

From Mess Maker to Mommy Helper:  
5 Tips on Training  
Your Kids



By

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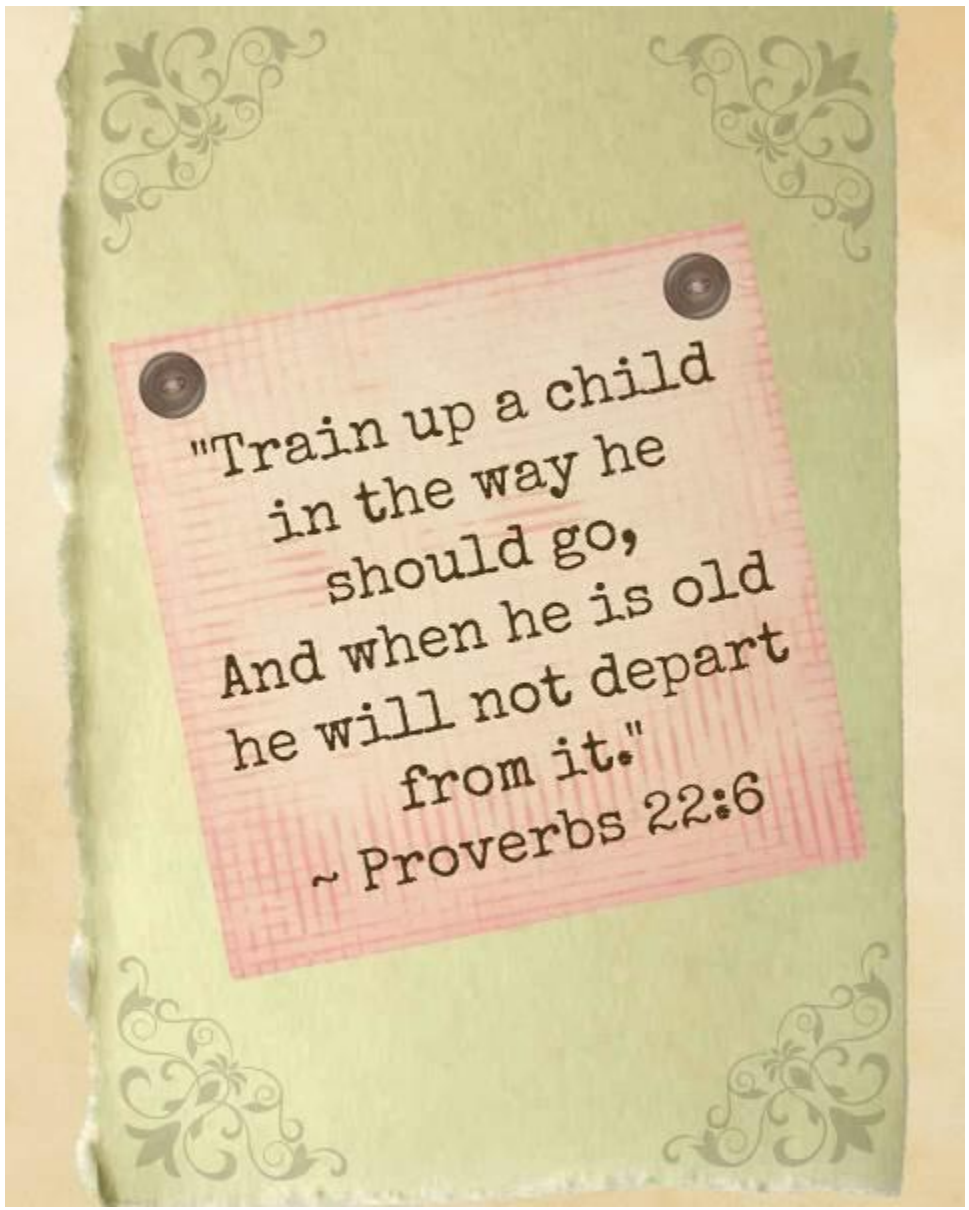
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"Train up a child  
in the way he  
should go,  
And when he is old  
he will not depart  
from it."  
~ Proverbs 22:6

## **A Letter to the Reader**

To the amazing, godly, blessed and anointed woman reading this book,

Now before you say, “You’ve got the wrong woman!” let me assure you that I am simply agreeing with what God has already said about you! I encourage you to see yourself as He sees you: full of grace, and fully equipped to handle ALL of the moments of motherhood in your future. I must lay this foundation before you read any further because I know how vital it is to believe that God has already put everything inside of you to be the mom He created you to be!

