

GOD MADE MOTHERS

Annie Zac Poonen

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A PERSONAL LETTER THAT YOU MUST READ

Dear Mothers,

I have written this book mainly to answer the questions that many mothers have asked me during past years. It has been written for mothers who feel a need for spiritual help and encouragement.

For 30 years, God has given me grace as the wife of a servant of the Lord. My husband was often away from home, preaching the gospel. Because of his uncompromising stand for the Lord, our family was a constant target of Satan's attacks. Today, we can testify that every attack of Satan was overcome - by God's grace alone. I am saying that only to encourage you to believe that God will do the same for you too.

God has also given me grace to be the mother of four sons - all of whom are grown up now. By the mercy of God alone, they have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and are following the Lord today.

I am not writing as an expert, but as one who has struggled, failed, got up and pressed on in the race - and discovered in the hard places of life that God is indeed "a very present help in trouble" (Psa.46: 1).

As a medical doctor, I have also added some practical advice at the end of the book.

The greatest thing you can do for your children is to lead them to God so that they receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. This will ensure that you and your children spend eternity together.

You must lead your children to salvation when they are still young. Once they are older, they may not respond as readily as at an earlier age.

A child wants its mother close to it at night. So when you tuck your children in bed, don't be in a hurry to go away. Spend a few minutes with each of them individually, or with all of them together.

Talk to them about the Lord. Children are most responsive to spiritual things at bedtime. Sing a hymn to them like "Just as I am without one plea... O Lamb of God I come", for example. Then tell them a short story, like one of the parables that Jesus spoke, or a story from some "Bedtime Storybook".

Then pray with them, something like this: "Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for this day and for all the ways in which You blessed me today with food and health and loving parents and brothers and sisters and many other good gifts. Please forgive me all my sins and cleanse my heart with the blood You shed for me on Calvary's cross. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and make me Your child from today. Thank You for hearing me. Amen".

Children who grow up in God-fearing homes may pray such a prayer many times. But one of those times, it will be from their hearts, with a sense of their own need, and then they will make contact with God. Thereafter they will no longer be just your children, but children of God as well. That will be your greatest joy.

Bangalore
October 1998

Dr. Annie Zac Poonen

CHAPTER ONE

A FIRST-CLASS MOTHER

"O God, You have taught me from my youth; and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me until I declare Your strength to this generation (to my children)" (Psalm 71:17,18).

All of us mothers have a great responsibility before God, to pass on to our children all that God has taught us. We must not leave this earth without having done so. This is not a responsibility that we can afford to postpone until our children are grown up. We must start sharing with our children the wonderful things that God has done for us, right from the time that they are very little.

Timothy's grandmother Lois must have passed on her "sincere faith" in God to her daughter Eunice at a very early age and Eunice in turn must have passed on that faith to her son Timothy also when he was very young (2 Tim.1:5). The result was that Timothy grew up to be an outstanding servant of God. What a great service to the church those two faithful mothers performed.

There is no magic formula for bringing up children aright, since each child is different. But you must never forget that it was God Who chose you to be the mother of your children. It was God Who created each of those children in your womb - and He created each of them with a purpose. He appointed YOU to be their mother. So you have to take your God-given responsibility seriously and be willing to sacrifice everything for His sake and their sake.

Children are God's gift to us, and it is only by His strength and with His wisdom that we can bring them up aright. We must believe that God will do wonderful things for our children.

Psalm 127:4 says that children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior. Arrows are used by a warrior to shoot at the enemy. We can put the Devil to shame through our children, if we bring them up aright for the Lord.

On the other hand, if we are not faithful, our children can grow up to serve the Devil, for that is the natural direction in which their corrupt human natures tend. But if we teach them to reverence God and instruct them in the principles of God's Word, they can grow up to be soldiers in God's army. This is a great responsibility and we must never take it lightly.

Psalm 127 goes on to say that the parents of such children will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies at the gates of the city (v.5). The Bible says that it is through the mouths of our children that God plans to crush His adversaries (Psalm 8:2).

May the Lord's Name be honoured then as the Devil is put to shame through our children.

And when it goes well with our children, we must be careful to give God all the glory for it. We must not take any of that glory ourselves, imagining that it was because we were such faithful mothers that our children are following the Lord.

Our boast should only be in the Lord and in what He has done. Not even in our thoughts should we take any of that glory to ourselves.

God compares His love to that of a mother for her child (Isa.49:15), because as the Creator of all men and women, He knows that a mother's love is the closest thing on earth to His own Divine, sacrificial, selfless love.

There is an old saying that God created mothers because He wanted to show Himself to little children through them.

Our challenge as mothers is to make our homes such an exciting place for our children, that they will never prefer any other place to their home. They should always long to come home from wherever they are.

May the Lord help us to be better mothers then, so that our children can see what God is like, as they observe us, and see what heaven is like when they observe our home.

What a challenge it is to seek to be a first-class mother.

*"Dear Lord, I do not ask
That Thou should'st give me some high work of Thine,
Some noble calling, or some wondrous task;
Give me a little hand to hold in mine,
Give me a little child to point the way
Over the strange, sweet path that leads to Thee;
Give me a little voice to teach to pray,
Give me two shining eyes Thy face to see.
The only crown I ask, dear Lord to wear
Is this : that I may teach a little child.
I do not ask that I may ever stand
Among the wise, the worthy, or the great;
I only ask that softly, hand in hand,
A child and I may enter at the gate"*

- (Author unknown)

CHAPTER TWO

KEEPING OUR CONSCIENCE SENSITIVE

If our children are to grow up in the fear of the Lord, then one of the most important things we mothers must have is a sensitive conscience.

Our conscience can become insensitive if at any time we become satisfied with our spiritual state. Perhaps we have heard the Word so often that we have now become familiar with it. Then we can no longer hear the Spirit speaking to us through it and our conscience becomes dull. Like a knife that has lost its sharpness, the truths that once excited us no longer do so.

We can become insensitive in our conscience through attachment to material wealth. When we prosper materially, it is easy for our conscience to become dull. It is easier to feel our need of God when we are poor than when we are rich. Even a small raise in our husband's salary can make us proud. Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. The Lord rebuked even an elder in a church once for imagining that he needed nothing just because he was wealthy (Rev.3:17). Wealth is a great snare. So we must be very careful if we have begun to prosper financially. It is not wrong to be rich, if God has made us so. But we must ensure that wealth does not go to our head and make us dull in our conscience. Poverty of spirit is the best state of mind to be in always.

Honesty is one of the most important virtues that we must have as mothers and that our children must see in us always. We should teach our children truthfulness by being truthful with them ourselves. We must get rid of all lying and every form of exaggeration from our lives. If we hear our children exaggerating or telling lies, perhaps they picked up that habit from us! We must never promise our children anything if we know we won't be able to keep our promise. If the cause is some unavoidable circumstance, then our children will understand, because there will always be situations where we have to deny ourselves for the sake of others. But otherwise we must keep all the promises we make to our children.

We must also cleanse ourselves from every type of hypocrisy ("acting"). Our children must see that we don't tell them to do something that we don't do ourselves. We must ask God to show us where we fail in this areas, so that we can repent. God can speak to us even when we see hypocrisy in our own children.

Covetousness is another deadly sin that we must cleanse ourselves from. If our children see that we are not content with the earthly goods God has chosen to give us, they too will become covetous. Girls (especially) observe very carefully what their mothers buy or long to buy.

If God wants us to have something He will give us the money to buy it. If He doesn't do that, that would be His way of telling us that we don't really need it. Even if we could have afforded it, it may not have been absolutely essential. And then it would be best for us not to have it.

A good conscience is far more valuable than all earthly goods put together. Our children can learn contentment with the simple, cheap toys and games that we can afford to buy for them. They can also learn to improvise their own games too. In the long run, they will then turn out to be more creative than other children whose rich parents can afford to buy them expensive, fancy toys and games.

We must also be careful not to backbite or speak evil of anyone in our homes. I have seen the tragedy of children despising and hating other believers in their own church as a result of the backbiting and gossiping that they heard against those believers in their own homes. What a tragedy it is when parents poison and destroy their own children like this! Surely it must be of such parents that Jesus spoke when he said that anyone who stumbled little ones should "have a millstone tied round his neck and be thrown into the sea (Matt.18:6). The mother has to be most careful in this matter, because she is the one who spends the maximum time with her children.

Children can easily sense when there is bitterness in their mother's heart against anyone. A little bit of sour milk or curd can make a whole vessel of milk sour - and sourness turns into bitterness, with time. The Bible warns us that many can be defiled by a root of bitterness in the heart. So we must get rid of all bad attitudes promptly.

Misunderstandings can arise in the closest of earthly relationships. But we must do our best to get rid of them as soon as possible, with God's help. Even small children can sense the difference between good and evil, music and noise, harmony and conflict etc., They understand these things, long before they start speaking. So we must be careful not to defile them.

We must also cleanse ourselves from all partiality. We must not have any favourites among our children. All of them must be the same to us and of equal value to us. No child must be treated in a special way.

Pride in our children's beauty, or behaviour, or intelligence, or anything else is another sin that we have to be very watchful about. We can destroy our children if we are proud about anything in their lives. As soon as we become proud, the nature of Lucifer takes control of us. Lucifer was a beautiful angel, but he became the devil in a moment when he became proud.

We must also be careful that our motive in bringing up our children in a good way is not OUR OWN glory. If that be the case, our children will quickly sense it and they too will begin to do things merely to impress others. We must teach our children to live for the glory of God alone.

Let us seek God for grace then to live in continuous repentance and continuous cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor.7:1) so that we can keep our conscience sensitive until the end of our lives.

CHAPTER THREE

CHILDREN NEED GOD'S WORD AND PRAYER

God told the Israelites that they were to teach their children about Him, when they sit down, when they walk together in the streets, when they are about to go to bed and when they get up in the morning (Deut.6:7).

This teaches us that it is important to teach our children spiritual principles at all times and on every occasion.

It is tragic to see the number of children from Christian homes who are doing things today that even unbelievers would not do! What is the cause? Is it because their parents failed them??? I don't know and I don't want to pass a judgment. I would rather sympathize with their parents and encourage them to believe that God can still do a miracle and change their children. But we must all learn lessons from the failures we see around us, or else we will make the same mistakes ourselves and our children will suffer.

Only through God's Word and prayer can we protect our children from disaster. There is no other way.

Reading a "Children's Picture Bible" to our children even when they cannot read for themselves is a good habit. Because, later on, they will then feel like reading it all by themselves. Another good habit to encourage in our children is that of memorising Scripture. That can be a good way for us to memorise some Bible-verses too!!

