

Christian Children at Risk?

Minni K. Ang, *Ph.D*

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“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” – James 1:5

“Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.” – Psalm 22:9-10

“Children are a heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” – Psalm 127:3

INTRODUCTION

Nothing has the potential of arousing such a myriad of emotions as does the announcement of the impending birth of a first born child. Even for a Christian couple who has prayed for and planned for this life-changing event, the initial awe, joy and thankfulness at the news of their pregnancy can be quickly overwhelmed by anxiety, self-doubt and bewilderment as a multitude of well-meaning relatives and friends deliver a barrage of multifarious advice. "Crying is good for the lungs", say some. "Babies should never be left to cry alone", say others. "Don't pick your baby up too often or you'll spoil him", say some. "Babies need to be cuddled and held as much as possible", say others. The new parents-to-be are understandably confused by such conflicting advice. Whoever imagined this thing called parenting could be so hard? So, like any responsible parents-to-be, the couple head to the local bookstore to buy a few good books to educate themselves for what could be the most important role they will ever play in someone else's life - their child's. But what do they find there? Rows and rows of books with all sorts of intriguing titles - a quick browse through several uncover similarly diverse opinions. This book

says babies should be fed whenever they ask to be fed, also called on-demand feeding. That book says babies should be fed on a strict schedule, at three hourly intervals, no more, no less. This book says baby should sleep beside mommy in her bed. That book says baby must sleep in his own crib and never ever in his parent's bed. What confusion! How do we tell the good advice from the bad? Simple logical deduction indicates that it is quite obvious that not all the advice can be equally true, especially those that directly contradict one another. And it is vitally important that new parents discover the truth, after all, this new baby will be the most important stewardship the Lord has ever assigned them to - this child of their own flesh and blood! So how do we separate the wheat from the chaff?

JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTOR OF OUR FAITH

What would Jesus do? This is the guiding question for us as Christians and should also be for us as Christian parents. What was Jesus' attitude towards little children?

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).

The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:1-6).

Jesus clearly highly valued little children. He not only commended them as examples of humility for all believers to follow, but also issued a stern warning against those who would hinder them from coming to Himself. Without a doubt, Jesus' advice on how we should treat others extends also to how we should treat our children. Here is how He sums it up:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12).

Another verse to keep in mind when relating to our children is this one from Paul's letters:

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20).

In all the instances where Jesus' interactions with children are recorded in the Bible, He treats them with respect, with great love, and also with gentle affection. It is again without doubt that this is how He would expect His followers to treat little children as well. All the examples in the above paragraphs are well and good and few Christians, if any, would dispute them. However, the actual mechanics of how these attitudes and responsibilities translate into real-life remain hazy for many. To provide some clarification in this regard, we need to turn to the discoveries of scientific research, keeping in mind this verse from Paul's letter to the Romans:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20).

WHAT SCIENCE SAYS

From late pregnancy through the second year of life, the human brain experiences a critical period of accelerated growth. This process consumes higher amounts of energy than any other stage in the human lifespan, and requires not only sufficient nutrients but optimal interpersonal experiences for maximal maturation¹. The human cerebral cortex adds 70 percent of its mass after birth and grows to 90 percent of its adult size in the first three years of life². The expanding brain is directly influenced by its environment, creating an interplay between biology and social environment³. The first year of a baby's life is especially critical with regards the fine-tuning of the brain's internal connections and cells, with excess cells and unused synapses being permanently eliminated⁴. This means that children raised with limited stimulation actually have fewer synapses than those who are regularly held, spoken to, played with and visually stimulated⁵. With the help of neuroscience and technologies such as EEG, PET, and MRI, we can see how the interplay between brain development and social environment actually looks. There is mounting evidence that stress and trauma impair optimal brain development while healthy attachment promotes it^{6,7}. Babies are born with the capacity for feeling deep emotions, but are unable to regulate either the intensity or the duration of these emotions⁸. Without the assistance and monitoring of a caregiver, babies become overwhelmed by their emotional states, including those of fear, excitement, and sadness⁹. In order to maintain emotional equilibrium, babies require a consistent and committed relationship with one

