

JOHN A. YOUNTS

# everyday

# talk

Talking about God with Your Kids



everyday  
talk

TALKING FREELY *and* NATURALLY  
*about* GOD *with* YOUR CHILDREN

JOHN A. YOUNTS

  
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## Foreword

Words have power. successful preachers, hucksters and salesmen all know that. They have the power to transform the thoughts and lives of people—sometimes in radical and even dramatic ways. Hitler brought about World War II through haranguing the German people. And during the campaign for the 2004 election, which as I write is beginning at a feverish pace, the candidates are relying heavily upon speech. Today—more than at any other time in history—we live in a sea of speech.

Recognizing these facts, it is evident that the speech that we use in our families, before our children is an important matter. It is with that matter that Jay Younts deals in this book in depth. He is concerned not only with that which we consciously say to them, but also with that which they imbibe from our casual—and often thoughtless—conversation.

The book is an awakening call to those who have never given serious thought to the effect of their speech upon their children. But it doesn't only send a clarion call, it also provides direction for change. It shows the reader how to bring about good things through speech and guides him in dealing with poor habits of speech.

The book has been long in coming, and now that it has arrived the Christian community has a guide to an issue of utmost importance. Many families will be blessed by using it to help them in their desire to have loving, obedient children who serve the Lord.

— JAY ADAMS

# Stupid Rain

What is the most powerful human influence in your child's life?

Your "quality time" with your child?

Church and Sunday School?

Friends?

Parental discipline?

These may all be good things, but there is another influence more powerful than all of them. The most powerful personal influence in your child's life is **everyday talk**.

Everyday talk is talk that happens in the unplanned moments. It happens in casual, unguarded moments. It happens when you are distracted or irritated and would rather not be talking at all. It happens when you receive unexpected news, good or bad. You are always talking or thinking about things—at home or on the way to the mall, when you are driving to work or school, when you are falling asleep (or lying awake), or when you are dragging yourself out of bed in the morning. This is everyday talk.

## **The power of everyday talk**

Talk is a given. Everyone talks. It's a basic function of life. In

order to teach your kids you must talk to them. But there are all sorts of talk. For example, formal discussion (usually a monolog, in reality) occurs when you sit your children down and explain some matter that you think is really important. Then there is talk that gives directions, such as, “Take out the garbage,” or “Be quiet,” or “Come here.” However, Deuteronomy 6 speaks about a specific type of talk that God wants you to have with your children—everyday talk.

Why do I say everyday talk is so powerful? Because the Bible teaches so.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

The New Living Translation freely translates the same passage this way, “And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again” (NLT).

The kind of talk that God requires here is talk that happens in the normal routine of life, every day. God wants you to talk about His world. God wants you to talk about what He does and how people respond to Him. He wants you to do this when you are at home, when you are out and about, when you relax. He wants you to talk about Him with love and awe every day. He wants you to talk freely and naturally to your children about His commands and how to obey them day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. This is what Deuteronomy 6:7 means. God wants your everyday talk to be about Him.

Does this idea seem strange or unnatural? Are you thinking, “What good will this do?” God’s ways are not our ways.

Remember the historical setting of Deuteronomy. Moses was giving his final instructions to Israel before they were to enter into Canaan. Moses could not go with them. After leading them for forty years, he had to say goodbye and leave them to enter the Promised Land without him. He was giving Israel the tools and weapons they would need to overcome the Canaanites.

What weapon would enable them to conquer a land filled with ferocious warriors? It wasn't what you might expect. He told them to talk to their kids about God every day. In Deuteronomy 6:12, Moses told the Israelites not to forget about God when they entered the land. The way for the Israelites not to forget was *to talk to their children about God all the time*—when they got up or when they went to sleep, wherever they were. Talking about God and what He was doing for His people was to be a vital weapon against their enemies. It was the key to their success.

### **The weapon of everyday talk**

Everyday talk is still key to successful parenting. But everyday talk is not automatically an effective weapon. At least two things have to happen. First, God says that *these commands of His are to be in your heart*, living there in a rich, full way. Think about that for a moment. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Moses says that these commands of God are to be so valuable to you that your heart cannot contain them. His commands are to dominate your thinking and overflow from your heart into the lives of your kids as you walk along life's road.