If we talk to our children about the Lord and His Word constantly, we will keep the channels of communication open with them. Then we will quickly detect any bad habits or words that they may have picked up at school or from their friends; and then we can help them to get rid of them.

We should keep our children away from things forbidden in the Scriptures. For example, we should not take our children for heathen festivals, neither should we attend them ourselves. We should not allow our children to celebrate heathen festivals along with their friends - for example, lighting sparklers and rockets at Diwali time.

In the same way, when we know that the baptism of babies is wrong in God's eyes, we should not allow our children to attend such child-baptisms - even the child-baptisms of our own relatives. Our children will not grow in reverence for God and His Word, if we do not teach them that they have to be separated from all that is of darkness, even if they have to displease their closest friends and relatives, as a result. We want to be friendly with our relatives. So we can visit them at some other time.

We should teach our children that the commandments of God are all for their very best - and therefore they should obey them joyfully. Children must be taught to love the Word of God and to obey the Lord out of love and reverence - and not out of the fear of getting caught or being punished.

Prayer is like a blanket with which we can cover our children. Just like we would make sure during a cold night that our children are properly covered, we also need to ensure that they are covered in a cold world by our prayers. Wherever they are - in school or far away - we can ask God in prayer to protect them from the snares that the enemy has prepared for them.

We must unite with our husbands and claim the promise of our Lord that "if two agree concerning anything on earth, it will be granted to them by our heavenly Father" (Matt.18:19). We must pray to God, agreeing together with our husbands, that all our children will be born again and become wholehearted disciples of the Lord. We must not allow Satan to bring anything between us and our husbands, lest Satan get an opportunity to attack our children. We should offer ourselves and our children on the altar to the Lord every day.

Praying together as a family is also very important. In the mornings, this may not often be possible, since it can be a big rush getting the children ready for school etc., So a brief prayer asking for God's guidance and protection over them should be enough. We could also pray for any urgent needs at that time. But in the evenings, at dinner-time, it is good to take some time to read the Scriptures and to pray together. Each child should be encouraged to pray. On holidays, we could spend a longer time together with God's Word.

Only God can preserve our children in an evil world. This is why we must depend on the Word of God and prayer more than on anything else. Every problem our children face can be overcome with the Word of God and prayer. When we face problems with regard to our children, if we have developed the habit of listening to the Lord, He will give us a promise for the solution of each problem. We can then cling to that promise and pray on, until the problem is solved.

We mothers should give our children a sense of security and love. Our children should find in us a haven and a refuge to which they can always turn. This will enable them in later years to understand the love and care of God more clearly. Surely this is a great privilege that we have - to reflect the nature of God to our children, so that their young minds can grasp the Unseen more firmly.

"The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands" (Prov.14:1)

CHAPTER FOUR

SPENDING TIME WITH OUR CHILDREN

Our children must be first priority in our lives as long as they are at home. We must never leave the bringing up of our children in the hands of their grandparents or their Sunday-school teachers. God has given that responsibility to us mothers first of all, because we brought them forth and we spend the most time with them at home.

Therefore, we must never neglect our children for the sake of pursuing our profession or a career, or by excessive visiting of relatives and friends or by any other form of social activity.

When my children were at home, I found it better to avoid attending most social functions, for their sake. I never regretted such self-denial, for the time saved thereby was time well invested with my children.

But when God brought needy people to my home, I would set everything aside and seek to help them out. And then God took care of my children.

Now that all my four sons have grown up and are away from home, I find that I have plenty of time for visiting people and other social activities. So I would encourage you to wait for God's time for everything.

Once we are married, our husband, our children and our home should have topmost priority in our lives - in that order. We will have to sacrifice many things if we want our married life and our home to be happy and if we want our children to grow up aright. But it is well worth it in the long run.

It will be very difficult for us to give full attention to our children, if we start working - even if it be only in a part-time job. We will return home in the evenings, from such a job, tired and weary, and find ourselves getting easily irritated and upset with our children over little things. Many things can then go wrong in the home. We will find that our children also tend to become more naughty and stubborn, when they find Mummy herself in a bad mood frequently!!!. It is a full-time job to be a mother - especially when the children are small and of school-going age. We mustn't therefore take on more than we can handle at such a time.

We should do everything possible to attend the meetings of the church along with our children. Thereby we set a good example for them. But if at times, we are unable to go to some meetings because our children are sick, we should not feel condemned. At such times, our children may be crying in secret, and their unspoken cry may be, "Mummy, please don't leave me alone now." When children are sick, they need the assurance and comfort of a mother more than anything else. So we shouldn't leave them in the care of others, at such times. One day they will thank us for the happy home we provided them, even if they never know how many sacrifices we made for their sakes.

Even if we are bedridden, we can still be good mothers to our children at home. We may not be able to attend many meetings perhaps. But our fellowship with the Lord can still be unbroken. There are many Christians in Communist prisons who cannot attend any meetings at all. But they are gems whom the Lord is polishing - and He will display them to the whole world one day. We mothers too can be such gems for the Lord.

We must take an interest in everything related to our children. If they have some function in school or if they are taking part in some sports event, we should go and watch them participate in it. By such actions, we can win the hearts of our children - for they will see that we are interested in the things that they do.

On holidays, we can play indoor games with them and talk to them about the things that interest them - and not just the things that interest us. We must talk to them individually and pay attention and listen to them when they talk to us. Then they too will pay attention to us when we say something to them.

We should take an interest in their academic studies too. If they don't understand something, it is no use scolding them. We should try and study that subject ourselves and explain it to them. If that is beyond us, then we should get someone else to help them. We should not plan social visits at times when our children should be studying. Neither should we be occupied with entertaining visitors at times when our children need our attention. Teaching our children will involve a lot of sacrifice on our part and we will certainly have to deny ourselves a lot of socializing if we want to do it right. But we will not regret it when we see our children grown up and doing well in life.

Many mothers find it a real problem getting along with their teenage children and getting them to share their problems with them. One reason could be that those mothers were so busy working and entertaining friends when their children were small, that they had hardly any time to spend with their children then. Now the tables are turned and their teenage children have no time to spend with their mothers!!

We need to win the confidence of our children when they are small itself. But if we failed to do that then, let us seek the Lord and try to do so at least now. It is never too late to start trying. We should never give up hope.

Let us never forget that our children are God's special gifts to us, and He tells us concerning each child of ours, "Take this child and nurse it for me ... and I will give you a reward" (Exodus 2:9).

Our children must grow up realising that they are valuable and precious to us. They must taste God's goodness from us mothers first of all. Then our homes will be what God wants them to be - and God will be glorified.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN PRINCIPLES AND NOT RULES

As mothers, we often think in terms of how to correct our children in a right way. But if we would only take some pains in instructing our children aright, we can avoid giving them a lot of unnecessary correction.

There should be very few rules that we make for our children. If we make too many rules, our children will either become legalistic or end up disobeying every rule we make. We must teach them principles rather than give them many rules. Simple instructions are better than complicated rules.

The most important principles that we must teach our children are obedience to parents, being truthful, unselfishness, being respectful to older people, and having a concern for the rights of others. If they follow these principles, they will not need many rules. Later on in life when they leave home they will have these principles and values to guide them all their lives.

The Bible promises that it will go well with children who honour their parents. So if we want it to go well with our children, we must teach them to honour us. They must also be taught to speak with respect to all older people.

We must teach our children to be unselfish, in practical ways at home. We must teach them to share their toys and the things that they like, with each other, and with others who come to our home.

Children must be taught to respect the property of others and never to steal. We must never allow them to bring home things from school that don't belong to them. If our children see us borrowing things from others that we are not careful to return, they too will start doing the same thing themselves. Children are not naturally virtuous. They must be taught virtue.

Children should be encouraged to do manual work at home. But we shouldn't give the same job to the same child repeatedly. We must rotate the jobs among the children so that each one gets a turn according to his/her ability. Thus we will be fair to all. We should not get our children habituated to receiving payment or reward for the work they do at home. I know there are different views on this. But there are dangers in this method. It may be all right occasionally. But otherwise our children must be taught that helping at home is the normal thing for everyone to do - father, mother and children. They must not feel that they are doing us a favour by helping us at home.

We must give our children the freedom to say whatever they want to us and to talk about any subject freely at all times. Of course, they should not be permitted to be rude or cheeky. But if we allow them to be free with us, we will soon discover the things that are bothering them. When they are aloof and quiet, we will know that something is wrong. We must win our children's confidence and they must consider us as their closest friends.

Our children will always value the fact that we mothers cared enough for them to help them and not just blame them. So if we take the time to cultivate fellowship with them, there will be less need to correct them. They will see the sacrifices we make for them and the wholehearted attention we give them - and they will respond to us warmly. Years later when they face pressures in life they will look back to similar situations when we mothers had faith and did not give up our faith....and how God brought us through that trial triumphantly. That is how their own faith will develop.

It is important that we never allow our children to be rude to any servants we have in our home. If we make our children apologise to a servant even once, that will often be enough to cure them of such behaviour. We must teach our children to be thankful to servants who help us in our homes. If our children earn some money or get a cash prize at school, they should be encouraged to get a gift for such servants, to show their appreciation for them. We must take it very seriously if our children ever despise anyone who works for us. The unfortunate circumstances of servants may have placed them lower in the social scale, but their Maker watches over them and will hold us parents responsible if our children despise them. If our children grow up with an attitude of superiority towards those who are socially lower, that will destroy our children in the long run. Asking forgiveness is difficult for all; it is worthwhile if we mothers set an example.

Oneness with our husbands is also very important. This will give us spiritual authority when we deal with our children. We must always do our best to resolve all differences of opinion with our husbands at the earliest opportunity. We should do this for the glory of God. But it is good for the sake of our children too. We cannot expect our children to submit to us if we ourselves don't submit to our husbands. The spirit of rebellion can easily be brought into a home by an unsubmissive wife and then all the children can catch that infection from her!! We must never forget that we and our husbands have a common goal: The well-being of our children

We should avoid praising our children too much in public, since that could puff them up. They may think that what we are flattering them or that we are exaggerating. But it is good to encourage our children - both publicly and privately. But we have to be careful here - for praising one child publicly can lead to jealousy among the other children and can lead to sibling rivalry. It can also lead to the child beginning to behave self-righteously thereafter.

Our home must be a foretaste of heaven. We must provide for our children a home that is like a "heaven on earth" - a place to which they can retreat from the battles, struggles and temptations they face in the world.

CHAPTER SIX

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN DISCIPLINED HABITS

Discipline is a good thing to teach our children - discipline in their eating habits, their study habits and even in their recreation. Even during holidays it is good for them to do a little study and memorising of Scripture.

