



The
Molding *of a*
Champion

Helping Your Child Shape a Winning Destiny



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Chapter 1: Preparing Yourself

If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck” (Mark 9:42).

I chose this verse as a reminder of the eternal significance of our job as parents — both to them and to us. This isn't a casual pursuit or something that can be undertaken as a hobby. It's an all-or-nothing, whatever-it-takes kind of commitment. It isn't something you can fit in around everything else in your life. It isn't an occasional occupation. Whether or not you live with your children 24/7, you must be a parent 24/7. As long as that child is young, all the way through adulthood, you're on the hook. Personally, I wouldn't have my life any other way.

The Whole World in a Tiny Hand

Have you ever seen one of those pictures of a tiny fist grasping just the finger of an adult? It's a beautiful depiction of the love of a parent and the trust of an infant. A tiny hand curled reflexively around the larger finger. The strength of a parent, the fragility of a child. It is amazing to realize, then, that God, who designed that tiny little hand, chooses to place the entire world into it. He's done it since the beginning of time. He did it through His Son; he does it through our own children. Looking at our world, though, it just doesn't seem possible that God would entrust so much to seemingly so little — the whole world in a tiny hand. Our paradox is answered in 1 Corinthians 1:27, which says “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

That tiny fist isn't just a fist; it's the fist of a champion. This is God's intent and design. It is also his intent and design to put that tiny champion into your care. It's our job as parents to help nurture this champion. We may not know

specifically yet the task God has laid out for our children but, as believers, we already know where the battle lines are drawn. For this is a battle, and champions are needed to overcome the world.

This section starts out with a rather lengthy Scripture reading from Romans 8. Now, you may have gotten a little distracted because it's a long reading and it takes a while to get to the "more than conquerors" part. But, when you did, didn't it make your heart soar! We love the thought of ourselves — and our children — in this context, as conquerors, as victorious — and we are! That's the finale we're all hoping for, the big finish where our children are victorious in the Lord! It's a stirring thought and a defining word — conquerors. We love that last verse. We say, "Yes! That's what I'm talking about!"

Of course, I always get just a little queasy reading the verse that comes just before that one: As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Now, I'm just like the next parent; I love to think of my kids as conquerors for Christ. My heart does a flip, however, to think of Gregg and Benjamin as sheep to be slaughtered. I want to say, "Wait a minute! Maybe I've got the wrong idea about what it means to be a conqueror." If I've got the wrong idea, I need to go back to the text and look at the fine print, if you will. Before I can help nurture my child to be a conqueror for Christ, I need to understand what that means to God. I need to understand, ultimately, what that's going to mean for me.

In All Things

Look at how the first verse of the passage, verse 28, starts: "And we know that in all things. . . ." This passage starts and ends that way. Verse 37 says, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Okay, so what are these "things" we're supposed to know about? Well, I think they're the good and the bad, the ups and the downs, the yings and the yangs of life. I think

they're the challenges life holds for your child and the protections God has to counter those challenges. I think "in all these things" is a way of saying "in life itself."

Isn't it comforting to know that God has already thought of everything? As a parent with two small children, and boys at that, every time my wife and I go anywhere with them, we have to act as expert prognosticators. Do they have their shoes? Their coats? Something to keep them occupied on the way? A favorite toy or game? We need to take into account where we're going, how long it's going to take to get there, how long we're going to be there, and what we might need for the boys as a consequence. When they were babies, it was even worse. No matter how prepared we thought we were, invariably we forgot something or overlooked some potential situation. In a similar way, we are heading out the door of life, with our children in tow, and there is just no way to think of everything! That's why is great to know we don't have to. According to this passage, God's got it covered. No matter what happens, God's going to make sure it works out for good.

Do we really believe that? After all, we're talking about our kids here. As Christians, we understand that God is powerful, yet in our minds we often harbor the what about or what if thoughts. Yes, God is powerful, but what if my child develops an illness? Or, yes, God is powerful, but what about the culture we live in? God is powerful but what about my own failings as a parent? What if the challenge is too great?

