

Parenting by The Book

John Rosemond

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Introduction

The Journey, So Far

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?
—Psalm 11:3

Several years ago, a young mother told me that she rejected “my” philosophy of parenting. After an exhaustive search of contemporary parenting literature, she had decided that “attachment parenting” suited her best. Suited her? This was postmodernity (the mind-set that objective truth does not exist and everything is relative) talking. As the Rolling Stones, in what may be the most postmodern of lyrics, put it, “I’m free to do what I want, any old time.” As I pointed out to this mother, the matter of how a child should be raised is not about the parent; it’s about the child. Furthermore, whereas there may be more than one way to skin the proverbial cat, there is but one correct way to raise a child. (If you think I’m making this statement presumptuously, I encourage you to read on.) But in fairness, the mental health community has been anything but of one voice where child rearing is concerned, and each of the competing voices in the cacophony of psychobabble has claimed and claims superiority. Choosing to listen to only one may be the only way to maintain one’s sanity.

One might ask what’s different about John Rosemond’s way of raising children, to which the answer is that John Rosemond’s way does not exist. The

way described in these pages is straight from the Bible. I am a messenger, and a somewhat paradoxical one at that.

I possess a license to practice psychology, issued by the North Carolina Psychology Board. In that sense, I am a psychologist. But unlike 99.999 percent of people who hold such licenses, I don't believe in psychology. I'm referring to the corrupted psychology that emerged in the late 1960s, when the profession was hijacked by secular progressives who were anti-scientific and focused more on advancing humanist ideology than advancing the human condition. And allow me to further clarify that there are notable exceptions to this general indictment, people of sterling integrity like Dr. James Dobson, who toil ceaselessly to bring light into the darkness.

A number of years ago, I came to the realization that for all of its pretenses to scientific objectivity, post-1960s psychology is a secular religion that one believes in by faith. I had been slowly losing that false faith since the early 1980s, but I lost the last vestige seven years ago, when I submitted my life to Jesus Christ. One of my purposes in writing this book is to help you lose your faith in psychology too.

I am absolutely convinced that modern psychology has done more harm than good to the American Family. Not "family," mind you, the various alternatives of which the American Psychological Association has enthusiastically affirmed, even actively promoted, but Family, as in heterosexual parents and children related by birth or adoption. The reason child rearing—once a fairly straightforward, matter-of-fact affair—has become so difficult, so emotionally taxing, so beset with problems, is that instead of going to their elders for child-

rearing advice, American parents have been listening to psychologists and other mental health professionals tell them how to raise children for more than a generation. With rare exception, the advice has been bad.

Beginning with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the Father of Modern Psychology, psychologists have cut one idea after another out of whole cloth. None of Freud’s theories have been verified; in fact, most of them have been discredited. After all, he made them up. He was convinced he had the Last Word on human reality—that he possessed unique powers of insight into the workings of the mind, any thought he had was true, and everyone else needed to know what his great mind was producing. It was inconceivable to Freud that he was wrong about anything. Psychology hasn’t changed all that much in the past sixty-eight years. Psychological theories come, and psychological theories go. The theories are different, but it’s always the same old, same old, come-and-go. Since Freud, the history of psychology has been the history of one failed diagnosis, theory, and therapy after another: multiple personality disorder, recovered memory therapy, psychoanalytic theory and therapy, gestalt therapy, play therapy, and so on and so on.

Before going any further, I need to make perfectly clear that I am not anti-psychologist; I am anti-*psychology*. I know of psychologists who do good work, but whether they realize it or not, they do good work in spite of the fact that they have advanced degrees in psychology. It’s nothing short of absurd to believe that a doctorate in psychology makes one competent to counsel people who are having personal or relationship trouble in their lives. Competent counseling comes from the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has no preference for PhDs.

On occasion, someone will ask me if I consider myself a Christian psychologist. No, I most definitely do not. To paraphrase Shakespeare, a psychologist by any other name is still a psychologist. The worldview of Christianity and the worldview of psychology are poles apart. The tensions between them cannot be reconciled.

Psychology holds that the individual is fundamentally good. Christianity holds that human beings, whereas created in the image of God, corrupted all of Creation by rebelling against him. Psychology's central doctrine is one of non-responsibility—fundamentally, the individual is the product of his upbringing; therefore, his vices are reflections of psychic conflicts engendered by his parents' inadequacies (i.e., the individual, fundamentally good, is messed up by his parents, who were messed up by their parents, and so on). According to psychology, a person is a chronic liar because during his childhood he was made to feel responsible for protecting certain family secrets, such as his father's alcoholism and his mother's tryst with the next door neighbor. He can't hold a job because his father was threatened by his achievements, so to achieve is to betray his father. He has three failed marriages because he secretly believes that like his mother, no woman can be trusted. And so on.

Christianity holds that we are solely and fully responsible for our sinful behavior and that only by accepting that responsibility can we receive forgiveness.

Psychology holds that a person can be "saved" through the process of therapy as mediated by another human being; that coming to grips with the corruption suffered at the hands of one's parents will set one free.

Christianity holds that salvation is attained only through faith in Jesus Christ, that he is the Truth, and that only his truth can set one free.

So, to answer the above question, I am not a Christian psychologist. I am a Christian who holds a license to practice psychology. I believe Jesus Christ is the one and only Wonderful Counselor. It is only through him that a broken person can be made truly whole again.

I began to realize that psychology was a secular religion when my licensing board accused me of professional misconduct in the early 1990s. The misconduct involved writing a newspaper column in which I said that an eighteen-month-old child who was sexually abused on one occasion by a non-family member was “not likely to remember the event.” Psychologists, clinical social workers, and marriage and family therapists all over the USA went ballistic.

At the time, one of the biggest income streams in the mental health professions was coming from “recovered memory therapy,” which rested on the nonempirical notion that in a proper therapeutic environment, a person could recover memories of traumatic events that occurred even during early infancy. I was accused of violating professional ethics. In fact, I had simply pointed out that the emperor had no clothes.

During the inquisition to which I was subjected, I became acutely aware that my profession is an ideology. As such, its practitioners care little for truth. If objective research findings contradict the prevailing clinical fad, the findings are ignored, even ridiculed. It did not matter, for example, that memory research verified my position: reliable, long-term memories do not form before the third birthday, approximately, and that this rule applies to traumatic events as well as

to everyday events. I had threatened the house of cards that clinical psychology had built; therefore, I had to go. In the end, my lawyers prevailed, and when it was all over, I realized that the ordeal had been a blessing in disguise. I had clarified for me that my profession was a house built on sand, and shifting sand at that. The truth began to set me free.

I still had another hurdle to clear, however. At the time, I was a cultural Christian. I went to church, I served on my church's governing board and various church committees, and I gave the church money. But all of this was a sham. I was doing nothing more than putting on a good face, a face that allowed me to avoid confronting my sinfulness, my need for forgiveness, my need for an authentic relationship with God through his Son. Even my pastor at the time told me that believing in the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection were not essential to being a Good Christian. I was free to believe what I wanted, he said; what really counted was the kind of person I was, how many good deeds I performed. I took this freedom to the limit. I devoured books about the "historical Jesus"—another way of hiding, substituting intellectual curiosity for relationship.

When my sister Ann and brother-in-law Michael tried to share the Lord with me, I maintained that there were too many contradictions in the Gospels for the story to be true, and I proceeded to enumerate some of them. They patiently listened and pointed out that the mere fact four people tell the same story in slightly different ways does not discredit the story. I countered that if the story of Jesus was the truth, as they claimed, which story was the truth? How could someone possibly claim, with a straight face, that the truth came in four different

forms? Exasperated, my brother-in-law told me that I was “too logical.” I replied that God had given us minds with which to think logically, and if I was ever going to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior, it was going to have to be courtesy of some logical process.

Several years later, that very thing occurred in the form of a book by Lee Strobel: *The Case for Christ*. Strobel had been an atheist when he decided to apply his training in investigative journalism to an in-depth study of the Gospels. Much to his own amazement, instead of being confirmed in his nonbelief, Strobel eventually admitted that he could not deny the validity of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John reported. Logic brought him to a place where he felt he had no choice but to admit and submit. Strobel had done my intellectual work for me. Upon finishing *The Case for Christ*, I admitted, and I submitted.

At this point, I’m going to ask the reader to bear with me while I backtrack a bit. During the ten years prior to my epiphany, I had enjoyed a reputation as one of America’s premier parenting experts. After all, I was a best-selling author of eight parenting books as well as a weekly syndicated newspaper column and the busiest public speaker in my field to boot. Every so often, a pastor would approach me at a speaking engagement and say that whether I knew it or not, everything I was saying was consistent with biblical teachings concerning children and parental responsibilities. I’d listen politely and respond diplomatically, all the while looking for the nearest escape route. Sincere believers in Christ Jesus made me very nervous.

One day, somewhere in America, a minister asked me, “Have you been born again, John?”

I was stopped dead in my intellectual tracks by the simplicity, the directness, of the question. I felt trapped, suddenly in danger of being exposed as the fake I was. “I don’t know,” I answered.

“Then you haven’t been,” he said. “But someday you will be. God is preparing you, John, whether you realize it or not.” With that, having completed his assignment, he politely excused himself.

He was right. I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior in my early fifties. That beginning in Christ was the beginning of the end of John K. Rosemond, MS, noted family psychologist. I began reading Scripture with no purpose in mind other than to strengthen my relationship with the Lord, the Word made flesh, and to nourish my new, reborn self. As I read, the fact that God has embedded in Scripture a blueprint for the raising of his children became increasingly clear. I began having one “Whoa!” experience after another as the blueprint slowly unrolled before my eyes. Some of the blueprint’s details are obvious, such as Proverbs 22:6: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” And some are not so obvious, such as Jesus’s instruction to his disciples in Matthew 5:37: “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’” What an elegantly simple and straightforward way of expressing the foundation of proper discipline!

One of the many miracles of Scripture revealed itself to me: It is all things to all people in every time. To find, one must simply seek. If one opens the Bible seeking marital guidance, the Bible will become, in his or her hands, a manual on how to properly conduct oneself within marriage. If one opens the Bible seeking advice on how to conduct oneself in a business relationship, the Bible will become

a guide to business ethics. For a parent seeking guidance in child-rearing matters, the Bible will become a parenting manual. And so on. I was amazed, to say the least.

Every Christian is a minister. Each Christian's ministry is unique. You don't choose it for yourself; it's chosen for you. As I listened to God with an open heart, I realized that he had given me an assignment—this ministry to America's families that I call *Parenting by the Book*.

People sometimes tell me that they like my ideas. I am quick to point out that what they think are my ideas are not my own, that I am a messenger, nothing more. With my tongue planted firmly in my cheek, I call myself the Great Parenting Plagiarist because I have never had an original idea concerning the raising of children (or anything else, most likely) in my life. Even when I thought I was coming up with original ideas, I was not. I was simply being prepared. My eyes were being slowly opened.

Writing this book is an act of submission to God's will. All I can do is pray that the words of my mouth (as I put them on paper) and the meditation of my heart are pleasing in his sight, for he is my Rock and my Redeemer.

I also pray that reading this book will be a blessing to you and your family; that the message contained herein will strengthen your marriage and both strengthen and "straighten" your efforts at raising responsible and compassionate citizens.

May the Lord be with you always.

