Our House for God's Economy

A conference for parents and serving ones

The Church in Denver December 14, 2019

Message One RAISING UP THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

- I. The children and young people (our next generation) are precious to God—Luke 18:16–17; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1:5; 2:2; Matt. 18:2–6, 10, 14; 19:13–14; Mark 9:36–37; 10:13–16; Luke 9:47–48; Psa. 87:5–6
 - Luke 18:16–17 But Jesus called them to Him, saying, Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Truly I say to you, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall by no means enter into it.
 - 2 Tim. 3:15 And that from a babe you have known the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
 - 2 Tim. 1:5 Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded dwells also in you.
 - 2 Tim. 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.
 - Psa. 87:5–6 But of Zion it will be said, / This one and that one were born in her, / And the Most High Himself will establish her. 6 Jehovah will count / When He records the peoples: / This One was born there. Selah.
 - A. Children are a blessing and a gift from God—Gen. 4:1; 21:1–2; 30:1–2; 33:5; 48:9; 1 Sam. 1:11, 20, 27; Psalm 127:3; Isa. 8:18; Luke 1:13
 - Genesis 4:1...I have gotten a man from the Lord. (Eve)
 - Genesis 33:5... Who are those with you? And he [Jacob] said, The children which God has graciously given your servant.
 - Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward.
 - B. The future of the church depends on the children and young people
 - 1. Throughout the ages, God has called young people for His move—Exo. 2:10; 33:10; Num. 11:28; 1 Sam. 1:24–28; Dan. 1:3–6; Jer. 1:4–8; 1 Sam. 16:11–12; Acts 7:58; Mark 1:19–20; Luke 1:41; 2 Tim. 3:15
 - 2 Tim. 3:15 And that from a babe you have known the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
 - 2. God's promise is to us and to our children—Acts 2:39; 16:31; Deut. 29:29 *Acts 2:39a For to you is the promise and to your children....*
 - Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.

- Deut. 29:29 The things that are hidden belong to Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed, to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
- C. To labor with the children and young people we need a vision of their preciousness
 - 1. We have been entrusted with a commission and are responsible to care for our children as God's stewards—Heb. 13:17; 1 Cor. 4:1–2
 - Heb. 13:17m ...for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account....
 - 1 Cor. 4:2 Here, furthermore, it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful.
 - 2. To labor effectively we must have a heart for what we are doing 2 Cor. 6:11 Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians; our heart is enlarged. Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, work from the soul as to the Lord and not to men. Matt. 19:14 But Jesus said, Allow the little children and do not prevent them from coming to Me, for of such is the kingdom of the heavens.
 - 3. It is good that we like children, but that's not enough to have a heart for them with endurance
 - 1 Kings 4:29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and very much understanding and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore.
 - 4. To labor most effectively, we need a vision—Prov. 29:18
- D. The church can increase by laboring on the children and young people—Psa. 127:3–5; 128:1–6; Gen. 1:28; Psa. 17:14
 - Gen. 1:28a And God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it....
 - Psa. 127:3–5 Behold, children are the heritage of Jehovah, / The fruit of the womb a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, / So are the children of one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man / Who fills his quiver with them. / He will not be put to shame / When he speaks with enemies in the gate.
 - Psa. 128:1–6 Blessed is everyone who fears Jehovah, / Who walks in His ways. 2 You will indeed eat the labor of your hands; / You will be blessed, and it will go well with you. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine / In the innermost parts of your house. / Your children will be like olive shoots / Round about your table. 4 Thus will the man be blessed / Who fears Jehovah. 5 Jehovah bless you from Zion; / And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem / All the days of your life. 6 May you also see the children of your children. / Peace be upon Israel.
 - Psa. 17:14c They are satisfied with children, / And they leave their abundance for their little ones.
 - 1. If we only gain our own children we will grow
 - 2. If we gain our children and some of their friends and preach the gospel and gain households we will have a very healthy growth
 - 3. We should not neglect our children in order to gain outsiders
 - 4. Rather, we include our children in our entire church life
 - 5. We must not lose any of our children!—John 17:12

