

FLOURISHING OR FAILING?

HELPS AND HINDRANCES
IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING



Christian
Concern



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*“May the Lord cause you to flourish,
both you and your children”*

PSALM 115:14 (NIV)

FLOURISHING?

When you are planning a garden, you must imagine what you want it to become. You consider the soil, you plant, you water, then feed, tend the young plants, prune, protect, look at the prevailing environmental conditions, adjust accordingly, and wait, and watch. Those who have had the vision and then the wisdom to patiently engage with this process are most likely to see their garden flourish. Our churches, our family, and our children are no different.

There is human joy in seeing a flourishing flower or fruitful plant, and this mirrors God's great joy and celebration of Eden. It is good! We are made in the image of God, and the joy of seeing a flourishing garden is a reflection of His joy, part of the *imago dei* being expressed in us! There can also be great sadness and disappointment in seeing potential unfulfilled.

What is true for a garden, is even more so for our children, isn't it? God has made each one of us with a body and a spirit.² Both must be healthy for us to flourish. And just as parents and community can help or hinder the *physical* development of our children (by not giving them nourishing food, or encouraging exercise), the same is also true of their *spiritual* development. There is a God-given authority handed to parents and churches to actively seek and invest in the flourishing of our children. There is a garden set before us. Do we see it? Do you see it?

It is sobering to recognise that there are also clear words from the Lord regarding choices which could cause children to 'stumble', which could be made by those responsible for them.

“And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!”

MATTHEW 18:5-7A (NIV)

Children need our help to be guided towards the Lord. However, alongside the assumption of a fallen, rebellious nature in our children (who hasn't found they learn to say 'No' to you from a fairly early age!) there is fascinating research which has shown that children have an in-built propensity to believe in God.³ Apparently, you have to train them to be atheists! The Bible is clear we all have what we need, even from looking at creation itself, to be able to believe in the existence of God.⁴ Our children are the vulnerable little ones who believe in Him, and are referred to by Jesus himself above.⁵ For their spiritual flourishing, we can provide the food, the nurture, the environments, the protection they need, but it is also possible for us to abdicate, forget, or be ignorant of what can hinder their spiritual development. *'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them.'*⁶

'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them'

MATTHEW 19:14 (NIV)

Is it possible to hinder them in ways that affect even their eternal destiny and flourishing? A salutary question to ask indeed, but it must be asked. In answering, we must have a full understanding of the grace of God, our understandable imperfections as parents, and the individual responsibility that our children have, as they mature, to make their own free choices. A perhaps more uplifting question to ask is, what can we do to help them flourish spiritually? With young people now spending 30 hours per week imbibing data and discipleship from devices, and 30 hours per week being trained by teachers, surely an hour a week of children's or youth activities each Sunday will not be enough to ensure parents and church are diligently tending the development of those in their garden. What will the true master of the garden find when he returns?⁷

For their spiritual flourishing, we can provide the food, the nurture, the environments, the protection they need, but it is also possible for us to abdicate, forget, or be ignorant of what can hinder their spiritual development.

We will consider six hindrances, and six helps as we look at this essential question for the sake of our children's flourishing.

"May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children" (PSALM 115:14 NIV)



HINDRANCES

“Let **us** throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let **us** run with perseverance the race marked out for **us**” HEBREWS 12:1 (NIV)

This table provides a way to consider six key areas from both the positive and negative viewpoint.

HINDRANCES	HELPS
PRESSED PARENTS	PEACEFUL PARENTS
TOXIC TEACHING	EFFECTIVE EDUCATION
DISTRACTING DEVICES	MONITORED MOBILES
CONSUMERIST CULTURE	CULTURAL COMMENTARY
CASUAL CONGREGATIONS	CHURCHES FOR CHILDREN
ENEMY ENTICEMENTS	GOD'S GRACE

HINDRANCE 1: PRESSED PARENTS

Note the 'us' in Hebrews 12:1 above! Together as church and community we can support each other, and especially our children, in 'the race'. If you are a parent, God has planned your race to be run with your children, God's children, joining you. You are supposed to *spend time* with your children. You. This is part of your race.

The lack of depth in the relationship with God that we have as parents easily becomes evident to our children, and leads to an inauthenticity of our eager encouragements to them to follow the Lord.

