



SAFE GUARDS

SHIELDING
OUR HOMES
AND
EQUIPPING
OUR KIDS

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Foreword

It was not my best or brightest moment. Luella, my dear wife, was the safety marshal in the family. One night as we were finishing dinner, she said, “I want to talk about what we would do if our house caught on fire. Paul, you start.” Without a moment’s thought I said, “I’d grab my guitar and get it out of the house!” Luella looked at me rather shocked and said, “What about us?” As I sat there mortified at the revelation of my selfish materialism, my kids laughed and said, “Yep, gotta save that guitar, Dad.”

Luella was right—safety skills are essential this side of eternity, and as I demonstrated, we are not always prepared to make wise choices. And here is the burden that every parent carries: you are tasked by God to be his primary tool for the formation of the souls that he has placed in your care. These souls have physical bodies that must be nurtured and protected as well.

The best word for the role of a parent is *ambassador*. An ambassador represents the one who sent him or her. Parenting is not first about what we want for our children or what we want from our children, but what God has for them and requires from them. In everything you do, in all the little moments as a parent, you are representing the one who sent you.

God makes his invisible authority visible by sending parents to oversee their children. God makes his invisible wisdom visible in the lives of children by sending parents to impart his wisdom to them. God makes his invisible guardianship visible by sending parents to children who need to be guarded and protected. There is no achievement, no hunt for success, no busyness of life, no hope or dream, no craving of the heart that should ever get in the way of our daily calling to be God’s ambassador in the lives of those he has placed in our care.

Being an ambassador means there are some settled beliefs that should daily motivate you. These beliefs are trustworthy because they are rooted in the truths of God’s Word, and they are vital because they give you practical tracks to run on. First and foremost, parents must be deeply persuaded that *God is wise and good*. God is the ultimate and

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glorious definition of everything that is wise and good. This means it is impossible for him to direct us to do anything that would be bad for us. And because he is glorious in grace, he unleashes his wisdom, goodness, sovereignty, and power for the ultimate good of his children.

Second, it is vital to not minimize that you parent your children in a *deeply broken world* that does not function as God originally intended. For his glory and our good, God has chosen for this groaning, dysfunctional world to be our present address. It is biblical to say that this world is not safe, but we must also say we are being guarded and protected by our heavenly Father for a world that will someday be free of evil, danger, sin, and suffering forever and ever. Being God's ambassador in the lives of your children means never minimizing the dangers of life in this sin-broken world.

Third, it is important for parents to understand that because God's ways are always right and because there is evil all around in this fallen world, the *wisdom of discernment is a vital commitment and skill*. Discernment is the ability to apply God's wisdom to the specific choices that face you in this broken world. It is the skill of knowing right from wrong, safety from danger, and good from evil. Children aren't naturally discerning; in fact, the Bible tells us that they are born with foolishness in their hearts. So, a practical commitment to teaching conceptual and functional discernment to our children is essential.

What I have written so far is why I love *Safeguards*. I know of no other book that does what this one does. Here is practical help for every parent who is preparing their children to live with discernment in our sadly broken world. Read and absorb its wisdom—you will gain so much insight here and loads of practical skills to pass down to your children. But perhaps the thing that I love the most about this book is that its practical focus isn't separated from the beauty and comfort of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Julie reminds us again and again of God's presence, goodness, and grace. She comforts us with the truth that he cares for our children more than we ever will. And she assures us that there is no wisdom so wise as the wisdom of the Lord. What you are about to read will change your life as a parent and will help you prepare your children to live with discernment both now and when they are no longer under your care.

