

HOW TO USE THE “HELP! I’M A PARENT: CHRISTIAN PARENTING IN THE REAL WORLD” RESOURCE

I. COMPONENTS

This parenting resource consists of three main components:

- 1. Manual**—“Help, I’m a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World” Manual
- 2. DVD Set**—This is a set of DVDs that contain a 30-minute segment that accompanies each of the chapters in the manual.
- 3. Website**—The website is a very important component of this resource. You will find additional resources posted on each topic. You will also be able to submit any unanswered questions that you may have, sign up for an e-newsletter, and follow a parenting blog. The website will be updated on a regular basis. Therefore, it is the place to go to keep this information current and relevant. The website is www.helpimaparent.org

II. WAYS THE RESOURCE MAY BE USED

So, what are the ways you can use this resource? There are three ways:

- 1. With a Group**—It is recommended that you use this resource in a group setting. Perhaps you can do it in your church and invite all the parents in your congregation to join you. Or, perhaps you could invite all of your neighbors to your house to participate in this parenting enrichment program. It is a great way to meet felt needs as well as getting to know your neighbors better. You may choose to facilitate or a facilitator may be designated to lead in the group discussions and activities. You do not need to be an “expert” to lead out in this program. You only need to be open to group processes and be willing to let God lead you.
- 2. As a Couple**—You may proceed at your own pace and share your ideas with your partner. If there is an opportunity, invite at least one other couple to join you in the experience. You will all benefit by having varying views, experiences, and insights.
- 3. By Yourself**—Yes, it is possible to do this program by yourself. However, why not check around and invite at least one other person to join you.

III. SESSION FORMAT

1. The first session should follow this format:
 - a. Greet each participant as they arrive.
 - b. Have opening prayer as soon as all the participants have arrived.
 - c. Share a light meal together or a snack.

d. Have participants introduce themselves and tell you a little about their family. They only need to share as they are comfortable to do so.

e. Distribute the manuals.

f. Assign the participants the homework of reading over chapter one and be prepared to discuss it the next time you meet. Suggest that group members work through the activities and come prepared with any questions they may have at the next meeting. It is not expected that they will answer every discussion question, complete every activity, or understand every concept discussed. The group will work together next week; you only want them to become familiar with the material in the chapter beforehand.

g. Announce the day and time for the next meeting where chapter one will be introduced. If you wish, you may let the group members help you decide. You want to be sure that it is a time they can all commit to. The dynamics of each group will be different so be as flexible as you can.

h. End with prayer.

i. You may want to check with each participant a day or so before the scheduled meeting. Remind them of the upcoming meeting.

Note: The purpose of this first get together is to get acquainted with each person, to start to build community, pass out the manuals, and give the assignment to read chapter one. You will not be discussing chapter one in this session. Rather, it is a meet and greet session.

2. Each successive session should follow the same format:

a. Begin with prayer.

b. Review scriptural principle.

c. Go over the Icebreaker-Group Discussion Questions with the group.

d. Together, watch the 30-minute companion DVD that goes with the chapter to be covered in that session.

e. Lead out in the chapter discussion. Review each topic. Lead out in the group discussion questions and activities. The participants only need to share, as they are comfortable in doing so.

f. If participants have any questions discuss them as a group.

g. Remember to remind the participants at every meeting to visit the companion website for additional materials and resources.

h. Assign the next chapter for group members to read.

i. Announce the day and time for the next session.

j. End with prayer.

Note: If you find that you need more than one session for each chapter that is

fine. You make it work for your particular group needs. If needed, you may take several weeks or sessions for each chapter.

IV. KEY SECTIONS IN MANUAL

This manual is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter addresses a topic that was identified by you, as parents, as one of your biggest parenting challenges. You will find these elements included in each chapter of the manual:

1. Scriptural Principle—Each of the ten chapters is guided by a spiritual principal that opens the chapter.

2. Icebreaker- Group Discussion—This is an icebreaker activity for the group. The purpose is to encourage discussion of the scriptural principal for the chapter. This section will ask you to remember, review, and reflect on what the passage teaches.

3. Group Activity—This section is activity based. You will be asked to write responses to the question presented. In some cases you may do this as an entire group. In other instances you may be asked to do this individually and then share your responses with the entire group.

4. Group Discussion—This section will either contain a question for the group's consideration or a statement to read and reflect on. You are to process it together with your group members.