John Rosemond
Gastonia, NC

Part One

The Great Deception

In the 1960s, secular progressives stormed the ramparts of American culture. They took sledgehammers to anything and everything traditional and erected the false gods of their new religions, the most insidious of which has been therapeutic psychology. The new psychology, unleashed from the restraints of objectivity, was programmed to aid in the destruction of the intact nuclear family, and a good job it has done. Mental health professionals attacked the legitimacy of the traditional marriage and demonized traditional child rearing, both of which are founded on biblical principles. Parenting according to Dr. So-and-So replaced parenting according to God's design, and it's been a downhill ride ever since.

The Walls Come Crumblin' Down

Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.

—Psalm 40:4

Our journey begins in 2002, in Lafayette, Louisiana. I'm in the lobby of an auditorium in which I'm about to speak, chatting with several parents. One of the women suddenly says, "I'm absolutely convinced, John, that my husband and I have experienced more problems in four years with two children than my parents had with all ten of us the entire time."

That mother's statement reflects the difficulties inherent to today's child-rearing philosophy and practice. Further, it echoes the experience of not just one set of parents in Lafayette, but the experience of many if not most parents in the United States. Whether you grew up in a large or small family, you are almost certainly experiencing more child-rearing difficulties than did your parents—a lot more. When compared to your grandparents' child-rearing experience, there is no doubt about it. Your grandparents had problems with their children—all parents do—but compared to the problems you are having, their parenting experience was a cake walk.

"Just Something You Did"

Men and women who accomplished most of their child rearing before 1960—people who are now in their 70s, 80s, and 90s—tell me that whereas they

dealt with the occasional problem, the raising of children *per se* was not especially difficult. As one ninety-year-old woman who raised five children during the '40s and '50s once told me, "It was just something you did." She was by no means diminishing the responsibility. She made it clear that raising children was the most important job anyone ever undertook. She was simply putting it in its proper perspective: Raising children was but one of *many* responsibilities she had assumed as an adult, and she had been determined to execute each and every one of them to the best of her ability. These included responsibilities as a daughter, sister, friend, wife, employee (she had worked as a secretary for a number of years), member of various women's clubs and civic organizations, member of her church, and so on. Because she did not over-identify with the role of mother, she was not over-focused on her kids. Therefore, raising children did not consume, exasperate, and exhaust her. She was able to discharge her responsibilities to her children, including their discipline, in a calm, collected, confident fashion. That hardly describes the day-to-day experience of today's oft-consumed, oft-exasperated, and oft-exhausted parents, and mothers especially.

"But John!" someone might exclaim. "Times have changed!"

That cliché really explains nothing. "Times" have always changed, but until recently, the raising of children did not change from generation to generation. As technology, demographics, and economic conditions changed, the general approach to child rearing remained pretty much the same. My grandparents, for example, were born in the 1890s. During the first thirty years of their lives, they witnessed and experienced more change—in every conceivable fashion—than has

occurred in the last thirty years (since 1977). Yet child rearing did not change during that time. My parents were born around 1920. Consider the dramatic changes that took place during the first thirty years of their lives, from 1920 to 1950: a worldwide depression that lasted more than a decade, a global war that lasted for five years, the development and use of nuclear weapons, the start of the cold war and the national insecurity that resulted, the invention of television, and the ubiquity of the automobile. These events transformed not only America, but the world. No one born after 1950 has experienced such profound cultural transformation. Yet from 1920 to 1950, child rearing in America did not change in any appreciable way. My grandparents raised my parents in accord with the same child-rearing principles that had guided my great-grandparents, and they employed pretty much the same methods. My point: The mere fact that “times” change neither means nor requires change in every single thing.

Once upon a time, people understood that in changing times, certain things should not change; that there must always be certain constants in culture. A short list of those changeless things includes consensus concerning morality, the need for adults to be contributing members of society, and constants regarding how the family should function, including how children should be brought up. Once upon a time, people understood that change would deteriorate into chaos unless change was organized around unchanging “still points” in the culture, and child rearing was one of those points. In fact, there is no evidence that in the Judeo-Christian world the fundamental principles governing child rearing had appreciably changed since its founding by Abraham and Sarah. For thousands of years, the child-rearing “baton” was handed down, intact, from

generation to generation. Children *honored* their parents by growing up and raising their children the same way their parents had raised them, and let there be no doubt: the “way” in question was based on biblical principles.¹

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long
in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

—*Exodus 20:12*

Progress constantly infuses culture with new energy, but in the fifth commandment God promises a stable, secure society to people who adhere to fundamental family traditions. But that understanding went by the boards in the 1960s, the single most deconstructive decade in the history of the United States of America.

Father Knows Best

During the 1960s, the USA underwent a culture-wide paradigm shift that had profound effect on all of our institutions, including the family. Prior to the '60s, we were a culture informed by and defined by tradition. Progress took place in nearly every generation, but most people continued to embrace traditional values and live their lives according to traditional form. When young people reached adulthood, developed occupations, married, and had children, they adopted their parents' values and consciously sought to emulate their parents' examples. (Exceptions to any general rule can always be found, but this was

certainly a general rule.) There had been a minor challenge to this constancy after World War I, but it came completely undone in the 1960s. America entered the 1960s one culture and emerged from that tumultuous decade a different culture altogether, in every respect. By 1970, we were no longer a culture informed and defined by tradition, but a culture informed and defined by a relatively new electronic media—television—a media that had decided to promote a radical, progressive agenda.

During its infancy in the 1950s, television programs, without exception, reflected traditional American values. Perhaps you're old enough to remember (or perhaps you've seen the reruns) *I Love Lucy*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Lassie*, *Walt Disney Presents*, and variety shows like *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

In the 1960s, however, the now-adolescent television industry began to take on a rebellious, activist character. Its movers and shakers—people such as NBC news anchor Walter Cronkite—became determined to use the influence of television to reshape America consistent with the vision of the emerging neo-liberal, secular elite. And they succeeded.

By 1970, the consensus that had previously existed concerning values, right versus wrong, and morality had begun to unravel. All of the “still points” that had previously stabilized America had been undermined and were beginning to topple.

By the mid 1970s, the USA had become a full-fledged “progressive” culture. Progressivism holds that just as most new technologies (e.g., computers) are better than old technologies (typewriters), new *ideas* are better than old

ideas. For the most part, the progressive mind-set rejects tradition. It refuses to recognize that there is, in truth, “nothing new under the sun,” as a wise man wrote thousands of years ago: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Many in my generation—the Baby Boomers—became seduced by the new utopian progressivism. We (as a much younger man, I identified with this movement) deluded ourselves into thinking that we had been anointed by some secular divinity to usher out everything old and ring in a Brave New World. We decided that traditional values and forms had to go—that our parents’ values were most definitely *not* going to be our values, and their ways of doing things were most definitely *not* going to be our ways. One of the old ways in question was traditional child rearing.

Child Rearing Becomes Parenting

Prior to the 1960s, when parents had problems with their children, they did not seek advice from people with capital letters after their names. Rather, they sought the counsel of elders in their extended families, churches, and communities. “Grandma”—the generic term I use to refer to the elders in question—was the universally recognized child-rearing expert. Grandma gave child-rearing advice based on the life she had led. Furthermore, the advice she gave concerning any given parenting problem was the same advice her mother would have given her under similar circumstances, and the same advice her grandmother would have given her mother, and so on down the generations.

After the 1960s, parents were no longer going to Grandma for child-rearing advice. Instead, they were seeking counsel from people in the mental

health professions—people who dispensed advice based not on lives they had led, but rather on books they had read.

Understanding what Grandma was talking about did not require a college degree. She did not say things like “In talking with you, I get the distinct impression that you are still trying to resolve childhood issues of your own, and I think we should give some time to exploring those issues and discovering how they relate to the problems you are currently having with your child.” That’s how people with capital letters after their names talk.

Grandma talked like this: “You know, it occurs to me that your uncle Charlie, when he was about Billy’s age, did something similar to what Billy has done. Here’s how I handled it. . . . You’ve no doubt noticed that Charlie is working for the bank today, not robbing banks. Maybe you’d like to consider going home and doing with Billy what I did with Charlie.”

Young parents left their “therapy sessions” with Grandma feeling empowered, reassured, and with a clear sense of what to do. I was in private practice from 1980 to 1990. One of the sobering things that slowly dawned on me during those ten years was that parents were not always leaving their first appointments with me feeling empowered, reassured, and with a clear sense of what to do. Instead, they were sometimes leaving feeling like miserable failures because, instead of dealing with them as Grandma would have, I was doing so from behind the mask of my impressive credentials. Instead of presenting myself as simply a not-so-remarkable person who had gained some measure of wisdom as a result of my own experiences while raising children, I was presenting myself as a high and mighty, all-knowing, all-seeing psychologist. That realization

eventually helped me realize I could be much more helpful to parents outside of the office than if I stayed within the protection of its four diploma-ridden walls.

Free to Be You and Me

One of the changes that took place in the 1960s concerned America's attitude toward authority. Prior to that deconstructive decade, Americans generally respected traditional authority. Someone might not have agreed with a certain politician, for example, but he still respected him. He had, after all, been duly elected, and that was that. By 1970, a cynicism and general disrespect had developed toward all forms of traditional authority, of which there are five: political, military, institutional, church, and family.

In the late '60s and early '70s, the secular, educational, and media elites began to demonize political authority, the military, institutional authority (especially within corporations), religion (especially Christianity), and the two cornerstones of the traditional family: the traditional marriage and traditional child rearing. Mind you, all of those authority traditions derived their legitimacy from the Bible. In effect, this was an assault on the very Judeo-Christian principles upon which Western civilization was built.

The attack on the traditional family was especially vicious. Psychologists and other mental health professionals allied with neo-feminists to characterize the traditional family as the primary institution through which the so-called "patriarchy" exerted its domination of women and manipulation of children. This, they believed, ensured that girls would grow up willing to be dominated by men who had been trained as boys to disrespect and dominate females. Feminists equated traditional marriage with slavery (a comparison first advanced by Hillary

Rodham Clinton in a November 1973 *Harvard Educational Review* article) and promoted “open” marriages in which neither party was obligated to be faithful. Feminists and the increasingly female-dominated mental health elite joined with the media to demonize men as natural aggressors. The 1950s father who might have worked two jobs was characterized not as responsible, wanting the best for his family, but as “remote,” a guy who really cared less about either his wife or his kids, a guy who in fact used his money and physical superiority to keep them in line. Finally, mental health professionals such as psychologist Thomas Gordon, author of *Parent Effectiveness Training* (Wyden, 1970), the best-selling parenting book of the era, claimed that traditional child rearing suffocated the “natural child” and produced instead a child who was destined to become nothing more than a mindless cog in the evil capitalist machine. In one of his books, Gordon actually claimed that the traditional exercise of parental authority was a moving force behind war!² Such was the progressive, deconstructionist hysteria on which all too many Baby Boomers, including a much younger John Rosemond, became intoxicated.

The Doctor Is In

During the 1960s, the television industry began to identify psychologists and other mental health professionals as the only legitimate purveyors of sound child-rearing advice. This trend had its beginnings not, as many think, with Dr. Benjamin Spock (a pediatrician), but with the elevation of psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers to the status of a cultural icon. After winning *The \$64,000 Question* (the 1950s–1960s equivalent of *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*) in 1955, Brothers became a regular talking head on all manner of television programs. She even

had her own show for a time. The networks held her up as an expert on anything and everything concerning human behavior and relationships, including how to raise children properly, and the American public listened credulously to anything and everything she had to say.