caring person. The research indicates that the person best suited for this relationship is the mother¹⁰. Babies have their own spontaneous expressions of themselves. When you pay attention to these expressions you communicate that you understand what they are doing, feeling, and even thinking. This assists brain development and creates a foundation for the negotiation of all social interactions. When these needs are not met, babies experience distress, typically displayed by crying. If their need remains unmet, crying intensifies, followed by screaming. Extended crying sometimes leads to nausea and vomiting as well. At some point, the child disengages from the external world's stimuli and retreats to an internal world. This reaction involves numbing, avoidance, compliance, and lack of reaction¹¹. This stage occurs in the face of a stressful situation in which the baby feels hopeless and helpless¹². All the baby's regulatory systems are thus focused on coping. Such early relational traumas become part of the structure of the forming personality¹³ as the brain is developing at its fastest rate and is thus at its maximum vulnerability to influences and stimuli affecting growth and development¹⁴. While this stress reaction is occurring, the infant brain cannot develop in other ways, thus missing opportunities for learning at the critical period of brain development¹⁵. The building of a good self-image, self-confidence and true independence requires the nurturing parenting practice of responding promptly to the child's physical as well as emotional needs, creating strong emotional bonds, also known as secure attachment, between the child and parent¹⁶.

CHILDREN AT RISK

The previous two paragraphs present a holistic answer to the question raised at the end of our introductory paragraph. The entire discussion thus far can be summarized as in the points below:

- Each child is a special blessing from the Lord to his or her parents (Psalm 127:3).
- Each child first learns to know God through his or her mother (Psalm 22:9-10).
- Each child is born completely dependent on his or her caregivers for survival and healthy development (scientific findings).
- The initial years are especially crucial to brain development, and consequently the formation of character and good mental health, besides physical growth (scientific findings).
- Secure attachment is critical to healthy development (scientific findings).

- Jesus places great value on little children (Biblical evidence).
- Parents are Jesus' ambassadors to their children and should treat them as He would (Biblical evidence).

Summarized in this way, the entire issue of Christian parenting might seem like a non-issue. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that something has gone wrong, and the evidence for this shows up very clearly much later: when the little children have grown up to become youths (although in fact the warning signs that all is not well usually show up much sooner but often pass unrecognized by most). The issues and challenges involving Malaysian Christian youth have recently been highlighted by both the NECF in its Youth Workers Consultation 2005¹⁷ and by the Kairos Research Center in the September 2005 issue of its magazine *Understanding the Modern World through Christian Eyes* with its theme of "Youth Challenge". In the latter publication, Margaret Loy identified three factors contributing to rebellion in Christian youth¹⁸, which she termed as "benign neglect", "pressure of expectations" and "dysfunctional homes". It is the opinion of the present author that "benign neglect" is in fact the primary contributing factor towards not only rebellion among Christian youth today but is also the main hindrance preventing them from coming to Jesus, and that this so-called "benign neglect" starts out not as a problem of youth but from infancy itself. Issues and challenges surfacing among Christian youth, including the trend towards liberalism and post-modernist views among second generation Christians, are in fact a barometer indicating the spiritual health of the Church in general and of its children in particular. Going by what Jesus said in Matthew 18:1-6, a Church whose children are spiritually unhealthy is in fact a Church that cannot claim itself to be spiritually healthy. In the following paragraphs I will greatly expand on the original concept of "benign neglect" and why it has become such a major problem in Malaysia today and how Christian parents can rise above these challenges to raise their children up not only to remain spiritually healthy in the Lord but also to vibrantly fulfil their potential to be salt and light that have a healing impact on a spiritually unhealthy world.

So how does God expect Christian parents to raise their children? The combination of general revelation (defined here as the nature of human beings as designed by our Creator God and revealed to us through science) and special revelation (defined here as how Jesus Himself viewed and treated little children as revealed to us in the Bible) gives sufficient guidelines as to how parents should ideally respond - so why is there still so much uncertainty and deviation, and what can be done about it? To answer these questions, we first need to consider the typical challenges facing new parents and how giving into

these challenges results in "benign neglect" that eventually seriously compromises the spiritual and emotional health of our children.

