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TFT Newsletter
Issue 024
February 2009

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CQLA March Sale -

Donna's Desk

Hello: Note from Donna

Dear Fellow Heart Trainers,

Welcome to another edition of the TFT E Newsletter!
Finally getting the Jan/Feb newsletter out—just in time for March to get here!

Life is changing more quickly than I care for it to around here. Everybody is growing up so fast. We have been enjoying our long talks with Kayla who is away at college and Cami and Joseph, who are now married and living thirty minutes from us. But it is just not the same as all being here together. And while I am thrilled for Kayla and Cami (and Joseph!), I am **not adjusting to all of these changes as quickly as they are happening.** (See [Dancing Through the Seasons](#) and the [\\$100 Pay It Forward Reward](#) at my blog; links in margin.)

Our winter classes have gone great. Please watch our newsletter and web site for next fall's class offerings. Also, keep in mind that if you are two hours or less from us here near Fort Wayne, Indiana, we might be able to send a TFT cottage class teacher or two your way for writing, history, government, economics, speech, debate, sign language, and language arts. (Sorry, our science and Spanish teacher moved away! L) We have had an **awesome semester of learning**—and have some new books coming out this spring that we have been testing with our guinea pigs, I mean, cottage class students, all winter and fall. These students truly teach me so much—and they make me smile and laugh every week!

\$59 per book! A \$20 savings!
Call to order. 260-597-7415

Still not sure about CQLA? [Try before you buy!](#)

Want to be a CQLA rep? Read [about it](#) on our website. Call Ray for more details. 260-597-7415

Love CQLA? Mention it to your favorite vendor.

New (and revised) TFT products:

CQLA

- CQLA Blue Pre A--revised (available in March)
- CQLA Blue A--revised (available in March)
- CQLA Blue B--revised (available in March)
- CQLA Blue C--revised (ships 1st of April)

Meaningful Composition (MC):

- MC 4±--revised (available in March)
 - MC 6±--revised (available in March)
 - MC 8±--revised (ships 1st of April)
 - MC 5 I—NEW (ships 1st of April)
 - MC 5 II—Creative Writing-- NEW
 - MC 9 I—Research Reports--NEW
 - MC 12 I—The Research Paper—NEW
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Hopefully, you will benefit and enjoy the new format of this newsletter. We want the information you need and want to be accessible to you, so we're experimenting with some things. Let us know what you think, and if you have any suggestions, we are open.

We are still looking for **representatives to carry CQLA and MC** to conventions and events around the country. If you would like to share our products with others, please contact Ray to become a TFT rep.

Lastly, we have so many new things coming this spring: revised Blue B and Blue C; revised MC 4, 6, and 8; new MC's—9 and 12, plus other ones coming later in the spring (creative writing, research reports for junior high, and more). And our new Write On! Quick Kit. (See the links and margins for more information about these new products.)

Spring is less than four weeks away. (I know because I have been counting down.) Keep learning going full steam. Be careful not to think of homeschooling as something you are doing until summer gets here to give you relief. **Make learning, growing, and discipling a way of life in your family.** You will be glad twenty years from now that you did. (And I can say that because of my, well, advanced years!)

Love,
Donna

P.S. Don't miss our March sale—CQLA books are **\$59 all month!**

TFT Teaching Mobile

Is it coming your way?

Now is the time to start thinking about special classes, co-op activities, etc for the next academic year. Some of our teachers are available to travel up to two hours to teach classes. Joshua has developed a dynamic fourteen week (three to four hour weekly session) course on American History, Government, and Economics (his area of interest

Want to learn more about our cottage classes? Check out our [class list](#).

Watch our website for the [fall class listing](#) for Fort Wayne and Ossian, IN. Call to be put on the waiting list. 260-597-7415

Check out the dozens of [topics and workshops](#) we offer.

Read about our family in our December 2008 [Christmas letter](#).

Tips

Teaching Tip: When your student is stuck on something (in any subject area), ask him, "What do you already know?" Walk

and degree area). He has dozens of pages of handouts and thousands of power point slides that are wowing his students every week—and letting them leave class with an understanding of supply and demand, the Great Awakening, the Constitution, and more. This would make an ideal co-op class for seventh through twelfth graders.

