. That was it. My kids would never “turn out.” I had ruined them forever.

I remember one time I got angry at one of my daughters. Although I had repented before God and asked my daughter's forgiveness, I still felt terrible. I berated myself for treating my child in such a manner. I was convinced the damage was irreparable.

But my husband encouraged me: “Because of your humility in asking her to forgive you, she feels close to you now than before.” And he was right. This

daughter and I were experiencing the sweet closeness that follows repentance in a relationship.

Now I'm not issuing a free pass to sin! I am not saying, "It's okay to be unkind to your children. They're tough. They can handle it." Sin is *always* the wrong choice. It does have consequences. So by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must work tirelessly to eradicate it from our lives (Rom. 8:13). When we sin we must not make excuses, we must confess our sin to God and humbly ask our children for forgiveness.

But we must not succumb to despair or live with low-grade condemnation or guilt. This maligns the gospel and does not produce the fruit of repentance or serve our children. Rather we must return to Scripture. We must remind ourselves of the truth that God is faithful and just to forgive us from our sins and to cleanse us from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), that he is busy conforming us to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), and that he works all things (even our mothering failures!), for our good and the good of our children (Rom 8:28).

(adapted from [\*Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother\*](#))

## When We Sin Against Our Kids

by Carolyn Mahaney

If you're like me, you're painfully aware of the imperfect example you are to your children. But this is good, for it brings us back to the cross.

We are sinful mothers; however, we must not forget that the Savior died for sinners. We will never be able to hold up for our children a perfect example; however, we should display the humble, honest example of a woman striving after holiness, by the grace of God.

In fact, our sins provide an opportunity for the light of the gospel to shine into our relationship with our children. If we humble ourselves, confess our sins, and ask for our children's forgiveness, we will be showing the power of Christ's saving work.

I vividly remember one interaction between my two daughters—Nicole and Kristin—when they were little. I had gotten angry with Kristin and afterwards I overheard Nicole reassuring her sister from vast experience: "Don't worry, Kristin—Mom always asks forgiveness." I didn't know whether to be pleased or discouraged!

While I didn't want to believe Nicole had so many illustrations to draw from, I was relieved that her experience, though not of a perfect mom, was at least tempered by some measure of humility on my part.

Paul Tripp concurs: "Living consistently with the faith does not mean living perfectly, but living in a way that reveals that God and his Word are the most important things to you. Such a [mother] can even honor God in [her] failure, with [her] humility in confession and [her] determination to change."

We can honor God in motherhood failures by humbly confessing our sin and drawing upon God's grace to grow. What a powerful example of gospel-centered mothering!

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Titus 2:11-14*

## How to Be a Happy Mom

by Carolyn Mahaney

I once talked to a woman who told me how she used to always be overwhelmed and unhappy as a mother. She was so burdened by the constant demands of her small children. She lived anxious and depressed. But then this mother was tragically separated from one of her children for a period of time. God worked in her heart through this difficult circumstance, and one way was to transform her perspective of motherhood.

"Ever since that time" she said "I have never struggled with depression again. God helped me to see what a blessing my children are. I wake up every morning so grateful that I get to care for them, to meet their needs, to have them near me. I am the happiest mom."

Thankfulness drives away the clouds of weariness, self-pity, and impatience that overshadow the joys of motherhood. If we find that we have lost our joy in mothering, it may be because we have neglected to consistently thank God for our children.

Sure, our children are a big responsibility and they do require a lot of work! But they are first and most importantly a gift from God and an incredible blessing. Read with me again the familiar words of Psalm 127:

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! (Psalm 127:3-5 ESV)

Let the truth of Scripture refresh your perspective of motherhood on this Monday. It doesn't matter how your children are behaving or how much discipline they may require or how much work it is to care for their needs. The truth is that they are a gift, a heritage, a reward. So choose to thank God for your children, and you will become a happy mom.

## Momentary Motherhood

by Carolyn Mahaney

It is easy to become distracted by the constant demands of motherhood, but we must not lose sight of this fact: Our children are only young for a very brief time.

When my girls were little, it wasn't always easy for me to wake up for those 2:00 a.m. feedings. Loneliness sometimes crept in when I missed an activity in order to put them to bed on time. I was eager to get them potty-trained and be done with the dirty diaper routine. Some days it felt as if that season would never end.

But frequently on trips to the grocery store a grandmother would stop to admire my little ones and leave me with this admonition: "Honey, enjoy them now because they grow up so quickly."

How right those women were!

I was keenly aware of the fleetingness of childhood when my son Chad was born. At the time of his birth, Nicole was sixteen, Kristin was fifteen, and Janelle was eleven. By now experience had taught me to treasure each moment, for I knew he wouldn't stay small very long.

The challenges of mothering seemed altogether insignificant this time around. Middle-of-the-night feedings weren't drudgery. I hardly gave a moment's thought to missing an activity. I certainly wasn't in a hurry to potty-train my son. In fact, much to the chagrin of my three daughters, I did not tend to that task until he was almost four years old. (By that time, it only took one day to train him!).

