

RAISING HEROIC CHILDREN IN AN ANTI-HEROIC AGE

Rev. Joseph M. Esper

Someone once said that “Parents spend two years teaching children to walk and talk, and eighteen years trying to teach them to sit down and be quiet.” This tongue-in-cheek observation reminds us that while parents and others with influence over children (including grandparents, relatives, teachers, catechists, and pastors) have a responsibility to train them, we can’t always *make* them do what we want. We have to show them the right path in life, and encourage them to follow it—but the choice is ultimately theirs.

Society once strongly supported parents in their efforts, honoring those mothers and fathers who took their duty seriously, and shaming those parents who neglected their legal and moral responsibilities toward their children. Now, however, things are quite different. Today there’s a very high divorce rate, and many children are raised in single-parent homes—and no matter how loving and heroic the efforts of the single parent (usually the mom), that situation is far from ideal. Those children are statistically less likely to succeed academically, and more likely to drop out of school, experience teen pregnancy, use alcohol or drugs, become part of a gang, become involved in criminal activity, and spend time in prison. Also, our culture of death tells women that motherhood is optional; if they don’t feel it’s convenient, they can abort their unborn child. Society tells fathers they aren’t really needed, and popular entertainment often portrays dads as weak or clueless. Christian values are derided; the Church is marginalized, and children are “empowered” at the expense of parental authority—often by government schools that indoctrinate them with values contrary to those of the parents.

All these things go against God’s plan for parents and children—and if we want to follow His plan, it requires a greater effort, and more courage and determination, than when our parents and grandparents were raising their families. Fortunately, with God’s help, success is still possible, and parents remain the greatest formative influence in their children’s lives. To give but one example: one research study suggests that the ages of 12 and 13 are the critical years in fighting drug abuse. Few 12-year-olds know how or where to buy marijuana, or personally know someone using hard drugs, but about three times as many do by the time they’re 13. However, the same survey discovered that teens who regularly eat dinner at home with their parents are much less likely to smoke cigarettes or use marijuana, and teens who normally attend church with their families are much less likely to smoke, use drugs, or hang out with people who do these things.

Involved parents can have a hugely positive influence on their lives of their children, especially when the family is active in a church. A strong spiritual commitment was found to be one of six important qualities in happy families, according to a major study of 3000 strong families located in half-a-dozen countries throughout the world. The other five characteristics are: (1) the members are committed to the family; (2) they spend time together; (3) there is good communication among the family members; (4) they express appreciation to each other; and (5) they support each other in times of family crisis.

Parents can have a huge and lasting influence not only on their children, but also on future generations. Several centuries ago there were two men in New York State whose lives went in radically different directions. Max Jukes was a man without religious faith and lacking a strong moral character, whereas Jonathan Edwards was a man who valued both very highly. Mr. Jukes married a woman of similar low character, and they refused to give their children any religious training or take them to church, even when the children asked to go. Mr. Edwards, however, sought out a virtuous woman to be his wife, and they made their children's religious and moral training a very high priority. Over the next century or so, Max Jukes ended up with over 1200 known descendants. Some 300 of them were professional vagrants or panhandlers, without homes or jobs; 190 were public prostitutes; 60 were habitual thieves; 680 were alcoholics; and over 300 spent time in prison for an average of 13 years—7 of them for murder. Jonathan Edwards, on the other hand, had over 900 known descendants, including 430 ministers or religious missionaries, some 100 university professors, over 100 attorneys, 75 published authors, 60 physicians, 30 judges, 14 presidents of universities, 7 United States congressmen, and 1 U.S. vice-president.

It's almost impossible to overestimate the lasting influence parents can have on their children; they play a crucial role in determining a child's outlook on life. Consider this reflection by Dorothy Law Nolte, titled "Children Learn What They Live":

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns
to find love in the world.