- E. Godly families can produce vessels useful to the Lord—2 Tim. 3:15; 1:5; 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:8; 6:6; 2 Pet. 1:7; 3:11; Matt. 6:33
 - 2 Tim. 1:5 Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded dwells also in you.
 - 1 Tim. 4:8 ...godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.
 - 2 Pet. 3:11 Since all these things are to be thus dissolved, what kind of persons ought you to be in holy manner of life and godliness.
 - 1. The Bible and church history are full of examples of godly families producing godly seed, including Adam & Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Amram & Yocheved, Elkanah & Hannah; Daniel, Mordecai & Esther, Joseph & Mary, Zachariah & Elizabeth, John Mark, Philip the Evangelist, Timothy; Augustine, Hudson Taylor, Susanna Wesley, John Newton, C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts—Mal. 2:15; Gen. 4:4; 18:19; 25:21; 37:2; 48:9; Exo. 2:10; 1 Sam. 1:24–28; Dan. 1:3–6; Esth. 2:5–7; 4:14; Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:21–25; Acts 12:12; 21:8–9; 2 Tim. 3:15
 - 2. Godly does not mean perfect
 - 3. Training the children and preparing them to serve the Lord is primarily the parents' responsibility—Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Deut. 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; Job 1:5; 1 Thes. 2:19; Heb. 13:17
 - Prov. 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And even when he is old he will not depart from it.
 - Eph. 6:4 And fathers (parents), do not provoke your children to anger, but nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.
 - Deut. 4:9 But be careful and guard your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; rather, make them known to your children and to your grandchildren.
 - Deut. 6:7 And you shall repeat them to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you journey on the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.
 - Deut. 11:19 And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.
 - 4. The parents are by far the most influential factor on the children and young people
- F. The church helps and supports the parents through the children and students' work—Gal. 6:2
 - Gal. 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ completely.

- G. Our labor is not just with the children and young people but with the families; the church should not replace the parents in the spiritual upbringing of the children, but rather to strengthen and equip them
- H. In the Biblical pattern, the congregation included the children—Deut. 31:10–13; Josh. 8:34–35; Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1–2; 1 Cor. 14:23; Psa. 8:2; Num. 3:28
 - Deut. 31:11–13 When all Israel comes to appear before Jehovah your God in the place which He will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Gather the people, the men, the women, and the little ones, and the sojourner with you, who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear Jehovah your God and be certain to do all the words of this law, 13 And that their children, who have not known these things, may hear and learn to fear Jehovah your God all the days that you live upon the land into which you are crossing over the Jordan to possess.
 - Josh. 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who went among them.
 - Col. 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord.
 - Eph. 6:1–2 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with a promise.
 - 1 Cor. 14:23a If therefore the whole church comes together in one place....
 - Psa. 8:2 Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings / You have established strength / Because of Your adversaries, / To stop the enemy and the avenger.
 - Num. 3:28 According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, there were eight thousand six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary.
- II. In God's economy, He takes the household as the unit of salvation—Gen. 7:1; 1 Pet. 3:20; Gen. 17:12–13; Exo. 12:3–7; Deut. 29:29; Num. 18:1, 11; Josh. 2:19; 6:17; 2 Sam. 6:11; Deut. 12:7; 14:26; Luke 19:9; John 4:53; Acts 2:39; 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; 18:8; Luke 10:5–6; 1 Cor. 1:16; 2 Tim. 4:19; 1:16
 - Gen. 7:1 Then Jehovah said to Noah, Come into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation.
 - Gen. 17:12–13 And he who is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he who is born in the house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your seed. 13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised; thus My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.
 - Exo. 12:3 Speak to all the assembly of Israel, saying, On the tenth of this month each man shall take a lamb according to his fathers' house, a lamb for a household.
 - Deut. 29:29 The things that are hidden belong to Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed, to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

