

How to Raise a Superstar

Tim Kelly



*Great parenting doesn't happen by accident—ask **Kate Battistelli**, mother of Dove award-winning recording artist **Francesca Battistelli**. Through raising her daughter to understand her gifts and calling, Kate has discovered a few keys to steering children toward their destiny in God.*

When my daughter, Francesca, was a little girl it was obvious that she had a flair for the dramatic and a bent toward the performing arts. So into ballet she went, then show choir and community theater, singing lessons, and later professional theater, guitar lessons, camps, conferences and college—all with an eye toward the future and a sense God had a plan for her in the performing arts.

Could I have ever known when she was 4 years old and starting ballet that she would grow up to be a Grammy-nominated contemporary Christian singer with five Dove Awards and five top-10 singles? Did I know her songs would be played on a variety of television shows and major motion pictures—all within the first two years of her career? Of course not. But I did know God had something special for her—just as He has for *your* child.

Successful adults don't happen by accident. It takes intentional effort to raise children to adulthood who have a strong sense of their destiny in God, a passion to serve Him and a deep knowledge of His gifts and callings. As parents, we know our children better than anyone else. By partnering with God we can equip them to go after their dreams and be all He called and created them to be.

Yet raising a child to be a world changer in any field takes

discipline, time, diligence and patience. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." These treasured words teach that we have a responsibility: We have to do the training! But we can also have faith that God will show us "the way [they] should go" as we're raising them.

As my husband, Mike, and I sought God for wisdom and clarity for Francesca's call, He narrowed the field, closed some doors but opened others, and step by step made her path clear. It was a family affair and involved lots of hard work, financial sacrifice, hours upon hours of practice (and driving!), and the inevitable emotional upheaval when things didn't go exactly as planned. Looking back, the lessons we learned formed her into the successful adult she is today, and there's little I would change.

But it's important to understand that parenting is a work in progress. It's OK if you fail from time to time! Just keep going and trust the Lord and know you are growing a great kid in the process. Francesca didn't just automatically step into the destiny God had foreordained for her. In fact, God's plan included Mike and I finding our purpose in Him first.

A Curtain Closes on Broadway

Before Franny was born, Mike and I experienced significant success in our chosen fields—music, acting, conducting, recording and musical theater.

We didn't fully achieve all our goals, but we worked consistently. We were on an upward trajectory and were considered by our peers to be quite successful in our field. My heartfelt desire during those years was to be a thriving, Tony Award-winning Broadway star whose name was synonymous with "leading lady." Mike had equally lofty goals beyond his accomplishments of conducting orchestras for Broadway, Radio City Music Hall and national tours.

So there we were living and working in New York City, newly married, successful, happy—and what happens next? We met the Lord, and He turned everything in our lives upside down! As brand-new believers we prayed for wisdom and for ears to hear God's will for our lives and careers. We were surprised when God seemed to make it quite clear He had a different plan for our lives and future.

What did we hear? Only the most difficult thing possible that two young career-oriented, success-addicted, limelight-seeking musical theater professionals could hear: Lay down your dreams of continuing your careers and leave New York and your Broadway aspirations behind.

We allowed the seed of our desires to die and go into the ground. They laid dormant there for many years before bearing fruit in Francesca's life. All the desires we laid down, all the unfulfilled dreams we had for ourselves, God has more than fulfilled through her. In fact, He's redeemed them and has given them kingdom purpose in our daughter's career. She's taken it much further than we ever dreamed.

Because of our years of training and experience, we were able to guide her in the early days. We knew the dedication it took to achieve excellence in the arts firsthand, and because of that we were able to steer her to the threshold of a professional career in music.

God had a much bigger purpose in mind for our arts training than our fame and fortune. Now, she's running with it to the next generation. It's every bit as satisfying—in fact more so—to see your child raised up and being a role model to others and making music that's blessing so many lives.

You may be reading this and thinking: *They must have been the perfect parents and did everything right. No wonder their daughter turned out so well.*

Actually—no! The reason I'm sharing my parenting journey with

you is that I made so many mistakes along the way. I messed up plenty, and you may too. It wasn't always easy for Franny or us. The thing is to keep going forward, correct the things you know to correct, repent and move on.