Life will be much easier for us, if we teach our children early in life to take care of their own things, to keep their things neatly, to get up on time, to eat their meals on time, etc., The older children can also be taught to wash their own underclothes and to share some of the heavy work at home, so that they don't take their mothers for granted. This may take a little time for them to learn. But once learnt, these habits will help them throughout their lives.

Our children must also be taught to honour God and to put Him first in their lives. One way is by teaching them when they are young, to attend the meetings of the church regularly and on time. I have seen how my own children have experienced God's help, when they honoured God by attending the weekly Sunday meetings, even when they had examinations the very next day. God honours those who honour Him.

Children should be taught to sit quietly in the meetings. By teaching them this, we will be teaching them to respect God, by not distracting others who are listening. We can give small children some storybook to look at or a colouring book to paint. Even when they are older and sitting by themselves, we should keep an eye on them to see that they are behaving themselves. If we find them misbehaving, we should warn them when we return home from the meeting and remind them of the importance of reverencing God.

It is not good to give older children storybooks to read during the meetings, if they are old enough to pay attention to what is being preached. If they can pay attention to their teachers for 3 to 4 hours every day in their classrooms, they can certainly pay attention for 2 hours in a meeting. We would not want them to be reading story books, while their teachers are explaining something. Neither should they be doing that in the meetings!

Children must be taught to be content with the food and clothing they are given and also not to be wasteful with material things.

Disciplined study habits are also important. We may have to sit with our children, especially when they are small, and go over their lessons with them so that they can be confident in the classroom. We don't want them to make education their god. But God will certainly not be glorified if they do badly in school because of their laziness. Our children may not be intelligent. But we can teach them all to be hardworking.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCIPLINING OUR CHILDREN

"Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older he will remain upon it" (Prov.22:6 - Living).

"Discipline your son in his early years while there is hope. If you don't, you will ruin his life" (Prov.19:18 - Living)

"A youngster's heart is filled with rebellion, but punishment will drive it out of him" (Prov.22:15 - Living)

"Don't fail to correct your children; discipline won't hurt them! They won't die if you use a stick on them! Punishment will keep them out of hell" (Prov.23:13,14 - Living).

"Discipline your son and he will give you happiness and peace of mind" (Prov.29:17 - Living).

When it comes to correcting and disciplining our children we need much wisdom and grace. We must chastise them, just as God chastises us - in love and with compassion, seeking their eternal good. We should not leave all disciplining of children in the hands of our husbands. A weak school-teacher will always send a disobedient child to the principal for punishment. And children will not respect such a teacher - or such a mother. Our children will see that we are weak if we never discipline them ourselves - and then we will soon lose our authority over them.

We should also know what matters to correct our children for and what to ignore. One fundamental principle to be borne in mind is that their character is more important than any material loss. We must have a proper sense of eternity's values ourselves. If our children are rude to us (or for that matter, to anybody), or if they tell deliberate lies, we must recognise these as more serious matters than if they merely broke some expensive item accidentally.

We must cleanse ourselves of all anger, impatience and irritation when disciplining our children. We must not punish them at any time in anger. I am sure we have all failed in this area in the past. But we can repent and ask the Lord for grace to correct our children in future, with love.

We should never give our children heavy manual work as a punishment. They should learn to work as a duty and not as a punishment. In the same way, we should not deny them food as a punishment - unless it be a luxury item such as a chocolate or an ice-cream. Children need good food for proper growth.

If we warn our children that we will punish them for disobedience in some area, then we must keep our word. Otherwise they will think our threats are empty - and they will lose respect for our words. But we can reduce the severity of a punishment if we see that they deserve a lighter one. We can even cancel a threatened punishment if we see that our children are sorry for what they have done. Even God Himself was merciful to Nineveh and canceled the threatened punishment when he saw their repentance (Jonah 3). God deals with us in severity and in kindness - and so must we, with our children.

Using the rod or the belt on our children is not the only form of punishment. We can also restrict them from playing or have them lie down quietly in their beds for some time. These actions too can speak to their hearts when they have done something wrong.

We should never punish our children unmercifully. We must not slap them on the face or injure them when disciplining them. Faces are meant to be stroked in love and not to be slapped. We should avoid using our hands to hit our children. It is better to use a rod when we punish them, as the Scripture says (Prov.23:13,14). Hands are meant to caress our children, thereby expressing our love for them.

Once our children become teenagers (above 13 years of age), we should avoid punishing them physically. If we have disciplined them between the ages of 1 and 13, there won't usually be any need to punish them physically thereafter. So let us make use of the years when they are young, to discipline them and to train them in godly ways.

We should never discipline our children in the presence of others, since that will be disgracing them publicly - and that will make their punishment double. We must respect their dignity at all times. We could punish them for their failures privately. Disobedience and rudeness however must always be corrected at once. If we fail to discipline them in such matters, they could go to dangerous extremes that could ruin them as they grow up. And then it may be too late to correct them. Some parents punish their children publicly just to show others that they are strict in bringing up their children. This is seeking the honour of men and is evil in God's eyes.

Both father and mother should be united in disciplining their children. If we mothers try to defend our children, when Daddy is punishing them, then we run the risk of destroying our children in the long run.

After disciplining our children, we must assure them that they are forgiven. We must also teach them how their mistakes can be corrected. But we should be careful not to remind them of their mistakes again and again. Some mothers do this, and that only serves to frustrate the children even more.

There are times when we should reward our children too. God Himself rewards us when we have denied ourselves in some area. When Abraham denied himself and gave Lot the opportunity to choose first whichever land he wanted (Gen.13), God rewarded Abraham immediately. In the same way when our children have been good and denied themselves in some way, it is good to reward them. We could also give them gifts on their birthdays, or when they are sick, or after they have been hospitalised.

There can be times when we feel bad for having punished our children too much and then seek to make up for it by giving them some gift as a compensation. That is all right if done only occasionally. But if it becomes a habit, we will soon find our children losing all respect for the punishment we give them. It is better to reward them at some later time, when they have made an effort to be good.

It's easy when problems arise concerning our children, to lose the sense of joy and wonder and gratitude to God that we first had when our baby was born. But we should never forget that it is a priceless privilege to bear a child. There are so many wives who have never had that privilege and who would give anything in the world to have a baby.

So we must determine that we will keep our hand on the plough at any cost; and we must do our best to see that everything runs smoothly in our homes. God will renew our strength and keep us spiritually fresh, if we spend time with Him and maintain a close walk with Him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ENCOURAGING OUR CHILDREN

I consider encouraging our children to be the most important thing that we can ever do for them, as mothers. But alas, this is what is missing in most homes.

We see many children growing up warped and twisted in their personalities, because of parental abuse, lack of love or lack of fellowship. A child who has the misfortune of growing up in a home where he is never encouraged, is like a plant growing under the shade of a boulder that never gets to see the sunlight.

It is easy to praise and encourage a talented child or one who does well in studies or athletics. But it is the weaker child who needs encouragement the most. We must sense the need of such a child who may be hurting inwardly but does not express his hurt. A sensitive mother will be able to pick up his feelings as easily as a thermometer reads the temperature!!

When a child feels inferior, or is not able to achieve what his older brothers have achieved, or feels rejected by his friends, and begins to feel unwanted, do we add to his pressures by scolding him when we should be encouraging him?

We can test ourselves by asking how often we use the word "Don't" to our children. Let us tell our children what they should do and not just what they should not do.

Perhaps you feel that one of your children was born without your planning to have him/her. Have you ever said these words to anyone or to yourself perhaps: "This child was an accident". How contrary that is to the Word of God which says that "children are a gift of the Lord" (Psa.127:3). We need to value every child as a gift of God. God makes no mistake, even when we did not anticipate having a child.

We should never expose our children's failures publicly or let them down publicly. Our children must know that we will be loyal to them even behind their backs.

We must also teach our older children to accept their younger brothers and sisters and not to be jealous of them, just because we spend more time with the younger ones. This can at times be a problem, when a new baby is born and it gets a lot of attention from everyone. But with God's help, we can show our children that all of them are equally valuable to us.

How often we have failed to be compassionate to a child who has failed. Even if a child has backslidden or fallen into sin, a mother can still lead that lost lamb back into the Saviour's fold by her loving concern and prayer.

When a child has failed, that is not the time to scold him. God does not scold those who lack wisdom and neither should we (James 1:5). How much wisdom we ourselves need to be better mothers - and God doesn't scold us!

Many backslidden children have been restored to the Lord through the faithful prayers of their mothers. So let us hold on to the promises of God without wavering.

If we spend time with our children, we will find that even while we are doing some ordinary task with them, they begin to open up and share their problems with us. And then we can encourage them to overcome and not to go under whatever they are facing.

As our children grow older, we must treat them as mature adults and give them the respect that they are due. We must stop treating them like the babies they once were. Then we will find that they grow up to be our friends and they won't be distant from us.

There are many opportunities we have, as our children grow up, to prove for ourselves the truth of the promises in Scripture. God's providential care and concern will become a living reality to us, if we commit our children to Him day by day and live in dependence upon Him. Bringing up children can be a great means of spiritual maturity for us too. And this will ultimately affect the spiritual lives of our children as well. May God help each one of us to be faithful.

*"When children live with criticism they learn to condemn,
When children live with hostility they learn to fight,
When children live with ridicule they learn to be shy,
When children live with shame they learn to feel guilty,
When children live with tolerance they learn to be patient,
When children live with encouragement they learn to be confident,
When children live with security they learn to have faith,
When children live with fairness they learn justice,
When children live with praise they learn to appreciate,
When children live with approval they learn to accept themselves,
When children live with friendship they learn to love."*

(Author Unknown)

CHAPTER NINE

HAVE PATIENCE WITH ME

"Have patience with me," cried the slave as he begged his fellow-slave for mercy (Matt.18:29).

This is the also unspoken cry that comes to us as housewives and mothers from many of those with whom we have to do each day. But we need to be sensitive in our spirits if we are to hear that cry - for it is unspoken.

It may be that our children are slow at learning something that we have repeatedly been trying to teach them, and we are sorely tempted to become impatient with them. If we could hear their unspoken cry, saying, "Have patience with me, I am trying my best to do it right," then it would be easier for us to overcome the temptation to get irritated with them.

Perhaps the servant who helps us with our work around the home is somewhat clumsy, and not as clean as we want her to be, and we are tempted to be hard on her. But her unspoken cry is, "Have patience with me. Give me another chance and I'll improve" - and we are presented with another opportunity to be more gentle.

Or it may be that our aged parents, being old and infirm, are now dependent on us. Their feeble, unspoken cry is also, "Have patience with me. I don't want to trouble you, but I need your help now." If we are sensitive to their feelings, we will hear their cry and help them, without depriving them of their dignity, and without letting them feel their dependence.