Psychologists and other mental health professionals rushed to hitch a ride on Brothers' coattails. Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) seminars trained thousands of psychologists, family counselors, and clinical social workers in his ideas and methods. In turn, this horde of true believers shared Gordon's utopian child-rearing vision with millions of gullible American parents. One of Gordon's most devoted disciples, Dorothy Briggs, wrote the best-seller *Your Child's Self-Esteem* (Doubleday, 1970), in which she advanced the notion of the democratic family—a family in which parents and children related to one another as equals. In *YCSE*, Briggs asserted, “Democracy in government has little meaning to a child unless he feels the daily benefits of it at home.”³ She was apparently ignorant of the fact that the Founding Fathers did not grow up in democratic families, yet seemed to have an exceptional grasp of democratic principles. But logic did not drive this paradigm shift; hysteria and hyperbole did.

Along about this same time, child rearing became “parenting,” a new word referring to a new way of going about it. The new way transformed the parent-centered family into the child-centered family. The new way substituted high self-esteem (individualism) for respect for others (good citizenship). Parents who subscribe to the new way are not supposed to simply tell their children what to do; they are to reason with them and reward them when they “cooperate” (being *de facto* peers, children of enlightened parents do not simply obey).

The new way would be most satisfying to Karl Marx, who said that in order for socialism to succeed, the traditional family had to go. In that regard, there is no doubt but that family psychology took on a socialist bent in the 1960s. In the 1970s I did postgraduate course work in family therapy and ultimately came to the conclusion that the real intent was to put parent and child on equal footing, to destroy the authority of parents. The authority that would step into the vacuum was the authority of the therapist, who usually sided with the kids in family disputes. The more alarming problem, however, was that I saw one set of parents after another acquiesce to this insidious kidnapping.

The new way involved not just a change in outward appearance and practice, but also a change in basic assumptions concerning the child and parental responsibilities. The traditional point of view holds that children are fundamentally bad, in need of rehabilitation; the *nouveau* point of view holds that children are fundamentally good. Supposedly, children no longer do bad things intentionally; they just make errors in judgment. The term most often used today is “bad choices”—mistakes, in effect, as if a child’s rebellious misbehavior is no more egregious than choosing the wrong answer on a television quiz show. Because malevolent motive is absent, punishment is not warranted. Besides, punishment damages self-esteem, or so the new parenting elite warns.

So instead of punishing children when they misbehave, new parents administer what I call “therapeutic discipline” or “yada-yada discipline.” That is, they talk to their children, taking care not to hurt their feelings. If repeated sessions of therapeutic yada-yada do not cause a child to start making “good choices,” then he is assumed to be in the grip of an “issue,” a psychological

conundrum from which he cannot extricate himself. His maladaptive behavior is a desperate way of drawing attention to his psychological plight and calling for help. And so, whereas the old way enforced responsibility on the child for his behavior, the new way neatly absolves him of that responsibility. The misbehaving child, once a perpetrator, has become a victim, in need of therapy or drugs or both.

It Just Isn't Working

I am a member of the last generation of American children to be raised the old way—according to traditional, biblical form—and a member of the first generation of American parents to raise their children the new way, according to psychobabble. Along with others of my generation, I possess a firsthand appreciation for both the old and the new. I know that whereas child rearing wasn't perfect prior to the 1960s, it worked for the ultimate good of the child, the marriage, the family, the school, the community, and the culture. I also know that the new way—what I call “Postmodern Psychological Parenting”—has never worked, is not working, and never will work, no matter how diligently anyone works at it. Why?

For one thing, it makes no sense. It's comprised of babble; clever, seductive babble, but babble nonetheless. But more important, because it is not in harmony with God's Master Blueprint, which he has bequeathed us in the form of his Word, the Bible. That's why it makes no sense. It is founded not on truth, but on falsehood.

The serpent manifests itself in different form in every generation, but its goal is always the same: to persuade God's children that God does not have their

best interests at heart, that he is only trying to keep them in a state of ignorant servility, and to turn away from him. Ultimately, Postmodern Psychological Parenting is a particularly clever manifestation of the serpent's ongoing effort to undermine trust in God's authority.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? . . . God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

—*Genesis 3:1, 5*

The Big Blueprint

God created the universe and all that is within it. The Bible tells me so, but my faith in the truthfulness of the Word is shored up by a number of relatively recent discoveries in physics, math, astronomy, and chemistry that have confirmed that the universe had a definite beginning. Before this beginning, known as the Big Bang, there was neither space nor time. There was nothing. A distinct beginning out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, requires the supernatural. The Big Bang means the universe had a cause, and Creation requires a Creator. It's as simple and undeniable as that.

God designed the universe such that it would support a complexity of life on one planet, and one planet only—our very own earth.⁴ The fact that all of

Creation seems specifically designed with the single purpose of supporting a complexity of life on Earth means that God's act of creation was not a "throw of the dice." He was not acting out of curiosity, throwing the building blocks of the universe out there just to see how they would combine and what kind of universe would result. Rather, it is obvious that he created with intent, that he had a very specific plan, an ultimate purpose.

God's ultimate purpose was to provide a home for his most special creation—humankind—with whom he desired, and continues to desire, a special relationship. He endowed us and only us with the ability to know him because he wants to be known.

God has given us a Big Blueprint for living creative, productive, fulfilling lives and experiencing fulfilling relationships with one another and with him. This blueprint is clearly set forth in his revelation, known as the Old and New Testaments of the Bible—the Word.

The Big Blueprint of the Bible incorporates a number of smaller blueprints for every aspect of living, including marriage (a permanent, faithful relationship between a man and a woman), conducting business (all parties are to profit equally, albeit differently), forming and living in healthy societies (laws must be obeyed; legitimate authority and the rights of one's "neighbors" must be respected), and the rearing of children (proper discipline is as critical to proper child rearing as is love; the education of children is the responsibility of parents).

Free Will

Because God created us in his image, we possess free will. This freedom includes the freedom to choose whether or not we obey God, whether or not we

live our lives in accord with his blueprints for living. Choices result in consequences. The ultimate (but not necessarily immediate) consequence of obeying God is good. The ultimate (but not necessarily immediate) consequence of disobeying God is the opposite of good. Said another way, we obey God to our credit and disobey him at our peril. Some people are uncomfortable with the notion of a righteous God who punishes wrongdoers by allowing them to experience emotional and/or physical pain; therefore, they deny the existence of God or create an alternative god in their *own* image. Their denial does not alter the fact that a loving parent does not allow a child to disobey without consequence. (As we will see, the notion of a one-dimensional god that does not punish is consistent with one of the tenets of postmodern psychology: to wit, that punishment is psychologically damaging to a child, and that loving parents, therefore, do not punish misbehavior.)

The risks of attempting to raise a child without regard for God's blueprint for child rearing, as clearly set forth in his Big Blueprint, include a child who is ill-behaved, disrespectful, destructive and self-destructive, irresponsible, inattentive, careless, aggressive, self-centered, deceitful, and so on. The risks to the child's parents include chronic frustration, stress, anxiety, anger, resentment, conflict, and guilt.

The sad, tragic fact is that most American parents, even (dare I say it?) most parents who would identify themselves as faithful believers in God and his only Son Jesus Christ, have deviated from God's child-rearing blueprint in the rearing of their children. This alone is sufficient to explain why child rearing has become the single most stressful, frustrating, anxiety- and guilt-ridden thing

American adults—and especially *female* adults—will ever do. This alone is sufficient to explain why a mother in Lafayette told me that she and her husband had experienced more problems with two children in four years than had her parents during the raising of ten children.

Just the Facts

This is a fact: *If you depart from God's plan in any area of your life, you will experience more (and more serious) problems than you would have encountered otherwise.* Oftentimes, those problems will seem never-ending, as if there is no light at the end of the tunnel. America has departed from God's blueprint for child rearing. That explains it all.

This is also a fact: *If you adhere to God's plan in your life, you will still experience sadness, pain, frustration, and heartache (since the Fall, there is no escaping this tribulation), but you will endure and you will eventually come out on top.* That's God's promise to us. Any parent who so chooses can realign his or her child rearing with God's plan and begin to experience success.

That's the purpose of this book. My intent is to help parents understand and properly align themselves with God's blueprint for child rearing. I can promise you this: Unlike the attempt to conform one's parenting to the many intricate and confusing dos and don'ts of Postmodern Psychological Parenting, this alignment will not strain the brain or cause doubt, anxiety, and guilt. I can make this promise with authority because of two simple truths:

1. God makes nothing complicated.
2. Conforming to God's plan in any area of life will bring relief from troubles, cares, and woes.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.

—*Matthew 11:28*

So, with that in mind, what say we take a walk with Grandma and her Bible?

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. In what specific ways does “honoring your mother and father” stabilize and sustain culture? How has the general dishonoring of the traditional family contributed to the unraveling and weakening of American culture? What are some signs that the ability to “live long in the land” is presently tenuous? How has the weakening of the traditional family contributed to a general weakening of our collective ability to respond adequately to forces that threaten America and, by extension, all of Western civilization?
2. Have you subscribed, however unwittingly, to the tenets of Postmodern Psychological Parenting? If so, what has influenced you to move in that direction?

3. Do you parent from the head or from the heart and the “gut”? In other words, do you tend to think a lot, to intellectualize, about child rearing issues or do you rely on what is called “common sense”? How does thinking a lot prevent a parent from getting in touch with common sense?

4. Like those parents in Lafayette, Louisiana, do you think you are having more problems raising your children than your parents had in raising you and your siblings? If so, what was different about your parents’ approach when compared with yours?

Postmodern Psychological Parenting

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

—Colossians 2:8

By the mid-1970s, Grandma's common sense had been all but drowned out by the shouts of people with capital letters after their names, who claimed that not only did Grandma not really know what she was talking about (she hadn't gone to college, after all), but she also had been dispensing advice that was bad for the psychological health of children. America's parents were now in thrall to Postmodern Psychological Parenting, an anomalous hybrid of three historically antagonistic schools of psychological thought: Freudian, humanist, and behavioral.

- From Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, comes the principle of *psychological determinism*—the notion that human behavior is shaped by early childhood experiences; for example, that negative toilet training experiences can cause later personality problems.
- The humanist contribution consists of two propositions: (1) children are fundamentally good, and (2) high self-esteem is a desirable attribute.
- Finally, the behavioral school has contributed the idea that behavior

modification works as well on human beings as it does on rats and dogs.

As we will see, all three of these philosophies are bogus. They are not only antithetical to a biblical view of human nature but also contradicted by both common sense and social science research. Unfortunately, they have become so embedded in collective thought that most people take them for granted, which is why they are causing so much trouble.

Freud Bites the Dust

Most people would be surprised to learn that not one of Freud's ideas has survived the test of scientific scrutiny. The Oedipal complex is a fiction. Penis envy is a fiction. Oral, anal, and genital fixations are fictions. Repressed memories are a fiction. It turns out Freud made it all up. He was convinced, however, that his insights into human nature were the product of genius; therefore, he felt obliged to share them with the world. Psychological historian Hans Eysenck accurately called Freud a "genius not of science but of propaganda" whose place is not, as Freud himself humbly claimed, with Copernicus and Darwin (who had enough humility to admit that history might well prove him wrong), but with Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, and other tellers of fairy tales. A more recent article in *Newsweek* magazine called him "modern history's most debunked doctor."¹

The Doctor Has No Clothes

Most significant to our purpose is the fact that Freud's claim of a cause-effect connection between early childhood experiences and maladaptive adult behavior patterns or personality kinks has never been verified. To take a popular

example, the notion that premature or highly punitive toilet training can cause a so-called “anal fixation” that will eventually develop into obsessive-compulsiveness has not been confirmed. In fact, it’s impossible to confirm. Who could accurately report on their toilet training experience? This is myth, pure and simple, as are all the supposed cause-effect connections between early parenting and adult personality.