Everyone who has regular interaction with children is helping determine what sort of adults they'll be; this is obviously most true of parents, but all of us must try to be a positive influence. As someone once said, "There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give to our children. One of those is roots, the other is wings" (Hodding Carter). In other words, we must help young people know where they're from, and assist them in discovering where they're going; we must teach them of their dignity as children of God, and encourage them to pursue their dreams while answering the Lord's call or plan for their lives, whatever it may be. In this regard, the support and encouragement of mothers is especially important. Abraham Lincoln, for instance, used to say, "All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to my sainted mother," and many other famous people have expressed similar sentiments. Mothers give life to their children in a physical sense, and this must also be true in an emotional and spiritual sense.

Mothers, of course, are very often quiet heroes—and sometimes it's little short of miraculous they aren't pushed beyond their breaking points. Once there was an army colonel transferred to Germany, and his long-suffering wife was left in charge of supervising their nine children, packing up all their belongings, and getting them on a flight to Germany, where they'd be living the next two years. At the airport, a shocked customs agent, seeing the mounds of luggage and the nine restless or crying children, all under the age of eleven, asked the weary and distracted woman, "Ma'am, do all these children and luggage belong to you?" "Yes," she admitted with a sigh; "they're all mine." The agent then began his routine interrogation: "Ma'am, do you have any weapons, contraband, or illegal drugs in your possession?" The army wife looked him in the eye and answered calmly, "Sir, if I'd had any of those items, I would have used them by now!" (She was allowed to pass through without having to open a single suitcase.)

As someone once noted, "All mothers are physically handicapped—they only have two hands." Moreover, as one mom remarked to another, "If it was going to be *easy* to raise kids, it never would have started with something called *labor*." Society's elite may not understand or appreciate the difficulties and importance of motherhood, but people who know what's really important certainly do. Once at a party a highly successful female attorney, with a touch of condescension, asked a homemaker, "And what is it *you* do, dear?" Without batting an eye, the mother answered in a professional-sounding voice, "I am socializing two homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the teleologically prescribed utopia inherent in the eschaton." The attorney's jaw dropped, and when the mother asked her "And what is it that *you* do?," the woman's answer "I'm a lawyer" just wasn't all that impressive.

By the way, the extensive vocabulary in the mother's answer refers to the importance of religious faith—and so many saints and important religious figures credited their mothers in this regard. The great 20th century German theologian and religious scholar Karl Barth, for instance, was asked near the end of his career by a reporter, "Sir, you've written all these great volumes about God. . . . How do you know they're all true?" The famous theologian smiled and, with a twinkle in his eye, answered, "'Cause my mother said so!" As another 20th century German, St. Edith Stein, wrote, "To be a mother is to nourish and protect true humanity and bring it to development"—and because God made us to live with Him for all eternity, nurturing a child's religious faith is obviously an essential element in helping him or her truly develop as a person.

Mothers have a special way of being there for their children. The late humorist and author Erma Bombeck once wrote, "All mothers have their favorite child. It is always the same one: the one who needs you at the moment. Whoever needs you for whatever reason—to cling to, to shout at, to hurt, to hug, to flatter, to reverse charges to, to unload on—but mostly just to be there." Mothers can be very good at nurturing their children—but sometimes it can be a little hard for them to let go. I like the story about the mother who was concerned about her only son going off to college, and who wrote this letter to the university president: "Dear Sir: My son has been accepted for admission to your college and will soon be leaving me. I am writing to ask that you give your personal

attention to the selection of his roommate. I want to be sure his roommate is not the kind of person who uses foul language, or tells off-color jokes, smokes, drinks, or chases after girls. I hope you will understand why I am appealing to you directly. You see, this is the first time my son will be away from home, except for his three years in the Marine Corps.”

Fathers, of course, would have an easier time accepting something like that, and they often have a valuable and needed perspective different from that of their wives. One dad was playing football with his young sons in the front yard, and in the process part of the lawn was being slightly torn up. When his wife came out to complain, he gently reminded her, “Dear, it’s our job to raise children, not grass.” Dads and moms often have their own way of looking at things, and children can benefit from both perspectives. As a general rule, mothers teach their children how to know and accept themselves, and fathers teach their children how to relate to the larger world.

