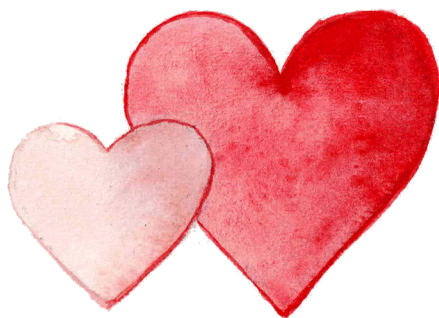


Baby Steps

Growing With Jesus



Quarter Three

GROWING A HEART OF LOVE

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. The Father's Heart | 8. Discipline |
| 2. Counterfeit Love | 9. Safety and Security |
| 3. Desire to Grow | 10. Patience |
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| 7. Encouragement | Heart |





ALIVE IN JESUS SABBATH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

BABY STEPS SABBATH SCHOOL PARENT TIME HANDOUTS, QUARTER 3



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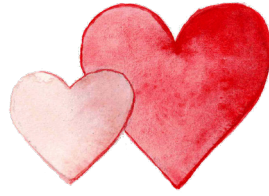
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The Father's Heart

God, our Father in heaven, is the source of all true love. We see His love expressed in a myriad of ways—a beautiful sunrise; the timeless expressions of God's loving, holy character in His living Word; the constancy of the steady ocean tides; the forgiveness of an old friend; a child's tight hug.

How do you most clearly see it?

God's love is pure, selfless, everlasting. It was expressed most clearly when Jesus came to earth. "Christ came to the world with the accumulated love of eternity" (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 76). He offers this love to you today, tomorrow, and every day into eternity, and He hopes you'll love Him back.

Connect

- + Many parents speak of their hearts "expanding" when their little one is born. Others may take a bit longer to bond, especially if the circumstances surrounding the birth were difficult. How have you felt your heart change since your baby was born?
- + Have you had new insights into God's heart of love that you couldn't comprehend before becoming a parent? Share these with the group.

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

Read **Ephesians 5:1, 2.**

- + What does it look like to "imitate" God the Father in our experience as parents?
- + What does it practically look like to "walk in love" when parenting a little baby?
- + What things are you currently "giving up" to raise your little one that help you better understand what God did for you?

Discuss and Reflect

Read and discuss **Matthew 25:34-40**. In many ways our babies meet Jesus' description of "the least of these." Right now these tiny humans need to be fed, clothed, and nurtured, but they are unable to "give back." With someone beside you, discuss:

- + Are there times you struggle to serve your baby's needs with genuine love? Don't feel ashamed of such feelings. Every parent is confronted with this reality in one way or another. If you feel comfortable, share an example, and why you think this happened.
- + "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these . . . , you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). What might change in your thoughts or actions if you thought about serving Jesus each time you attended to your little one's needs?

The more you give God's love to those around you, the more God will fill your heart with *His* love. Even during sleepless nights, new stressors, and constant parental demands, God wants to help you grow a heart of love. Ask Him for this, and also share with Him your insufficiencies and needs.

Challenge

- + Which of the different love languages do you most commonly express (physical touch, gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, or service)?
- + What spiritual habits might help you *grow in love*? Make a list as a group and discuss these with your spouse or a friend during the week.
- + Considering the busy realities of parenting a baby, what would it take for you to implement these positive spiritual habits, keeping in mind that sometimes we simply need rest? What kinds of creative solutions might be necessary? What special help might single parents need?

Pray

**Thank God for showing you what it means to be a good parent.
Ask Him to grow more of His love in you for your little one (as well
as your spouse or family members) so that you can love
your baby the way He does.**





Counterfeit Love

We live in a world in which it's becoming increasingly difficult to tell the true from the false. There's "deepfake" technology, which uses artificial intelligence to create deceptive, fake videos of real people saying things they never actually said. Deepfakes can be powerfully convincing, as can many other counterfeits. The Bible warns us about discerning between the true and the false, and our discussion of love is no exception to this. There is true parental love, but there are also many lookalikes.