With that in mind, here are some practical points we discovered on our parenting journey. I believe these will help you too to steer your children toward their true destiny in God.

1. Decide What's Important

We decided early on what was important to our daughter would be important to us. Kids deeply care about what their parents think, particularly when it comes to their ideas and the dreams they have for their lives.

We took great interest in the things Franny was passionate about, which were music and the arts. Our interest came naturally and was easy for us because it was right in line with what we already loved.

What if your child has a burning interest in and is excited about a subject you know nothing about and couldn't care less about? What do you do? Well, you learn about it, do the best you can to understand it and dig into it with both hands right alongside your child! What a great way to spend time learning something new while demonstrating to your child their importance to you.

Think how empowering it is to your children for you to tangibly share their excitement about a subject! At the very least, go to the library or get on the Internet and start learning about whatever it is that's capturing their interest. Find some research on the subject, look for local classes you can take, order a magazine subscription for your child and for you. Actions really *do* speak louder than words.

2. Model It

How hard do your children see you work at what *you* do? Are you

setting an example of excellence in your household for them to emulate?

Our children imitate what they see us do. My daughter knows I pray, and when she has an issue in her life, she'll call or text me, confident I'll pray about whatever she's asked me. She knows I will because it's the pattern I set for her hundreds of times when she lived at home. Whenever there was a crisis, large or small, she knew prayer would be the first line of defense.

I recommend removing the words, "Do as I say and not as I do," from your vocabulary. Model integrity by keeping your promises, keeping your word and following through on your commitments. Your children need to see your word as your bond and know that you can be trusted to follow through. They need to see you do what you say you're going to do, for them and for others.

Franny grew up knowing if we committed to doing something, we were going to follow through, and so was she!

3. Be Available

Time is so precious during the years we have our children at home. So many things conspire to steal our time and attention, causing us to waste the priceless hours we will never get back. Social networking comes to mind as one of those things valuable for sharing news or asking for prayer, but it can become for some of us a huge time-waster. I admit to being active on both Facebook and Twitter, and it's been a great way to stay in touch with friends, as well as with my daughter's busy schedule. But can you honestly tell me the value of spending countless mindless hours on games such as FarmVille or Mafia Wars? I can certainly find myself spending way too much time on Facebook or Twitter while the important things, the pressing items on my to-do list, remain undone.

As parents we have precious few years to influence their

values, help shape their dreams, and model the moral code and work ethic we live by. We shouldn't let anything take precedence over spending time with them.

4. Watch the Time

Consider this: Each week has exactly 168 hours. Assuming work (or school), travel and sleep occupy 106 of those hours (40, 10 and 56, respectively), we're left with 62 hours. Housework, shopping, meal preparation and other chores will take up a chunk of the time remaining. Some of us also need to sneak a little "me time" in there just to maintain our sanity and recharge our batteries. Don't forget time alone with your spouse!

Allocating these remaining hours can take some serious balancing, but the good news is we get 52 opportunities every year to get it right. As a mom, it was my priority to be as involved in my daughter's life as much as possible without being smothering. I homeschooled Franny and was blessed to be a stay-at-home mom who didn't have to work outside the house. Mike ran a business and worked from home during those years.

We had lots of hours in the car driving to myriad classes, lessons and rehearsals. The car for most moms is already their home away from home, but we always tried to make it a fun family experience as much as possible. Today we still play some of the same silly word games we invented during the many hours we spent in the family minivan.

5. Set (Measurable) Goals

Because time is so valuable—and limited—one of the most treasured gifts you can deposit into your children is goal setting, which enables them to use their own time wisely. Here is a basic outline to get you started:

- State your goal as a positive statement
- Be precise and specific so you can measure results
- Prioritize and revisit your goals regularly

- Write them down and put them where you can see them
- Lay out the steps you need to take to achieve them
- Set deadlines and attach intermediate time lines
- Develop a plan to deal with obstacles.

A great exercise to do with the whole family is to write down some family goals and brainstorm to come up with specific, measurable ways the family can work together to achieve them.

6. Avoid the Traps

The enemy sets lots of traps for parents. The last thing he wants us to do is raise world changers who live with power and anointing on their lives. His traps all have one purpose: to knock our children off the path God appointed for them. Here are a few to recognize and avoid.