Paul David Tripp

CHAPTER 1

Unique Dangers in Our Modern World

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” John 17:15

All it takes is less than an hour of watching the local news to become aware of the dangers that our children confront every day as they go out into the world. Consider some of these common risks to young people:

- Rising reports of youth depression, suicide, and anxiety¹
- Marijuana and drug use becoming more common place
- Bullying and cyberbullying increasing with technology²
- Young and younger children being exposed to pornography, sexting, and solicitation³
- Sexual activity, orientation, and identity issues on the rise
- Internet and online addiction
- A growing culture of violence, objectification, and desensitization of the mistreatment of others
- Physical abuse, sexual abuse, date rape, and trafficking of young people
- School shootings, teens encouraging other teens to commit self-harm, and dangerous viral social media challenges

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This chapter will give you a bird’s eye overview of some of the unique dangers that children face today. As the saying goes, “forewarned is forearmed.” Before we discuss how to equip our children with the safety skills they need to thrive in our world, we have to face squarely the threats that they might encounter.

Technology

With the entrance of social media and personal electronic devices, a world of new possibilities—carrying with it both blessings and dangers—have poured into our children’s lives. Children and teens are being given devices with little preparation on how to steward them. These shiny objects (smartphones, tablets, smart watches, and the like) are handed to your son or daughter, opening a world of entertainment and connectivity. Unless precise parental controls have been activated, children and teenagers have access to a plethora of online games and apps, they can text and video with anyone they wish, they have access to video streaming services, social media, and a wealth of information via internet browsers, and all of it is promptly available at their fingertips.

On the positive side, kids can get help with their homework, find out how to build anything from a fort to a chicken coop, learn a second language, and listen to podcasts, sermons, music, and stories. They can connect with others who share their hobbies and interests, or with kids of a like-minded community who feel different or have disabilities.

But many hazards are also present. Pornography sites target young people by researching commonly misspelled words and redirecting youth to porn sites and images they will be tempted to click on. Online games have people trolling and making connections with children, hoping to gather personal information, gain access to a child’s world, or lure young people away from home and into all kinds of horrid lifestyles. Romans 16:17–18 warns us that “. . . such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” Our young people are actively being pursued by evil influences. Videos,

chat rooms, and cultural influencers all win a voice in your child's life that is often louder, more consistent, and more accessible than ours.

As a counselor, I hear young people regularly report unwanted sexual solicitations, online provocation, unsolicited exposure to "sexting," and sexual material. We have handed over a small device with a world of good and evil. As parents and caregivers, we need to consider the hazards and ask ourselves if our children are mature and responsible enough to handle them. If we answer yes, then we need to teach them to steward such privileges and put accountability in place to shepherd them.

The Influence of Peers

Peer pressure and influence is not a new thing. We can trace it back to Adam and Eve as they listened to the voice of evil pressuring them to not believe that God is good and for them. As the apostle Paul said, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). It's easy to understand that all of us are shaped by those around us. But our children are especially vulnerable to being influenced by the views of their peers. Their voices are loud, compelling, and promise affirmation, freedom, and acceptance. Such voices seduce kids to believe that something good is being withheld from them and that they must pursue it on their own.

In the modern world, as children get older, they begin to ask questions related to their worldview and identity, and they want to know if what they have been taught is true. Preteens and teens often struggle to accept that their parents have the best answers about relationships, identity, activities, and even questions of meaning and purpose. They are drawn to the most persistent voices in their lives (their peers) to help answer these questions. The desire to fit in and please becomes dangerously strong. This means that it matters who speaks into their lives. What kinds of friends are they choosing? Who are they spending large amounts of time with? Proverb says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

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Of equal concern is the progressive eradication of positive, mature, adult influences in the lives of older children and teens. Young people are parenting and shaping each other. They are in school together, they are in extracurricular activities together, and they are online together, on social media together, gaming together, texting together. They are rarely disconnected from their peer group. As a result, they are becoming their own source of wisdom.