Connect

- + As a group, create a list of ways that counterfeit love might appear between a parent and child. (For example: perfectionistic expectations, etc.)
- + Sometimes our own parents might not have loved us the way God intended. If you feel comfortable, share a time your parents "loved" you in a way that hurt or diminished your sense of self.

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

Divide into pairs. Each pair can read one of the following verses about true and false love. Discuss the verse for five minutes, then have each pair share two insights from their discussion with the group:

- + Romans 12:9
- + John 13:34, 35
- + 1 Peter 1:22, 23
- + 1 John 3:16-18
- + 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Reflect

Quietly reflect on how the following principles could relate to the love you have for your baby. Share your thoughts with the group.

“True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176).

“Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection. Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 358).

Weekly Challenge

- + Think back to the way your parents parented you. Are there ways they loved you that you hope to imitate? Are there ways you experienced counterfeit love that you wish to avoid repeating with your own baby?
- + If your parents loved you well, take a moment to send a card or text this week to thank them. If your childhood was not characterized by parental love, journal a message from God the Father to your younger self, describing His care and love for you in the midst of your most difficult childhood moments. You may like to include ideas from these verses: **Jeremiah 3:15; 30:17; 31:3, 25; 32:41.**

Pray

Ask God to fill you with His true, heavenly love for you and your baby.
Ask Him to break any generational tendencies toward counterfeit love.
Thank Him for being the most constant source of love in your life.





Desire to Grow

Consider what your worst parenting moment has looked like. Certainly we've all had moments of anxiety, impatience, immaturity, or anger. Babies have an uncanny way of revealing our weaknesses. They are very needy, they can't be reasoned with, and they aren't very good at doing what we want! With these still-developing little beings in our care, our own selfish natures can be a time bomb waiting to explode, especially when we're tired.

Connect

- + As we consider the worst parts of our own characters, what gives us motivation to grow more like Christ?
- + When you “explode” or let your selfish nature take over, do you later tend to be too hard on yourself, too lenient, or fairly balanced? What makes you say that?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

Read **Ezekiel 36:25-27** and **Hebrews 8:10-12**. These passages tell us how God will empower us to grow.

- + As the parent of a little baby, I might feel pressured to “do everything.” What do these two passages have to say about what God does?
- + What does this new covenant experience look like, in a practical sense, in my parenting?

Discuss

Read the following quote quietly, then discuss in a group. Which aspects resonate most with your own experience with Jesus?

“Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’ Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly—by abiding in Him—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 69).

Growing a heart of love for our babies cannot be separated from our growing love for Jesus. During the next 10 weeks we will discuss 10 qualities that help us grow in love. Which of these topics stand out to you and why? At this point in the journey, which ones do you see might be challenge areas for you?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| + Affection | + Safety and Security |
| + Obedience | + Patience |
| + Comfort | + Boundaries |
| + Encouragement | + Worth |
| + Discipline | + Identity |

Challenge

Ask God to reveal something in your life that He wants to transform in order to make you a better parent. Write down whatever He impresses upon your heart, and keep it in your Bible. During the next 10 weeks, pray daily for God to do His miraculous work in your life.

Prayer

Ask God to help you look away from yourself as the solution to spiritual failings and accept His gracious power on your behalf.

Thank Him for being a loving Father who can re-create you from the inside out.





Affection

When you express love to your little one through gentle touch, kind actions, tender looks, and caring words, your affection says, “You’re special to me. I’m so glad we’re together!” Affection is a way of communicating to our babies that they are valued.

Connect

- + What’s your favorite way of showing affection to your baby? Do you enjoy cuddling most? Do you tell her about your love with kind words? Do you spend lots of time laughing and playing with him?
- + Pause for a moment to reflect on the ways you like to show affection to your little one.

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

It’s an amazing thought to consider that our Father in heaven is affectionate toward us. His love is not an abstract concept. It’s also not limited to historical acts, such as creation and redemption. His affection for His children is a longing that bubbles up in His divine heart and declares, “I’m so glad we’re together!” Read the following verses and discuss what they tell us about God’s affection. Is there anything new or surprising to you in these concepts?

- + John 14:1-3
- + Zephaniah 3:17
- + Isaiah 40:11
- + Exodus 25:8
- + Numbers 6:24-26

Reflect and Discuss

Silently read the following quotes, then discuss the questions that follow.