Perhaps the behaviour of our fellow-sisters in the church is a trial for us. Their unspoken cry is also, "Have patience with me. I still lack a lot of wisdom." Then we realise that they also, like us, are struggling towards perfection.

In such situations, we all find a tendency in our flesh to be like that unmerciful slave. Yet those are the very times when we need to remember afresh how much we have been forgiven by God, and how patient others have been with our own follies.

So we should have our spiritual ears attuned at all times to hear the cry for patience that comes to us from our fellow-slaves - both young and old.

"Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (Jas.1:4).

CHAPTER TEN

A SPIRIT-FILLED HELPER

The Holy Spirit is our Helper in our time of need (Jn.14:16).

A wife who is filled with the Spirit will naturally then be filled with this characteristic of the Spirit and be a helper to her husband in his times of need. God created Eve to be such a helper for Adam.

A good helper is one who is quick to see the need and the helplessness of her husband and equally quick to run and meet that need. Strong though your husband may be, there are still times when he needs someone to stand by him and encourage him in the battles of life.

Blessed is the wife who can be such a helper to her husband.

Unfortunately many wives are so taken up with their own sorrows and trials that they are always wanting to be comforted and consoled and pampered by their husbands. Thus they are never free from themselves to be of any help to their husbands.

In some cases, this could be because those wives took on responsibilities for many unnecessary things that could have been avoided, and that finally weighed them down with burdens that became too much for them.

We need to recognise our limitations, and take on only what we can handle.

It is not enough that we help our husbands. As mothers, God has called us to be helpers for our children too.

When our children fail in some area and are discouraged, or when they sin and disappoint us by their conduct, or when they don't come up to our expectations, what is our attitude?

Baby-girls are thrown into rivers in China, and into garbage-bins and temples in India, because they are a disappointment to their mothers who wanted male-children. Are we like those mothers, when a child of ours fails us in some way?

A child who has failed, or who feels inferior, needs more love, compassion, understanding and care, more time to be spent with him and more prayer - not to be thrown into the river!!

We must believe that God, the Master Potter, can remake the most broken vessel in the world into something useful for His purposes.

He is able to remove the hardness from the most stubborn child of ours, and to make him a vessel that will glorify Him. The Holy Spirit, the Helper, has come to make Divine successes out of those of our children who are failures in this world. And we mothers are called to encourage our children to believe this.

Or take another example: When the father has had to discipline a child firmly, we should not spoil that child at such times, by "comforting" him by giving him the impression that his father has been unduly hard on him.

Some mothers can go even so far as to encourage their children to deceive their fathers - as Rebekah encouraged Jacob to deceive Isaac. Jacob is commonly spoken of as a deceiver. But who was the one who taught him to deceive? An unwise mother, who was not one with her husband. These things are written for our instruction.

As women, we have a vast storehouse of emotional energy within us. Instead of expending that energy on nagging our husbands for not doing various things for us, why not spend it more profitably on carrying the burdens and problems of our children - for, after all they too have problems, and they are too young to bear them alone. They need someone to help them.

We are in a battle with an Enemy who is determined to destroy our homes, our children and our families. We must never give up in this battle, or lose sight of who our real enemy is, until every member of our family is safe in the kingdom of God. As the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we as helpers must pray for our husbands and our children.

We can liken this struggle to a tug-of-war, in which the forces of darkness are pulling against our husbands and our children . Which side of the rope are we going to pull on - WITH our husbands and our children (praying for them and encouraging them), or AGAINST them (nagging them and scolding them)?

We need never be discouraged in this battle, for we have the Holy Spirit at all times to strengthen us, all of God's promises to back us up, and a cloud of witnesses to cheer us on. Every one of us can become the type of helper that God wants us to be.

All of our present self-denials and sufferings will seem as nothing in the final day, when our husbands and our children rise up and call us blessed, because we did our task as helpers faithfully.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS

"Mary sat on the floor, listening to Jesus as He talked. But Martha was the jittery type, worrying over the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to You that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.' But the Lord said to her, 'Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it - and I won't take it away from her'" (Luke 10:38 -42 - Living).

Martha was working hard at home. What can be more gratifying for a sister who truly loves the Lord than to make a good meal for her beloved Master and for His disciples? But that sweet labour she was engaged in became a burden too great for her to bear, when she saw what her sister Mary was doing. Not only was Mary doing nothing to help her - which seemed selfish - but she also appeared to be so happy in the Lord's presence. And the Lord seemed happy with her too. Martha's attitude had shades of the attitude that Cain had towards his younger brother. It is not easy for a sister to see others free from household burdens and rejoicing in the Lord, when she herself is weighed down with heavy burdens in her own home.

Are we the jittery type like Martha? Martha was a weak vessel. All of us sisters are. She was also tired. But all of that still could not justify her spirit of complaining, judging others, comparison, jealousy and self-pity.

When we are tired, we can go to Him Who invites us saying, "Come to Me all you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke, and I will give you rest. Let Me teach you - for I am gentle and humble - and you will find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens." (Matt.11:28-30 - Living).

In the midst of all our work, we can live before God's face and acknowledge that He is on the throne, fully assured that He knows our every burden and problem. That will enable us to do our work with a lighter heart and with a spirit that is free - free to love and bless the others, even those who seem to have an easier lot in life, who seem to be able to go wherever they want to, whenever they want to.

"There is really only one thing worth being concerned about, and Mary has discovered it," Jesus told Martha.

It is a comforting thought that we don't have to choose between being a Mary or a Martha. We can be both. We read that after Lazarus had been raised from the dead, they made the Lord a supper in that home again, and "Martha was serving" (John 12:2). Mary was again sitting at the Lord's feet. But this time Martha had no complaints. She was happy, because she had learnt how to be at rest in the middle of her service.

She had probably learnt to "sit at the Lord's feet", while working in the kitchen. We who are tied down to our houses can do that and experience the joy of fulfillment in our earthly work. We can be at the feet of our Lord, even while we are doing those necessary chores for our family. It is the unrest that comes from a spirit of complaining and jealousy that takes us away from the Lord's feet, not our daily work. The whole earth is the Lord's footstool. So we can sit at His feet anywhere.

David could testify, "I am quiet now before the Lord, as a child weaned from the breast" (Psa.131:2 - Living). With no restlessness or possessive desire for the attention of its mother, the weaned child goes about without a care in the world. We can be like that too, for when we abide in the Lord, we will discover that He is with us, even in the midst of our household work.

"A single day spent in His temple (and my home is His holy temple, if that is the place He has appointed for me) is better than a thousand days anywhere else! I would rather be a doorman (or a busy wife and mother) in the temple of my God than live in palaces (of ease and comfort, outside His will for my life)..... For the Lord gives us grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk along His paths" (Psa.84:10,11 - Living) - even when those paths keep me for days on end cooped up in my home with long hours of work, or with sick children.

"I am with you always. I will never leave you nor forsake you", is the Lord's word to us. This is the good news that our Lord has brought to us sisters in the new covenant: That He will always be with us, no matter what we are doing. And so we can meet with Him always - in our homes.

Now we desire nothing on earth but the presence of our Lord Himself (Psa.73:25). As Madam Guyon has so aptly put it:

*"While place we seek or place we shun
The soul finds happiness in none;
But with my God to guide my way
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.*

*Could I be cast where Thou art not
That were indeed a dreadful lot;
But regions none remote I call
Secure of finding God in all."*

The Old Testament saints cried out saying, "As the deer pants for water, so we long and thirst for the living God. Where can we find Him, so that we can come and stand before Him?" (Psa.42:1,2). But today, we find Him always right next to us - in our own home. How blessed!

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GENTLE WHISPER OF GOD

"I stand silently before the Lord.....Why then should I be tense with fear" (Psa.62:1,2 - Living).

Haven't we all felt discouraged at times?

Haven't we felt like running away from some difficult situation?

The great prophet Elijah once felt like that too. He had stood alone for the Lord at a time when others in Israel had backslidden (1 Kings 18). But after that great victory, he ran away from his appointed place. He ran 500 kilometres and finally found himself at Mount Horeb, with an earthquake and a windstorm and a fire around him (1 Kings 19).

But there was a greater storm than all of these within his own heart.

But Elijah was not alone on that mountain. Just as God had been with him when he took a stand for the Lord on Carmel, God was with Him when he ran away in fear and despair as well.

As mothers, we may find ourselves in situations at times, where a storm rages within our hearts, and we feel like running away somewhere. But our heavenly Father is so compassionate that He will stand by us, speak to us tenderly, and encourage us, even if we are fed up with life, like Elijah was.

At such times we must refuse to listen to the stormy voices of self-pity, because they will lead us to do and say many things that we will regret later on. Instead, let us do what Elijah did, when he was discouraged: Listen for the "sound of a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12 - Living) . Above the windstorm and the earthquake, the Friend of sinners, Who understands our every weakness, seeks to speak to us. That gentle whisper alone can bring comfort to our souls. The storm will be stilled, and peace will reign in our hearts.

David said, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me.....How precious it is, Lord, to realize that You are thinking about me constantly! I can't even count how many times a day Your thoughts turn towards me. And when I waken in the morning, you are still thinking of me" (Psa.139:7,9,10,17,18 - Living).

"Peace, Fear not, It is I," said Jesus, with gentleness to His disciples, as He came walking to them over the very waves and the sea that they feared would drown them. In no time at all the storm was stilled. And He is the same today - to still every storm in our lives that may cause us to fear or despair. "Thy gentleness makes me great" (Psa.18:35).

Do we face hostility from others? Then consider Him Who endured contradiction and hostility from sinners against Himself (Heb.12:3).

The enmity we face from even friends and relatives are only indications that we are on the right path. Along that path, we see Jesus, our Forerunner - Who also suffered hostility, but Who did not yield to self-pity, criticism, or complaining, but instead overcame evil with good. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but forgave and blessed His accusers. He listened to the gentle whisper of His Father and committed His cause to Him.

Our Father Who watches everything that everyone says and does, will judge everything righteously one day, and there is no partiality with Him, because He is aware of the true facts in every situation.

If we do what Jesus did, we will be able to overcome all feelings of self-pity, and exult with joy that we have a share in the fellowship of His sufferings. Then we will also be able to finish with all reviling, slander, accusations, demands, self-defense, self-justification, and self-pity.

Let us allow the Lord then to crush our Self-life through such fiery trials. From that death to Self will arise a fragrance in resurrection-power to God's glory. And we will hear Him saying, "You are my beloved daughter, with whom I am well-pleased". That word of approval will be our greatest reward.