- Num. 18:1, 11 Then Jehovah said to Aaron, You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood....This also is yours, the heave offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the children of Israel. I have given them to you and to your sons and to your daughters with you, as a perpetual statute; everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.
- Josh 6:17b ...Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in her house, because she hid the messengers we sent.
- 2 Sam. 6:11 And the Ark of Jehovah remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and Jehovah blessed Obed-edom and all his household.
- Deut. 12:7 And there you shall eat before Jehovah your God, and you and your households shall rejoice in all your undertakings, in which Jehovah your God has blessed you.
- Deut. 14:26c ...and you and your household shall eat there before Jehovah your God and rejoice.
- Luke 19:9 And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.
- John 4:53 Then the father knew that it was in that hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives; and he believed, he and his whole house.
- Acts 2:39a For to you is the promise and to your children....
- Acts 10:2 [Cornelius], ... Devout and one who feared God with all his household....
- Act 11:14 Who will speak words to you by which you shall be saved, you and all your house.
- Acts 16:15 [Lydia] And when she was baptized, as well as her household, she entreated us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. And she constrained us.
- Acts 16:31 And they said [to the jailor], Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.
- Acts 18:8 And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with his whole household; and many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.
- Luke 10:5–6 And into whatever house you enter, first say, Peace to this house. 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon it; but if not, it shall return upon you.
- 1 Cor. 1:16a And I did baptize the household of Stephanas also....
- 2 Tim. 4:19 Greet...the house of Onesiphorus.
- 2 Tim. 1:16 May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain
- A. God chooses families and blesses them for multiple generations—Exo. 20:5–6; Deut. 28:4; Isa. 51:2; Eph. 3:14–15; Psa. 103:17–18; Prof. 12:7; Acts 13:26

- Exo. 20:5–6 You shall not bow down to them, and you shall not serve them; for I, Jehovah your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 Yet showing lovingkindness to thousands of generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
- Deut. 28:4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your animals, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock
- Isa. 51:2 Look to Abraham your father, / And to Sarah who travailed with you; / For I called him when he was one person, / And blessed him and multiplied him.
- B. The head of the household has a special responsibility to choose the Lord for the entire house—Josh. 24:15; Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:18–19; 1 Cor. 7:14; Job 1:5; 1 Cor. 11:3
 - Josh. 24:15 And if it seems wrong in your sight to serve Jehovah, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, either the gods from across the River, whom your fathers served, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.
 - Gen. 18:19 For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.
 - Job 1:5 And when the days of feasting ran their course, Job would send word and sanctify them; and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their heart. Job did this continually.
 - 1. A sister can also take this stand before the Lord—Josh. 2:19; 6:17; 1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 16:15; 2 Tim. 1:5
 - 1 Cor. 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the brother; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.
 - 2. Our labor is not for our selfish interest—Prov. 11:25

 Prov. 11:25 The blessing soul will prosper, / And he who waters will also be watered himself.
 - 3. The result depends on God's sovereignty—Eph. 1:4–5, 11; John 17:12; Rom. 8:28–30; 9:11, 15–16
- C. Our labor should be to gain households, not individuals—Luke 19:5–9
- D. We must avoid one of the greatest failures of the Protestant church, being too loose with the second generation—Prov. 22:6
- III. God's Word presents principles of parenting, that is, how to parent our children—Judges 13:1–23; Eph. 6:4
 - Judges 13:8 Then Manoah entreated Jehovah, and said, Oh, Lord, I pray you, let the man of God whom you didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

