

How to War for Your Children

Raising kids is a battle of faith—especially if they have wandered from God.

There are few things in life that can shake our faith and our world more than difficult circumstances in the lives of our children. Whether these tough situations are caused by illness, rejection, poor choices our children have made or the like, we often tend to feel their pain more deeply than our own.

We long for our children to experience success, prosperity, fulfillment, joy and a deep relationship with God. Most parents truly desire for their children to have greater measures of abundant life than they have known themselves. And we should.

Children are an inheritance from the Lord. But getting them from tiny, helpless newborns to adults moving in God's destiny for their lives is perhaps one of the hardest and most demanding tasks we will ever face. It takes great faith and great patience.

Psalms 128:3 states, "Your children [shall be] like olive plants all around your table" (NKJV). Some plants are fragile. Some are wild. Some refuse to grow no matter what you attempt to do with them. Other plants grow and flourish with little care.

I think children are like plants.

My co-author, Rebecca Sytsema, and her husband, Jack, have faced unique challenges in raising the oldest of their three sons, Nicholas, who has full-syndrome autism. Rebecca attended a secular conference on autism in which the speaker painted a beautiful picture with her words.

One year, the speaker said, she planted a wild strawberry plant in her garden. Not knowing much about strawberries, she was surprised to see that her plant not only survived the winter but also thrived and began to spread. In the years that followed, it grew with very little care and continued to spread. Finally, it took over her whole garden.

However, the same was not true of her orchid plant. This fragile and delicate little plant needed much more care. It required the right amount of light and water and the perfect level of temperature and humidity.

The plant food had to be just so. The orchid's stock had to be propped up as it grew, and the plant had to be constantly checked to make sure that its growing conditions did not need to be adjusted.

Unlike the strawberry plant that flourished on its own, the orchid needed constant attention. In the end, however, the orchid bloomed, rewarding her commitment with a rich and colorful bud unlike any other she had seen—one that she was indeed very proud of.

The strawberry plant describes many of our “easy” children who seem to grow, thrive and bloom almost on their own. The orchid, however, represents those types of children that we did not bargain for when we became parents.

“Orchids” require a great deal of extra care, like the Sytsemas’ son Nicholas. With these types of children, nothing is simple or taken for granted.

The Importance of Patience

Whether our children are adults or are not yet conceived, we need to apply certain principles to their lives in the same way we would apply them to our own. These include the principles of prophetic fulfillment, warring for a prophetic word and dealing with hope deferred.

However, there is one principle that is equally as important as believing for our children. It is not only a fruit of the Spirit but also a tremendous component of faith. If we are to see our children move into their God-given destinies, we need to have patience.

Admittedly, waiting on God's timing is not always an easy thing to do—especially in a society such as ours that is accustomed to instant everything. We are conditioned to seeing things happen now. We want to stand on a table somewhere, shout at the devil and see our children make miraculous, instant changes.

Sometimes God does work that way. But often His approach seems to be more in line with a prophetic word Jack and Rebecca once received regarding their son: "I will heal him. But it will not be an overnight miracle. It will come day by day by My anointing."

This was not the word Jack and Rebecca were hoping for. "Day by day" is a long, hard road that can wear us thin. The circumstances seem insurmountable and overwhelming, and often it appears nothing is happening.

But if we are in covenant with God through Jesus and are living with Him as our Lord, we can be assured that God is very much at work and that He will fulfill His promise that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). God is busily preparing the orchids to bloom, and they will do so in His time.

Having day-by-day patience does not mean having day-by-day passivity. We must remain active in moving forward as God directs. We need to hear His voice, war with our prophetic words, watch for the enemy's attacks, and always look for the now season in our lives and in the lives of our children. Our patience should be active and full of faith and hope.

We also need to be aware that there are certain things God is working in us as we go through the process of believing for our children. Patience—not only with God’s timing, but also with our kids—can produce many worthwhile benefits in our lives. Here are some biblical byproducts of patience:

Wisdom. Proverbs 14:29 says, “A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly” (NIV). The more patience we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, the more wisdom we will have for living our lives. It is in the wisdom derived from patience that we gain the strategies to overthrow our enemies.

Inheritance. “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” (Heb. 6:12). As with any inheritance, there is a right time to possess it.