“Love cannot long exist without expression” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 107).

“In many families there is a great lack in expressing affection one for another. . . . Every hasty word should be checked, and there should not be even the appearance of the lack of love one for another” (Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, November 14, 1892).

- + If we feel stressed, tired, or annoyed with the concerns of home life, is it wrong to fake an affectionate response to our babies? How might you separate life’s burdens from nurturing your little one with authenticity?
- + In your home, what are some reasons that love and affection might exist but not be expressed?

Challenge

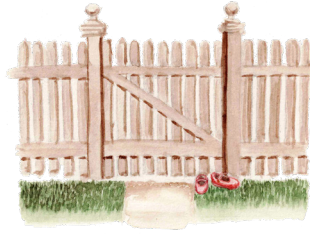
- + As a group, make a list of different ways you can show affection to your baby.
- + How much time do you spend each day intentionally showing your baby how glad you are to be together? What can you do to cultivate more affection for your baby (and others in your family) this week?

Pray

Pray for each other—to appreciate God’s affection for you more this week. Thank God for giving you such a precious baby to love. Ask Him to help you show tender affection to your child, no matter the circumstances.

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless”
(Philippians 1:9, 10, NIV).





Boundaries

The happiest children are those who have a warm, close, and loving connection with their parents who have clear rules and boundaries. When a parent's love is combined with clear limits, it's easier for a child to obey. If we are harsh, our children learn to feel angry and rebellious. If we neglect to show love, they become sad. If we love them without boundaries, they may feel confused and learn to be entitled. Growing a heart of love for our babies involves lovingly guiding them with certain limits.

Connect

- + How well do you set your own boundaries? What will your child see you modeling as they grow? Are you able to say no graciously yet firmly?
- + What mental associations do you have with the word “obedience”?

Explore

Read **Ephesians 6:1-4** and **Colossians 3:20**.

- + What are the benefits of teaching obedience to our children?
- + Have you ever thought that disciplining your child will provoke them to anger? How could a lack in discipline lead to permissive and “anything goes” parenting?
- + How can you safeguard your discipline so that you don't provoke frustration or anger?

Read **Deuteronomy 21:18-21**.

- + What are the dangers of allowing our children to grow up disobedient and rebellious?
- + How can we teach obedience in a way that is winsome and reasonable?
- + Why is it helpful to aim for first-time obedience, complete obedience, and unchallenged obedience, particularly when our children are young?

Discuss

Read the following and paraphrase it in your own words.

How might you apply these principles to your parenting now and in the years ahead?

“At a very early age children can comprehend what is plainly and simply told them, and, by kind and judicious management, can be taught to obey. . . . The mother should not allow her child to gain an advantage over her in a single instance; and, in order to maintain this authority, it is not necessary to resort to harsh measures; a firm, steady hand and a kindness which convinces the child of your love will accomplish the purpose. But let selfishness, anger, and self-will have their course for the first three years of a child’s life, and it will be hard to bring it to submit to wholesome discipline” (Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, pp. 82, 83).

Challenge

Discuss the following ideas and choose one—or share one of your own—that you’d like to implement over the coming week.

- + Be gentle but consistent when you require your baby to do something he doesn’t want to do, such as taking a nap or waiting longer to eat.
- + Explain the daily actions and choices you are making for your baby, even though she cannot yet understand you.
- + Make up fun little songs you can sing at “transition” times in your daily routine.
- + Make a decision that “rules should be few and well considered; and when once made, they should be enforced” (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 290).
- + Don’t enforce confusing boundaries at home—letting bad behaviors slide until you snap. Instead, be consistent with your routines and expectations.
- + Reflect on your own boundaries and how you’re modeling these to your baby.
- + Prioritize self-care and time with God so you’ll have energy and kindness to follow through with your boundaries.

Your baby is learning about boundaries now. You can teach her that no means no (**Matthew 5:37**). As she grows, what kinds of healthy boundaries will she need to create for herself?

Prayer

Ask God for wisdom and help as you set gentle, kind, and loving limits with your child, remembering that He is gentle, kind, and loving when we make mistakes.