I have been on my motherhood journey for the last 23 years, and I can tell you from experience (not theory) that without the grace of God, and without the mercy of God I would have quit the “mommy business” a long time ago! So, let me ease your mind a little bit before moving on. This is not a formula for having perfect children, nor is it an expectation for you to be a perfect mom! Yay! What you’ll read in these pages are a few tips from a mommy humbled by the grace of God, and doing my best to raise giants for the Lord.

At the writing of this book, I have raised one son from diapers to the altar - he got married in April 2013 – (tears of joy); however, I am now starting over and have 2 children ages 3 & 5! I have find myself thanking God daily that I know so much more this time around, but I am always learning and growing. I wrote this little book to share some of my insight with you. I believe we moms need to stick together, lift one another, share trade secrets, and constantly pass on what we’ve learned to each other.

One thing I want to encourage every mom to learn is that you CAN train your kids! I know, I know! Isn’t that great news! Let’s get together and chat, one mom to another, and I’ll share some things that, in hindsight, I’ve found to be “pearls of wisdom” when it comes to training children. I pray that everything I share can help you grow in God and grow as a mom!

Much Love,

Kelli Sanders



## What We've Got Here is Failure to Communicate!



When I left high school, and decided to study, I chose to be a teacher of little ones. I had the privilege of teaching in 1st & 2nd grade for several years, and I must say it was one of the greatest joys of my life, BUT it didn't start out that way. In fact, halfway through my 1st year of teaching I was ready to quit. I thought I had wasted the last seven years of my life in college, not to mention a lot of money earning a degree that I wasn't going to be using for very long!

So, what was it that made me want to quit? It was a classroom full of six year olds that I didn't yet have the wisdom to teach and train! I was taught learning methods! I was shown the latest techniques! I was equipped with text books and instructor guides! I didn't know hardly anything about classroom management, or how to get a child to stay in his or her seat; how to help an anxious 6-year-old that cried all day; how to diffuse a child with an explosive temper that made it his habit to derail my carefully planned lessons!

What I soon discovered was that I wasn't just called to teach reading and math skills, but I also had to teach the children what I expected of them in the classroom. I had to teach them how to carry out the things that I'd asked, and how to follow the procedures I'd set in place. My first year of teaching was marked with a failure to communicate, but my second year was marked with clear expectations! My first year may have been a "sink or swim" year, but in the following years my confidence grew, and I actually looked forward to going into the classroom and spending the day with my little blessings called students!

You may be in that boat now, where every day of your mommy career is "sink or swim." Some days you sink, others you barely keep your head above water, and still others you swim. I want you to get to the place where you're doing the backstroke while enjoying a nice, cold glass of lemonade! I want you to look forward to the days you spend with the little blessings called your children.

So, what changed after the first year I was in the classroom? Where was my breakthrough? I discovered the practice of discipline. Now, that word conjures up different things for different people so let's define our terms. According to Webster's Dictionary, the word discipline can mean: "A rule or system of rules governing conduct or activity."

I'd say that's a precise definition of what I'm talking about here. My breakthrough was when I discovered that I needed a system of rules in place that governed the activity in my classroom! Let me tell you it made all the difference in the world, not only to me, but also to my students who actually benefitted from knowing what was expected of them!

It's no different in the home! The first pearl of wisdom I must share with you is DISCIPLINE: Get a system of rules in place in your home that will govern the activity of your children!! This is so much easier than many might think, and the earlier you can start the better. Here are a few tips to setting up your own "house rules."



## Clear Expectations

Wow, is this a revelation to many parents! Our world is very diverse, and different homes have different rules, different standards, and different values that are being taught. Your child won't automatically know the things that you highly value, the things that you are really relaxed about, or the things that call for punishment. These things have to be communicated.

For example, I like my house fairly clean (not the page torn out of HGTV Magazine kind of clean, but clean nonetheless). My children know that if they make a mess, they need to clean it up. We highly value honesty and lying is treated very seriously. We value respect and love, and we set up clear expectations on how we communicate with one another.

Take a moment to think about what expectations you have of your children, and then make sure they know what those expectations are.