Too often the 21st century culture of hurry has been embraced by Christian parents,⁸ and especially church leaders. This 'hurry culture' primarily shapes the rushed, and therefore surface level, relationships we have with God, with each other and with our children.

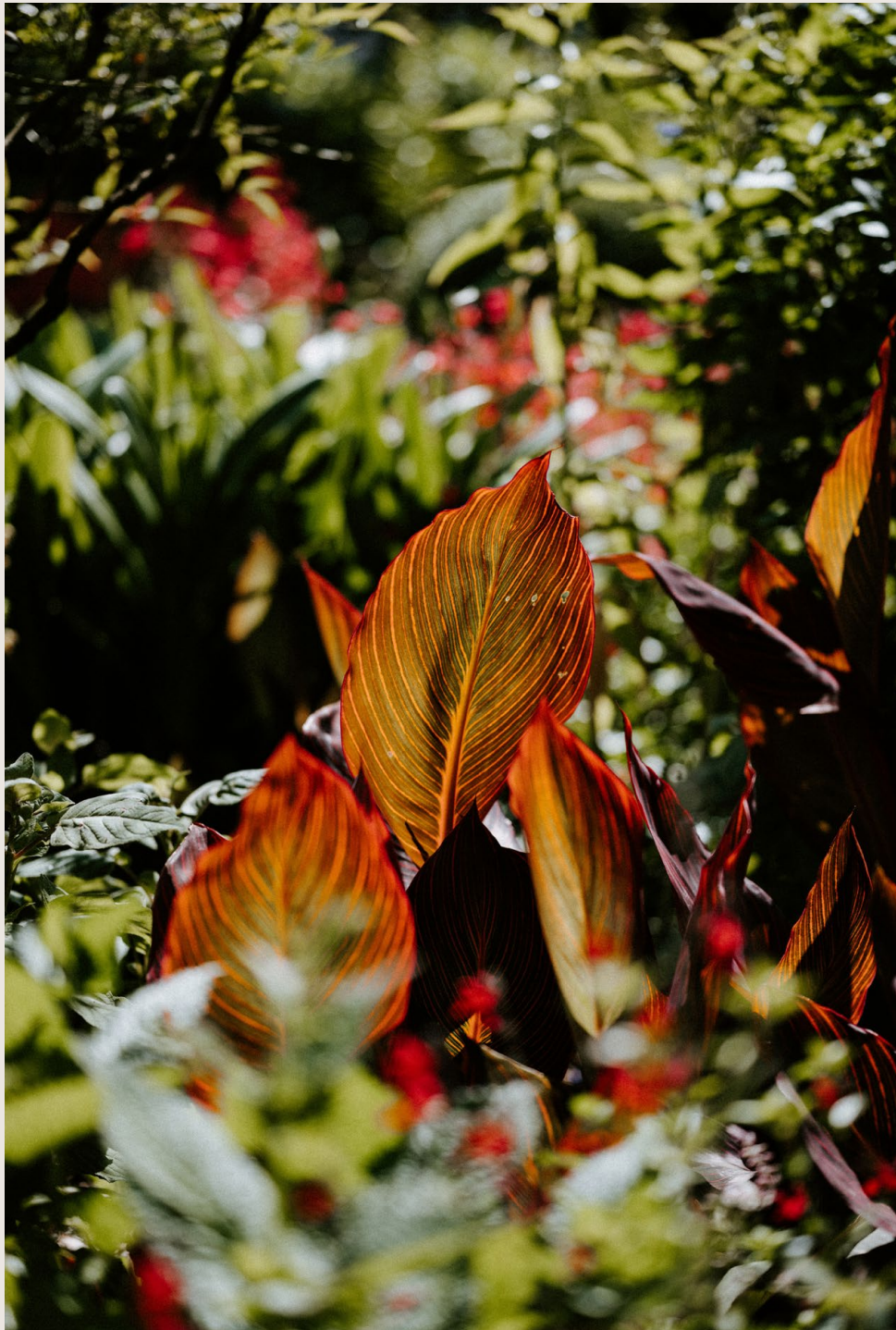
The lack of depth in the relationship with God that we have as parents easily becomes evident to our children, and leads to an inauthenticity of our eager encouragements to them to follow the Lord. In reality, any encouragement, when combined with such a lack of modelling, is more likely to lead to an *inoculation* to the gospel-founded life based in a daily life-giving relationship with God. The research on Generation Z demonstrates this authenticity is essential for our children to see Christianity as relevant and true.⁹

