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THE SPLENDOR OF SEPTEMBER!

**CHARACTER LIKE BAMBOO**

BY JIM DALY

**Tough  
Questions  
from Kids****Can we pray  
anytime  
we want?**

PARENTING TEENAGERS CAN BE CHALLENGING. FROM THEIR BIRTH, you've planted good values in their hearts and carefully cultivated the soil. But now the high school years are flying by, and you're still staring at a bare patch of dirt where you expected good character to appear. On good days you're up to your eyeballs in bad attitudes. On bad days, you question where you went wrong as a parent.

As you navigate this season of parenting, I encourage you to consider the growth cycle of Chinese bamboo. Unlike most seeds, Chinese bamboo doesn't germinate in days or weeks. It can take months—sometimes years. Even in perfect conditions, you could be staring at a bare patch of dirt for a long time. So long, in fact, that you might question where you went wrong.

But wait. With patience and faith, you'll witness something amazing. One day, when you least expect it, the bamboo will emerge from the soil and grow at an astounding rate—sometimes several feet in a day—until it reaches its full height of 80 feet or more.

In your child's heart, a vast root system of maturity and good character has been developing. As you wait for that first green shoot to burst through the soil, trust that God is at work even when it seems like nothing is happening.

Want to know more? Visit [www.focusonthefamily.com](http://www.focusonthefamily.com).

## COUPLES, ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

The Bible says that one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17) and that Christians are meant to encourage one another's faith (Romans 1:12). To encourage one other, we need fellowship. And we also need fellowship and encouragement to keep our marriages strong.



If you are dealing with issues in your marriage, there's a good chance that other couples in your church have already dealt with (or are dealing with) the same problems. They can empathize with you, pray for you and offer advice as you and your spouse work to grow in your relationship with each other and God.

If you're not facing any marriage difficulties right now, you can provide Christian guidance to a couple seeking support. If you're the example of a marriage that's survived and thrived because of Christ, it will stir up gratefulness in your hearts for what God has done in and through your marriage. Fellowship is a win-win!

—Julie Holmquist

## WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET

When Christ washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-5), they were shocked. Peter even tried to refuse Jesus' service. How could their teacher and leader do the unpleasant work that was often delegated to servants and slaves?

The disciples once argued about who would be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). By washing their filthy feet, Jesus showed them that the greatest were those who served others in love and humility.

In marriage, we have ample opportunities to "wash one another's feet." Just think of the ways we could be humble and do the dirty work! Linking "dirty work" and "opportunity" doesn't come naturally, of course, which is why we need to think about it.

In humility, you can let your spouse have the first choice or the last brownie. You can try your mate's solution to a problem instead of insisting on your way. You can listen respectfully to their correction if you mess up. With a servant's heart, you can do the dishes, even if it's not "your turn." You can be the one to get out of bed at night with the sick child and clean up the vomit.

There are many ways to wash one another's feet without actually touching any tootsies.

—Julie Holmquist

## HELPING TEENS TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

At the age of 19, I was a young mother who had no idea what she was doing. By the time I turned 25, my husband and I already had four kids under the age of 5. We had our hands full but tried to persevere. I quickly realized that I needed God's help if I was ever going to help my kids grow up and successfully transition into adulthood.

We can't sacrifice the future God has for our kids because of our own fears and insecurities. There is a middle, a balance and a transition. It is best for everyone when we help our kids through the transition from teenager to adulthood, rather than hold them back.

Our children don't automatically gain wisdom when the clock strikes midnight on their eighteenth birthday and they are considered an adult by law. But if we don't allow our kids to enter into adulthood and enable them to transition into this wonderful chapter in their lives, it can be more harmful than helpful to them.

Here are a few ways to help you survive your teenage child's transition into adulthood.



- **Pray.** Never underestimate the power of prayer. Ask God to give you wisdom when making parenting decisions. This is true from the very beginning, but it is even more critical during this time of transition.
- **Spend time in God's Word.** Ensure that you have a pure heart and that you are not parenting out of fear, frustration or emotions.
- **Have a conversation with your child.** Find out what is going on in their world. More than likely, they have their own fears they battle. They just want to talk it out—let them, and be an active listener. “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13). We can't help our kids if we don't know their hearts. Be approachable.
- **Watch your nonverbal language.** Our tone, facial expressions and body language can speak louder than our words. It can either draw them near to us or push them away from us.
- **Communicate expectations between you and your young adult child.** Make sure these expectations are realistic for both of you. Remember to expect them to be responsible young adults and hold them accountable.

—*Maria Miller*

# FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

## How can we model Christ's love in our marriage?

### ANSWER:

Paul said in Ephesians 5:1-2 that we are to “be imitators . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (NIV).

What does that look like for us in our marriage?

Christ's love is a giving love. It is a sacrificing and selfless love. It is a love that shows itself in action. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV).

Jesus loves us simply because He loves us. In

His love, He made the ultimate sacrifice, giving up everything—all His glory, His life—to serve us.

The Greek word for this sacrificial love is *agape*.

Here's the definition:

“Unconditional love that is always giving and impossible to take or be a taker. It devotes total commitment to seek your highest best no matter how anyone may respond. This form of love is totally selfless and does not change whether the love given is returned or not.”

Jesus doesn't expect anything in return. He loves us when we speak to Him daily, spend time in His Word and help an elderly person cross the street. He also loves us when we respond with a

harsh tone to our kids, yell at the person who cut us off and don't feel like going to church on Sunday morning. His love is unconditional and is there even when we screw up.

If you want to love like Jesus loves, you have to put yourself aside. In a sermon entitled, “What Is Christian Marriage?” Coty Pinckney said, “Agape is a love that gives, a love that does not demand or hold on to rights, but has the good of the other at heart. This is the love we need to work on in our marriage in order for our spouse to feel like he or she is married to Jesus.”

—Matthew J. White

## TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

### ANSWER:

**Yes, we can pray to God anytime—between meals, when we can't sleep at night or in school. Because of Christ, the door to God is always open. Of course, we need to respect others. We should not start praying out loud in the middle of a conversation with our friends. But we can still take a moment to pray silently.**

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