Most people, however, believe in psychological determinism because it’s the basis of much psychological therapy. If you seek professional help concerning a personal problem, the likelihood is that the therapist will engage in what I call *psychological archeology*—he will begin asking you about your childhood, and your parents in particular, in an attempt to establish a connection between then and now. And he will eventually tell you, for example, that you have difficulty making commitments because your parents put you in the middle of their messy divorce. The truth, however, is that a therapist who is seeking such a connection will most assuredly find one. He’s convinced that such a connection exists before he begins his inquiry. He seeks, and he finds.

In your eyes (*you* being a typical client), his discovery testifies to his amazing powers of insight, not to mention absolves you of responsibility for your relationship difficulties. And so you will continue paying him for his services. The fact is, however, you might have difficulty making commitments if your parents had not gone through a divorce and even if their marriage had been idyllic. If that was the case, however, the therapist would have simply “discovered” another connection, perhaps that you have difficulty making commitments because you don’t think you can live up to your parents’ example. My point is that these

supposed cause-effect relationships are cut from whole cloth. They are untestable inventions and arbitrary ones at that. Five therapists may well find five different “causes” for your problems, none of which can be verified.

Yes, one’s childhood experiences have influence on the adult the child becomes, but the influence is far from predictable. The child is *not* father to the man. Negative childhood experiences do not necessarily predestine adult problems any more than a wonderful childhood predicts a blissful adulthood. After all, a good number of people who grow up within adverse family circumstances manage, without the help of therapists, to make lemonade out of lemons. Likewise, a good number of people who grow up in highly advantageous family circumstances, raised by parents who would be considered exemplary by any reasonable standard, take a wrong turn somewhere and wind up trashing their lives. This wasn’t their parents’ doing; it was their own doing.

Ironically, Freud’s most significant contribution to present-day parenting is guilt, infections of which tend to single out mothers. Because Freudian mythology has managed to stay alive despite a lack of proof, the all-too-typical modern mom believes that she is *cause* and her child’s behavior is the *effect*. This belief has benefit only as long as one’s child is behaving properly and doing well in school, but the downside of pride is a heavy load of guilt when behavior or grades suddenly go south.

Grandma Got It

Grandma knew that the most powerful shaping force in a person’s life was the force of the person’s own free will. She understood that the choices people, including children, made were *influenced* by early childhood experiences, socio-

economic factors, cultural expectations, peer pressure, and so on. But Grandma also understood that when all was said and done, people were fully responsible for the choices they made. Thus, when one of Grandma's kids did something wrong and tried to mount a defense, she turned her withering look on him and said, "There are no excuses—no ifs, ands, or buts." The Freudian point of view allows, even encourages, excuses, ifs, ands, and buts. Grandma would hear none of them. She held her children fully responsible for what they did, and she held them fully responsible from the time they were toddlers.

Grandma also knew that she could not be a good enough parent to guarantee that her children would never do anything despicable, disgusting, and depraved—that the power of their choosing was *more* powerful than the power of her parenting. She knew that to be the case because the Bible told her so.

Western civilization's first parenting story is contained in the third chapter of the book of Genesis. Its theme, in a nutshell: The Only Perfect Parent There Is Or Ever Will Be creates two children who disobey his first instruction. What, pray tell, did God do wrong that caused his first kids such pronounced *obedience issues*? Freud might have said Eve resented that Adam was created first, that he was obviously the favored child. Tempting Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge was an expression of this resentment, a passive-aggressive means of lowering Adam's image in God's eyes. Grandma would have scoffed at such. She knew there was no psychology behind the Fall. It happened because human beings possess what animals do not: freedom of choice, including the freedom to choose wrongly. If a perfect God could not raise children who were perfectly obedient, what chance do you have?

The Adam and Eve Principle: *No matter how good a parent you are, your child is still capable on any given day of doing something despicable, disgusting, and/or depraved.*

It will be highly therapeutic if you read the previous sentence out loud, in the first person and present tense: (Out loud!) “No matter how good a parent I am, [insert your child’s name] is still capable on any given day of doing something despicable, disgusting, and/or depraved.”

Now, don’t you feel a whole lot better?

That brings us to the first of humanist psychology’s two contributions to Postmodern Psychological Parenting: the idea that children are fundamentally good; that in any given situation a child is inclined to do the right thing.

The Humanists Bite the Dust, Part One

In the 1960s, New Age gurus and mental health professionals developed various therapies and workshops that would supposedly help people get back in touch with their wonderfully innocent, playful, wise, and peace-loving inner children—the real, “natural” selves that had been forced into cowering exile by parents and teachers intent upon producing conformists who would willingly serve capitalist society (aka, “the Machine”), which was thought to be the genesis of all evil. Unfortunately, the New Age myth—*every child is an incarnate being of holy light, sent from heaven to grace us with his or her immaculate presence*—still thrives. Moreover, it has become the dominant cultural view.

It follows from this fairy tale that children do wrong things because their original nature has been corrupted. And make no mistake, the mythmakers want you to believe that the number one corrupting influence is bad parenting. So

where parental guilt is concerned, if Freud doesn't get you, humanism will.

Grandma's Little Criminal

Grandma knew that every child came into the world bearing a nature that was already corrupt, depraved; that each and every child was a natural born criminal; and that to steer the little criminal in a pro-social direction required a combination of powerful love and powerful discipline. She knew this because the Bible had told her so, and she had seen it with her own eyes.

The Bible is clear on the subject: Human nature is fundamentally sinful. Psalm 51:5 says we are sinful "at birth," from the get-go. Proverbs 22:15 tells us that "folly is bound up in the heart of a child." The Hebrew word that is here translated "folly" is used in other contexts to mean moral depravity. This means that in any given situation, a child is inclined to do the wrong thing, the self-serving thing, to consider his own interests before anyone else's.

The real, honest-to-badness human being—a raging sociopath (although often charming, like many sociopaths)—emerges from behind the deceptive mask of infancy sometime during the second year of life. The story is universal, and it always features a child whose behavior suddenly begins to reflect the three beliefs that form the core of the criminal/sociopath mind-set:

1. What I want, I deserve to have (entitlement).
2. Because I am entitled to what I want, the ends justify the means (pragmatism).
3. The rules do not apply to me; therefore, no one has a right to deny me or stand in my way (narcissism).

The metamorphosis is usually sudden, startling. One unremarkable night,

parents put to bed an eighteen-month-old, who has been to that point cuddly, affectionate, and easy-going. The next morning when they walk into his bedroom, they are met by the spawn of Satan, who announces that their parenting honeymoon is over.

The demon-child demands his way and screams like one possessed when his parents don't dance to his tune, don't dance fast enough, or dance the wrong dance. He also expects them to read his Most Royal Mind and goes ballistic if they are lax in this duty. If they try to comfort him during these frequent fits, he slaps, scratches, and bites them. He blatantly defies their instructions while looking at them as if to say, "I dare you to do something about it." He seems impervious to punishment, demands to be served like a potentate, and is displeased by his parents' most conscientious attempts to serve him properly.

"Where has our sweet boy gone?" they wail.

They do not realize that the sweet boy they lived with for eighteen months was not the *real* boy. The real boy, the real human being, woke up at eighteen months, stepped out from behind the beguiling mask of infancy, and asserted "I Am!"² He realized, in a burst of insight, that he is "me," and the discovery is intoxicating. This is the same self, the same human nature that first awakened and asserted itself in the Garden, and the result has always been the same: disorder in the house. This disorder is exacerbated by the fact that during infancy and early toddlerhood, the child is the center of attention of parents who are waiting on him hand and foot. Under the circumstances, he has every right to believe that his parents exist for the sole purpose of serving him, to do his bidding. After all, he does not know that they preceded him, that there was life

before the Great and Powerful Me came into existence. Jean Piaget, the foremost developmental psychologist of all time, said that during the first two years of life a child is *egocentric*—he believes that the world revolves around him. Sinfulness and egocentricity are a highly explosive combination, as parents of toddlers will attest.

The Same Thing Said Three Different Ways

Man is the measure of all things.

—Protagoras, circa 440 BC

No higher answer exists. We must construct it ourselves.

—biologist and author Stephen Jay Gould, late twentieth century

You're not the boss of me!

—the toddler, since the beginning

Raging Against the (Parental) Machine

The toddler is a factory of antisocial behavior. One does not have to teach a toddler to hit, steal, lie, disobey, covet and destroy other people's property, or act selfishly. Those behaviors come naturally to a toddler. This is exactly where psychological explanations of human behavior break down, because psychology

cannot explain such things as the following:

One day, the mother of a twenty-month-old child who has never witnessed an act of violence, even cartoon violence, denies him a cookie before supper. The child falls to the floor and begins having a high-self-esteem seizure. His screams can be translated thusly: *“HOW DARE YOU DENY ME, LORD OF THE UNIVERSE, A COOKIE! GIVE ME THE COOKIE OR SUFFER THE FULL FORCE OF MY WRATH, WRETCHED UNDERLING!”* Out of the goodness of her heart his mother picks him up with the intent of comforting him, and with perfect aim and perfect timing he slaps her across the face. Believe me, the slap is not an accident, no random thrash that just happened to connect with Mom’s cheek. As a camera would have proven, the expression on the child’s face at the moment of impact was pure, 100-percent demonic.

What is the psychological explanation for this outburst of violence directed at the very person who has shown this child the most kindness, who has sacrificed her own needs in order to meet his? What unresolved issue is the child attempting to express (Freudianism/humanism)? Who has modeled such vicious behavior for him (behaviorism)? And keep in mind, please, that violence is the stock-in-trade of the toddler. He slaps his mother, pulls the hair of other children (and if the smile on his face is an indication, he enjoys hearing them cry), pushes his younger brother to the floor just to see him fall and hear him wail, and appears to derive great pleasure from trying to pry people’s eyeballs out of their sockets. Freudians, humanists, and behaviorists are struck dumb by toddler behavior of this sort.

God in his infinite mercy and grace has distinguished us from animals in

many ways, but one is most significant to our discussion: He has not allowed human offspring to grow to full size in one or two years. Imagine the consequence to a mother who denies her five-foot, ten-inch tall, 165-pound two-year-old male child a cookie before dinner. Not a pretty picture. God is good.

Likewise, psychology cannot explain why, as soon as a child begins to master the power of language, he begins to lie. (Most interesting, the first lie told by every child is the first lie recorded as having been told: *I am not responsible for what has happened here; I'm not even responsible for what I did.* First Adam said this, then Eve.)

Psychology has no means of explaining why a child whose parents have been as loving and caring as parents can be suddenly begins to refuse to obey even the most innocuous of their instructions and seems to take perverse delight in doing exactly the opposite of what they ask of him. Psychology cannot explain the arbitrarily rebellious behavior of the toddler because psychology refuses to accept that humans are by nature rebels without a cause. That is the biblical perspective, and since Freud, psychology has taken the greatest of pains to distance itself as much as possible from anything “religious.” After all, Freud wrote that belief in God was a delusion and religion was the refuge of the neurotic. In a sense, psychology is postmodernity’s toddler, determined to deny that there is a Truth, an Authority, greater than itself.

