

TONY EVANS RAISING KINGDOM KIDS



GIVING YOUR CHILD
A LIVING FAITH

FOCUS
ON THE
FAMILY



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*Let our sons in their youth be as grown-up plants,
And our daughters as corner pillars fashioned as for a palace.*

— PSALM 144:12



To my four wonderful children: Chrystal, Priscilla, Anthony Jr., and Jonathan. I am deeply grateful to God for the honor and privilege of raising you and calling you my own. Your mother and I love you.

—Dad

FOREWORD

Are you a mom or a dad? If so, you've probably noticed—parenting isn't as simple as it used to be.

Once upon a time, having and raising kids was an experience that most people sort of “fell into” as a matter of course. It was part of the natural order. “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.” That's what our grandparents used to say.

In those days, husbands and wives didn't always devote a lot of conscious thought to the challenge of becoming effective parents. They just did what came naturally. That may have been good enough in the past, but it isn't going to wash in today's high-tech, fast-paced, morally mixed-up society. Nowadays, mothers and fathers need a strategy, a plan—*especially* if they're the kind of parents interested in raising children who can be described as true kids of the kingdom.

If you fall into that category, this book is for you.

“Kingdom parenting,” says Tony Evans, “involves intentionally overseeing the generational transfer of the faith in such a way that children learn to consistently live all of life under God's divine authority.” That's something we care about deeply here at Focus on the Family. In fact, Tony's ideas on this topic dovetail perfectly with the objectives of our GEN3 initiative, a campaign designed to encourage folks to build marriages and families worth repeating *over three generations*. It's a goal we can all get enthused about.

How can parents create a home environment that fosters and facilitates that process? Dr. Evans offers a detailed response in the pages that follow. Not surprisingly, his parenting strategies go hand in hand with the time-honored, biblically based principles we've been promoting at Focus for more than thirty years—principles we've summarized and delineated as the Twelve Traits of a Healthy Family.

The first of these traits is a *strong marriage*. Matrimony deserves special attention in its own right, of course, but a solid marriage also has a direct impact on the development of healthy kids.

Next, thriving families are *committed* to one another. They take steps to

develop a deeply rooted sense of “we-ness” among themselves. They emphasize loyalty, unity, and interdependency, and they develop traditions and rituals that become the basis of lasting bonds.

These households are also built upon a *shared spiritual foundation* that includes church attendance, family devotions, and moral discipline. After all, parents can’t pass on a faith they don’t possess.

Good *communication*—the open and frequent sharing of feelings—is another important characteristic of kingdom families. So is a strong sense of *connectedness*. Kids experience a high degree of warmth and closeness at home when their relationships with Mom and Dad are distinguished by play, fun, humor, shared meals, and a high level of parental involvement. Connected and communicating family members learn to *honor* one another with practical demonstrations of unconditional love, which in turn equip them with a *resiliency* that can weather any storm. By bending and flexing with circumstances, they’re enabled to meet the challenges of life in a positive way.

It’s important to add that loving, grace-based households are characterized by *consistent expectations and discipline*. Clearly expressed rules tend to produce secure and responsible kids. And when children are secure and responsible, they’re ready to *share responsibility* with other members of the family by working together toward common goals.

Put it all together and what you have is an intergenerational group of *healthy individuals* who understand who they are, where their blessings come from, and what it means to be autonomous and interdependent at the same time. People like this have a unique capacity to reach out to others. They’re *community-minded* in their approach to the outside world. Their relationships with folks beyond the front door bear the marks of strong *social skills*.

That’s what a truly *thriving family* looks like. And that’s what *Raising Kingdom Kids* is all about.

Want to know more? Then you’ve come to the right place! Dr. Tony Evans knows this subject inside and out. He’s mapped out the course, and he’s ready to guide you to a whole new level of parenting and family interaction.

The journey begins when you turn the page.

—Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family

INTRODUCTION

I was raised to love memorizing Scripture. As Tony and I raised our own children, we agreed to place a priority on teaching our kids the Word in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6. It was our goal to make God’s Word a topic of conversation, a symbol of our family culture, and a message that permeated every room in our house.

One of the ways that we did this was by hanging wall art with Scripture verses. I bought ’em; Tony hung ’em. Still adorning the walls of our home today are signs with verses such as “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” “By grace are you saved,” and, my favorite, “I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit.”

In addition to the Word, I also purchased décor that emphasized the importance of home and family. Words such as “The Gathering Place” and “Family Matters” communicated the high value we placed on our home. Hanging in our kitchen is a framed print that reads, “Write it on your heart that the ones you love are life’s most precious gifts.” That’s exactly what we sought to help our kids do—love life, love God, and love each other.

Not only did we communicate the value of God and His Word to our children, but we also sought to help them understand their individual and unique importance to us and to God’s kingdom.

There is a special set of signs vertically aligned right next to the doorway that divides our den from the hallway that leads to the bedrooms. Each sign has the name of one of our children. They read as follows: Anthony, *Priceless one*—“How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust” (Psalm 40:4); Chrystal, *Follower of Christ*—“For to God we are Christ’s fragrance for those who are being saved and for those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:15, paraphrase); Priscilla, *Full of honor*—“I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me” (Micah 2:7, ESV); Jonathan, *God’s gracious gift*—“The LORD will give grace and glory, no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11, paraphrase).

We are now collecting meaningful art with messages that matter for our grandchildren.

Life-giving messages from the Word were not only presented in art form. We also purchased Scripture memory cards to use with our children as we sat at the table for dinner. Both Tony and I led our children as we read, discussed, and memorized quite a few of them.

Even now, on a monthly basis, our grandchildren recite memory verses they have learned as we gather together as a family.