No matter how many what abouts or what ifs, God already has an answer and a solution. Let's look at the passage again. There are always going to be "things" that happen in our lives. In all things isn't the issue here; rather, it is the fact that God works. His working through our "things" has already been promised and planned for. God's power is manifest through His intervention and sovereignty over our "things." He has considered the what abouts and the what ifs and still works for your child's good and his purpose.

He's got you and your child covered — covered in Christ. That helps me feel better about the slaughtered sheep part.

According to His Purpose

Our children are so vulnerable; we feel it daily. They are bombarded with ideas, opinions, situations, and circumstances that chip away at their innocence. As they get older, they weather this external maelstrom while coming face to face with their own human shortcomings. You are the parent and your child needs to look to you for strength and stability. How you view your child, therefore, is vital. You must consistently remind yourself and your changing child that God has called him or her to His purpose. There's a bigger picture, here, and your child is an integral part of it.

There are going to be times when it's hard to see how God can use your child. He'll seem too little. She'll seem too scattered. He'll seem too defiant. She'll seem too distracted. Fortunately — for all of us — God is in this for the long haul. He's not going to give up on His purpose for your child. Philippians 2:13 reminds us “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” God not only has a purpose for your child picked out, but He is actively in the process of shaping your child to be ready and able to accomplish that purpose. Your child's identity as a champion of God comes directly from this purpose. If you doubt your child is a champion, it may be because you are unclear that he or she has a purpose. Even if you can't see it yet, or aren't sure what it is, never doubt there is a purpose. Your job is not to define the purpose; your job is to defend the promise.

God works; God wills; God acts. These are incredibly powerful statements. After all, God's working created the universe. God's will brings about redemption. God's actions move mountains. This same power is at work in your child. There will be times you doubt your child or you doubt yourself; don't doubt God. This champion has been called

according to his purpose, and God is actively and willfully working toward that end. This is a powerful truth and a source of great hope for all parents. I know I will fail. My child will fail. But God never fails. In this rests my hope for my child.

According to His Process

Where my children are concerned, I like to call the shots. I insist on knowing who they're with, where they're going, and what they're doing. This isn't to say I'm not spontaneous, but where my kids are concerned, certain areas just have to be covered. Why? Because I love them and want to know they're going to be as safe as possible. God is no different. As this passage clearly shows, God has gone to great lengths to make sure our children are taken care of.

God foreknew your child, his champion. In other words, God's relationship with your child started before yours did. In fact, the very first relationship your child had with anyone wasn't with you, it was with God. Psalm 139 says that God knew your child from the moment of conception and was intimately involved in that process. Further, Romans 8 says that God planned for your child. It isn't just a static knowledge; it's an active work in progress. This champion's direction has already been established; this champion's arenas are already known.

Going one step further, God not only knew your child before you did, He planned for your child to be like Christ. He knew your child before you did and He had plans for your child before you did. His plans trump yours. As a parent, that can be difficult to accept (we'll talk more about that a little later) but it's true. God has designs on your child and has had those longer than it's possible for us to calculate. These are eternal designs and plans, carried out in the here and now.

Now, God doesn't just keep this relationship and these plans a secret. They may not be recognizable at the moment,

but God is calling your child to them, even now. Since God created your child with his or her own unique championship tasks in mind, your child is created to respond to God's special call. This champion, your child, is designed to reverberate with that call. It will resonate with your child in a way that is unique to him or her.

God calls all of us; He invites us to be a part of His plans for us. Your child will have a choice we all have when called — answer, ignore, or refuse. When your child is called to make that choice, to whom will he or she go? Where will be the examples to emulate? As a parent, you want to be able to say to your child, “Look here! Look to me! This is how you answer the call.” Notice, I didn't say this is what you answer; I said this is how you answer. It makes a difference, since your child's call will probably sound very different from yours. If you expect it to sound the same, you won't recognize it when it comes and you won't be able to point your child in the right direction. We need to ask ourselves, Am I able to hear God's voice in my own walk? Am I able to recognize it and respond accordingly? If my child asks me what God sounds like, what would be my answer?