The single biggest challenge of parenthood is that of socializing the toddler. That sometimes Herculean task demands discipline that causes the child to (a) realize he will not be able to get away with criminal behavior, even as a “baby,” and (b) submit to the civilizing force of his parents’ loving yet awesome

authority. (But make no mistake, whereas the toddler may submit, he never goes away, and every so often, even well into adulthood, he demands to be heard, to be the center of attention, to be catered to, to be obeyed. You've seen other adults' toddlers suddenly burst forth, and if you are reasonably self-aware, you can even identify regrettable occasions when you let your own toddler take over and begin terrorizing the world. The New Age gurus and humanist psychologists were right about one thing: the inner child is very real; he lives within each of us. He's the toddler that needs to sit in permanent time-out, preferably facing into the corner.)

Grandma, who understood that her toddler was a criminal-in-the-making, stepped up to the plate and cured his criminality to the best of her ability (and make no mistake about it, this cure, however effective, is never complete). But then Grandma believed Psalm 51:5 was the truth. Today's parents are not curing toddlerhood, but then today's parents read Psalm 51:5 and are loath to accept that the reference is to their children.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

—*Psalm 51:5*

To Teach the Unteachable

But the delusion does not end there. When I ask an audience, “Does one have to teach a toddler to hit, lie, or disobey?” the answer that comes back is

always “No!” All right so far.

Then I ask, “Is it possible to *teach* a child to be nonviolent, to tell the truth, and to obey legitimate authority?”

“Yes!” the audience answers.

Wrong! In order to teach, one must have a willing student, one who realizes his deficiencies and readily pays attention to the teacher. The fundamentally sinful toddler does not qualify, not by a long shot. The truth is that before one can teach a child the whys and wherefores of right behavior, one must *force* wrong behavior to stop. One must *force* a child to stop hitting, *force* a child to stop lying, *force* a child to stop stealing and destroying, *force* a child to share.

This force requires two things: parents who communicate to the child that they *will not tolerate* hitting, lying, stealing, and destroying; and consequences that are potent enough to form permanent memories.

I am reminded of one of our grandchildren, whose parents told my wife, Willie, and me, when he was two, that he hit them when things didn’t go his way.

“How are you dealing with this?” we asked, to which they replied that they were explaining to him that hitting was wrong and trying to help him develop better ways of expressing frustration. In other words, they were trying to *teach* a toddler to stop hitting, not realizing that *force* was the necessary prerequisite.

Several weeks later, said grandchild was spending the weekend with us while his well-meaning parents were out of town. While trying to dress him, I somehow incurred his displeasure. He promptly hauled off, emitted a savage yell, and slapped me across the face. I immediately reached around him and slapped him, with intent to cause significant pain, on his bare bottom—once. I didn’t do

this out of anger or some retaliatory reflex. I did it because I knew, as his young parents did not, that he had to be *forced* to stop hitting. His big blue eyes got even bigger, he began to quake, his mouth opened wide, and he started howling and jumping up and down, holding his bottom. I picked him up, held him close, and told him I loved him but was not going to let him hit me or anyone else. When he calmed down, I put him on a chair, knelt in front of him, and *taught*.

“What did you do?”

“I hih-hih-hit you,” he answered, his sobbing not quite fully over.

“What did I do?”

“You spanked me!” he answered, with a tone that bordered on defiance.

“Yes, I spanked you,” I said, “and the next time you hit me, I’ll spank you again. And if you hit Grandma, I’ll spank you. If you hit anyone in my house, I’ll spank you. Do you understand?”

“Ye-heh-hes.”

Then we talked about what I had done that he didn’t like. (I finally figured out that I was telling him to step into his underwear, whereas his parents still placed him on his back and put it on for him.) I told him what to say when he doesn’t like something. I taught for about two minutes—the attention span of a just-turned-two-year-old—and then got back to the business of dressing him.

Three weeks later, the parents proudly reported that said grandchild had suddenly stopped hitting!

Once again, all I did was (1) make it perfectly clear that I was not going to tolerate hitting, and (2) bring to bear a consequence potent enough to form a permanent memory. (By the way, the next time this grandchild saw me, he ran up

to me and jumped into my outstretched arms. Authority, legitimately exercised, slowly liberates the human spirit, which is creative and loving, from the prison of human nature, which is anything but.)

The Little Criminal Awakens

Parents who do not understand that the real human being is not the manifestation of holiness and innocence are in for a rude awakening when the Little Criminal awakens from the slumber of infancy and begins demanding that they please and obey him. Their lack of preparation enables the child to knock them off balance, a position from which some parents never recover. For that reason, I advise parents of infants to prepare themselves for the Little Criminal's burst upon the scene, and that when he does, to make it clear to him from day one that they do *not* exist to please him, that they are *not* going to obey him, that, in fact, it's the other way around.

A few years ago, an obviously distressed mom called my office and persuaded Willie to set up a phone consultation. Her twenty-month-old had awakened screaming from his midday nap four days prior and had not stopped since. She and her husband had tried everything to get him to stop, but nothing had worked. Even giving him new toys caused him to scream even louder. If anyone tried to hold him, he began thrashing around like he was in pain. He had even caused himself to throw up several times.

On the third day, now desperate and worried sick, the parents had taken him to the pediatrician who, unable to determine a cause for the child's persistent howling, had referred him to a pediatric neurologist. The neurologist was also stumped and had scheduled him for an MRI. When I returned the mother's call, I

could hear the child screaming in the background. Both sets of grandparents, an aunt and an uncle, and several friends had gathered at the home to console the now distraught parents.

“Do you have any ideas, anything that could possibly help us?” the mom asked. I could hear her anguish. At several points during the ensuing conversation, she broke down in tears.

I had a sense of what was going on. The real human being had awakened, and for whatever reason, nonstop screaming was the way he had decided to announce his arrival. I related to the mother what I thought. It was certainly not the explanation she expected, but it definitely fit the facts.

“What should we do?” she asked.

I told her to take him to a comfortable sofa and place him in the angle between the back and a seat cushion, facing out. Then she was to sit down and move back against him, applying just enough pressure to keep him there, pinned in place. He should be able to squirm, I said, but not escape. While he was so pinned, Mom was to talk softly to him, telling him that it was all right to scream, but as long as he screamed, she was going to keep him there. Then she was to say positive things like “life is good, we live in a nice house, we eat good food, we can pay all of our bills, and America is still the greatest country on the planet.” She didn’t know it, but the real purpose of having her say such things was to help *her* calm down.

“You may have to hold him there for a couple of hours,” I warned.

She thought that was no big deal, given that she had survived his screams for three days already. I told her to let him up when he stopped, but to stand

ready to pin him to the sofa the minute he started wailing again. She assured me she would follow my instructions and call me with a progress report the next day.

As promised, she called the next evening. I immediately knew from her calm, confident tone that all was well.

“It was amazing, John,” she said. “He screamed for about an hour and stopped, so I let him up. He started up again about an hour later, but I immediately went back to the sofa with him and he stopped right away. He hasn’t screamed in nearly twenty-four hours. He’s been playing contentedly and happily. I have my little boy back again!”

Several days later, another good progress report, and that was that. The moral of the story: How do you prevent a little sociopath from becoming a big, full-blown sociopath? Sit on him.

Had this mother not been willing to accept that her child’s sinful nature had awakened, she and her husband might have fallen for the currently popular notion that any persistent behavior pattern that deviates ever so slightly from the norm is a sign of either psychological or physiological problems. Both of these explanations—which are really two sides of the same postmodern coin—deny the sinfulness of human nature, deny that even a toddler exercises free will, and deny that a child is (and should therefore be held) fully responsible for his behavior. These parents might have wasted years, not to mention thousands and thousands of dollars, pursuing a chimera. They would have begun, when their child was not yet two, ceding authority in his life over to medical and psychological professionals who would have had a field day with his “case.”

Said professionals would have ordered one test after another and come up

with one hypothesis after another, each requiring yet more tests. Meanwhile, the parents' sense of powerlessness would have grown and deepened. They would have suspended serious attempts to discipline until the professionals found the reason for their child's behavior problems. The behavior problems would have worsened, therefore, and the psychologists and medical doctors would have collaborated on the stock diagnoses—attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, bipolar disorder of childhood.

At that point, the pharmaceutical industry would have gotten in on the act. One prescription after another would have been tried. Some would have worked longer than others, some not at all, and to some the child would have had negative reactions, all of which “proving” that the child's case was unique.

And down the slippery slope of never-ending “treatment” this family would have gone. This is speculation, of course, but this is also a description of a reality being experienced by millions of parents and children today, and largely because we have forgotten about sin. (More about that later.)

The Humanists Bite the Dust, Part Two

Humanistic psychology's second contribution to Postmodern Psychological Parenting is the idea that high self-esteem is desirable—essential, in fact, to personal happiness—and parents should do everything in their power to help their children acquire it.

In the late 1960s, psychological propagandists began portraying high self-esteem as the Holy Grail of Right and Proper Parenting. Nearly fifty years later, the propaganda continues unabated. Raise a child properly, parents are told, and your child will acquire high self-esteem. Parent improperly, and your child will

implode psychologically. He'll grow up thinking he's a worthless piece of protoplasmic junk.

Supposedly, any negative response to a child's behavior or task performance will lower this precious psychic commodity. Praise boosts self-esteem, while punishment depresses it. Success (e.g., high grades, receiving a sports trophy) causes self-esteem to go up, while failure and disappointment (e.g., low grades, not receiving at least a "certificate of participation") cause it to go down. High self-esteem was supposedly the natural condition of the child, before the imposition of parental authority smothered it. All of this hoo-hah held great appeal to a generation of parents who, like my wife and me, had been raised on regular doses of "Because I said so." And so off we Baby Boomers went, down the yellow brick road to the Land of Parenting Oz.

Before going any further, let's accurately define the term self-esteem. *Self* refers to one's person. To *esteem* means to admire, worship, venerate, revere, and adore. To have high self-esteem, therefore, means to admire one's own person—to think highly of one's self.

Grandma didn't believe people should think highly of themselves. In fact, she did not have a lot of regard for people who did. She thought, and rightly so, that high self-regard was a problem, not a solution to a problem. Grandma valued humility and modesty and did her best to pass those virtues along to her children. "Don't brag," she told her children, and "It's not polite to attract a lot of attention to yourself." When one of her children "forgot himself" and began getting carried away on the intoxicating breezes of high self-esteem, she sternly told him that he was acting too big for his britches and that he'd better get himself back down to

his normal pants' size, and quick. (Being on one's "high horse" meant the same thing.) In Grandma's view, what we today call high self-esteem was something to be frowned upon, discouraged.

That's a biblical point of view. Scripture does not validate high self-esteem. In the Old Testament, every single person with high self-esteem takes a huge fall, self-destructs, or is the eventual recipient of God's wrath. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke on the subject of self-esteem—numerous times, in fact.

- "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).
- "The last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16).
- "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). (It is significant to note that here Jesus was quoting almost word-for-word from Isaiah 2:12.)

During the Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12), Jesus blessed the "poor in spirit," "the meek," and "those who mourn." There is simply no way to square Jesus's teachings with the notion that high self-esteem is a good and wonderful thing that parents should pursue on behalf of their children.