Comfort

At this age, one of the most important ways you can meet your baby's emotional needs is by consistently providing comfort when he is distressed. Soothing your baby quickly and consistently teaches him that you are a dependable source of comfort—an important lesson that will help him form a correct picture of God, our greatest Comforter.

Connect

- + Can you recall a time someone comforted you in a memorable way? Share what makes you feel better when you're distressed or sad.
- + When you're able to soothe your baby, how does it make you feel? Have you had any special insights about the heart of God when you're comforting your child?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

- + **Read John 14:18** in several Bible versions. What does Jesus model here for parents to imitate?
- + God notices when we are sad, and He comforts us. To be a source of comfort for our children, we as parents should first be comforted by God. What does the Bible say about different sources of comfort? Contrast these with the comfort the world offers.
 - + Acts 9:31
 - + Romans 15:4
 - + 2 Corinthians 1:3-5
 - + 2 Corinthians 7:6

Fast Facts

- + Babies cry for all kinds of reasons. They might be in pain, hungry, uncomfortable, thirsty, bored, lonely, afraid, or confused. Sometimes we don't know why they cry.
- + Respond quickly when your baby cries. A baby's understanding of object permanence develops around the age of 4-8 months, so if your baby cannot see you, she is not sure you exist.
- + Stay calm and try not to lose your temper when you are with her, even though you may be exhausted and frustrated. Let someone else care of her for a few minutes if possible, or walk away and take some deep breaths before returning.
- + Handle your baby's delicate body gently and warmly, with a smile.
- + The more babies are comforted when they cry, the more their brain develops empathy and an ability to comfort others when they are older.

Discuss

Read and discuss the following and the ideas that most stand out to you.

Sometimes we might misinterpret our child's tears by giving them something to eat when really they just need a cuddle and our care and time.

"Every mother should have time to give her children these little endearments which are so essential during infancy and childhood. In this way, the mother would bind up the child's heart and happiness with her own. She is to them what God is to us" (Ellen G. White manuscript 43, 1900, in *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 15, p. 271).

Challenge

This week, as you comfort your little one's tears and distresses, remember that your soothing words and calm touches are teaching him about the love of God. Imagine yourself as an aqueduct, channeling God's comfort to your baby. If you need comfort this week, turn from the artificial forms of comfort the world provides, and press deeper into Christ's soothing presence. Ask Him to show Himself to you in a special way, and He will do it.

Pray

Ask God to soothe your baby through you.

Ask for more of God's Spirit so that you may represent Him to your baby and believe that He will do this for you.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"
(Matthew 5:4).





Encouragement

Your baby needs your encouragement. Even though he does not yet understand the words you are speaking, he can understand your encouraging tone and supportive touch. When you laugh, squeal, and show excitement at each new milestone he meets, he is internalizing the idea that he is not alone, and that there are people who are happy and supporting him through his successes. As he grows, your loving encouragement serves as a template for him to understand the loving encouragement of God, his greatest cheerleader.

Connect

- + Think of a time someone spoke words of encouragement that had a profound impact on you. Share the experience with someone next to you.
- + To “en-courage” your child is to give her courage to face life’s challenges. What is one specific life obstacle that you want your baby to have courage and confidence to overcome? What can you do even now to encourage your baby toward that end?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

- + **Read Joshua 1:9 and John 16:33.** At the heart of encouragement is the knowledge of Christ’s presence with us. What can you do to show your baby that Jesus is present in your home?
- + **Read Ephesians 4:29.** Here the word “edification” or encouragement is contrasted with “corrupt words.” What would it look like—in word or in action—to discourage our babies as they grow and explore?

Discuss

Read the following quotes and share your thoughts with the group.

“In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 106).

“[Children] need gentle, encouraging words. How easy it is for mothers to speak words of kindness and affection which will send a sunbeam to the hearts of the little ones, causing them to forget their troubles” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 196).

“An approving glance, a word of encouragement and praise from the mother, will often cast a sunbeam into their young hearts for a whole day” (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 439).

Challenge

What if “encouragement” means more than just a few words, more than a quick “good job”? What if encouragement is your smiling presence casting a sunbeam over your little one’s efforts? This week, consider ways you can be more physically and emotionally present with your baby to be a continual encouragement to them.