Our desire was and still is rehearsing God's Word so we fulfill the commands of Deuteronomy 6 to keep God's words before our children and even our grandchildren. Our hope is to continually encourage them to experience God as a natural part of being in our home. Even as I write this brief reflection, I'm staring at the art resting on our fireplace mantle which reads, "The Spirit of Favor is on the Evans' home—Zechariah 12:10."

—Lois Evans



PART I

ESTABLISHING
A KINGDOM
MINDSET

1



THIS ISN'T THE MAGIC KINGDOM

It began as a typical Evans vacation. My wife, Lois, and I piled our four ever-growing kids into the car and took off on a road adventure. Our car held sounds of cheerful anticipation because our destination offered promises of adventure, fantasy, and amusement. This was our first of many trips to Disneyland, but it stands out in my memory because our fairy-tale story nearly turned into a tragedy.

It was August—my vacation time—so the winding streets and pathways at Disneyland were packed with other people on summer break. The sheer volume of visitors pressed us in on all sides, and we were herded along with the masses. I felt as though I waddled more than actually walked.

Being forced to walk closely together, we chatted amicably. (This was before cell phones had become ubiquitous, so my family still had the easy freedom of actually talking to one another.) Cheerful conversations bounced back and forth among Lois, me, and our four children: Chrystal, Priscilla, Anthony Jr., and Jonathan.

Because all the kids were tall enough to get on most of the fast rides, we were thoroughly enjoying our time together, myself included. But the joy diminished somewhere between Adventureland and Tomorrowland when we realized that one of our kids had stopped participating in the conversation. Jonathan, our youngest, was missing.

Right around seven years old, Jonathan had never given us much cause for alarm. He rarely acted up or required any special attention to get him to obey

the family rules. Jonathan had—and still has to this day—a strong yet gentle demeanor. Because he was so compliant, no one kept an especially keen eye on him—not even me. With each step inside the Magic Kingdom, I had become more and more captivated by the smell of good food and the sounds of the rides and the music. The promise of adventure consumed me.

I'm not sure who noticed it first, but soon the questions started coming: "Where is Jonathan?" "Where do you think he went?" "Where was the last place anyone saw him?"

Concern rose to panic as the frightening reality settled in: Jonathan was nowhere to be found. We quickly divided up into groups and began to retrace our steps as best as possible. We decided to reconvene at a chosen location after a set amount of time. Ten minutes passed, and then twenty. Still no Jonathan. We gathered, divided, and searched again.

This time I informed a security officer, and the Disney staff began searching as well. Thirty minutes passed, and then forty. No Jonathan.

My heart raced faster than I ever knew it could. My eyes scoured the crowds as I looked for my son. *Where do all these people come from?* I wondered as I po-

lutely yet quickly wove in and out of them. Fifty minutes had passed, and then sixty. Still no sign of Jonathan.

The sounds of the rides suddenly became an annoyance. The smell of food made me feel ill. What had been a place of pleasure just over an hour before had devolved into a locus of anguish. I realized that without my son, this was no magic kingdom.

And then . . . there he stood in the distance. When I first noticed him, Jonathan was looking at some baubles in a gift shop,

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unaware of the grief he had just put us all through. Jonathan had become caught up by the sights, sounds, and souvenirs that Disneyland had placed so invitingly for him to see. He was so engrossed that he had wandered off to enjoy them all by himself, not even realizing he was lost.

Jonathan smiled at me, and I rushed toward him, simultaneously wanting to hug him and spank him right there. I was grateful he was alive—yet also disappointed that he had wandered off from us. With mixed emotions I wrapped my arms around him. The story of the prodigal son became all too real in my mind at that moment. Sure, the similarities between Jonathan's actions and the rebellious son in the parable didn't entirely line up, but the concept of finding a child who was once lost and rushing to that child with a heart full of both frustration and elation seemed far more plausible than ever before. While Jonathan was lost, I would have given anything I had in order to find him. I felt that way despite the fact that he was the one who had chosen to wander off. I felt that way despite the nagging regret I had for becoming so engaged in the activities around me that I lost track of him. We both contributed to the problem in our own way, but, as the father, I was ultimately responsible.

The Journey of Kingdom Parenting

Parents, some of you are just beginning your journey in raising kingdom kids, and your eyes are filled with the bliss of those parents standing in line to board an enjoyable ride at Disneyland. Others of you have teenagers who are walking with the Lord and on the right path, but you are seeking wisdom on how to guide them through the transition from the youthful innocence of Fantasyland to the more turbulent times waiting in Tomorrowland. Still others may have children who have walked away from the Lord. Their fairy tales have morphed into tragedies, and you want to know how to point your kids back home. And others are facing the challenges of a blended family whose members may not even want to be at the park at all.

This book will meet each of you in a different place on your parenting path. Regardless of where you are, if you apply the principles we are about to explore, you will experience their fruits in your home. By intentionally applying these principles, you will reinforce one of the primary traits of a healthy home: honor. You will honor your kids by placing a high enough value on them to warrant the time and energy needed to parent well.

We're Not Perfect

by Priscilla Shirer

My family wasn't perfect. (I'm certain my dad and mom would agree.) But my parents made sure that our family was extremely purposeful. They worked hard to intentionally and deliberately create an environment where they could transfer the principles they believed in to my siblings and me.

And yet it's often only with the hindsight of age that a child can truly begin to appreciate and understand the effort and initiative involved in a process like that. The more the years gather behind me, the more easily I can recognize the sacrifice and diligence that such intentional parenting requires, not to mention how critical it is to giving a child any chance at maturing into a successful adult. I didn't really get it at the time. I found the boundaries and discipline of our upbringing to be strict. But I get it now.

I get it.