Sometimes, a person will point out to me that Jesus also said to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). That's right, but it is a mistake to think Jesus was advocating self-love. That would make no sense in the light of his other comments (above) on the subject. If the statement is turned into a question—"Do you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself?"—the honest person would

be forced to answer in the negative. In other words, Jesus was challenging us to accept that self-love is the stumbling block to sufficient love of one's fellow man. Rather than endorsing self-love, Jesus was saying that in order to love our neighbors as much as we should, we need to love ourselves less . . . much less. This is the same sort of challenge he issued when he said that a man who has even looked with lust upon another woman is as guilty of adultery as someone who has actually broken his marriage vows and had sex with a woman other than his wife. Let's face it: Jesus was inclined toward tall orders.

Self-Esteem Goes Maximum Security

For many years, I have contended that good social science research always confirms both Scripture and common sense, and indeed, such is the case here.

Social scientist Roy Baumeister has spent more than a decade studying people who possess high self-esteem. His results would come as no surprise to Grandma. Baumeister has discovered, for example, that people with high self-esteem tend to have low self-control, especially when they aren't getting their way. They don't handle defeat or disappointment very well. Why? Because a person with high self-esteem thinks he's entitled to always be the winner, *Numero Uno*.

Furthermore, they tend to lash out, verbally and often physically, at the people they blame for their defeats and disappointments. Baumeister finds that wife abusers have generally high self-esteem, as do child abusers, people known for frequent episodes of road rage, and inner city gang members.

Most stupefying, Baumeister discovered that hard-core criminals—people locked up in maximum-security prisons—score higher on self-esteem

assessments than any other group. That should send chills up and down your spine.

Wrong!

In one sense, high self-esteem is an insurance policy; it is our best guarantee that a child will make the most fruitful use of his capacities.

—*Dorothy Corkille Briggs, Your Child's Self-Esteem*

When I share this with an audience, I often point out that Adolf Hitler had high self-esteem and, correspondingly, no regard for anyone else. So did (or does) Josef Stalin, Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Ted Bundy, and every other degenerate sociopath you can think of. Common sense says that the higher one's self-esteem, the lower will be one's regard for the rights of others, including, in extreme instances, their very right to life.

On the other side of the self-esteem spectrum are people such as Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa—selfless individuals who think first and foremost about others. But there is no better example of selflessness than Jesus Christ, who had such love for us, so little regard for his own self-interests (actually, Jesus had no self-interests at all), that he willingly paid the price of our sins so that we might become citizens of heaven. Jesus said in order to become his disciple, a person must first “deny himself.” How much more explicit could he have been concerning the ultimate worthlessness of high self-esteem? After all, self-esteem and self-denial are polar opposites. To love God with all of one's heart and mind,

one must put aside all forms of idolatry, including esteem of the self.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

—*Matthew 16:24*

Here is a summary, according to the best social science research, of the characteristics that typify people who possess an abundance of self-esteem:

- an overriding sense of entitlement (“What I want, I deserve to have”);
- low self-control, especially when frustrated;
- apt to explode toward others when they don’t get their way;
- a criminal/sociopath mind-set, distinguished by the belief that the ends justify the means.

Self-Esteem Goes to School

The reader should recognize those as characteristic of the toddler—the Little Criminal. Again, Grandma knew that high self-esteem was a problem, not a solution to a problem; that the problem first expressed itself in the behavior of a toddler; and that preventing a little sociopath from growing into a big one required a combination of powerful love and equally powerful discipline, which Grandma was not a bit reluctant to administer.

The correspondence between high self-esteem and low self-control should resonate with any veteran elementary school teacher. Over the past forty years, as

promoting self-esteem has taken precedence over promoting academic excellence, the self-control of America's kids has taken a nosedive. Testament to this is the fact that whereas fifty years ago a single teacher had no problem controlling a first-grade class of forty or more children, today's first-grade teachers have their hands full with twenty-five, and today's teachers have aides! Yesterday's teachers dealt with the occasional behavior problem; today's teachers deal with an epidemic of kids with so-called "behavior disorders," all of which are variations on the theme of low self-control.

American education has led the way in the quest to find and fill the new "holy" grail. Despite a plethora of research showing that high self-esteem is undesirable, American education clings tenaciously to the myth that the higher a child's self-esteem, the better will be his school performance. That myth is belied by the steady drop in academic achievement levels over the past forty years. It is further smashed by research findings to the effect that individuals with high self-esteem perform consistently lower than predicted by their ability levels, not to mention lower than they *think* they're performing. That's because people with high self-esteem possess an entitlement mentality; they believe that *anything* they do is worthy of merit. As a consequence, they rarely do their best at anything.

Self-Esteem Goes to Work

This entitlement mentality is beginning to show itself in the workplace. A corporate manager recently told me, echoing many other managers and employers, "We're having lots of problems with this new generation of workers." A friend of mine recently told me that one of the prime reasons he is setting up a

factory in Asia is that young people there possess what American young people are losing: a good work ethic.

“Why should I pay a twenty-five-year-old American kid ten dollars an hour for doing only what’s required of him,” my friend said, “when I can hire a twenty-five-year-old in India who believes in doing the very best job he is capable of doing and will work twice as hard for half the pay?”

(Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not defending the practice of exporting jobs. I am pointing out the degree to which the quest for high self-esteem has damaged the national work ethic and threatens to tear down everything previous generations worked hard and sacrificed to build.)

Anyone who has dealt with college students in recent years knows that
work is a declining value and practice in America.

—*Clyde Wilson, retired professor of history, University of South
Carolina*³

Whenever I give a talk on the problems associated with high self-esteem, I’ll see a good number of puzzled looks sprinkled throughout the audience. After all, over the past forty years the supposed virtue of high self-esteem has become taken for granted. So, when I say that high self-esteem is not a virtue, that it is a dangerous social commodity, parents often react with confusion sometimes bordering on distress, as if what I’m promoting will impair their children’s ability to succeed in life. These imagined impairments take three predictable forms: that

lacking self-esteem, their children will (1) not have what it takes to become leaders, (2) possess no self-confidence, and/or (3) become depressed. In fact, these imagined impairments are exactly that: imagined.

Self-Esteem Leads the Way

Concerning leadership, I point out to parents that they do not simply want their children to become leaders—they want their children to become *ethical* leaders. After all, some of the most effective leaders in history have been degenerate sociopaths—Hitler, for example. Ethical leadership is exercised in the best interests of others, not in the best interest of the leader himself. The ethical leader is focused on helping the people he or she leads bring out the best in themselves. Ethical leaders do not have high self-esteem. They have high regard for others. Unethical leaders have high self-regard and low regard for others. In their view, other people exist to help them reach *their* goals; to be manipulated, at best, or eliminated, at worst.

Besides, why do nearly all parents want their kids to be leaders? What is so awful about being a good follower? Is good leadership better than good followership? If so, then why? Is it because good leaders make more money than good followers? Is it because they enjoy more social status? I suggest that what parents really want is for their children, as adults, to find ways of contributing to the common good to the best of their ability. If the best of their ability involves leadership, that's fine. But if the best of their ability is followership, well, that's fine too. Given that the laws of probability predict that most children will be followers, not leaders, perhaps parents would do best to help their children learn to be good followers. That learning begins in the home, by the way, with chores

and obedience and good manners.

Nor is a high level of confidence in one's own ability necessarily a good thing. Researchers have found that people with high self-esteem regularly overestimate their abilities, to their ultimate detriment. Because they are so sure of their superiority, they are likely to approach tasks, especially challenging ones, without having invested adequate effort into practice and preparation. Therefore, they are likely to perform less well than people with lesser ability and lesser self-confidence who, realizing their shortcomings, do their homework. High self-confidence can also cause people to take foolish, if not downright life-threatening risks. In the final analysis, it's not the person with high self-confidence who is most likely to succeed in life; it's the person who possesses a realistic appraisal of his or her strengths and weaknesses.

Concerning depression, some research suggests that people with high self-esteem may be more likely to suffer depression than people who lack self-esteem. People with high self-esteem have little tolerance for disappointment, frustration, failure, and criticism. These everyday facts of life often send "high self-esteemers" into tailspins, invoking the "flight or fight" (depression or aggression) principle. (Whether the response to circumstances that threaten the self-evaluation of a person with high self-esteem is depression or aggression seems to be a matter of personal history, situational variables, and personality.) It's as if people with high self-esteem epitomize the axiom "the higher they fly, the farther they fall." The opposite of high self-esteem, then, is not depression. The opposite of high self-esteem is humility—characteristic of both good leaders and good followers.

Wrong Again!

High self-esteem is . . . the essential core, the basic foundation, of positive mental health.

—*Thomas Gordon, PhD*, *Teaching Children Self-Discipline at Home and at School*

The Behaviorists Bite the Dust

It is no coincidence that people who embrace a mechanistic view of the universe—people who believe, on faith, that the universe came into being accidentally and that evolution explains the unique appearance of life on Earth—also embrace a mechanistic view of human behavior.

In the 1960s, as the psychological parenting revolution was gearing up, the behavioral theories of psychologist Burrhus Frederic (B. F.) Skinner burst out of academia and into popular culture. Skinner believed that the same simple principles that govern the behavior of rats, dogs, and other animal species also govern the behavior of human beings. That is, behavior that is rewarded strengthens, and behavior that is not rewarded or punished weakens and eventually “extinguishes.” Smitten with the idea that the behavior of a child could be trained as easily as a rat’s, psychologists began proclaiming that it was just a matter of time before parents skilled in the use of behavior modification would be raising a new generation of blissfully well-behaved, high-achieving mod-children. Some forty years later, parents are experiencing more problems in the discipline

of children than Grandma even thought possible.

Inconsequential Consequences

What went wrong? Quite simply, human beings are not animals. As recorded in the book of Genesis, we are God's special creation, created for relationship with him. It is ludicrous to think that a mechanistic approach to the manipulation of behavior will work equally well on animals and humans. The idea presumes that animals and humans are different only in that *homo sapiens*, quite by accident, came out ahead in the evolutionary slog.

Unlike animals, human beings possess free will; as such, we are capable of resisting the power of consequences. Rats and other animals are not capable of such resistance; they bend involuntarily to the power of any consequence. Unlike animals, humans are rebellious by nature, something animals are not. Humans are the only species that regularly engages in acts of self-destruction. A human being will sabotage his own best interests to prove that the rules don't apply to him, that he is impervious to any and all attempts to make him change his ways. Thus the ubiquity of the parental complaint "My child keeps right on doing what he wants no matter what I do to him." Dog trainers do not make this complaint; nor do rat trainers. In my graduate-school course in experimental psychology, twenty-four students were given twenty-four rats and told to teach them to run mazes. All twenty-four students employed the same behavior modification techniques, and all twenty-four rats learned to run their mazes equally well. If twenty-four sets of parents, guided by twenty-four behavioral psychologists, use the same set of behavior modification techniques on twenty-four misbehaving children, eight of the children will get better, eight will get worse, and eight will

stay about the same. (I didn't make that up, by the way. The above numbers reflect the research findings concerning the results of psychological therapy.)

Consider: A rat comes to a choice-point in a maze, where it can go either right or left. If it goes to the right it will be rewarded with a morsel of cheese, but a left turn will result in a slight electric shock. Said dumb beast will only venture to the left two or three times before it will never, ever go left again. But given a choice between "going to the right" and being rewarded or "going to the left" and being punished, a human may well go to the left over and over and over again just to prove that no one has authority over him, rules do not apply to him, and he is immune to discipline. As the toddler so eloquently puts it, "You're not the boss of me!" Or as the teen puts it, "I don't care what you do to me!"