Take heart, Romans 8:31 says, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” God is on your side when you're on His side, when you're answering the call. (And even when you're not, He's still working on your behalf to bring you back to Him. This, of course, is also true of your child.) What that means for you as a parent is, you're not alone. Your child is not alone. There's a process going on here and God is in charge. That's good to know when it seems like you're sending your little lamb out among wolves.

We Are As Sheep

Back to the slaughtered sheep part. This is a reality that's difficult for us to accept as parents. We want to shield our children from the wolves of this world, as we should. The sad truth is, hard as we try, we can't keep our kids

totally safe. Again, the world with its values intrudes. As a parent, you protect as much as you're able but trouble, hardship, and persecution will not veer away from your child. For many Christian parents, especially in some parts of this world, the famine, nakedness, danger, and sword talked about in Romans 8:35 are very real threats to the well-being of their children. My prayers go out to those parents. My gratitude goes out to God that I live in a society where I am able to feed, clothe, and, for the most part, protect my children.

This should not be used, however, to lull ourselves into a sense of false security. We need to realize the dangers present in this world, both physical and spiritual. Our job as parents is to protect our children as best we can, while teaching them how to protect themselves. We need to ask ourselves, what blinders hinder me from recognizing the dangers threatening my child? The terrible truth is, there are people and forces in the world and the heavenly realm that see your child as a sheep to be slaughtered. When this evil looks at Gregg or Benjamin, it does not see a beautiful soul to be loved and protected, it sees a potential victim to be devoured and destroyed. This is the evil I must protect my child against. It is the evil God is preparing my child to conquer.

More Than Conquerors

I'm not sure I would have the courage for the sheep part, if it wasn't for this assurance in verse 37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." With the wolves out there, I need to know that even if my child is considered a sheep, he has a Good Shepherd on guard, watching over him, who loves him. This gives me hope and courage in parenting. This lets me know I'm not alone. No matter how hard I try, I can't protect my children from every danger. As a human being, I know that evil always wins the first round when it comes to our children; they will sin and fall short of the glory of God (that's a little

earlier, in Romans 3:23.) I couldn't stop it in myself and I can't stop it for my children. But I can prepare myself and my child for it.

The Story of Hannah: Where Rubber Meets the Road

God is molding my sons into champions for him. We're all in my car — my life as a parent — but I'm not in the driver's seat, God is. I like to be in the driver's seat, especially when it's my car. My wife and I are blessed to each have a car. If we get ready to go somewhere and decide to take my car, I drive. I don't really like to take her car, because if we do, she drives. It feels wrong not to drive. It just seems odd not to be driving my car. I like to be in control. I'm a confident driver.

As good a driver as I am in my car, God's a better one when it comes to my life and the life of my family. That's easy to admit, but extremely difficult to put into practice. It's my car, my kids, and I want to drive! Even when I let God drive my car, I still find myself clutching the overhead handle around turns, stomping my foot on the floorboards if I think we should stop, and getting antsy if I think we're going too s -- l -- o -- w. All those things I hate in backseat drivers, I can easily do when God's driving my life. I'm even worse when my kids are in the car.

I need help to learn how to handle not being in control where my kids are concerned. How do I learn to trust God with the lives of my children? As in all things, God has anticipated my question. To help me — and you — He's provided a story in the Bible that's perfect for parents — the story of Hannah in the Old Testament Book of 1 Samuel. Here's a short synopsis. I'd encourage you to read the whole story yourself during a devotional time and make note where God is speaking to you and your particular situation. This is a story for all parents but, by reading it over yourself, God can speak to you individually:

Hannah was one of two wives of Elkanah and she was unable to have children. Because of this, the other wife tormented her. Even though Hannah was loved by her husband, she was miserable as year and after year, the harassment continued. Each year the whole household went to the temple in Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord. One year, Hannah made a pledge to God that if He would give her a son, she would turn him over to the Lord. At first, the priest at the temple, Eli, thought Hannah was drunk because of the fervent way she was praying before God. After being assured she was deeply troubled, not drunk, Eli blessed her and the household returned home.