Daddy and Mommy constructed a bubble of sorts for us to live in. Home life was padded with instruction in God's Word, discipline in life lessons (such as saving and tithing our money), manners ("No elbows on the table!"), and good work ethics. We had lots of fun with our friends, but we played mostly at our home instead of theirs because my parents were so careful about the kinds of influences we might encounter somewhere else. Sure, that meant taking on the exhausting work of having a dozen sweaty kids track muddy prints in and out of the kitchen for snacks and Kool-Aid during games of basketball and Ping-Pong. But our parents did it for a reason. And they did it for us.

When we weren't at home, we were at church or at school—a simple, quaint, Christian school that reinforced the lessons taught at home. Public school came during our high school years. But even then, my parents were very involved in our studies and our friendships. They were watching, stewarding, shepherding.

They just seemed to have this *knowing* inside—a deep, inner consciousness about the culture. They knew their job as parents couldn't be

passive. They knew they needed to fight aggressively against the low values and standards of the common crowd, the crude lasciviousness that was trying to seep into our minds and hearts, our attitudes and opinions, our actions and emotions.

So they put on their gloves . . . and fought.

And now that I'm older, I'm grateful for it. I can see it all more clearly. I recognize the wrinkles around the eyes that were whittled out of long nights and loving discipline.

In fact, I never thought I'd say this, but . . . I want those wrinkles, too. And I'm working on them as hard as I can.

That's why I'm sitting these three sons of mine around a dinner table tonight, just as my parents did, and teaching them God's Word. I won't allow myself to be lulled to sleep and disengage from their education, their friendships, their influences. And together with their father, I'll be intentional and purposeful in their lives every precious day that God gives us to share with them under our roof, until they spread their wings and fly out of this nest—off to their own where, hopefully, the cycle will continue.

Wherever you are on this pathway of parenting, God has a word for you. It's never too early nor is it ever too late to start applying biblical principles to parenting and watch God bring about the growth and the fruit. You may have regrets about the past and poor decisions you have made, but this is not the time to stop trying. As the saying goes, only a fool trips on what is behind him. Seize today, and start now if you haven't yet done so. I regretted not keeping a closer eye on our youngest child that day at Disneyland, but that didn't mean I didn't do everything I could to find him.

Just as Jonathan got so caught up in the sights, sounds, and smells of the park, it is easy for kids to get caught up in what our world so tantalizingly sets before them: social media, television, gaming, and peer groups. They may not even realize they have strayed off the family path. As a parent, it is your responsibility to locate them, guide them, and bring them back.

Kingdom Parenting in a Fallen World

It is easy for parents to get so caught up in the sights, sounds, and smells of their careers, entertainment, social lives, and even church commitments that they lose track of their kids as I did with Jonathan. Because parents have neglected their responsibilities to their children, there is chaos in the kingdom (see Isaiah 3:12).

Thankfully our story of losing Jonathan at Disneyland had a happy ending. But not all stories at Disneyland end that way. These stories don't normally hit the headlines because they are frequently swept under the carpet by the public-relations police, but the Magic Kingdom has had its own share of tragic endings.

Over the years, there have been people who have actually lost their lives at Disneyland or Disney World. One visitor died when a cable holding back an enormous anchor broke on the pirate ship. A registered nurse witnessed the scene and rushed to try and save the victim. Later, a colleague of mine who knows the nurse told me she said, "It came as such a shock. One minute everyone was happy and life seemed perfect, and the next minute a lady was dying before me. You just never think when you wake up to go to Disneyland that you might be going there to watch someone die."¹

Tragedy hasn't struck just those within the park, though. Due to Walt Disney's enormous success, he was able to buy a new home for his parents in North Hollywood near the Disney studios. Yet less than a month after moving in, Disney's mom died of asphyxiation due to an improperly installed leaking furnace.

Clearly, the Magic Kingdom isn't always so magical after all.

Neither is the kingdom of the world that we are born into—a kingdom that surrounds us every day (see Ephesians 2:1-4; Matthew 12:25-26). While the world holds the glitter of success and the lure of the flesh, it also comes with the promise of death (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Matthew 7:13; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Yet despite this reality, in so many ways it is easy to get caught up in and distracted by that which appeals to our sinful nature. Not only can we get lost and thus drop the baton of kingdom parenting, but our kids can get snared as well (see 2 Timothy 2:26), particularly if we as parents

lack the tools and skills necessary to parent well because we didn't have good parenting strategies modeled for us.

It is difficult for a parent to pass on a faith that he or she does not possess. The best way for you to inspire your kids to have their own faith is for them to witness your faith—not only in your words, but also in your actions.

It is also difficult to pass on life skills you have not yet applied in your own situations. To parent well requires intentional personal growth in the art of living well, since much of parenting revolves around a child's innate ability to pattern the thoughts and actions of his or her parents. The first responsibility in parenting well is that you yourself are growing and developing as a healthy individual spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially.

I witnessed the damage of young people parenting prematurely not long ago when I went to Baltimore to visit my own parents. As I sat on the porch and looked at the neighborhood I had grown up in, I grew saddened by what I saw. No longer did the homes contain two-parent families. Windows had been boarded up throughout, a tangible symbol of the state within.

Not too far from my parents' home sat two young women, talking loudly enough for me to hear. Each was a single parent, and each was complaining about how rough life was raising kids while also trying to survive.

Midway through their conversation, one of the ladies turned my way and said something; I don't remember what. I answered and then joined their discussion by asking them their names. I asked them to tell me their stories. As they began to talk, despair registered in their words. Phrases such as, "I'm not," "I can't," and "I don't know," punctuated their sentences.

"How do you make it?" I asked, curious if public assistance was actually enough.

"Me and my two kids live with my grandma," one woman replied. She paused and then added in a whisper, "And I sell drugs. That's the only way I know how to make it."



Clearly, the Magic Kingdom isn't always so magical after all.



Her friend chimed in, perhaps trying to cover for her, “We don’t have anyone to help us.”