What kinds of thoughts live long enough in your heart to take up residence there? Or, said in a slightly different way, what things are so important to you that you can't stop thinking about them? Dads, how many times do you replay that six-iron that gave you a winning birdie? What about when your team won

the big game in the last seconds? Is there a new car or new DVD player that is constantly on your mind? Are you consumed by getting your new fall wardrobe? Or, negatively, is your heart dominated by thoughts of how others have wrongly treated you? Are your thoughts dominated by how unfair life is? You get the point—what topics are alive inside your heart? What do your friends, family and coworkers hear about, whether they want to or not?

God wants his commands in that place of special privilege. Do you love God? Are you blown away by His Word? Is the awesomeness of God something that your mind keeps turning to? Does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for your sin dominate the thoughts of your heart? This is the picture of Deuteronomy 6 when it says, “These commands are to be upon your hearts.” What thoughts live in your heart? You know and God knows. Your children know.

**Second, impress them on your children.** God wants you to repeat His Words over and over. Wherever you are with your children, they should hear about the constant interaction you are having with God and His Word. This is how God’s word will make an impression on your children.

Lasting impressions cannot be made only by prayers at mealtime that thank God for food and missionaries and then nothing else is said about God until the next meal. Now, let me explain. This does not mean that you must quote the Bible all day, or spout systematic theology in every conversation. It does mean that as you grasp a profound truth of God’s Word you will find ways to explain it to your children. Your knowledge and wisdom will become part of their lives, too.

For example, suppose you are reading in the Gospels and you come to passages where Jesus shows His power over the winds and the waves (Matthew 8:26–27). As you think about this



you realize that God is so powerful that He controls the weather. All weather, everywhere. So when you see a cloud in the sky or experience a sudden, unexpected thunderstorm (even if it messes up your golf game), or read about a hurricane, you are amazed that Jesus is, indeed, Lord over the weather. You are blown away (pun intended) by the truth of Scripture. Talking about the weather isn't just small talk. Weather events are opportunities to talk to your children about God in the way that Deuteronomy 6 envisions. This insight isn't obscure or hard to understand—it's everyday talk!

God wants you to look at the world His way. You can learn to be thankful for a rainout. You can even learn to be intrigued at what God is doing. How many other events did He change by that thunderstorm? You are observing God at work! God wants you to use the ordinary events of life to teach your children to know and trust God and His Son.

Here is a practical example of this point.

Let's say you planned a special day. You scheduled this day weeks ahead. Today is the day. You were going to finish a landscaping project in the morning and then meet the guys for a round of golf at the country club. You had arranged to take the day off to get it all done. The forecast was for clear skies. But the growing puddles of rainwater spreading across the ground say the forecast was wrong. Your mood matches the dark clouds. You turn away from the window and mutter a comment about the stupid (or worse) rain.

"What, Daddy?"

*Why couldn't it rain tomorrow?*

"Daddy?"

"Uh, what did you say, son?"

"What's stupid?"

"Oh, nothing. Why don't you go clean your room? Daddy's

busy now.”

These unguarded words from your mouth present a powerful view of God to your children. Your seemingly casual words forcefully instruct your children about God—for good or for bad. How would Satan want you to talk to your kids about something as basic as the weather? Your big golf date (or boating day, or baseball game, or garden show, etc.) gets rained out. You find yourself angry and upset. You say something like, “Why couldn’t it have waited until tomorrow? I’ve been weeks setting this up. Stupid rain! I can’t believe what bad luck this is!”

These comments communicate to your kids just how well you think Jesus Christ, the Lord of the wind and the waves, is running His world. You are complaining against His decision to bring rain when you didn’t want Him to. Whom are you pleasing? Whom do you think is cheering you on, saying, “Go for it, keep it up, couldn’t have said it better myself, atta boy!” (Hint: it’s not the Holy Spirit.)

Think about it. Do you really want to present God’s actions in His world with Satan’s spin? You only have so many words, so many minutes to show God’s truth to your kids. God wants you to make them all count. Your children can hear Satan’s spin from the world all the time. They need to hear God’s truth spoken with love and awe by parents who are following God’s direction in Deuteronomy 6.

*The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* documents that teenagers spend only thirty-five minutes a week talking with their fathers.<sup>1</sup> That’s five minutes each day. What do your children hear from you about God in the few minutes that you have each day to speak to them?