Moms, you may be up to your earlobes with babies and dirty diapers. Or you may be spending half your life in the car, driving your children to and from numerous activities. In whatever stage of motherhood you find yourself, may I remind you of something? It won't last for very long.

In Psalm 90 Moses depicted the reality of the brevity of life. He compared our lives to a watch in the night, a dream, grass that flourishes and then fades—all brief and fleeting images. Then he prayed this way: “So teach us to number our days” (v. 12).

Have you numbered your days lately? If we pause to count the remaining days we have with our children, we will realize how few there are. This awareness will help us to love our children today, to joyfully sacrifice for them today, to thank God for the gift of being their mom today.

—*adapted from Feminine Appeal*

## Not Her Best

by Carolyn Mahaney

As mothers we can sometimes feel overwhelmed because we think that, in addition to being an amazing mom, we should also be exceptional at something else, distinguishable from all the other moms out there by some trade or talent. We can be keenly, sometimes painfully, aware of our lack of specialized skill.

Many of us trained for a specific field of work only to leave it behind to come home with our baby; and then the field left us behind as we raised our children. We may see our husband excelling at his career or observe other women who seem to be exceptionally gifted at one thing or another, and because we haven't distinguished ourselves in some way (we've been too busy cleaning toilets, running errands, reading children's books, and pouring bowls of cereal), we wonder if we are really good at anything.

Twentieth century British author G.K. Chesterton has liberating insight for all mothers who feel pressure to excel in something besides caring for their children, husband, and home. In an essay entitled “The Emancipation of Domesticity” he observed that woman is a “general overseer” in the home, and as such, she must be able to do *many* things well—she shouldn't have to worry about being “the best” at something.

“In other words, there must be in every center of humanity one human being upon a larger plan; one who does not ‘give her best,’ but gives her all....

The woman is expected to cook: not to excel in cooking, but to cook; to cook better than her husband who is earning [a living] by lecturing on botany or breaking stones....the woman is expected to tell tales to the children, not original and artistic tales, but tales—better tales than would probably be told by a first-class cook.

But she cannot be expected to endure anything like this universal duty if she is also to endure the direct cruelty of competitive or bureaucratic toil. Woman must be a cook, but not a competitive cook; a school mistress, but not a competitive schoolmistress; a house-decorator but not a competitive house-decorator; a dressmaker, but not a competitive dressmaker. She should have not one trade but twenty hobbies; she, unlike the man, may develop all her second bests.

This is what has been really aimed at from the first in what is called the seclusion, or even the oppression, of women. Women were not kept at home in order to keep them narrow; on the contrary, they were kept at home in order to keep them broad”

My fellow moms, let’s embrace the “larger plan” ordained by our Creator. Let’s not worry about being the *best*, but eagerly give our *all* to the broad calling of motherhood.

*“She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”*  
(Proverbs 31:27-29 ESV)

## A Mother’s Large Career

by Nicole Whitacre

A couple more brilliant quotes from G.K. Chesterton on motherhood. We’ve posted them before but they are worth a reread:

“[Woman is surrounded] with very young children, who require to be taught not so much anything as everything. Babies need not to be taught a trade, but to be introduced to a world. To put the matter shortly, woman is generally shut up in a house with a human being at the time when he asks all the questions that there are, and some that there aren’t....”

“[W]hen people begin to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost energy of imagination conceive what they mean. When domesticity, for instance,

is called drudgery, all the difficulty arises from a double meaning in the word. If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge [at his work]. But if it means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling, colorless and of small import to the soul, then as I say, I give it up; I do not know what the words mean.... I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people's children [arithmetic], and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness."

## Gospel-Centered Child Training

by Janelle Bradshaw

"No scream."

"You may not hit."

"No throw."

"Come to mommy."

I spend all day saying stuff like this to my two-year-old son [Hudson](#)—simple sentences that rarely get above three words together. That's why, when I brought up the topic of [gospel-centered parenting](#) back in October, I admitted that I can find it overwhelming at times.

You see, we're just trying to survive around here. If I can keep Hudson out of the pantry, get my afternoon nap, and keep the highchair tray wiped clean, it's a successful day. Because Hudson's behavior demands my constant training and discipline, the thought of trying to deliver mini-sermons on the wonders of the cross is enough to send me back to bed.

That's why I'm so grateful for my mom's encouragement. (Another reminder to me of why God's Word in [Titus 2](#) instructs the older women to train the younger women—we need it!) She has been faithful to provide a freeing and biblical perspective to her exhausted and sometimes guilt-ridden daughter: if I am faithfully disciplining and training Hudson to obey—with the ultimate goal of preaching the gospel to him—then I AM practicing gospel-centered mothering.

As Mom reminds me: *Obedience is the gateway to understanding the gospel.* An obedient child is a receptive child, a child who is prepared and positioned to receive the good news of the gospel.

For although it's not intended as an explicit promise, this maxim of Scripture does hold true: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" ([Prov. 22:6](#)).