An important part of preparing children for life in an often unfriendly and uncaring society is teaching them self-acceptance. There was once a young man with a large and highly-noticeable red birthmark on his face, but he never seemed embarrassed or defensive about it. His college roommate asked him how he was able to go about in public without being self-conscious, and he said, “Oh, it was my dad. You see, he told me from my earliest days, ‘Son, that’s where an angel kissed you, and he marked you out just for me. You are very special, and whenever we are in a group, I’ll know which one you are—mine.’” The young man added, “It got to where I felt sorry for people who *didn’t* have red marks across the front of their face.”

That’s a wonderful example of how parents—fathers in particular—can prepare their children for life in the bigger world outside the home; another example involves this story by a noted psychologist (Emmy Werner). She wrote, “One day . . . Sam’s father told him to stick with his math problem until he found the solution. As Sam worked, he could hear his father fiddling with an antique radio he was restoring. He had been at it for a week, taking the radio apart again. Sam learned from that lesson—and he stuck with his math problem and other challenges he faced right on into adulthood.”

Society today often downplays the importance of fatherhood, but that’s a foolish and shortsighted point of view—because a good relationship with one’s father is often the single-most important factor in whether a child grows up to become a moral, courageous, and loving adult. During World War II, after the Germans conquered Poland, they began oppressing and persecuting Polish Jews, and eventually started rounding them up for execution in Auschwitz and similar death-camps. Some Polish Catholics risked their lives to shelter fleeing Jews, but many others turned a blind eye, or even handed Jews over to the Nazis. After the war, a sociological study was commissioned to discover why there was such a wide range of reactions to the Jewish community of Poland in its time of need. One not surprising discovery is that those Catholic Poles raised in families where religion was more of a social experience, or a “Sunday only” expectation, turned out not to have much sympathy for desperate Jews trying to preserve life and liberty, whereas those Catholics who came from families that took their faith seriously were much more

likely to act in a heroic manner. However, an even more central finding of the study involved fathers. In families where the fathers were the religious leaders of the household, setting an example for their children and being actively involved in their religious and moral upbringing, the children grew up to become courageous adults willing to do what was right under moral circumstances. In contrast, the Poles who refused to help the Jews tended to come from families in which the fathers played little or no role in their children's religious education and formation.

Fathers can have tremendous influence on their children. A study in Switzerland found that if both parents were regular churchgoers, only 33% of the children would regularly attend church as adults. If the mother attended regularly, but not the father, only 3.4% of the children became regular churchgoers. However, if the father attended regularly, but not the mother, 44.2% of the children became regular churchgoers as adults. In other words, a father's example of practicing his faith can be statistically 13 times as important as a mother's. A father helps his sons learn what it is to be a man—both in terms of religious and moral values, and the proper treatment of women. However, a father's influence can be equally important for girls. For example, one article on the subject (“The Search for a Phantom Father”) states that “most single women in the 25 to 35 age bracket who have affairs with married men have one thing in common—they seldom or never experienced meaningful interaction with their fathers.”

Dads can play a crucial role in helping their children learn to recognize and resist moral temptations, anti-social activity, and dangerous or self-destructive behavior. It's a father's job not only to protect his children, but to teach them the things they'll later need to know in order to protect themselves. One author (Tony Evans) uses the following analogy: “Satellites are often used to show us where the enemy is located. They provide pictures and perspectives so that we are kept from ambushes and traps. They provide information critical for being victorious in war. Fathers are supposed to be like satellites, providing a perspective for their kids in order to keep them from being ambushed in illegitimate relationships.” In addition to this analogy, there's a story about a father who went mountain climbing with his son. At a certain point, as they were ascending the slope, the father stopped to consider which direction would be safe to take. He heard his son say, “Choose a good path, Dad; I'm coming right behind you!”

This is what all fathers are supposed to do—though, of course, their guidance and advice must be genuine and authentic. It's not enough just to talk the talk; they also have to walk the walk. A father should have high standards for his children—but in order to avoid being hypocritical, he should also have high standards for himself. There's a joke in which one teenage boy complained to another, “My dad wants me to have all the things in life he never had when he was a kid—including straight As on my report card.” Another story involves a father criticizing his teenage son for not measuring up to his expectations; the man said, “Frankly, son, I'm ashamed of you—you still don't have a job. When George Washington was your age, he was already working hard as a surveyor in the wilderness.” To that, the boy made the obvious response: “Yes, Dad, that's true—and when he was *your* age, he was President of the United States.” Maybe the boy's remark was a little disrespectful—but perhaps the father had it coming.