5. Sidebars—Please take time to read all of the sidebars. They each contain valuable information that adds to the information presented for each topic.

6. Try this at Home—this section will challenge you to try certain activities at home. You do not have to attempt all of them at once. However, we do encourage you to select one idea and try it as you complete each chapter.

7. A Prayer You may Say—This is a suggested prayer for you to say. Of course, you may say one of your own.

Above all, enjoy the parenting journey. It is our prayer that as you learn together, find answers together, pray together, encourage each other, and grow together in the task of parenting you will be blessed and enriched.

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1. INVITATION AND INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGES OF CHRISTIAN PARENTING IN THE REAL WORLD AND INVITATION TO JOURNEY WITH US

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

ICEBREAKER- GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Share one of your fondest childhood memories of your family. What made that event so special to you?
- Do you remember any valuable lessons you learned as a child from an adult—from your parents, grandparents, or another significant adult? How did they impress that lesson on you (a story, a conversation, a saying, modeling, etc.)?

2. REVIEW

- Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. For whom were these words of Moses intended?
- Why do you think there’s such emphasis on the teaching of laws, beliefs, and principles?

3. REFLECT

- How do you demonstrate your love for God? How does that fulfill verse five? What can you do today to demonstrate it? What can you do to teach your children to show God their love?
- How important is it to you that your children grow up to love God and appreciate His presence in their lives? How can you help teach them about God’s love?

OVERVIEW

Have you, as a parent ever felt like screaming out for help? The reality is that Christian parenting in the real world of today can be challenging. This resource is a response to cries for help. It was developed as the result of a survey of parents throughout the North American Division territory including the United States, Canada, Bermuda, and the Micronesian islands. Respondents were asked to identify their most challenging areas of parenting in today’s world. The topics covered in this series, are a response to those felt needs. This chapter serves as a basic overview of the biggest challenges that parents face today. Subsequent chapters

will then take these challenges one by one and deal with each separately.

From managing busy schedules to dealing with outside influences, parents have their hands full these days. There is broad agreement among the public that it is harder to be a parent today than it was in the 1970s or 1980s. A national survey by the Pew Research Center, (2013), finds a widespread belief that today's parents are not measuring up to the standard that parents set a generation ago. Mothers are seen as having the more difficult job, but they are also judged more harshly than are fathers. More than half of Americans (56%) say that mothers are doing a worse job today than mothers did 20 or 30 years ago. By comparison, somewhat fewer people (47%) say fathers are doing a worse job than fathers did 20 or 30 years ago.

The biggest challenge in raising children today, according to parents and non-parents alike, is dealing with the outside influences of society. Some of the specific challenges identified by parents and addressed in this manual include:

- **Changing Picture of Home:** How do we build a firm foundation?
- **Secularization of Society:** How do we help our child turn from the secular to the sacred?
- **Me First:** How do you teach your child the importance of sharing and service?
- **Healthy Relationships:** How do you deal with sibling rivalry and help your child build healthy relationships?
- **Media:** How do you deal with the invasion of media in everyday life?
- **Health:** How do you help your child incorporate healthy principles into their life choices?
- **Discipline:** How do you teach your child to be respectful and responsible?
- **Too Little Time and Too Much Stuff:** How do you teach your child to manage their time, talents and treasures?
- **Lack of Support System:** Who and where can you go when you need help with your parenting challenges?

“Parents, are you working with unflagging energy in behalf of your children? The God of heaven marks your solicitude, your earnest work, your constant watchfulness. He hears your prayers. With patience and tenderness train your children for the Lord. All heaven is interested in your work God will unite with you, crowning your efforts with success.” (White, 1952, p. 205)

CHANGING PICTURE OF HOME

As soon as a young child has the motor skills to hold a crayon, one of the first pictures that they will draw is a picture of their family. These are the individuals that the child recognizes as significant in their upbringing. I can still remember drawing that picture of my family in kindergarten. In fact, I ran out of room on my paper as I tried to draw my mother, father, two brothers, one sister, and all four of my grandparents. And, of course I wanted to include all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I saw all of them as “family.” Indeed, they all lived in very close proximity to me and our home was their home. At the same time, every aunt and uncle shared the role of parenting us with our mother and father.

However, today's picture that the child draws may look different. Living close to one's large extended family is not as common as it used to be. The North American society today is very mobile. Instead of living next door to your relatives, you may live across the country. A short walk away or a short car ride away daily or weekly has now been replaced by a plane trip once a year or two. As a result, the number of significant adults in the lives of some children is shrinking and the number of adults who share in the parenting responsibilities are becoming fewer and fewer. We no longer enjoy the broad social support system families once did.