- A. In sanctification—Num. 6:1–12; Judges 13:1–23; 1 Samuel 1:9–20, 22, 28; 2:20–21; John 17:4–20; 1 Cor. 7:14; Job 1:5; Gen. 22:16–18; John 13:15; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:14–16, 18–19; 3:3–5; 1 Tim. 2:9–10; 1 Thes. 5:22
 - Judges 13:3–5 And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, you are barren, and do not bear; but you shall conceive, and bear a son. 4 Now therefore beware, I pray you, and drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat no unclean thing: 5 for, behold, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come upon his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.
- B. In the way of oneness—Psalm 133:1, 3b; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 4:2
- C. With learning—Judges 13:1–23; Titus 2:4; 1:6
 - Titus 2:4 That they may **train** the young women to love their husbands, to love their children....
- D. Our parenting should be for God's purpose—Acts 16:31; Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:4
 - Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.
 - 1. To conduct our children to Christ—Exo. 10:9; Mark 10:14; Gal. 3:24
 - 2. For God's building, God's testimony—Num. 3:28
 - 3. We raise our children to lend them to the Lord—1 Sam. 1:24–28

 I Sam. 1:27–28a For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him: 28 therefore also I have lent him to Jehovah; as long as he lives he is lent to Jehovah.
 - 4. It is normal to gain all our children—Acts 16:31; Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:4

 Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.
 - Titus 1:6 If anyone is unreprovable, the husband of one wife, having believing children, not accused of dissoluteness or unruly.
- E. There is a war over the children—Exo. 1:15–17, 20–22; 10:8–9; Matt. 2:13–14, 16

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Message Two THE HOUSEHOLD: THE UNIT OF GOD'S SALVATION AND THE BUILDING BLOCK OF THE CHURCH

I. Our family life is central to God's economy—Gen. 2:24; 1 Tim. 3:2-5

- 1 Tim. 3:2–5 The overseer then must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, of a sober mind, orderly, hospitable, apt to teach; 3 Not an excessive drinker; not a striker, but forbearing; not contentious; not fond of money; 4 One who manages well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity 5 (But if one does not know how to manage his own house, how will he care for the church of God?).
- A. The building blocks of the church life are not the individual believers, but families or households—Acts 5:42; 16:33; 1 Cor. 1:16; Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; 2 John 1
- B. God's calling, blessing and dealing are with families for generations upon generations—Eph. 3:14–15; Psa. 103:17–18; Prof. 12:7; Acts 13:26; Exo. 20:5–6; Deut. 28:4; Isa. 51:2
 - Eph. 3:14–15 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, 15 Of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named.
 - Psa. 103:17–18 But Jehovah's lovingkindness is from eternity / Unto eternity upon those who fear Him, / And His righteousness is to the children's children; 18 To those who keep His covenant / And remember His precepts so as to do them.
 - *Prov.* 12:7 The wicked are overthrown and are no more, / But the house of the righteous will stand.
- C. Without a godly family life, we will not have a strong church life

II. We can raise godly families by following the principles in God's Word

- A. Godly families begin with godly marriages—Gen. 1:27–28; 2:24; Mal. 2:14–16; Eph. 5:25–33
- B. As parents, we have a commission, a responsibility, and even a mandate to raise godly children—Gen. 1:28; Prov. 22:6; Josh. 24:15; Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:19
 - 1. Our children are not a burden but a blessing and a responsibility
 - 2. Our job is to nurture them
- C. Raising a godly family is a matter of discipline—Heb. 12:6–11; Prov. 13:24; 1 Kings 1:6
 - 1. Discipline is not a matter of punishment but of discipleship and training—Matt. 28:19; Prov. 22:6
 - 2. Discipline is a nurturing of our children—Eph. 6:4