My two and three word sentences aren't an evidence of my mothering failure (although there are plenty of those!). My efforts to consistently train and discipline Hudson are preparing him to one day (soon, I pray!) understand the demands of God's holiness, the depravity of his heart, and the astonishing mercy of God.

## Obedience and Gospel-Centered Mothering

by Nicole Whitacre

As moms, we may be so afraid of raising little heathens of the self-righteous, legalistic, variety that we neglect to teach our children how to obey.

Perhaps we grew up in a home that was as unloving as it was overbearing, or maybe we have known children who conformed to certain outward standards but who were also arrogant and rude. Or we may fear that to be firm with our children is the same as being ungracious and unloving.

But here is where we have to be careful not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. In (rightly!) trying to throw out the *bad motive* of raising children who meet a certain external standard for the sake of our ease or reputation, we have to be careful not to throw out the *biblical mandate* to raise children who know what it means to obey, who can come to understand the gospel and live in submission to its claims on their lives.

Throughout Scripture, from the Pentateuch to Proverbs to Paul's letters (e.g. [Deut 5:16](#), [6:1-9](#), [Prov. 6:20](#), [Eph. 6:1-4](#)), God couldn't be more clear about a parent's priority: we are to teach our children to come under the authority of God's Word by coming under *our* loving authority. It is what [Tedd Tripp](#) so descriptively calls "the circle of God's blessing."

Lovingly teaching our children to obey, "right away, all the way, and with a happy heart," is not legalistic, moralistic parenting. It is obeying God's Word—if, and only if, we are doing it to please the Lord and not men. *Obedience is the gateway to understanding the gospel.*

We find a striking example of gospel-centered mothering in the life of [Elizabeth Prentiss](#), author of well-known hymn “[More Love to Thee](#).” A friend observed:

“With her children she was a model disciplinarian, exceedingly strict, a wise lawmaker; nevertheless a most tender, devoted, self-sacrificing mother. I have never seen such exact obedience required and given, or a more idolized mother. ‘Mamma’s’ word was indeed law, but—O happy combination!—it was also Gospel!” (from [The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss](#) by George Lewis Prentiss)

Here was a mother who was lavish with her affection as she was insistent on her children’s obedience. The fruit was found in her children’s love and in their receptivity to her gospel words. May our “Mamma’s word” be loving law *and* gospel grace to our children. O happy combination!

## Teaching Our Children the Gospel Started with Obedience

by Nicole Whitacre

When we brought Jude and Sophie home—before we could even speak the same language—we had two simple priorities: show them we loved them, and teach them to obey.

The first one was easy. We said “I love you” non-stop in English and Amharic. We gave lots of hugs and kisses and smiles of approval. We bought new clothes and books and bikes. We took them sledding (a first!) and played legos and put together puzzles. We made it clear, through our actions and attention, that they were every bit as much our children as our biological son and daughter.

All these things were hugely important. In hindsight, though, I think they felt our love most of all through our gracious authority.

It didn’t feel that way at the time. To train them to obey we started with a few simple guidelines that were easy to understand: No TV until right before dinner (4:45 pm to be precise), no getting up from the table until being dismissed, and no hitting or biting.

They fought back at first—pouting about no TV or sitting at the table with their legs stretched out to the side, poised to bolt. Some days we were tempted to give up. Were we being too strict? Would they grow to hate us forever? What was the

harm in letting them watch a little extra TV? But a well-timed word of encouragement from Mom always strengthened our resolve.

So we kept telling them “I love you” and put the remote out of reach.

A funny thing happened. Instead of becoming more resentful toward us and unhappy with the rules, Jude and Sophie became more compliant and obedient, and what’s more, they grew happier by the day.

Recently it dawned on me. One of the main reasons Jude and Sophie seem to have bonded with our family so quickly (in addition to the sheer grace of God!) is because the clear boundaries helped them feel like they belonged. They know the rules, the way things work around here. And so they feel comfortable because they aren’t on the outside trying to understand how this family works. They are “on the in” of the Whitacre family. Because they know what is required of them, they can relax and concentrate on other important things such as soccer and coloring and learning to read.

Don’t get me wrong, like every family, we have plenty of areas that need work. But this morning, as I write, Steve is downstairs going through our Advent devotional over breakfast. And tonight we will be able to sit down at the dinner table and talk and laugh as a family.

Now that they understand our words, *and* can sit still long enough to listen, we can tell them the greatest news of all: through Jesus Christ, they can join the family of God.

*Obedience is the gateway to understanding the gospel.*

*“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” ([Hebrews 12:6-11](#) ESV).*

# From One Mom to Another: Don't Grow Weary

by Nicole Whitacre

Our Aunt Betsy (Ricucci) is our dad's sister and one of the most encouraging people you will ever meet. On Sunday at church she passed on some very encouraging motherhood advice to me, and then followed up with an email yesterday. It was too good not to post. While I wish all of you could be in the same church with Aunt Betsy to receive her specific and godly encouragement each week, I hope every mother who is seeking to diligently teach her children to obey will receive these encouraging words as "just for you."