Additionally, we have CQLA classes, as well as composition-only classes using any of our ten new Meaningful Composition books that will be available for the fall semester. Of course, we are still teaching speech and debate or elementary/middle school speech a couple of locations each semester. Call Ray to find out what we might be able to offer in your area! (You can reach him at home at 260-597-7415 in the evenings.)

Need a Speaker?

Reishes' Speaking and Teaching Availability

When you support group leaders or convention organizers are considering your next event, think of TFT! **We have four speakers available now—on over fifty topics.** Ray and Donna LOVE to speak about heart training and our new book, *The Well-Trained Heart*, as well as many other topics (academic and non-academic topics). See our website for a complete list of topics and contact Ray to set up a TFT speaker for your event.

Who? What?

Who are the Reishes and What is TFT?

If you are new to our newsletter and Training for Triumph Family Ministries and TFT Publishing—welcome. We have had a lot of new people added to our newsletter list over the past few months, and we are thrilled to be able to share with so many. If you are new to the Reishes, follow the link in the margin to read our Christmas letter and find out "everything you ever wanted to know about the Reishes but were afraid to ask."

him through the process of seeing that he already knows a great deal—and that the information he already possesses can and will help him to solve unknown problems.

Heart Training Tip:
Ask your children (and your spouse!) one of the most important questions you can ask: "What are you thinking?" And then take the time necessary to let him or her answer. Our children and spouse need to know that we care about what they care about—and that we genuinely desire to know what is in their heart, mind, and soul.

Cleaning Tip:
Always teach your children to clean from the top down. We teach our children to clear all surfaces of extra things first (so dirt doesn't get on them as he cleans). Then we instruct him to start at the highest point that he needs to clean. For example, in the living room, after "picking up," he should feather dust the ceiling and corners. Then dust the piano, desk, bookcases, and file cabinet. From there, he can clean lower surfaces (piano bench, chairs, etc.) And lastly, vacuum.

Internet in Your School Tip:
Teach your children (preferably with a guard on your computer) how to search for pictures. For example, as we do our morning reading, I will often tell one or two of the younger kids, especially, to go "Google Image" a blue whale, David Livingstone, a place in Africa, etc.—whatever we are reading about. This way the child has a visual to bring with the oral reading. (Be

Section II: Heart Training - This and That

Pass It On

"The \$100 Pay it Forward Award"

As you read this month's article ("Only By Comparison"), you will learn of a time in which we received a free meal in a restaurant after someone observed the kids' good behavior. Only happened once, but it made our day! J Anyway, for years and years we have thought it would be so neat to have money to buy meals for families learning, growing, and discipling their children in positive ways anytime we felt like it. We will probably never fulfill that dream of affirming families in that way, but it was fun, exciting, poignant, and memory-inducing the one time we did last fall. Read "[The \\$100 Pay It Forward Award](#)"—and consider how you can bless, encourage, and help families around you.

Four Commandments

"Four Commandments" for Children/Parents

Our children's pastor (Pastor Barry Jorris) recently preached part of the sermon in our family Sunday at church. He had such an incredible, creative message, I wanted to share some of it in this month's newsletter. In his sermon, he explained to the children (and parents!) that the fifth commandment is to honor your parents. And the previous four commandments are ways we honor God: (1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me; (2) Thou shalt not make an idol from anything...and shall not bow down before it and worship it; (3) Thou shalt not use the Lord's name in vain; (4) Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

He then explained to the kids that since the fifth commandment is to honor your parents, and the first four are ways to honor God, we can adapt the first four commandments in ways that help us fulfill Commandment Five (honor your parents).

Here are his suggestions to the kids on ways to use the

careful, when reading about African missionaries, I recently had the boys Google Image pygmies—not a safe picture!

If you missed last Jan/Feb's newsletter and need some new year motivation, read Donna's "[Eight Daily Habits for '08](#)"

You probably already know that you can get CQLA help, read past e-newsletters, read articles, download samples, read the first chapter of the WTH, and much more at our [website](#).

You can also some of my musings on [my blog](#) (when I get time to add them).

Did you also know that you can join the [CQLA users group](#) to commiserate with other CQLA users or learn more about the program?