Favoritism and Jealousy. I raised an only child, so I didn't have to deal much with favoritism. But its cousin, jealousy, is a snare we all understand. Scripture warns that jealousy is worse than wrath or anger! It is a destructive force in families, and parents must be vigilant and not allow jealousy to grow between siblings or parents.

Unfulfilled Dreams. It's not uncommon for parents to impose unfulfilled dreams on their children. I determined Franny would never be a "mini-me." It would have been easy for me to fall into the common trap of pushing her to fulfill the dreams and goals I came close to achieving but that remained just out of reach. Our goal was to provide the proper environment and the tools and the encouragement to let *her* gifts rise to the surface.

Unrealistic Expectations. We must be careful of the demands we place on our children. It's reasonable to expect a standard of excellence, but it is also easy to go overboard. We can overtax a young child pretty quickly. If we've pressed in and heard God's heart on the matter, we won't run the risk of projecting unrealistic expectations on our kids. We must learn

to accept our children's limitations and love and accept them the way God made them.

Dream Thieves. God has taught me to take care whom I share my dreams with, and I've learned the hard way to obey Him. There are many who will try to steal your dreams. Either they were never able to dream for themselves, or they're jealous or just plain ornery—it doesn't really matter. Try to use discernment before sharing every little detail about what God has shown you for your family.

Child or Idol? In the spirit of full disclosure, this is the area where Mike and I nearly slipped off the cliff and failed for a season. God graciously pointed it out to us, and when we realized our error, we quickly repented. Any child can become a parent's idol, and unless we're careful, we risk upsetting the balance God designed for healthy family life.

When Franny first moved away, God revealed to Mike and me that we had wrapped our lives up in hers for so long that we were in danger of making her an idol. It was time to let her go.

But it was hard! Our lives and her life had been intertwined together for a long time. Her dreams had become our dreams, and it was hard to tell where she ended and we began. For a long time I was "Franny's mom"; my identity was wrapped up in hers.

It was also time for Mike and I to find the life God had for us. The season of being the main force and primary influence in our daughter's life was over. It was good for her *and* for us to accept this new season as it unfolded.

Today Franny is married to a wonderful man, Matthew, and has a family of her own. And we are blessed with a beautiful grandson, Matthew Elijah. Though it can be tempting to want to hold on to our kids forever, let me assure you, there *is* life after parenting!

I'm more than Franny's mom now (although I'm proud to be), and I'm in a new season of life where I can even call myself a writer. I never saw *that* coming, but God has wonderfully creative ways of wooing us down new paths!

Kate Battistelli *is a wife, author, speaker, former Broadway actress and mom—and thoroughly enjoys her newest role as grandmother to daughter Francesca's first child, Matthew Elijah. She writes about parenting, food and faith regularly at . Her new book, Growing Great Kids, released this year.*

Which Season Is It?

By recognizing your child's current life stage, you can help him or her develop a sense of God's will. Here are seven distinct seasons, and what you can expect with each.

Season of Growth

Although this one will encompass most of the seasons, the extent to which your child learns to navigate every season determines how well-rounded and well-grounded an adult he or she becomes.

Season of Preparation

Preparation includes all the years of your child's schooling and training. During this season, cultivate an ear to hear God's voice and a surrendered heart to obey it.

Season of Maturity

The field your child is striving to excel in will determine how long this season lasts. It will take ongoing sacrifice and prioritizing of what is truly important.

Season of Multiplication

This is the one when children's hard work begins bearing fruit and they start to see results. It doesn't happen overnight. But when it hits, life comes at you fast!

Season of Chastening

God will discipline your child to help him or her change and better conform to His image. Chronological age brings no special immunity from this. God's chastening brings an understanding that God is sovereign in every area of life.

Season of Failure

It is especially important to encourage your child to buckle down in the teen years. Guard against allowing failure to cause your child to abandon the dreams God has put in him or her.

Season of Success

As parents, this is what we wait for! Our children's hard work begins to pay off. Each success builds on the one before, setting up a pattern from which it can be easier to discern the path God has laid out for their lives.