## Clear Rewards and Consequences

Now that you have those expectations in mind, what are the rewards for your child meeting those expectations and what are the consequences when they don't? You know the scenario: "Why are you playing this game when your homework isn't finished? You know you are expected to finish your homework before you play."

So, what happens in this situation? Are there consequences? Better yet, do your kids know what they are? When your children know that there are rewards for doing what is asked of them, and consequences for not doing what is asked of them, they will start to make better choices!

Rewards can be anything from verbal praise, to more time doing an activity they enjoy, to special privileges. Consequences can scale from a verbal warning, to the loss of a privilege, to time outs or spankings. Do what is right for your family, just have a system in place!!

## Ignorance vs. Rebellion

To add some insight to some of what we just covered, it's important to know the difference between ignorance and rebellion because they are dealt with in

different ways. Sometimes your children may not have understood what was asked of them. The answer to ignorance (or lack of understanding) is instruction. They didn't understand, so you make it clear. On the other hand, sometimes your children are crystal clear on what is expected, but they just choose not to do it. This is not the time to educate them! The answer to rebellion is not instruction. Rebellion must be corrected with the consequences you have in place taking place.

So, my friend, the first tip to add to your child training toolbox is DISCIPLINE. Take a good look at what kind of system is set up in your home. What are your expectations? What are the rewards and consequences attached to those expectations? How do you deal with ignorance? How do you deal with rebellion? If you don't have a system in place, get one going today!

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## **Why Don't They do What I Ask Them To?**

Ahhh the joys of motherhood, I can remember so many times going into my son's room after I had asked him to clean it only to find that there were still disorganized piles of papers, knick knacks, empty cups, etc. on his dusty shelves, AND I remember the look of shock on his face every time I told him that the room wasn't clean. He had made his bed and picked up his clothes off the floor – what more was there to be done!? Mothers of teens, you know what I'm talking about!

As a mom, I take one look at a room like that, and I think, “Why didn't he do what I asked him to!?” As the child, he takes one look at a room like that and thinks, “Cool, mom's gonna be happy that I cleaned my room!” Two totally different perspectives.

What is really going on in this situation? What's happening is that mom and abovementioned child have two different ideas of what it means for a room to be clean, and if I want it cleaned to my standards some teaching needs to take place! TEACHING is a “must-have” in our child training toolbox.

Let's illustrate the importance of teaching when it comes to children. Your lovely tots many times have the right heart and really do desire to please you, but they lack the skills necessary to carry out the tasks and daily chores that are expected of them.

One bright, sunny day my precious child was going to wash my truck for me. It was a shiny, black Ford F150 that I had bought not too long before this fateful day. As I was working in the house, my son was outside working just as diligently – and I mean the boy worked. He wanted to get that truck so shiny and clean that he came into the kitchen looking for something to really scrub the dirt off. Well, he found just the item he was looking for under the sink. It was an abrasive scrubbing sponge made of metal – exactly what he needed to remove those stubborn dirt spots! As he finished up all his efforts, he stood back and said, “It is very good.”

Upon entering the house, he came to me with excitement and asked me to come outside to take a look at his work. I followed behind him and began to examine the truck. At first it looked nice, you know, the dust was gone, the windows were clean. Then he took me to where he said he, “really had to scrub it” to get the dirt to come off. As I’m sure you have imagined by now, all of the paint in this area was deeply etched with big swirling circles - think Karate Kid, “Wax-on, wax-off,” only with a metal sponge!

As he stood there beaming with pride, my questions began to flow like a river: “What happened?” “Are these scratches?” “What did you use to clean this?” “Why did you use a metal sponge!?” “Didn’t you know it would scratch the paint!?” That beaming grin began to fall a little more with each question. He soon realized that his pride and joy was my sorrow and pain!