Let silence reign then within our heart at all times, for it is now God's holy temple. "The Lord is in His holy temple. Be silent all flesh before the Lord." (Habakkuk.2:20; Zech.2:13).

By such tranquility and silence under provocation, we will prove that we are true servants of our Lord Who told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this earth. If it were, my servants would fight" (Jn.18:36).

Jesus is King. Earthly Pilates and their soldiers are all but slaves of our God. And He Who "turned the curse into a blessing" for His people centuries ago, will do the same for us even today (Deut.23:5).

God invites us to "BE STILL (relax, cease striving and let go) - and recognise that He is God" (Psa.46:10).

Yes, God is Sovereign. All authority in heaven and on earth are still in His hands. He is our Creator, Redeemer, Master and Lord. All that He sends across our path has been doubly filtered through the micro-filters of 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Romans 8:28. So we can be at rest at all times.

In the thick of the battle, when the fire is hottest, we will hear His gentle whisper telling us, "My grace IS sufficient for you, even in this situation. I will not allow you to be tested or tempted beyond what you are able to bear. I will make all that you are facing to work together for your very best - to transform you increasingly into My likeness."

Yes, even the weakest among us sisters can come out triumphant.

*"Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess -
The beauty of Thy peace."*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

Outside the ruins of one of the richest cities of its time, we find a salty statue of a woman, that brings a message to women of all time.

The words of the Lord, "Remember Lot's wife" (Lk.17:32), are a warning to all of us.

When Lot's wife looked back, that was but the final act of a way of life, whereby she had ruined her family already.

Her husband "was a good man who was sick of the terrible wickedness that he saw everywhere around him, (in Sodom) day after day" (2 Pet.2:7,8-Living). But she did not feel about Sodom the way her husband felt. And that was the tragedy.

Having no fear of God herself, she could not teach her two daughters to fear God either. She was perhaps too busy socializing, to have time to spend with her two daughters as they grew up.

She was a prominent businessman's wife, and she was proud that her daughters too had been accepted in Sodom's society. She had no doubt overruled her husband's objections and allowed her daughters to adopt the styles and fashions of Sodom, and finally to be married to two of Sodom's smart young men. Thus she destroyed her daughters.

A word of warning comes to us mothers from that 4000-year old pillar of salt: Spend time with your children. Remember Lot's wife.

Lot's wife had her treasure in her earthly goods, and so her heart was there too. Since we mothers work so much at home with earthly things, it is easy for us to place far too great a value on food, clothes, household gadgets etc.,

And so another warning comes to us from that pillar of salt: The things that are seen are temporal. Remember Lot's wife.

Perhaps it was the parting from her worldly friends in Sodom that Lot's wife found so difficult. Many sisters are ineffective for the Lord, because their best friends are their worldly relatives and neighbours, and they spend most of their time in unprofitable conversation with them.

To such sisters too, the word of warning comes: Bad company will neutralise your witness for the Lord. Remember Lot's wife.

Perhaps it is some failure in the past that could be weighing us down, or a hurt or a betrayal by some loved one that we don't seem to be able to forget. Or it may be some sorrow or affliction that we delight in recounting to others to earn their sympathy.

Whatever it may be, looking back is always dangerous. It can halt all spiritual progress and reduce us to pillars of salt, when we could have become pillars in the church. (Yes, God's Word tells us that even sisters can become pillars in the church if they overcome sin - Rev.3:12).

Let us heed the warning then: Forget the past. Don't brood over it. Remember Lot's wife.

"Flee to the mountains, and don't look back, or you will die" was the call of the angels to the Lot family (Gen.19:17). This is the call that comes to us also from heaven today. Let us live on the mountain-top with the Lord, and never live in the past. And let us give up our tight hold on the things of earth that we will have to leave behind one day, in any case.

Remember Lot's wife.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A DOOR OF HOPE

"I gave her time to repent....." (Rev.2:21).

When we read these words, do we think of an earthly father threatening his daughter with dire consequences if she does not repent?

No. It isn't so. It is the voice of a heavenly Father who loves His daughter and Who is opening a door of hope for her and showing her a remedy for her faults. He wants her to repent and so He gives her time.

We hear the Father saying, "I will speak to her tenderly and I will transform her Valley of Troubles into a Door of Hope" (Hosea 2:15 - Living)

Think back to another "her" - Eve. God certainly punished her for her disobedience. But along with the words of punishment a door of hope was also opened - a remedy for her sin, a hope of a glorious day when her seed would crush the enemy's head. The deceiver would be dealt with and her children would still be able to inherit the kingdom of God.

Think of a second "her" - the haughty daughters of Israel and Judah who went after idols. Despite repeated warnings from the prophets whom God sent to them in His love and mercy, they hardened their hearts and spurned the entreaties of God. And so they were led captive and scattered. Yet in the very message of judgment, God opened a door of hope for them too, giving them a promise of restoration in the future (Jer.29:11).

Such is the infinite love of God. Even in His sternest judgments, He always opens a door of hope. As Frederick Faber has said,

*"There's no place where all our sorrows
Are more felt than up in heav'n
There's no place where all our failures
Have such kindly judgment giv'n."*

Let us then use the time given us now to repent, and not be like that wicked, "false prophetess" Jezebel, who mocked God's warnings and despised his prophets, and about whom the Lord had to say, "She does not want to repent" (Rev.2:21).

Let us rather be like that other repentant woman about whom the Lord said, "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much" (Lk.7:47).

God has opened "a door of hope" for every one of us - even for those wives and mothers who have failed the most and who have made a mess of their lives!! God can fulfil His plan for your life even now, if only you will trust Him. Nothing is impossible with our God. Only trust Him.

Those who trust in Him will never be disappointed.

As my husband often says, "God is ALWAYS on our side against Satan."

Hallelujah!! Amen!!

APPENDIX ONE

SOME ADVICE FOR EXPECTANT MOTHERS - PREPARING FOR BABY'S ARRIVAL

As soon as the newly wed wife feels that she is expecting a baby, she should visit the doctor. The first signs of pregnancy are: Missing of period, nausea and vomiting, increased frequency of urination, changes in the breast.

The expected date of delivery is 9 months and 7 days from the beginning of the last menstrual period.

There may be things in the mother's or father's constitution which may need treatment. Some ailments may not be evident in the parent but might affect the child. Some of these can be corrected. So it is good to have a medical check-up, if you are in doubt.

Pregnancy is not an illness - obviously! But if you happen to be on the borderline between health and ill-health, then pregnancy can make you unwell. Good nutritious food and healthy habits are most essential. And, by the way, the mind needs to be fed too. Meditation on God's Word can relieve your mind of tensions and improve your health and thereby the health of your unborn baby too. Some mornings you may find yourself too tired or sick to concentrate on reading the Bible. Then try meditating on just one verse, or read a good book of daily devotions or a book of hymns . You could also ask your husband to share the time of devotion and prayer with you.

Diet

The baby in your womb gets its food through what you eat. So your daily diet should ordinarily consist of the following :

- Rice, wheat or other cereal
- 2 to 4 glasses of milk
- Eggs, meat or fish
- Grams and dhal (lentils) - sprouted lentils are very good
- Curds (yogurt)
- Vegetables - leafy and non-leafy
- Fats and oils
- Fresh or dried fruits

Vegetarians should substitute more curds (yogurt) and dhal (lentils) in lieu of meat and fish. Rice, wheat and fats are fattening and should not be taken excessively. Your diet should be supplemented with multi-vitamins, iron tablets and calcium for building up the baby's bones and teeth. Avoid excessive salt and eating too much of fried food from wayside vendors.

You must also take the iron, calcium and magnesium tablets prescribed by your doctor regularly during the early months of pregnancy, and immunisation against tetanus after the sixth month.

Fresh air

Do take time occasionally to get out of your stuffy kitchen (or office) and breathe a few breaths of God's fresh air. This can be most invigorating. Take a walk in the evening with your husband. This will relax and refresh you and your husband too! Try to maintain an upright posture when walking.

Exercise

Physical exercise can help digestion, promote sleep, prevent constipation and keep your muscles in good working condition. This will make it easier for you to deliver your baby when the time comes. So don't give up your house-work - taking care of course, against over-exerting yourself. Deep breathing exercises, expanding the chest and abdomen are helpful. Sitting on the floor with legs crossed, once in a while, is good for your pelvic muscles. Avoid straining the back. Avoid lifting heavy things. Bend your knees when you have to stoop and try to keep the back straight.

Cleanliness And Rest

You should have a bath daily, taking care to wash yourself thoroughly.

You should have a good sleep at night, and if possible, for an hour after lunch as well. Pause from your daily work, now and then, to relax for a few minutes with some fruit or a cup of curds. You should cut down activities that tire you too much.

Your Husband's Part

Pregnancy is a time of emotional stress for a woman. An understanding and sympathetic husband can make life easier for his wife. You should therefore share your problems with your husband. Remember that the two of you are "joint-heirs of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7) Many men may not be aware of the medical and physiological aspects of pregnancy. Try and make your visits to the doctor together so that your husband can understand the role he has to play at such a time.

Some "Don'ts"

1. Don't allow fatigue and mental strain.
2. Don't allow situations where there could be sudden strains or falls or your having to lift heavy items.
3. Don't take long, bumpy rides, particularly during the first three months and last three months of pregnancy. It is best to travel as little as possible. Try to keep your legs elevated from time to time.
4. Don't allow constipation. Take plenty of fruit and water.
5. Don't take laxatives, sedatives or other drugs without consulting a doctor.
6. Don't wear uncomfortable footwear and tight clothing.
7. Don't try to slim during pregnancy.

8. Don't allow yourself to be exposed to anyone having German measles and other viral infections. Avoid taking any X-rays. If an X-ray is essential for any reason, then make sure your abdomen is protected with a lead screen.

Ante-Natal Checkups

You must visit your doctor regularly.

Here are some things that should be reported to your doctor at once:

- Any brownish or blood discharge at any time.
- After the sixth month: Severe headaches, visual disturbances, swelling of feet, decreased output of urine, excessive weight-gain (normal weight-gain is about 1.5 to 2 kilos per month after the third month of pregnancy), lack of movement of the baby, abdominal pain and vomiting, swelling of the feet or puffiness of the face.

Some Simple Remedies

For morning-sickness: Get up half an hour later than usual. Rinse your mouth with 1/4 teaspoon of soda-bicarbonate in a cup of water and drink a glass of lime-juice. Avoid fatty meals.

For pain in the legs: Avoid stooping and bending down, as far as possible, and don't stand when you can sit. It may also help to soak your feet in warm water for about half-an-hour before you retire at night.