In addition to seeing a decrease in the number of extended family members living close by, we also have evidence that the number of homes with a single parent raising a child has significantly increased. A study entitled, "The State of our Unions," (2012), found that as recently as the 1980s, only 13 percent of the children of moderately educated mothers were born outside of marriage. By the late 2000s, this figure rose to a striking 44 percent.

Another trend in today's world has been the increase of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Current studies reveal that in the last 10 years, the number of children living with their grandparents has increased by 50 percent (Livingston, 2013).

As a result, when a child is asked to draw his/her family picture today it may be that of the grandparents with the child, a mother and child, a single dad, adoptive parents with their biological parent in another house, a child with two moms, a child with two dads, or a foster child may draw several homes with varied family make-ups. And these are but a few of the variety of scenarios they may picture.

As the household make-up differs from the past, so do the challenges of parenting. No two homes are exactly alike. No matter what your home may look like, the reality is that no home is "challenge-free." Yes, all of those entrusted with raising a child experience both the joys and challenges that come with home life. We all have those days when we shout, "Help! I'm a parent." The good news is that, although the picture of today's typical family may differ somewhat, God is the same yesterday and today! And, He, our Heavenly Parent loves us and is eager to help us build our homes on a firm, healthy, lasting foundation.

SECULARIZATION OF SOCIETY TODAY

Many parents today blame society, in general, for their biggest parenting challenges. Recently the results were released on the largest study ever conducted on families in America (Culture of American Families, 2012). Less than a quarter of today's parents agree that this is a great time to be bringing children into the world and most say it is tougher to raise children today than it was 50 years ago. This view is accompanied by a generally gloomy assessment of the family's trajectory in American society. The study found the following:

- Among other things, nearly half (49 percent) of parents agree that "in general, Americans lived more moral and ethical lives 50 years ago" than they do today; those who disagree with that assessment are in the minority (only 24 percent).
- Less than 1 parent in 10 (8 percent) thinks the quality of American family life has improved since they were growing up.
- 64 percent say that family life has declined.

ME FIRST

An additional area that concerns today's parents is the "child-centered" society. There seems to be more of a focus on what "I need" instead of looking at and responding to the needs of others. In other words, the world of today is described as a "Me First" society. Athletes raise their hands and shout, "I'm number one!" Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way." And, before committing to something it is common to ask, "What's in it for me?"

"Bible promises are pain killers and life savers." (Kuzma, 2006. p. 35)

Do you find it challenging to teach your child the opposite of this self-centeredness that they are exposed to? After all, teaching young children to practice the golden rule and put others first takes time. Service and community related projects just seem to be one more thing that needs to be scheduled. Perhaps, some things have to be eliminated from the family's calendar and service activities need to be intentionally added; doing so will prove beneficial to the receiver and to your family.

Yes, teaching your child to share and to put others before themselves takes time and effort. At the same time, perhaps you are making it too hard on yourselves. Small things can oftentimes make a difference in the lives of others and at the same time teach your children big lessons of selfless service. We will explore ways to teach your child to be open to the needs around them and to have a servant's heart.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

If you have more than one child chances are that you have already encountered sibling rivalry. Teaching them to get along with brother or sister is one of your first parenting challenges. A battlefield can emerge in the back seat of your car, in your living room, and in the children's bedroom. In fact, where two or more of your children are gathered, there will most likely be a fight! Does this describe your home?

Another challenge is teaching your children to get along with their peers outside the home. Even if you only have one child this could be an issue for you. This may mean getting along with relatives, other children in the daycare facility, children at church, or other friends or neighbors.

Good relational skills in toddlers build the foundation for healthy relationships later in childhood and throughout adulthood. Don't despair. With God's help, coupled with prayer, patience and persistence, your child will develop positive relational skills. We will look at ways to help you deal with sibling rivalry and turn your home from a battlefield into a peaceful haven. We will also explore ways to help you guide your child in building healthy relationships outside the home environment.

"God not only created you; he created your children. And he chose to place those children in your home. To doubt any of this amounts to nothing less than questioning the sovereignty of God." (Thomas, 2005, p. 13)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Arguably one of the biggest challenges of parenting today is dealing with the

onslaught of media. It comes at you and your child from every direction. As soon as you have one gadget mastered another comes on the market.