Time appointed for motherhood and fatherhood has been overwhelmed by society's value of identity through work and career development. 'So, tell me, what do you *do*?'. Hours assigned for parenthood have been taken over by our cultures' undervaluing and despising of a mother's and especially a father's role. The father - the perpetual butt of the joke. The mother - the undervalued heartbeat of the home. Christian fathers and mothers, where are you? Don't accept this! Your children need you.

As parents we can sometimes end up feeling we only have time to undo the negative results of influences around our children. Weeding, but never feeding. The hours on devices, in social media groups, or in school, end up becoming the main influencers on their character formation.

But take heart there are choices we can make to throw off this hindrance of being a 'Pressed Parent', if we can be decisive enough to take them. Peace-filled parenting is possible!

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HINDRANCE 2: TOXIC TEACHING

Not all teachers are 'toxic' of course! In my experience most do everything they can to be fantastic role-models and teachers. However, the *teachings* in a school atmosphere and some teachers' attitudes can have a significant and potentially detrimental effect on a child's spiritual development. Something is being breathed into their spirit, day by day. If parents have less time to shape the lives and loves of their children, teachers become even more influential. All children automatically assume that those whom the parent hands them over to must be trustworthy, and especially when the parents of their friends seem to be doing so as well. 'You have been given this authority by my parents so you must be okay!' Parents must understand that children have an inbuilt and God-given nature to trust, and this means they are vulnerable. Especially at the younger ages.

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The relationship of a child with their teacher has always been a powerful dynamic. Children assume the attitudes and beliefs of those around them. It is a law of nurture. As far as spiritual and character formation is concerned, cynicism of godly values can quickly be caught. Drip-fed doubt can become a significant hindrance to a growing faith in young minds. This doubt is then a strong influencer regarding moral development and religious questioning as they enter the teenage years. 'Did God really say?'¹⁰

Schools, and teachers, are shaped by needing to demonstrate how they are passing on the latest British value to be emphasised, or what the latest campaign group is advocating.¹¹ The myth that it is possible for individual teachers and even education itself to be totally 'neutral' is owned by too many of us. Much of what may be explicitly *taught* in curricula as well as implicitly *caught* from attitudes, can be toxic to the wisdom, joy, and faith in God which could be flourishing in our children. The controversial nature of some recommended Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) books or materials are an example of the subtle but potentially toxic teaching, which is sexualising our children.¹²

Being surrounded in an educational setting by children, and teachers, who have a non-Christian worldview can at least undermine, and potentially destroy the foundations of faith, which could otherwise be laid.

They can be undermined through the repetition of other worldview mantras and mindsets, and their subtle but toxic denial of God. The physical environment, the place of education is also hugely important. The signs and displays, that which is written upon 'the doorposts', makes a difference to what is taken into the heart of a child or young person, as Deuteronomy makes clear.¹³ But effective Christian education is possible!

'These commandments that I give you today are to be on 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.'

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (NIV)

HINDRANCE 3: DISTRACTING DEVICES

Do you even need persuading that this is an issue? YouTube, Netflix, TikTok, films, media, gaming, Facebook, streaming, constantly demanding advertising, all incessantly being reached for by us and our children; a constant, instant, servant, living in our pockets. Servant or Master? Entertain me! Titillate me! Communicate with me! 'Like' me! Respond to me!!! The content is *always* educational to some degree or other. Think about it; those communications shape their understanding of relationships, and the content shapes their understanding of the world. And, for so many children, the parent's present becomes the primary source of their pollution.

For example, the damaging hindrance of widely distributed pornographic content cannot be underestimated.¹⁴

57%
OF 16-25 YEAR-OLDS
BELIEVE SOCIAL
MEDIA CREATES AN
"OVERWHELMING
PRESSURE" TO
SUCCEED

46%
OF 16-25 YEAR-OLDS
FEEL "INADEQUATE"
WHEN COMPARING
THEIR LIVES TO THEIR
FRIENDS ON SOCIAL
MEDIA

1 IN 6
EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS
HAVE BEEN INVOLVED
IN SEXTING

30%
OF YOUNG PEOPLE
USE SMARTPHONES IN
A DYSFUNCTIONAL WAY

How sad that the playful, unconcerned, freedom of childhood relationships is being stolen. Invaluable innocence being swiped, as they swipe.