God remembered Hannah's prayer and granted her a son. In her joy, Hannah didn't forget where this child came from and even named him Samuel, which sounds like "heard of God." From the outset, she explained to Elkanah that Samuel belonged to the Lord and as soon as he was weaned, she was going to take him to the temple for service.

Hannah fulfilled her pledge and left her small son in the hands of complete and total strangers.

Okay, maybe that last part's a little provocative, but it's true. Hannah, with full understanding and permission of her husband, essentially takes a very small child and leaves him at the temple. Granted, the second chapter of 1 Samuel goes on to say that the family got to visit Samuel once a year, but still, when Hannah said she would give the child over to the Lord, she wasn't kidding!

I'm not sure I have as much courage. I'm glad I'm not asked to give my child over to the Lord like that. Or, am I? Are you? What can we learn from Hannah? Here are a couple of things I've learned from thinking about this story, knowing God will reveal to you your own special insights.

Know where your children really come from. Hannah was very aware that God was the source of her child. Yes, he was the physical product of Hannah and Elkanah, but Samuel was ultimately a product of God's love and mercy to Hannah. The Scripture says God remembered Hannah

and her prayer and allowed her to conceive a child.

Children come to us in a variety of ways. They are conceived by us, adopted, or fostered from others. For those of us who conceive children, I think it can be more difficult to really see the child as coming from God. We know this intellectually, but it's hard to separate out the fact when every time we look at him or her we see our own face, expression, or mannerism looking back at us. We see Grandma Ruth or Uncle John. We see a mother or father, a sister or brother. The strength of the physical origin can cause us to forget the spiritual origin.

In my life I've known several couples who experienced the joy of adopting or fostering a child. Often, these couples struggled for years to have children of their own, only to be unsuccessful. Their heartache was so evident and certainly felt by the members of their spiritual family. What absolute joy, then, when these couples were able to adopt or foster a new life into their family. The wait and the frustration produced a very real understanding and appreciation for the child as a gift from the Lord. Because the child did not come easily but was agonized over and prayed for, the answer of "Yes" from God was easier to be heard and remembered.

Hannah suffered for years. She waited and bore the brunt of unrelenting harassment from Elkanah's other wife, who had many children. She prayed and prayed for deliverance, for redemption from her childless state. Her conception of Samuel occurred after this ardent prayer. Hannah had no doubt where this child came from.

Gregg and Benjamin are an exquisite blending of people I've known and loved in my life. When I see them, I see myself, LaFon, our parents, and siblings. As beautiful as that is, it must not obscure the fact that Gregg and Benjamin ultimately don't belong to me, they belong to God. Hannah understood this and so should I.

See your child as God's champion. Right from the beginning, Hannah understood that if God gave her a son, he

was going to be special. In verse 11, Hannah promises that she will raise him to be special, to be set apart. She pledges to raise him to be a Nazirite. (This is where she says that no razor will touch his head. The other famous Nazirite in the Old Testament is Samson, and we'll talk about him in a later chapter!) I need to see my children, no matter their age, as special and set apart for God.

This can be hard for us as parents. After all, what parent wants their child to be different, to not fit in? If we were popular ourselves as kids, we might worry that our children won't experience the same level of acceptance. If we had trouble fitting in as kids, we may harbor a desire for our children to be popular because we weren't growing up. It's not our child's job to either continue or rectify our own status as kids growing up. Being God's champion isn't a personality or popularity contest. It isn't about fitting in with the world. It's about standing up, not staying low. It's about being a beacon, not a blender.

Our children have been set apart by God; they are called out of the world. This will not win them a worldly popularity contest — quite the opposite. Jesus said in John 15:19: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." I venture to say that every Christian parent, at some point, has had to explain this difficult concept to an upset son or daughter. If your child is going to be different from those around him or her, isn't it better to be a champion? For your child to view him or herself as that champion, you need to see it yourself.