Hi Nicole!

I just wanted to clarify my quick encouragement to you yesterday. I had seen Janelle earlier and encouraged her as a mom and she said I should tell you too, so I tried!

As your mom said to me multiple times when I was a young mom: Don't grow weary of the well doing on behalf of your wee ones! Every time you deny or disappoint their selfishness, no matter their response, is a win for you and ultimately a win for them! Don't evaluate your mothering success by their response to your training initially, but by the fact that true biblical love looks out for their ultimate best interest. And their best interest is not to have selfishness rewarded but denied and overcome. (And isn't that true of us too?!) So just know, when you must say "no" for the kiddos best good and their response may be wailing, you can have a biblical perspective that some sin has been wounded but their souls ultimately helped! This is true, biblical, sacrificial love that truly considers the greatest good of others. And those others are the precious lives of your children!

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." [Gal.6:9](#) This verse has always encouraged me so much! The promise of reaping a good harvest is not dependent upon the perfections of the good we do (we fail so often don't we?!) but simply in not giving up. And I must depend upon His faithfulness to not give up. But, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." [1 Thess. 5:24](#)

May God reward your faithful mothering with an awareness of His nearness, His working, His goodness and His faithfulness above all else.

Love you so very much!

Aunt B

# “Real Simple” Mothering

by Nicole Whitacre

Whenever I get overwhelmed and mothering seems as complex as a calculus problem, my mom always helps me put things in perspective. “Gospel-centered mothering at this stage is simple,” she tells me. “Not easy, mind you. It requires sacrificial love, hard work, and consistency. But it isn’t complicated.”

My problem is that I am a professional complicator. If “complicating the simple” was a science they would have tenured me as a professor at some prestigious university by now. I chase every new rabbit trail of a mothering idea, and fret about the roads not taken with my children. In this self-constructed maze, I quickly lose sight of God’s priorities for mothering young children.

But Mom’s right. It isn’t that complicated. It comes down to two basic but crucial priorities: **Obedience and Respect**. Paul summarizes these twin child-training “musts” for the early years:

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Eph. 6:20).*

There are many good things that we can—and should—teach our children. But these two are essential if we want our children to enjoy a long and a good life, a life of gospel fruitfulness. This isn’t moralistic mothering. Training our children to respect and obey is God’s command. And it is essential to helping our children understand what it means to fear the Lord, to walk in obedience to Him.

“The child trained in biblical obedience is better able to understand the gospel” explains Tedd Tripp. “The power and grace of the gospel is most deeply understood, not by those who never face their biblical duties, but by those who do.”

*Obedience is the gateway to understanding the gospel.*

So as I consider at the beginning of this year how to train my children, I return to these two simple priorities. I ask myself: How am I doing at training my children to respect and obey us? How can I as a mother be more consistent, more effective, at teaching, training, and disciplining my children in these two areas?

Gospel-centered mothering in 2013? Not easy. But real simple.

# How is Obedience a Gateway to Understanding the Gospel?

by Carolyn Mahaney

One of the most powerful illustrations is from the relationship of Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller. You may know the story. Helen was a young girl who, at the age of nineteen months, became deaf and blind as the result of an unknown illness. Her parents, at a loss as to how to help their suffering daughter, provided little restraint or discipline. So when Annie was hired to teach Helen, she made no progress at first, due to Helen's wild and violent behavior. "It was useless to teach her language or anything else until she learned to obey me" Annie reasoned. So Annie began at the beginning. She insisted that Helen obey.

After an extended battle of wills, Annie won. Helen became calm and submissive, able to listen, and able to learn. And oh what she learned! This little girl, whose life was up until now a dark and lonely place, learned to communicate. She learned to "speak" and to "listen" through her hands. She learned to read. And so, Annie wisely concluded: "Obedience is the gateway for knowledge to enter the mind."

So it is with our children. We have this all-precious gift to give to them—the good news of the gospel. We have much to teach them about God, who He is, what He has done, what His Word has to say about the world and about their lives. And yet to truly practice effective gospel-centered mothering we must first teach them to obey.

"Training must come before teaching" insisted Katherine Howard, Elisabeth Elliot's mother. "[Teaching] is impossible unless the children cooperate. And they don't cooperate unless they are disciplined from their earliest days. This discipline lays the groundwork for teaching."

This is why Scripture equates a parents love with discipline and hatred with a lack of love ([Prov. 13:24](#)). Counterintuitive to the post-modern mind, but as true as ever. "Train up a child in the way he should go" Proverbs exhorts us, "even when he is old he will not depart from it" ([22:6](#)).

This is both an exhortation and encouragement to mothers. It is an exhortation to moms when we are tempted to neglect loving discipline and training—whether from laziness, busyness, fear of our children's rejection, or biblical ignorance. We must not neglect this most important biblical mothering priority.