A father can't succeed in his God-given mission without respecting his children; this is how they'll learn to respect themselves, and respect others. In this regard, it's particularly important for children to see their dad loving and respecting their mom. In addition to providing great emotional security, seeing this is how boys learn to respect women, and this is also how girls learn to become women who insist that men respect them. The happiest children tend to be those whose parents truly love each other—and in this area, it's up to the husband and father to take the lead. Fathers are also influential in teaching their children to be generous and compassionate. In one study, a group of boys in a nursery were each given 18 pieces of candy, and told they could either keep all of it for themselves, or share it with their two closest friends. It turned out the boys who were most generous in sharing their candy were those who saw their fathers as the warmest and most affectionate; these boys also turned out to be kinder, and more cooperative and sympathetic, than the others.

In a Sunday school class, the children were asked to use their imaginations and draw a picture of God. There were a variety of depictions. One boy drew a rainbow to represent God as Creator; a girl drew an old man with a long beard sitting on a throne up in the clouds. Another boy drew God in a way that made Him look remarkably like Superman. However, perhaps the best effort came from a girl, who said, "I didn't know what God looked like, so I just drew a picture of my daddy." She must have had a remarkable father—and that's the sort of dad all fathers should strive to be, one who makes the idea of God real and inviting to their children.

Fathers and mothers both have an important role to play in shaping their children's understanding of God; this means teaching them to love God, trust Him, and obey Him. Most young children, of course, are by nature self-centered, and one of their favorite words is "No!"—so parents have to apply discipline as needed. Doing so is especially important in a hedonistic, self-indulgent society which spurns accountability and other such limitations. Discipline, of course, involves finding the proper balance between being too lenient and too strict. As one author (P. D. James) notes, "If from infancy you treat children as gods they are liable to act as devils"—for if they always get their way, they'll never learn good manners or self-restraint. Rules must be clearly stated and enforced—but in a truly loving way; as another author notes, "Rules without relationship will always lead to rebellion" (Tony Evans). Someone (James Hewett) once compared raising children to holding a wet bar of soap: too firm a grasp and it will shoot from your hand, but too loose a grasp and it will slide away. A gentle but firm grasp is the right approach to holding a wet bar of soap, and to raising children to behave in a proper and respectful manner.

According to eminent psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, "A recent study [1985] of almost 2000 fifth and sixth graders—some of whom had been reared by strict parents, others by permissive ones—produced some surprising results. The children who had been strictly disciplined possessed high self-esteem and were high achievers, socially and academically. . . . What these children said [in the survey] revealed that they were actually happier than the undisciplined children. They loved the adults who made and enforced the rules they lived by." This shouldn't surprise us, for children need to have a

clear sense of boundaries. There was once a kindergarten with a nice outdoor playground, but it was located right next to a busy highway. The children were frightened of the cars whizzing by, so during recess they huddled close to the school building—until the day workmen installed a chain-link fence along the edge of the property. From then on, the children happily used the entire playground. The fence didn't limit their freedom, but expanded it. In the same way, children need boundaries, or clear rules and expectations, in order to be happy and successful in life—and it's God's plan that parents to provide these things in a firm and loving way.

The words “discipline” and “discipleship” go hand-in-hand; properly disciplining our children makes it easier for them to live as followers of Jesus. When we as adults give young people an example of genuine faith, it helps them keep everything in proper perspective. There was once a newspaper reporter whose car was passed by a fire truck; sensing a story, he followed it to a burning house. While watching the firemen fight in vain to save the house, he noticed a boy standing nearby with his parents; they were obviously the family who lived in the ruined house. The reporter said sympathetically, “Son, it looks like you don't have a home anymore.” However, the child answered courageously, “We have a home—we just don't have a house to put it in.” This wise answer demonstrated that the boy's parents were doing an excellent job raising him, helping him understand that spiritual things, especially our relationship with God and other people, matter most in life.