Pray

Ask God to send the sunshine of His loving encouragement into your home. Open your heart to His presence so that every word, tone, and look will give courage to your baby.





Discipline

Discipline is an important way that we love our children, though it is not always a pleasant process. In many languages “discipline” is semantically related to the word “disciple,” reminding us that every gentle effort made to train and direct our child’s behavior is preparing them to be a faithful disciple of Jesus.

Connect

- + There are many forms of so-called discipline that wound a child’s soul and body. What are some forms of discipline you’ve experienced or heard about that are not appropriate or even very harmful?
- + If Jesus were an earthly parent, what would be some forms of discipline you could imagine Him using with His little ones?

Explore

In pairs, divide the following passages. Read and discuss these verses for several minutes, then return to the group and share your verses and insights.

- + Hebrews 12:11
- + Proverbs 22:6
- + Ephesians 6:4
- + Proverbs 29:15, 17
- + Proverbs 6:20-23
- + Revelation 3:19
- + Proverbs 3:11, 12
- + Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Discuss

Read the following silently, then share with the group the ideas that stood out to you. What is challenging? What is confronting? What do you want to remember?

“Parents, you should commence your first lesson of discipline when your children are babes in your arms” (Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 230).

“Neglecting the work of disciplining and training until a perverse disposition has become strengthened is doing the children a most serious wrong; for they grow up selfish, exacting, and unlovable. They cannot enjoy their own company any better than can others; therefore they will ever be filled with discontent. The work of the mother must commence at an early age, giving Satan no chance to control the minds and dispositions of their little ones” (Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 230).

“The education of the child is to begin in the home. There it is to learn the lessons that are to guide it throughout life...Self-will, hasty words, are never to be allowed to go unrebuked. Parents should realize the sacredness of family discipline. The children are to be taught to respect themselves, because they are the Lord’s property, bought with an infinite price” (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, pp. 323, 324).

Challenge

- + Are there teenagers or young adults in the church who you feel have been raised well? Consider asking their parents about the methods and principles of discipline they used when their children were still young.

Pray

Ask God to give you a heart of humility and tenderness when disciplining your children. Ask specifically for wisdom to know how and when to begin.





Safety and Security

The Bible tells us that true love casts out all fear. It's an incredible promise to think of relationships that are truly secure. Because all human love is imperfect, the only way we can create a loving, fear-free environment for our babies is to drink deeply from God's perfect love.

Connect

- + What are some things you've noticed that seem to frighten your baby? Are there certain sounds, objects, people, activities, or situations that make her afraid? What is his favorite way of being soothed?
- + Can you recall a time God soothed you in a moment of fear or anxiety? How did He give you a sense of security when you needed it most?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

As parents, sometimes we can feel embarrassed by our baby's behavior in public. Sometimes we are tempted to base our self-worth on what other people think of our parenting abilities. Read **1 John 4:18**.

- + How can a secure relationship with God flow into your parenting?

Read the following verses about how we can find security in God. Discuss how these promises can find expression in the way we treat our babies.

- + Romans 8:38, 39
- + Psalm 91:1-7
- + Psalm 34:4-6
- + Philippians 4:6
- + Isaiah 41:13

Discuss

Read the following quote and discuss:

“An eminent divine was once asked how old a child must be before there was reasonable hope of his being a Christian. ‘Age has nothing to do with it,’ was the answer. ‘Love to Jesus, trust, repose, confidence, are all qualities that agree with the child’s nature. As soon as a child can love and trust his mother, then can he love and trust Jesus as the friend of his mother. Jesus will be his friend, loved and honored’ ” (Ellen G. White, *Good Health*, January 1, 1880).

- + What might your little one’s trust in you look like this week? What gives you encouragement as you seek to be a trustworthy source of security for your child?

Challenge

Think of ways you can help your baby feel secure in your love this week. Discuss your ideas with the group. Below is an example.

- + Discover what soothes your baby. This may be different from one child to the next. As you soothe her fears, you are helping her learn the skill of self-soothing.

Pray

Praise God for the times He has soothed your fears.

Ask Him to make you a safe place for your child to find security and rest.