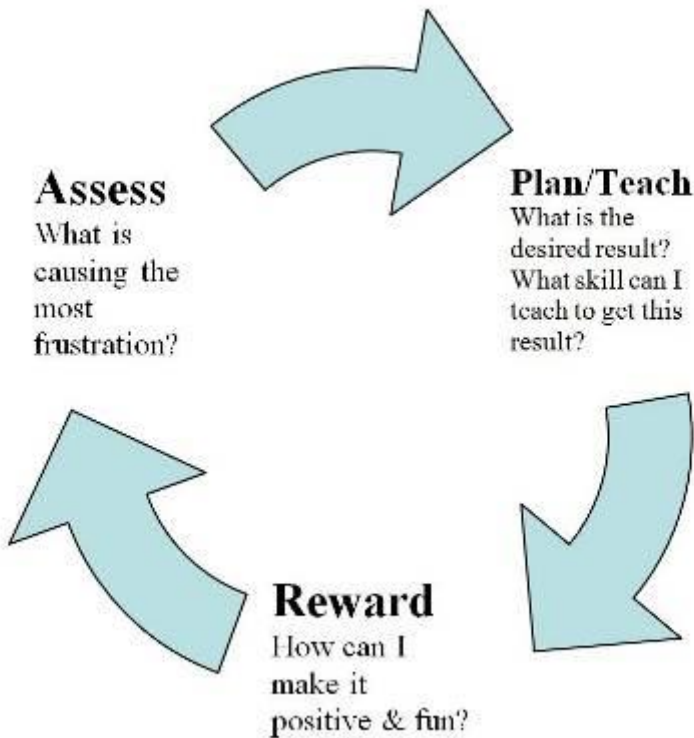
So, what’s a mom to do? When I accepted what had happened I took it as a lesson to myself: when you ask your child to do something, you should show them how to do it! This is precisely what I want to get across to you. Your children aren’t born knowing how to clean a room to your standards, or how to wash dishes properly, or how to take the trash out, or how to wash a truck! These things need to be taught or you could end up with a scratched paint job like me. At the very least there will be frustration when your child believes she did what you asked, and you completely disagree!

It’s great to have clear expectations, have rewards and consequences, and have your house rules communicated to all; but, when it comes to carrying out those expectations, your children must be taught. Like I said in my letter to you, I know so much more this time around, so I am teaching my younger son already. He is 5 years old now, and he loves to help with the laundry. He puts it in, pushes the buttons, and tries to help with the folding. He and my daughter try to help with the sweeping and the dishes – I say “try” because this is a work in progress! It takes patience to teach & train. It’s so much quicker when we say, “Just go in the living room and let me do this,” but we are missing a great opportunity to teach & train when we don’t let our kids help. It’s amazing how much they can learn even as toddlers!

Some of you are past the toddler stage and you are dealing with homework, cleaning the rooms, setting limits on video games, infighting between the

siblings, driving the family car – whatever it is, teaching must take place to ensure your expectations are met.

So now that you are thinking about this teaching tip, what are some of the areas in your home where teaching needs to take place? How can you help your children grow in these areas? Here is a simple thought process that helps me answer some of these questions:



There was a point when I was getting really frustrated with my teenage son because of the way he was choosing to spend his money. After working hard and making some pretty good cash he had very little to show for it except a nice gaming system, TV and some great memories of his social life. He wanted to move out in the near future, but had no savings to speak of, and when his car broke down there was no emergency fund to draw from. So, I assessed the situation. The desired results were wiser spending habits, setting a budget, and having a savings. Simply put, I wanted him to learn to manage

his finances. How could I teach him these skills? In this particular situation, I bought a teaching series for teens from Dave Ramsey. We spent the whole winter doing each lesson together, watching the videos and talking about what we learned. (I even learned a lot for my finances! Thanks Dave!)

I tried to make it positive and fun so I created a big picture on a poster board and there was a trail (like a chutes and ladders board) that went from my son to his future home. Each square was an increment of money, and the goal was to save a certain amount of money to be able to move out. As he reached each smaller goal he could fill in the square until he finally would have the amount needed. It was fun to make the chart! He thought it was humorous, and he tolerated my teacher-like approach. What can I say? I taught in the primary grades and visuals help me!

I am happy to see my son now, managing his own household with his wife, and applying what he learned during that time in Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University!

What a great honor and privilege we have as parents to raise up our children, to teach them, and to train them. It may not seem like it when they are little, but we only have them for a short time, and it's all of the little moments and little choices that end up making the big picture. That's what I was trying to show my son in that chart. That's what I'm trying to show you here. Every day is a day to teach our kids. Don't just get frustrated, my friend. Assess the situation. Make a plan. Teach to get results, and enjoy the fruit of your labor!

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## You Mean I Have to do This Every Day?