God has given us promises for our future and for our children, but if we do not wait on His timing, we could lose the fruit of those promises. Hebrews 10:36 states it this way: “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

Demonstration of love. “Love is patient, love is kind” (1 Cor. 13:4). Most of us seem to have a supernatural level of patience with our children. With all that is demanded of us, however, we can easily lose sight of the fact that we need great patience in the other important relationships in our lives, such as with our spouses, extended family and good friends. These are the people to whom God has connected us and who will fight with us for our children.

Endurance. “Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience” (Col. 1:11). Marathon runners do not begin their training by running marathons. It takes training to gain the necessary endurance to run the race.

It is no different with us. As we allow God to take us through the training of life, the patience we develop gives us not only the endurance to run the race to the end but also the endurance to finish it well.

Increased fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). It seems to be a spiritual law that the individual fruits of the Spirit are interconnected. The more we have of one, the more we will have of the others.

As we obtain more love, we will get more faithfulness; as we obtain more joy, we will get more peace, and so on. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work patience within us, we will see the levels of love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control rise to an equivalent degree within us. The fruit of the Spirit in our lives not only will produce such benefits for us but also will undo the work of the enemy.

Character and hope. “Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5, NKJV).

Patience is truly a virtue, and those who have it tend to have great character as well. But this verse in Romans indicates that those with patience also possess hope.

Why? Because those who wait patiently on the Lord have seen Him move and know that He will move again. Their hope is in Him because, through patience, they have seen the depths of His grace, mercy and power to overcome all of life's obstacles.

No matter what our children face in their lives, believing for

them will propel us into a new level of faith. It will test every bit of our beings, but in this area we need to remember that the best is truly ahead. We can trust God for the patience to see our orchids bloom.

God Intervenes in Our Weariness

Pam and I have six wonderful children whom we have been able to nurture. Two of them, Daniel and Joseph, came to us through adoption.

Daniel arrived as a newborn. His birth mother was a Christian who had gone astray and knew that she would not be able to take care of a child. He has been a joy to his mother and me in every respect.

Joseph came to us at the age of 13 when we were serving as administrators of an institute in Texas for children from dysfunctional homes. He did not know his natural father, and his mother was in prison. He was a street kid from Houston who had been in numerous foster homes and group homes.

Because of his background, Joseph was a trial for us. Not only did we have to help him come to know the Lord and work to develop his character, but we also had to undo many of the ungodly mind-sets he had taken on to survive.

The promise God gave me for Joseph was that he would be an A and B student in school. This was neither a reality nor a desire in his heart, and there was constant contention over these issues.

One day I came home at the end of my rope after a conference with one of Joseph's teachers. When I walked into the house, Pam said, "The Lord spoke to me and told me that He is going to fill Joseph with the Holy Spirit."

I said: "Oh, great! That means I have to endure this war longer."

Pam replied, "Well, you can agree with God or agree with what you see." I chose to submit and trust the word the Lord had spoken to my wife.

I would like to say things turned around immediately, but they did not.

After high school, Joseph went to a private college in east Texas and then attended a junior college in north Texas for two years. Yet he was still mediocre at school and still filled with issues. Joseph decided to enter the Air Force, and Pam and I took assignments in New Mexico and Colorado.

Joseph married soon after, but his life continued to be up and down. I still wondered if he would ever really change. But Pam walked in faith and believed God.

When Joseph was 32, Pam and I moved back to Denton. Joseph had four children, was attending the University of North Texas and was working part time.

When he and his family came for Christmas that year, he shared with me that they had little money because of his working part time and attending school. However, he did have a special gift for me—it was his final grade report in college. He had gotten all A's!

He had made the dean's list and finished his schooling, just as the Lord had said in the beginning. He had finished strong. He had proved to the enemy, to himself and to me that what God had said about him was a reality.

Joseph and his wife now serve in pastoral ministry. The Lord fulfilled the word He had spoken to my wife as well. I learned much through watching this orchid bloom. The message here is: Don't grow weary—God's Word promises that if we persevere in doing good, at the proper time we will reap a harvest (see Gal. 6:9).

Look at your kids as investments. Look at them as treasures you have been asked to protect and keep from the enemy's hands. Look at them as God's training instruments in your life to increase your faith. Easy or hard, they are worth warring over!

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