The pressure from social media, can become totally distracting from real relationships. In February 2019, The Prince's Trust eBay Youth Index found that 57 per cent of 16-25 year-olds believed social media creates an "overwhelming pressure" to succeed, while 46 per cent said that comparing their lives to their friends on social media made them feel "inadequate".¹⁵ Again in 2019, research showed that 1 in 6 eight-year olds had been involved in sexting.¹⁶ King's College has published research that shows that up to 30% of young people use smartphones in a dysfunctional way and show signs of depression, anxiety, poor sleep and stress as a result.¹⁷ Let us all be completely clear on this matter, this is not an environment designed for the flourishing of our children.

Outdoor collaborative and creative play, understood to be so essential for the development of children and young mammals of all kinds, can be totally shelved, as our children are given access to so much immediate self-stimulation through screens. Research clearly shows this leads to unhealthy social, physical and spiritual development.¹⁸ But it is possible to monitor and manage this well.

HINDRANCE 4: CONSUMERIST CULTURE

Globalising western society is founded on consumerism and an identity found in self. *'I shop therefore I am'*. A selfhood based in what I can *have* to be happy, fuelled and encouraged by the needs of the economy to relentlessly grow, at all costs. The cost, even, of sanity. The cost, certainly, of the environment. Even at the cost of our children's flourishing. Christmas has become a mammoth religious celebration, of all that Mammon has to offer our children.

Parents' highest goal has become *'I just want them to be happy'*, without the understanding that a flourishing life is one that is joyfully given away to Christ and to others.¹⁹ The world preaches actualisation of *self*, with that *self* primarily found in being an autonomous consumer. Autonomous and therefore 'free' from any authority figure's assignment of identity. Free to consume and be happy? This cultural mindset points our children to the lie that life and identity is found in expressing your 'true' inner self, outside of any reference to God, and then gathering to yourself all that will please. No reference to anyone else is necessary in this worldview, and so they learn to please themselves without regard to any external source of wisdom. The main source of such pleasure is falsely prophesied by the culture to be found in consuming.

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A consumerist mindset leads to a belief, which is taking root in our children, that people also are objects to satisfy *me*, and not to sacrificially love. The poisonous mix of consumerism with sex, showers our children through the many screens, sexualising and objectifying their view of personhood. Have you discerned how the latest dolls are dressed, and what the clothes are designed to do? What more insidious hindrances to sacrificial love, putting others first, patient faith or learning to wait, could there be?

But we can guide our children well, through understanding and commentating on this.



HINDRANCE 5: CASUAL CONGREGATIONS

Between 2001 and 2011 the number of those who would state they are Christians in Britain fell by 5.3 million, about 10,000 a week. If that rate of decline continues, Christianity will come to an end in the UK in 2067.²⁰ The average age at which Christian parents' children leave the church is 14.²¹ Now, combine this with the therefore disturbing fact that, at the most optimistic reading of the statistics, two thirds of all those who are ever going to become committed Christians do so *before the age of 18*²²... If someone in the UK has not made the choice for Christ before they reach university age, it is fair to say they are unlikely to do so. In many churches around 25% are under the age 16. What an opportunity we have! Yet most churches spend less than 5% of their budget, and much less of their time, in reaching and supporting their children, when they are the ones in the congregation who are most likely to be responsive to the gospel.²³ Casually missing the captive audience. This makes no sense. This is strategically and spiritually tragic. Churches, who were once the main source of education provision, have handed this over to the state and no longer find themselves able to provide anything resembling a regular Christian witness to *children*.