Speaking of homes, someone (Michael Green) once used this analogy: “Raising children is like pouring concrete. Before a baby arrives, a couple should prepare a solid base in their marriage and share a readiness for parenting. After the first child arrives, the first few years can be likened to the time before the concrete sets up. By our presence . . . , by careful attention to the thousands of details and tens of thousands of repetitions required, by unfailing prayer and careful instruction in the things of the Lord, we parents attempt to set a mold that will last a lifetime and more—into eternity.” Your role as parents is far more important than most people realize; you are helping your children build a destiny for themselves. A crucial element in influencing your children to develop a good character and make proper choices, is of course, your presence and availability to them. A popular speaker named Carol (Kent), who spent a lot of time away from home, once wrote: “One day when [my son] Jason was young, we were eating breakfast together. I had on an old pair of slacks and a fuzzy old sweater. He flashed his baby blue at me over his cereal bowl and said, ‘Mommy, you look so pretty today.’ I didn't even have makeup on! So I said, ‘Honey, why would you say I look pretty today? Normally I'm dressed up in a suit and high heels.’ And he said, ‘When you look like that, I know you're going some place; but when you look like this, I know you're all mine.’” Children need and value our time and attention more than we might think—and the more we give them these things, the better-equipped they'll be to resist the temptations of the world and face the challenges of life.

Needless to say, if we want children to respect and obey us, we must first give our respect and obedience to God. One Sunday a farmer told his grown son to go out and work in the fields, but the young man objected, saying, “Today is Sunday, and I must not

break the Third Commandment.” When the father insisted, “Those commandments are only meant for children; they don’t apply to you now that you’re grown up,” the son replied, “If that’s so, I needn’t obey *you* any more—for if the Third Commandment is no longer binding on me, neither is the Fourth.” The father had no answer to this, for if parents undermine reverence for God’s authority, they saw off the branch on which they themselves sit. We must not only give a good example to our children and young people; we must tend to our own spiritual help if we are to be of any use to them. During the review of safety procedures in an airplane, we’re told that when oxygen masks drop from the ceiling in an emergency, the proper procedure is to put on our own mask *first*, and then help any child needing our assistance. In the same way, we cannot help prepare our children for a glorious destiny in Heaven unless we ourselves take the faith seriously.

The harsh but undeniable reality is that today’s world is a spiritual battleground, with many dangers and temptations, including people who seek to harm or pervert the young and the innocent. Instead of trying to completely shelter their children from the world—which, in the long run, is impossible—parents are commissioned by God to teach their children how to defend themselves morally and spiritually, so as to make it safely through life and reach the goal of eternal happiness in Heaven. To summarize, we might say there are “Ten Commandments for Raising Heroic Children in an Anti-Heroic Age:”

1. Spend time together as a family; in particular, eat dinner together as often as possible, using this as a chance to discuss the events and happenings of the day.
2. Make and enforce family rules firmly but lovingly, so as to help your children learn fairness, honesty, and self-discipline.
3. Teach your children to accept themselves, including their strengths and abilities, and their weaknesses and limitations.
4. Give children an example of perseverance, and don’t let them give up too quickly when something is difficult or challenging.
5. Make mutual respect a normal part of family life, and insist your children act in a way that’s respectful of others and of themselves.
6. Honor and emphasize the role of the father, especially as the family’s religious leader.
7. Be aware that you’re marking out a direction for your children to follow, and ask yourself, “Is my attitude or behavior something I want them to imitate?”
8. Encourage your children to discover and pursue their vocation, or calling from God, and explain that this is the only sure path to happiness in life.
9. Attend church together as a family, and make your children’s religious education a priority—for you want them to be happy not just in this life, but for all eternity.
10. Make your own relationship with God your highest priority, for not only will this help you be more loving toward your spouse and children, but it will also make it easier for them to know and love God, and for your children to trust, honor, and obey you.

Our world has become a very dangerous place in a spiritual and moral sense—but Jesus promises that He has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33), and if we genuinely strive to live as His followers, we and our families will share in His victory.

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Ten Commandments for “Raising Heroic Children in an Anti-Heroic Age”

(summary of talk)

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Jesus promises that He has overcome the world (John 16:33), and if we genuinely live as His followers, we will share His victory.