In other words, they didn’t have any hope of a brighter tomorrow for themselves, let alone for their kids. At the heart of both of these ladies’ troubles—as well as in the hearts of people throughout our country—is the hopelessness that comes as a result of poor parenting. We are witnessing a generation of parentless people who, either through neglect, abuse, or simple absence, are becoming parents themselves. And so the cycle continues.

You know the statistics. Nearly 50 percent of all the children in America



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are being raised in single-parent homes. Over three million kids drop out of school each year. High school dropouts commit 75 percent of all crimes in our nation.² Nearly one million teen girls get pregnant every year, burdening our already fragile economy through taxation expenses of nearly ten billion dollars annually,³ not to mention the high emotional, physical, and spiri-

tual cost on young mothers and their children. Churches no longer hold the appeal for our young people as they did in the past. As a result, churches are closing their doors at an alarming rate with somewhere around eight to ten thousand shutting down each year.⁴

Urban problems now burden suburban centers with many of these same issues as well; drug use in suburbia more than doubled in the last decade.⁵ Homicide is now the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four.⁶ Bullying has become an epidemic. Hopelessness is at an all-time high. Antidepressants are taken at nearly the same rate as vitamins, with over four million teenagers on some form of medication for the mind.⁷

I don’t need to go over more statistics because you’ve already seen the

alarming trends on the evening news, online, or in the papers. The culture in which we are seeking to raise our kids is clearly not a magic kingdom at all, although it declares itself as just that on the marquee of life.

Let me illustrate what I mean with a story. Long ago, there lived a man who sold pork as a butcher. He had never bought any pigs, rather he slaughtered wild pigs by the hundreds. A man from a neighboring town asked him one day, “How do you catch all of these wild pigs?”

The man replied, “It’s easy. I just stick a big trough of food out there down low enough for the piglets. Then when the piglets come to eat, the parents follow. While they are getting used to it each day, I start putting up a fence at night. Just one side. I do another side every night until all I have left is a gate. Eventually they come in, distracted by the sweetness of the food, and I close the gate without their ever knowing what had happened.”

In order to raise our kids with the skills to not only survive but also to thrive in the world, we need to raise children with the ability to discern what the world puts in front of them to lure them into bondage—whether that be emotional, spiritual, financial, or relational. We need to teach our kids how to look for the fences Satan seeks to erect in their minds and in their hearts (2 Corinthians 10:5). We need to raise them in a discerning environment. Because even though we live within the demonic influences of the prince of the power of this air in a world smoldering with strife, tantalizing temptations, and rebellion, we do not belong to this kingdom, and we have been given the ability to overcome. For Christ has “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

The Kingdom Mindset

Parents, you have been called to raise kingdom kids—in *God’s* kingdom. And His kingdom functions according to His rules and under His authority. In God’s kingdom, He gives the agenda, and we are to advance it. In God’s kingdom, the glory is His, and we are to reflect it. In God’s kingdom, He provides the covenantal covering under which we are to submit and flourish.

Kingdom parenting involves intentionally overseeing the generational

transfer of the faith in such a way that children learn to consistently live all of life under God's divine authority.

The command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) wasn't given simply so parents would have look-alikes. Rather, it was given so *God* would



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have look-alikes. The creation of humankind was established so man would be an image bearer of God Himself. This concept is captured in Genesis 1:26—“Let us make man in our image.” Therefore, the goal of people in general—and the family in particular—is to mirror God in the visible realm predicated on His reality in the invisible realm. This obviously doesn't mean to mirror what God looks like, since none of us know what He truly looks like. It means we are to mirror His nature, character, values, and principles.

It is essential that parents teach their children the importance of submitting to God's legitimate authority in their lives. Through that submission to Him comes their greatest influence and impact for Him.

Adam and Eve were meant to bring their children under divine rule as a reflection of their own submission to God, and we as parents are to do the same. The family is to be the replication of the image of God in history. Children are image bearers of our great God and King who seeks to promote His kingdom agenda, which is the visible manifestation of His comprehensive rule over every area of life.

Kingdom isn't a word we hear much about in Christian circles, and so before moving on, let me quickly set the stage. God has one agenda: To glorify Himself through the advancement of His kingdom. The Greek word the Bible uses for kingdom is *basileia*, which translates as “rule” or “authority.”⁸ Intrinsic within this rule or authority is power. So when we discuss the kingdom, we are also discussing a king and a ruler with power.

Now, if there's a ruler, there also have to be

- rulees (those ruled);
- a realm (the sphere over which the ruler rules); and
- regulations (guidelines that govern the relationship between the ruler and the rulees).

God's kingdom includes these three elements. He is the absolute Ruler of all creation, and His authority is final.

At the heart of the kingdom agenda is the reality that there is no separation between the sacred and the secular. All of life is spiritual because all of life comes under God's rule. Therefore, every issue mirrors God's nature and principles related to that specific area and thus reflects and promotes His agenda in history.

God has made Jesus Christ the sovereign over all of humankind's kingdoms (see Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:13–18). His rule is to be represented in history by those who are a part of His kingdom (see Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 1:22–23).

And just in case you are wondering, there are no in-between kingdoms. There are only two realms in creation: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. You are subject to one or the other. Raising kingdom kids includes orienting them to God's kingdom, His principles, and the reality of His agenda on earth.

God Blessed Them

It is also important to note that prior to the day when God gave the command to “be fruitful and multiply,” we read that “God blessed them” (Genesis 1:28). In other words, He provided Adam and Eve with all they needed to carry out His command. After all, the true definition of a blessing is that God provides the resources for what He asks you to do. It involves both enjoying and extending His provision in your life. The blessing is not only for the parents; it is also for the benefit of the children who would then bring about the expansion of God's image in His people. This blessing enabled Adam and Eve to fill the earth and also to extend God's blessing throughout the land to those who came after

them as they established families of their own. That same blessing is there for you, too, in your parenting role.