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**14
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OLD**

IS THE AVERAGE
AGE CHILDREN WITH
CHRISTIAN PARENTS
LEAVE THE CHURCH

2 OUT OF 3
CURRENT CHRISTIANS
COMMITTED BEFORE
THEY WERE 18
YEARS OLD

<5%
OF CHURCH
BUDGETS IS SPENT
ON SUPPORTING
CHILDREN

Even the general state provision of any sort of Religious Education, especially in secondary schools, is now under threat.²⁴

The absence of the young is often the fruit of a lack of conviction from parents that the church should even play a substantial role in the spiritual direction of their children. Some Christian parents on Sundays encourage the sports-field gathering above the spiritual-family gathering. We can demonstrate our undervaluing of our younger children in our, *'Baby sitting on Sundays please, and please don't ask me to join the rota!'* attitude. Church leaders can collaborate with the state in this lack of focus on the flourishing of our children. But not all churches do this. Some have not adopted the casual attitude and have demonstrated the love of their children in action and investment. Can more be done to stem the tide, by God's chosen vehicle to disciple the children of the world? That vehicle is, to be clear, your church and mine.²⁵

HINDRANCE 6: ENEMY ENTICEMENTS

Make no mistake, we are at war. At war with an enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion.²⁶ A prowling lion lurks and watches to pick off the young and the vulnerable; who hasn't seen the wildlife programmes? There is a temptation not to protect, not to guard, and to go with the flow of the culture when it comes to our children. Like an ignorant and aimless herd of antelope. It could be expensive in time and money to pay close attention to the spiritual development of our children. There is so much else to be getting on with after all...

The more attractive nature of the world's more immediate and visible rewards and entertaining distractions can hinder our attention and take our eyes from our children. To some, having a smaller house, less of a career, fewer holidays, less time for self, fewer gadgets, and looking different from the neighbours, is a price too high to even consider. Have the enticements of the world succeeded in turning our attention away from the young, and hindered our vision for seeing them flourishing in the kingdom of God? How can we then expect them to learn to resist these temptations, these enemy enticements, themselves? By God's grace there are ways to resist the enemy of our children.



HELPS

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” MATTHEW 19:14 (NIV).

So how do we *help* them come to Jesus?

HELP 1: PEACEFUL PARENTS

To counteract the hindrance of ‘Pressed Parents’, what do our children need us to become? When our children ask us a question²⁷ or attempt to show us something they have made or done, are they more likely to get a welcoming response, or a ‘not now’? The truth is, if they come to expect a rebuff, or distracted disinterest, they will stop asking. Your opportunity for influence in their lives diminishes over time. But you can learn to say ‘yes’ more often, and make decisions that bring less hurry and more peace to your home.²⁸

Plan for unplanned time, not just when you have your scheduled appointment with your child, as though they were some task to complete; real time, where you are present with them in the moment, their moment. In these occasions of peaceful communication, and even silly playfulness, then their questions will come, you can offer to pray with them, demonstrate your sacrificial love for them and point them to Jesus, letting them into your relationship with Christ. One small change which can make a big difference... can you ask them about their school day, where your question shows you *knew something* about what their day held?

You can offer to pray with them, demonstrate your sacrificial love for them and point them to Jesus, letting them into your relationship with Christ.

We won’t always get this right, but we can make it our aim, while we have the chance. The song *Cinderella* by Stephen Curtis Chapman²⁹ expresses this so well if you have a daughter. The song *Cat’s in the Cradle* by Harry Chapin, and then covered by Ugly Kid Joe in the 90s, is worth a listen if you have a son!³⁰ Why not search for them now, and let God speak to you?

HELP 2: EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

I want to emphasise, not all teachers or teachings are toxic. And where there are attitudes and actions being encouraged which are against the Christian spiritual formation that we'd want, we have the ability to counteract this as parents and church communities. We can regularly help our children and young people detox, in the evenings and holidays, through prayer and discussion. We can also seek to provide the best schooling, given the circumstances we are in. Making a choice for the best school, and the best teachers is clearly crucial. It is also important for our churches to encourage Christians into the teaching profession, to be salt and light in this highly influential position. I believe I was able to have a profoundly positive effect through my teaching in state primary and special schools over 17 years.

The joy of the research conclusions from studies on present and past pupils in Christian School's Trust schools, like The King's School, has been to see the difference Christian teachers make in the encouragement of faith in children.³¹ The positive results in the mental health of past pupils is also a powerful testimony of this kind of education. Parents who are able to home school can also have a high level of involvement in the ongoing development of their children as they help them to follow Christ. What value there is in an education where the Bible and prayer are a creatively integrated part of the daily experience for a child!

