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Growing Olives—Growing Children

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...Your children like olive plants around your table. Psalms 128:3

The Bible states that our children will be like olive plants around our table. I wondered why God would use an olive plant to describe children. I began researching olive plants and found that they are rare plants that can grow well in coastal climate environments, such as the Mediterranean, South Africa, Australia and some parts of California. They grow slowly and require a long, hot growing season to properly ripen. Olive plants can grow when neglected, but they don't grow very well. A deep, monthly watering is recommended for maximum growth potential. As a result of researching olive plants, I began to see the reason God used them in His word to describe our children. Olive plants, like children, grow well in the right kind of environment. And as their parents, we are responsible for creating that environment. This is a key parenting principle because our environment colors the view we have of ourselves, others and the life around us. Therefore, parents must spend the time necessary to create an environment where our children receive the Word of God, prayer, encouragement and affirmation needed to grow and flourish, thus producing good fruit themselves.



Let's look at what our environment looks like on a daily basis. Many of us have many obligations and responsibilities such as marriages, jobs, households, organizations and children to manage. Our culture has caused almost every ounce of our day to be occupied with something. Even parents who stay home with their children find themselves occupied with an array of daily chores like doing the laundry, preparing dinner, and cleaning the house. What remains is little or no time for ourselves or our children. The various errands and details of each day have caused us to lose our true focus on the environment that we are creating for our children.

Psalms 128:3 discusses how blessed we are when we fear the Lord, and the happiness and blessings that flow on the house of those who fear God. The verse continues by stating that the wife will be a fruitful vine and the children as olive plants around the table. The scripture is describing an environment that is balanced and blessed. But I wonder how many of our olive plants are living in a balanced and blessed environment? Are these olive plants benefiting from our wisdom on a daily basis? Let me put it another way, outside of ourselves, what other environments are helping our olive plants to grow? School, TV, their friends? Children are precious in the sight of God and are gifts from heaven that look to us, their parents, for guidance and direction. But we can't give them guidance and direction if the environment that we have created is packed with other duties. For example, many of us spend precious hours every evening doing things like checking our email or watching "Must See TV," not realizing the lack of quality time spent with our children.

In far too many homes, the routine is the same day in and day out. The children are picked up, or the bus drops them off. They are allowed to watch TV or play video/computer games until dinner is ready. Or if you have teenagers, they are on the phone, computer or text messaging someone. They eat dinner and do their homework. Then they take their bath and are off to bed. I challenge you to look at the time you spend with your olive plants. According to the Time Use Survey conducted by The Office of National Statistics (ONS), parents who work full time spend just 19 minutes each day "caring for their own children." **Is 19 minutes truly enough time to spend with your child on a daily basis?** The survey further stated that "an additional 16 minutes was spent looking after their children as a "secondary activity." This means that they are doing something else – such as the weekly run to the grocery store – at the same time.

Honestly, we all have been guilty of not spending enough time with our children or doing something else

while we are supposedly spending time with them. But we are being held accountable for what we are pouring into our children. No one should have more influence on a child than God and that child's parents. If we are only spending 19 minutes a day, one and one with our child, and just an additional 16 minutes with them while we are working on something else, then there is no way we are providing the proper parenting that they need. You may be saying, "But I don't have time, I've got too much on my plate." Then maybe it's time to clean the plate. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that you have to drop everything that doesn't involve your child. But I am saying that it is your responsibility to remove the unnecessary things that fill up your time. You and I are responsible for creating an environment where our olive plants can grow and thrive, reaching their fullest potential.

You may be thinking, "Where do I start, how do I begin?" The best place to start is in the Word of God! Ephesians 6:4 states, *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord.*

Begin by speaking love to them. If you do not already do so, begin by saying you love them every day. Reinforce that love by spending some real time with them. This may mean you need to turn off the TV and reconnect with your children. Find out what they are interested in, start building a relationship with them, and make a conscious effort to show that you care about them and their interests.

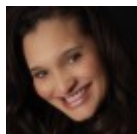
Next, begin sharing the Word of God with them. Now, I am not saying to read the scripture to them all night because that is not practical, but there should be some discussion about God's word and how it relates to your life and to theirs. These olive plants should know the Word of God, and they should know how to pray. If you're too busy to show them, how will they know? When our daughter was 2 years old, we found out that she had memorized a joke from one of her favorite shows. Once we realized she could memorize a joke, we figured it was time she memorize some scripture. We began with a simple verse, Philippians 4:13, *I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me.* As time progressed, she began to understand the true meaning of this scripture. One day she stated to us, "What do we do about 'can't?' We don't say can't because I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me." She has developed faith and confidence in God, and in herself. But this could not happen if her daddy and I had not created an environment where we spent time loving her, building a relationship with her, and explaining the Word of God to her.

Here are some suggestions for growing your olive plants:

1) Review your day. Determine how much time your olive plant spends alone, with others, or with the TV. Then determine how much time you spend with your olive plant. Set a daily goal to spend quality time with your olive plant either doing an activity, or just talking.

2) Each day, ask your child about their day. For example, "What did you learn?" "Who did you play with?" Or if you have teenagers, just ask "How was your day?" Now, you may have to probe deeper in order for them to give you some information. But if you have younger children, starting with this pattern of talking about their day engages them and causes them to develop a closer relationship with you. It becomes a normal routine for them, so when they are teenagers, those lines of open communication have already been established.

3) Encourage scripture memory. Encourage them to memorize one scripture a month, and find ways to use that scripture weekly. Talk with them about the scripture, and remind them of the scripture when dealing with issues they are facing. Always remind them of God's love. As we discussed earlier, this can be started as young as 2 or 3 years old.



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