This concept, of course, applies to areas of life other than just the weather. The principle of Deuteronomy 6 is that your everyday comments are the ones that teach your children most

profoundly about your view of God. Your interaction with God in everyday, ordinary, non-church life is the most powerful tool of influence that you have with your children. It communicates what you *really* believe. You are being either a good example of someone wholeheartedly committed to God or a bad example, depending upon how you react to everyday life. Do you see how important everyday talk is?

**To make a good impression, everyday talk must be spoken with a pleasant spirit**, so that children will regard your direction the same way they would a gift of fine jewelry.

You might ask, “Where did this thought come from?” Listen to Proverbs 1:8–9:

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction  
And do not forsake your mother’s teaching.  
They will be a garland to grace your head  
And a chain to adorn your neck.

Your instruction of God’s Word should be given as joyfully and carefully as if you were presenting your kids with the finest jewelry to wear. Your teaching, if heeded, will make them attractive, just as fine jewelry would. Don’t just throw God’s Word at them. Present it with love and care.

If you bought your daughter a gold necklace for her birthday, how would you give it to her? Would you ball it up and toss it to her on her way out the door? Of course not! Would you not rather place the necklace in a jewelry box, wrap it beautifully, pick a special moment, and then give it to her? If you just balled up the necklace and threw it at her, she would probably think the necklace was on the bargain table at the dollar store. Too often, we hurl admonitions at our kids in the heat of battle, propelled by frustration and anger. Proverbs 1 encourages you to present

God's truth as the precious gift that it is. How you present it is likely to have a great influence on how children receive it. The loving presentation of God's truth is a way that you can impress God's commands on your children.

The Gospels provide the most profound illustrations of how to obey the command of Deuteronomy 6 with the power of everyday talk. Consider the example of Jesus Christ, whose everyday talk was exactly what God the Father wanted it to be—perfectly righteous and holy. In living a perfect life, He showed how to use everyday talk

**Jesus used everyday talk as his primary method of teaching.** In his training of the disciples, Jesus did what God instructed the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy 6. He lived Deuteronomy 6:1.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Jesus' disciples were different from other religious leaders. Mark 3:14 says that Jesus selected his disciples so that they might be with Him. He intentionally chose a method of teaching that involved around-the-clock discipling. They were with Him 24/7. Acts 4:13 says that it was *obvious* that the disciples had been with Jesus. There is a clear cause and effect here. He lived with them, traveled with them, ate with them, worked with them, and talked with them. In the end, they were like Him. Not perfectly, of course, but *obviously*.

How did that happen? We have the account in the Gospels. Jesus talked with His disciples about God. He used every event (and non-event) to talk to them. He used a fig tree, a sparrow, a kernel of wheat, foxes, wine, camels, gates, highways, pearls, mustard seeds, the hair on your head, money, the weather and all sorts of other things to talk to His disciples about God. This is the kind of talk Deuteronomy describes. Jesus used everyday talk to train the apostles. In the same way, God wants you to talk to your children about Him all the time. No matter what comes up during your hectic day, He wants you to talk about

Him—every day.

Does this kind of talk seem unnatural to you? We lead busy lives, and all too often lose sight of priorities. We don't take time to meditate. Talking about God isn't hard or complicated, but it does require some time and preparation. If you don't spend time *thinking* about God, you won't have much to *say* about God.

God is everywhere, all the time. He controls everything. If you are aware of His power and presence, if you take even a little time to meditate on Him, your everyday talk will begin to be about God.

*Everyday talk happens*; the question is, what kind do your kids get most? Following the principles just described will help you to increase your conversation time with your kids. Your teenage children need more than thirty-five minutes a week. Practicing everyday talk about God will help give you the extra time they need.

But what about the other influences on your children? You aren't the only one talking to them. Deuteronomy 6 also teaches you that children, as well as adults, are designed to be influenced by others. Jesus was with His disciples so that He could influence them. Someone will always be influencing your kids. Someone will always be using the powerful tool of everyday talk to encourage your kids either away from God or toward God. The apostle Paul knew this well when he warned the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (I Corinthians 15:33 NASB).