Not too long ago I was at a women’s conference and one of the speakers shared a humorous story that bears repeating here. Her three boys were getting to the age where they were not smelling like freshly powdered angels anymore. Yes – they had crossed the threshold where that sweet baby smell changed to sweaty boy smell, and to celebrate this momentous occasion she stuffed their Christmas stockings with deodorant. Upon discovering this unique gift, the boys curiously questioned what it was. With great glee she declared that it was deodorant and that it meant they were becoming...MEN! As she explained how it worked one of them interrupted and said, “You mean we have to put it on every day?”

Fast forward to the following morning, and she encountered a perplexing sight. This same boy was standing there in his underwear, lathering his entire

body in deodorant in hopes that he'd get enough on him that he wouldn't have to put it on EVERY day!

When it comes to training our children we sometimes groan inside with the same exhausted pattern of questioning – you mean I have to do this every day? Yes, mama, we do this daily, and we remain consistent with the things we have taught. We can get our house rules established. We can teach our children exactly how to do all that is required of them. We can have rewards and consequences, but if we only follow through occasionally on what we have said and taught then it's all for naught! (I didn't mean to make that rhyme, but that was pretty nice verbiage, huh?)

All kidding aside though, this is where the proverbial “rubber meets the road” when it comes to training our little ones. Are you going to follow through on a daily basis, or is it going to be hit and miss? Children are so very smart. They can tell in about 5 minutes what they can get away with when under the care of certain individuals. Some adults follow through on what they say, and some utter empty threats. Don't kid yourself. If you are one to offer endless empty threats don't expect a lot of results when it comes to training your kids. It's just not gonna happen.

As I'm sure you've gathered by now, the 3rd tip on training your kids is **CONSISTENCY**. Being consistent is the key to lasting success, and yet it seems to be one of the areas that is the most difficult for moms.

Not too long ago I did a small survey with moms I know, and consistency popped up as one of those things that gave them the most trouble. Here is what one mom said,

“Children will always be there to test you when you are at your weakest...when you haven't got time, when you are exhausted, when you are running around like a chicken with its head cut off, and when you are holding your breath 'til your next paycheck. They don't ever pick the appropriate time to test your superb skills of discipline!!!”

This perspective gave me great insight on why we sometimes fail at being consistent. It's because we have days that we are sharp and energetic, days that we are exhausted and impatient, days that we make ourselves follow



through, and days that we are in such a happy state of mind that we don't feel like being the "bad guy." As believers, we strive to become consistent and stable in our souls by the grace of God, yet we are all works in progress. When we allow ourselves to be moved by the various circumstances in our lives, we can also respond differently to our child's various methods of testing us. The end result is that we send mixed messages to our children, and when we send mixed messages to our children they will constantly test boundaries because sometimes they don't get away with things, BUT SOMETIMES THEY DO!

Think for a moment about a place where training happens, like in the gym. Let's say you decide that you want to build some muscle, so you get a trainer to put together a program for you, and you commit to working out five days a week. Day one comes and you are pumped. You jog. You lift weights. You do 300 sit ups! You can conquer the world! Day two comes and you're a little sore, but still motivated. You complete your workout. Day three comes and you are really feeling sore now. Your motivation wanes, but you force yourself to stick to your commitment. Day four comes and you think of some pretty good excuses for not going to the gym – yet you press on toward the goal and finish day four! Day five you reward all of your hard work with a day off. The next week you work out three days, and the next week only two. In the days and weeks that follow your workouts are spotty. You go for some good, long stretches where you are consistent, but at other times you don't go to the gym all week. Now, let me ask you, how quickly will you see your desired results with such inconsistent training? Even though the potential to build muscle is there, inconsistency sabotages all of your efforts and you end up feeling discouraged and ready to quit.

Some of you moms have been there when it comes to training your children. You go for some good stretches where you are consistent with your expectations, discipline, teaching and training, and then there are times that life gets you in a "why bother" state of mind. When your children lose their structure, you lose your mind, and you are ready to throw in the towel! Don't do it! Don't quit! It takes time and self-discipline to be consistent in your efforts, but I promise you the payoff is so worth it!

I'm going to let you in on the number one secret to parenting. Don't let it be too simple. Don't let its profound truth escape your heart and mind. The number one secret to parenting is PRAYER! Why am I bringing this up in this chapter? Because in our weakness, God is strong. When we are in those parenting moments when our patience is at its end; when we don't have the answer; when we are becoming more and more frustrated and overwhelmed – it is in those moments that we ask God for His grace to help us in our time of need. We need God's grace to be the godly women and mothers He created us to be!