Do you often feel as though you are constantly competing with media as you strive to teach values and morals to your child? The struggle becomes all the more difficult when television sitcoms portray children being disrespectful to their parents as if it were “normal” and “no big deal.” What was unacceptable behavior yesterday has become “normal” and even expected today. In numerous ways, the media condones the very behaviors you are trying to eliminate from your home.

The over-use and abuse of media has changed the way entire families communicate. Look around you the next time you go with your family to a restaurant. How many people do you see texting or talking on their cell phones, playing on their Ipad, listening to their iPods, or playing with some other electronic gadget? Chances are pretty good that you will see this all around you.

Interaction with media has replaced meaningful dinnertime conversation. Instead of sitting down as a family at the dinner table, more and more families are hastily gobbling down their food while sitting in front of the television or the computer monitor. It is not at all uncommon for each family member to be scattered all over the house in different rooms, engaged in various forms of media entertainment. Readily available media prevents families from sitting down and talking with one another on a heart to heart level at the dinner table.

But, let’s be honest and make this real. It is all too easy to use various forms of media as a “babysitter.” It works and it’s free. Your child is occupied and quiet. They even have their favorite DVDs from a very early age or watch them online from their own tablet. And, even the tiniest child can be taught how to touch an Ipad, access their apps, and play their games. The colorful and moving graphics are appealing to them and keep their interest in ways that nothing else seems to do.

The truth is that media is a great babysitter if all you want a babysitter to do is to keep your child quiet and allow you to do what you want or need to do. At the same time, however, the ultimate cost is too great.

Take a media inventory in your home. How much time are you as a parent consumed by it? How much time is your child engaged in various forms of media use? Start now and commit this challenge to prayer—that God will reveal to you, as a parent, areas where change is needed in your family life. We will take on this challenging topic and learn practical ways of managing media in your home.

QUESTIONS?

As you begin this study, make a list of the challenges you face as a parent today? Cross them off as they are addressed in this resource. If they are not addressed, please contact us so we may address them or post additional resources on our website. You may also submit questions directly on our website at www.HelpImAParent.org

GROUP ACTIVITY



1. Individually make a list of all the electronic gadgets you had as a child. Make a list of all the gadgets your children have. Which ones do they use or spend the most time with? Share your responses with the entire group.

2. Did you have any electronic gadgets when you were growing up? What gadgets does your child have (computer, Ipad, television, etc.)? Where is it? In their room? Do they have free access to these things or is access restricted? Do you monitor the use?

HEALTH

Another area that parents highlighted as a concern was in the arena of health. Teaching children the importance of making healthy food choices and getting a proper amount of exercise is too often neglected. Health also includes teaching your child habits of good hygiene and having an awareness of your child's mental health status.

Here is another area where we see the availability and use of electronic gadgets help account for children's lack of exercise. When I was a child, I was always outside playing ball, riding bikes, playing hide-and-seek, or catching fireflies. Inside was boring! Today's children have television sets, video games, computers and many more electronic gadgets in their rooms. And, all too often young children are left unsupervised in their use of these devices. Why go outside and exercise? Being a couch potato and watching television or playing on the Ipad is so much more fun. Unfortunately, this lack of physical activity is showing up in higher obesity rates and more social isolation in children.

Teaching healthy food choices can be challenging as well. In fact, it is easier for today's parents to pop that sugar frosted pop-tart in the toaster for breakfast, warm that frozen meal in the microwave for lunch, tear open that bag of chips as a snack, hand over that store bought cookie, and stop at a fast food place on the

answers to all of these questions and discover ways to help your child be both respectful and responsible.

TOO LITTLE TIME AND TOO MUCH STUFF

Too little time is one of the biggest challenges for parents. Twenty-four hours a day is not enough time. Modern society puts so much emphasis on productivity and activity. If you could just slow down, think of the win-win situations you could create not only for your children, but also for your entire family.

Think about this for a moment. When do most of the daily power struggles occur in your home? When your preschooler is dawdling over putting his shoes on and you're running late? Or, when they want to stay on the playground but you have to leave so you can make dinner, supervise homework, get baths, have devotionals, pack lunches, and are still in bed on time? The time crunch is truly a pressure cooker that makes it challenging for you, as a parent, to live in the moment and just enjoy your child.

Parents often feel torn between professional and parenting responsibilities. When focusing on one, you may feel like you are neglecting the other! This is a common dilemma for today's parents, who often have schedules packed with innumerable tasks and responsibilities. How do you balance work and family responsibilities when both seem pressing?