You see, if you aren't talking to your kids, someone else is. The statistics indicate that teenagers are spending three hours a day watching TV. Preschoolers are watching as much as four hours per day. If teenagers are listening to three hours of TV every day and averaging five minutes a day talking with their dads, who is winning the influence battle? If your preschooler

watches four hours per day, how many hours is he hearing from you about how God runs His world? It doesn't take X-rated violence, sex and language to have an ungodly influence. Even the "good" programs for children can be "bad company" if they offer an exciting, satisfying world that ignores (or denies) the sovereign God of the Bible. Do you really want your children to get the impression that it's okay to ignore God most of the time?

Paul teaches that bad company, which brings the wrong sort of everyday talk, will attack and weaken good teaching and moral character. Notice two more translations of this text:

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" NIV

"Don't be misled, 'Bad companions corrupt good habits.'"  
CCNT

All these translations give insight into the original Greek. Bad influence (that is, bad company or companions) will act to corrupt or ruin good habits of moral character. *The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* says that this corruption is active.<sup>3</sup> In other words, bad companions will actively attack good moral character and even overcome it if not countered. Wrong everyday talk is corrosive. It will keep on corrupting until it is stopped, cleaned up and replaced. This is something you must be concerned about. What sort of everyday talk do your children hear?

TV, videos, movies, conversations with others, listening to music—these are all sources of everyday talk. They are all influences that impact your kids along life's road. If you spend five minutes saying what is right and the influences from bad

company total three hours or more, what do you think is going to have the biggest impact on your children? Your good words as a parent can be drowned out by the sheer volume of corrupting bad influences. If you don't agree, go back and read the verse again: **“Bad companions corrupt good habits.”**

Everyday talk is important. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that some influences are neutral—neither good nor bad. Anything that doesn't influence your child **for God** is an influence **away from God**. Jesus taught that whoever was not with Him was against Him.

### **How to measure your children's everyday talk**

Here is one way for you to analyze the forces influencing your child's life. Write down how your child spends his day. List how many hours he goes to school, watches TV, videos, movies, computer games, plays with friends, listens to music, sits by himself, rides the bus, etc. Evaluate whether each of the above is influencing him for good or bad. Remember that no influence is neutral. Add up the hours of good influence, and add up the hours of bad influence. Compare these totals. Add in how much time you spend influencing him for good. This will give you a picture of how much your child is being corrupted with bad company. Parent, what type of everyday talk is your child hearing most?

Do you need to begin reclaiming the influence your child receives? This is why Paul says so bluntly, “Don't be misled, [don't be fooled] bad company corrupts good character.”

Now you know why everyday talk is important. You know how powerful everyday talk is. You can, in the long run, provoke your children to anger by not providing the everyday talk that God describes in Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6. And you

realize now that this everyday talk should be given as the most precious of gifts, because it is! Everyday talk will influence your kids either for Satan and his ways or for God and His ways. As you read this book, pray that God will use it so effectively that the everyday talk your children hear will lead them to Christ. Pray that your responses, even to something as mundane as unexpected rain, will lead to the praise of God.

### Application Questions

1. What do you think your everyday talk reveals about your priorities and your worldview?
2. Make a list of twenty-five ordinary events or things that you could use for everyday talk about God.
3. When do you have everyday talk with your children?
4. What opportunities do you have to increase or improve your everyday talk?

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> William J. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994) 102-103

<sup>2</sup> Jesus' "everyday talk" was not unplanned or unthinking, of course, as ours often is.

<sup>3</sup> Fritz Reinecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1980), p. 443.



# Your Children and the Gospel

## **Your child began life as an enemy of God.**

He (or she) was an unregenerate, sinful, rebellious enemy of God.

Do you believe this?

If you do, you can have great hope and peace about your child and his relationship to God. If you don't believe this, then you will have no reason to tell your child what he needs to know to become God's friend.

Paul teaches in Romans that all have sinned and come short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and that there isn't anybody who is righteous, not a single one (Romans 3:10). This is also what David says in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

Paul sums this doctrine up in Ephesians 2:1–3:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of

the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (NASB).

The Bible is clear: your child, as well as you, was born an enemy of God and fully deserving of His wrath. This is not a popular thought today. More often, people see children as innocent victims. If they do something wrong, it is probably just because they haven't learned better yet (after all, they're just children), or they have had negative role models.