Children's Ten Commandments for Parents (Kevin Lehman, quoted in the “Dear Abby” column on January 12, 1981, in the *Independent Press Telegram*)

1. My hands are small; please don't expect perfection whenever I make a bed, draw a picture, or throw a ball. My legs are short; slow down so that I can keep up with you.
2. My eyes have not seen the world as yours have; let me explore it safely; don't restrict it unnecessarily.
3. Housework will always be there; I'm little only for a short time. Take time to explain things to me about this wonderful world, and do so willingly.
4. My feelings are tender; don't nag me all day long (you would not want to be nagged for your inquisitiveness). Treat me as you would like to be treated.
5. I am a special gift from God; treasure me as God intended you to do—holding me accountable for my actions, giving me guidelines to live by, and disciplining me in a loving manner.
6. I need your encouragement (but not your empty praise) to grow. Go easy on the criticism; remember, you can criticize the things I do without criticizing me.
7. Give me the freedom to make decisions concerning myself. Permit me to fail, so that I can learn from my mistakes. Then someday I'll be prepared to make the decisions life will require of me.
8. Don't do things for me; that makes me feel my efforts didn't measure up to your expectations. I know it's hard, but don't compare me with my brother or sister.
9. Don't be afraid to leave for a weekend together. Kids need vacations from parents, and parents need vacations from kids. Besides, it's a great way to show us kids that your marriage is something special.
10. Take me to Sunday school and church regularly, setting a good example for me to follow. I enjoy learning more about God.

A Parent's Prayer (Anonymous)

O Father, help me to treat my children as You have treated me. Make me sensitive to their needs and frustrations. Help me to listen with attention, insight, and understanding to what they have to say. Help me to treat them as a person of Your design and therefore of real worth. Help me to respect their times to talk without interrupting or contradicting them, their ideas, their need for freedom to make choices and to take responsibilities as they are able. Oh, give me the wisdom and understanding to teach my children as You have taught me.

Let me not forget they are children and not little adults, being patient and helpful as they are developing skills and mental abilities and to allow them mistakes and accidents without laughing at or belittling them.

Thank You for the provision of my need as a parent in charge of this flock of God. Thank You that in the Lord Jesus You have given all I need to be what I ought as a Christian parent.

Authentic Discipleship,

by William Barclay

It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, "So and so tells me that he was one of your students." The teacher answered devastatingly, "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.

*Which are we—followers or disciples—
and which are we teaching
our children to be?*

What Not to Do

The sheriff's office in a Texas city once distributed a list of rules titled "How to

Raise a Juvenile Delinquent in Your Own Family":

1. Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants. This will insure his believing the world owes him a living.
2. Pick up everything he leaves lying around. This will teach him he can always throw off responsibility on others.
3. Take his part against neighbors, teachers, policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child. He is a "free spirit" and never wrong.
4. Don't teach him about God or how to pray, and don't take him to church or impose your moral values on him; from his earliest years, respect his "freedom" to choose or reject religion on his own.
5. Finally, prepare yourself for a life of grief. You're going to have it.

A Family Garden, by Charles Swindoll

A family is like many things, perhaps most like a garden. It needs time, attention, and cultivation. It needs the sunshine of laughter and affirmation. It also needs the rains of difficulties, tense moments, serious discussions about issues that matter. And there must be spade work, where hardness is broken loose and planting of fresh seeds is accomplished with lots of tender loving care. Here are some suggestions for fifteen rows worth planting:

Four rows of peas: preparedness, perseverance, promptness, politeness.

Then three rows of squash: squash gossip, squash criticism, squash indifference.

Along with five rows of lettuce: let us be faithful, let us be unselfish, let us be loyal, let us love one another, let us be truthful.

And three rows of turnips: Turn up with a smile, turn up with a new idea, turn up with determination.

And then? Well, from then on it's pretty simple. Water, weed, tend with care, and patiently watch the garden grow. Someday you'll look back and realize it was worth all the years of all the work and effort and prayer. Like a lovely garden, your family will be a thing of grateful pride, of seasonal beauty, of daily sustenance.