Access to smartphones, social media, and the internet, means that peer influence press in more and more; it also means that parents struggle more and more to have a voice in their children's lives. Most parents want to be intentionally influencing and shaping their child's character, but that requires a significant investment of time and thought. If parents are not actively building relationships and educating their children, someone (or something) else will shape them. When mature, godly influences are removed, or at least diminished, young people will be guided by their friends and culture. When we—quite literally—leave our young people to their own devices, they will look for guidance from their peers and “disciple” one another in these ways:

- A false sense of maturity/confidence in their self-knowledge
- An inability to occupy themselves or be alone
- Proneness to alienate from adult influence
- Tolerance for bad behavior and inappropriate peer demands
- Intolerance of wisdom and a mockery of what is good and wholesome
- Turning a blind eye to immoral and risky behavior
- Disparaging authority as irrelevant

Indeed, the companion of fools will suffer harm, but when our kids walk with the wise, they will become wise (Proverbs 13:20). Loving adult influence will help children in these ways:

- Build respect and cooperation
- Create an atmosphere of deference and admiration

- Provide security for children
- Encourage a child's healthy dependence on parents and adults for spiritual and emotional nurturing
- Model a reliance on wise counsel, especially from the Lord
- Display a proper respect for leadership and authority

Paul, in his letter to Titus talks at length about the need for Christians to influence a younger generation in what is right and good. We are called to model saying “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:12). We live in a world that can turn everything that is right and good upside down for kids. What is good is called evil, and what is evil is called good. If we do not talk with, listen to, nurture, and walk alongside our kids, they will be drawn into the value system surrounding them.

Culture

We live in a world that is distinctly self-oriented. Consider these cultural clichés: “Look out for number one;” “You do you;” “The greatest love of all is self-love;” “Do what’s right for you;” “Live your truth.” The list can go on and on. Our kids are inundated with a version of moral relativism that seeks to sweep them away with the current of their peers. It is the cultural air they breathe. It is the environment they are educated in, and it is the constant beat of the media drum.

These messages lead our kids to question what is right and good. Their surrounding culture can easily shape their values and ideas regarding moral absolutes, relationships, romance, sexuality, identity, and how or what informs their decision-making. A secular culture will sway your children to embrace a worldview devoid of God, and they can quickly be swept away by the ideology and behaviors that go with it.

When these messages are internalized, young people often decide that the highest good is what they personally choose as good. It leads to looking out for themselves, sometimes at the expense of stepping on

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others. Or they swing to meaninglessness, despair, lack of motivation, and a downward spiral to depression or suicide.

Along with holding out to our children the value of self-love and self-orientation, the world puts doubt in their minds about God's Word. Scripture and its authority are under attack. We ourselves may even attempt to reinterpret God's Word to fit our beliefs and choices. When our children begin to doubt what God says, and to question his care for us, they start to move toward what feels right to them. Their desire for autonomy becomes more powerful and informative than God's Word.

Truth has become subjective—that's why people so easily talk about "my truth." This leads to the breakdown of any moral absolutes and the rise of individual sovereignty. Our kids learn to chase after things that promise to deliver joy, pleasure, fulfillment, connection, and identity, but they lead to death. Ultimately, there is a battle in our children's hearts and minds between revealed truth and subjective truth.

It is sobering how it only takes a generation to lose sight of God's ways. The need for parents to safeguard their children from empty philosophies is greater than ever. Judges 2:10 says: "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel."

"Change is always one generation away," the atheist Bill Hallowell said. "So if we can plant seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away—that's what I think we have an obligation to do."⁴ Make no mistake about it, our generation and the generations to follow are actively being proselytized, persuaded, and converted to a new relative truth.

Secular thought says we are most human when we are in charge of ourselves. Christian thought says the opposite—we are most human when we give up control and trust a sovereign God with ourselves. How the world around us thinks can be compelling, but Paul reminds us, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty

deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

The Danger Also Lies Within

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

You can and should maintain a close watch on your children. You can and should monitor their activities and try to shelter them from harm. But you will find that the danger your children face cannot always be kept at bay. We must equip them to function wisely in the world and to know good from evil. Good parenting is not simply about putting up boundaries and high walls—protecting our children from the external dangers of this world. Wise parenting also helps children understand that there is also danger from within. Sin resides in the heart and is not easily visible. Every person—loved ones, trusted friends and acquaintances, respectable individuals with whom we live and work—is capable of being led astray into destructive choices. This includes your own children.