God established the family as a conduit of blessing, providing both the opportunity and framework for individuals to collectively carry out His plan in history. In particular, that plan includes the implementation of His kingdom rule, or dominion, on earth. My definition of *dominion* means ruling on God's behalf so that all of life comes under His authority. Children are the divinely ordained means of bringing the world under the dominion of Jesus Christ.

The reason Satan continually attacks the family is that the family was specifically created as the channel through which God's kingdom would be reproduced, as kingdom kids were raised to become kingdom parents in their own homes. This is precisely why childbearing and parenting are so critical to the program of God. God foretold that it would be the woman's seed that would destroy the serpent (see Genesis 3:15). And Paul wrote in the New Testament that women would be preserved through childbearing (see 1 Timothy 2:15). In bearing and raising godly children, women participate in the kingdom of God, which overrules the kingdom of Satan. In this way a kingdom woman has the privilege of symbolically reversing what happened to Eve in the garden as a woman bears and raises new lives committed to God's truth (1 Timothy 2:14).

Through parenting, each of us raises kingdom kids to be kingdom men and women so that God's purposes are fully manifested on earth, and countless more are ushered into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. So then, kingdom parenting is more than a social enterprise; it is at its core a spiritual and theological imperative. Kingdom parents raise kingdom kids to fulfill God's plans and purposes for families, not what the culture intends. Our culture is seeking to redefine marriage and family in such a way that it no longer reflects how our Lord designed it. It is critical that we model godly parenting and marriages to our kids so they have the opportunity to see firsthand what kingdom families look like.

Yet unfortunately today, our Christian culture has bought into the secular culture in redefining children as burdens rather than blessings. Reducing the

sizes of our families by reducing the number of children we bring into the world also reduces our capacity to be blessed. Scripture tells us that children are a gift from God. We read in the book of Psalms, “Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (127:3). Children are a blessing and yet ironically they are the one blessing we often seek to limit in our lives. But if we were to view children through the lens of kingdom dominion and influence—as God views them—I think we would have a different attitude about how many children we bring into our homes, as well as the priority we place on them once they are there.

Yet in order to raise kids equipped to fulfill their roles in God’s kingdom, we are going to have to be intentional about our parenting. After all, it is far easier to shape a child than to repair an adult.

And that’s true even if you find yourself approaching this monumental task alone. Numbers of you reading this book are raising your kids without the help of another parent. Maybe you have been widowed, divorced, not ever married, or you are married to a spouse who doesn’t share the same values as you or is not involved in the development of your kids. Whatever the case, let the Scriptures encourage you that you can do this well. Never underestimate the power of God when He is called upon and looked to as the source of strength, wisdom, and provision (Philippians 4:13).

The Bible tells us that Timothy, one of the great leaders in the early church, had a Greek father, who had apparently rejected God. His dad had never read *Kingdom Man*, and he certainly wasn’t living up to the title. Yet Timothy still wound up faithfully serving God due to his mom and his grandmother’s impact.

If you are raising your kids alone, remember Timothy. Keep him and what God did through him at the forefront of your mind. Even if you are a single parent, God has a plan for your kids. Commit your way to Him in all you do,



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and your kids will reap the benefits of having a parent who models biblical discipleship.

Kingdom kids don't need perfect parents. Kingdom kids need purposeful parents who seek to understand and apply God's principles in their homes. I



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applaud you for picking up this book and making use of other resources in order to better equip yourselves as parents under God.

May God guide and bless your journey of raising kingdom kids so you will experience the great joy of seeing your children and grandchildren walking in His truth (see Proverbs 17:6; 3 John 1:4) and making a kingdom impact. No matter what your successes or failures have been

up to this point, it is my desire that this book helps take you to the next level on your quest to raise kingdom kids.



ASHER AND THE ELEPHANT

Remember Mayzie, the lazy bird from Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hatches the Egg*? She lamented:

I'm tired and I'm bored
And I've kinks in my leg
From sitting, just sitting here day after day.
It's *work*! How I hate it!
I'd *much* rather play!
I'd take a vacation, fly off for a rest
If I could find *someone* to stay on my nest!¹

If you've ever had toddlers in your home, you have probably read more than your share of Dr. Seuss's books to them. You might have even inadvertently memorized some by now.

Dr. Seuss artfully combines silliness with language finesse, but he's not typically known for moral instruction. One exception is *Horton Hatches the Egg*. This clever tale of parenting invites readers to look at the more essential components of being a parent. Commitment, connectedness, gentleness, resiliency, strength, character, and kindness show up in the pages of this book. Those traits subsequently transfer the likeness of the parent to the child.

Horton Hatches the Egg is the tale of a blended family. The story begins with

Mayzie, who gives up on the hard work of parenting and finds an elephant to take her place. Horton, an elephant of his word, sits on the egg for months on end, repeating the now famous line,

I meant what I said
 And I said what I meant . . .
 An elephant's faithful
 One hundred percent!²

Horton's home life with Mayzie's egg ends up challenging him in multiple ways. The job also takes him to many unexpected places that usher in hardships and even criticism from his friends. Ultimately captured by hunters, stuck on a boat for a treacherous sea adventure, and finally placed in a traveling circus—Horton remains nested on the egg.

When the circus winds up in Florida, Mayzie, who has been selfishly vacationing there all along, spots her egg and decides to reclaim it now that all the hard work has been done.

However, when the life in the egg emerges from the cracked shell, what it has grown into resembles Horton. It has developed into an elephant-bird. Thus, Horton and his new baby are promptly returned to the jungle to happily live out their days, while Mayzie is punished for her laziness and irresponsibility.

It is a child's story, yet it carries an overtly adult message: Successful parenting comes through commitment, dedication, love, and hard work. Successful parenting also ushers in a lifetime of reward.