It is also an encouragement to moms who are “in the trenches.” You are faithfully—not perfectly, but consistently—training your young children to obey. You may see very little in the way of results so far. You may be worn out and discouraged. You may wonder if you are on the right track. You may worry because your mothering doesn’t “feel” very gospel-centered at the moment. But your child’s obedience isn’t opposed to the gospel. It is the gateway through which you can bring the gospel message.

So persevere. Be faithful. And I promise—better yet, God has promised!—that you will reap a harvest if you do not give up ([Gal 6:9](#)).

## Target the Heart In Time

by Nicole Whitacre

Targeting our children’s hearts is a very important goal in gospel-centered parenting. Ultimately, I want my children to understand that their hearts are sinful and that they need a Savior. I also want to help my children discern the motives of their hearts—why they do what they do.

To this end, my husband and I provide regular instruction about the true state of their souls before a holy God. We also seek to teach them, primarily in more structured family times, about how sin works. Recently my husband, gave them a little Lying 101 lesson over breakfast: “We often lie because we want to look good, make others look bad, or stay out of trouble” he explained.

And in order to shepherd our children’s hearts, we watch them closely. We seek to discover and discern what motivates them, what makes them tick, what are their characteristic temptations and tendencies so we can parent them wisely.

But targeting the heart looks different, depending on the age and maturity each individual child. With our sons, Jack and Jude, who are 9 and 8 respectively, we are just beginning to spend more time talking about their hearts when they disobey or when an opportunity arises.

With our daughters Tori and Sophie (5 and 3) however, I don’t often spend a ton of time dialoguing and discussing their heart in moments of disobedience. Mostly that’s because when a fight breaks out and one of them is involved, there is lots of crying and wailing and I could ask penetrating questions about heart issues, but nobody would hear me.

But I also don’t expect them to always grasp “heart issues” at this young age. After all, as Jeremiah tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and

desperately sick; who can understand it?” I’m in my thirties and I still don’t always know why I do certain things! I can hardly expect my three-year-old to have it figured out by now.

A good long chat about heart issues may be wise parenting for a teenager or an older child, but what a three-year-old needs is consistent training and discipline. First they need to learn to obey. Heart issues, those will come in time.

So don’t become discouraged if your toddler doesn’t understand why he grabbed the toy or your five-year-old still doesn’t “obey from the heart.” This doesn’t mean you are failing as a mom. As long as you are lovingly and consistently training your little ones to obey and respect parental authority, you are fulfilling God’s commands.

## Go Forward in Gospel-Centered Mothering

by Nicole Whitacre

If you only ever buy, read, and re-read one book on parenting, let it be J.C. Ryle’s [\*Duties of Parents\*](#). It is short and sweet—just the right length for tired moms. It is clarifying, provoking, and encouraging. And even though it was written over a century ago, it is as relevant as ever. Here’s a thought or two:

We must not expect all things at once. We must remember what children are, and teach them as they are able to bear. Their minds are like a lump of metal — not to be forged and made useful at once, but only by a succession of little blows. Their understandings are like narrow-necked vessels: we must pour in the wine of knowledge gradually, or much of it will be spilled and lost. “Line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” must be our rule. The whetstone does its work slowly, but frequent rubbing will bring the scythe to a fine edge. Truly there is need of patience in training a child, but without it nothing can be done.

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Beware of that miserable delusion into which some have fallen, — that parents can do nothing for their children, that you must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still. These persons...would like [their children] to die the death of the righteous man, but they do nothing to make them live his life. They desire much, and have nothing. And the devil rejoices to see such reasoning, just as he always does over anything which seems to excuse indolence, or to encourage neglect of means.

I know that you cannot convert your child. I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I know also that God says expressly, “Train up a child in the way he should go,” and that He never laid a command on man which He would not give man grace to perform. And I know, too, that our duty is not to stand still and dispute, but to go forward and obey. It is just in the going forward that God will meet us. The path of obedience is the way in which He gives the blessing. We have only to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Cana, to fill the water-pots with water, and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine.

## Mothers, Servants, and God’s Saving Power

by Nicole Whitacre

We cannot save our children. Which is why, when I see a rebellious teenager of Christian parents, my first thought is not, “Wow, those parents did a really bad job.” For all I know they are better parents than I will ever be.

The truth of God’s power to save, of His *exclusive* power to save, should be a source of immense comfort and hope to us as mothers. It is not our job to save our children! God has not placed this unbearable burden on our backs. Salvation is God’s and it is His alone. Not only should this flood our souls with comfort, it should fuel them with hope. Our God saves! Our God loves to save! “You have reason for hope as parents who desire to see your children have faith” writes [Tedd Tripp](#):

“The hope is in the power of the gospel. The gospel is suited to the human condition. The gospel is attractive. God has already shown great mercy to your children. He has given them a place of rich privilege. He has placed them in a home where they have heard His truth. They have seen the transforming power of grace in the lives of His people. Your prayer and expectation is that the gospel will overcome their resistance as it has yours.”