Keep your pledges before the Lord concerning your children. Have you ever prayed one of those If only A, then B prayers? If only you'll do A for me, God, then I'll do B for you? If only you'll do what I want, then I'll do what you want, is basically what these prayers boil down to. They're often said in times of extreme desperation. Does this type of prayer seem manipulative or wrong to you? It didn't to

Hannah. Hers is a classic If A, then B desperation prayer: If you'll give me a child, God, I'll give him back to you.

It's not really that remarkable that Hannah made this type of prayer. After all, she was fairly desperate and pretty fed up with the treatment of Elkanah's other wife. What is remarkable is that she kept it. How often do we send up this kind of prayer, only to back out of the deal when God delivers? Not Hannah. She made the pledge and kept it, even though most of us as parents would find it excruciating to be separated from our children, especially at a young age. Hannah believed enough in God to make the prayer and she believed enough in God to keep the prayer. Hers was a two-part faith that I need to have. I need to have faith enough to ask, and when God delivers, I need to have faith that it really is Him working in my life and keep my part of the deal. After all, my prayer is a verbal contract with God.

What this means to me is I need to honor my pledges. If I have pledged to teach my children about God, I need to take that seriously. Gregg and Benjamin need to know more about God than they do about soccer or superheroes. Not that these other things are bad, but my priority needs to be God. My practice also needs to honor my pledges. If I've promised to teach my children to know, honor, and love God, then I need to know, honor, and love God myself. Who is my child's first teacher? I am. My life speaks louder than my words, so both had better be as unified as possible.

Don't keep your vision for your child a secret. From the very beginning, Hannah made sure her husband understood about her vision for Samuel. She didn't try to hide it, but actively secured his permission. When she tells Elkanah about her rather radical plan to drop their only son off at a distant religious institution, he says the words I'm sure all wives would love to hear: Do what seems best to you. It's a testimony to Hannah's life that Elkanah had this level of faith in her. When it is time to fulfill Hannah's vow, the two of them go together to present Samuel as well as an offering to the Lord. It may have started as Hannah's pledge, but it became

a joint vision they shared for their son. I cannot help but believe that this — more than anything else — strengthened their relationship with God and their relationship with each other.

Give God glory for what He will do through your child. What's interesting to me is the timing of when Hannah sings her song of praise to God. You'd think it would be after she realizes she's conceived a child or after giving birth. Instead, her outpouring of joy to God is expressed not when she is given the child but when she gives the child up. This outpouring of praise to and faith in God is a beautiful song found in I Samuel 2:1–10, that reminds me of the song Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings in Luke 1:46–55. Hannah got it. She recognized that God is a fulfiller of promises and would work His will in her son. Knowing that, she could let him go and sing praise. What a powerful lesson for me, as a parent.

Recognize God's blessings in your life through your faithfulness. God appreciates what we give up in this life to follow Him. He is a rewarder of faithfulness. Because Hannah was faithful to her pledge and trusted God to take care of her only child, God gave her five more — 3 sons and 2 daughters. He filled up the void in her life created when Samuel went to live in the temple. Jesus promises us the same thing in Mark 10:29–30: "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in the present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." God will bless you in this life for the sacrifices you make, including giving up your child to His care. But this is not a sugar-coated, Santa-like, promise; Jesus in His honesty and wisdom cautions that with the promise come persecutions — oh, and eternal life.

Accepting God's Arenas

Yes, for much of your child's life, you are in the driver's seat. You set the rules and you determine the outcome. However, for your child to truly become God's champion, there's a time when you must let go and accept a supporting role in your child's future, even if God takes the car, with your child in it, to places you wouldn't go if you were the driver. As God's champion, your child may enter arenas you never would have chosen for him or her.

Arenas often mean battles. It's tough to think about your child engaged in battle. But without the battle, there's no champion. Your child, God's champion, will need to undergo the crucible of battle in order to be prepared to conquer. In truth, our children fight battles all the time. As Christians, they are raised within a faith structure that is misunderstood by many and openly despised by some. As they grow, they will undergo those inner battles all of us face. (I think these are probably some of the hardest for parents to weather.) When we see our child in the midst of a battle, our initial reaction is often to yank them out, thinking it's too hard. Sometimes, God wants our child right where he or she is, in the heart of the battle. Our job isn't to tell them to run away, but to support them and help them to stand firm in the Lord.