If being consistent is really hard for you, ask God for His grace to help you remain consistent. God is giving you wisdom as you read this book, and I believe when you act on what you are learning, you will see results!

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## What's Love Got to do With It?



No, I'm not talking about a Tina Turner song here ladies; although, I do admire the woman, I mean who looks that good in their 70's? What I really want to talk to you about now though is the fourth tip to add to your child training toolbox, and that is CARING.

We've covered discipline: having clear expectations, rewards and consequences. We've talked about teaching and the process we go through to figure out in which areas our children need the most instruction. Then we tackled the elusive idea of consistency and how prayer can help us be strong in this area of weakness so we can see results, and enjoy the fruit of our labor!

As powerful as I believe these tips can be when it comes to training our children, if love and caring are absent when we do all of the above, we will be nothing more than legalistic task masters in their eyes.

Just the other day I was talking with a woman in leadership that I greatly respect and admire. We were discussing qualities of leadership and what makes for a good manager. She made a statement that really resonated with me. She said, “When you don’t care, the people you lead will see right through you, and when you don’t care, they don’t care.”

Nowhere was I more aware of this than in the career of teaching children. They saw right through the teachers that didn’t care, and they often times adopted the same attitude; however, they also saw clearly when a teacher genuinely did care, and they would go to the moon and back for that teacher!

So how can you ensure that you are a caring mom? Of course, all of us love our children and we care for them deeply. We know that we love them and care for them, but what I’m talking about here is how that caring is communicated to them so that *they* know we love and care for them. Mama, you’d be surprised at how often we can communicate to our children the idea that we aren’t that interested in what’s going on in their world.

I once read a heart-wrenching observation made by an older gentleman one day as he sat at a park watching a child play. “Look at me, Mama!” “Mama, Mama, look!” “Uh, huh,” the mom said dismissively as she kept her eyes locked on her cell phone. “Mama!” the child said again with more determination, and again mom kept her gaze on the little screen in her palm. The child continued to vie for his mom’s attention, but the cell phone remained victorious in the fight for mom’s eyes and ears. The gentleman, being older, saw not only the look of defeat on the child’s face, but being older and having lived a few years, he felt sorrow in knowing how the mom would later wish that she could recapture those moments that went by too quickly - precious times that were traded for a text, or to catch someone’s latest rant on Facebook, or to see a post on what someone ate for dinner last night. It was a poignant observation, and I’m glad he took the time to write about it.

Now don't start throwing stones at me yet! I'm not against Facebook, social media, or texting when it is an urgent matter, and I'm not proposing that your child has your undivided attention all day long. There is much to do in life, much to accomplish in each day, and a lot of things demand our attention as moms. I'm just asking you to look at the heart of what the man saw in the context of what we are teaching here about communicating that we care.

There have been times in my motherhood journey that I have caught myself mostly communicating with my child so that I could direct, direct, direct. "Clean your room. Did you get your chores done? Where's your homework? Did you look for a job today?" On and on the structure, and teaching and discipline would go. There were literally times God would stop me and show me that the only interaction I was having with my child was me talking at him, and not listening to him. It happens very easily in a busy life!

So, again, how do we make sure our children see (through our actions) that we care? I want to help you to examine your own heart with a few things that God showed me. The first thing He showed me is the importance of being present. Are you present, not just physically, but mentally, spiritually, and emotionally when you are spending quality time with your children? Examining your heart in this area is especially relevant in today's "screen time" culture.

One evening I was out at a restaurant with my older son and my husband. We had checked in to get a table already, so we decided to have a seat on one of the benches while we waited. Within seconds I looked to my left and my husband had out his iPhone. I looked to my right and my son had out his phone. Then I lifted my eyes and looked around the room. I kid you not, down our whole row of seating EVERY person had their phone out and their faces glued to the screen! What was going on here? We were all physically present in the same room, but nobody could rightly say that all in the room were mentally or spiritually invested in what was taking place around them! Someone could yell, "Fire!" and you'd wonder whether anyone would get up!

This brings me to the second thing that God showed me, which is the importance of being a good listener. Now, I did mention that we are all

works in progress, right? That includes me! Being a good listener is something that I have really had to work at, and I am still growing in this area by the grace of God. Learning to be present in the moment that you are in, with your mind connected, with your spirit connected, with your heart open to hear from God, and your ears ready to listen – that is a skill we all need to develop. It is a skill that, as moms, we must practice with our children so they know we truly care about what is going on in their world.