But we must also watch ourselves, lest this hope-inducing truth morphs into a subtle “let go and let God” approach to mothering. We cannot save our children, but that doesn’t mean we are free from responsibility. God has called us to a significant task: we are to teach, train, and discipline our children so that they will obey, honor, and walk in the ways of the Lord. This is gospel work. It is hard work. And we must persevere in this work. We must be faithful, despite our failures, despite the apparent lack of fruit in our children’s lives.

And, then, when we have spent our strength doing diaper and discipline duty, we must turn and “leave all with the God of all.” For we are mothers, and only

mothers. Servants who have only done our duty. We have planted. We have watered. And God—and God alone—can save. He will give the growth (1 Cor. 3:16).

## Just Choose One

by Janelle Bradshaw

Over the last few months Hudson has crossed that threshold from baby to toddler. His speech has taken off, his comprehension level is higher. He's not my baby anymore. But with big boy words and actions have come big boy attitudes. Mike and I needed to become more intentional about training him to [obey](#).

But where to start? Mom's advice has always been so helpful here: "Choose one area at a time and be consistent." As we considered our little guy, we decided to address screaming. For one thing, Hudson's screaming had become clearly defiant. He screamed when he was mad or frustrated with us, one of his sisters, or with himself. He screamed when we didn't let him have what he wanted. This was clearly an area where he needed to come under our loving, biblical authority and to learn self-control.

Not only was Hudson's screaming a clear expression of disobedience, it had ramifications for family life. It made it difficult to take him out to the store or to a restaurant, it didn't bless Caly or MJ as they tried to play with him, it caused babysitters to run the other direction. His high-pitched, badly-timed screams were kind of hard to ignore.

So a couple of months ago I buckled down and began intensive, focused training on this area. This meant I had to overlook or other ways Hudson lacked self-control such as throwing toys or his near-constant whining. Whenever Hudson screamed I repeated the same simple phrase, "No scream. Say 'Yes Mommy.'" Then I brought appropriate consequences.

Consistency was the hardest part. Sometimes it meant turning off the stove and dragging my pregnant self upstairs to address a screaming incident. But the consistent training is beginning to bear fruit in Hudson's life.

Sure, he still screams, but not nearly as much as he used to. And even though we focused on this one area, it has spilled over into other areas as well. Most notably, Hudson is happier now. And his newly formed habits of obedience and self-control mean we can go to out to dinner and make memories as a family.

We're just at the starting line of many years of training Hudson, but one area at a time, by the grace of God, we can make progress in teaching him to obey.

## Q&A: How Do You Focus On One Thing?

by Janelle Bradshaw

Karissa wrote in with a great question:

In a recent post you talked about "[picking one thing](#)" and being consistent about it in the discipline of a toddler. I guess my question is: How? There are multiple little issues of obedience that are clear to my 19-month-old, but I also want to be consistent about tantrum throwing. So what do I do about those other issues? Do I overlook her disobedience or lead her away from the "no touch" object? What do I do about those other obedience issues? Thanks for your input!

Great question, Karissa, and I think you've got the right idea. We most effectively train our children when we focus on one or two areas at a time. But very young children disobey in a myriad of ways! So how can we focus on one thing without losing ground in other areas?

I'm sure many moms have more wisdom than me, but here are a few ideas I've found helpful:

### **Distract**

If temper tantrums are your "one thing" then consider ways to minimize other sources of temptation. If your daughter always heads for her favorite "no touch" item in the living room, maybe remove it for a time. If your son cries when you drive by the local park, then try taking another route home. If your child is eyeing another child's toy dump truck, distract him with some blocks. Eliminating predictable areas of temptation can help you focus most consistently on the most important things.

### **Redirect**

If our child sins in ways we can't ignore, seek to deal with it appropriately and move on. So if our child grabs a toy we need to help him return it, telling him as we do that it is wrong to grab. Or if she won't come right away we may need to go get her and remind her to always come to mommy right away. These are important areas to deal with and should be our "one thing" sooner rather than later, but in the meantime it may help deal quickly with these issues and move on.

## Overlook

This requires patience. For example, we may find our child's whining irksome, but if we have already decided that tantrums are a more urgent issue, we may need to bite our lip, smile, and model cheerfulness for the time being.

In conclusion, it might help to think ahead about your day: Where can I distract my child from temptation? Where can I overlook or redirect? And where do I need to focus all of my discipline and training?

Finally, as we've said all along, don't grow weary in doing good. Your consistency in one area will produce fruit in many areas in your child's life.

## Moms, Hold Out Until You Can Say...

by Nicole Whitacre

"Why do you tell your child a thing twenty times?" asked some one of a mother. "Because," said she, "I find nineteen times is not enough." Now, when a soul is to be ploughed, it may so happen that hundreds of furrows will not do it. What then? Why, plough all day till the work is done. Whether you are ministers, missionaries, teachers, or private soul-winners, never grow weary, for your work is noble, and the reward of it is infinite. The grace of God is seen in our being permitted to engage in such holy service; it is greatly magnified in sustaining us in it, and it will be pre-eminently conspicuous in enabling us to hold out till we can say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." ~Charles Haddon Spurgeon

## Most Embarrassing Mom Moment

by Nicole Whitacre

My most embarrassing moment as "mom" took place before I had children of my own.