Battles can be tremendous faith builders and produce unprecedented times of family unity and solidarity. We need to teach our children how to avoid unnecessary conflict but there are times when the standard must be raised and a stand must be taken. Perhaps it's when your child is criticized for his Christian beliefs or confronted about her stand on controversial issues. These are times when your child is tested and, handled well, strengthened.

As a parent, it's not up to us to control every arena our child enters, any more than it's possible for us to shield our children from all hurt or pain. We want our children to learn to ride bikes, to run and play, even if it means a stubbed toe or a sprained ankle. We want them to make

friends with other children, even though it means they will eventually be called a name or treated unfairly. These things hurt but they are part of life, and our children need to learn how to deal with life, not run from it. In a similar way, God may choose to put our children in a difficult family situation or school environment in order to further the process of molding His champion.

It's amazing how perceptive children can be. They are able to take their "child-sized" circumstances and apply spiritual applications. God is very real to them and they are alert to His working in their world. After all, we tell them that God loves them and is looking over them. They fully expect Him to be involved in what happens to them. How do we know this? By listening in on the conversations our children have with God through their prayers. Children are very honest in prayer and ask God for help in all kinds of situations. It is only as we get older that we learn "prayer language" and lose the spontaneity and familial closeness we had with God when we were younger. In fact, as adults we often spend a great deal of time trying to get back to that simpler time when we were kids, just talking to God.

Because God is very real to children, we need to honor that faith. We must teach our children not to avoid all struggles but remind them that God is in the midst of their struggles. Our children need to experience God in the midst of their struggles. Shielding our children from all struggles shields them from seeing God at work. It prevents them from learning how to cope with adversity. How can our children learn to get up if we never allow them to fall down? How can our children be champions if we keep yanking them out of the arena?

Taking the Back Seat

Are you prepared for your child to surpass you spiritually? Are you ready for your child to go and do more for God

than you have? Can you allow your child's faith to teach you more about your own? As parents, we can feel proprietary about our children's faith. It should look like ours, agree with ours. But what if it's different from ours? What if it's bigger than ours?

As you prepare God's champion, be aware of your own reactions to his or her growing faith. This faith will not look like yours in many ways. This can be comforting and scary, all at the same time. It's comforting to know that God can propel our children further than our own spiritual momentum. It's scary, though, to see them speeding across the spiritual planes, headed to God-knows-where. We've got to be ready to let them soar on God's wings. Our job is to help prepare them for the journey, not dictate to God the flight plan.

Daily Devotion

Parenting my children is the hardest task I've ever endeavored. Daily I'm confronted with my own shortcomings. And I thank God for these reminders. It helps me to remember to get on my knees and give myself — as well as my children — over to God. In so much of my personal and professional life, I feel in control. I've set my priorities and made plans. I know (for the most part) where I'll be each day and what I'll be doing. This can create an illusion of control that's very seductive. It's easy for me to think, I've done this. I'm in charge. I'm in the driver's seat. Being a parent, however, has forced me to learn just how much is beyond my manipulation! I deeply desire my children to be happy, healthy, and godly, but it seems I'm so often swimming furiously against the tide of this life and my own shortcomings.

In order to cope with this constant uncertainty, I grasp even more tightly to God. Here's how I prepare myself each day. I offer these to you, not to say, "See how pious I am," but as one parent to another:

I turn each day over to God. As the founder of The Cen-

ter for Counseling and Health Resources, a large Christian-based counseling agency, I'm "in charge." I make decisions, large and small, every day that affect many lives — those of my family, those of my staff, those of our clients. As a father, it's natural for me to think of myself as "in charge" of my household. This is a trap that I must daily resist. God is in charge of my household, through me. If God is not in charge of me, He is not in charge of my household. I love my family too much to let that happen. Through prayer and willful submission, I consciously strive to allow God to be in charge. I ask for His guidance when making decisions. With eyes of faith, I look for Him at work in my world. I want to be alert to what He's doing so I make sure I'm "on board." The reason I have to be so intentional about it is because it's so hard! And I can be as short-sighted and stubborn as the next person. So I work to keep God in the forefront of my mind and my life. It's a battle of wills and I need God to win, for my business, my family, and myself.