CHALLENGES FACING NEW PARENTS TODAY

For the sake of focus and immediate relevance, our discussion will be limited to Malaysian Christian first-time parents or parents-to-be. Challenges facing these new parents can come from the outside (external challenges) or from within (internal challenges). We will begin with the external challenges first, as these are often overwhelmingly strong in our Malaysian context.

Pressure from elders

The first hurdle many newlyweds face is pressure from ageing parents to have children before the couple is ready. This is a very real pressure, and is far worse when the ageing parents involved are non-Christians and producing grandchildren is viewed as the ultimate sign of filial piety, although even Christians are sometimes guilty of glibly quoting "be fruitful and multiply" regardless of whether or not the couple concerned is ready for parenthood. Christian couples facing this sort of pressure need to constantly remind themselves that bringing a new baby into this world is the biggest responsibility that they will ever be given over another human life precious in the sight of the Lord, and that God will surely hold them accountable for this stewardship. This does not imply that couples should be afraid to have children, the Bible is very clear that children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3) and that new parents can freely ask the Lord for the wisdom to raise them in a way that is pleasing to Him (James 1:5). What it does imply is that parenthood is not something to be undertaken lightly or without preparation, and it certainly should not be embarked upon solely for the purpose of pleasing one's own parents through providing them with much demanded for grandchildren.

Perhaps one of the strongest pressures on parents-to-be that often interferes with and sometimes completely destroys the intimate mother-baby bond designed by God and present from the moment of conception is the pressure to follow certain detrimental traditional confinement practices. To understand this statement, we need to examine the various typical confinement practices in light of the findings of science as well as the context of Scriptures.

The newborn phase is the most delicate in terms of the new mother-baby relationship, with good parent-child bonding during the first three years of life being critically important for healthy emotional development¹⁹. This scientific

fact, especially in the light of Psalm 22:9-10 and Isaiah 54:13, indicates that to jeopardize the mother-baby bond is most definitely not in the best interests of the child (or the mother) - yet that is precisely what many traditional Chinese confinement ladies proceed to do when they insist that mother needs to sleep and rest as much as possible during the infant's first month of life. The not uncommon practice of the confinement lady taking care of the infant while the new mother rests, even sleeping through the night, seriously interferes with what should be the budding mother-baby bond. The first few months of life should be the time for the new mother to personally care for her infant, getting to know baby's needs and personality quirks intimately through constant personal interaction and physical care - but not only that - the newborn baby's personality is shaped through these intimate interactions with mother, even as her own responses are moulded to fit her baby's in an ever-evolving finely balanced synergy. This is obviously God's design and one which Christians should not ignore. Yet Chinese confinement practice rudely intrudes a stranger into this intimate relationship (the confinement lady, who could either be a hired helper or the new mother's own mother or mother-in-law), and not one who is benign either but one who actually actively comes between the new mother and her infant. On top of that, the infant's father is typically completely crowded out of the picture as baby's early needs are fulfilled between the mother and the confinement lady. No wonder Malaysian father's often have difficulty bonding with their babies! The ideal scenario in a home with a newborn infant should be mother as the primary caregiver and father as her helpmeet. The typical scenario in a Malaysian home with a newborn infant is the confinement lady as the primary caregiver of both mother and infant, with mother helping out with the baby and father only supporting them by going shopping for groceries - how far removed this is from the ideal!

Without a doubt, God intended that infant nutrition needs be met through breastfeeding - there is ample research published on the fact that breast is best as far as infant nutrition is concerned²⁰. Breastfeeding not only fulfils nutritional needs but is also the best way to nurture the mother-baby bond. The WHO and UNICEF recommend that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life with complementary foods being introduced after 6 months and breastfeeding continuing up to 2 years of age at least²¹. It is a sad fact that hardly any Malaysian babies actually receive this. There are many reasons for this and comprehensive research still needs to be carried out, but the present writer believes there is enough evidence to claim that traditional confinement practices are the trigger leading to a cascade of reasons for the high breastfeeding failure rates.

