

Growing Characters for Eternity

TWO-YEAR-OLD HANNAH pulled the toys out of her toy box and scattered them over the floor. Finally she found what she was looking for—a soft rattle for her new baby brother to play with. Instead of focusing on the messy floor, Mom smiled, hugged her, and said, “Thank you, Hannah! That was very kind of you.” She could learn about tidying up another time.

Toby was doing his math homework. It was hard, but he was determined to finish it before bedtime, even if it meant missing his favorite TV

program. Dad came by with a glass of juice for him. “Hey, son! I’m proud of you for sticking with your homework, even when it’s hard and takes a long time. That’s perseverance.”

Pastor Gary and his family parked around the corner from Katie’s home. Her husband had just left her. She had four children, and the youngest, Janna, was chronically



ill. Quietly, Pastor Gary's family carried several boxes of groceries and vouchers for children's clothing and toys up to Julie's front porch. As they drove away, they planned their next act of kindness.

All of these families understand the importance of growing characters for eternity. They are pro-actively nurturing their children's characters, and their own.

GROWING STRENGTHS

A character strength is what you're capable of being and doing when you're functioning at your best. The more often you use a character strength, the stronger it will become. The more character strengths you cultivate, the happier and more resilient you'll be, and the more likely you'll be to have healthy relationships and a strong faith. You can work on character strengths as a family, encouraging each other and developing them in creative ways. Pray that you and your children will develop your different strengths so that you can become more like Jesus.



EXPLORING CHARACTER STRENGTHS TOGETHER

- Make a list of characteristics you want to nurture in yourself and your children.
- Invite your children to create posters for your home describing the different character traits. Search for poster samples on the Internet to inspire them.
- Focus on one character strength each week and ask your children to research and list the choices and behaviors that develop each character strength.
- Read Bible verses about each character strength and look for Bible stories about people who used that strength. Think about characters who made mistakes. Which strengths were they neglecting or missing? What could they have chosen to do instead?
- Watch for people using character strengths at church, at school, in the family, in storybooks, in movies, in news stories, etc.
- Encourage one another to practice different character strengths—as individuals and together.
- Work on your own character strengths so that your children have a positive role model.

FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS

It's easy to focus on your child's mistakes and misbehavior and forget to notice the amazing times when they practice their character strengths.

- Try to notice your child using one of their character strengths every day. Let them know when you've seen them using a character strength, however small it may seem. Your appreciation is one of the biggest incentives they have for developing their character strengths.
- Make a chart where your child can add a sticker, shape, or mark whenever they've practiced a character strength.
- At bedtime tell them which strengths you've noticed them using throughout the day. Ask them to tell you about a time when they used one of their character strengths, too.

MAKE GROWING CHARACTER STRENGTHS FUN!

Think of fun ways to help your child develop character strengths—then they will associate practicing their character strengths with feeling happy and appreciated. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Thankfulness:** Make a scrapbook of things your family is thankful for, or make a collage of pictures and objects on a canvas, grouped around the word *Thanks!*
- **Appreciating creation:** Make a “wonder box” and fill it with non-perishable nature objects for your children to explore, such as seed pods, shells, feathers, etc. Encourage them to find three things about each object that fill them with wonder.



- **Generosity:** Grow vegetables or bake bread and cookies so your child can share with others.
- **Kindness:** Plan a special act of kindness each month. Work on the project together and do something fun as a family after dropping off your soup at the soup kitchen or leaving a package of food on someone's doorstep.
- **Patience:** Teach your child fun things to do whenever they're waiting or bored. Encourage them to save up for things they want, so they learn to wait.
- **Respect:** Role-play different situations where they can show respect to others. Set out a pretend banquet at home and make it fun to learn good table manners. Help them to look for the good in every person, even those who are hard to like.
- **Helpfulness:** Encourage your child to find ways to help others, or to ask, “How can I help you?” and then help cheerfully.
- **Teamwork:** Do fun projects where your family needs to work together for a good result. Try flying a kite, putting up a tent, or making a surprise party for someone.



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