For many this is not an option. However, regular effort from parents in intentionally connecting with their children and young people, deliberately discipling, can result in good foundations being laid. If parents take account of the relevant hindrances and helps, and avail themselves of the power of prayer, relying on the grace of God, then children can be helped to flourish in their faith. This was my experience as a child. Hopefully, parents will also be able to enjoy the active support of the wider church they are called to join.

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Those stewarding and parenting our children can, and should, regularly assess the trends in culture, and in addition discern what attitudes and beliefs are developing in our children. This is only possible if we spend time with them. This consideration by those with responsibility for children and young people, can result in the time and wisdom that is needed to shape their beliefs, mitigating well against any negative discipleship from society.

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HELP 3: MONITORED MOBILES

It is possible to train our children to use the technological tools of the 21st century for the Lord. But as with any sharp tool, wise and age-appropriate exposure from parents is essential. Regular monitoring,

sharing of passwords and 'friends', time limits, and encouraging a balance of other activities must all be put in place for flourishing in this area. But this requires attention and resolve. It also requires good modelling from the grown-ups! Parents must recognise they are the gatekeepers to their home, and should be those who guard the doors and the windows (pun intended), so children are not left to their own devices.³² The unfettered modern-day global circus and playground available on the internet is just too dangerous to give them their own free ticket to explore. As our children grow and mature, teaching them to discern what they watch and who they communicate with becomes essential to prepare them for life. We must point them towards discernment, not experiment.

HELP 4: CULTURAL COMMENTARY

As adults we are influenced by the culture that we are immersed in. The conscience of a child is something which is even more strongly affected by the 'voices' of those around them. Parents who can discern the cultures presented, when watching or experiencing things together, can helpfully commentate on the messages, so that the norms of society do not become the norms for the inner conversation of the child.

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For example, when seeing persistent advertising, noting ‘can you see how we are constantly being told we need to buy things to be happy; that’s not true is it...?’ Additionally, when hearing children speaking in unrespectful ways to each other or to adults on TV, just commenting, ‘They are not talking very nicely are they? What do you think would have been a better response?’, can make a big difference. This helps to prevent the development of assumptions in a child’s mind that all the cultural attitudes being expressed are ‘fine’, from the songs, adverts, films, and games they connect with. Of course, if headphones are always on, will you even know what they are seeing and hearing?

As the young person becomes more mature, deeper issues should be addressed, such as the ubiquitously negative view towards authority figures in contemporary media, the new sexual ethics

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and gender ideology, or the prevailing ‘dissing’ of prominent Christians and Christianity’s core beliefs in comedy or satire. Really thinking through what messages culture is conveying, and then discussing these well with our children, can bring into focus where these ideas agree or disagree with the beauty of the gospel and the security and desirability of a growing relationship with God. And if all this seems too hard on our own, and it probably is, we should ask God to provide Christian community or even a Christian school to support us and helpfully commentate with us.

HELP 5: CHURCHES FOR CHILDREN

We should carefully think through the practices in our churches, our events and messages, and all play our part in encouraging a faithful witness to our children. The ‘belong before you believe’ paradigm is certainly true for our children. We can help children believe we want them as part of our corporate times of worship and testimony, if we really do want them to stay into their teens. They will quickly see through any inauthenticity.



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We can pray for them as they go to their groups, remember their birthdays, and value those who do lead and support their activities. We can even pay for the best resources and staffing, so that they are a focus of our community's service and blessing as a strategic part of our churches' vision.

Our children, who are all in the valley of decision about faith, can have many valuable, and at least weekly opportunities to be welcomed into the life of the extended family of church under our wonderful heavenly Dad.

Parents can also commentate on what goes on in church meetings, to help their children understand what is happening. It is important to show them that worship activities are important enough to explain. To a child it can all be quite mysteriously ritualistic, and the words and practices are really quite strange at times!

Parents can remind busy church leaders of their responsibility to those most responsive to the gospel. Yes, the children. Church leaders should be at the forefront of encouraging the attitude of welcome, and genuine participation which causes our children and young people to feel they fit with the family of faith. Mentors and role models for our young people should be sought and encouraged. Such confidants are so important as the natural detachment processes occur through adolescence that will lead to maturity and the inevitable dislocation from the close nurturing of parents.³³

Our children will all need safe places to be given biblically based answers to the increasingly challenging questions they will have.