For varicose veins: These will usually disappear after delivery. A simple exercise is to lie on your back, raise your legs and rest the heel against a wall for a few minutes. This can be done several times a day. Elastocrepe bandages are also beneficial at times.

Onset Of Delivery

The symptoms of the onset of delivery are usually as follows: Regular contractions of the uterus that will come at first as a pain in the low back that will travel to the front of the abdomen. A pink vaginal discharge will also appear. Sometimes there will be a sudden gush of water. If there is bleeding, you should rush to the hospital.

Finally

Look forward confidently to the birth of a healthy baby, and have faith in God, for the Bible says, "Women will come safely through child-birth if they maintain a life of faith, love, holiness and gravity" (1 Tim. 2:15 -J.B.Philips)

APPENDIX TWO

SOME ADVICE FOR NEW MOTHERS - CARE OF THE INFANT

The immediate care of the newborn, just after birth, will be supervised by the doctor or midwife.

You should then take your baby for a medical check-up once every month. The doctor will advise you about immunisations etc.

Your baby will sleep most of the time during the first month. His wants are few - sleep, warmth, comfort, and food.

Sleep

During the first month, the baby may be awake only for its feeds. As he grows older, he will be awake for longer periods.

Provide him with a quiet, well ventilated room (without any draught) to sleep in. Keep him under a mosquito net to protect him from flies and mosquitoes etc.

There is no need to rock him to sleep as this will become a habit that may become difficult to break, later on.

Your baby may feel more comfortable if he is made to lie on his stomach. This will save him from choking himself in case he vomits, and will also relieve him of any colics. His head too will thus have a good shape and won't be flattened. But you should check him frequently, whenever he is sleeping on his stomach.

Warmth and Comfort

Remember that a baby doesn't have an efficient temperature-controlling mechanism in his body, like an adult has. So don't over-dress him in the hot season. A thin cotton dress diaper will be sufficient.

Woollen clothes can also irritate a baby's skin. So when using woollen clothes in winter, make sure that you use cotton underclothes as well. To check whether your baby is warm enough, you should feel his hands and feet and see whether they are cold or chilly.

When using a cap, ensure that it is of some knitted material so that the baby can breathe, even if the cap falls over his face.

When your baby awakes, check that he is not uncomfortable with wet diapers. Diapers should be washed well, rinsed thoroughly and dried in the sun. Particles of soap on them can irritate the baby's skin. If possible, try and boil all diapers once a week.

Bathing The Baby

Very hot baths can be harmful for a baby. Keep a separate soap and towel for your baby. Wash him in warm water and try and give him an oil-rub every time you bathe him. Avoid exposing the baby's body to anything that will suddenly cool it, and ensure that no water enters his nose, mouth and ears.

Clean out visible secretions in his nose and ears, but never put anything into them that could cause injury. If the nose is blocked, it can be cleaned with something soft like a thin wick made out of soft cotton cloth. The ear can also be cleaned in a similar way.

Care should also be taken over the umbilical cord, till the navel has healed completely. Until then, you should keep it dry, applying a clean dressing over it and a light, soft bandage round his abdomen in that area.

If the baby is even slightly ill, it is better to give it a sponge bath rather than giving it a regular bath and thus exposing it to chill.

Feeding

There is actually no substitute for breast-milk! It is the best milk your baby can have. There are antibodies in breast-milk that can protect your baby from many infections. Breast-fed babies thrive well, are more satisfied, have a greater feeling of security and also do not get bowel-infections as easily as bottle-fed babies.

In the beginning, feed your baby every three to four hours between 6 a.m. and midnight. After the first month, you may find that your baby prefers to sleep through the night. You can then omit the night-feed. But don't let him starve if he is hungry and cries at night.

A nursing mother should have a good diet herself, including vitamins and iron tablets. She should also take sufficient rest every day. She should avoid hot spicy foods, chocolates, laxatives, sedatives, aspirin and other drugs, as these can be passed on to the baby through the milk, and may harm him. The breasts should be washed before and after feeds. You should never allow your breasts to be engorged with milk, lest an abscess begin to form there.

Bottle-Feeds

If you have sufficient breast-milk, you need not start your baby on bottle-feeds until he is 6 to 9 months old. Fresh cow's milk, if used, should be boiled well. Baby-milk-powder is usually fresh and free from germs. But always check the date of expiry on the tin before buying milk-powder. Drinking water should also be boiled.

For every kilogram of body-weight, a baby usually needs about 125 millilitres of fresh milk and 75 millilitres of water every day. So for a 3-kilogram baby, the daily formula would be about 400 ml. of fresh milk and 200 ml. of water, with two tablespoons of sugar. This can be divided into five feeds during the day. (If you are using baby-milk-powder, follow the instructions on the outside of the tin).

As the baby grows older he will need more milk and less water. In summer, or whenever the baby has diarrhoea or a fever, you should add more water to his feeds.

In tropical countries like India, where germs multiply easily, the feeding-bottle and its nipples should be boiled well. Otherwise the baby can easily get diarrhoea or some other infection. The bottles should be boiled for at least ten minutes, and its nipples boiled separately in mild salt water. Make sure you don't touch the inside of a sterilised bottle or the inner portion of a sterilised nipple.

Check and see that the milk is not too hot, before giving it to your baby, lest he burn his tongue!

After the first month you can start giving him vitamin drops and fruit juices as well. Make sure that fruit juices are well strained.

General Precautions

People with colds and infections should not be allowed to come near your baby. If you yourself have a cold, you can wear a mask or cover your nose and mouth when feeding him.

Here are some things that you should report to a doctor:

1. Any discharge from the baby's eyes. (Remember that babies have no tears for the first three months).
2. Any rashes on his skin.
3. Jaundice. Physiological jaundice may occur in many infants on the third day, but it will usually clear up in a week. If it persists it should be reported.
4. The area around the baby's nipples may sometimes be swollen and excrete a yellow fluid. This is normal in many infants, but if they get infected and form an abscess then they should be reported.
5. Any foul smell or pus from the navel.
6. Bleeding from any site - mouth, navel, skin, rectum or vagina.
7. Any frequent, watery, foul-smelling stools. (Babies normally have three to four bowel-movements daily for the first three months.)
8. If the baby is not growing properly. (An average baby should double his birth-weight in about five months, and triple it in about a year.)

APPENDIX THREE

THE GROWING CHILD

It is an awesome and sacred responsibility that falls upon a mother when God gives her a child to nurture and bring up. Neglect or carelessness on her part may handicap her child (physically, mentally or emotionally) for the rest of its life. How careful therefore a mother needs to be to discharge her responsibilities with the utmost care.

Such a word of warning is particularly needed in our day when there is an increasing tendency on the part of many mothers to leave their children in the care of `ayahs' and to concentrate on earning additional income for the family. The effects of such neglect of the children are often seen only in later years when things become impossible to correct.

There is no more sacred duty we can fulfil as mothers than to bring up our children in spiritual, mental and physical health.

Diet

If your baby is on breast milk, he will need only vitamin and iron drops, and fruit juices in addition, during the first three months.

When he is three months old, you can introduce him to solid foods. The first solid could be cereals. Tinned cereals of various types are available in the market. One of the cheapest cereals may be a ragi preparation: Place 2 teaspoons of ragi powder in a thin cloth, tie the cloth and squeeze it repeatedly in a cup of water until all the cereal is extracted. Only the husk and roughage will be left in the cloth. Add a cup of milk to this liquid in the cup and boil, stirring well, till it turns dark brown. Add sugar and serve it warm to the baby. This is most nutritious.

When he is four months old, very ripe mashed bananas can be added (half to one teaspoon to begin with). Other fruits such as apples, may be cooked and mashed. You could also use a mixture of several cereals like rice, ragi, wheat, maize, dhal (lentils), green-gram, powdering them, after washing and drying them. This powder can then be made into a porridge.

A daily diet for a six-month old could be somewhat as follows,

- *6-7 am*: Breast milk or bottle feed.
- *9 am* : Orange juice (or tomato or other fruit juices). Vitamin and iron drops. Cereal or idli, followed a little later by breast milk or bottle-milk. Vegetable soup can be prepared by pressure-cooking different vegetables, including greens. This liquid can then be given along with the solids.
- *1 pm* : Cooked, mashed vegetables like carrots; bottle-milk.
- *4 pm* : Hard biscuits.
- *6 pm* : Cereal, fruits (such as plantains), breast milk or bottle-milk.

- 10 pm : Milk (if he is hungry)

Meat and fish can be added when the baby is a year old. Although meat and fish broth can be given even earlier, along with mashed vegetables, it is better to give curd (yogurt) and other milk products. This is because proteins from meat and fish are a greater strain on the baby's kidneys at an early age. So, vegetable proteins such as those found in beans and lentils, are better.

By the time your baby is one year old, he should be able to eat two small idlis for breakfast, rice, dhal and vegetables for lunch and dinner, in addition to milk. If cow's milk is given, 300 ml. a day is adequate.

Don't use any drugs, especially antibiotics, without a doctor's advice.

Feeding The Baby

1. It is not necessary to give solids before the baby is three months old.
2. Solids should be started one at a time, in very small quantities, and increased gradually.
3. If he is interested, offer fluids in a cup after six months. (Don't be discouraged if he spills it! He will learn!!)
4. If any new food causes a digestive upset (vomiting, diarrhoea), stop it and stop all solids as well. You should then wait for awhile before re-starting any solid foods.
5. If the digestive trouble persists, then consult a doctor.
6. Give him a bottle-feed only after he has had the solid food, as otherwise he may refuse the solids.
7. Don't force the child to eat if he is not interested. He may like a change in diet too. Try to make mealtimes interesting. Avoid too many sweet foods, since they spoil the appetite and damage baby's teeth.
8. Remember that during the second year, babies don't grow or gain weight as much as in the first. So don't be worried if you don't see much growth in the second year.

Toilet Habits

Conscious control of the bladder and bowel may be developed only after the second or third year. But you can save yourself from messy napkins by putting him on the pot immediately after a feed. You may be able to anticipate a bowel movement if you watch him carefully. Teach him early to use the toilet or pot and not to pass motion or to urinate in the open.

Summer Care

In warm summer months, a diaper and thin cotton dress is sufficient to cover the baby - and a cotton blanket at night. Avoid over-dressing him in summer. When out in the sun, protect his eyes from the direct rays of the sun. If you notice any prickly heat rash, use a bland lotion or ointment like zinc-oxide cream.

Just like adults, babies too need extra fluids in summer. So give him plenty of sweetened water with a small quantity of salt in it. Remember that when the baby has diarrhoea, he loses more fluids. Notify your doctor if your baby has diarrhoea. This is a more serious matter if it happens in the summer months.