The initial few days in the breastfeeding relationship are critical as baby learns

to correctly latch on and draw out mother's milk. Mother and baby need continual undisturbed time together, with baby being nursed on demand, and mother needs as much support from everyone around her as possible as her body and mind adjust to this new role. However, as already described in a preceding paragraph, the confinement lady jeopardizes this budding nursing relationship through her intrusive presence. Besides actively coming between mother and baby, many confinement ladies also introduce unnecessary infant formula feeding, either with or without the mother's knowledge. Of course, if they keep the baby away from its mother, the baby will naturally cry - and this is the time they typically give the baby infant formula instead of "disturbing" the mother from her supposed much needed rest. They also frequently question the mother's ability to produce "enough milk", and this leads the new mother herself to have serious self-doubt that she can properly nourish her baby. The traditional Chinese confinement diet also interferes with the new mother's ability to produce milk - steeped in alcohol and all kinds of herbs, with the drinking of plain water strongly discouraged, it promotes everything that the nursing mother should actually avoid! The nursing mother's nutritional needs are in fact best promoted by sensible eating habits - a balanced diet with plenty of fluids. Large amounts of certain herbs actually decrease milk supply²², while alcohol enters the mother's bloodstream thus getting into her milk. Considering the diet many Malaysians, especially Chinese, mothers are on during their confinement month, it is no wonder that so many complain of not being able to produce enough milk for their babies! This fact, added onto everything else, contributes significantly as to why so few Malaysians are able to achieve the WHO and UNICEF ideals.

There is no doubt that pressure from elders to do things the way they have "always been done" is a difficult hurdle for new parents to overcome, even when they know that the "old ways" are not optimal for their child's development. The ageing parents or in-laws feelings may be hurt as they feel criticized or indirectly being accused of being bad parents themselves through rejection of their "tried and tested" methods of child raising. We have only discussed at length certain traditional Chinese confinement practices, however pressure from elders to do things their way typically extends well beyond that initial month, though it is at the initial stage that new parents are most vulnerable to the influence of their own parents as their confidence is undermined by constantly being told what to do. If the new parents prepare themselves for parenthood well, it is often possible to remain firm in doing things God's way, as illuminated through the findings of research, yet without offending or hurting their own parents. For example, it is hard for elderly people to completely let go of the idea that the confinement period or the confinement lady is needed - new parents can compromise by allowing for a

helper during the initial month, but strictly limiting her role to supporting the family through cooking and housework.

Peer pressure

The second external challenge faced by many new parents is pressure from friends, church members and colleagues, especially those who are supposedly more experienced in parenting than the new parents are. One of the first pieces of advice Malaysian parents-to-be are typically given by their peers is "get a maid". New parents are advised that it is impossible to cope without a maid in our modern urban world. While there is nothing inherently wrong in hiring someone to do housework, the typical maid in Malaysia is assigned responsibilities well in excess of what one would expect of someone hired under the job description of a maid, including, in some cases, round-the-clock childcare. Putting aside the fact that the majority of typical foreign maids hired via maid agencies are young, inexperienced single women who have never been trained in proper childcare, even if parents hire someone who has herself happened to have been a mother - in the light of what we have read so far in this paper, can Christian parents honestly and in clear conscience leave the primary care of their young and highly mouldable children to other people, more so strangers who most of the time don't even share the same mother-tongue let alone beliefs, principles and intellectual levels? This is what the "benign neglect" discussed in the Kairos magazine late last year²³ is all about. It is not surprising that many Malaysian children say "kakak" before they say "mama" - consider the number of waking hours the young child spends in the company of the maid - in his/her short life, this would typically account for the largest percentage of conscious time - it is perfectly reasonable that the maid is recognized by the child as the mother-figure instead of the biological mother. It is the maid who becomes the infant's role model as she is the one who spends the most time with him/her. Why are parents surprised when this happens? It is merely the consequence of their own decision to leave the primary care of their infant in someone else's hands. In fact the same conditions apply when parents decide to leave their children in the care of their own parents or in-laws for most of the day, especially in the earliest years. Of course in this latter scenario, perhaps the new parents own parents have values and intellectual levels that are not that far removed from themselves - however, grandparents, even doting ones, are still not the child's actual parents and the mother-baby and later father-baby bond²⁴ will still be seriously jeopardized if anyone other than the child's own parents are the primary caregivers.

Perhaps many parents have failed to seriously think through these things.