And don't forget our CQLA one month samples to "[try before you buy](#)".

first four commandments to honor their parents:

1. No gods before the Lord—**do not put others ahead of your parents**. Do not listen to others or desire others more than your mom and dad. They were given to you first and should be honored and held in high esteem.
2. No idol before your parents—**do not put idols (television was the example he used) ahead of your parents**. Do not listen to the advice and trends of television (and movies, pop culture, etc.) over that of your parents.
3. Not use God's name in vain—**speak to your parents and about your parents respectfully**. Do not use disrespectful titles (old man, old lady, master, the captain, etc.). Additionally, do not speak about them behind their backs in derogative ways. You should speak positively and in love about your parents to others.
4. Keep the Sabbath—**spend at least one day a week with your parents**. Have a weekly family night or family day in which you keep that day just for your family—not for others. A day that you show your parents their worth by keeping it available and open for them.

Isn't that neat? I was thankful for such a great message to our congregation (youth pastor spoke to youth about same topic; associate pastor spoke to adults about honoring their parents as adults, besides Pastor Barry's message) and such clever applications. Share these with your family (during family night?) and remind your children that honoring (and obeying) your parents is commanded in the Old Testament and the New Testament—and is the beginning of honoring all authorities we will eventually encounter in our lives.

Section III: CQLA and Meaningful Composition

CQLA Labeling

About the Colors and Volumes

For more parenting help, see "[I Want an Oompa Loompa Now, Daddy!](#)"

Other Mega Cooking Links From Donna's Blog

[Holiday Recipes](#)

[Cooking for Two—Using a Saucepan](#)

[Dori's Wedding Reception](#)

[Freezer Entrée: Sloppy Joes](#)

[Freezer Entrée: Creamy Potato Casserole](#)

[Cooking and Freezing Meats for Easy Meal Preps](#)

[Hot Turkey or Hot Chicken Sandwiches](#)

[SUPER Mega Cooking Link—the authority on the subject](#)

Cooking Tip: For the richest brown gravy or drippings on pot roast, rub your roast with non-instant, non-flavored coffee before roasting. We rub 1-2 TBSP of coffee, then proceed with our recipe (for regular pot roast, that is usually garlic, bay leaves, mushroom soup,

In CQLA, it does not matter which color you begin with!

The three color series'-- Red, Blue, and Green--are just the way the character qualities are divided.

Choose the level you need according to your student's language arts abilities (Level Pre A--2nd and 3rd grade; Level A 4th and 5th grade; Level B 6th, 7th, and 8th grade; Level C high school), then choose the color series you desire according to the character qualities you would like to study that year. Be sure to get the same color (same set of character qualities) for each student so that the **entire family is studying the same quality at the same time.** [Check out the character qualities of each color series on our site.](#)

Section IV: In the Kitchen This Month

Cooking for Two Families

Mega Cooking

One of the **neatest things about mega cooking over the past nearly twenty years has definitely been the ability to bless others.** Through the years, we have cooked for those having a baby, moving (and their movers), suffering illness, losing a loved one, and more—several times over. We have organized cooking co-ops in which teen girls learned to mega cook together. We have held "cooking bees" in which our field trip group cooked for the mom having a new baby (multiple times). We have helped with weddings, receptions, showers, and graduation parties. All because of, with, and through mega cooking. And **we have been blessed in reverse many, many times** (including our recent wedding, rehearsal dinner, and showers!).

We had occasion to cook for us and another family in need a few months ago. I purposely chose some **"hearty" meals** since both families were feeding eight people at least during that time. I also purposely chose **meals that**

dry onion soup, and beef base all mixed and poured into the oven cooking bag over the coffee-crusting raw meat). Your family will love it!

are “normal”—things that most people are familiar with and enjoy. Lastly, I chose those entrees that **come together quickly** on our end, but produce a nice, final entrée (without seeming like they were thrown together quickly! J).

These included the following recipes: Grandma’s Meatloaf (from Ray’s grandma when I was a young bride); Swiss Steak (also from Grandma Rager); Lasagna; and Pizza Burgers. To go with the meats (I don’t like to give meats only—either combination entrees like lasagna or a meat and rice or meat and potato), we made Freezer Mashed Potatoes (not like fresh, but definitely better than instant) and Creamy Potato Casserole (our most-used freezer recipe by far).

Try our recipes. Get some simple entrees in your freezer. **And they each yield plenty to share—so spread the love of Christ through mega cooking!**

Note: Over the past year or so, I have been...sniff-sniff... revising my recipes to feed less people. Anyway, you will notice that many of my new recipe entrees yield four or five servings—and they can easily be combined to feed eight or ten (i.e. each meatloaf feeds four or five, so we may use one when it is just me, Ray, and two boys (did I really just write that?) or two meatloaves for several of us).