A man spends ten years in jail for robbing a convenience store at gunpoint. He is released, and four months later he is back in jail for robbing a convenience store at gunpoint. This is not because "the system failed him" or some such blather, but because he is a toddler at heart. He's no different from the toddler who keeps right on pulling the dog's ears even though his mother pops his behind and puts him in his crib for ten minutes following every single pull. Does he like being spanked and confined to his crib? No, not any more than the criminal likes being in jail. But in both cases the narcissistic need to prove that the rules don't apply, that the only authority in the child's/criminal's life is the child/criminal, cancels the effect of the punishment.

Unrewarding Rewards

It turns out that when it comes to humans, reward is no more reliable than punishment. Rewards sometimes have a paradoxical effect on human behavior.

Take, for example, a five-year-old who seems to enjoy tripping his younger brother. After determining that punishment doesn't work, his parents decide to reward him if he doesn't trip his brother for one hour. An hour goes by with no tripping, and the parents give the child some candy along with lots of praise and then are dismayed to discover that the tripping actually increases! It's as if the child figures out that the way to get his parents to offer him candy is to trip his younger brother. Kids are a lot smarter than rats, after all. Researchers have also found that praising and rewarding children for a job well done—say, coloring—may cause certain children to stop performing altogether!

With a dog, correct consequences will result in correct behavior, but all bets are off with a human being. If a dog does the wrong thing, and its trainer does the right thing, the dog will stop doing the wrong thing. But if a child does the wrong thing, and his parents do the right thing, the child may keep right on doing the wrong thing. A dog does not possess free will; a child does. This means that a child will change his behavior only if he *chooses* to do so. A persuasive enough consequence may promote the right choice, but because the child is a human, not an animal, there are no guarantees. Correct consequences change the behavior of a dog. Correct *choices* change the behavior of a human being.

Behavior modification seems to work often enough on children (i.e., children choose to cooperate with it just often enough) to make parents and teachers believe that if they just tweak it properly or apply it more consistently, it will work all the time. But that simply isn't the case. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, you can fool some children with behavior modification some of the time, but behavior modification will not fool most children very much of the time at all.

Behavior modification also seems to work fairly well with children who have serious developmental delays and in closed, institutional settings, like residential treatment centers for incorrigible youth. But in the field, in real life, it only “works” as often as children *choose* to comply with it.

Unfortunately, most of today’s parents have bought into the myth of behavior modification. Over the past forty years or so, behavior modification has become the reigning disciplinary paradigm. When parents use the term “discipline,” they usually mean some means of manipulating reward and punishment. The belief that what works with rats and dogs also works with human beings is why the discipline of children has become overwhelmingly frustrating and stressful.

Once upon a time not so long ago, parents understood that for the most part, the discipline of a child was accomplished by simply meaning what one said and saying exactly what one meant. If, for example, a parent told a child he could not have a candy bar, then it was necessary that the parent stick to her guns and demonstrate to the child that no amount of persuasion or distress would obtain the candy bar. Furthermore, most folks understood, and intuitively so, that discipline was fundamentally a matter of leadership, not punishment-ship or consequence-ship. As we will soon see, it still is! There is, after all, nothing new under the sun.

The Postmodern, Psychological

Point of View

Grandma's Point of View

Freudian: Early childhood experiences shape behavior and personality.	Biblical: The child's behavior is influenced, but not <i>determined</i> by outside influences; rather, the child <i>chooses</i> his path in life.
Humanistic: Children are fundamentally good.	Biblical: Children are fundamentally sinful.
Humanistic: High self-esteem is good and parents should help their children acquire it.	Biblical: Modesty and humility in all things is desirable; furthermore, those with high self-esteem "will be humbled."
Behavioral: Behavior modification works on human beings as well as it works with rats and dogs.	Biblical: Humans are not animals. Possessing of free will, humans can successfully resist the manipulations of behavior modification.

Utopia Bites the Dust

Enough time has passed to determine whether this grand social experiment is working or not. Is it? One single fact answers the question: Since

1965, when Postmodern Psychological Parenting began gaining a toehold in our culture, every single indicator of positive well-being in America's children has been in a state of precipitous decline. Today's children are nowhere near as happy as kids were just two generations ago.

"Oh, come on, John," a psychologist once retorted, "there is no happiness measure. You're just making that up!"

No, I'm not. And yes, as I pointed out to him, there is a happiness measure: the per-capita rate of child and teen depression, which has increased at least fivefold since 1965. In just one fifteen-year period, from 1980 to 1995, the suicide rate for boys ages ten to fourteen almost doubled!⁴ If that's not unhappiness, I don't know what is.

I grew up in the 1950s. Ironically, my peers and I were expected to shoulder more responsibilities than are kids today, and our parents and teachers expected a lot more of us than is the case today; yet, we were much happier than are today's kids. The high school I attended in suburban Chicago was huge: some 4000 students in 1965. In four years, in a mega-high school, I knew of no one who committed suicide. No one took razor blades and carved satanic symbols or weird messages on their arms or engaged in any other form of nihilistic self-abuse. There was, of course, the occasional kid who wasn't the happiest of campers, but no one was so incapacitated by unhappiness that he or she had to drop out of school or enter residential treatment (it was called by less politically correct terms back then). Don't get me wrong. I'm sure there were kids with problems. They were few and far between, however. In today's typical high school, by contrast, many of the girls are taking antidepressants, a good number

of kids are into self-mutilation, lots have regular appointments with therapists, thousands of dollars are being spent annually on suicide prevention, and the dropout rate is climbing, even among the middle- and upper-middle classes.

It is not arguable: America's kids were a whole lot happier before parents began listening to psychologists (and remember, I am one!) and other mental health professionals. Am I saying that my profession is the problem? Yes, I most certainly am. Mental health professionals were the prime architects of Postmodern Psychological Parenting; therefore, they are primarily responsible for the damage it has caused.

It is not arguable: Today's parents are having more problems with their children than their parents and grandparents thought possible, experiencing more stress than did all of their ancestors combined, and yet they have more professional advice at their disposal than ever before. That's not irony; it's cause-and-effect. The advice is the problem.

Grandma's advice wasn't perfect. Grandma was human, and nothing humans do or dispense is perfect. But Grandma's advice worked. It worked for the child, the marriage, the family, the school, the community, and the culture. It worked then, and as attested to by a growing number of parents who have unplugged from PPP and plugged themselves back into Grandma's wisdom, it still works.

Postmodern Psychological Parenting is a house built on sand. It's been crumbling from the day its front door was first opened to the public. We abandoned the house built on rock some forty years ago. The good news is it's still standing, and it's as livable as ever. Grandma still lives there, in fact. Stay

with me if you'd like a tour.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. Identify three aspects of your child's performance or behavior, whether positive (good grades) or negative (disruptive behavior), about which you have tended to feel either prideful or guilty. Consider the possibility that your child would be doing the same things if he'd been raised by someone else. How would your parenting behavior be different if that was in fact the case?
2. Have you tended, at times, to make excuses for your child's misbehavior? If so, give an example. How would your parenting behavior differ if you did not allow "ifs, ands, or buts"?
3. Are you willing to accept that your child's free will is more powerful than your parenting? Give three examples of behavior on the part of one of your children that bears no relationship to how you have raised him or her, where you have obviously done your best and yet your child continues to do his "worst."
4. Were you knocked off balance when your child's real nature first emerged? Are you still off balance when it comes to discipline? If yes, in what ways? How does it change your parenting perspective and attitude to accept that your child's nature inclines him to do the wrong thing in any given situation?

5. Consider: What was the point of Jesus's redemptive sacrifice on the cross if all antisocial behavior is the result of either unresolved psychological issues or physiological "imbalances" and the like?
6. Identify several high self-esteem behaviors that your child exhibits on a frequent basis. Examples are tantrums, interrupting conversations, being loud and disruptive, pouting, and refusing to obey. Have you tended to make excuses for some or all of these behaviors (e.g., "he's just four years old," "he'll outgrow it") and failed to adequately discipline them?
7. Identify several of your child's misbehaviors that have seemed impervious to discipline—nothing you've tried has worked. How do you imagine your parents or grandparents would have dealt with these same problems? Would they have used behavior modification? Would they have had the same degree of frustration?
8. Rank order, in terms of influence, the following factors that are involved in the behavior of a child: parenting, peers, temperament, miscellaneous events and circumstances in the child's life, free will, God's will. Discuss with the group and see if consensus can be reached.

Parenting as One Flesh

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

—Genesis 2:24

Genesis 2:24 is the record of the moment when God, after he created man and woman, established marriage as the foundation of the family, the child rearing unit. It is the “First Family Principle.” Before a married couple begins having children, for them to be one flesh means they should be devoted and faithful to one another. That means in the sexual sense, of course, but it also means that no other relationship or enterprise of any sort should come before their relationship with one another.

After they begin having children, for them to be one flesh means—listen up!—no other relationship or enterprise of any sort should come before their relationship with one another. In other words, being one flesh with children means the same thing as it does without children. The relationships a husband and wife have with their children should not, must not, come before their relationship with each other, and the enterprise of being parents (parenting) should not, must not, come before the enterprise of being married. Husband/wife must trump father/mother.

With that in mind, and after having read Genesis 2:24 out loud, I will ask parents in a seminar audience to answer the following question: “Of the time you

spent in your family during the past week, what percentage was spent in the role of father or mother versus the percentage you spent in the role of husband or wife?”

The typical distribution is 90 percent parent versus 10 percent spouse, which is the empirical definition of a child-centered family. If in fact the first figure is above 50 percent, the family is child centered. The right answer to the seminar question above is no less than 60 percent wife/husband, and no more than 40 percent mother/father, and that’s acceptable only during a child’s infancy, when parenting demands are unusually high. Ideally, the relative percentages should be 75 percent spouse, 25 percent parent. A 90/10 skew in the other direction means that the typical American marriage is in danger of getting lost (if it isn’t already) in the frenetic and rather constant child-rearing tango. That’s simply not the way God planned it.

To repeat what I said in chapter 1, *if you depart from God’s plan in any area of your life, you will experience more (and more serious) problems than you would have encountered otherwise*. In this case, we’re talking about the single most important of God’s instructions to married couples! The nearly universal violation of this one instruction is sufficient to explain the profusion of child-rearing problems today’s parents are experiencing. Keep in mind that many of the problems in question were relatively unheard of before the rise of Postmodern Psychological Parenting (e.g. tantrums and defiance beyond toddlerhood, children hitting their parents, blatant disrespect of adults, teen self-mutilation).

Parenting from Within the Marriage

One reason—perhaps the primary reason—the American family worked better in the 1950s and before (all of the available statistics bear this out) is that most married people with children—even those who did not subscribe to the *Bible*—were married first, parents second. The mother of fifty-plus years ago was a wife first, a mother second. Likewise, the father of fifty-plus years ago was a husband first, a father second. When the pre-1960s husband came home from work, he came home to be with his wife, who began preparing for his homecoming in the middle of the afternoon. She began cooking the evening meal, made sure the house was neat and tidy; she might have even bathed and changed from her housekeeping outfit into clothing that was more “wifely.”¹ This ensured that when her husband came home from work, he was greeted not by his children’s mother and not by the housekeeper, but by the woman he married.

