

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** My seven-year-old son, from very young on, has been a “deep” thinker and can be very serious. Every teacher he has had has noticed this. He seems to ponder and think about things even before his nine-year-old sister. The other night I heard him crying in his bedroom. When I asked him what was wrong, he said: “I don’t ever want to move out of this house. I’m afraid to leave when I am a grown up.” He was obviously very upset. I assured him that he would always have a place in our home. I could tell, though, that this did not comfort him. Since he is such an analyzer, “sweet talk” has never worked with him, he sees right through it. There have been other similar issues he has brought up. How can my husband and I help him to deal with these fears and his very active mind?

**ANSWER:** My prayer for you is that you and your husband will see this struggle as **far more than just a difficult problem to overcome.** (Sadly, most people see problems as simply something to get rid of.) They are **opportunities** for great spiritual growth for everyone involved. Far more spiritual maturation and growth might happen in you and your husband than in your son, which is often how God uses parenting. Having a child gifted by God with a deeply contemplative and emotional soul is both agony and ecstasy. Your goal with your son will be to help him enter life deeply even though the potential to flee or to numb himself will be great. You must inspire the courage for him to walk into the realities of life in a sinful, hurtful, and maladaptive world with the convictions of Christ. Why, you might ask? Isn’t it better to help him be happy and carefree?

**If your primary goal as a Christian parent is to help your son grow closer to, and ever more dependent on, the Savior; then this is probably the best opportunity with the highest success rate to accomplish the goal.** This is the time for you as parents to honestly rethink and solidify what your primary goal for your son is. If it is not to help him grow closer to, and more dependent on, the Savior; then you will collapse under the pressure to make life easy for him. This will have as much to do with meeting **your** own needs as your son’s.

Now, at a very young age, your son has the courage and honesty to look at life the way King David did in the Psalms. He was the man whom God called: "The man after my own heart." Your son has the potential to have deep awareness, commitment, and empathy in his relationship with God and others. Will it be easy? Of course not! At times it will be heartbreaking and overwhelming. Who wants that for their son? I am reminded of a heavenly Father who did. Do you so value the relationship he might have with his heavenly Father that you can seize this opportunity for your son, and have the courage and strength in your own hearts to rise to help him seize it too?

For the pragmatic part in all parents, how can you help this happen?

1. Show him that **you** can enter life deeply too. With courage and faith, you can walk through anything in life with Christ at your side. **How your son sees you and your husband (or fails to see you two) do this is critical.** Model for him a faith-walk that will calm his fears. Let him see you honestly "analyze" all the fearful possibilities and still choose to live like Christ (who lived with both great joy and great sadness).
2. Never flee or numb yourselves to the realities of life in a sinful, fallen world. **Show your son that with Christ you can walk through these realities (agony).** Let him see that you are able to survive intact because of your relationship with Christ. Not only can you survive, but let him see you can have great joy (ecstasy) as well. Why? Because you (1) see God moving (JA 1:2-4), and (2) you have an eternal hope (2 COR 4:16-18). Most Christians put too much hope in this world and in this life. They have fallen in love with a counterfeit!
3. Never dismiss the intensity or the deepness of your son's thoughts and feelings. Enter them, feel with him, and analyze with him. **Show him that you can handle any thought or feeling he has, just like God can handle any thought or feeling we have (JER. 33:3).** His picture of God will be formed and solidified as he experiences his father and mother. (How will you and your husband seek out God so that you may become the parents you need to be? How interested are you in being this kind of parent?)

4. This whole issue is first and foremost an issue for your husband. **Fathers are critical in forming a child's concept of God.** Children look to their fathers for strength ... one of the defining characteristics of God. Your husband must model courage, wisdom, and strength in dealing with the deep and often frightening aspects of life. He must be able to "reach back" to his son and convince him: "I have walked where you are walking now and with God at my side. I have made it ... and so can you, if you come with us!" If your husband avoids the deep issues in life, if he shrinks back from honestly feeling the deep issues in life, your son may also choose that same road. Avoidance is the primary way that sin shows itself in males.

5. **Help your son think and feel as deeply in times of great joy as he does in times of fear and worry.** Model for him parents who enter times of joy thoughtfully and appreciatively. Verbalize your thoughts and feelings out loud to be overheard by your son. Read the Psalms, which are a great mix of the agony and ecstasy of Christian life.

6. The Chinese character for "crisis" is a combination of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity". Seize these times as difficult, but wonderful opportunities (RM 5:3-5).

7. **Help your son experience the person of Christ through reading the Holy Scriptures with him.** As I read, pray, and contemplate the person of Christ, I am stuck by his strength and courage to walk through life as the "man of sorrows" (IS. 53:3). What comforted him? Who gave him the courage and strength? Here was a man who was not only a deep thinker, but a deeply emotional man as well. Ever wonder what feelings Jesus had at age 7? Do you think he ever saw a Roman crucifixion and wondered if that would be his end? Do you think he ever picked up some big nails while on a carpentry job and imagined them piercing his hands? Do you think he ever looked at the sick and decided some day he would do something about it? Do you think he ever opened his heart to the lost and understood that he was the Way? Find answers to these questions together. Wouldn't it be awesome to help another very young man take on a little something of the character of Christ!

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