Also, **see the margins for some links to other mega cooking helps I have at my blog, as well as an awesome freezer cooking site that is dedicated to nothing but freezer cooking. Very helpful and well done!

GRANDMA’S MEATLOAF

½ cup beef base
 ¾ cup+ minced onion
 ½ tsp pepper
 4 tsp salt
 10 lbs ground beef
 8-12 c. oats
 ¾ cups ketchup
 8 eggs

milk, as needed
4 (9x13) foil pans

1. Mix all ingredients.
2. Shape into 12 loaves of 1 lb each.
3. Place two in each 9 x 13 foil pan (6 total pans)
4. Cover tightly. Label. Freeze with nothing on top of them.
5. Make labels for them as follows (6 labels needed)
GRANDMA'S MEATLOAF Serves 4-5 per loaf
(Uncooked)
Thaw. Bake at 300' for 1 ½ to 2 hours w/ sauce over them (just over an hour for one loaf), if desired. Sauce per two meatloaves: 6 TBSP brown sugar, ½ tsp nutmeg, ½ cup ketchup, and 2 tsp dry mustard. (May reduce sauce if less is desired.)
6. Yield: 12 loaves of 1 pound+ each; each one serves 4-
5. Thus, six pans of two loaves each, serving 8-10 for a "panful."

Swiss Steak

10 lbs round steak
1 cup flour
1 ½ tbsp salt
½ TBSP pepper
2/3 cups celery, sliced thinly
5 onions, sliced in rings
5 green peppers (optional)
5 (8 oz) cans tomato sauce
3 cups water
4 TBSP worcestershire sauce
4 TBS beef base diluted in
½ cup hot water

1. Trim fat from meat. Tenderize with meat mallet, and cut into serving pieces.
2. Mix flour, salt, and pepper.
3. Coat meat pieces and brown lightly in oil in electric skillet.
4. Saute or micro vegetables.
5. Mix vegetables with rest of ingredients.
6. Pour meat and veggie mix into 8 one-quart bags (approximately 1-1 ½ lbs meat w/ sauce per bag).

7. Label with info below and freeze:

Swiss Steak for 4-5 Use 2 quarts, at least

Partially cooked DATE

Thaw. Cook in cooking bag at 250° for 1 ½ to 2 hours or on low in crock pot for 4-6 hours.

Optional: Make gravy out of tomato-based juices.

Lasagna

We have been making our lasagnas without precooking our noodles for years now. It is SIMPLE You'll make lasagna more often once you try this method! This recipe yields six deep lasagnas (be sure to use lasagna or roasting pans, not regular 9 x 13's).

12 lbs. ground meat
 12 quarts spaghetti sauce
 8 (12 oz) pkgs lasagna
 240 oz cottage cheese
 24 eggs, beaten
 6 tsp pepper
 24 TBSP parsley
 6 cups parmesan cheese
 8 lbs mozzarella cheese

1. Brown meat and drain. (If browning large amounts of meat together for several dishes, remember that 2 ½ cups fried and drained meat is equivalent to 1 lb of raw.)
2. If using uncooked noodles, place them in large roaster filled with water to soften (or squirt each layer of noodles with a squirt bottle filled with water as you layer the lasagna).
3. Add sauce to meat.
4. Combine cottage cheese, parmesan, eggs, pepper, and parsley.
5. Grease 6 9 x 13 baking dishes or foil pans.
6. Place small amount of meat sauce in bottom of dish.
7. Place one layer of noodles (if desired, cook noodles before this step).
8. Place ½ the cottage cheese mixture over all pans evenly.
9. Place ½ the mozzarella over all pans evenly.
10. Place ½ the remaining meat sauce over all pans evenly.

11. Repeat.
12. End with sauce.
13. Label and freeze:
Lasagna Partially cooked
DATE Serves 6-8
To use: Thaw. Bake at 375' convection for 30-40 mins (40-50 regular)—Covered.