The Bible's negative statements about human nature may seem harsh and offensive, but they are true. In this case, the hard truth is the kindest message. The Bible explains the problem accurately, and then it also gives you the right answer to that problem. The answer of hope is that those who are born the enemies of God can know peace with God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before I discuss how to present the gospel to young children, let me mention another mistaken view of children. Sometimes parents take seriously the biblical doctrine of sin, but then lose their balance in the other direction. They know their children are born with wicked, sinful hearts, and so they are pessimistic about their young children's ability to understand the gospel. They tend to be doubtful about the sincerity of a young child's prayer or profession of faith. They take a "wait and see" attitude, carefully scrutinizing the child's behavior to judge whether he produces consistent spiritual fruit. Sometimes parents require more spiritual fruit from professing children than they do from professing adults. But the gospel message, properly understood, deals with both of these wrong views: insisting that children are

basically good, and imposing a false standard of performance on children.

### **What is the Gospel?**

I Corinthians 15:3–4 says it consists of three parts: “. . . for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (NASB).

The first element is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that man is hopelessly guilty before God from the moment of birth. God is a holy God who demands perfection. Christ is the only One who can satisfy God’s requirements for a perfect life. Therefore, Christian, when Christ died for your sins, God was satisfied.

The second element is that by dying Christ actually paid the full penalty for our sins. Christ, the man, died so that you and all men who trust in Him could live.

The third element is that Christ conquered death when He was raised from the dead as God promised. This gospel message is found throughout the whole Bible beginning with Genesis 3:15.

This is the good news. It is not complicated. It is centered on the work of Christ, not man. Only Christ can satisfy God’s demand for justice and perfection. God only requires that you and your children believe this by faith in order to know Him. He even provides this faith as a gift because we cannot produce faith in ourselves (Ephesians 2:1–8).

### THE GOSPEL

- Jesus died for our sins as the Scriptures teach.
- The wrath of God that we deserved was turned fully and awfully upon Jesus. Therefore He died and was buried.
- Jesus rose from the dead, defeating the power of sin and Satan, and gives new life to His own.

This is the gospel. This is what the Bible teaches about the gospel. This message of good news brings life and light to a dark world. This same message will bring life and light to your child.

### What do your children think the gospel is?

Do your children believe the gospel of Christ is about His performance on the cross? Or do your kids think that the gospel means God will only be pleased if they obey him and obey you? Do your kids think that the gospel means that they must be good so God will love them? Do your kids think that they must be good for *you* to like them, for *you* to love them? Your everyday talk teaches your functional understanding of the gospel to your children. Does your everyday talk center upon grace or performance?

Listen to your children talk about their understanding of the gospel. They do, you know. You may be thinking that children seldom, if ever, sit around and talk about the gospel. Actually, they do all the time. Listen to your children talk. Listen to what makes them happy or sad. Listen to what they say about how you love them. Listen, listen, listen.

*“Mommy, I’m sorry I make you angry.”*

*“Daddy, I won’t do it again.”*

*“Why is everybody mad at me?”*

*“Do you think God is mad at me?”*

*“He hurt me, so I hit him back.”*

*“I am sorry that I am not good enough to make you happy.”*

*“I’ll be good, I promise. Please don’t be mad at me.”*

*“I try and try and try but I just can’t do what you want me to.”*

*“I guess I am just not good enough.”*

*“Mommy, I just can’t do it. I try but I just can’t.”*

Have you ever heard words like these from your children? These statements indicate what your children think about the gospel. These kinds of statements show that performance (not grace) forms the basis of how your children are attempting to relate to you and to God.

Are you able to delight in your children simply because God gave them to you and you love them? Or must your children behave in a way that pleases you before you can delight in them?

The purpose of this book is to help you, parent, to reflect the power of gospel grace in your everyday talk. As this powerful grace begins to control your everyday talk, you will lead your children to a rich and growing understanding of the gospel. When your children complain that they can’t do what God wants, you will seize the opportunity to respond with the powerful gospel of grace. This is your opportunity to say, “Sweetheart, I know that you can’t obey by yourself. This is why Jesus died. He did what you cannot do. Now He can help you to trust Him. Let’s ask Jesus to forgive you and help you love Him by the power of His gospel.”

**Teach your children to pray and ask for God’s forgiveness and God’s strength to obey Him.**

Teach your children to pray and ask God to help them love Him. Teach your children that God delights in their prayers when they repent and ask for His help. Jesus taught His disciples how to pray and what to pray for. God also instructs you to teach your children how to pray and what to pray for. This is Paul's point in Ephesians 6:4 when he directs fathers to raise their children in "the fear and admonition of the Lord."