After dinner, the children cleaned up the kitchen and dining area while Mom and Dad retired to the living room to talk or just relax together. The evening was not child centered, any more than was the family. The children understood that when their chores were done, they were to find things with which to occupy themselves, including their homework (in which their parents did not participate).

This arrangement and those understandings underscored the primacy of the marriage. The two adults in the household wore the hats of husband and wife far more than they wore the hats of mother and father, thus creating and maintaining a family that was marriage centered. Furthermore, the marriage operated the family. It was the family command post. Although the female adult was on the front lines of child rearing, the marriage raised the children. *That’s*

the way God planned it.

Wait until Your Father Gets Home

For the marriage to raise the children means husband and wife are of one flesh, one mind where the children are concerned. They see their children through one set of eyes, adhere to one child-rearing plan (God's), aim at one set of goals, share one set of values, and act as one body when it comes to loving, teaching, and disciplining their children.

Parents whose child rearing fits this description can be said to be “parenting from within their marriage.” The wife is a mother, yes, but she “mothers” from within her role as wife, with primary consideration of the unity she shares with her husband. When, for example, a child asks her permission to do something, and she isn't sure what her husband would say, her proper response is “I'll talk about that with your dad when he gets home.” If the child says the decision needs to be made right away, that when Dad gets home is too late, Mom's proper response is “Then the answer is no.” (If that sounds really odd, it's because you're under the age of fifty. Kids in my generation heard that from their mothers fairly often.) The same applies to the husband. He “fathers” with primary consideration of the bond between himself and his wife. As these two people rear their children, they are primarily focused on one another.

For a family to work according to God's design, the husband-wife relationship must be far more active than either parent's relationship with any child. Husband and wife must be more involved with one another than either of them is with the children. Their lives must be centered on the bond of their marriage, not the children.

People sometimes ask me, “Won’t the children feel left out?” to which I answer, “Yes, and what a blessing that is!”

After all, nothing makes a child feel more insecure than the feeling that his parents’ marriage is tenuous, that it could fly apart at any second. It follows that nothing makes a child feel more secure than feeling his or her parents’ marriage is rock-solid. So husband and wife give their children one of the greatest of gifts by creating a family in which children are “left out” of the husband-wife relationship; a family in which the children are most definitely not “members of the wedding.” That requires that husband and wife create and enforce a boundary around their marriage, one that the children learn to respect. That means, for one, that the kids do not share the marital bed, even as infants. It means parents go out on frequent dates without the children. I even recommend that if suitable child care can be found (grandparents, perhaps?), the married couple take one or two vacations a year that do not include the kids. The bottom line is that husband and wife should spend a good amount of time together, on a regular basis, without their children. The family that does “everything” together is not a family operating according to God’s instructions.

It goes without saying that when child-rearing is done from within the marriage, it will be done more effectively. Two heads are always better than one. It also goes without saying that when the children do not occupy the center of attention, they will be more independent and will therefore attract less attention to themselves. Therefore, marriage centeredness makes for a more peaceful home in which children are usually found occupying themselves quietly and the overall level of stress is considerably lower. Last, but certainly not least, paying attention

to children demands energy, but when two spouses are paying attention to one another, energy is created! All of this adds up to a much more enjoyable child-rearing experience!

Till Children Do Us Part

Unfortunately, as the results of my seminar exercise indicate, the above description is the exception, not the rule. In most two-parent families today, one finds that the roles of husband and wife have been displaced by the roles of father and mother. In their parenting, they are focused not on one another, but on their children, who therefore occupy center stage in the family.

Instead of being of “one flesh” with one another, instead of putting their relationship center stage and keeping it there, they are preoccupied with the stuff of child centeredness: They pay more attention to their children than they do to one another, they do more things for and with their children than they do for and with one another, they give more of their time to their children than they do to one another, they talk more to their children than they do to one another, they are more concerned with their relationships with their children than they are with their relationship to one another, they plan their vacations with primary consideration of entertaining the children instead of refreshing their marriage, and so on. When today’s all-too-typical dad comes home from work, he comes home to a woman who cannot get children off her mind, and he comes home to play with his kids. It’s as if they each took a secret vow on their wedding day that said, “I take you to be my husband/wife until children do us part.

The consequences of this inside-out, upside-down, and turned around backward family situation include

- *The children lack a model of what being truly married is all about.*
Therefore, when they grow up, they are likely to either avoid getting married (which more and more young people are doing)—running instead from one “fly by night” relationship to another—or enter into marriages for all the wrong reasons (e.g., sex, status, financial security, to legitimize children), in which case their marriages are likely to fail.
- *The children develop a sense of entitlement* as regards the disproportionate amount of attention and material things they receive from their parents. They become ever more demanding, disrespectful, petulant, and even outraged at the notion that they should actually lift a finger around the house. As adults, they are likely to bring this same expectation into relationships. Symptomatic of this is the self-centered answer many newly divorced young people give when asked what caused the divorce: “He/she wasn’t meeting *my* needs.”
- Because the parents are more concerned with having relationship with than providing leadership to their children, *the children do not receive adequate discipline.* Behavior problems develop, almost always involving one or more of the “3 Big Ds”: disobedience, disruptiveness, and disrespect. Quite often, however, these parents have their heads so buried in the sands of a fourth “D”—denial—that they do not even see that their children are undisciplined. They think they’re “just being children” while other adults generally think they’re obnoxious.
- *When the normal time for emancipation rolls around, the children do not have permission to leave home.* Quite simply, a child cannot emancipate

him- or herself easily from the center of the family universe. The center is too cozy. Who would want to leave? Besides, the child in this situation knows that for as long as he can remember, he has been the glue holding his parents together (in psychological terms, this is called codependency). If he leaves, he knows they are likely to divorce.

Indeed, these days, married couples are at greatest risk for divorce shortly after the last child is emancipated. As we all know, many married couples with children never even make it that far. The reasons are many, but surely one big reason is that the people in question stopped being married, really, shortly after they began having children. One flesh became two fleashes. The legal divorce only formalizes what has, in fact, been the case for some time. Isn't this sad? And it's so unnecessary! In most cases, these are people who could have made a go of it if they had simply put God's plan for families, and therefore child rearing, foremost in their minds.

The Power of Prefixes

I'm often asked how Genesis 2:24 applies to stepfamilies and blended families. Do different rules apply to different family types? No, they do not, and the current notion to the contrary is yet another example of the confusion wrought by the Tower of Parent-Babble. A family is a family. Stepfamilies and blended families are families first, step and blended second. In both cases, therefore, the husband-wife relationship should trump the relationship either parent has with his or her child or children. In addition, stepparents should have blanket permission to exercise complete, unrestrained authority over their

stepchildren. A family's prefix should not determine how it should be run.

Unfortunately, most mental health professionals, including the influential Dr. Phil, give exactly the opposite advice. In *Family First*,² Dr. Phil says that in step and blended families, the biological parent should discipline only his or her children. This is the worst of generally bad family advice the telegenic doctor has ever given (and it is the norm in the mental health community). First, it divides the house into two parent-child camps. Second, it marginalizes the stepparent and prevents the marriage from being the relationship of primacy. Downright awful professional advice of this sort is behind a disturbing statistic: *Second marriages involving already existing children are more likely to fail than first marriages.*

More problematic, perhaps, is how Genesis 2:24 applies to parents who began raising children within marriages but are now single because of divorce or death. Being single and being of one flesh with a mate are obviously mutually exclusive. On the other hand (and I most definitely do not mean to twist Scripture here), where one unmarried parent is concerned, *one* can be regarded as either one-half of two or a whole number, as broken or unbroken. The unbroken single parent is a person who regards him or herself as a fully whole human being and functions as such—a person who lives the fullest life possible. Therefore, I propose the following: *Single parents must make sure they do not get so wrapped up in their kids that they lose their identities and fail to meet their own needs.* In their families, single parents don't have the option of being able to take off their parent hats and put on their spouse hats, so they need to find lives of their own outside of their homes, outside of being parents. They need to strike a

balance between parent and person. A simple principle of parenting physics, one that applies to married as well as single parents, is *you can't give to someone else what you have not secured for yourself*.

I speak with some authority on this subject. My mother was single for most of the first seven years of my life, during which time she did me the greatest of services by not over-focusing on me. She held a job, went to college, and enjoyed a full, rich social life in which I did not participate (other than on very special occasions). She was an unbroken single parent, and it was obvious to me that she occupied a space much larger than “John’s mother.” Although she had a life separate and apart from me, I never felt the least bit shorted when it came to her love. I always knew that she had more space in her heart for me than for anyone else and that when I needed her she would be there. But I also knew I did not have some exclusive claim over her. She was her own person. Her unbroken independence gave me permission to develop my own interests, learn my own lessons, and carve my own path through life (however meandering it has been at times)—a wonderful gift, indeed.

Unfortunately, many if not most single parents—*especially those who tend to read parenting books*—do not give themselves permission to pursue interests and relationships that do not include their children. So they end up including their children in nearly everything they do, which means they end up doing very little for themselves, which means child rearing becomes far more consuming than it ought to be. The child-centered single parent home is no more functional than a child-centered two-parent home.

Coda

In November, 2006, after I spoke to a Sunday school class in Atlanta, a fellow introduced himself and told me he was a manager in a Fortune 500 company. At recent executive meetings, he said, a major topic of discussion centered on how to deal with parents of young employees who were calling their children's supervisors to complain about bad performance reviews. These are young people in their mid to late twenties, mind you. This parental interference is happening with such frequency that the corporation's lawyers had drafted very specific guidelines that supervisors were to follow in dealing with these parents. He shook his head and said grimly, "We've been having lots and lots of problems with young employees, John. Now we're having problems with their parents."

I have a theory. These are parents who were of "one flesh" with their children for the entirety of their child-rearing years. As a result, they have forgotten how to be of "one flesh" with one another. Another way of saying the same thing: They don't know how to stop being parents. Being parents gives meaning to their lives. If they have to stop, meaning will drain out of their lives and they will have to confront the brokenness in their marriages. To avoid that unpleasantness, they seize upon every opportunity to do what they have learned to do best: protect, enable, and defend their kids.

This does not bode well for America's future, to say the least.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. Take the exercise described earlier in the chapter: Of the time you spent in your family during the past week, what percentage was spent

in the role of father or mother versus the percentage you spent in the role of husband or wife?

2. Assuming that the past week was typical, is your family child centered or marriage centered? If the former, what can you and your spouse do, *beginning today*, to re-center your family around your marriage? What are you currently doing for your children that you can stop doing without detriment to them (not to say that they may not like that you stop)? What are you currently not doing for one another and with one another that you can begin doing?
3. Imagine a household that isn't child centered. Write down five things that you would be doing differently. What is stopping you from doing those things?
4. What can you begin doing, today, to describe a boundary around your marriage? Is one or more of your children sleeping with you? Are you reluctant to do things without them? Do you plan vacations with them foremost in mind?
5. Are you parenting as one flesh—from within your marriage—or are you parenting as two fleshes? If the latter, what cultural and social forces have influenced you in that regard?

6. If yours is a stepfamily or a blended family, have you been acting as if the prefix in question should determine how your family operates? If so, what can and should you begin doing, today, to put family truly first?

7. If you are a single parent, have you become so consumed with child-rearing responsibilities that your own needs have been neglected? List five things you can begin doing, today, to take better care of yourself.