Blended Families

The family unit in our nation today is no longer largely comprised of biological children in the home. We often have “blended families,” where one or both parents are raising children they did not originally produce. I'm very familiar with this concept because our daughter Chrystal has a blended family of her own. Yet while two biological parents may be ideal, the underlying traits found in a healthy home aren't merely tied to genetics. Rather, they are tied to the kingdom principles of parenting, illustrated for us through an elephant named

Horton—commitment, connectedness, gentleness, resiliency, strength, character, and kindness.

Whatever your family makeup, there is always hope that you can build a kingdom home. Stay on the nest, and you'll find that the principles in this book can transform your family.

Horton the elephant isn't the only elephant with a moral to teach. In fact, we can learn a lot from a group of orphaned adolescent bull elephants in South Africa's Pilanesberg Park that began to act unruly. These elephants had reached an age where they experienced periods of high hormonal levels, resulting in their more aggressive behavior. Left unchecked by their parents, these adolescent bulls became extremely dangerous—able to go on a rampage at any time. The park rangers chose to address the situation by adding mentors to the elephants' natural environment.

When adolescent bulls break away from the herd in the wild, older bulls become their mentors. As a result, the adolescent bulls submit to the presence and the power of the older bulls among them. In fact, they learn how to direct their hormonal upswings in responsible ways that are productive to the herd rather than destructive.

When the park rangers introduced adult bulls into the living space of the adolescents, the result was exactly what they had anticipated. Where there had been chaos, there was now calm. The "father" elephants completed the environment so that the young elephants received the guidance they needed to live well.³

While elephants can't be compared to humans on all levels, the principles evident in their interactions reflect what psychologists observe in teenagers today. So many teenagers are living a life of chaos simply because they are lacking parental involvement and dedication. Parenting is so essential to the develop-

ment of a boy becoming a man and a girl becoming a woman that many, if not most, of the issues that plague us as a nation today would be eradicated if we



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would just master this one thing. Rather than looking to the White House to fix all of our ills, we ought to be looking to our own houses to do just that. As goes the family, so goes the nation.

When the family breaks down, everything that's supposed to be built on that sacred foundation crumbles with it. And so God's kingdom on earth (made up of the body of Christ) is now reaping the devastation of family disintegration. When parents fail to provide their children with the tools necessary to resist the culture's onrush, the rising tide of secularism washes away a generation of children like sand castles on the shores of life.

As we saw with the illustration of Horton, the bull elephants, and as I have personally witnessed in many successful blended homes, family commitment is a trait that transcends DNA and can produce great results. A strong sense of commitment is the foundation for a strong, fully functional home. Aspects of



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commitment include dependence on each other, loyalty, honesty, and trust—as well as developing goals and dreams together as a family.

Commitment focuses on a child's proper development. In fact, a child's development is so critical that, in biblical times, whenever a young boy was earmarked to become a king, many people took much care in training that child about how to be a king. Yet somewhere along the line, we have come to believe that the princes and princesses in God's kingdom don't need any significant training at all. Just as we saw in the illustration of the elephants, parental modeling and involvement impact the young. We see this impact show up in the life of a man many of you have never heard of: Asher.

Asher's Blended Home

Let's face it: The Chronicles aren't the most exciting read. But hidden among the myriad difficult-to-pronounce names lies one of the greatest treasures of

kingdom parenting we have. His name was Asher, which in Hebrew means “happy.”⁴ In 1 Chronicles 7 (as well as in Genesis 46:17), we read the genealogy of his descendants. It starts with his five children—four boys and a girl. As the only girl in the group, no doubt his daughter, Serah, held a special place in Asher’s heart. We know this for a number of reasons.

It is said in Jewish rabbinical literature that Serah is actually Asher’s stepdaughter, thus making Asher a father of a blended home. She was the daughter of a woman named Hadurah, who had become a widow early on. History records that Hadurah married Asher when Serah was just three years old, and he raised her as his own child.

So loved and welcomed into the family was Serah that she is the only granddaughter mentioned in the entire lineage of Jacob, her grandfather.

Piety and virtue, though, were not something Asher could have claimed for himself when he was a young man, although he later went on to live a life accented with great wisdom. In his youth, Asher did something that was terribly wrong—by anyone’s standards. He joined in on a selfish and hard-hearted scheme to have his half-brother, Joseph, thrown into a pit and later sold as a slave to a traveling caravan headed to Egypt.

Perhaps due to his own early misdeeds, the ensuing guilt as he watched his beloved father grieve, as well as the subsequent near-starvation of his people at the start of the seven-year drought, Asher became a changed man. Maybe it came through witnessing Joseph model a spirit of charity, mercy, and grace to his family. We don’t really know what brought about his transformation, but we do know the legacy he ended up leaving behind—a legacy of great wisdom, faith, character, and service to his nation. It’s a legacy that has impacted generations of his descendants.

Asher’s legacy ought to give each of us hope, especially those who may not have started out on the best possible footing as parents. Asher made mistakes early on—big ones that harmed his original family. He certainly didn’t have it all together. In addition, he was raised in one of the most historically dysfunctional homes ever to be recorded biblically. Sprinkle on top of that the added burdens of a blended family of his own—four sons and a stepdaughter—while married to a woman who had been married once before, and most might not

have considered that Asher would have produced much of anything lasting at all.

But he did. In fact, his is a great legacy and a model for kingdom parenting today.

That legacy is recorded for us in 1 Chronicles 7:40 where we read, “All these were the sons of Asher, heads of the fathers’ houses, choice and mighty men of valor, heads of the princes. And the number of them enrolled by genealogy for service in war was 26,000 men.”

They Call Me “Mommy”

by Chrystal Evans Hurst

They call me Mommy. It’s a five-letter word that my children use all day, every day, hundreds and thousands of times a day. And it means . . .