Our children will all need safe places to be given biblically based answers to the increasingly challenging questions they will have. Churches that have schools can make the most of this fantastic resource of Christian witnesses

who are able to point children and young people towards Christ. This then occurs not only in the few hours of organised church activity each week, but in strengthening the foundation of faith day by day in support of parents and churches. It truly takes the village to raise the child.³⁴

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HELP 6: GOD'S GRACE

Whatever the limitations, whatever the trauma of our own education, whatever the imperfections of our parenting, whatever the attitude in church leaders, whatever the provision of education available to us, God is able to bring about his purposes. Whether we need grace for our children to be in our local school, grace to find provision to respond to his call to home educate, or grace to make a decision to send to an independent Christian school, his grace is sufficient. Whatever the mistakes we will make as parents and churches (and we will make them!) the presence of God is able to work all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.³⁵

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

ROMANS 8:28 (NIV)

This, of course, does not negate our responsibility to respond to the wisdom which God gives to us *through his grace*. Decisions do have consequences now and into eternity. As seen above it is possible to hinder or help. However, we must remember, salvation and flourishing are God's sovereign blessing over us and there will never be the perfect conditions³⁶ or the perfect people getting it right this side of judgement day! We cannot secure this flourishing in our own strength. The Lord is our Shepherd and however he leads us we can be assured we will lack nothing, as we follow him. May we have the enabling grace of God to make wise choices so that the garden he has set before us flourishes with life and is fruitful for his kingdom purposes. May our children receive the grace of God through us, his church, as his extended family, and especially through those of us as parents who have been given this most unique and holy responsibility for his children.

"May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children" (PSALM 115:14 NIV)



A COMMENT ON MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Christians rightly tend to believe that there is a strong link between spiritual wellbeing and mental health. In schools, the current adoption of 'mindfulness' language and practice, also acknowledges this connection.

The Prince's Trust completed extremely thorough research on 18-25 year olds across the UK in 2018. At the same time detailed research findings on past pupils from what are called 'The New Independent Christian Schools', from a similar age range, was coming through. The statistics from the latter were extremely encouraging on whether these adults had what most Christians would describe as healthy Christian beliefs and behaviours. On the key beliefs that affect mental health the conclusions could not have been clearer. The main example of this was that of the UK wide survey of thousands of 18-25 year-olds, 27% *disagreed* with the statement 'Life has a sense of purpose'.³⁷ Of the past pupils of independent Christian Schools like The King's School in Witney, 98% stated they felt life did have a purpose.³⁸ Even more starkly, 18% in the Prince's Trust survey *disagreed* with the statement 'Life is worth living', whereas 99% of the past pupils felt life was worth living. The past pupils were 18 times more likely to think life was worth living. Despair, self-harm and suicide are natural end points to the negative beliefs, whereas *flourishing* is the result of a sense of purpose under God, through a saving faith in Christ Jesus.

The Christian worldview, proclaimed by churches, encouraged by parents, embodied by congregations, and then supported by Christian teachers through the 30 hours per week in school, seems to make a huge difference to the beliefs developed, and their mental health. Why would we not want this for our children? At a time when we are facing a mental health crisis in adults as well as the young,³⁹ it is hugely encouraging to understand through clear research findings what can make a significant and long-term difference. The spiritual and mental health of our children results in them being able to '*enjoy long life*'.⁴⁰

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

We have been thinking through what most hinders or helps the spiritual development of our children. We have considered the image of a garden which needs thoughtful tending. Why not take time to pray and consider if any of these hindrances or helps are something which you need to recognise in this season and to do something about. *“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...”* HEBREWS 12:1-2A (NIV). Our children deserve that we reflect and prayerfully think this through.

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FLOURISHING OR FAILING?

Parents! This easy to read, informative and challenging booklet will help you quickly understand the key practical ways you can help cultivate your children's faith in Christ.



By pointing out six hindrances and six helps to a child's faith, Head of Education Steve Beegoo guides readers to make adjustments that will provide a better environment for children to come to know, follow and love God in a challenging world.

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