In 2004, M. Night Shyamalan produced the movie *The Village*. It is a story of a group of adults who, after experiencing their own victimization and suffering, decided to withdraw from the outside world in order to protect themselves and their families from future harm. A village was created, and it was purposely surrounded by a forest filled with evil creatures, which kept their villagers contained and “safe” from the outside world.

In a desire to escape the tragedy and evils of the outside world, they created their own protected environment, believing the lie that evil exists “out there” beyond themselves. They quickly find out the evil they sought to avoid exists within the very walls they built. Indeed, it existed within them. Being ill-equipped for this reality led to devastating consequences.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, says it like this: “The line separating good and evil passes not through states,

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nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.”⁵

Jesus tells us, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21–22). Yes, each of us is vulnerable to evil happening to us, but we are also each capable of allowing it to take root *in* us. Our children need to be taught to guard their hearts, for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). James reminds us about the slippery slope of giving in to sinful desires: “. . . desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:15). We will fail our children if we only shelter them from the external perils of this world and do not foster in them a conviction to guard themselves from corruption.

We can try to keep evil far from us, but we will fail because of the pervasive nature of sin and evil. Your children will be tempted by their own wrong desires. Just like you, they will sometimes fall. They will sometimes go in the wrong direction. But this is the very issue that the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses. Jesus died on a cruel cross because we are all sinners. On that cross, all of our sins were forgiven—the sins of parents and children alike. Isaiah 53:6 says: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” We have been rescued from ourselves—and continue to be. We and our families have been given a Helper and Comforter who transforms hearts and minds—places that no one else can go.

Our ultimate safety, and our children’s safety, will be found in trusting a faithful Father who has rescued us and continues to rescue us. Even as we spend the rest of the book discussing how to protect our children from the dangers in this world, remember the good news that you have to share with your children—that Jesus Christ came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Then together you can remember that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

The Challenge: How to Be Salt and Light

Knowing that Jesus is more powerful than the deluge of pressures and risks facing our kids is a great starting point, but it can still be hard to know what would be a uniquely Christian response to the dangers our children are exposed to. Should we remove our children from society and all technological devices, seeking to have complete control over every influence that may come their way? Is that what it means to protect our kids?

Jesus points the way forward for us by using the metaphors of salt and light to illustrate how his followers are to live in the world (Matthew 5:13–16). We are to preserve and illuminate what is good, both before our children and our communities. We must enhance the broken world around us. Our lives as redeemed children of God should have an obvious heartening affect to those with whom we work and live. This is the posture we want to pass on to our kids. Instead of being terrified of the dangers our children face, or sticking our head in the proverbial sand and pretending they don't exist, we can turn to Christ for the help we need to teach and equip our children to be both salt and light.

But it does take careful thinking to figure out what it looks like to be “in the world but not of the world” (John 17:14–19). Scripture tells us to not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2) and to be renewed in our minds (Ephesians 4:23), but it also teaches us that Jesus didn't pray that we would be taken out of this world, but that we would be kept from the evil one (John 17:15).

When we faithfully image Christ to the world around us, we illuminate the path for them to their Creator. We want to raise our children and equip them in such a way that when the world sees their lives, they are drawn to Christ and his ways.

Our faithfulness should be evident to all. The behavior of God's people should be a light that draws others to it. We need to remember that salt must not lose its flavor and light must not be concealed or dimmed. It is tempting to look at all the hard things we will be

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discussing and believe the darkness is too great, but we must “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

How do we equip our children to live in their world and as salt and light? Their character must be shaped and transformed by a personal relationship with Christ. We instill a love for the Lord and for all that is right and good and holy. We point them to what Scripture tells us: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Galatians 2:10). Young people will become salt and light when they learn to walk with the Lord.

Our children’s greatest defense against the evil of this world will be to know God and his ways. Then they will know the straight path to take and will be able to recognize the crooked path and avoid it. You and I should have no greater joy than that our children walk in truth (3 John 1:4). As a parent, do not grow weary discipling your children; the Lord and his Spirit will be your help. Take encouragement for your journey from 2 Corinthians 9:8: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so having the sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”