I was babysitting my toddler nephew Andrew and I took him to the grocery store. He spied a bag of Cheetos and when I told him "no" he proceeded to throw a big fit. Right there, in the middle of Giant Food, he threw himself down onto the floor and began kicking and screaming.

I was mortified.

*All these people probably think he's my kid and that I'm a really bad mom!*

Now Brian and Kristin are some of the best parents I know. They were already working hard to train Andrew to obey and today he is an exceptionally mature thirteen-year-old.

But this was a new experience for me. Not until I had children of my own did I learn that every child throws at least one temper tantrum in the grocery store. It's right there in the how-to-be-a-kid manual.

Even so, it's hard not to be embarrassed when our kids put on a sin show for a curious crowd.

So when the time came and it really was my kid screaming for Cheetos in Giant Food, my mom's advice was invaluable: "You shouldn't be embarrassed when your child disobeys in public" she said. "He's a child and he's a sinner. That's what they do. You should only be concerned if you aren't faithfully training him to obey in private."

In other words, we aren't parenting for the crowd. We're parenting for an audience of One.

We don't teach our children to obey so that they will make us look good. We teach our children to obey because God has been good to us, and because we want our children to experience the goodness that comes from walking in His ways ([Eph. 6:1-4](#)).

Mothering under the gaze of God spurs us on to be faithful in the everyday mundane mothering moments when nobody else sees. But it also transforms our most embarrassing mothering moment into a beautiful opportunity to laugh at ourselves.

Sure, your most recent trip to the grocery store may not have been your proudest moment as a mom. But if, by the grace of God, you are faithful in private "your Father who sees in secret will reward you" ([Mt. 6:18](#)) in public.

## A Gospel-Centered Mom Looks Both Ways

by Nicole Whitacre

A few months ago, when the weather was mild and our kids were playing together at a park, Janelle and I chatted about writing a few mothering posts for the blog.

“I don’t know,” she hesitated, when I pitched the idea. “I am very aware of my sins and shortcomings as a mom.”

“Me too!” I agreed. “But maybe that’s *why* we should write about it. If nothing else it will challenge us to be more faithful mothers.”

“I guess so,” she agreed, before calling to our children that it was time to go. A chorus of complaints met this announcement and we both looked at each other and laughed. “Yep, we’ve got a lot of work to do!”

We aren’t perfect mothers and we don’t pretend to be.

But that doesn’t mean we are content with imperfect. The mothering bar we’re aiming for is high. It has been set in place by God himself: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” ([Mt. 5:48](#)).

As moms we must be humble and admit we fall short of the bar of mothering perfection. Very. Far. Short. We are not always patient with our children. We are not always faithful to teach and train and discipline. We give in to selfishness, anger, laziness, and grumbling.

That’s why a mother who is grounded in the gospel looks two ways. She really does have eyes in the back of her head.

A gospel-centered mom first looks back to her justification in Christ. She remembers that all of her mothering sins and shortcomings have been nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ. That he became sin for her that in him she might become the righteousness of God ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)).

But she doesn’t stop there. The gospel-centered mom looks forward too. She strives with the Holy Spirit’s power that works within her to be perfect as her heavenly Father is perfect. She stands on the ground of forgiveness and accesses grace—through God’s Word, through counsel from godly women, and through prayer—to grow as a mom. To be more patient, more joyful, more consistent, more loving. To be perfect.

Moms need grace. We need grace to admit that we are weak and grace to not settle into those weaknesses. We need grace that frees and forgives and grace that gives power to grow.

# Gospel-Centered Counsel for Moms

by Nicole Whitacre

“I feel like such a failure. I’m a horrible mom and a terrible wife. I’m exhausted, depressed, and overwhelmed.”

Sound like a mom you know? How would you counsel this woman? What gospel-centered words would you give her? Maybe you are that mom. As your soul’s counselor, how do you apply the gospel?

So often, in our sincere desire to be gospel-centered, we skip over a biblical diagnosis and assume we know what the problem is.

“You’re caught in the performance trap,” we tell the discouraged mom. “You just need to remember that God’s approval isn’t based on your performance. He loves you, in spite of all your failures. He doesn’t expect you to do it all or be a perfect wife or mom. You just need to rest in God’s grace.”

True, to a point.

But Scripture trains us to be more careful counselors, to apply the varied grace of God *appropriately* to various mothering discouragements:

*“[A]dmonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all”* ([1 Thes. 5:14](#)).

In other words, gospel-centered counsel looks different for different counselees.

“Discouraged Mom” may, in fact, be experiencing genuine conviction for anger or impatience or some other area of sin in her mothering. She may need an exhortation to repent and encouragement in the grace of God available to help her to grow ([1 John 1:9](#)).

Or a mom may be discouraged because she is comparing herself to other moms or cultural expectations of motherhood. She may need to hear our Savior’s words, “What is that to you, you follow me?” ([John. 21:22](#))

Maybe a mom is looking to her children’s performance as the measurement of her mothering success. She may need to be reminded of her call is just to be faithful, and to trust God with the fruit. Her children’s sin isn’t the final measurement of her motherhood ([Gal. 6:9](#)).