I need you . . .

I’m hurting . . .

Help me . . .

Can we talk? . . .

Love me . . . and

What’s for dinner?

They use that word so loosely. They use that word a lot. They use it whenever they need to find me.

Why? Because they know that I hold the keys.

They know I hold the keys to whatever will make it onto their dinner plates that evening.

They know that if anybody can get the splinter out, I can.

They know that if anyone will love them, I will.

But that common name means so much more. It means that I am responsible, along with my husband, for training them in righteousness. It means that I have to shape their hearts and their character in a way that will prepare them for the plans God has for their lives. It means that they will learn from me how they are to parent their own children someday.

And it's scary.

It's a little unsettling to think that you could mess up your kids, isn't it?

I know I'm not perfect, but somehow that fact is grossly magnified under the lens of my role in the lives of my family.

Asher's story comforts me. He didn't get it right at first either.

And then, when he grew up and became a man, he didn't have the picture-perfect family. But that didn't stop his children from becoming leaders characterized by bravery, excellence, and influence.

My parents did a great job raising us. Really. They did. They will tell you that they don't harbor many regrets. That's wonderful to hear.

But I want to encourage those who may be reading this book on raising kingdom kids and thinking, *Well, this couldn't apply to me. I've messed up too badly to be a positive influence in the lives of my children.*

Enter Asher.

He messed up too. After bad decisions, he committed himself to make good ones going forward.

Enter the blended family.

A perfectly nuclear family was not a prerequisite for God to work through Asher to produce godly people.

Enter impact.

As I've heard my father say many times, "God can hit a bull's-eye with a crooked stick." And while Asher—and maybe you and I—may not have had a straight start, God can work miracles.

So as you read this book and arm yourself with knowledge to help you in your parenting journey . . .

Know that when your children call out for you, Mommy and Daddy are not titles to be held loosely.

You are not common.

You hold a crucial place and have significant value in the life of your children, now and in the future they will experience.

And if you choose, starting now, to have a kingdom home, you can have an impact beyond your wildest dreams.

No wonder Asher was a happy man. He did not look at his five children as getting on his last nerve. Rather, he was a satisfied man who was intentional in caring for his offspring and those under his care. As a result, he and his descendants truly lived out his father's blessing: "Of Asher [Moses] said, 'More blessed than sons is Asher; may he be favored by his brothers, and may he dip his foot in oil. Your locks will be iron and bronze, and according to your days, so will your leisurely walk be'" (Deuteronomy 33:24–25).

Raising Leaders

The first parenting principle we can learn from the life of Asher is that his sons were the "heads of the father's houses." Asher raised his sons, and also his daughter, to be leaders. They weren't just hanging around the house, eating food and taking up space. According to 1 Chronicles 7:40, these men grew up to fulfill a leadership role. (In the Bible, "headship" refers to a leadership position within a home.) Asher took his role as the head of his home seriously and subsequently raised up leaders over their homes as well.

As a leader, Asher and his sons set the tone and direction for their homes and ensuing generations. One of the worst things that can happen to a family is to have parents who do not adequately fulfill their leadership roles. They want to be called parents without the commitment of parenting. Yet "headship" in the Bible isn't a title; it's a responsibility. In order to claim the title, a leader must also own the responsibility that goes along with it.

I can't say that I want to be a preacher and not want to preach. I can't say that I want to be a pastor and not want to shepherd my congregation. That would be taking a title and misusing it. Likewise, parents need to fulfill the responsibilities that come within their role, and that includes preparing their children to do the same.

Second, Asher raised his children to excel in all things. We discern this from the descriptive terminology used to introduce them. The Bible says they were "choice" men. It was rare in historical Jewish culture to record much of anything about women, but taking into account other verses referencing Serah, we can discern that she grew to be a choice lady as well.

Asher's descendants went on to become "choice" men; these individuals

grew up to become top of the line in all that they did. Asher and his wife raised choice children, those of great ethical character who accepted their responsibilities. They held high standards that wouldn't allow them to settle for mediocrity. As parents, they most likely communicated high expectations to their children. Clearly expressed expectations coupled with consistent follow-through produce responsible kids.

These children were not just trying to make it and get by, still living with Mom and Dad long after they were physically able to work and provide for themselves. Neither were these young adults postponing the responsibilities of life as long as possible by pursuing degree after degree. Asher didn't raise his children to be like that. Rather, he raised them in a spirit of excellence and integrity. Even though he didn't have a perfect track record, he sought to better his own character while steering his children to a higher plane than he had experienced.

Kingdom parents, if you are satisfied with your kids being mediocre, then mediocre might be all that you are going to get. If you don't raise the bar, how can your kids experience anything better? You run the risk of



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them becoming mediocre adults who marry mediocre spouses because that's all your kids know and understand. But if you raise the bar, what might happen? Your kids could become like Asher's children. You could raise them to be the cream of the crop—to aim for excellence in all things.

These days, in a room that is crowded with no more seats available, it amazes me that men will allow women to stand for an inordinate amount of time. My father would have corrected me sternly if I ever let a woman stand for an extended period of time while I was seated. Today we've got a generation of children being raised without the simplest notion of etiquette, common courtesy, respect, honor, excellence, and integrity. Why? Because we have a generation of parents who are so distracted by the sights, sounds, and smells of life's adventures that they simply settle for mediocrity in both themselves and

their offspring. It's easier that way. However, trifling children typically grow up to become trifling adults—and, in the long run, that isn't easy at all.

Obviously not everyone is going to excel in everything. Raising kingdom kids who are “choice” simply means they will maximize their personal potential and God-given gifts. Maybe they won't be in the top of their particular class in every subject, but whatever it is that God has created them to fulfill, they will do so with a degree of excellence, and they will do all else to the best of their abilities.