It is best to use boiled water always for the baby - since many germs spread through water in tropical countries like ours. So if you are traveling with a baby, ensure that you carry sufficient boiled water with you.

Winter Care

Avoid exposing your baby to the cold and to draughts. Use cotton under-clothing and woollens on top. Blankets should be light and warm. Ensure that clothing is not tight around his neck. Use long-sleeved garments and pajamas to protect his legs. Remember that a baby loses more heat from his limbs than from his head. So use pajamas and socks when it is cold. It is useless putting a warm cap on his head, if you keep him bare below the waist!

Check near the folds (neck, thighs and arm-pits) to see if there is any rash. (This should be done in summer months too.) Babies feel comfortable if you put powder on those areas. Take special care to keep diaper areas washed and dry always. By using proper clothing, your baby can be protected from pneumonia and lung infections. You must ensure that his dress is appropriate for the climate and that he is comfortable, clean, dry and able to move his limbs without any hindrance.

Provide good restful sleeping conditions - at all times.

Teething

The first tooth may appear by six or eight months. Usually the lower two front ones appear first. Normally the baby may be irritable and disinterested in food at such a time, because of sore gums. Many babies may have constant watering from the mouth at such times. In such cases use a bib. You should ensure good oral hygiene and care of the teeth. Wash his mouth after every meal or give him boiled water to drink after a meal.

Hygiene

Teach your child good hygienic habits from an early age and he will grow up to appreciate cleanliness.

Pray with him and sing hymns to him even when he cannot understand a word of what you are saying. Such practices will make a deep impression on his subconscious mind. As he grows up he will learn the value of spiritual hygiene as well.

APPENDIX FOUR

MILESTONES AND IMMUNOLOGY

Isn't it a thrilling experience to see your baby grow and develop into an individual with distinct characteristics of his own?

As he grows, you will naturally be anxious to know that he is developing normally, both mentally and physically.

There are no ideal standards that indicate normal development.

Babies differ and if one begins to walk, say, three months later than another, this is no indication that he is in any way abnormal or backward. He can grow up to be just as normal and healthy as the other. So don't get unnecessarily worried.

However, here are some things that babies usually do at different stages in their growth :

- *At 1 month* : Baby can usually focus his eyes on objects and his eyes and head will follow slow-moving objects. He can also lift his head while lying on his stomach.
- *4 months* : He can usually recognise his mother, smile at people, grasp objects and inspect his own hands. He can hold his head erect when carried and may "goo" and laugh.
- *7 to 8 months* : He can sit without support, lift up his arms to be carried and put objects into his mouth.
- *9 to 10 months* : Baby can stand with support, wave bye-bye and raise himself to sitting and standing positions.
- *1 year* : He may walk without support and use a few words with understanding. The soft spot on the top of his head begins to close. He may have 6 teeth by now and can hold a cup to drink.
- *2 years* : Baby can run, build blocks. He may speak in simple sentences and obey simple instructions (when he feels like obeying!!). This is probably the best time to start the process of subduing his will and teaching him obedience. Bowel and bladder control (in the daytime) is usually established by this time, particularly in girls. Boys may take a few months longer.

The most important thing is to let your baby develop and grow naturally.

Don't keep comparing your child with your neighbour's!

And don't ever force your child to do something he is not ready for, whether it be sitting, drinking from a cup or walking. Give him freedom to grow at his own pace. Encourage him as he grows to do certain things for himself, like dressing himself. He should also be encouraged to play with other children. Don't overprotect him.

Immunology

Most hospitals follow the following procedure.

- *Within the first 3 months* - BCG
- *6 weeks* - DPT (Triple antigen) 1st Dose; OPV (Oral Polio Vaccine) 1st Dose
- *10 weeks* - DPT 2nd Dose; OPV 2nd Dose
- *14 weeks* - DPT 3rd Dose; OPV 3rd Dose
- *18 weeks* - OPV 4th Dose
- *22 weeks* - OPV 5th Dose
- *9 months* - Health check
- *9 - 12 months* - Measles Vaccine
- *18 months* - DPT 1st Booster; OPV 1st Booster
- *5 years* - DPT 2nd Booster; OPV 2nd Booster

Repeat the appropriate booster dose after any exposure to diphtheria or polio.

After a bad wound, repeat the tetanus booster.

TAB (Anti-typhoid) booster should be repeated every year.

It is advisable to give an injection of Hepatitis B Antigen (0.5 ml.), intramuscularly, in the thigh at some time. The second dose should be given after one month.

Care of Premature and Twin Babies

A premature baby is one born before the full-term or whose weight is less than 2 kgs. Twins or triplets, even if full-term, usually weigh less than 2 kgs. and should be treated as premature babies.

Premature babies are not able to maintain normal body temperature and are sometimes unable to breathe, swallow, digest food and withstand infection. They feel tired very quickly too.

A premature baby weighing less than 2 kgs. should be kept in a hospital preferably, at least until he weighs 2.5 kgs. If you have to keep him at home, observe the following precautions :

1. The baby should be kept at a constant room temperature of about 28 degrees Celsius, as far as possible. Protect him particularly against draughts. In winter, beds can be heated with hot-water bottles.

2. Watch him closely until his breathing is steady and free. Keep the head low and turned to one side, so that secretions from his throat will come out of his mouth and not flow inwards and choke him.

3. Handle him as little as possible. Too much handling tires him.

4. Feeding. Babies who cannot suck can be fed with a medicine dropper. Those who cannot swallow will need tube-feeding. In the beginning, they may not be able to tolerate milk and can be given sugar-water. (Boil one tablespoon of sugar in 250 to 300 ml. of water.) They can be given diluted milk gradually. Start the baby on Vitamin C drops by the 4th or 5th day, and Vitamin A and D drops after a week.

5. Protect him against infections. Take meticulous care with feeds and in keeping yourself clean.

When the baby reaches 2.5 kgs, he can be treated as a normal baby. He may be slow in general development at first, but will soon develop normally. There are special feeds available for weak and undernourished babies.

An Absolute Essential

You cannot make your baby grow. Only God can do that. But you can provide him with an atmosphere for healthy growth.

In fulfilling this responsibility, one absolute "must" is to spend time with your baby. Never get so busy that this gets crowded out of your daily routine. This must be a top priority.

You may perhaps have to give up certain secondary things in order to find this time but it is well worth it.

APPENDIX FIVE

PHYSICAL DEFECTS AND OTHER TROUBLES

Why God permits sickness and disease to come into the families of even those who are His own children, does not have an easy answer. Perhaps it is so that we might have a fuller experience of His grace and power (2 Cor.12 :7-10) and also that we might more readily sympathise with others who are suffering (2 Cor.1: 4-8)

We have to thank God for every form of medical treatment He has placed at our disposal that can help alleviate pain and heal sickness. And of course He can heal miraculously too.

The instructions given here are to help you to know when to go to a doctor. They are not meant to be a substitute for such a visit.

Resistance to disease can be built up only through the years. Babies obviously don't have such resistance, and so they fall sick much quicker and much more seriously than adults do. Babies have the added limitation of not being able to explain what is bothering them. All they can do is cry. It is helpful, therefore, for mothers to know something about the common complaints their babies can have.

Physical Defects

Squint or crossed eyes : For the first two or three months most babies' eyes will appear crossed, because they are not able to focus. If this persists up to 18 months or 2 years, medical help should be sought. Otherwise the weaker eye will gradually lose its vision.

Blocked tear duct : One or both eyes may sometimes water or have a sticky yellowish discharge. This should be reported to the doctor so that it can be rectified by probing the duct. Probing is best done before the baby is a year old.

Noisy breathing : This is worse when the baby is lying on his back and may improve when he sleeps on his side. It usually disappears by the sixth month. If a baby who has been breathing silently suddenly develops noisy breathing, this should be reported to the doctor.

Cleft lip and palate : Babies with a cleft palate can easily aspirate milk into their lungs. They are also more prone to catch a cold. They may have feeding problems too. In any case they will need surgery, and medical advice should be sought at the earliest.

Hernias : This is a bulging of the abdominal wall in the umbilical region or the groin. The bulge becomes more prominent when the baby cries, coughs or strains. It usually appears after the baby has had a cold or illness. Sometimes the hernia disappears when strapped with adhesive tape (after pushing the bulge inside). If it persists, it may require surgical correction. In rare cases, the bowel may get trapped in the bulge. The doctor should then be called immediately, as this can be very serious.

Birth-marks : Many new-born babies have dark patches on their skin. These usually disappear in course of time. If the patches show any tendency to increase in size, they should be shown to a doctor.

Problems and Illnesses

Babies express hunger or discomfort by crying. Sometimes, of course, they may cry for no reason at all, but you should try to find out the cause of their crying. The baby may cry when it needs a change in position, or when it is wet or dirty or too cold, or too warm or sleepy, or due to digestive problems. When the baby cries from hunger, he may also chew his fists. He will fail to gain weight too. This will mean that his feeds are insufficient.

If a baby manifests any of the following symptoms, a doctor should be called: irritability and drowsiness, consistent refusal to take its feeds, unusually loud crying or whining, vomiting, rapid noisy breathing, hoarseness of voice, cough, diarrhoea, fever above 38 degrees Celsius, rash, convulsions or any noticeable change from his usual behaviour.

Digestive Troubles

Diarrhoea : The baby's stools will be foul-smelling, watery, showing signs of undigested milk, or greenish with mucus and blood. The baby will have fever. You should be very careful on such occasions in handling his diapers and you should wash your hands frequently. The diapers should be boiled or put in some disinfectant and put out in the sun to dry. All food should be covered so that flies don't sit on it. The baby should be given more water in his feeds and all solids should be stopped. Sometimes it may be necessary even to stop the milk and give him boiled glucose water with a small quantity of salt in it. The doctor should be informed, since the baby will require antibiotics in the case of an infection. Don't take any chances with diarrhoea and vomiting as your baby can become seriously ill very quickly. You should be cautious in re-starting feeds after a spell of diarrhoea. Feeds should be diluted to start with and their strength gradually increased. If the diarrhoea is not due to an infection but due to a change of food or overfeeding, then give him more dilute feeds for a day or so, and he will soon be back to normal. Babies on breast milk do not usually have this problem.

Vomiting : To keep your baby from vomiting, hold him upright after each feed and let him burp (expel the air he has swallowed). If vomiting is accompanied by any of the symptoms mentioned above, then the doctor should be informed.

Constipation : If the baby's stools are hard and he has discomfort when he has a bowel movement, give him fruit juices or strained raisin juice (raisins washed well in boiled water, soaked overnight and crushed) and more water in his diet and more sugar in his feeds. Sometimes babies are constipated because they are not getting sufficient feeds. In this case they will of course show signs of hunger as well. If constipation is severe, the baby may need a suppository or an enema.