Pizza Burgers

24 (1/4 lb) hamburger patties
Optional: canned mushrooms
8 cups pizza sauce or spaghetti sauce
Optional veggies: green peppers and onions
36 1 oz slices of mozzarella cheese

1. Grill hamburgers on grill until medium rare.
2. Stir fry or micro veggies until tender (optional).
3. Place 6 patties in each of 4 foil pans.
4. Top each patty with veggies and mushrooms.
5. Pour 2-3 TBSP of sauce over the veggies.
6. Place 1 ½ slice of cheese on each patty.
7. Freeze unlayered.
8. Label:
Pizza Burgers
DATE Serves 4
Fully Cooked
Thaw. Reheat in micro or oven until bubbly and hot all through.
9. Total yield of this recipe: Four pans of six patties each; four pans serving four people each.

Mashed Potatoes

20 lbs russet or Idaho potatoes
2 cups cream or ½ and ½
4 sticks butter
4 tsp salt
2 tsp pepper

1. Boil peeled potatoes until tender.
2. Mash potatoes in big mixer with white beater in 5 lb increments(4 "loads")—first add butter, salt, and pepper to

each load, then gradually add in warm cream or ½ and ½.
 3. Freeze in 5 lb increments in foil pans or large freezer bags.

4. Label:

Mashed Potatoes

Serves 8-10 Fully Cooked

Thaw. Reheat in micro or carefully on stove top, using wire whisk and warm cream or milk to soften and cream.

5. Total yield of this recipe: Four "loads" feeding 8-10 people each.

Creamy Potato Casserole

6 bags of 32 oz. hash browns (or 2 bags of 3 pounds each)

6 stick butter

12 cups half and half

3 1/2 pounds Velveeta

4 24 oz containers of cottage cheese (small curd)

1. Pour hash browns in six, greased 9 x 13 pans.
2. Melt butter, half and half, and Velveeta on stove.
3. Dissolve cottage cheese in hot mixture (heat off).
4. Pour over hash browns evenly. (Three cups for each pan, then in 1/2 cup increments until mixture is gone to be sure each gets the same amount.)
5. Let sit at least one hour or overnight in fridge.
6. Bake uncovered for an hour to hour and half at 350.
7. For freezing: Cover tightly with foil and label as in point 8 below.

Freeze unstacked until thoroughly frozen.

8. Labels:

Creamy Potato Casserole-

Uncooked Serves 8-10

Thaw. Bake uncovered for one to one and a half hour at 350' regular (1 hour+ convection).

Let sit before serving for ten minutes.

9. Yields six pans that serve 8-10 each.

Section V: Article from Training for Triumph

"Only By Comparison"

by Donna Reish

Many years ago I found a comic strip that became our family's mantra. In it, Blondie and Dagwood sat in a restaurant with their four children. The kids misbehaved mildly—spilling drinks, bickering over the orange crayon, and asking for something expensive. However, in the background of the Bumstead's restaurant booth, other little ones were everywhere misbehaving—swinging from the chandelier, standing on the table, throwing food from high chairs, and screaming. A couple approached Blondie and Dagwood and commented on how well-behaved their children were, to which the tired parents smiled and then turned to their offspring and said **those words that ring too true: "Only by comparison."**

Through our years of parenting seven young children (especially once we had four or more eight and under), we were often stopped in public (as many large, homeschooling families are) and told that our children were behaving well. *They sit so nicely. They don't talk in church. They aren't fighting when they get in or out of the van.* And through the years we have told our children two things: *Only by comparison* and *If your behavior was really good, someone would pay for our dinner like they did for the Prides.* (Mary Pride wrote in an article many years ago that someone paid for her family's meal not once, but twice, on the same vacation, due to well-behaved children.)

Those two lines became our family's jokes through the years—**we only look like we have well-behaved children** because *compared to biting, screaming, thrashing kids, you guys are great! People only think you are being quiet because compared to the noise level around us, you kids are practically whispering.* And the old—*when you guys are really, really good in a restaurant, we'll know it because someone will pay for our meal.*

Without even saying (or thinking) the phrase, *Only by comparison*, homeschooling parents today often pat themselves on the back, rejoice, and sometimes, dare I

say it, even gloat—because compared to much of children’s behavior that is permitted today, our kids are doing okay. And we develop a **false sense of security in our children’s Christian development** and a Pharisaical attitude about our parenting.