**“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you
with My righteous right hand”
(Isaiah 41:10).**





Patience

No parent wants to admit it, but all of us have felt irritated, exasperated, and even a little angry toward our darling babies. As we seek to grow a heart of love for our children, one of the most important characteristics we need to ask God to nurture in ourselves (and our babies) is patience.

Connect

- + What is something your baby does (or doesn't do!) that tests your patience? How do you usually respond when you feel yourself losing your sense of calm?
- + Try to imagine things from your little one's perspective. That frustrating thing he does—waking up too often, throwing food, biting down while breastfeeding—why does he do it? How can having an understanding of your baby's complex developmental milestones help grow a spirit of patience in you?
- + Do you find it easier to be patient with your baby or with your spouse/ other family members? Why?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

- + Focusing on the goal can help us to endure the day-to-day struggles. Read **Galatians 6:9**. What do you hope to “reap” from parenting your child?
- + Read **Isaiah 40:31**, **Exodus 14:14**, and **Galatians 5:22, 23**. What solutions do these verses present for our struggle with impatience?

Discuss

The following quote contains much advice for cultivating patience in the home. Divide into pairs and read the quote; then, as a group, discuss the ideas that stand out to you.

“When we beseech the Lord to pity us in our distress, and to guide us by His Holy Spirit, He will never turn away our prayer. It is possible even for a parent to turn away from his hungry child, but God can never reject the cry of the needy and longing heart. With what wonderful tenderness He has described His love!” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 132, 133).

“The revelation of Christ in your own character will have a transforming power upon all with whom you come in contact. Let Christ be daily made manifest in you, and He will reveal through you the creative energy of His word—a gentle, persuasive, yet mighty influence to re-create other souls in the beauty of the Lord our God” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 129).

Challenge

This week, when you find yourself becoming impatient (in thought or in action) with your baby (or with anyone else), pause and pray to God. Ask Him to send His Spirit to grow the fruit of patience in your life. Pair up with another parent to share with each other how your “patience challenge” has gone this week.

Pray

Ask God to give you supernatural patience so that you can rightly represent His heart to your baby.





Worth

It's no easy job to grow a deep, appropriate sense of worth in children. Affirm too little, and they may struggle with low self-worth. Affirm too much or in unhelpful ways, and they may develop proud, selfish egos. Despite these ditches on either side of the path, love for our babies will lead us to try our very best to help them develop pure, healthy views of themselves and their worth to God.

Connect

- + How does a person with too little self-worth behave?
- + How does a person with too lofty an opinion of himself behave?
- + What types of parenting or life events do you think might contribute to these character traits? What other factors contribute to a child's sense of self-worth?

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

- + **Psalm 8** is a psalm about human worth in relation to God's greatness. Read the full psalm and discuss the following:
 - **Verses 1 and 9** form bookends to the psalm, ascribing worth to God. How can a God-centered focus in the home prevent little egos from making themselves the center?
 - **Verses 2-8** are the heart of the psalm, focusing on human worth. Share your thoughts on the incredible value placed upon all human beings as it is described in this passage. How might these truths, expressed in the home, help prevent low self-worth?

Discuss

Share the ideas from the following quote that challenge you the most.

“Whenever the mother can speak a word of commendation for the good conduct of her children, she should do so. She should encourage them by words of approval and looks of love. These will be as sunshine to the heart of a child and will lead to the cultivation of self-respect” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 532).

Reflect and Challenge

Our little ones don’t learn their self-worth in a textbook—they absorb it!

- + Always affirm your child’s effort and their good character qualities rather than their personal identity. (“Your actions were so kind when you did that for your sister” instead of “You’re a good girl being kind.”)
- + Mothers, do you speak negatively about your body in front of your daughter?
- + Fathers, do you affirm your sons—even if it feels awkward, and even if your own father never affirmed you?
- + Do you boast in a prideful way in front of your children?
- + Are you grounded enough in your God-given worth to accept criticism graciously, or do you pridefully kick against it? Do you wilt in low self-esteem if critiqued?

This week, take time to prayerfully consider your own sense of self-worth as a parent and what it might be teaching your child.