The third lesson we can learn is that Asher raised warriors. According to 1 Chronicles 7:40, he raised “mighty men of valor.” This describes individuals who are brave, courageous, and willing to risk themselves for the betterment of the whole. Valor means boldness. A person of valor is willing to take a stand when a stand needs to be taken. Asher raised children who grew into adults of conviction.

Too many of our children crumble under the pressure of their peers rather than rise above the fray. They are indecisive, taking a stand for little or nothing at all. To raise kingdom kids, we must instill in them a heart of valor—a spirit that will stay strong despite the challenges and enemies that they might face on any given day. Scripture tells us that Satan roams around like “a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). A kingdom kid must be adequately equipped with knowledge and wisdom in order to be prepared for the spiritual battle that surrounds him or her. Asher raised children who were ready.

Finally, Asher raised children who would serve others. They became mentors. We read that they were “heads of princes.” Essentially, Asher mentored leaders who were then positioned to influence the kingdom as mentors themselves. A prince is a king waiting to happen. By raising princes, Asher's children influenced society. Parents, keep in mind that strong families are always connected to the community in some way. A healthy home is not an isolated home—it's a home where family members are encouraged to get involved in local activities, as well as service opportunities in the community and beyond.

Asher's children not only took care of themselves (choice men), their own homes (heads of the fathers' houses), their own community (mighty men of valor); they also took care of their country (heads of princes). Asher raised kingdom kids who understood that the stability and advancement of the kingdom

began with them, weaving through their families into their congregations and communities and ultimately impacting their nation.

Unfortunately, today many parents have lost sight of the long-term impact their children will one day make. As a result, some parents spend more time training their dogs than they do their kids. They rarely play with them, study the Bible with them, take them to church, discuss what was taught, correct them when they are wrong, give them a vision and a dream, develop their character, instill godly virtues, and so on. They don't do any of these things—or they do them halfheartedly—and then they wonder why their children turn out the way that they do. Rather than reaping the generational cycles of victory Asher and his wife experienced, they wind up with generational cycles of collapse passed on from their kids to their grandkids and so on. Instead of positive patterns being transferred, they transfer a DNA of defeat.

First Chronicles 7:40 concludes with this summary of successful parenting: “And the number of them enrolled by genealogy for service in war was 26,000 men.” Keep in mind that Asher had only four boys and a girl. Yet by the time those five children raised their own families, there were 26,000 choice men of valor (not including the women of valor who were undoubtedly produced as well).

I'll never forget the birth of my first son. Our first two children were girls, so when Lois gave birth to our third child, I waited anxiously in the sitting area outside of the labor room with my mind fixated on one thing: Will this be a boy? I desperately wanted to have the legacy of a son. I was so excited when I first saw him that, without even thinking, I blurted out, “His name is Anthony Tyrone Evans Jr.” I gave him my name because I was so thrilled at having the legacy of a son.

As I grew older, God began to develop in me the ability to see His creation more as He does. He opened my heart to think like a king. Legacy is much more than simply passing on the family name. Legacy involves passing on a kingdom worldview and perspective, whether that involves sons or daughters.



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Perhaps because we think our daughters will grow up and take on someone else's name, we don't always look at them through the legacy-lens. But when we live life as parents from a kingdom perspective, we grow in our understanding that we aren't just passing on our name through our children—we are passing on God's name, His character, and His kingdom agenda. We are reminding them that they no longer have only our blood flowing through their veins; they have God's—they have royal blood.

Many of our children may struggle with issues of ethnicity as well. One of the greatest lessons my father instilled in me as a child growing up in the



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midst of a country torn by racial disparity and injustice was that I was not primarily to identify myself by my ethnicity, but rather by my citizenry. As a citizen of heaven and a child of the King, my father always taught me to remember that I had royal blood flowing through my veins. If people called me names or treated me unjustly, he would remind me that it wasn't a reflection of who I was—it just meant they failed to realize that I was a prince in God's kingdom.

Parents, there is a world of princes and princesses in our nation today who have no one to tell them who they really are, as my father told me or Asher told his four sons, stepdaughter, and subsequent grandchildren. No one studies the Bible with them, takes them to church, corrects them when they are wrong, teaches them about life, shows them how to treat others, or tells them what it means to be responsible and make wise decisions. This has resulted in a form of spiritual castration on the part of our young men and spiritual barrenness on the part of our young women. Their royalty has been stripped from them by a culture that fails to even recognize them as princes or princesses.

Today our nation needs men and women who will fulfill the high call of kingdom parenting. Our world needs parents who will act as a police escort, guiding their children safely into the future as they oversee the covenantal

transference of the faith. Parents who will walk with their children along the checkerboard of life until they finally reach the destination where each child can stand tall and say, “Crown me.”

And then repeat the same cycle in their own home.

It's an Elephant

One day a father decided to take his daughter to the zoo. She asked if she could bring some friends along, and her dad agreed, so she invited ten friends to join them. At the zoo, the kids ran over to where they were giving elephant rides. Excitedly, the daughter jumped up and down and asked her dad if they could all go on an elephant ride. The father looked at the price, multiplied it by eleven, and shook his head no. “It’s too much,” he said.

“Too much?” his daughter replied. “But Daddy, it’s an elephant.”

“Yes,” he said, “but that’s a lot of money.”

“I know, Daddy,” she replied, “but that’s because it’s an elephant.”

The father was looking at the price. The daughter was looking at the size. It seemed like a lot to him because he just saw the cost, but it didn’t seem like a lot to her compared to the size of the elephant. Parents, raising kingdom kids comes with a high price tag of time, energy, investment, and many other things, but when you take your eyes off the cost and focus instead on the size of the legacy you are producing, you will realize that it’s worth every single thing that you invest.