Our kids might fight and say mean things to each other, but at least they aren’t doing what the neighbor kids do—cuss each other out and squeal out of the neighborhood at twice the posted speed limit. Our kids might not listen and respect the pastor as much as we would like for them to—but at least they’re not texting other teens and playing games on their cell phones during the service like the kids two rows up are doing. Our kids might not work as hard as we think they should on their chores and household responsibilities, but at least they do a job or two each day—unlike a nephew or niece who never does anything around the house. And on and on it goes. **And yet it is all only by comparison.**

Case in point one: A couple of years ago Josiah (then ten; child #6) had a bad case of strep throat and ended up dehydrated and very sick. He was admitted into the hospital for eighteen hours to rehydrate, gets some iv antibiotics, etc. He went in at eight pm and came home the next afternoon. In the course of eighteen hours, for some reason still unknown to us, Josiah received an award—patient of the week. Now, remember he was only there for eighteen hours—and at least ten of those were spent sleeping. During the eight hours he was awake, I had to tell him at least a dozen times to quit asking so many questions when a nurse came in the room. (“Where does that lead to?” “How does that give fluid?” “What’s in that fluid?” etc. etc.) What did Josiah do in eight hours of precocious questioning that warranted him the “patient of the week” award? Nothing—that’s the point. **He simply didn’t do anything bad.** He didn’t complain, fuss, fight with me or the nurses, throw fits, argue, or disagree. He got an award not because he did anything great—he got an award because he didn’t do anything *bad*. Talk about low expectations! Josiah is a great kid with tons of character; however, this award didn’t make us especially proud of him. We would have been proud of him if he had gotten an award for helping the nurses straighten the

parent room or for encouraging another sick child or for cleaning up his toothpaste in the sink. But he got an award simply because he wasn't *bad*. *Only by comparison*.

More recently, I was editing at McDonald's (my favorite editing spot, believe it or not) with Jacob, then age nine (child #7). He was taking a "recess" from his school work and went to play in the play area. After a little while, he came back out to me with an elderly lady following close behind him. He said, "Mom, this lady wants to meet you." I introduced myself, and the lady said that Jacob was being such a good boy in there that she had to come out and find out for herself what his mom had done to raise him that way. She went on and on about well-mannered he was, how he didn't fight with the other kids, etc. etc. Then she questioned me about how we "kept him from being like the other kids in there." She then shook both of our hands and left, telling us that she was going to tell everyone she knew about this little boy and his homeschooling mommy. After she left, I asked Jacob what he had done to earn him such accolades, to which he replied, **"I didn't do anything good, but the kids in there were really bad today, so maybe I just seemed good because they were being really bad."** *Only by comparison*.

There are myriad problems with the *only by comparison* way of thinking. The first, and obvious one, is that we are told in Scriptures not to compare ourselves among ourselves: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Corinthians 10:12 KJV). **This version says that when we do this, we are not being wise.** Other versions say we are being fools when we do so.

Besides the Bible's take on that, something extremely unhealthy happens to our spiritual lives (or our character or our parenting, etc., whatever the case may be) when we start measuring ourselves against others. We either feel badly about ourselves because we think that we

cannot measure up to someone else—in the case of measuring ourselves to someone who is more spiritual, more noble, more disciplined in their parenting, more character-filled, etc. Or **we feel good about ourselves—because the party that we chose to measure ourselves against happens to be lower than we are (in our eyes, anyway) in that area of comparison.**

It is such a common malady that parents everywhere for ever and ever have told their children, “Don’t worry about what Johnny said about you. *He just puts you down to make himself feel/look better.*” Then as adults we do the same things to ourselves—**compare with someone weaker in some area to make ourselves feel better.**

The problem is widespread in Christianity—and it has invaded our parenting, forcing our parenting standards to go down lower and lower—lower than they were, but still a notch above the person or persons we are comparing to! Too **often we homeschooling parents base our performance in parenting on how poorly someone around us is parenting—and we try to at least hover above that level.**

This ought not to be! Christian parenting should not be about looking, seeming, or feeling better than those around us. It should be about excellence. It should be about high expectations. It should be about pleasing God in our parenting—not others, and certainly not ourselves!

I have a list (of course!) of suggestions for those of us who seem to be sliding down into “normalcy” or “sub-par” parenting due to false and unhealthy comparisons. (And even after twenty-six years of “doin’ the Christian parenting stuff,” I still fall into that trap myself at times!)

1. Prayerfully **seek God on your current parenting approach.** Is it based on how children around you act? Are you basking in the fact that your kids’ behavior is better than another family’s kids’ behavior? Do you relish the idea that compared to other young people, your teens are really not that bad?