GROUP DISCUSSION



Calculate the following:

1. How many hours in one year?
2. How many hours do you and your children spend in church in one year?
3. How many hours do your children spend at school?
4. How many hours do your children spend sleeping and eating?

Once you have calculated each of these, add #s 2, 3, and 4 and subtract them from #1.

Now consider the following questions:

1. Considering the number of hours your children spend at school, church, and with you, who has or should have the greatest influence in their life?
2. Are you depending on the school or the church to disciple your children? Or are you partnering with the school and church to help you with that task?
3. Of all the hours you have with your children, how are you spending them? Watching TV? In extra-curricular activities (sports, music lessons, etc.)?

Talented children abound today. This must be the case because we as parents have them signed up and involved in every imaginable activity. They go to soccer practice, dance class, art class, yoga class, swimming lessons, etc. Yes, you need to recognize and encourage the talents that you see in your child. But, are you overloading them? Are there better ways of encouraging them to develop and use

their talents to bless others?

Today's families have too little time, too much to do, and too much stuff! Instead of learning to be creative or value what they already have, children who are constantly showered with toys and gadgetry merely master the first commandment of out-of-control consumer culture: Stuff equals happiness. What does your child treasure? Are they valuing material things over heavenly treasures? Does your child equate stuff with happiness? Would your children rather have more toys or enjoy more quality time with you?

When we consider the whole realm of teaching our children to be good stewards of their time, their talents, and their treasures, are there areas where we need to improve? Are we teaching them to manage all of these things so that they will glorify God? We will explore ways to teach your child to be good managers of their time, their talents, and their treasures.

LACK OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Rather than the village raising the child, parenting has become something we do isolated within the walls of our homes. Keep in mind the statistics shared at the beginning of this chapter. As the make-up of our families has changed, so have our support systems.

Where can you go as a parent on those days when you feel overwhelmed? Who can partner with you on the most important task you will ever undertake? How do you know when you need more guidance than mom, a friend, or a pastor can offer? We will look at ways of partnering with others as you take on the awesome task of parenting your child.

WRAP UP

With all of the challenges of today, parents may be tempted to throw up their hands and accept defeat. Regardless of the make-up in your home, it is important to remind yourself that God has called you to parent your child “. . . for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). In other words, regardless of the circumstances in which you find yourself, whether a grandparent raising your grandchild, a single parent, a foster mom, a couple etc., God has called you at this time and for His purpose. And, when God calls, He also enables. Do not despair. God is bigger than any of the parenting challenges this world can throw at you.

In subsequent chapters we will take each of these challenges, one at a time, and explore it in depth. We will look at each challenge through the principles that are given to us in God's word. We will consider current research and break it down in to practical parenting principles that we can apply in our homes. And, most of all, we will lean on our Heavenly Parent for wisdom and guidance. We invite you to continue with us on our journey of learning to be a Christian parent in the real world of today.



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page- "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. Discuss the statement below. How may it be applied to Christian parenting in today's real world? What does this say are the things you can do to help you in your parenting role? What will be the result?

"Parents may well inquire, "Who is sufficient for these things?" God alone is their sufficiency, and if they leave Him out of the question, seeking not His aid and counsel, hopeless indeed is their task. But by prayer, by study of the Bible, and by earnest zeal on their part, they may succeed nobly in this important duty, and be repaid a hundredfold for all their time and care . . . The source of wisdom is open, from which they may draw all necessary knowledge in this direction" (White, 1954, p. 64).

GROUP ACTIVITY



List what you consider to be the biggest challenges of parents today?

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Throughout this course we will encourage you to engage in a "Bible Promise Project." That will start today. Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about overcoming the challenges of parenting in the real world of today. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members.
2. Pray daily and commit yourself to God as a Christian parent. If you are married, pray with your spouse. If you are not married, find another single parent to partner with. If they are not currently in this study group, invite them to participate in these lessons with you.
3. Ask God to guide you in the specific parenting challenges that you face. Lay yourself before Him. Remember, however great the challenges—He is greater still!

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, the challenges of parenting today are great. But, the good news is that You are greater. I pray for wisdom as I parent my child. I want to dedicate myself and my child to You. Help me to be faithful to this God-given responsibility. Show me where I need to change. Above all, help me to reflect You to my child. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our Parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more www.HelpImAParent.org