Certainly, there is pressure to keep up with what your friends are doing and to listen to those "more experienced" than oneself. Typical couples, and especially vulnerable new mothers, may have to deal with self doubt if their choices are different from the majority of their peers. This is where internal challenges to be overcome must be identified. We will now consider the two major internal challenges to Christian parenting: personal attitudes and lifestyle choices.

Attitudes

Not all hurdles to successful parenting can be blamed on external factors. As mentioned earlier in this paper, parents-to-be are certainly accountable for their stewardship of their own children. While external pressures can overwhelm new parents in their force and persistence, it is internal attitudes that finally determine which road the new parents will take in their journey through parenthood.

The scenarios described in the opening paragraph of this paper reflect the wealth of information available on all aspects of parenting. From books to journal articles to magazine write ups to information available on the Internet to televised documentaries, new parents are certainly not starved of information - however for those not used to sifting through vast archives of available material, making sense of it all can be a formidable and sometimes even insurmountable task. Our present generation's fad of wanting quick answers to everything does not help matters - it is all too easy to seek out those materials that promise quick solutions to all parenting problems, to want to believe in claims of simple ten-step approaches that make your child smarter or sleep better or eat better or be better behaved. The truth of the matter is that bringing up a child is a lifelong commitment with no easy answers or one-size-fits-all quick fix methods. It is in fact very hard work, but it is also great fun and the most rewarding job in the world. Still, misinformation through inadequate education as to what parenting practices are actually in the best interests of the child is still sadly very widespread, even among Christians, with the internal challenge to be overcome here being sheer laziness. Parents-to-be, especially Christian parents-to-be, need to recognize that their new role will be one of the most important ones they will ever play, and therefore requires their best efforts at self education. Time needs to be set aside to read, to discuss and pray over parenting choices with spouses, to attend childbirth and parenting classes together as a couple. These are some of the basic ways in which couples can prepare themselves for parenthood.

So how do you sift through the vast amounts of material available? It is

important to go back to the basics mentioned in the first few paragraphs of this paper - in terms of printed or online material, is it based on solid scientific research? Are its claims backed up by proper references that you can also check out and read if you want to? If you are reading an article on the Internet, is it published by a reputable website? For example, articles made available on the website of the World Health Organization (WHO) or the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) or other university-based early childhood research centres can certainly be considered reliable. The other criterion to consider when evaluating any material you read or advice you are given is, is it consistent with the principles by which we live as found in the Bible? Another way of looking at it is, would Jesus do it?

A second attitude that negatively impacts our children is parental selfishness. It is sad but true that some parents, despite knowing what they should do with regards to raising their children, just refuse to do it because ultimately they do not really care that much about the child's best interests. New parents that fall in this category are typically those that were either pressured by their own parents into having children before they really wanted to or those that had unplanned pregnancies.

A third attitude that can affect new parents confidence in their own parenting ability is fear. Some new parents can become bogged down by worry about what will happen if they don't obey their elders, as much traditional advice is accompanied by dire warnings as to what will happen if the advice is not heeded. An example of this are some of the confinement practices - new mothers are warned that if they fail to heed the advice to rest as much as possible or if they fail to follow the traditional confinement diet that they will suffer the consequences in their old age, such as arthritis and rheumatism. Certainly there is no scientific basis for such claims, and new Christian parents who feel themselves in the grip of such fears need to meditate on Scripture verses such as Isaiah 41:10, *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

New parents who have themselves been negatively affected by their own past childhood experiences may be scarred and require spiritual and emotional healing before they can overcome their hang ups. Besides all the usual ways of educating themselves for parenthood such as reading, such parents (even if it involves only one, either the mother or the father-to-be) would be well advised to seek pastoral or professional Christian family counselling before the arrival of their newborn in order to avoid transferring their own hang ups onto their children.

Lifestyle

I have separated lifestyle choices from attitudes in identifying internal hurdles that hinder ideal parenting because although lifestyle choices are in fact the result of individual attitudes, some of these choices would have been made some time ago and individuals do become trapped in certain lifestyles sometimes without really realizing what has happened or actively choosing to remain where they are.

