



Dear Friend,

Greetings from Focus on the Family! With the spring season under way and the end of another school year in sight, I hope your family is doing well and looking forward to warmer weather ahead. Despite the continued and significant turmoil facing our nation, I pray you are filled with gratitude by the assurance that God is faithfully guiding His people and shaping His Church for our good and His glory. He never takes His hands off the reins, and we can rest in the certainty that His good and loving will always prevail.

Focus on the Family has seen a great deal of cultural change and turbulence since we first opened our doors. In fact, we're celebrating our 45th year of ministry, and we remain humbled and grateful by the ways God has sustained our work over these last four-and-a-half decades. The pressures on families have never been greater — and yet God's healing and redemptive power is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's why we continue reaching out to married couples and parents with practical, biblical advice and guidance as they navigate the challenges of family life and relationships amidst our postmodern culture.

Helping equip parents in their crucial role is one of our primary emphases, particularly now that scripturally based parenting principles have fallen out of favor across society. Moms and dads who desire to raise children according to the Judeo-Christian system of values are truly swimming against the tide.

You know as well as we do, however, that it is still possible for Christian families to survive and even thrive. If we didn't believe that, we would have closed up shop here at Focus years ago! But because we hear from families every day who have experienced healing and renewal through our outreach, we are encouraged to "keep on keeping on."

Your efforts to support parents through Focus are multifaceted. Not only do you provide a team of counselors that are available to offer one-time phone consults to those confronting serious and complex situations, but you also help air a daily radio broadcast that is heard by millions of people around the world even as you provide numerous other resources in various formats. Whether someone is looking for a helpful book or curriculum, an online article or Q&A, a podcast or video, or even a magazine subscription, you make it all possible to help mothers and fathers raise their children according to biblical principles.

Among the many books you offer through Focus, some have been published by our own ministry. One of our more recent releases is titled *Seven Traits of Effective Parenting* and was written by Dr. Danny Huerta, our Vice President of Parenting and Youth. His book takes a look at seven characteristics that are embodied by successful parents: adaptability, respect, intentionality, steadfast love, boundaries, grace and forgiveness, and gratitude.

I'd like to share with you the following excerpt from Danny's chapter on intentionality:

Time can fly like a supersonic jet. I did not fully believe this until I became a parent. I remember thinking to myself when my son was three and my daughter was one that adulthood was a long way away for both of them. But suddenly, my son is taller than me and has a lower voice than me. My daughter is a young woman, and she and I are talking about what to look for in a man as she considers dating in the next few years. Where did the time go?

I have met with countless parents who have said they wish they'd done this or that differently. Some say that if they could do it all over again, they would reprioritize what

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they did as parents. They would spend more time with their kids, especially during the younger years when children were at home and didn't have jobs, places to go, cars to drive, or friends to see. The reality is that we do the best we can with what we've got. We simply don't have the time or energy to adjust to everything life throws at us, and schedules seem to get busier at each age and stage of a child's development. We feel regret when we look back and evaluate ourselves and the jobs we've done as parents.

We all feel this way as we look back in hindsight. But there is something we can do to minimize this feeling of our realities being out of sync with our desires for our family lives.

Intentionality can help us feel that we have more control over the direction of our parenting. Intentionality is simply a matter of knowing what you want to do to make each day count in your child's life and in your opportunity to be transformed as you embrace the challenge and responsibility of being a parent. It is not about indulging your child and making your home an activity- or child-focused home.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of working with a couple who were seeking help with their 13-year-old son, the youngest of three boys. Unlike his parents and two older brothers, this young man — Ryan — was having difficulty coping with everyday life. He was struggling with chronic anxiety, nervousness, and insomnia, so something needed to be done. The more we talked, the clearer it became that he was in need of serious help.

When I asked for his side of the story, Ryan was ready with an answer. "The problem," he said, "is that I'm totally stressed out. My family is too busy! We're always going somewhere, doing something, adding another commitment to the calendar. I never get any downtime! It's too much, and I wish we could hang out more as a family!"

The interesting thing was that nobody else in the family seemed to share his feelings. In fact, they seemed to like their hectic schedule and they didn't have an intentional plan for connecting with each other. Rather, they valued sports and school. Ryan's mom and dad weren't bad parents. They were just highly motivated people who maintained an active involvement in everything from work to church to the local community to their sons' educational and extracurricular activities. Ryan's brothers seemed perfectly satisfied with the fast pace of their family's busy lifestyle but were struggling in their life choices. The rest of the family had a hard time understanding why Ryan didn't see things the way they did.

The family's pace of life didn't allow time for reflection and connection with each other and God. Ryan's parents were used to pursuing, but intentionality means knowing when to slow things down or just simply stop.

My suggestion for this family was to intentionally balance rest, relationship, and work in their lives, and to be aware that different members of the family have different needs. This may seem obvious, but finding such balance is hard, especially when we add technology, entertainment, and the endless menu of possible distractions and pursuits to the mix. Intentional parenting begins with pausing to determine what you're pursuing and why you're pursuing it.