Colic : This is common among babies in the first three months. The baby screams and passes gas, especially after a feed. To avoid this, see that the baby doesn't swallow air. The hole in the nipple of the bottle should be large enough for milk to drop at the rate of two drops per second. It may also help, if baby is made to sleep on his abdomen. Sometimes, a suppository may help. If colic persists, a doctor should be called. Some babies continue to have colic in spite of all the precautions taken, but outgrow it in due course.

Hiccups : This may be stopped by a drink of warm water or by a change in baby's position. In any case, the hiccups will stop by themselves in a few minutes.

Thrush : (White coating of the tongue caused by fungus). This is usually found in babies during an illness. It can be prevented by giving the baby boiled water after every feed. Boil the nipples and bottles well.

Colds and Ear and Chest Problems

Colds : When a baby has a cold it puts him off his feeds and disturbs his appetite. Colds can also lead to chest complications and earaches, so you should try your best to protect your baby. Keep him away from anyone who has a cold. If you have one yourself, wear a mask while handling him. If baby does catch a cold, give him extra doses of Vitamin C drops and fluids. Keep his head low to drain secretions. If the infection goes to his ears or lungs or if his voice gets hoarse, inform a doctor. Do not start antibiotics without medical advice.

Ear trouble : This is usually indicated by the baby crying and moving his head from side to side. There may also be a discharge from one or both of his ears.

Chest troubles : These are often indicated by rapid and difficult breathing in addition to cough and fever. The child may need antibiotics. So a doctor must be consulted.

Skin Troubles

Diaper-rash : A baby's skin, being sensitive, can often develop a rash in the diaper region. This can be avoided by changing diapers frequently, and thus keeping the diaper region clean and dry. If there is a rash, use zinc-oxide ointment after cleaning the area. Diapers can be soaked in water containing a small quantity of vinegar. Strong detergents that remain on a baby's diapers or clothes (after a wash) can cause an allergy or rash too. So all of the baby's clothes must be rinsed well.

Prickly heat : This occurs in hot weather and at times because the baby is over-dressed. Use some bland lotion or zinc ointment or prickly heat powder especially over the folds of baby's body. Change his clothes more often.

Eczema : This may be due to an allergy. So the factor causing it should be discovered and avoided. It usually disappears as the child grows.

Skin Infection or Impetigo : In this condition there will be itchy blisters containing pus. The baby's towels, clothes etc., should be boiled well. A doctor should be consulted and treatment taken quickly, as this can spread rapidly.

Scabies : This usually appears in older children, between the fingers and the toes, and is very infectious. It can become worse, if the child scratches it. This should be shown to a doctor and treated. Any ointment used should not be applied more than 3 times. Care should be taken that the ointment is not applied near the child's eyes, nose or mouth.

Fever and Convulsions

In babies, high temperature sometimes causes convulsions (fits). These usually disappear when the fever comes down. To bring the temperature down cool the head and body with ice. A plastic packet with ice cubes kept on a towel and placed on the top of the baby's head and a dose of CROCIN syrup (paracetamol) will usually bring the temperature down quickly.

When a baby has fits, he may lose consciousness, become pale, twitch his limbs and roll his eyes. Put a folded cloth in his mouth at such times to prevent him from biting his lips and tongue. Make sure however, that he is able to breathe. Wipe off any saliva and keep his head lowered so that he won't aspirate any secretions. The doctor should be informed so that the problem causing the convulsion can be treated. Fits resulting from high fever are not serious. You should not allow the child's temperature to go high. This can be controlled through ice packs and CROCIN syrup.

It is humanly impossible for any mother to protect her child from all harm, danger and disease, no matter how careful she is. But Jesus said that little children have angels to watch over them constantly (Matt. 18:10). This encourages us. And so, after we have done our best for our children, we can safely trust God to do the rest.

APPENDIX SIX

ACCIDENTS AND DISEASES - PREVENTION AND CURE

Babies are very fond of exploring, and love to examine everything they see. They are ignorant of danger. So we mothers are the ones who have to protect them.

Accidents and First Aid

For the first year and a half it is best to keep away from baby's reach anything that might hurt him. After that he can be taught gradually how to use various things like scissors, pencils etc.

Never leave your baby alone when he is in the kitchen, bathroom, or on the floor. Until he is a year old, the best place for him to be alone is in his crib or playpen. Never leave him alone in the house even when he is sleeping.

Prevention is better than cure. So take special care to ensure that he has no access to medicines or to anything poisonous. Pins and buttons, if lying around, will find their way into his mouth. So keep them out of his reach too. It is safer for babies to play with large toys rather than small ones, for the same reason.

Minor accidents can be treated at home, but certain accidents must be reported to a doctor at once, such as for example:

1. If the baby has swallowed any sharp object or any poison.
2. If he has pushed anything into his nose or ears.
3. If he is badly scalded or burned.
4. If he is bitten by some animal.
5. If he becomes unconscious or pale.
6. If he vomits after a fall or a blow on his head.
7. If a cut or a wound does not stop bleeding, or if it is infected and he has fever.
8. If he has a sprain or a fracture.

If he has swallowed any drug or poison, the first thing to do is to make him vomit. Make him drink plenty of water and then tickle his throat with your finger. After he has vomited, feed him only with something bland, like milk, for a few days.

Bruises following a fall, can be treated with ice-packs or cold compresses. Cuts, scratches and bites should be washed with soap and water and some antiseptic applied. The wound should be kept covered. Bleeding may be stopped by applying pressure over the wound.

If the baby has a bad wound, especially one that is likely to have street-dirt or manure in it, he should be immunised immediately against tetanus. Some wounds will need suturing as well.

If the child gets dust in his eyes, do not rub his eyes, but wash them with plenty of water. If the eyes are still red, you may need to put some antibiotic eye-drops.

If the child is choking with some object in his throat, hold him upside down and tap his back. Never put your finger into his throat on such occasions, since that may push the object further down.

Common Ailments

Worms : In India this is very common. The child has itching around the anus and thighs, when he has pin-worms. If he has vague abdominal pain and loss of appetite, and looks pale, his stools should be examined for worms. If he passes worms in his stools, he should be taken to a doctor and treated. If the hygiene is good, there is no need to administer medicines for worms, routinely.

Tonsillitis and Adenoids : If the child has a throat infection, or if he breathes through his mouth, or has an ear-discharge, he should be shown to a doctor. Regular use of Vitamin C tablets usually prevents such infections.

Allergies : If the child shows some allergic manifestations, like skin-rash or breathing difficulty, or has an attack of asthma, consult your doctor. Try and find out what he is allergic to, so that you can avoid that.

Infectious Diseases

Measles : The child will have high fever for 3 or 4 days, with a running nose and redness of eyes. At this stage, the child will be irritable and will resist bright light. He may be more comfortable in a room where there is no glare. The rash will begin on the face and neck and gradually spread over the whole body. It will usually fade away in 3 or 4 days and disappear completely in about a week. Possible complications resulting from measles are pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infections and, rarely, encephalitis (brain inflammation). If any of these are suspected, a doctor should be informed immediately.

German measles: This is milder than simple measles and complications are rare. A pregnant mother should avoid exposure to German measles, especially in the first three months, as it can cause serious defects in the unborn baby.

Mumps : The child will have fever, headache, poor appetite, and generalised aches and pains for a day or two. After that a swelling begins to appear at the corner of one or both jaws near the earlobes. This increases for 2 or 3 days, and then slowly subsides. Complications in children are rare. In adults, this can cause inflammation of the testes and ovaries or pancreas, or a form of meningitis. This can be avoided if the child is immunised against it.

Diphtheria and Whooping Cough : In diphtheria, the baby will have fever and a sore throat with a membranous patch in the throat. In whooping cough, the baby will have fever along with severe fits of cough followed by a whooping sound, while it draws in its breath. The baby may also become blue.

Poliomyelitis : The child has general symptoms of fever and headache and of being unwell. He will also have pain in his legs and when he bends his neck forward. The doctor should be informed when this is suspected. If the child has been immunised against polio there is less chance of his catching it. If there is an epidemic around, he can have partial protection for a few weeks by being given gamma globulin.

The above-mentioned diseases are, however, rare nowadays, because of the widespread use of immunisations.

Chicken-pox : The child loses his appetite and has slight fever. The rash is itchy and raised like blisters, and comes out in crops, especially over the face, trunk and scalp. It usually takes 3 days to come out completely. Calamine lotion can be applied to ease the itching. The child should not be allowed to scratch, as the blisters can get infected. If skin infection (pus in the blisters) is suspected the doctor should be informed.

Nutritional diseases : Diseases like rickets are preventable if the baby is on a good diet, and is given adequate vitamins. Malnutrition is very common in Indian children but can be avoided if the child is on a good diet. It is good to give a baby multi-vitamin preparations regularly.

Rheumatic fever : This usually starts 2 to 3 weeks after a sore throat or cold. The child will have pain in a joint. The joint will be warm, swollen, red and very painful. After 2 or 3 days, this joint becomes normal and another joint gets affected. In addition, the child may have fever, chest-pain and breathlessness. The doctor should be informed immediately, as the heart can be affected. If the child gets repeated attacks of rheumatic fever, his heart may suffer severe damage. In such a case, he must be under the regular supervision of a doctor and given antibiotics until he reaches adulthood.

What has been said need not make hypochondriacs of us, so that we live in constant anxiety every time our children are even slightly sick. Children are able to get over many physical hurdles with amazing ease. God has a special care for them and so we can safely commit them into His Almighty hands.

Emotional Problems That A Mother Can Face

Let me conclude with a few words about emotional problems and "mood-swings" that some mothers face. There are many reasons for this.

The cause could be hormonal, especially if you are middle-aged.

Sometimes, the cause may be tiredness or pressures at home or with the children.

Whatever the cause, ensure that you take sufficient food and rest. And don't take on unnecessary tasks outside the home that may be too much for you to handle. Take some extra iron, calcium and vitamins in your diet as well.

It may be necessary to seek medical help, if the problem persists.

Our Heavenly Father knows our frame that we are but dust. And He cares for our bodies. His grace IS sufficient for us to come out triumphantly in every situation - no matter what the problem may be.

How wonderful it is that in a world cursed by sickness and disease we can be in touch with the living God. This is indeed an unspeakable privilege.

If we have learnt to praise God in all situations, and have freed ourselves from all bitterness, and cast all our anxiety on Him, we can be overcomers in every crisis we face.

Finally, let us remember God's unchanging promise to us at all times - that He will NEVER leave us nor forsake us (Heb.13:5,6).