Here is an example of how you can lead your children to the power of the gospel. For the purpose of this discussion we will look only at Sarah's response, although Brandon also needs attention.

You hear a loud cry coming from the children's room. You walk into the room and discover that Sarah, your four-year-old daughter, has just hit Brandon, your three-year-old son, because he wouldn't give her the toy she wanted. You take Sarah into your room and administer the appropriate discipline. Sarah sadly tells you she knows that she should not have hit Brandon, but she just was so angry with him that she did it anyway. She tells you that she just can't do it, she can't obey and be good.

### **What do you say as a parent?**

**Response # 1** —*Mom replies with an even but stern voice*, "Well, Sarah, that is what discipline is for. Eventually, you will learn that it is wrong to hit when you're angry. If Mommy disciplines you enough times you will get the message. Please don't hit Brandon any more. We don't solve problems by hitting."

**Response # 2** —*Mom replies with a tone of exasperation*. "I know Sarah, you always say that. But, you just have to learn to be good. How many times must mommy spank you? You shouldn't do something you know is wrong. Maybe someday you will change."

**Response # 3** —*Mom replies in anger*, “Sarah, if you wanted to be good and stop hitting Brandon, you would. Mommy is really losing patience with you. Your father and I are going to have a long talk when he gets home. This has got to stop. This is the fourth time this week.”

**Response # 4** —*Mom responds in dejected frustration*, “Sarah, I don’t know what to do with you. Mommy has tried and tried to teach you what is right. I just don’t know what to do. I can’t seem to make you change. I just don’t know what to do.”

All of these responses are performance-based. They result in broken relationships, not healthy ones. Mom is treating Sarah as if she could solve her problem with sin by responding in her own strength, simply by doing what Mommy says. “Just do it,” she says, in effect. The problem is that Sarah, like everyone else on planet Earth, can’t do good in her own strength. All of these first four responses might produce a fine Pharisee, but they will not lead to new life in Christ for your child.

Contrast the first four responses with this next one.

**Response # 5** —*Mom replies with warmth and understanding*, “Sarah, I know you can’t obey by yourself. I know that. But that is why Jesus died on the cross, because we can’t do it ourselves. Remember the Bible says that Jesus died so that we would have new life. You can’t obey in your own strength, but you can obey in Jesus’ strength. Let’s pray right now and ask Jesus to help.”

“Dear God, please help me to obey you and love you. I just can’t do it by myself. Please forgive me for hitting Brandon. Please help me to trust you. I know that you are the only one who can help me be different and turn my heart to you. Please help me to obey Mommy and to obey you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

This simple little prayer addresses the issues at hand. Sarah

needs Jesus to help her to obey. Sarah acknowledges that she must change. She turns to Christ for help.

At this point I can imagine someone thinking, “What four-year-old child is going to come up with that prayer? Are you kidding me?!?”

Your four-year-old can “come up with this prayer” the same way the disciples came up with the Lord’s Prayer. You teach it to her, just as Jesus taught the Lord’s Prayer to the disciples. Luke 11 records that Jesus taught His disciples His prayer word for word. This is how you start with your children. Help them pray by teaching them word for word what to say to God. Teach your children to pray phrase by phrase, by repeating each phrase after you say it. Jesus didn’t wait for His disciples to become spiritual enough to know what to pray and how to pray. He told them what to say and how to pray, word for word. Spirituality doesn’t come by waiting for it to appear. Spirituality comes by teaching what the Holy Spirit has written at the time it is needed. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He taught them word for word—in the middle of their everyday lives. Jesus taught his disciples everyday prayer.

As a parent you must exercise patience as you pray this prayer and others like it over and over again with your children. By doing this you are teaching your children that you can’t be a good parent in your own strength either. As your children repeat this prayer, you also pray that God would honor His word and hear the plea of this child who is in deep need of God’s love and mercy and power to obey. After they learn to follow the pattern of prayer you provide, they will eventually begin to formulate their own prayers, following that example. This is the power of the gospel. It is the greatest gift that you can give to your child.



## **Application Questions**

1. How can you use your child's disobedience to lead him to (or remind him of) the gospel?
2. How can you lead your child to obedience by explaining the gospel?
3. How would you explain the importance of prayer in obedience?
4. What is the difference between punishment and discipline?