Many people have been led to believe that an intentional parent is a perfect parent, which is not true. There are many things I have started with a great deal of intention that I didn't completely follow through on, including a weekly family meeting in our home. But we try our best to have intentional conversations and time together. I have yet to

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meet a family that has been perfectly intentional along the way. However, I can tell you about many couples who are thankful they have learned to be more intentional in their parenting because of what it did for them, their kids, and their family...

Are you familiar with Reinhold Niebuhr's famous "Serenity Prayer"? The first four lines go like this:

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*¹

Intentionality in parenting is all about knowing that difference. The longer you live and the more experience you have raising children, the more deeply you will understand that there are plenty of things in this world — things about yourself, your kids, and the circumstances in which you live — that can't be controlled.

Intentionality is a matter of identifying those things that can be controlled and then doing something about them. It's about choosing the values you want to emphasize in your home and taking deliberate steps — baby steps, if necessary — toward making them the foundation of your family's experience together.²

I love what Danny shares here, because it captures Focus' vision for parents: to be intentional about prioritizing family life with the goal of raising children who love the Lord and desire to serve Him. And we always try to emphasize that successful parenting doesn't mean *perfect* parenting. After all, there's no such thing as a perfect parent — except for our Heavenly Father, of course, and even He has wayward children!

Parenting, in other words, is not a formula. It's a relationship between sinful parents and sinful children. All of us make mistakes as we raise our kids, and some of the best parents I know have children who have rejected the values and beliefs their parents worked so diligently to instill in them. I firmly believe we are called to bring up our kids "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), but I also know that the outcome is not guaranteed.

Nonetheless, we *do* have a vital and indispensable role to play in our kids' upbringing — and it should be the goal of every mom and dad to invest wholeheartedly in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development of our kids. What's more, we can trust that the Lord will honor our dedicated and sincere efforts, despite our inevitable failings and shortcomings. He never promises that our kids will always stay on the straight and narrow, but He does promise to strengthen and help us — and we can take heart in the assurance that He loves our sons and daughters infinitely more than we do.

So regardless of what you or your kids might be going through, I encourage you simply to ask God to equip you for your parenting journey. Perhaps Danny's book would be a helpful source of wisdom and inspiration. Here's what one mom shared with us about the impact of this book:

I am slowly working my way through Danny Huerta's book. I finally put it on my phone and am listening in the car when I am alone. I am using this book both as a guide for parenting my 13-year-old son and also as a guide for reparenting myself. I have a lot of un-doing to do. It helps to see healthy perspectives and apply them to how I treat others and myself. With God's help, I will

1 Reinhold Niebuhr, "Prayer for Serenity," retrieved from: <https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/serenityprayer>.

2 Daniel P. Huerta, *Seven Traits of Effective Parenting* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2020), 95-98, 116-117.

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*recover from some of my childhood trauma and break the cycle for my son and future generations.
Thank you for sharing your God-given wisdom with us. —Kristin, New York*

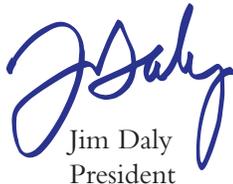
Our team at Focus rejoices every time we hear from someone who has been influenced in positive ways by our work. It is work that is only possible through the kind and compassionate support of parents and friends just like you who want to help other parents. Will you give today to empower parents to instill an unwavering, bold faith? It takes just \$34 to equip parents like you to pass on a legacy of faith to a child.

With your gift today, you'll come alongside parents and families with encouragement and biblically based resources like broadcasts, *Adventures in Odyssey*, age-appropriate magazines, podcasts, online articles, counseling efforts, *Bring Your Bible to School Day*, *Live It Challenges*, *Alive to Thrive*, books, *Plugged In* and more.

As a nonprofit organization, we rely on the donations and generosity of friends just like you. So please prayerfully consider a gift to offer parents Scripture-based resources and programs to come alongside their efforts to train up their child the way God intended and empower them with a bold faith.

We would greatly appreciate your help! And if we can help you in some way, I invite you to contact us; you can call 1-800-A-FAMILY (232-6459) or visit us online at FocusOnTheFamily.com. And, if you could benefit from speaking with one of our licensed staff counselors, don't hesitate to mention that when you call. The representative who answers the phone would be happy to help connect you with our Counseling department.

I hope the coming weeks will be a time of joy and refreshment for you and your family. Thank you for your interest in Focus' mission — we rely on friends like you as we carry out the tasks God has entrusted to us. May God richly bless you and yours!



Jim Daly
President

P.S. Parenting in a culture that challenges morality and faith isn't easy. Will you stand with other parents like yourself and help provide resources and programs that equip parents to raise children bold in faith? Every \$34 you give empowers another parent to pass on a legacy of faith to their child. Whatever you give today will be sown directly into our family-building outreach to help parents and families like your own.