- 3. The Lord disciples us in love with nourishing and cherishing, sacrificing Himself for our perfecting; this is our pattern in raising our children—Eph. 5:25; 1 Pet. 2:25; John 17:19
- D. Raising a godly family is a matter of admonition—we are responsible to teach our children the Lord's Word—Deut. 6:1–2, 5–9, 20–23; 11:18–21; Gen. 1:1; Eccl. 12:1; 2 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Exo. 10:8–9; Acts 21:5; Gen. 18:17–19; Josh. 24:15
 - Deut. 11:18–19 Therefore you shall lay up these words of Mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. 19 And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.
- E. We must not provoke our children; i.e., must not make them bitter—Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4
 - 1. Through a lack of discipline—Prov. 22:15; 1 Kings 1:6
 - 1 Kings 1:6 And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why have you done so? and he was also a very goodly man; and he was born after Absalom.
 - 2. Through improper discipline—getting angry, punishing in anger, abusing or criticizing—Eph. 4:26; Col. 3:21
 - 3. Not neglecting them—2 Sam. 13–14
 - 4. Through a lack of affection, love, encouragement and time
 - 5. By showing favoritism—Gen. 37:3–4
 - 6. All issues in the family resolved by coming to the Lord

III. We can raise godly families by praying together and meeting together as a family

- A. A home meeting is a meeting of the family at home
 - 1. Meeting in the "home way" and not in the congregational way
 - 2. The family meetings of a godly family are in our daily life, not in a formal setting
 - 3. In the church life, "each house" is involved—Acts 5:46
- B. We should start at birth or even before, and *not* when the children are older—2 Tim. 3:15; Judg. 13:7; 1 Sam. 1:11; Jer. 1:5; Isa. 49:5; Luke 1:15, 41–44; Gal. 1:15
- D. Let us not "outsource" the spiritual raising of our children
 - 1. Training the children and preparing them to serve the Lord is primarily the parents' responsibility—Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Deut. 4:9; 11:19; Job 1:5; 1 Thes. 2:19; Heb. 13:17
 - Deut. 11:19 And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.
 - 2. The church helps and supports the parents through the children and students' work—Gal. 6:2

- E. The homes with the home (family) meetings are the key to building up the church—Acts 2:46–47; 5:42; 9:31; Rom. 15:16a; 16:5a & footnote 1; Acts 20:20; Heb. 10:25; 2 Tim. 3:15; John 15:16
 - 1. The fastest way to build up the church is *day by day* and *house to house*—Acts 2:46–47
 - 2. The building of the church involves *each house*—Acts 5:42; Heb. 10:25
 - 3. The built-up families are the "nest" to bring new ones into the church and bear fruit—Psa. 84:3; John 15:16; Rom. 16:5
 - 4. The excelling way to go out is to shepherd others by household—Acts 20:20
 - 5. The home (family) meetings are the best way to preserve our children—2 Tim. 3:15
- F. Our children and student work can also be carried out in the homes—Heb. 10:25
- G. Eventually our family life will become our church life, and our church life will be a family life

IV. Our labor in three stages is to gain the next generation for the building up of the Body of Christ

- A. To have the children saved and baptized by around age 12
 - 1. With an emphasis on learning the Word that will make them wise unto salvation—2 Tim. 3:15
 - 2 Tim. 3:15 And that from a babe you have known the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
 - 2. Not leading them into premature knowledge or experience
- B. To have the young people develop a spiritual life and become functioning members in the Body of Christ by the time they are in college
- C. To have our college graduates be perfected in the Lord's service and go on to the full-time training
- D. The full-time training perfects our young adults to be normal, functioning members in the Body of Christ— Eph. 4:12; 2 Cor. 13:9, 11; Heb. 13:20–21; 1 Pet. 5:10
 - Eph. 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

V. The parents must take the lead in laboring to gain the next generation

References

LSM, Raising up the Next Generation for the Church Life

Witness Lee, Character

Witness Lee, How to Lead the Young People

Witness Lee, The Exercise and Practice of the God-ordained Way, Chapters 8-9

Watchman Nee, *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, Vol. 2, Ch. 20, "Household Salvation"

Children and Students class from the FTTA - recorded messages

Previous parents' & serving ones' conferences - recorded messages

Trumbull, H. Clay, Hints on Child Training

Durbin, Kara G., Parenting with Scripture

Secular resources for character training (books, etc.)