Moms, we must be intentional when it comes to being invested in and connected to our children. We must be intentional in expressing through our actions that we love them and care for them. We must take the time to ask them how their day was, who they are hanging out with, what their goals are, and what dreams we can encourage their little hearts to believe! Then, when they talk, we must be present, connected and ready to hear what they share. When you stop asking the questions; when you stop listening to the answers, you forfeit the place that your children have given you to speak into their lives. Saying you love your children isn't enough. You must demonstrate that love through action!

Be real with your kids. Be genuine and demonstrate humility. Show them what it looks like when a mistake is made, when an apology is given, when forgiveness is extended. Your children will respect you more, and “listen to you” more when you take the time to listen to them. Love is like the oil that makes the entire “training your kids” machine run smoothly. So tuck that nugget of wisdom in your treasure chest, and let's get ready to look at our final tip on training your kids!

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## **If Ye be not Flexible, Ye Shall Break!**

Are we to the last pages of the book already!? I do hope we can keep the conversation going, and encourage each other to keep growing as mommies! I have enjoyed sharing some of my life with yours, and I do have one more very important tip to teach on: FLEXIBILITY.

There has been an intentional progression to this book. It's line upon line, precept upon precept. We had to get the foundation of discipline laid down, and then we built up with teaching. We had to cement everything into place with consistency, and then make everything run like a well-oiled machine with love and caring. The law has to be in place first, but the balance that moves us out of a legalistic set of rules and into a living relationship is love. It is essential to have both aspects when it comes to training your children. Some can really major on rules and discipline, but they lack love. Others can major on "so-called" love, yet they lack discipline. Both are needed to train up your children to be confident in their faith, secure in your love, and strong in the Lord!

So where does flexibility come in? Flexibility comes in when "life happens." What is beautiful about training your kids and having structure is that it gives you the freedom to be flexible without everything falling apart. You have built a team that works together and has a vision of how the home is run, so life can briefly take your family off the beaten path, and you all know how to quickly and easily find your way back home. Being flexible becomes easy!

Here is a "for instance." Mom feels she is supposed to go to a conference, but it requires that she is gone for three days. Dad takes over. Everyone eats pizza for dinner and gets to stay up late. Socks and dirty clothes haven't been picked up or washed yet. Homework gets done, but the baby didn't get a bath. No big deal. The kids are having fun with their dad! Mom is happy as she gets refreshed and strengthened in her spirit. Was the family out of its usual routine the last few days? Yes. Did all go "as planned?" Maybe not, but in one day everyone can quickly navigate back to what they know to do, what their training has taught them!

There are a lot of unexpected events that can pop up on any given day, month or year of a family's life. As moms, we can learn to be flexible and not allow the storms of life to break our branches so to speak. We can bend with the wind and even have joy in the midst of it all!

Motherhood is nothing if not a journey. It can feel messy and chaotic at times. It can press our emotions to boundaries we didn't even know existed! It is a continual process of learning and growing, making mistakes and fixing them, investing time and energy, love and prayer. I'll tell you another little secret. It doesn't stop when your children turn 18. It doesn't stop when they move out. It doesn't stop when they get married! You will ALWAYS be mothering. You'll just transition at some point from actively teaching to quietly praying, but a mother you will always be! So, enjoy the journey! Relax and have fun. Be flexible and laugh. Life wouldn't be half as fun without the scratched up paint jobs and spaghetti faces, the mess making and the late night pizza parties! Make responsible, godly, well-trained children, but don't forget to make silly, light-hearted and lasting family memories. I believe in you, now go and do!

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## About the Author



Kelli is the founder of Grow in God Ministries, a teaching ministry established for the purpose of helping believers grow to a place of strength and maturity in their walk with the Lord. Kelli is happily married to Tom Sanders and mother to three beautiful children. Kelli has authored both non-fiction works and children's books. When she's not writing she's thoroughly enjoying her family and friends, serving her local church and growing closer to God every day!

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## **Connect with Kelli Sanders**

I'm thankful that you've taken some of your precious time to read this book! It's my prayer that it really does affect positive change and growth in your life! Let's keep in touch:

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