Pray

Thank God for making us worthy in both creation and redemption. Ask Him to help us nurture a deep, abiding sense of self-respect in our children.





Identity

How we see ourselves as parents will often be reflected in our children.

Connect

- + How would you describe yourself in three words?
- + What factors have most contributed to your personal identity?

Too often our identity comes from the praise and affirmation of others (or lack of), what we have (or don't have), or what we do (or can't do). Yet each of these things are fleeting. We need something greater that helps define us and our children.

Explore

Pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.

- + When you think of Bible characters who faced an identity crisis, who first comes to mind?
- + Which Bible characters had a strong identity, and what factors contributed to this?

Invite one person to read the entire story in **John 4:1-42**. Then, as a group, discuss:

- + How would you describe Jesus in this story?
- + At what point does the woman begin to change her attitude toward Jesus? (Notice Jesus' words at this point. See verses 13, 14.)
- + How did the woman's identity change after meeting Jesus? Where do you see this in the text?

Jesus openly declared His identity to this woman, after He plainly stated hers. She left her waterpot to rush back to the city to tell them about Jesus, the

Messiah. From that moment on, she didn't care about the town's gossip, her past sinful life, or what she owned (her waterpot). She had met Jesus, and nothing could stop the change happening inside of her.

Reflect

Jesus also seeks us out—when we're alone or lonely, when we're feeling criticized or that we're a failure, when we feel inadequate or self-sufficient. He comes to us. He challenges our status quo and brings to light our deep need for Him.

- + What do you need to surrender to truly live out your identity as God's son or daughter? (Think about expectations of others, work, reputation, pleasure.)

Share

There may be someone in the group who is willing to share how God has shaped or is shaping their identity in new ways. Like the woman at the well, consider sharing your story of how you've met God.

Sing and Pray

Sing together or read the words from the hymn "Take My Life and Let It Be."

Spend a few moments in individual prayer, inviting God to shape your identity in Him rather than in the shifting things of the world.
He will steady you and carry you.





Reflecting God's Heart

Connect

If you feel comfortable, share of a time your heart has been full of love for God. How did this impact those around you?

Reflect in Review

Pray together. Then consider the various topics you've explored this quarter. As you reflect back on these topics, share a few insights that have contributed to your understanding of growing a heart that reflects God to your baby, both now and in the future.

1. *The Father's Heart.* Imitating the Father's love is a high calling.
2. *Counterfeit Love.* False, self-serving worldly love surrounds us, yet we are called to reflect something different to our babies.
3. *Desire to Grow.* As parents, knowing we can grow is the starting point for meaningful change.
4. *Affection.* It's important to communicate to our babies that they are wanted and important.
5. *Boundaries.* Lovingly guiding our babies, and teaching them obedience, is a foundational principle of love.
6. *Comfort.* We can meet the emotional needs of our babies through comfort in distressing times.

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| 7. <i>Encouragement.</i> | The encouragement we express reflects the courage we hope our babies will live by, knowing Jesus is with them. |
| 8. <i>Discipline.</i> | We can gently train and direct our babies' behavior so they can be faithful disciples of Jesus. |
| 9. <i>Safety and Security.</i> | As parents, we should be a safe place for our babies to find security and rest. |
| 10. <i>Patience.</i> | Growing a heart of patience will reveal God's heart to our babies. |
| 11. <i>Worth.</i> | We are called to help our babies grow a healthy view of themselves and their worth in God. |
| 12. <i>Identity.</i> | Our true identity comes from knowing we are God's son or daughter. |

Take turns sharing insights from the past few weeks. Which has been your favorite topic?

Explore

Read the following verses together.

Which one is your favorite? Share why with the person beside you.

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| + Numbers 14:18 | + Ezekiel 36:26 |
| + Psalm 103:11, 12 | + Psalm 51:10 |
| + 1 John 4:8 | |

Pray Together

Praise God for who He is and what He has taught you in recent times.

Thank Him for a particular quality He has shown you in your parenting. Pray for the needs of those in your group. Give Him your worries and concerns, and trust that He will take care of them.

Thank you for sharing throughout this quarter.

“My son . . . receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding; . . .
Then you will understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God”
(Proverbs 2:1-5).