The first lifestyle choice that significantly intrudes on parents ability to spend time with their children and typically results in leaving children for extended periods with other caregivers such as maids, grandparents or babysitters, is materialism. Parents, and in the Malaysian context this often includes either both mother and father or sometimes just father alone, feel compelled to work long hours to support a certain level of material comfort. This is true even for Christians, especially urban Christians who can easily become caught up in the race towards an ever more materialistic lifestyle. Teachers in schools within the Klang Valley regularly testify that many problem children claim misbehaviour is the only thing that gets their parents attention - some parents even leave for work before their children wake up in the morning and get home after they have gone to bed, many others spend long hours in school only to come home to spend time on their own or with the maid, yet others spend the hours outside of school at childcare centers, seeing their parents only for brief periods when they pick them up and drop them places. Parents often claim they have no choice but to work like this, but do they?

It is worthwhile for parents-to-be to evaluate their financial status. Besides jeopardizing the parent-child bond and thus negatively impacting their emotional and mental development, very young children who are left for extended periods of time with other caregivers incur a significantly higher financial burden on their parents. Consider the following monthly costs:

- Infant formula (infants cared for by those other than their mothers are also typically not breastfed)
- Medical bills (infants not breastfed typically have poorer immunity and easily get sick)
- Disposable diapers (while not all infants cared for by their own mothers use washable diapers, the possibility of this is virtually nil by those cared for by other people)
- Childcare/maid

These are only the essential unavoidable costs involved in maintaining a child within this sort of lifestyle - additional costs could include insurance, transportation, et cetera. Then of course there are other risks to consider including safety. Parents-to-be who think they may be trapped into having to succumb to this sort of lifestyle should seriously consider their position again. Is it really worthwhile for both parents to work given all the additional costs incurred as identified above? Mothers especially should seriously consider taking at least a year or two off full time employment, especially during the critical early years, to spend time bonding with and caring for their own babies. Perhaps there may be a need to sell off one car or to live a more frugal lifestyle - as Christians we should be aware that material possessions are not everything anyway. If prospective parents really cannot afford not to work or to cut down on their working hours, perhaps they should consider delaying having children until they are more ready for the time commitment required to raise them well.

A second lifestyle choice that has the same final result as materialism is career mindedness. Some people are engrossed in their jobs, not for the love of money but for the job satisfaction or self-fulfilment it brings. This is all well and good, as long as children are not in the picture. Having children means compromising on certain things, and spending long hours at work is certainly one of those things that need to be reconsidered. Again, if prospective parents really feel that their career is of vital importance, then they should consider delaying having children until they are more ready for the time commitment required to raise them well.

A final lifestyle choice that again has the same final result as the two above but a quite different motivation is too much involvement in church or charity-like activities. The sincere motivation here is to serve and to help others, as opposed to selfishly pursuing individual gain - however, the end result in terms of "benign neglect" is the same. It is common knowledge that children of pastors and elders are often the worst rebels - these children often grow up feeling that they are not as important as all those other people that father and/or mother are helping and consequently many do turn away from the faith of their parents. It is imperative that church leadership recognizes that too many church activities that separate the parents from their children are damaging to the spiritual and emotional health of the family. Churches should instead rally around new (and existing) parents and organize programs that families can participate in together as a family. Pastoral visits to the home to support stay-at-home-moms should be a regular feature of church ministry.

DARING TO BE DIFFERENT

We have touched on many different things in this paper, but the bottom line is this: are current typical parenting practises among Christian parents putting our children at risk? At risk of stunted mental, emotional and spiritual development? At risk of losing their faith in the Lord altogether? The blueprint for healthy Christian parenting is freely available - children, especially the youngest ones, need their parents, especially their mothers at first but also their fathers a little later, to be with them all the time, to interact with them, to care for them and to just show them their love - this is what the findings of science have revealed to us, and the Bible makes it clear that such scientific findings are valid as they make known God's design for His creation (Romans 1:20). Do we dare not to be different from the mainstream?

NOTES

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¹⁵ Ibid 6.

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²⁰ *The Many Benefits of Breastfeeding* (links), available at <http://www.kellymom.com/bf/start/prepare/bf-benefits.html>

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²³ Ibid 18.

²⁴ Ibid 19.