I turn my children over to God. I love my children so much I want to keep them close. Keeping them close can mean keeping them within my control. In a broader sense, this is prudent as a parent and part of my job. But spiritually, I need to turn my children daily over to God, to allow Him to do what is necessary to mold them into His champions. Again, I need to allow God to place my children in arenas I would not choose myself. As hard as it is to turn myself over to God, it's geometrically harder to turn my children over to God. Which is why I have to commit to it daily.

I daily renew my commitment to be faithful to the mother of my children. Someone once said that the best gift I can give my children is to love their mother. By upholding my vow to LaFon, I teach my children how to keep their own vows. By upholding my vow to LaFon, I do everything in my power to ensure my marriage stays strong for my children. Study after study has shown that kids do better in a stable, intact home. I understand the pain of divorce, and

it's not my intention to cause those of you who are divorced to feel guilty about that decision. My point and my plea is for those of us who are married to stay that way, whenever and however possible. If your marriage relationship is rocky, it's going to cause those foundations for your champion to totter. We used to tell people to stay together "for the sake of the children." This is always my preference and something we work very hard to do at The Center — reconcile husbands and wives back to each other, for the sake of their children, as well as for their own.

I stay close to God myself so I can show my children the way. My child may be the champion but I'm one of the primary trainers. That means I need to be spiritually fit myself. Just like physical exercise, I need to work out spiritually each day, in prayer, meditation, and study of the Word. It's hard to find a quiet time during the day to stay spiritually fit, but I do it by getting into work very early in the morning. There, before the business gets up and running, I get up and running spiritually by engaging in at least an hour of personal quiet time with God.

You don't have to do it the same way I do, but I encourage you to find a consistent time with a goal of daily observance. Things happen — that's just part of life, but the goal is to spend time each day in spiritual communion. The only way I've ever found to make this work is to set aside a set time each day when I don't allow anything but an emergency to intrude.

Include prayer, meditation, and examining the Word as part of your quiet time. Spend time with God, get to know Him, learn to hear His voice. The groundwork you lay in your own life is the foundation of faith for your family.

Training Ground

So many thoughts swirl in our minds when we think of all we hope and desire for our children. As hard as it is to

corral those thoughts, I'd like you to take a moment and do just that. First, write down the hopes you have for your children. This doesn't need to be long — just a sentence or phrase that captures each desire. Next, turn your child over to God in writing. Acknowledge in your pledge that it is God who controls the life of your child. Lastly (and don't leave this part out!), do like Hannah and write down your praise to God for all that He has done in your life. Hannah had confidence that God would take care of Samuel because she personally experienced His love and grace in her own life.

When you have written these three parts, say them as a prayer to God. If you're like me, you'll need to say them often, certainly more than once, as you fortify yourself to raise God's champion, your child. Your child is in training and so are you. It's part of our role as parent to this incredible gift from God. Mine are named Gregg and Benjamin. Make a personal pledge and prayer for each of yours.

If you have difficulty expressing your thoughts, don't give up! In the last chapter, you'll find information on *The Power of a Praying Parent* by Stormie Omartian. I have found great comfort in praying these prayers for my children. They are specifically set up to do this easily. If you're having trouble putting your own prayers to words, pick up this book or another like it and claim the prayers of others. You can also read through Scripture and claim that promise for your child.

In order to help you, here's one I've prayed, taken from Stormie's book, on page 141:

Lord, I pray that Gregg will so love the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind that there will be no room in him for the lies of the enemy or the clamoring of the world. May the Word of God take root in his heart and fill his mind with things that are true noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Give him understanding that what goes into his mind becomes part of him, so that he will weigh carefully what he sees and hears.