Often a discouraged mom is an exhausted mom. She needs a good night sleep and an hour in God's Word.

I could go on, but point is, gospel-centered counseling doesn't make a blank check out to grace and hand it over to a discouraged mom. We must be diligent to discern the specific gospel-truth that applies to a particular discouraged mom in her unique situation.

So whether we're counseling a friend or our own soul, let's be wise, gospel-centered counselors.

## Q&A: How to Be Patient With Your Children

by Nicole Whitacre

Stephanie's has a two-year-old whom she loves to pieces, but who whines a lot. Ashley has five children at home under the age of nine. Both wrote to ask "how do you stay patient with young children?"

I can certainly relate. Impatience is a common temptation for us as moms. So, as I always do, I asked my exceptionally patient mom (she raised me after all!), and wrote down a few of her suggestions. This is not an exhaustive list, just a few things she's passed on to me that I have found most helpful:

### **Identify temptation points**

Recently my husband and I realized that we were most tempted to be impatient when we had to get our four children out the door. Identifying this temptation-point helped, not only so we could prepare our hearts to be more self-controlled and patient, but also so we could streamline our process and get an earlier start. Less temptation for everyone. Less impatience from Mom and Dad.

### **Be consistent**

More often than not, when I find myself growing impatient with my children, it is because I have not been clear about the rules or boundaries. They are simply following my lead. So why am I getting impatient with them? My impatience is often a clue that I have slacked off in one area or another. It is time to get back to basics and train or instruct ahead of time and then be consistent to bring appropriate consequences. Being consistent helps me guard against impatience.

## Don't do stupid things twice

This one is for me. I am always repeating my own stupid mistakes. But Janelle is the opposite. She's a fast learner. For example, a little while ago her two-year-old Hudson became obsessed with balloons. He would throw a fit when he saw a balloon in the store. He would even start screaming in his car seat when they drove past balloons outside! Once she realized this, Janelle made strategic decisions to avoid balloons where possible. She took alternative routes home and avoided certain sections of the store, unless she was prepared to buy a balloon. Point is, if you know your toddler is going to throw a fit in aisle three, if possible, don't go to aisle three for a while. Wait until your consistent training at home makes it possible for you to go to the store without a meltdown. Do whatever you can to avoid walking into situations you know will be tempting for you and your child.

## Be grateful

I read a great post on this by someone, somewhere, and now I can't find it. The upshot was that when we cultivate a heart of gratefulness to God for the precious gift of our children, it counteracts the impatience in our heart. So if we find our impatience is rising, how's our gratefulness? Let's thank God for the amazing gift of our children and it will be much easier to be patient.

## Pray

There is something about going to God in prayer that reminds us just how patient our heavenly Father is with us. This produces humility in our hearts, which in turn, produces patience toward our children. And we need God's help. So let's pray. He is eager to help us to model His patience toward our children.

# To Sum Up: Gospel-Centered Mothering

by Kristin Chesemore

The girls asked me to close out our little series on gospel-centered mothering. I thought it might be helpful to share three areas my mom has encouraged us to use as kind of a "quick check" on our mothering in between more significant times of evaluation and planning. Gospel-centered mothering certainly involves more than these three things, but not less.

1. **Teach your Children God's Word** (Deut 6:7) Our children are bombarded with words all day, every day: from friends, siblings, teachers, coaches, and media. As parents we must not only guard and approve those who

can speak words into our children's lives, we need to make sure they are getting a large dose of *God's Word* each day.

Just as we evaluate and adjust our children's food diet, we should often evaluate and make adjustments to their "gospel diet." Each day are they getting a heaping helping of Scripture?

Many of the gospel words our children receive will come from our mouths, but we should also use as many resources as possible, especially those available through our local church.

Our prayer is that 2 Timothy 3:15--which John Piper preached from at our church this past Sunday--can be said of all our children: "...how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15 ESV).

- 2. Teach Your Children to Respect and Obey (Eph 6:1-4)** – We spent most of our time in this series on the importance of obedience and respect because it seems there is more confusion, and as a result, maybe less application in this critical area of gospel-centered mothering. But it is of vital importance! There is much more we could say, on this topic, but for further study we highly recommend J.C. Ryle, Tedd Tripp, and Elisabeth Elliot.
- 3. Win Your Children's Hearts (Titus 2:4).** – "Love is the grand secret to effective training" said J.C. Ryle and he couldn't be more right. This is why we talk often here at girltalk about making memories with your children and why it is so important to lavish them with affection and encouragement. Your training in obedience and respect, and your teaching of God's Word will be effective in proportion to your expressions of love for your children.

No doubt we'll return to the topic of mothering some time soon, but in the meantime, you can download a pdf of this series to review and apply. May God give us much grace as we seek to preach the gospel to our children. I know he is eager to answer this prayer.<sup>1</sup>

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