2. Do **you treat others whose parenting skills are not as well-established as yours in a condescending or “holier than thou” way?** I think we would be surprised how what we see as “confidence” or “certainty” in our parenting approach can appear to others to be pride—and actually hurt them (and unnecessarily cause them to suffer from the “comparison syndrome”).

3. Do you feel yourself **slipping into a mediocrity or “only by comparison” mentality?** Purpose to measure your parenting—and your children’s behavior---by God’s Word and His character, not by those around you. You know in your heart of hearts that absence of bad does not necessarily mean good. God wants us to strive to live our lives fully for Him—and raise our children to do the same, not just to live in such a way that we avoid “the bad.”

4. **Try to steer clear of the “putting out fires” approach to parenting.** Yes, we do have to solve problems, but we should be teaching, training, and disciplining all the time—not just correcting negative behaviors. Use teachable moments to instruct in righteousness, such as pointing out how others feel (empathy), discussing helpfulness and opportunities to serve (selflessness), talking about taking the high road (decisiveness), illuminating good morals (virtuousness)--encouraging godly character in our kids’ everyday lives.

5. **Focus on our children’s interactions with each other and us.** The way our children treat their parents and each other will eventually be the way they treat others in their lives in the future. If they are consistently selfish or hateful to a brother, they will likely not have good relationships with co-workers. If they are disrespectful to us, they will probably not respect their future spouse. All relationship and character training begins at home. **It is a constant magnifying glass to show us parents exactly what our children are becoming.**

6. **Fill our children’s lives with stories of good—not just stories of absence of bad.** We have made it a practice to read biographical material aloud nearly every school day for the past twenty years. Reading about how

Hudson Taylor gave up his daily comforts of a soft mattress and rich foods or how Amy Carmichael put her own life in danger to save children or how William Borden gave up great riches to bring people to Christ will eventually leave their mark on your children. (They also give us points of reference for discussion: *Remember how decisive Hudson Taylor was before he ever left for China? What did William Borden discover about worldly riches?*)

7. Beware of **verbal comparisons** in front of the children. This is a fine line as we have used other children's good and bad behavior as learning tools for our children for twenty-five years. It is not uncommon for us to ask the kids on the way home from something (after serving at disability ministry, for instance) to each tell us two instances of godly character and one example of poor character or Christian living. We have done this not to compare our kids with others or cause our children to put others down—but to **help them recognize Christ-like and non-Christ-like behaviors**. However, if we constantly talk about how bad other families are or how bad a certain child is, we will fall into the comparison trap quickly—and so will our children. (And their behavior will reflect this—as they start to feel superior to that child—but not expect much more.) Thus, handle these discussions carefully. Use them if they help, but certainly not if they hurt. (Ray has made it a habit to ask for two good and one bad example of behavior and character. This helps the kids to focus on others' good traits too.)

8. Raise expectations! **Do not settle for absence of bad. Instead, expect good—no, expect great!** You can begin doing this by discussion. (Can you tell we like to talk at our house? J) Discussions of going that second mile. Of giving more than what is expected. Of leaving a place better than it was when we came. Of helping someone more than they even asked. Of sensing someone else's need and meeting it. Of reaching out to the weaker ones (elder, disabled, younger children, etc.). It is not uncommon for us to discuss high expectations as we travel somewhere: *What can you do to encourage Grandpa today?* (Not just *don't be bad at Grandpa's.*). *How can you lift others up this week at drama camp?* (Not just *don't talk when the teacher is talking.*)

We have found out through the years that the only by comparison parenting mode does not result in good parenting—or well-behaved children. However, our second mantra, *if your behavior had really been good, somebody would pay for our dinner*, eventually did pay off. When Joshua turned fourteen, he chose Red Lobster for his birthday dinner (back when we could afford sit down restaurants for birthdays!), and we enjoyed the meal together—only to be approached by a couple who commented on the children’s behavior *and* slid Ray a \$100 bill* for our food. The kids were ecstatic—and we were pretty happy parents. The children felt they had finally done it—they had, had good enough behavior to earn a free meal. And we were not out the money for an expensive meal. I wouldn’t want to get in the habit of paying my kids for good behavior—but I sure enjoyed this windfall—and I was more than a little bit happy that this couple thought our kids were well behaved—even if it was “only by comparison”!

*Read about our recent “[\\$100 Pay It Forward Reward](#)” experience on my blog.



